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Review/Reseña

Víctor Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein eds. *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012.

Of Machos and Men

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Studies in Latin American and Mexican masculinity have been on the rise in recent years. While traditional historiography has focused on men, it has rarely analyzed them as men, how they proved they were men, or how men and masculinity intersected with nationalism. In this light, Víctor Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein's edited volume, *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico*, is a welcome addition to Mexican and Latin American scholarship. Combined, the chapters give an excellent overview of Mexican masculinity from the early Porfiriato (1876-1911) to the present day.

In the introduction, Macías-González and Rubenstein lay out the volume's agenda and provide a brief overview of the history of masculinity in Mexico from the wars of independence (1810-1821) to 1970. They assert that gender identities are unstable and these identities are constructed "collectively from codes of behavior, attitudes, memories, stories, and emotions" (2). They justify their focus on masculinity by underscoring the prevalence of the Mexican-originated word 'macho' in global discourse and by stating the book's central thesis, that "both men and masculinity...have been part of Mexico's historical transformations" both in terms of how historical events have shaped masculinity and how debates over masculinity have impacted Mexican history (2). The editors also highlight three themes that link the chapters together: the importance of Judith Butler's work on gender performance, Michel Foucault's work on discourse analysis, and the importance of physical space in shaping masculinities.

The first section of the book is entitled "Experiences" and features case studies on masculine identity formation. The section opens with Macías-González's contribution, "The Bathhouse and Male Homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico." Borrowing terminology from Benedict Anderson, Macías-González argues that bathhouses allowed "individuals to imagine themselves as belonging to a distinct community of same-sex attracted men" (26). The author draws attention to the constructed nature of both bathing habits and masculine sexuality. During the Porfiriato (1876-1911), elites promoted bathhouses and hygiene as a way to 'Westernize' Mexico. Ironically, however, many Mexican elites traveling abroad saw themselves as superior hygienically to their European counterparts. Macías-González notes a shift in attitudes toward these bathhouses from the 1890s to 1905, when these spaces became associated with "sexual license, irresponsibility, degeneracy, and scandal" (43). Lawmakers promulgated ordinances against tub-sharing, physical contact with other bathers, mixing male and female bathers, bathing too long, and bathing with prostitutes. Macías-González points out that these measures contributed to the formation of a male homosexual community, despite their aim to eradicate 'degenerate' behavior. Throughout his analysis, Macías-González examines a wide variety of sources, such as diaries and

public health manuals, and subtly situates them within scholarly discussions on bathhouses, gender, and the Porfiriato.

Changing the focus from same-sex attracted men to female masculinity and honor, Kathryn A. Sloan's essay examines how women transgressed gender norms by examining *rapto* and *estupro* (seduction and deflowering) cases in Porfirian Oaxaca. According to Sloan, *rapto* had major implication for male honor. For the seducer, luring a virgin displayed his virility and his honor increased among his peers. On the other hand, the virgin's father "suffered a blow to his honor and reputation" for his inability "to control and protect his female family member" (55). Sloan highlights the different opinions of female honor among the social classes, moving beyond the elite fixation on virginity. In her analysis of judicial archives, Sloan found many cases where male seducers professed their love for their girlfriends, even after it was 'determined' that they were not virgins at the time of seduction. According to Sloan, "Other bases for female respectability may have included the ability to work hard and earn money, make a home, and raise children" (66). The author notes the active measures taken up by women in some of these cases. On occasion girlfriends pushed their boyfriends to seduce them and, in other cases, single mothers charged male seducers for injuring familial honor. Sloan concludes her analysis by noting, "scholars have overemphasized virginity as the main determinant of female honor, especially for the working class" (72).

James A. Garza's contribution continues the focus on the Porfiriato and employs historical narrative to highlight the impact of homosocial bonding on masculine identity. Garza analyzes a crime of passion that stemmed from a love triangle involving an office worker, Luis Yzaguirre, his supervisor, Carlos Rodríguez, and the supervisor's mistress whom Yzaguirre murdered, María Piedad Ontiveros. Garza contrasts the masculine identities of Yzaguirre and Rodríguez. The former engaged in carousing with his male friends and was more sexually aggressive, to the point of cuckholding his supervisor. The latter "played a silent submissive role," allowing Yzaguirre to betray him (81). Constructing his narrative from newspaper clippings and court documents, Garza frames the incidents

within the gender norms of the Porfiriato, a time when “Men were supposed to be sober and hard working, while women were to be compliant and submissive” (84). The chapter also highlights how *marianismo*, an ethos that emphasizes “the Virgin Mary’s absolute self-abnegation and acceptance of suffering as the model for acceptable feminine behavior,” affected the trial of Yzaguirre (89). This ideology transformed Ontiveros from a mistress who cheated on her partner into a suffering woman worthy of honor in the eyes of elites. Throughout the chapter, Garza highlights how historical analysis of a crime can shed light on “a hidden world of masculine friendships and codes of conduct” (98).

