

A LITERATURE OF  
CONSCIENZIALIZACION:  
Women in Latin America\*

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES**

- WOMEN IN THE THIRD WORLD: A HISTORICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY.* Edited by Pamela R. Byrne and Suzanne R. Ontiveros. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio Press, 1986. Pp. 152. \$28.00.)
- LATINAS OF THE AMERICAS: A SOURCE BOOK.* Edited by K. Lynn Stoner. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989. Pp. 692. \$87.00.)
- BASE DE DATOS MUJER / WOMEN'S DATA BASE.* Volume 1, Numbers 1-2. By Isis International. (Santiago: Isis International, 1988. Pp. 328. \$12.00 paper.)
- LISTADO DE DESCRIPTORES EN EL TEMA DE LA MUJER / LIST OF DESCRIPTORS ON THE THEME OF WOMEN.* By Isis International. (Santiago: Isis International, 1988. Pp. 121.)

**SURVEYS AND REPORTS**

- CUBAN WOMEN: CHANGING ROLES AND POPULATION TRENDS.* By Sônia Catasús, Alfonso Farnós, Fernando González, Rosario Grove, Raúl Hernández, and Blanca Morejón. (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1988. Pp. 125.)
- LA MUJER Y LA ECONOMIA MUNDIAL.* By Susan P. Joekes. Instituto Internacional de Investigaciones y Capacitación de las Naciones Unidas para la Promoción de la Mujer (INSTRAM). (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1987. Pp. 205.)
- PARTICIPACIÓN SOCIAL, RECONSTRUCCIÓN Y MUJER: EL SISMO DE 1985.* Compiled by Alejandra Massolo and Martha Schteingart. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1987. Pp. 116.)

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## THEMATIC EDITED COLLECTIONS

*MUCHACHAS NO MORE: HOUSEHOLD WORKERS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.* Edited by Elsa M. Chaney and Mary García Castro, with a bibliography by Margo L. Smith. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1989. Pp. 486. \$34.95.)

*THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA: FEMINISM AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY.* Edited by Jane S. Jaquette. (Boston, Mass.: Unwin Hyman, 1989. Pp. 215. \$45.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)

*THROUGH HER EYES: WOMEN'S THEOLOGY FROM LATIN AMERICA.* By Elsa Tamez. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989. Pp. 168. \$11.95 paper.)

*PRESENCIA Y TRANSPARENCIA: LA MUJER EN LA HISTORIA DE MEXICO.* By Carmen Ramos, María de Jesús Rodríguez, Pilar Gonzalbo, François Giraud, Solange Alberro, Françoise Carner, Soledad González, Pilar Iracheta, Jean Pierre Bastian, and Enriqueta Tuñón. (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1987. Pp. 189.)

## MONOGRAPHS

*LA MUJER EN EL CHILE MILITAR: TODAS IBAMOS A SER REINAS.* By María Elena Valenzuela. (Santiago: Ediciones Chile y América and CESOC, 1987. Pp. 249.)

*PERIODISMO Y FEMINISMO EN LA ARGENTINA, 1830–1930.* By Nestor Tomás Auza. (Buenos Aires: Emece Editores, 1988. Pp. 316.)

*AQUI TAMBIEN, DOMITILA!* By Domitila B. de Chungara, with David Acebey. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1985. Pp. 281.)

What distinguishes the work on and by Latin American women, especially that of feminist scholars engaged in interpreting and understanding Latin American reality, is a commitment to the process of *conscientización*, understood in the Freirian sense of raising one's consciousness through cultural action for freedom, developing teaching materials that focus on the most pressing problems of the community, and participating in efforts to change the circumstances that oppress and limit human lives.<sup>1</sup> The books under review here are often explicitly committed to this view, as is indicated by the title of Elsa Chaney's and Mary García Castro's introduction to *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, "A New Field for Research and Action." Similarly, Isis International's *Base de datos mujer / Women's Data Base* begins by stating, "Information and communication are basic elements in changing social situations." The need to collect and distribute more accurate information on women's lives was a basic premise of the United Nations

1. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

Decade for Women, 1976–1985, and that premise is reflected in these books, many of which received direct support from UN agencies. But these works are post-decade, published mainly in 1988 and 1989. What is new is the range and depth of analysis exhibited in the best of them. Evidence that the study of women in Latin American society is maturing into a field of its own is apparent in each of the four categories of work under review: bibliography and sources, surveys and reports, thematic edited collections, and monographs.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

Change over time, as well as the cumulative effect of scholarship generated by the women's movement, is apparent in the succession of bibliographies under discussion. *Women in the Third World*, edited by Pamela Byrne and Suzanne Ontiveros, is part of the ABC-CLIO Press's series of historical bibliographies on women, which began publication in 1976. The chapter "Women in Latin America and the West Indies" contains 271 annotated entries consisting primarily of journal articles published between 1973 and 1983, the longest chapter in the book by far. In comparison, one finds 140 listings for Africa, 101 for Asia, 55 for the Middle East, and 5 for the Pacific Region. The content of the chapter on Latin America reflects the era of women's studies when amassing material was the goal: obscure references to archival reports and articles on Mexican American women are listed side by side with substantive analytic articles on women of Latin America and the Caribbean. This observation is not meant to fault the important service provided by Byrne and Ontiveros in making this material accessible to students and scholars—the annotations are exceptionally well done—but to note the difference between the earliest of the bibliographies under review and more recent works.

Since its inception in the 1970s as an alternative women's press with a special commitment to the exchange of information among women all over the world, Isis International has consistently published valuable and analytically critical articles on and by women in Latin America and the Caribbean. The purpose of its two new publications, *Base de datos mujer / Women's Data Base* and *Listado de descriptores en el tema de la mujer / List of Descriptors on the Theme of Women*, is to make accessible via computer data search the growing body of material filed in the Isis documentation and information centers. Both these volumes are bilingual in Spanish and English, both received support from UNESCO, and both are publications of the Isis office in Santiago, Chile, which opened in 1984. "Information is for action," states the introduction to *Base de datos mujer*. Although the data base does not focus exclusively on Latin America and the Caribbean, its

entries reflect "the great quantity of information available from that region in our centers" (p. xi).

