79 | book reviews

Gender in Latin America

Sylvia Chant and Nikki Craske; Latin American Bureau, 2003, London; £15.99

ISBN: 1-8899365-53-2, (PBK)

Chant and Craske have produced a comprehensive overview of gender issues in Latin America, which spans the past 50 years and includes discussion of topics ranging from politics and legislation, to sexuality, ageing, health, migration and employment.

Overall, the analysis focuses on how far and in what ways gender inequalities have changed over the past 50 years and considers whether gender is a more important basis for inequality than other axes of difference such as class, 'race' or sexuality. In many ways, the situation of women has visibly improved across the region, there are now more women involved in formal politics, gender gaps are closing in education and in levels of employment yet, as the study reveals, the reality is far more complex. Each chapter seeks to review these overarching questions through an in-depth discussion of a different sector and to highlight the policy implications of the current situation.

Given the region's shared history of conquest and colonization by the Spanish and Portuguese, the authors argue that power relations were assigned in sexualized and racialized forms that continue to have implications for women and men's gender roles and sexuality even today. They suggest that it is possible to identify two stereotypical extremes that have emerged from this shared history, firstly that of sexual repression, associated with religion and particularly Roman Catholicism and secondly, that of exoticism and sensuality, especially in relation to Brazil and the Hispanic Caribbean. Hierarchies of class, 'race' and gender forged during the colonial period have remained fairly constant and can still be detected today; for example, in Argentina attributed female sexuality plays a role in distinguishing between higher ranking farmers of Northern Italian descent (*los gringos*) and the subordinate group of seasonal labourers of indigenous and Spanish descent (*los criollos*). *Gringas* are seen as staunchly Catholic and 'decent' whereas *criollas* are deemed to be 'easy' due to their 'hot blood' and an improper upbringing, which did not teach them to curb their sexual urges (p. 133). Nevertheless, women's groups throughout the region have been working to overcome these stereotypical views and broader changes (e.g. as more women enter the labour market and the subsequent challenges to men's role as the primary bread winner), have all inadvertently supported the efforts of women's fight for change. The analysis also looks at the ways in which some Latin American men have been involved in the struggle to challenge gender norms, an area which has previously been neglected in 'gender and development' studies. Again, broader processes of change have

facilitated this; for example, increased awareness of HIV/AIDS has in a small number of countries, such as Mexico, gradually removed the 'shroud of silence' (p. 153) from gay male culture. Nevertheless, at the same time states have resorted to new modes of repression even where homosexuality is not technically an offence, for instance by excluding openly gay politicians from government office.

Other sections of the book offer reviews of changing patterns of women's and men's engagement with the labour market and include a focus on gender differences in migration both nationally and internationally, providing clear and detailed analysis of current trends in the region. Female rates of participation in paid labour have increased across the region and the authors show how this situation has arisen following the introduction of neo-liberal economic reform programmes which have resulted in a proliferation of service industries across Latin American cities and have favoured women's employment. However, neo-liberal reforms have also led to an overall deterioration in working conditions, which has overlain, and in some cases exacerbated, a variety of gender inequalities in the labour market. Gender gaps in wages remain high and women are more likely than men to be employed in low-paid, low-status occupations with little chance of improving their long-term situation.

The book concludes with a reflection on the gains made by Latin American feminist activists and women over the last decades and considers some future policy directions that are required to support these gains as well as some areas for future research. In particular, the study argues, if gender relations are to be effectively addressed men need to become more involved in the fight for change. Although this can bring problems to the struggle for change there are also many positive examples cited of women and men working together to challenge prevalent gender norms.

Overall, the book provides a thoughtful and fascinating starting point for those wanting to know more about questions of gender across the region. While it presents a reflection on gender relations in Latin America the analysis clearly offers useful lessons that extend beyond the confines of the region. It is written in a clear and accessible style that will appeal to 'specialists' and 'non-specialists' alike and is both informative and enjoyable to read.

Jasmine Gideon

doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400211

Gender's place. Feminist anthropologies of Latin America

Rosario Montoya, Lessie Jo Frazier and Janise Hurtig (editors); Palgrave, 2002, London; 304pp., ISBN: 1-4039-6040-2 (Pbk) £13.99

Gender's Place is an impressive edited collection of ethnographic case studies of gender in Latin America. While it is remarkably wide-ranging, both thematically