

# ***Introduction***

IN December 1971 the University of Texas at Austin hosted the Third Biennial Meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, a meeting which devoted an entire session to the subject of Female and Male in Latin America. Revised and accompanied by some additional articles, the papers presented at that session appear in this volume, lending depth and breadth to this first-ever collection of essays devoted to the female in Latin America.

There are several themes or subthemes presented in the individual papers but all overlap in one way or another. A basic theme of the volume and one essential to any examination of the roles of or attitudes toward the Latin American female is the conflict between image and reality—what she is supposed to be and what she really is. Another theme involves the problems women encounter in the process of modernization and this interaction of traditional with modernizing influences underscores the possibilities of conflict among lower- and middle-class women. This, in a sense, has much to do with the changes and continuities in patterns of behavior toward and by females in “pre-” and “post-” revolutionary societies, another theme which emerges in the volume. Overall, however, our fundamental concern and purpose is to tell a story, the story of woman and man in Latin America as viewed through a prism, the many facets of which comprise the essays in this book.

The twelve essays cover the geographic areas of Spanish South America, the Spanish Caribbean, and Portuguese Brazil, and reflect the concerns of scholars in several disciplines, many of whom have utilized the concepts and methods of disciplines other than their own. Their discussions of the images, roles, and relationships of female and male in Latin America are produced not only from their personal field experience but also from intensive archival research and an ability to lift their findings out of the realm of rhetoric and into the arena of academic analysis of the highest order.

The study of women has recently acquired a new respectability in Western society and in the United States in particular where institutions are scampering to fulfill hiring requirements as dictated by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Woman's new visibility, both as observer and observed, has encouraged scholars to delve into the realm of female activity and behavior, but it has also made us aware of how ill equipped we are, especially in terms of materials, to cope with growing demands for information about one-half of the world's population.<sup>1</sup>

Study of the female in history and society has as much validity as the study of racial and ethnic groups, peasants, proletariat—indeed any other segment within a society. That is not to say that in “histories” or “studies programs” that these groups must remain forever distinct from each other; this, to me, is neither an ideal to be pursued nor a realistic assessment

in light of world development. There is a value, however, in temporarily "isolating" each group which makes an input into society and examining it separately—for however many years it takes—as well as in relationship to the whole, since it will ultimately aid our understanding of the historical interrelationships of those groups as well as of the larger society.

Two rationales for advancing the necessity of studying women should be noted immediately. Gerda Lerner, in noting the neglect of women by historians, claims:

As long as historians held to the traditional view that only the transmission and exercise of power were worthy of their interest, women were of necessity ignored. There was little room in political, diplomatic, and military history for American women, who were, longer than any other single group in the population, outside the power structure. At best their relationship to power was implicit and peripheral and could easily be passed over as insignificant. With the rise of social history and increasing concern with groups out of power, women received some attention, but interest was focused mainly on their position in the family and on their social status.<sup>2</sup>

She further emphasizes a factor of which we are all aware: that the literature of women's roles is narrow, lacking in analysis and interpretation, and rife with rhetoric due to the failure of scholars to undertake any systematic study.

Others speak to the scholarly neglect of females with a different vocabulary, in terms of what Lemisch labels the "inarticulate" or Ursula Lamb describes as "units of one."<sup>3</sup> Women have been so excluded from textbooks that lack of records of their activities places them in the category of common people with no means for expressing themselves in our elite-oriented scholarship. Women need scholarly spokesmen—not polemicists or rhetoricians—in order to sustain their visibility in this time of renewed interest.

As women and men are quite different, their historical roles have usually been divergent; "different" in our Western democratic mode of thought should not mean "unequal," but it has often been translated as such. It is partially to rectify any notion of inferiority or inequality—male or female—that studies of women should be undertaken and conducted according to criteria devised to deal with the differences between the sexes, in their roles and their achievements.

The twelve essays here encompass approaches for studying women in literary, historical, and social science contexts. The use of literature for the study of a subject is as valid an approach as any quantification technique. As Jaquette, Pescatello, and Flora demonstrate in their essays, literature can present existing social relationships as well as help to socialize women into roles expected of them. To the reader, therefore, literature serves the dual purpose of translator of image and arbiter of society. It also can give us a closer understanding of the individual observer since in literature the writer's "manipulation" of evidence is presumably more arbitrary than the

social scientist's. Literature supplies us with the symbols, stereotypes, archetypes, and roles it creates or conjures up which are useful for testing "real" situations.

