
REVIEW ESSAYS

WOMEN OF VICE, VIRTUE, AND REBELLION: New Studies of Representation of the Female in Latin America

Sueann Caulfield
New York University

MENINAS PERDIDAS: OS POPULARES E O COTIDIANO DO AMOR NO RIO DE JANEIRO DA BELLE EPOQUE. By Martha de Abreu Esteves. (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1989. Pp. 212.)

PLOTTING WOMEN: GENDER AND REPRESENTATION IN MEXICO. By Jean Franco. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Pp. 235. \$30.00.)

SEX AND DANGER IN BUENOS AIRES: PROSTITUTION, FAMILY, AND NATION IN ARGENTINA. By Donna J. Guy. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. Pp. 260. \$35.00.)

OS PRAZERES DA NOITE: PROSTITUIÇÃO E CODIGOS DA SEXUALIDADE FEMININA EM SÃO PAULO, 1890-1930. By Margareth Rago. (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1991. Pp. 322.)

In 1986 Joan Scott lamented that despite the high quality of work in women's history, the field had failed to "shake the power" of dominant disciplinary concepts. Advancing gender as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power," Scott argued that feminist scholarship could potentially transform the way historians understand not only the history of women's place in society but also the ways in which various social rela-

tionships are constructed and sustained.¹ Recent work on women in Latin America is now confirming this potential.

The four books under review here explore the ways that representations of women have been used historically to establish and consolidate authority (moral, intellectual, and political), illuminating the links between gender and power relationships that range from adolescent courtship to international diplomacy. These studies also investigate dissident responses to authority, counterrepresentations produced by women, and the existence of competing symbolic systems. The four authors usually recoil, however, from setting up schematic opposition of repression and resistance. Indeed, the complexity of gender-based power relations make it difficult to present simple binary conflicts.

Academic disciplines have certainly been challenged in this work. Each discipline employs sources and methodologies derived from various fields. Moreover, major themes in Latin American history look different after considering how gender has coded processes of change. Central to the four studies, for example, is the question of how particular constructions of gender were instrumental in consolidating nations and national identities. Gender was an essential tool in ideological struggles for power between religious and secular authorities, in new strategies of social control, and in the fostering of the image of modernization that characterized the national period in urban Latin America.

In *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico*, Jean Franco demonstrates that the Mexican nation was only one of a series of “imagined communities” built on gendered relations of power. Noting that women have been marginal in the great “master narratives” of Mexican history—religion, nationalism, and modernization—Franco seeks instances of women’s “struggles for interpretive power” (p. xi). By identifying creative representations of and by women in various major media of Mexican history (religious and political writing, literature, street performance, painting, film, and ethnography), Franco achieves a comprehensive and ingenious synthesis of how gender was symbolically constructed at the center of institutionalized power. In general, she is remarkably adept at balancing the failure of women’s isolated “interventions in the social plot” to transform patriarchal institutions against their success in constituting “new social selves” and writing alternative (and recurring) plots. Unfortunately, however, Franco often concludes these fascinating stories of dissidence by reemphasizing the failure of her protagonists to escape the master’s language, thus undermining the very convincing case she makes for their successful challenge of the symbolic boundaries of that language.

Franco’s analysis is particularly astute, for example, in her discus-

1. Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 30.

sion of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexican mystics—religious women who experienced bodily transformation, trances, and rapture through intense prayer, fasting, and self-mortification. Mystics' descriptions of their psychic voyages included sensual contacts with Christ that subverted sexual symbolism. Eroticizing wounds and blood and denying phallogentrism, these women could simultaneously claim religious authority and express forbidden fantasies and sexual desire. Franco stops short, however, of considering these interventions as effective resistance to patriarchal clerical power. Mystics did not escape the clergy's conceptual system, in which female knowledge was a "way of feeling" that was opposed to abstract reason. Moreover, the interpretation and even authorship of mystical "fantasy literature" was appropriated by male clergy, who inverted its potential subversive power. Confined within Catholic dogma, mystical experience ultimately legitimized the authority of the Catholic Church and reinforced the opposition between female emotion and male intellect.

