

*Power and Television in Latin America: The Dominican Case.* By ANTONIO V. MENÉNDEZ ALARCÓN. Westport: Praeger, 1992. Graphs. Tables. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 199 pp. Cloth. \$47.95.

Antonio Meléndez Alarcón has written an interesting, and yet fatally flawed, study of politics and television in the Dominican Republic. His book explores the relationship between the development and functioning of television and its use by political and economic elites. Television in the Dominican Republic was introduced by the dictator Rafael Trujillo as early as 1952, and was used as another instrument of Trujillo's vast control. After Trujillo's assassination in 1961, television expanded to become the chief communications medium and the main source of political and social values. Yet as the author well explains, the explosion of private and public television on a variety of networks has not led to a much greater pluralism of viewpoints. Rather, because of concentrated ownership, interlocking social networks, the pressure of commercialization, and the dominance of the industry by a single class, the medium is boring, biased, homogenized, and without redeeming social virtues.

The factual data presented in Meléndez Alarcón's book are original, useful, and an important contribution to general knowledge of the Dominican Republic. The author traces the origins and early growth of television under Trujillo and its use for propaganda purposes. He explains television as a medium of production, to be treated like any other service industry, and analyzes its patterns of ownership in the Dominican case. He then looks at the "cultural space" that television fills: the content of the programming, the sources of the *novelas* and other series that fill the screen. He has a very interesting chapter on television in the marketplace of ideas—the news programs and the biases that pervade them. His chapter on "Election Ritual and Television" is similarly fascinating, showing how, in the Dominican Republic as elsewhere, television has become *the* source of information—and prejudice—about the candidates. Throughout the book Meléndez Alarcón introduces valuable ideas from the vast and rapidly growing literature about television, which offer important insights and help put his case study in broader perspective.

So far, so good. The trouble comes when the author tries to put all this material together in a single conceptual framework. First he employs a simple-minded Marxist paradigm that has been thoroughly discredited and that no one believes in anymore. Second, the methodology leaves a great deal to be desired. It is all impressionistic; it includes no content analysis, no systematic analysis of programming biases, no satisfactory explanation of whom the author interviewed or the interview questions and subject matter. Third, the author is exceedingly weak in his use of the literature on the Dominican Republic, including the seminal earlier materials on his subject, the media. Fourth, Meléndez Alarcón throws out numerous Marxist or Millsian terms—*power elite*, *bourgeoisie*, *capitalist class*, and,

of course, *contradiction*—without ever telling precisely who the first three are, the bases of their influence, their interrelations, their rivalries as well as their cohesiveness, how they operate, or how they exercise their economic, social, and political power. Finally, in his conclusion, the author presents an idealistic and highly romantic vision of what he thinks television ought to be—but without providing the slightest clue as to how to achieve the results most of his readers would probably agree are desirable.

The truth is that there are power elites in the Dominican Republic who often operate by stealth and subterfuge, who disguise their ownership and interrelations, and who subtly manipulate national politics. But in a serious, scholarly book, that needs to be shown, demonstrated, and illustrated, not simply asserted like an incantation. It really would be useful, as sociologists and communications specialists write more about politics, for them to really know the literature, and to understand what politics is all about and what political science can contribute to their studies.

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*The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti.* By LESLIE G. DESMANGLES. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Illustrations. Maps. Figures. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. xiii, 218 pp. Cloth, \$32.50. Paper, \$12.95.

Despite the rapid growth of evangelical Protestantism in Haiti, most Haitians are both Voodooist and Catholic, and they experience no contradiction in this dual allegiance. Voodoo's prominence in Haiti is chiefly explicable by the large proportion of Africans in its population when the country achieved independence in 1804. Countervailing Christian influences were present from the beginning of French colonization in the seventeenth century, but were never strong. The dynamics of Voodoo's coalescence from a variety of African religions and the chronology of the black population's adoption of Catholicism remain largely uncharted territory. Hence one welcomes a work offering a historical approach to the subject by an author who has done fieldwork in Haiti and Benin (an area that has greatly influenced Haitian Voodoo).

Leslie Desmangles' main thesis is that the syncretism between Catholicism and Voodoo is best described as symbiotic: no real fusion has taken place between the two faiths; they merely coexist in a mosaic pattern. This point is hardly controversial, but Desmangles illustrates it well. The parallels between Catholic saints and Voodoo deities are based generally on superficial visual similarities in their respective iconographies. Catholic elements are always interpreted in an African fashion and are not well integrated into Voodoo ritual. The *pret savann* (bush priest), who reads Catholic prayers at Voodoo ceremonies, is unknown in some parts of the country; regrettably Desmangles does not specify which.