The historical experience of each of the nations of America, while similar in some respects, is unique in terms of the physical, demographic, social, economic, and political influences peculiar to each region. Historical analysis for any given time frame helps us to understand the structure of a society, the interaction between economic and political organizations, and the attitudes and beliefs of a people, because by its introspective forays into the past, it provides a perspective for interpreting the present (and, some would say, predicting the future). Analysis within different time frames also gives the observer the opportunity to examine and measure change, lack of change, and/or continuities within a single cultural milieu, as is seen in the essays by Hollander, Pescatello, Purcell, Stevens, and Tancer.

The work of the social scientists in this volume has been directed toward explaining the position of women in contemporary Latin American societies in terms of the dictates of sociology, psychology, political science, and anthropology. Many of the authors—Chaney, Flora, Fox, Harkess, Kinzer, and Smith—worked within a study design in which variable factors could be controlled: sections of the cities of Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Lima, Santiago, Mexico City; particular classes or groups within the society, that is, *émigrés*, domestic servants, *barrio* dwellers, or professionals. They utilized interview techniques for basic or supplementary information and applied statistical field methods to investigations of social ideologies and attitudes. Thus, carefully "controlled," "quantifiable data" serve as a balance for the more impressionistic evidence invited by literary analysis.

It is difficult enough for people to analyze the problems of their own culture; their analyses are subject not only to their own personal biases but also to those of their class, race, region, ethnic group, religion, discipline, sex, and other subtle or not-so-subtle forces. The difficulties are complicated when the investigator moves into an alien culture, for no matter how intensively one seeks to overcome the biases of one's own culture, these biases remain; they must be acknowledged and compensated.

It is not my purpose here to write an exposé on what has served to differentiate each Spanish American nation from another, from Brazil, or from the United States, for the roots of differentiation are delineated elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> But the very deep cultural differences among the various Latin nations can be generalized to some extent, as Morse has done, and it is these general qualities which serve to indicate the ways in which historical experiences have helped to shape contemporary reality. Such identifiable attitudes can be found in the beliefs that Latin individuals were less concerned than their Anglo counterparts in shaping their world; that Latins were more willing to alienate rather than to delegate power; that Latin Americans had more respect for natural law than for those made by man; that Latin Americans perceive the world as parts related through a patrimonial and symbolic center rather than directly to each other.<sup>5</sup>

Two other points should be borne in mind; first of all, Iberian societies are seen as hierarchical systems in which an individual or group serves a larger purpose, and secondly, inequalities inherent in any society imply the acquiescence of the individual to his place in life.<sup>6</sup> These ingredients of an Iberian heritage have been relatively impervious to attack by principles of the Enlightenment and other Euro-American philosophies; they indicate why bias is possibly likely to be class oriented rather than sex oriented.

The female in Latin America appears to most North American observers in the following terms. In most of these societies at almost all historical epochs she has enjoyed few if any political perquisites and little economic power; in other words, she fits the Lerner schema as one removed from the decision-making public processes. However, the Latin American female has some perquisites not usually available to the contemporary Anglo-American woman. The Latin American family, integral to the historical schema discussed above, provides much latitude and legitimization of behavior in terms of social status, prestige, marital-*compadrazgo* alliances, and the like. The extended family, still widespread and potent in countryside and city, affords the female an extensive amount of influence on the members of her family. This certainly confirms some theses of Aries, Goode, O'Neill, and others that the "traditional" kin network in extended families with its built-in delegation of duties among several members gives women more "equality" and influence, and that it is the development of the nuclear family with its demands that woman perform functions which had previously been parceled out which causes the North American feminist reactions.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the average U.S. woman the Latin American female, especially in the middle as well as upper classes, can afford domestic help and thus is freer to spread her talents in the public arena while maintaining a certain image and dignity among the members of her family. At the lower levels of Latin American society, the theory for North America holds true, that "lower-class men concede fewer rights ideologically than their women in fact obtain,"<sup>8</sup> a point which speaks more to the point of similarities and differences between classes in different cultures rather than among cultures per se. The points discussed above seem to imply not only a model—one based on "female powerlessness" at personal and public levels—for feminine development different from the North American, but also more clearly defined points for comparison and contrast in the experiences of all American women. The authors in this collection of essays attempt to compensate for our Anglo-American viewpoints by carefully qualifying the boundaries within which they have worked, by drawing tight models and/or case studies, and by utilizing options allowed in literary, historical, and social science methods.