Moving from the Porfiriato to the Revolutionary Period, Eric Schantz provides a northern perspective to the volume in his chapter on Mexicali’s red-light district. Schantz constructs his argument around what he calls “transculturative masculinities” that combine “Mexican models of male privilege” with international red-light district practices such as overlapping the red-light district with the city’s segregated Chinatown (102). He frames red-light districts in Mexicali as an issue of “penetration and...vagination” (105). The penetrators were the foreigners that corrupted Mexico by infusing its vice economy with capital. The vaginal actors were Mexican politicians that geographically transformed the border into a macho playground for these foreigners to spend their money in Mexico. Schantz notes that reformers on both sides of the border were concerned about the health and moral problems associated with red-light districts. He draws particular attention to the Owl, a casino/bar/dance hall/theatre/brothel that appeared in Chinatown in 1916. Adopting Jim Crow segregation policies, the Owl “carefully contained prostitutes and people of color in such a way as to accommodate commercial sex without repelling bourgeois sensibilities” (116). In sum, Schantz’s chapter highlights how racial policies and popular beliefs about Mexican masculinity in the United States impacted urban planning in a border city like Mexicali.

Anne Rubenstein also interrogates the intersection of masculinity and public entertainment with her contribution on movie theatres and masculinity before 1960. Rubenstein frames the theatre experience as “an

intensely physical” one that “produced new sensations and experiences” (133). Rubenstein notes that the experience of going to the cinema could be a noisy one, as men in the audience often jeered and whistled when the film was scratched or out of focus. This experience was especially true for the working classes, for whom cinemas “were not places for people to sit passively, peacefully taking in a movie” (138). In the early days of cinema, theaters often segregated along gender lines, with balconies reserved for raucous young lads. Rubenstein also highlights the role of the Catholic Church in framing moral critical commentary about theaters that emphasized men’s duty to protect women. This critique corresponded with the behavior of schoolboys who physically shielded their female classmates in the theater from state-sanctioned sexual education films in the 1930s. Rubenstein concludes that, between the 1920s and 1960s, the cinema “became a kind of laboratory for gendered modernity” (151). A laboratory where young men could emulate the behavior of their friends, their fathers, or Marlon Brando.

Part Two of the volume is entitled “Representations” and focuses on the mass-media and how it has portrayed Mexican masculinity. This section begins with Robert Buffington’s contribution, “Toward a Modern Sacrificial Economy: Violence Against Women and Male Subjectivity in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico.” Buffington investigates male-against-female violence through images and poems found in the Mexico City penny press. He argues that this violence “resulted not from the inherent brutality of working-class men, but from a more generalized crisis of masculine subjectivity” (160). Examining the penny press, Buffington finds a variety of attitudes toward women, including positive, negative, and indifferent. He divides the poems he analyzes into three categories: those emphasizing feminine virtue, those focusing on feminine betrayal, and the focusing on abjection, a state produced when “the subject (identified as male) is both irresistibly drawn to and inevitably repulsed by the abject (identified as female)” (180). Buffington notes that these poems highlight the “psychic violence to men” wrought by modernity but erase “the physical violence to women,” often by using ellipsis in the poems (188). According to Buffington, this erasure of women’s suffering and sacrifice from the public

sphere coincided with changes in society during the Porfiriato that also moved executions from public to private venues.

Andrew G. Wood continues the focus on media, but directs his attention away from the Porfirian working class and toward Postrevolutionary celebrity in his essay, "Nationalizing the Bohemian: The Mythogenesis of Agustín Lara." Wood argues that Lara, a singer/songwriter who rose to fame in the 1930s, constructed a celebrity identity that drew upon Mexican nationalism, hedonism, and masculinity. According to Wood, Lara was able to combine an artistic identity with a masculine one through "his 'total dedication' to his female muse and...his identification, however fabricated, as a *jarocho*" (198). The author highlights how Lara created an alternative masculinity through his identification as a native of the state of Veracruz and embracing that region's *jarocho* identity, even though he was actually from Mexico City. Employing terminology from Benedict Anderson, Wood argues that the *jarocho* identity gave Lara and his bohemian, hedonistic persona a "geographic and cultural grounding in the 'imagined community' eagerly promoted by post-Revolutionary nationalism" (199). By 1943, Lara had conquered the heart of film star María Félix, and Wood notes that the famous and popular couple challenged gender norms, "as Félix played the role of the tough, near-macho woman to Lara's sensitive, romantic male" (207). Wood underscores how masculine and regional identities intersected in post-Revolutionary Mexico when he concludes that Lara's *jarocho* identity that "comforted audiences by revealing he was a 'good' Mexican man" (211).