From the perspective of a research historian, this data base is a beautifully organized resource, consisting of a general index of abstracts and five partial indices by subject, author, geographical area, conference, and serial. The references are to publications and events that occurred during the UN Decade for Women, with emphasis on articles appearing at the end of the decade, 1984 through 1986. Isis claims a network of ten thousand contributors and invites users of the data base to send any information they have. *Base de datos mujer* also contains tear-out sheets at the end for requesting documents and computerized searches. Considering that the book is intended to facilitate retrieval and distribution of information via computer, that seemingly most impersonal of forums, this Isis publication radiates a generosity of spirit in its conception and execution.

Isis International's *Listado de descriptores en el tema de la mujer / List of Descriptors on the Theme of Women* updates the first list of descriptors published in 1987. Each one appears in English and Spanish, along with its scope of reference, source, and the subject category or categories to which it pertains. Two aspects hold special interest. The first is the impressive number of women's research groups in Latin America that contributed to the book. Many of them are now in their second decade of work, like GRECMU (Grupo de Estudios sobre la Condición de la Mujer en el Uruguay). The second interesting point is that the material in the Isis document collections called for the creation of new descriptor categories that reach beyond conventional usage. For example, in the Isis list, the subject category "Violence" includes the descriptors self-defense, incest, prostitution, tourism and prostitution, domestic violence, and sexual violence.

*Latinas of the Americas: A Source Book*, edited by historian Lynn Stoner, is another invaluable resource. Its 3071 entries are presented in 15 categories (including biography, demography, education, feminist studies, health, history, family, literature, political science, religion, and development). Each category is introduced with an essay written by a scholar who has done significant work in that particular field (thus, Sandra McGee Deutsch on feminist studies, Donna Guy on biography, Susan Schroeder on health, Susan Bourque on urban development, and Elizabeth Kuznesof on the household). These essays place the bibliographic material historically and conceptually and offer suggestions for avenues of future research. Read together with Stoner's introduction, the essays provide an excellent overview of the field of Latin American women's studies.

Taking up where Meri Knaster's pioneering *Women in Spanish America* (1977) left off, *Latinas of the Americas* emphasizes material published

between 1976 and 1986. Stoner's bibliography is also broader in concept than any of its predecessors, including material on Portuguese-, French-, Dutch-, and English-speaking America as well as Spanish America. The decision to include unpublished material is a good one: the dissertations, papers presented at conferences, and notes on work in progress indicate what might be looked for in more recent releases. The decision to include material on Chicana, Puerto Rican, and other women of Spanish American heritage in the United States is less successful on two counts: the book provides far more comprehensive coverage of Latin American women than of their North American sisters, and second, the rapid development of Mexican American women's studies as a field since 1985 has dated that bibliography in a way that is not true of the Latin American material. In any case, the time lapse between manuscript completion and publication is exceptionally vexing for bibliographers, and the Stoner bibliography may be regarded as evidence of the need to view the history of women of Hispanic descent in a hemispheric as well as a national context—another challenge to future scholarship. Nine years from inception (at the 1981 meetings of the Latin American Studies Association) to publication, the Stoner bibliography is unquestionably the best humanities and social science bibliography on women in Latin America published to date.

#### SURVEYS AND REPORTS

Each of the three surveys and reports under review received support from an agency of the United Nations. Susan Joekes's *La mujer y la economía mundial* was funded and published by INSTRAM (referred to here by its Spanish title, Instituto Internacional de Investigaciones y Capacitación de las Naciones Unidas para la Promoción de la Mujer). As Joekes states in her introduction, this publication comprises the work of many researchers. Unfortunately, it also reads as if it had been written by a committee to be read by a committee.

*La mujer y la economía mundial* provides a global overview of women's economic activity since World War II, with emphasis on the period between 1976 and 1985. Like most such overviews, it describes long-term trends and broad patterns for vast geographic regions (Asia, Africa, Latin America) but contains no specific documentation. In regard to Latin America, the study points out the decline in the importance of the agricultural sector as a source of employment for women, the increased importance of the urban service sector for formal and informal jobs for women, and the destructive effects of the economic decline of the 1980s for middle-sector as well as poor women. From the historian's perspective, this survey is a useful means of contextualizing more specific material.

But *La mujer y la economía mundial* has a far broader mandate than establishing a general comparative background for individual case stud-

ies. As a synthesis of the results of numerous research projects, it is intended to provide a new basis for policy formulation—one that includes women. Yet its lack of specificity prompts an uneasy speculation: might not this sort of generalized information on women lead to the same kinds of problems previously generated by generic overviews in which women were subsumed in the category of “man”? Two stylistic problems also plague this publication: the practice of subnumbering paragraphs intensifies the sense of reading bureaucratized, and the translation of the titles of all bibliographic references into Spanish whether or not they are available in that language is not useful. This kind of global study was needed until very recently to make the gross point of the difference between the male and female experience under seemingly congruent political and economic circumstances. But whether it is of value in the 1990s is open to question.

In contrast, *Cuban Women: Changing Roles and Population Trends* is rich with detail, historical context, and analysis. Prepared with the financial support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the study was carried out by faculty and graduate students at the Centro de Estudios Demográficos at the Universidad de Havana, with the assistance of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) in the fieldwork stage of the investigation. Although this demographic study studded with figures and charts was compiled by six authors (Sonia Catasús, Alfonso Farnós, Fernando González, Rosario Grove, Raúl Hernández, and Blanca Morejón), *Cuban Women* reads as if the authors were speaking directly to the reader. And they have information of great interest to relay.