Franco's evaluation of the interpretive power of *las ilusas* ("deluded women") is less satisfying, although her discussion of the interventions of these fascinating women in late-eighteenth-century Mexico City is one of the most engrossing passages of *Plotting Women*. *Ilusas* claimed experiences similar to those of the mystics, but because they were outside the direct control of the church (or any other male authority) and because their narratives and behavior did not conform to those attributed to mystics, their claim to knowledge was deemed illegitimate and even sacrilegious. As "a living . . . parody of all that was held holy," *ilusas* were particularly threatening to religious authority and social order (p. 55). Franco therefore views the trial of the *ilusa* Ana Aramburu before the Inquisition as a "more generalized struggle for the control of public space" in a city that "had become dominated by a vast underclass" (p. 57). Franco hints intriguingly that the *ilusas* played an integral role in "the construction of a subaltern culture as a bricolage of elements from mysticism and the construction of a space for bodily pleasure" (p. 75). She fails, however, to explore this subaltern culture and the significance of Aramburu's performances within it. Franco neither investigates fully Aramburu's success in creating a place for herself among the "vast underclass" nor considers the possibility that many *ilusas* and other women in positions of spiritual leadership may have escaped the gaze of the Inquisition and thus were not delegitimized. Rather, Franco chooses to emphasize Aramburu's failure to convince church authorities of her special status. Ultimately, then, Franco largely dismisses Aramburu's struggle for discursive space as a battle lost to the great repressive force of the Catholic Church.

The second part of *Plotting Women* demonstrates how the secular recoding of women's role in society created "master narratives" that were as impervious to women's interventions as religion had been. In the secu-

lar intelligentsia's bid to usurp interpretive power from the clergy, they scrutinized women's bodies, discovering biological justifications for women's reduced participation in the public sphere and exalting women's natural maternal function. Symbolically, however, the mother of Mexico was La Malinche—the traitor, *la chingada*. If, as Octavio Paz has suggested, Mexican national identity rested on the rejection of everything represented by La Malinche, including her femininity, then that identity was masculine. Aspiring to rescue Mexico from this dark past, revolutionary nationalists erected the image of the messianic male redeemer through national allegory in which women were again marginalized, relegated to the spheres of the family, the church, and the ethnic and regional communities that predated the nation. In Franco's view, attempts by women to represent female identity within this new conceptual system were bound to be frustrated or destructive, as exemplified by writer Antonieta Rivas Mercado's suicide and painter Frida Kahlo's mutilated self-portraits. Even in Luis Buñuel's film *Los olvidados*, a critique of the "hypocrisy of benevolent paternalist authority," women represented nature (life and death) and were marginal to the plot. Benevolent patriarchal authority and its stifling of women's voices were not limited to national allegory and could even take the form of U.S. social scientist Oscar Lewis. According to Franco, Lewis, like the priests and confessors of the Inquisition, reserved the right to interpret and edit female expression, in this case the autobiography written by Consuelo Sánchez, which he presented as evidence of a fatalistic "culture of poverty." Ironically, when Franco lifts this text out of Lewis's narrative, it reveals Sánchez's optimism and ability to transform her social role. Sánchez becomes an independent woman and even takes the place of her father as provider and authority in her family. But again Franco reminds her readers that for Sánchez to tell her story of emancipation, she had to gain the recognition of patriarchal authority (reconstituted in Lewis) and to rely on "the master's voice."

In the second part of *Plotting Women*, the master, who had once been univocal religious authority, had multiplied as knowledge was wrested from the exclusive monopoly of the church and appropriated by many institutions of secular authority. But while the master had become many, his voice was increasingly one—that of science. As scientific knowledge came to share the authority of religion, diverse specialists arose to claim the right to identify and order people and things.

It is at this point that Franco's work dovetails with the other books under review. A major theme running through all four studies is that the consolidation of independent nationhood in Latin America coincided with the rise of secular authorities (especially urban professionals and politicians but also including novelists and even feminists), who invoked both scientific rationale and religious precepts to reorder society. At the core of their project of creating homogenous modern societies was the notion of

the “bourgeois nuclear family” as a model of modern values and norms. The separation of the public from the private, a common feature of the establishing of bourgeois society in Europe, was an integral part of attempts to “civilize” and “whiten” urban populations in Latin America through policies of moral and social hygiene. Women’s confinement to the private sphere was justified “scientifically,” as their minds and bodies became primary objects of inquiry.