In addition to the real problem of culture bias on the part of an investigator, the varying component cultures that North Americans so glibly lump as "Latin American" afford another serious block to analyzing women in Latin America. As difficult as it is to generalize about our own Anglo-American nation it is even more difficult to do so with respect to the twenty variegated culture clusters beneath our southern boundaries. All of the

authors realize that it is impossible to *overgeneralize* for all of Latin America from their studies of isolated segments of one or two countries. The place to start is with particularized studies and the authors here concentrate on specific segments, building generalizations within the limits of their well-defined criteria, or variables.

All this leads to the distribution of subject matter in these articles with regard to region and class. Some countries, for example, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, simply have more accessible materials and a longer history of public concern for the female than do other of their sister nations. Also the available materials are mostly concerned with the upper-class, educated, and often highly visible professional *latina*. These specific biases of region and class, while they prevent overgeneralization for Latin America, provide solid units for the building of some general schema about professional elite, upper-class women in Latin American countries which share similarities in social, economic, and political development. The same dangers and possibilities for limited generalizations are applicable to the treatment of Latin America's working-class women from the studies presented here about domestics and other types from select *barrios* in Bogotá (considered by some to be an atypical Latin American city) or in Lima, which is a "traditional" society with strong and special attitudes regarding race and class.

All of the studies indicate an interrelationship between class and sex roles, attitudes, and behavior. Harkess's "Pursuit of an Ideal," Tancer's "*La Quisqueyena*," Flora's "Passive Female," and Smith's "Domestic Service" offer considerable insight into the relationship between class and women's roles. Harkess focused on the "stable working class" and the "very poor" in Bogotá while Flora concentrated on "middle-class" women in Colombia and Mexico. Each study buttressed the other's conclusions that, culture aside, lower-class women in the two countries—more traditional Colombia and "modernizing" Mexico—had more in common with respect to "universal" notions of class ideals than they had with "middle-class" women of their own country. Yet, as Harkess is right to point out, the results of these studies are generalizable only to similar neighborhood groups in regional or national capitals of Latin American societies at the "middle level" of economic development.

One of Flora's major points concerns the "passive image" of female, one which she finds (and which is supported by Harkess's study) more common among "middle-class" women, and one which, by extension of her research into U.S. materials, she also finds to be true of North America. However, Flora also suggests that in relation to Latin American middle-class women, their North American counterparts seem to exhibit more "active" characteristics, have more alternatives and more options to act; she attributes these manifestations to the different cultural contexts.

Smith's article stresses the growing importance of domestic service, not only for upper-class women for whom having servants is a sign of their high status, but also for the servants themselves. Smith suggests that domestic service is one of the contexts in which migrant women are absorbed into

membership of the urban lower class and is at the same time one of the avenues for upward socioeconomic mobility. Smith's analysis of servant girls for the city of Lima also concludes that compared to the United States and England, domestic service in Peru is a more indirect channel to self-improvement and consequently in that Latin society a servant girl is less likely to achieve upward mobility.

Tancer's "*La Quisqueyena*" complements Smith's "Domestic Service" by illustrating the reliance of middle-class Dominican women on servants. The availability of a pool of unskilled and semiskilled female labor is one of the major factors freeing the middle- and upper-class Dominican woman for involvement in professional activities and public affairs, a point suggested for other Latin countries in several of the other essays. Lower-class women also have considerable "freedom" because they are breadwinners and, as such, can dictate in matters outside their households. Tancer suggests that cultural characteristics peculiar to the Dominican heritage preclude a North American-style woman's liberation role, for the *dominicana* has full legal rights and equality with men and in both the upper and lower classes may have greater freedom than her North American counterpart. It is the middle-class women who are the most disenchanting in either culture and Tancer suggests that the same class patterns hold true for Puerto Rico.

Harkess's essay, in its discussion of a *changing* situation in a "traditional" or "prerevolutionary" society balances Purcell's "Modernizing Women" and Fox's "Honor and Shame" which also examine a changing situation, but in a "revolutionary" society. Purcell's study reveals the importance of differential sex roles in modernization and also stresses that the rate of change when imposed from above depends upon the priorities of the regime determining the changes. Purcell notes that woman's roles and status have changed and are continuing to do so because the "modernization" of women is a serious goal in Castro's nation, one which is necessary to the regime's attainment of other goals and which supports the regime's attempts to effect changes throughout the society.

Fox's article deals with resistance to the "modernization" of women in Cuba on the part of males for whom changes of any kind are a threat to the traditional security they have enjoyed. Working-class émigrés from Cuba offer us an unusual opportunity to analyze male reactions, for the émigrés in Fox's study were required to articulate their resistance to changes in general and the modernization of women in particular. The Cuban Revolution, in providing new roles for women outside the purview of the "traditional extended family," accelerated trends already underway and in that acceleration aroused the latent resentment of working-class males who saw in it a lessening of their prerogatives of male authority and traditions vis-à-vis their women and children. One of Fox's major contributions is that he delineates sex roles—both female and male—and reactions to changes in them, therefore suggesting that further research be directed toward a proper understanding of both sexes in society.