The study is framed around the dramatic decline in the Cuban birthrate, which dropped from 29.5 births per 1000 inhabitants in 1971 to 14.0 in 1981. Like most changes in Cuba, the declining birthrate has been the subject of considerable speculation and discussion in U.S. journals and newspapers, which have asked such questions as, Are women too depressed at living “under Castro” (or “under Communism”) to want to have children? *Cuban Women* compares women in three different regions of the country: Adheres, a rural municipality; Buenavista, a suburban district; and Plaza de la Revolución, a densely populated and highly urbanized community. The economic backgrounds, educational levels, occupations, and health and living conditions of the women involved in the study are set forth before introducing questions of fertility, ideal family size, spacing of births, conjugal variations, incidence of abortion, and knowledge of contraception. The project’s meticulous research is evident, as is the great care taken to achieve a balanced tone in discussing the results: “The information on the fertility of working and non-working women has confirmed the hypothesis that women currently working tend to have fewer children than those not working, although [a] causal link cannot be stated” (p. 55).

The researchers are asking in what ways might the changing fertil-

ity pattern be linked to changes in women's roles since 1959: to greater access to education, entry into the paid work force in significant numbers, improvement in health care and distribution of information on contraception, and reduction of previous urban-rural disparities—in other words, to the improvement in the quality of women's lives in Cuban society? The results point to the conclusion that it is the success of Cuban policies, especially in the areas of education and health care, that has given women more choice and control over fertility. In Cuba, as in other countries where there is freedom to choose, women in the work force choose to have fewer children. The catch-22 for the Cuban nation is that these healthy, educated, hardworking women are not reproducing the work force. Another measure of the success of Cuban social policy in creating a healthy work force is that the declining birthrate is matched by a declining mortality rate. Both trends closely parallel European and North American demographic patterns. *Cuban Women* demonstrates the way in which close attention to the lived experience of women provides an effective means of measuring social change in the larger society.

But although the Cuban study focuses on women and reflects the near-universal concern with studying women's lives that marks the period since 1985, it is not a gendered analysis and does not incorporate a feminist understanding of events. This approach is in keeping with the FMC's consistent rejection of the term *feminist* and its ideological stance that feminism is bourgeois. In contrast, *Participación social, reconstrucción y mujer: el sismo de 1985*, edited by Alejandra Massolo and Martha Scheingart, is an explicitly gendered analysis of an event. A working paper, *Participación social* resulted from a series of workshops sponsored by the PIEM (Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de la Mujer) at the Colegio de México. They brought together women from various neighborhoods that had been heavily damaged in the earthquake. The purpose of the workshops was to assess the role of women in reconstructing neighborhoods, based on the premise that "women were able to take the initiative in reconstruction because they knew the conditions of daily life in the barrio and because the most drastic rupture . . . was caused by the destruction of the home, the very arena in which the woman has concentrated her main concern and responsibilities" (p. 23). Women's prominence in recovery efforts is also attributable to the high number of female-headed households with children or other dependents (like aging parents) who were dispossessed by the catastrophe.

The earthquake on 19 September 1985 claimed an estimated fifty thousand lives in Mexico City and destroyed or severely damaged thousands of residences. International aid poured into the Federal District, and volunteers from around the world joined survivors in caring for the wounded, searching for the missing, and trying to establish sources of clean water, medical care, food, and shelter for the living. The courage



and “spontaneous” cooperation of the populace received considerable attention in the media. All the women who attended the PIEM workshops were participants in neighborhood associations that included both men and women, though women often belonged to a female auxiliary. Each association acted as the political intermediary between the neighborhood and the government or international agency. Many of the neighborhood associations predated the quake (some were founded in the 1950s), although most of the women who attended the PIEM workshops had not been active in the associations prior to the earthquake.

What is striking about *Participación social* is that it represents an immediate recognition of the importance of knowing what the female role was in resuscitating the neighborhoods of Mexico City. For almost twenty years, scholars and activists have painstakingly reexamined every field of human endeavor to “revindicate” a space for women in history, literature, psychology, science, politics, health care—the list is inclusive. In contrast, the PIEM workshops were not an exercise in the retrieval of information or a gendered rethinking of a time-honored postulation. They were an immediate, almost simultaneous response to the earthquake that proclaimed, “We now know that the female experience may be different than that of her male counterpart, and we now know that such experience has impact beyond the individual woman, that it will have significance within the national community and resonance in the international community.”

The catastrophe focused attention on the neighborhood associations and the female role in those associations in response to the earthquake. The testimony of the representatives from the neighborhood associations at the PIEM workshops “verified once more that women are the social group that most quickly responds to the necessities and urgencies that arise in the home and community” (p. 23). The analysis casts women primarily in the role of homemakers, who take on a public role only when their home space is disrupted. The PIEM analysts posit the response to the crisis as consciousness-raiser: “The manner in which relationships and daily occupations were recomposed, in conjunction with a social interaction greatly broadened through solidarity with neighbors, students, university professors, advisory groups, church communities, government representatives, et cetera, articulated a new social and political space with the possibility of autonomy that permitted women to learn to express their opinion, propose and elect, defend and negotiate, learn to listen, and represent others” (p. 23).

In this assessment, the earthquake becomes synonymous with other events—such as revolution and political repression—that propel women out of their daily routine. The question becomes, what happens when the semblance of normalcy is restored? Do some of these women continue to be politically active, or are they quickly reabsorbed into the ceaselessness of the quotidian? In the Mexican case, part of the answer



may be reflected in wide support of urban women for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who ran in opposition to PRI presidential candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari in the 1986 elections.

#### THEMATIC EDITED COLLECTIONS

The four thematic edited collections under discussion here share certain characteristics with their predecessors in the field of Latin American women's studies. First, most book-length studies continue to be collective efforts rather than monographs, as was true of the pioneering studies of the 1970s like Ann Pescatello's *Male and Female in Iberian America* (1972), June Nash's and Helen Safa's *Sex and Class in Latin America* (1976), and Asunción Lavrin's landmark *Latin American Women: A History* (1977). Second, the early books included articles by women from throughout the hemisphere, and the most recent edited collections continue this transnational collaborative practice, although the collaborative nature of *Presencia y transparencia* is apparent not in the venue of the contributors (all are from Mexico) but in the international exchange of ideas visible in the footnotes and bibliography. Third, the authors of each volume come from traditional academic disciplines: sociology (Chaney and García Castro), political science (Jaquette), theology (Tamez), and history (Ramos et al.). If the earlier work had a mandate to point out that the story of women had not been written and to challenge the assumption that women's lives could be understood through an ungendered class analysis, the recent work has undertaken the task of assessing the impact of two decades of feminist thought, especially the spread of the ideas and programs of the women's movement during the UN Decade for Women, 1976–1985.

*Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, conceived and edited by sociologists Elsa Chaney and Mary García Castro, exemplifies the literature of conscientización. It is dedicated "to the organized household workers of Latin America and the Caribbean, and to their efforts to build new forms of association through a gendered class struggle that begins with the domestic sphere but does not end there" (frontispiece). The idea for the book emerged at the meetings of the Latin American Studies Association in Mexico City in the fall of 1983. One of the editors writes, "There it became obvious to me that adequate collaboration among committed researchers and activists was not taking place, if only because those interested in domestic service did not know who the others were . . ." (p. 5).

Approximately 20 percent of the female working population in Latin America is employed in domestic work. In Mexico, Brazil, Peru and Colombia alone, this percentage adds up to nearly eight million women. Household workers are traditionally the most isolated of workers, shut into private homes and drawn from a labor pool of young girls who have

migrated to the city from rural areas, girls whose very speech patterns and appearance define them as different, lesser, exploitable. In the chapter "The Autobiography of a Fighter," Adelina Díaz Uriarte describes her evolution from a young girl of the Peruvian interior into an organizer of domestic workers in Lima: "I came to Lima the week after my house was robbed. I was friendly with the nuns who taught in a school near my town. When I told them I wanted to leave home, the director of the school suggested I accompany her to Lima. She told me she would take me as her own daughter and put me in school. . . . I did not know that this was the standard line told to all the girls who were brought here. . . . Nothing the nun told me was true" (p. 395).

But if it was through trust in the Catholic Church that Adelina was first lured into housework, it was through another aspect of the church, the Jóvenes Obreros Católicos (JOC), that she discovered the strength of organizing. Beginning in 1965, using the legitimacy provided by the Catholic night school she attended, Díaz Uriarte "brought together many compañeras and gave union training to more than two hundred household workers." In 1975 she represented Peruvian household workers at a world meeting of the JOC and says of that experience, "I became aware that not only in my country were we hungry, exploited, and in misery. . . ."

Díaz Uriarte's essay is part of the section entitled "Testimonies: In Their Own Words," which concludes *Muchachas No More*. The decision to include stories told in the houseworkers' own words is in keeping with Chaney and García Castro's care not to co-opt the houseworkers' story but to facilitate the collective telling of it. The individual stories are in the tradition of the *testimonio* as literature that calls the reader to action, which is also Chaney and García Castro's intention. These two scholars were instrumental in raising support for the Encuentro de Organizaciones de Trabajadoras del Hogar de América Latina y Caribe, which met in Bogotá in March 1988. The four other sections of their book consist of essays that give historical and analytic context to the material. Margo Smith contributed a bibliography based on computer data, "Domestic Service in Cross-Cultural Perspective."

Among the edited collections under review, *The Women's Movement in Latin America* is distinguished by its thematic consistency and illuminated by Jane Jaquette's superb comparative analysis of the country studies in her introductory and concluding chapters. The purpose of the book is to analyze "the role of women and of feminism in the transition from authoritarian to democratic politics in South America during the 1980s" (p. 1). Women activists were highly visible in the opposition to these authoritarian regimes, but they emerged from diverse social and economic sectors and were motivated by different perceptions of themselves and of events. Jaquette identifies three major strands of the women's movement that came forward to oppose the military regimes: women's human rights

groups, feminist groups formed to combine consciousness-raising with political and social action, and neighborhood-based organizations of poor women. Moreover, there were historically specific reasons why women became central political actors in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina in the 1970s. Sônia Alvarez makes this point clear in her analysis of the women's amnesty demonstrations on International Women's Day in Brazil in 1975, as does María del Carmen Feijóo in her writing on Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. The main reason was that the conventional avenues of popular political expression—such as political parties, labor unions, and student organizations—were (like the governments) led by men and were effectively suppressed by the military dictatorships in power. Alvarez's particular insight, first developed in her doctoral thesis in 1985, is that the Brazilian military's narrow perception of middle-class women as non-threatening wives and mothers helped to create the political *sombra* that activist women used to call for social justice.<sup>2</sup>

*The Women's Movement in Latin America* presents a country-by-country analysis of women's activism and assesses the results of women's political involvement, as measured by the persistence of a gender-based political activism and by female participation in electoral politics. Female prominence in a successful national cause, combined with the reverberations of the international women's movement, meant that women's issues were on the negotiating table during the process of redemocratization. Yet despite tangible success in Chile and Brazil, where national and state women's councils are staffed by women whose political roots are feminist and leftist, the consensus of the contributors is that women appear to have made few permanent gains either for themselves or for their programs. Why is this the case?

Jaquette and the other contributors offer a variety of interpretations. First, there are distinct differences in the development of the women's movements and the history of feminist thought in each country. Sônia Alvarez points out that Brazil has a dynamic, diverse, and politically effective feminism that has produced visible and viable results, although this development has not shown up in national electoral politics. Rather, the feminists' success is a measure of the degree to which Brazil still functions not as a democracy but as a hierarchic corporative state. Looking at Chile, Patricia Chuchryk argues that there is room for optimism: "a concern with women's rights and gender issues is becoming increasingly more legitimate as a vehicle for political activity" (p. 176). Writing on Argentina, María del Carmen Feijóo exhibits no such optimism. She argues that women have been ineffective in translating their

2. Sônia E. Alvarez, "The Politics of Gender in Latin America: Comparative Perspectives on Women in the Brazilian Transition to Democracy," 2 vols., Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986.

politics of opposition into the politics of accommodation and negotiation necessary to participation in democratic political practice. She observes, "Ethics and politics, which had complemented each other during the transition, became locked in mortal combat" (p. 85). Carina Perelli's essay on Uruguay presents an even darker view based on her thesis that the Uruguayan women who helped undermine the power of the military regime never desired true political change but sought only to return to a romanticized status quo ante.