The concept of sexual honor or “honesty” dominated medical and legal investigations into female identity. Honor distinguished between two female types: the “public woman” or prostitute and the homebound “honest woman.” Martha Esteves’s *Meninas Perdidas: Os Populares e o Cotidiano do Amor no Rio de Janeiro da Belle Époque* is a study of the crime of deflowering (extramarital sex with an honest virgin woman between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one). It demonstrates how turn-of-the-century legal authorities in Rio de Janeiro constructed the “honest women” as a juridical subject and used this subject in attempts to teach the population “civilized” behavioral norms and moral values.

The issue in deflowering cases was not whether the sexual act occurred but whether the offended woman was “honest.” An obligatory legal-medical examination might provide such evidence as “flaccid breasts and labia,” supposedly a sign of frequent sexual activity. Usually more incriminating, however, was evidence of behavior and lifestyle that did not conform to bourgeois norms of propriety for women. The defense in deflowering cases often sought to demonstrate the dishonesty of the offended woman by providing evidence that she participated in popular festivals, walked in the streets alone, or showed signs of self-assertiveness or independence.

The prosecution, obliged to prove the offended woman’s honesty, called on witnesses who described her as “sheltered,” “modest,” and “reserved,” and claimed she never left home unaccompanied. To prove that the defendant was responsible for her “dishonor,” the young woman typically described her first sexual contact with him as extremely painful and bloody and her own behavior as passively submissive. The intense pain and bloodshed reported and the formulaic nature of depositions, often expanded after the original statements at the police station, led Esteves to suspect that the women were coached by officials well-versed in judicial conceptions of the honest woman.

Donna Guy and Margareth Rago, in their respective studies of prostitution in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, demonstrate that the identity of the dishonest woman was constructed as insistently as that of her antithesis. For both authors, an intense preoccupation with identifying these two female types coincided with the ideological consolidation of the modern independent nation in Argentina and Brazil. “Family women” were conceded only “passive citizenship” (which excluded the right to vote or

participate in politics) because of their “natural passivity.” By denying even passive citizenship rights to prostitutes, whether formally (as in Buenos Aires) or informally (as in São Paulo) and by segregating them from family women, authorities defined the family as the basis of the nation. The prostitute or “public woman” constituted a boundary beyond which respectable family women could not venture. Thus while “modernization” of provincial society brought new liberties for the honest woman, her freedom “would always be limited symbolically by the presence of the prostitute” (Rago, p. 40).

The creation of this “phantom” resulted in more than symbolic restrictions. Urban authorities couched their fears of threats posed by modern society to social and sexual order in terms of the threat that the prostitute posed to independent women. The factory, commerce, and new forms of leisure were all blamed for exposing women to profligacy. Authorities thus justified regulations limiting women’s employment opportunities as necessary to protect women from contamination.

Notwithstanding the coincidence of major issues in the two studies—gendered construction of citizenship, debates over regulation of prostitution, and the “white slave trade”—and some common source materials, the studies by Guy and Rago are very different books. In keeping with their respective national historiographical traditions, the Brazilian author’s *Os Prazeres da Noite: Prostituição e Códigos da Sexualidade Feminina em São Paulo, 1890–1930* emphasizes theoretical issues (with many references to French authors) over empirical reconstruction of events, while the U.S. author’s *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* provides an empirically solid, loosely chronological narrative. Both authors have taken the best of these traditions and largely avoided the pitfalls. Rago supports her analysis of the “fragmentation of the modern subject” and “deterritorialization of subjectivity” with solid research. Guy in turn uses her narrative of political and cultural events to structure relevant theoretical observations and her own provocative explanation of changes in the *mentalité* of Argentine political culture.

In part, this divergence reflects the different kinds of sources for research available for São Paulo and Buenos Aires. For the latter, where the state regulated prostitution from 1875 to 1936 and again briefly in 1954, documentation is available in much greater abundance. Porteño authorities compiled police registries of prostitutes, records of obligatory gynecological examinations and fees paid by brothels, and congressional debates and legislation. Moreover, Buenos Aires was, far more than Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, the focus of international campaigns against the “white slave trade” and was therefore the topic of much of the documentation left behind by various international reform organizations.