In the following chapter, Jeffrey M. Pilcher frames a labor battle in mid to late 1940s through the lenses of gender sexuality, and celebrity. He contrasts the masculine identities of actors/singers Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante, actor/comedian Mario 'Cantinflas' Moreno, and Spanish flamenco dancer Miguel de Molina. The author characterizes Negrete and Infante as "operatic machos," who displayed virility and risk-taking tendencies and whose films "reduced [female leads] to little more than a plot device" (220). Despite their virility, these rural *charro* characters frequently displayed 'defects' such as their predilections for women and

alcohol. Pilcher contrasts this masculine type with Moreno's *pelado*, or street urchin, character that frequently transgressed urban gender norms. When Negrete and Moreno helped form a union independent of the government-friendly Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), CTM head Fidel Velázquez brought in Miguel de Molina to undercut striking actors. However, "the overt homosexuality of...Molina proved equally threatening to audiences," and eventually President Ávila Camacho ordered that the CTM accept a settlement with the actors. During the breakdown in negotiations, Pilcher notes that it was Moreno, "the posturing *pelado*," and not Negrete, "the true macho," who stood up to Velázquez's henchmen and he argues that this situation reveals that "the moment of rural nostalgia had passed and Mexican audiences became increasingly interested in the modern, urban society in which ever greater numbers of them lived" (231). Like Wood, Pilcher analyzes the intersections of geography and celebrity in the urbanizing world of post revolutionary Mexican masculinity.

Mary Lee Mulholland takes an anthropological approach to interrogate issues of national symbolism, celebrity, and sexuality in her contribution to the volume, "Mariachis Machos and Charros Gays: Masculinities in Guadalajara." In her introduction, Mulholland tells the story of mariachi legend Vicente Fernández and his son Alejandro kissing each other on the lips on stage. She uses this event to draw the reader into her investigation of Guadalajara as a bastion of mariachi, of Mexican conservatism, and of homosexual 'zones of tolerance.' The author interrogates the masculinity of Vicente and Alejandro, as they both promote traditional Mexican music and advocate "images of charros, bullfighting, cockfighting, the Revolution, and rural life" (253). Despite their celebration of traditional masculinity, both father and son have had their masculine authenticity questioned throughout their successful careers. Particularly, Mulholland notes, Vicente's "excessive crying" has "often led to the insinuation that he and his son, Alejandro, were gay and perhaps even lovers" (255). The author highlights that the Fernández's ability "to perform an idealized and normative masculinity and a queer one simultaneously" echoes the enigmatic nature of gender and sexual identity formation for men in Guadalajara and in Mexico (257). In addition,

Mulholland's work reveals that while Mexicans may have become more interested in urban masculinities, as Pilcher notes, the allure of the rural masculine charro identity persists.

The volume ends with Ramón A. Gutiérrez's conclusion that compares and contrasts the chapters of the volume to the studies in Mexican masculinity by Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos, and Américo Paredes. Gutiérrez adeptly highlights the diversity of masculine experiences in Mexico, how these experiences functioned in opposition to femininity, and how these experiences intersected with class, race, and space.

The strengths of this volume stem from the variety of Mexican masculine identities and performances that each chapter analyzes. Throughout the volume, men protect women, seduce women, pay for sex, engage in homosexual behavior, joke about spousal abuse, lament lost love, act affectionately toward the fathers, are cheated on, and display toughness, among other behaviors. The volume also highlights how women displayed 'masculine' traits to maintain feminine honor. The variety of masculine experiences rivals the variety of methodological approaches undertaken in the volume, as the individual chapters draw the attention to how masculinity converges with notions of race, class, sexuality, crime, celebrity, and, above all, nationalism. The authors highlight these intersections while keeping in mind the complimentary nature of gender roles. Moreover, although there is a substantial focus on Mexico City, the volume also contains studies from the U.S. border, Guadalajara, and Oaxaca.

Out of necessity, this volume does not analyze every aspect of Mexican masculinity. Race appears in the analyses throughout the volume (most noticeably in Macías-González's and Schantz's contributions), but the volume might have benefitted from including more indigenous ideas on gender, such as the third-gender *muxes* of Juchitán, Oaxaca. Also, the volume could have included rural perspectives on masculinities; particularly how rural men viewed their more urban counterparts. In addition, there is very little on Catholicism in the volume, aside from Rubenstein's and Mulholland's contributions. Considering the importance of the Catholic Church in determining honor for both genders and the

Church's contentious relationship with the Mexican government since independence, more studies that integrated Catholicism and masculinity might have been beneficial. That said, these observations are minor quibbles with what is otherwise an excellent edited volume.

Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico brings new insights to the historiographies of Modern Mexico and Gender. Aside from its scholarly significance, the volume's chapters are written in accessible prose that makes it an excellent choice not only for graduate seminars, but also for upper-division courses in Mexican History, Gender Studies, and Latin American History.