The intent of the contributors to *The Women's Movement in Latin America* is to take a scrupulously critical view of women's organizations. In doing so, they lay waste to several ideas cherished by the women's movement, for example, the concept that participation in a women's group is ipso facto consciousness-raising. Maruja Barrig writes of the communal kitchens in the barrios of Lima that they "did not succeed in changing the way in which these women valued their potential as citizens or as dynamic agents of change in their own communities" (p. 119). Although the military government in Peru differed from the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in the Southern Cone, economic collapse and the enforced "paralysis of democratic institutions" resulted in a social crisis in which newly formed women's groups came to the fore as political actors, much as they did in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. A number of scholars have perceived the communal kitchens of Callao and Lima as contributing to a grass-roots gender consciousness. Barrig disagrees, however, concluding that the kitchens "did not succeed in changing the way in which these women valued their potential as citizens or as dynamic agents of change in their own communities. . . . Involvement did not bring about a new awareness of women's gender identity" (p. 119). It should be noted that Barrig is not in sympathy with separatist strategies at any level. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of Peruvian feminists, faced with the continuing dismissal of their agenda by the leftist parties, chose to follow a politically autonomous path supportive of the goals of the Izquierda Unida but based organizationally in women's centers.<sup>3</sup> Barrig's objections to the strategy of feminist autonomy emerge from her own political commitment and her belief that separatism effectively "restricts the arenas of power in which democratizing efforts can be pursued" (p. 127). Moreover, as she points out, "autonomy" within the Peruvian political and economic context likely means dependence on "external financial sources." Barrig's research shows that communal kitchens and grass-roots women's groups that receive aid from international churches and agencies do little to promote ideals of independence

3. *Congreso de Investigación acerca de la Mujer en la Región Andina*, edited by Jeanine Anderson de Velasco (Lima: Universidad Católica del Perú, 1983).

or autonomy. She is likewise wary that economic aid to feminist groups carries the potential for intellectual imperialism and co-optation.

The contributors to *The Women's Movement in Latin America* are in agreement that the removal of the common enemy of the military governments allowed the widely divergent political agendas and class interests of the women involved to reemerge, vitiating the probability of continued gender-based political coalitions. For feminists, this interpretation raises several difficult issues. First, it implies that once the crisis is past, women have no cross-class gender-based interests, of which access to health care and prevention of violence against women are some of the most obvious. Alvarez offers a subtle reading of the apparent disintegration of umbrella-type women's organizations: "Interest-group, partisan feminism appears to be dominating and potentially undermining autonomous, movement-based feminism" (p. 55). Second, this interpretation risks implying that women are thrust to the forefront of events through no will or thought of their own. Alvarez, Chuchryk, and Jaquette resist this analysis, but Perelli, for example, explicitly asserts that in Uruguay, "women broke the authoritarian order of discourse without being aware of it" (p. 106). Feijóo, Perelli, and Barrig share an antipathy toward middle-class feminism and a thorough skepticism about the viability of resistance grounded in the social construct of the feminine.

In her work on Las Madres, María del Carmen Feijóo extends researchers' empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding of feminine expressions of dissent. She engages in the thorny problem of whether or not female political resistance that emerges from the violation of women's ability to carry out their perceived feminine role can be effectively extended beyond the event that prompts such resistance.<sup>4</sup> Feijóo explores the intrinsic limits of essentialist politics: "The Madres, basing their defense of human rights on their reproductive role, reinforced the conventional division of labor." She hypothesizes that "the political discourse about women that was constructed by Argentine women themselves led the women's movement down a dead-end street [that] ensured the depoliticization of women, further reinforcing the view that women's participation is crisis-driven" (p. 72). Despite the difficulties of translating the politics of the mothers' movements into an effective politics in an electoral system, Feijóo credits the women's movement in Argentina with helping to create a political climate in which women have made some significant gains, notably in an increased awareness of reproductive rights and the recognition of domestic violence as a social problem. The creation of autonomous women's groups in the trade unions, a bastion of male polit-

4. Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918," *Signs* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 545-66.

ical power in Argentina, also contains the potential for future political gains for women.

Carina Perelli's essay, "Putting Conservatism to Good Use: Women and Unorthodox Politics in Uruguay," proffers a provocative thesis: that the daily "gossip" of women and older people ultimately undermined the ability of the military to govern. She explains, "At a time when silence was ordered, they spoke. They spoke in markets and supermarkets, protesting the cost of living, the poor quality of the products, the members of the Armed Forces who could get 'free milk, free meat, free medical care'. . ." (p. 105). The power of women's daily conversations and of interconnections made in the process of carrying on transactions necessary to the maintenance of family life was vividly illustrated in Suad Joseph's penetrating study of women in Beirut.<sup>5</sup> Perelli carries this analysis further. In trying to create a sense of normalcy amidst apparent chaos, women (mothers in this case) continually told their children tales of how good things had been before the military took power and thus "created a fund of shared concepts, myths, and symbols that helped perpetuate the Uruguay of old in the memories of the young" (p. 106). Their stories in effect created a "new" version of the Uruguayan past. Perelli argues that this practice helped ensure that the redemocratization process in Uruguay would be profoundly conservative: the revolution of 1985 was a return to the rule of law, "comfortable, secure, and mediocre," rather than a search for "freedom, justice, equality, and socialism" (p. 95).

This assertion raises the question of Perelli's own reading of Uruguayan history. She clearly admires the revolutionaries of the 1960s—her heroes are Ché and Tania. The difficulty is that her admiration for the values of the revolutionaries of the 1960s leads her to overlook the contributions of earlier generations of activist women, especially the anarchist and socialist feminists of the early twentieth century who pressured the government for social change. Perelli attributes this change to the "anticipatory" success of Uruguayan social legislation. The "anticipatory" concept implies that legislation such as divorce laws (passed in Uruguay in 1912), access to higher education for women and men (1916), and the right of married women to work was enacted by an enlightened government before the demand for such legislation existed in the society at large. This interpretation is ahistorical. The record of Uruguayan women's participation in the Congreso Femenino Internacional in Buenos Aires in 1910<sup>6</sup> as well as the lifelong struggle of feminists like Paulina Luisi and Celia

5. Suad Joseph, "Working-Class Women's Networks in a Sectarian State: A Political Paradox," *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 1 (Feb. 1983): 1–22.