Guy’s meticulous research on this international campaign and the traffic in women is one of the major contributions of *Sex and Danger in*

Buenos Aires. Weighing the fears and activities of anti-white-slavery groups in Europe and Argentina against the “verifiable reality” of the organized traffic in women, Guy concludes that the white-slavery debate constituted “the quintessential discourse on how presumed dangers of female immigration linked gender and family issues to national identity and international prejudice” (p. 7). The symbolic power of the prostitution issue, Guy argues, explained why “native-born prostitutes were almost totally ignored” in much of the debate (p. 126). Ironically, the issue of foreign prostitutes in Buenos Aires was used by European moralists to denigrate Argentine society and, after 1920, by Argentine moralists to bolster xenophobic and anti-Semitic nationalism.

Guy and Rago agree that the prostitution traffic existed, and they use some of the same sources to outline its general characteristics: the formation of organized networks of French or Jewish pimps who, through complex social and political connections, were able to supply Argentine, Brazilian, and U.S. markets with European prostitutes. Both also find that the size of the traffic was greatly exaggerated, as was the victimization of “innocent women.”

While Rago limits her observations to Brazilian responses to foreign prostitutes and is less critical of European attitudes, Guy provides a sophisticated analysis of the European chauvinism, racism, and anti-Semitism underlying a good part of the moral reform campaigns to abolish the white slave trade. European reluctance to accept the idea of “their” women prostituted to colonial or postcolonial nations led to political, racial, and religious explanations of the traffic: vulnerable European women fell prey to racially inferior, immoral societies; modernizing nations were “accomplice[s] to the loss of family control over women” (p. 35). Religious differences between Protestant (especially British) and Jewish moral reform groups and Catholic Argentina were reflected in different attitudes toward prostitution. Catholics, despite official Vatican policy condemning licensed brothels, often cited Saints Thomas Aquinas and Augustine to argue that prostitution was a “necessary evil.” In contrast, “Protestants were more united in their stand that sexual self-control should be practiced by men and women outside marriage and that female prostitution must be suppressed” (p. 13). Protestant reformers were more likely to see Argentine tolerance of prostitution and state-sanctioned bordellos as the cause of European women’s downfall than to look for explanations within their societies of origin. Much more commonly, however, anti-Semitic rather than anti-Catholic sentiment was fueled by the white-slave controversy because of the high visibility of Jewish pimps and prostitutes in Catholic societies and, ironically, by the publicity generated through the efforts of Jewish anti-white-slavery groups.

In fact, it was not international pressure but Argentine anti-Semitism, along with rising xenophobic nationalism, that led to the demise of

legalized prostitution in 1934. After decades of debates over Buenos Aires's state-regulated bordellos involving issues of morality, social control, and public health, the victory of "abolitionists" came in the wake of a major Jewish white-slavery scandal. Public outcry expressed indignation and fear not of the legalized brothel but of the imaginary threat of "evil Jews and immigrant mobsters" (p. 122). In any case, by the 1930s and following women's entry in the industrial labor force, "the symbolic debate over the dangerous woman had shifted from the bordello to the factory" (p. 132). It was the working woman, rather than the prostitute, whose independence came to be perceived as a threat to the family and the nation.

Even more intriguing than Guy's discussion of "dangerous women" is her analysis of how deviant men came to replace them as a privileged receptacle of anxiety and fear by the 1950s. The movement against legalized prostitution, she explains, was accompanied by campaigns supported by diverse political parties to "improve the moral fiber of Argentine society" (p. 183). The media and especially popular culture were censored and sanitized, first through the Socialists' "public education campaign" and later by more authoritarian means. With the demise of the "golden era of Argentine popular culture" characterized by the dance halls, bordellos, and tango music of the 1920s, collective male passions channeled into politics and soccer came to represent the greater threat to social order. Sexual and homophobic anxieties, heightened by "neo-Victorian" sexual and cultural repression, were accentuated in the soccer stadium, where fans "developed their own set of rituals that helped define them as true men" (p. 191). In the same way that authorities had been preoccupied with distinguishing prostitutes from "honest women" in earlier decades, by the 1950s, "the anxiety was that sexually dubious males were 'disguised as men'" (p. 191). Fears of uncontrolled tension in the soccer stadium and elsewhere, along with perceived increases of homosexuality and other forms of sexual "deviance," led to nostalgia for the days of legalized prostitution. Legislation relegalizing bordellos, enacted in areas near military bases in 1944 and nationwide in 1954, thus responded to fears of male rather than female sexual deviance.