A pattern based more on "class" than on "cultural" similarities and differences seems to emerge from these social science articles and is further revealed by the two literary novel analyses—Pescatello's "The *Brazileira*" and Jaquette's "Literary Archetypes." Both essays adumbrate attitudes attributable to specific classes and groups in society, a classic case being one of Amado's *brazileira*, Gabriela, who, in moving from the lower class into a middle-class situation, loses many of her prerogatives. The expectancies and behavior for all classes of northeastern Brazilian women are beautifully outlined in her story. Jaquette's Peruvian characters confirm the various dimensions of expectancies among classes; the "upper-class" Peruvian and Brazilian woman exerting power through exercise of proper behavior, the "lower class" with fewer societal restrictions, the "middle class" caught in the vise of aspirations. Jaquette's characters further depict class/sex biases in the utilization of ideals and realities as found in the different racial-ethnic groups on the coast and in the interior, on conflict between the exploited Indian population and the dominant criollo culture.

Female involvement in political activities in Latin America presents a different pattern of behavior for analysis. Elsa Chaney's "Women in Latin American Politics" examines the political activity of upper- and middle-class women in "traditional" Peru and "modernizing" Chile. In most countries, including Chile and Peru, politics is the last public arena which women can and do enter. Despite differences in family styles, literacy rates, educational or economic activities, and the like between the two Latin nations, Chaney argues that few women in either country exhibit aspirations to achieve positions which would allow them to contribute to policy-making, and nearly three-quarters of these women occupy positions which they and others look upon merely as an extension of traditional family roles. She suggests that this is so because all vocations which women seek to enter must be justified in terms of the "one honorable vocational option" available to all women—that of *madre*. The author further suggests that because of this, professional Chilenas and Peruvians fulfill their roles in a manner different from their North American counterparts who tend to reflect the competitive characteristics of their culture. And Chaney concludes that sex-related differentiations between men and women are most sharply defined in the sphere of politics, not only in Latin America, but elsewhere.

"Women in Latin American Politics" complements and is complemented by Nancy Hollander's "The Forgotten Half" which discusses political activity among the Argentine lower classes and class exploitation, particularly of women. Hollander examines the historical experience of Argentine women, pointing out that the early twentieth-century feminist movement was concerned with redressing inequities of female status within the national system. She traces changes in Argentina's economic and political development and the effects which Argentina's change from an agricultural and pastoral economy to an industrialized economy with increased foreign investment had on working-class women. Hollander demonstrates that these women

had no means of political articulation until Eva Perón organized them and used the Peronist Feminist party and the General Federation of Workers to give power to lower-class women. This political participation, however, should be seen in light of mass participation and not in terms of the ability of any member of the lower class to rise to elite roles within the political context. Peronist Argentina was unlike any other Latin American country, until Castro's Cuba, in its attempts to rechannel political articulation and socioeconomic participation on a larger scale. Generalizations about women in politics, at least for the upper classes in most of Latin America, are more akin to those for the pre-1970 Chilean-Peruvian situation discussed by Chaney.

Kinzer's article on "Women Professionals in Buenos Aires" complements Hollander's essay, for it supports the argument that class is indeed an important element in evaluating and analyzing privileges and responsibilities in society. According to Kinzer, in addition to traditions of small families and attenuated motherhood—similar to the United States—Argentines have other bonuses. Working-class women retain their modicum of freedom by using the *guarderías* (state-supported day-care centers) and middle- and upper-class women have domestic help. This allows Argentine women of all classes more options in their society than seem available to North American women. Kinzer further suggests that Argentine women can serve as "viable role models" for North American feminists.

Several of the other essays offer both implicit and explicit areas of comparison/contrast for the United States situation. Stevens's "*Marianismo*" is quite explicit in suggesting that Mexican women, while acting out the stereotype of submissiveness, do in fact utilize the images thus conjured up to dominate their society. *Marianismo*, or the cult of feminine superiority, she regards as a reciprocal of *machismo*; *marianismo* thrives because the strength of its conviction is shared by the entire society. The author alludes to the existence of this phenomenon in Chile, Peru, and Puerto Rico, but does not extend her suggestion to the rest of Latin America. Stevens uses her data to suggest that, within the confines of *marianismo* society, the question of personal identity is less troublesome to Latin American than to Anglo-American women; *Latinas* always retain their family name and pass it on to their children. Also she suggests that should a *Latina* acquire expertise which is socially useful, she is more likely to find conditions more favorable for exercising that expertise than would her counterpart in the United States or in Western Europe. Furthermore, any woman who works outside her home is supposedly guaranteed the built-in respect of "sacred motherhood" so that in any conflict between job and care of family—regardless of civic rights—an employer is bound by custom to grant her leave for her family. Also, Stevens confirms for Mexico the fact that middle- and upper-class women have more "freedom" than Anglo-American women for socializing and for work since they have domestic service.