6. See Asunción Lavrin, *The Ideology of Feminism in the Southern Cone, 1900–1940*, Latin American Program Working Paper no. 169 (Washington, D.C.: Wilson Program, 1986). See also Francesca Miller, "The International Relations of Women of the Americas, 1890–1928," *The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Inter-American Cultural History* 43, no. 2 (Oct. 1986).



Paladino de Vitale to bring about social change in their country are only two examples of evidence to the contrary. Perelli also asserts that the first time Uruguayan women were imprisoned for political acts was in the 1970s (p. 100), overlooking or ignoring the brutal repression of male and female immigrants, labor leaders, and political dissidents in Uruguayan politics in the early 1930s.

Although Perelli recognizes the problems posed for *guerrilleras* who had to deny their womanhood to be accepted as fighters, she nevertheless believes that the generation of the Tupamaros “incarnated a new way of being a woman, not bound by the limits of a household with husband, etc.” (p. 99). Thus Perelli is even more vehement than Feijóo on the futility of basing a politics of change on feminine values: Uruguayan women “were set to modify their own situations (via soup kitchens, better schooling, prisoner advocacy groups), not to change the world or overthrow the regime” (p. 106). When the housewives’ specific goals were attained, their public political commitment evaporated. Perelli’s argument is partly constructed to prevent a feminist claiming of all female forms of resistance, but she is also arguing for a new reading of women’s political participation that does not “lose sight of how effectively women helped create the climate of transition” (p. 108). The peril in the discussion as presented here is that it reiterates the historical notion of women as intrinsically conservative and depicts the women actors as unaware of the consequences of their actions, unaware of the power of their storytelling. I doubt that this is true of the generation of Uruguayan women whose compatriots produced the slyly named journal *La Cacerola*. Its inaugural editorial proclaims, “Thus from the center of the home, from the kitchen, emerges the humble casserole, ancient symbol of female oppression, today the symbol of national liberation.”<sup>7</sup>

The initial problem posed in *The Women’s Movement in Latin America* is that the feminisms and women’s movements of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, and Peru developed in a climate of oppositional politics. Now that the dictatorships are out of power and electoral politics have been restored, what are the consequences for women’s movements and feminism? The concern is that for a variety of reasons the women’s movement may have carried within it the seeds of its own demise. In some cases, most notably that of Las Madres de los Desaparecidos, women’s political activism was grounded in deeply traditional ideas about women and motherhood and thus seems a priori ill-equipped to challenge the larger society’s ideas about gender, even if individual women experienced empowerment and personal growth during their political involvement. Chuchryk takes issue with this interpretation, however, in her analysis of

7. *La Cacerola*, *Boletín Interno de GRECMU* 1, no. 1 (Apr. 1984):1-16. I am grateful to Gwen Kirkpatrick for providing copies of this journal, which is published in Montevideo.

the Chilean situation: "While it might be tempting to view these housewives' organizations as having purely economic goals, that would be incorrect. . . . They have provided these women with a focus for political organizing and self-education, they are seeing themselves differently" (p. 154). A second problem lies in the very nature of oppositional politics: a recurring observation is that "women are still using the confrontational discourse developed when they were part of the opposition" and finding it difficult to adapt "to the ordinary requirements of democratic politics which call for negotiation and bargaining" (Feijóo, p. 103).

Maybe the reason women have not "succeeded" in making visible gains for themselves and their agendas in democracies (and these analysts would concur that the term *democracy* must be considered an exceedingly relative term in these contemporary political contexts) is that the problem lies not in the women—not in some intrinsic inability to act politically or to make the transition from oppositional politics to cooperative politics—but is embedded in the political system itself. The likelihood must be considered that women act as if they were still part of a politics of opposition because they *are* in a situation of opposition: their voices, ideas, and agendas are neither heard nor heeded in a situation of politics as usual. Alvarez observes that "proportionally fewer women were elected in precisely those states where feminine and feminist movements are most advanced" (p. 59). This view suggests that women do continue to be left out of the national political process. And if this is so, it is not a failure on the part of women activists but a failure of the democratic political system as we know it. It is not inclusive: it continues to be androcratic. In her introduction, Jaquette asks, "What strategies are available to move from women's entry into politics to changing the political agenda and even the definition of politics itself?" (p. 5). In the long run, this is the heart of the matter. Chuchryk writes that "feminists have begun to reconceptualize democracy. . . . the struggles for democracy must include a struggle for women's liberation or it will not eliminate authoritarianism" (p. 168). For this reviewer, what the superbly researched and analytically provocative *Women's Movement in Latin America* shows is not that women have "failed" to make the transition from oppositional politics to democratic politics but that the process of redemocratization—in the sense of a profound rethinking of the national social contract—is far from complete and that a gendered political understanding is absolutely critical to the process.

The premise of *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America*, edited by Elsa Tamez, is that "Women need a militant and combative theology, one that gives them theological and biblical tools to tear out by the roots the sources of their marginalization" (p. v). The book consists of an introduction by Tamez and eight essays and ends with the final statement of the Latin American conference "Theology from the Perspective of Women" (held in Buenos Aires 30 October through 3 November

1985). The nine contributors include five Roman Catholic women and four from various branches of the Methodist Church. This book is valuable as an initial statement on a topic with vast implications for women in Latin America, but the essays, which Tamez refers to as "reflections," are uneven in the quality of their scholarship and analysis.