Sex and Danger is a superb and extraordinarily thorough study of how discourses about gender, sexuality, and prostitution were shaped by and in turn shaped social organization, culture, and politics in modern Argentina. Yet the way in which Guy treats the women and men whom she describes as marginalized by these discourses is sometimes problematic. For example, in the conclusion, Guy states that "civil liberties of even the most socially unacceptable men, women, and children must be protected lest their civil incapacity be extended to other members of the population" (p. 209). Not only does Guy seem to go along implicitly with the idea that the groups she discusses are "socially unacceptable" (thus contradicting her previous argument that marginality was socially constructed

as a way of defining acceptable behavior), but she also implies that denying civil liberties to these groups was not, in and of itself, a significant historical problem. At times, some of her explanations of why women decided to become prostitutes lean toward ahistorical assumptions: prostitution inevitably proliferated “in a city with so many unmarried men and poor women” (p. 58) or because of the “unwillingness of public authorities to curb male sexual desires” (p. 44); prostitution was a consequence of “urban disorder”; women turned to prostitution out of economic desperation. These kinds of assumptions by no means characterize most of Guy’s study, for she also considers historically specific reasons that women became involved in prostitution. She discusses the increasing restrictions placed on female employment as well as different sexual mores among poor rural women that might have “made them consider commercial sex a viable survival strategy” (p. 43). She also notes that many women rose to positions of power in the prostitution racket. Finally, in her fascinating discussion of the tango, Guy explains how prostitutes came to play a central role in “popular forms of male recreation” specific to this period in the development of Argentine society (p. 142).

Notwithstanding these qualifications, some of Guy’s explanations of the “causes” of prostitution employ precisely the kinds of theories that Rago rejects as “the logic of the negative.” Rago argues in *Os Prazeres da Noite* that analyses that posit economic hardship, demographic sexual imbalance, or a sexually repressive moral order as causes ignore the specificity of its practice in a particular historical juncture and society. Poverty, for example, may engender responses other than prostitution. Male sexual tensions that might arise from a scarcity of women could be alleviated through masturbation, homosexual relations, or various other practices as much as through prostitution. Furthermore, theories of “negativity”—which include those that consider prostitution a form of resistance to patriarchy as well as those that see prostitutes as victims—ignore the erotic element of prostitution and “desexualize” licentiousness. Rago’s interest lies in explaining the “singularity” of the phenomenon of prostitution in São Paulo during the First Republic (1890–1930) by looking at its positive dimensions, that is, at “the functions that it fulfills as a . . . mode of subjective behavior” differentiated from that of the bourgeois nuclear family (p. 21).

Focusing primarily on “luxury prostitutes” and arguing that prostitution was understood by contemporaries “symbolically rather than empirically,” Rago perceives prostitution as a fundamental element of a new urban space dedicated to creating and fulfilling modern desire. She vividly describes the development of public spaces of male sociability (like *café-concertos*, cabarets, *pensões alegres*) and new “technologies of desire” (such as pornographic literature and films, sexual paraphernalia, and garments), in which new images and fantasies about sexual women were

marketed. This new commercialization of desire, she argues, supported prostitution and “deterritorialized” subjectivity and desire. That is, the space designated for the erotic and the confirmation of sexual identity and social relationships were relocated from the rural extended household to the urban public sphere.

The construction of this public space of desire paralleled and complemented the construction of the bourgeois nuclear family. Illicit sex was no longer to take place within the home. As the bourgeois household was increasingly “sanitized” and its men sought the bordello for expression of “unsubmissive sexuality,” the “francesa” replaced the black slave as the privileged symbol of sexual immorality. The prostitute came to be imagined as a figure of modernity, “associated with the extreme liberalization of customs in civilized societies” (p. 37). In mimetic and Francophile bourgeois São Paulo, it was only fitting that the prostitute and the bordello were “French.” To compete with prostitutes who actually were from France, women of various nationalities took on French identities, and Paulista cabarets and pensões with names like “Palais Elégant” or “Maxim’s” masqueraded as affiliates of erotic establishments existing in Paris.

Rago argues that a large part of the attraction of this “universe of illicit sexual practices” was its “civilizing” function in “provincial Paulista society.” Foreign prostitutes and their milieu, sophisticated and worldly, “taught refinement to Paulistas dazzled by progress and the conquest of modernity” (p. 25). The pensão was also socially sanctioned as a space for young men’s sexual initiation, necessary to guard the virginity of future wives and as an outlet for lads’ “internal fire.”