Jaquette's and Pescatello's studies also suggest differences between female options in Latin and Anglo America, among them the historical experiences which underlie basic attitudes. Both authors suggest that more



"traditional" Latin American cultures allow strong female roles and, with Stevens, conclude that *machismo* may be and often is a social convention, for male "moral weakness" is necessary to female influence. North Americans, reading the signals from their own cultural bias, tend to view *machismo* as the basic sign of oppression and powerlessness of *Latinas*; this, other misconceptions, and attempts to transfer them tend to indicate that North American-style "woman's liberation" will not work in the more "traditional" societies.

In a volume of this nature, serviced by several disciplines, analyzing various cultures whose political systems differ from "socialist" Cuba to "traditional" Colombia, from "modernizing" Chile to "conservative" Peru, there are bound to be contradictions emanating from the materials available and the authors' interpretations. One article focuses on economic-sexual equality (Purcell), another on concerns of sociosexual equality (Fox); some focus on female behavior (Chaney, Jaquette, Kinzer), others more on attitudes (Stevens, Pescatello); some examine working-class economic and political activity (Hollander, Harkess, Smith), others define middle- and upper-class activity (Flora, Chaney, Kinzer) or look across all classes (Tancer).

Class is a major concern, and one of the themes which emerges in the volume is the similarities of attitudes, roles, and behavior in classes across cultures. Although each author is careful to delineate the cultural ambient, social structure, and, to a lesser extent, economic development, political activity (Hollander, Harkess, Smith), others define middle- and seem to exhibit themselves in classes. It is also obvious that the authors fairly question implications of North American woman's liberation and understand changes and continuities of the female experience in terms of the *Latinas'* cultures and not the Anglo-American. Above all, almost all of the essays confront the image and the reality of women in Latin societies and demonstrate the difficulties in sustaining both the imagined and the real roles, attitudes, and behavior of women in a pan-Latin context. They do, as best they are able, confront the image in its implicit and explicit forms and test its application to the realities of each individual society.

The essays are arranged in a sequence from literary, through historical, to contemporary concerns; from examination of women in traditional contexts through changing milieux to a "modernizing" society which in its revolutionary context provides a socialist prescription and index for change. The latter type of society seems most characteristically represented by Cuba; Purcell's essay is most concerned with modernizing societies, for she sees equality as one measure of modernization and tests that assumption in light of Castro's stated goal of a modern egalitarian society as impelled from above. But modernization is not the main theme of the book and Purcell's discussion should not be considered as definitive of modernization, since each author from an individual discipline has devised models to explain "modernization" for her own purposes. Thus the essays are best read in light of each author's consideration of that problem.

Finally, I should point out that due to the circumstances under which this book was born and also to the nascent nature of the study of women

in Latin America, it has been impossible to include discussions of the female in all Latin American cultures. This, of course, precludes the possibility of making any systematic comparative analysis; indeed, the themes and substance of the volume as set forth in this introduction afford as tentative a generalization as any of us feel can be made about Latin American females at this point in time.

#### NOTES

1. For a comprehensive examination of sources and methods concerning study of the female see chap. 10, "An Essay on Materials and Methodology, Sources, and Suggested Areas of Research" in my forthcoming book, *The Outcaste: The Female in Iberian Societies*.
2. Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," *Journal of Social History*, 3, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 53.
3. See Jesse Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate,'" *Journal of Social History*, 3, no. 1 (Fall 1969): 1-29, and Ursula Lamb, "Units of One and the Visible Event," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, 13, no. 1 (January 1971): 131-35.
4. Richard M. Morse, "The Heritage of Latin America," in *The Founding of New Societies*, ed. Louis Hartz (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964): 123-77.
5. *Ibid.*, see pp. 172-77 for an elaboration of these points.
6. *Ibid.*, see p. 156 for a discussion of Thomistic principles.
7. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962); William Goode, ed., *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (New York, 1963); William O'Neill, *Divorce in the Progressive Era* (New Haven, 1967).
8. Goode (1963): 21.