As is true of much of the literature on women and religion that has been published in Europe and the United States, the contributors to *Through Her Eyes* at times tread the quicksand of essentialist claims: "it was frequently the sisters who more quickly intuited . . . what it meant to live the faith in a commitment of solidarity with the oppressed" (p. 26). But although several of the authors use pre-Columbian myths to illustrate ideas about women, they avoid the pitfall of making utopian claims for earlier societies in which powerful goddesses were prominent religious figures. In addition, there is a surprising intellectual ecumenicism evident in this quest for a women's theology based in Latin American reality. Thus the Brazilian spiritist practice of Candomblé, in which an Afro-Brazilian woman is often the central practitioner, is pointed to as an example of women's spiritual empowerment. Ivone Gebara writes, "This activity is sapiential: it springs from life, and life is its reference point. It is received as a gift from God and handed on as a gift. . . . This sort of thing does not take place in Christian churches, although one can cite some similar nonofficial functions: counselors, prayer leaders, faith healers, and providers of other services deeply connected to the religious dimension of human life" (p. 39).

Liberation theology sprang from the experience of the Catholic Church in Latin America and profoundly reshaped the practice and thinking of the universal Catholic Church in the late 1960s and 1970s. But in its revolutionary commitment to the oppressed, liberation theology did not view the world in gendered terms. In fact, as historian Ana María Bidegain recalls, "Anyone embracing feminist theory was put in her place with the allegation that feminism was an imperialist theory calculated to divide and weaken the popular sector" (p. 27). Her essay traces the roots of the present generation of feminist theologians back to their involvement with direct-action Catholic youth groups formed in the early 1960s. Today this generation of women religious seeks to revolutionize Catholic praxis once more. In doing so, their commitment to the principles of liberation theology's solidarity with the poor is clear. Contributor Consuelo del Prado states, "The characteristic contribution of the feminine experience of spirituality is born and developed among poor Christians. . . . It is from here that it questions what remains of the shadows, cold and alienation of our old way of living the faith" (p. 140).

*Presencia y transparencia: la mujer en la historia de México* is an example of the best kind of historical scholarship being produced by the contemporary feminist movement in Latin America. The volume resulted from a

conference entitled "La Mujer en la Historia de México," held at the Colegio de México in 1984 under the auspices of the PIEM, the same organization that sponsored the workshops and publication of *Participación social, reconstrucción y mujer: el sismo de 1985*. Many of the women associated with the PIEM and a number of the contributors to *Presencia y transparencia* helped found *fem* (1976), one of the oldest and most influential feminist journals in the hemisphere. Such collaboration and the support of a women's research collective or women's center have been crucial to bringing the work of feminist scholars to fruition in Latin America. Few if any women intellectuals or feminist activists could find institutional support in the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s. The response was to form independent women's groups like GRECMU in Uruguay, CEM (Centro de Estudios de Mujer) in Argentina, and the Centro de Flora Tristán in Peru. All of these have now been active for more than a decade, and new groups and publications continue to appear. *Feminaria*, which began publication in Buenos Aires in 1988, regularly runs a bibliographic article about new work on and by women. The November 1989 issue reviews thirty new titles published between 1988 and 1989.<sup>8</sup>

*Presencia y transparencia* signals its collective nature in listing its ten contributors as coauthors. Following the introduction by Carmen Ramos Escandón, the essays include "La mujer y la familia en la sociedad mexicana," by María de Jesús Rodríguez; "Tradición y ruptura en la educación femenina del Siglo XVI," by Pilar Gonzalbo; "Mujeres y familia en Nueva España," by François Giraud; "Herejes, brujas y beatas: mujeres ante el tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en la Nueva España," by Solange Alberro; "Estereotipos femeninos en el Siglo XIX," by Françoise Carner; "Señoritas porfirianas: mujer e ideología en el México progresista, 1880–1910," by Carmen Ramos Escandón; "Modelos de mujer protestante: ideología religiosa y educación femenina, 1880–1910," by Jean Pierre Bastian; and "La lucha política de la mujer mexicana por el derecho al sufragio y sus repercusiones," by Enriqueta Tuñón.

The essay "La violencia en la vida e las mujeres campesinas: el distrito de Tenango, 1880–1910," by Soledad González Montes and Pilar Iracheta Cenegorta, illustrates the caliber of research and analysis as well as the political commitment that gives energy and drive to the book. They comment, "Although the theme of violence between social classes has a long trajectory, in historical and sociological studies only in recent years has an interest arisen in trying to understand domestic violence. This field of investigation was propelled by the feminist movement and takes its perspective from the conception of the family as a structure of domination, in which there is inequality in relations of power, according to sex

8. Lea Fletcher and Jutta Marx, "Bibliografía de/sobre la mujer argentina a partir de 1980," *Feminaria* 2, no. 4 (Nov. 1989):32–34 (published in Buenos Aires).

and age" (p. 111). González and Iracheta also point out that most of what is being published on interpersonal violence is journalistic and focused on the urban experience, with "scant reference to the world of the campesino."

González and Iracheta searched the records held in the Archivo del Poder Judicial del Estado de México to discover the materials for their story. In their view, the documents permitted them "an approach to the daily lives of women through a privileged medium: their own voices" (p. 111).<sup>9</sup> The authors' thesis is that during the Porfiriato, the district of Tenango was undergoing substantial change that destabilized the economic and social order. The resulting dislocation and disorientation experienced by the populace gave rise to an increase in domestic violence: "For the most part, men's violence against women was motivated and carried out in order to reaffirm masculine authority . . . , to buttress or prop up the established order. The violence that affected women was frequent and intense" (p. 138). Thus the authors deftly illustrate the direct connection between broad social forces and the intimate experience of daily life. In accomplishing this first-rate historical work, González and Iracheta bring their analytic skills, careful archival research, and a grounding in contemporary feminist scholarship to bear on the historical experience of the women of Tenango. In its engagement in urgent contemporary issues, their essay belongs to the tradition of conscientización; in its analytic specificity, it is part of the unfolding feminist scholarship that seeks to build understanding and theory directly on the experience of Latin American women.

