

editors and contributors are to be commended for producing a volume that makes a valuable addition to our understanding of Latin America's urban growth and of the social history of the region.

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*The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box.* Edited by JOHN D. FRENCH and DANIEL JAMES.

Comparative and International Working-Class History. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. Photographs. Tables. Figures. Notes. Index. viii, 320 pp. Cloth, \$54.95. Paper, \$17.95.

In their introduction, editors John French and Daniel James define the current challenge for labor historians of Latin America: "to produce fully gendered accounts of class formation and working-class subjectivity." The interesting, if unbalanced collection of nine articles in this anthology does suggest various ways to "rethink the categories . . . [and] broaden our understanding of working-class identities for both men and women" (p. 6). The articles study worker subjectivity without ignoring material and structural constraints, and they are well written in jargon-free language.

These well-documented articles by historians focus primarily on industrial labor, mostly in urban settings during the period of the 1930s to 1950s in a few countries; three articles focus on São Paulo, Brazil; two on Berisso, Argentina; two on Chile (Aconcagua and El Teniente); one on Guatemala City; and one on Medellín, Colombia. They draw creatively on a rich variety of sources—including oral testimony, court records of domestic conflict, factory personnel, and disciplinary records—to explore connections between the material conditions of workers' lives and their varied consciousness and identities. Although women are the subjects of most articles, their identities are shown to be constructed in relationship to men's identities, and two authors—Deborah Levenson-Estrada and Thomas Klubock—include fascinating and suggestive (if brief) discussions of the complex and ambiguous construction of working-class masculinity.

Oral histories stand at the center of the majority of the articles, providing both rich evidence and raising interesting issues about how to use such documents. Daniel James and Deborah Levenson-Estrada study the different paths of two female labor activists—Doña María and Sonia Oliva—both of whom are keenly aware of how gendered ideology shaped their experiences. James views Doña María as living in unresolved tension between her self-image of the good wife and mother and the irreverent rebel girl turned Peronist labor activist. In contrast, Levenson-Estrada shows how Sonia Oliva's union activism in the 1970s in Guatemala City grew out of and reinforced her highly self-conscious rebellion against female familial roles and gender norms.

Oliva's "lonely grassroots feminism" (as Levinson-Estrada terms it), does not accurately characterize the consciousness of most of the women workers discussed in this anthology. Those who took the "unfeminine" step of working for wages generally "lived

in a gray area of ‘gender imperfection’” (p. 211) in which they could not live up to “ideal” female behavior but were unwilling to explicitly reject the ideals. Mirta Zaida Lobato found that the female meat-packing workers of Berisso she interviewed handled the contradictions in their lives by conceptualizing their employment as “necessary” and as “helping out” the family. Similarly, Theresa Vecchia presents a wealth of oral testimony to demonstrate that female textile workers of São Paulo valued the skills they acquired in the factories and the economic contributions they made to their families; nevertheless, they persisted in defining themselves above all as housewives and mothers, and expended considerable energy trying to reconcile the two roles. In her study, “Talking, Fighting, Flirting: Workers’ Sociability in Medellín Textile Mills, 1935–1950,” Ann Farnsworth-Alvear shows how workers evaded industrialists’ attempts to control the productive process and thereby humanized the workplace. She concludes that such actions cannot be neatly classified as “resistance,” and suggests that the concepts of accommodation/resistance only distort and flatten historians’ understanding of informal aspects of working-class cultures. John French with Mary Lynn Pederson Cluff document the important contributions women made to working-class mobilizations in São Paulo between 1945 and 1948; but lacking oral testimony, the subjective experiences of women activists remain little explored.

Thomas Klubock and Heidi Tinsman examine how gender dynamics within the working class have been shaped by actions of employers and the Chilean state. Klubock demonstrates that the success of the Braden Copper Company in El Teniente in creating a stable community of married male workers living in nuclear households with economically dependent wives and children backfired as a strategy to bring accommodation and discipline to the workforce. While the new domestic relationships limited women’s autonomy (in exchange for greater economic security and legal protections), they also fostered the rise of an increasingly combative and cohesive working-class community. Tinsman studies shifting patterns of domestic violence in Chile’s Central Valley province of Aconcagua as a way to uncover the changing nature of gender hierarchies. She argues that “during the 1960s and early 1970s men used violence to bolster an already existing male social and sexual privilege that was in many ways reinforced by the process of Agrarian Reform; while under military rule and export capitalism, men used violence in reaction to a relatively greater social and sexual agency assumed by women,” who gained access to jobs in new fruit-packing plants (p. 266).

These articles are representative of exciting, innovative, and suggestive new work. And yet they constitute only small pieces and provide only small glimpses of what a gendered history of the Latin American working class as a whole might look like. As the editors acknowledge in the introduction, the gaps in our knowledge remain huge, so much so that the agenda remains one of conceptualizing and carrying out new kinds of microhistories. The possibility for synthesis is still far off.

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