By stressing the “positive” functions of prostitution, Rago does not mean to suggest that the construction of urban space “destined exclusively to the satisfaction of male pleasure” was “valuable” or “good,” but rather to explain why it was so attractive to a large part of Paulista society. Even bourgeois women, Rago argues, “had erotic fantasies about the world of prostitution as a space of liberation of desire and loss of oneself,” an assertion she supports through analysis of novels written by women (p. 164). In fact, the prostitute’s allure was so dangerous that it justified the restriction of the social space of “honest women” so as to “protect” them from temptation. Various authorities worked to delimit this social space, elaborating a complex discourse on “female nature” and respectability.

Rago offers a disappointingly timid evaluation of the extent to which this discourse was effective in disciplining society. She suggests that while theories of women’s biological inferiority and maternal nature were highly influential, even among feminists, many “honest women” chose not to confine themselves to domesticity. As for prostitutes, the very need to produce “increasing rigid and delirious” scientific explanations of prostitution revealed “the fragility of theories that sought to discipline, if not eliminate, insubmissive sexual practices” (p. 163). These observations, how-

ever, categorize women in the same way that contemporary authorities did: the bourgeois honest woman and the prostitute. Because Rago is primarily interested in bourgeois society and its projections of the underworld, she does not consider the possibility of other configurations of the woman or other kinds of social influences in the construction of feminine identity.

In *Meninas perdidas*, Martha de Abreu Esteves focuses predominantly on the “other,” that is, the population that did not belong to the “cultured minority” or the “bourgeois society” that is the primary reference in the studies by Franco, Guy, and Rago. For this reason, Esteves is better able to evaluate the effectiveness of the discourse of public authorities in “disciplining” the general population. In the court cases she analyzes, defendants, victims, and witnesses were all members of Rio de Janeiro’s poor majority. Skillfully extracting evidence from their testimony, Esteves identifies a set of moral values and social norms that existed side by side with those of the justice system. Without denying the strength and diffusion of the bourgeois social codes that she finds in legal language, Esteves shows that bourgeois discourse was not monolithic but rather competed with the value system of popular culture. Esteves discovers, in contrast to the narrow parameters of acceptable behavior established in juridical discourse, that diverse lifestyles and social practices were accepted as normal patterns of everyday life by those in the popular sectors.

Esteves recognizes that bourgeois women also may have frequently transgressed juridical codes of honor. She argues nonetheless that these codes corresponded to lifestyles and values that characterized bourgeois society. Conversely, however, it was often impossible for poor women to follow bourgeois codes of honor. Their family and living situations did not conform to the ideal of the nuclear family and its concomitant sexual segregation. Premarital sex and consensual unions were social norms. Working-class women’s livelihood generally depended on their being outside their homes. Furthermore, they saw nothing unusual in going out alone, even if they were not on their way to or from work. Social interaction and courting among the poor on the street or in public plazas were natural everyday occurrences. The young women whom Esteves studies were assertive, even aggressive in initiating flirting and courtship in public, and they engaged in sex after what lawyers and judges considered to be short periods of courtship. Finally, underlying deflowered women’s attempts to describe their sexual experience in ways that would make them look virtuous in court, Esteves uncovers evidence that many of the women enjoyed sex or initiated the eroticism leading up to it. Analyzing the logic and cohesiveness of social codes that she finds in testimony, Esteves demonstrates that these “girls gone astray” were social “marginals” only when removed from their primary system of social identification—popular culture—and placed within the conceptual system of the court, with which they were less familiar.

Theoretical differences among the four authors lead them to divergent conclusions about the historical meaning of gender in Latin American societies and the significance of political constructions of gender in the lives of the historical subjects in each study. Esteves stresses the persistence and cohesiveness of popular culture as a form of collective resistance to aggressive attempts to impose new codes of female behavior and more constrictive sexual values and norms on the Carioca working class. Franco sensitively recovers alternative “social plots” for women in Mexican history but distinguishes between the creative “interventions in the social text” she studies and the “real struggles of Mexican women” (p. 187). Guy focuses on the power of images of prostitution to induce repressive social policies and fears of dangerous women, while Rago emphasizes the power of the same images to induce the expression of “insubmissive sexualities.” What all four studies share are their methodological rigor and creativity, the solidity of their research, and their confirmation of the power of gender as an analytical tool for understanding history.