#### MONOGRAPHS

Maria Elena Valenzuela's *La mujer en el Chile militar* also discusses the issue of violence against women, but from the perspective of the effects of institutionalized violence: "In Chile violence has been constituted as an instrument of privilege in the exercise of military power, affecting women in a special manner: as victims of the internal war, of tensions provoked by the increase in poverty, and of violence itself in the home" (p. 221). Valenzuela's study grew out of her work as coordinator for the Grupo de Estudios sobre Mujer, Militarización y Desarme de la IPRA (International Peace Research Associations), and it received support from the United Nations' Study of Violence and Democracy in Latin America. Although much has been written about the terrible violence used by the armed forces to seize power on 17 September 1973 and dominate Chile for

9. González and Iracheta credit as an inspiring model of this approach to archival material Silvia Marina Arrom's *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).

more than a decade, Valenzuela's book is the first to analyze how women were affected by the militarization of national life.

In the first section, Valenzuela explores general questions about women's relationship to armed force: "If women do not have access to the use of arms, and others do who are willing to use them, then women are cut off from an effective source of power within the nation" (p. 11). Other scholars in other political contexts have grappled with the conundrum of women and the military (for example, Sheila Tobias has observed that in the United States, military service continues to be the imprimatur for high elective office). Valenzuela's contribution is to examine these theories in the context of the Chilean experience. One of her insights is that the incorporation of Chilean women into the Chilean Armed Forces has not altered the relationship of women to power but merely extended militarization to a new population group. The Chilean Army opened recruitment to women in 1974 and created a military service school (La Escuela Femenina Militar, ESFEMIL) in 1975. Valenzuela concludes that the recruits—young, single women who had completed pre-university degrees—were reinforcements needed for the regime's effort to expand the role of the military in staffing the government bureaucracy: "The women replaced civil personnel on bases and in hospitals, personnel who had not received two years of military instruction and were therefore more difficult to control and to make perform within strict military regulations" (p. 196). The chapter "La mujer en las Fuerzas Armadas" is packed with information that will be new to most readers, and Valenzuela's analysis of this material is fascinating. Another aspect of women and the military that she addresses is the role of women who are linked to the military through marriage and family ties, whom Valenzuela dubs "military without rank." She asserts, "The wives of the military are linked with the institution in a manner less formal [than that of the men] but no less strong" (p. 206). Valenzuela characterizes officers' wives as encouraged to think of themselves as part of "the great family" that constitutes the husband's branch of service. She also points out that for these women, there are no clear boundaries between the working life revolving around their husbands' military careers and family life (p. 206).

Valenzuela's central theme is the relationship of institutionalized violence in a society and "the presence of a model of patriarchal domination," in this case the Armed Forces, to pervasive patterns of domestic violence (p. 221). She concludes that in the Chilean instance, the institutionalization of violence and patriarchal systems has meant that "[p]olitical violence is justified as having a 'higher goal,' and domestic violence is part of the rights of the husband over the wife and of the parents over the children" (p. 221).

Two other monographs deserve brief mention. Nestor Tomás Auza's *Periodismo y feminismo en la Argentina, 1830–1930* is the first book to ex-



amine the female contribution to the great tradition of Argentine journalism. Auza emphasizes the nineteenth century, devoting the second part of the book to analyzing twelve periodicals written by women during that era. As he is careful to point out, some, but not all, of the journals were feminist. *Periodismo y feminismo* contains a wealth of detailed information and makes a welcome contribution to the literature on women in Latin America.

In 1978 Moema Viezzer's edition of Domitila Barrios de Chungara's story, *Let Me Speak! Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines*, became the exemplar of the Third World woman's challenge to middle-class and elite feminists. In *Aquí también, Domitila*, David Acebey has now undertaken with Barrios de Chungara to recount her experiences as an internationally known spokeswoman. This story, which Acebey calls "una historia inmediata," tells of her continuing commitment to her community, her participation in a brutally repressed strike in Bolivia, a period of exile, and her travels in Europe and Latin America (including a trip to Nicaragua to express solidarity with the Sandinistas). Photographs record her attending the first Congreso de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia in 1980 and the Seminario Internacional de la Mujer en la Defensa de la Democracia en América Latina in Quito, and visiting the Swiss Alps with her seven children. The account ends with her words, "All that I have learned I transmit to my people" (p. 281).

## CONCLUSION

The quality and quantity of the new work on women in Latin America make it clear that the study of women in Latin American society is no longer an adjunct to other fields. It is now an area of study that is contributing important information and theoretical insights, which are in turn reshaping the way scholars think about Latin American history, politics, sociology, and theology. Nor should the study of women in Latin America continue to be viewed as a less developed area of women's studies or lumped with research on Asian, African, and Middle Eastern women under the tired rubric of "Third World." Most important, the new work signals that theoretical understandings of Latin American women must be grounded in the experience of Latin America,<sup>10</sup> not imported from European and North American experiences, a practice that tends to obscure more than it illuminates.

Finally, it is clear that a central theme demarking writing by and about women in Latin America is its political intent. This was true in 1830; it is true in 1990. For to write on women in the Latin American context, no

10. See Jean Franco's discussion of this idea in her fine monograph, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

matter what the historical era, is to immediately engage in issues of colonialism and imperialism, dominance and exploitation, race and ethnicity. In contemporary historiography, a gendered understanding of politics has become a prime vehicle for social criticism, visible in the redemocratization efforts of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay and in post-earthquake politics in Mexico. Among many Latin American women writers, especially, the connection between writing about the female experience and a feminist perspective is explicit and urgent. This link is apparent in the concern with violence against women, and by extension, against all people. This theme pervades Valenzuela's book, González and Iracheta's article, and Domitila's story, and it is a subject with which the authors of *The Women's Movement in Latin America* grapple. A Chilean woman, now living abroad, expressed the matter thus at the IV Encuentro Femenino Latinamericana y del Caribe in Taxco, Mexico, in 1987: "For me, a woman who becomes politically conscious of being a woman is a feminist. What feminism does is to develop our consciousness of oppression and exploitation into a collective phenomenon capable of transforming reality, and therefore revolutionary."<sup>11</sup>

11. Cited in Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991).