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Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez. *Women Writing Resistance: Essays on Latin America and the Caribbean.* Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2003. xii + 241 pp. \$18.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89608-708-8.

Linden Lewis, ed. *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. x + 328 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2677-0.

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New Directions in Caribbean Gender and Sexuality Studies

The relationship between women's studies and studies of gender and sexuality continue to be the subject of debate within many feminist intellectual circles. To some, expanding the field to include both sides of the gender coin seems a logical next step. For others, however, it raises a number of questions about whether or not the project of women's history is indeed complete. As Bryce Traister so provocatively asked, to what extent is the rise of masculinity studies merely "American Viagra"? [1] Do these new studies really uncover gendered narratives of power? [2] Or do these merely resituate heterosexual white men at the center of academic discourse? When viewed from the standpoint of the Caribbean, where the need to define and develop an indigenous reading of feminist discourse still remains very much in progress, such questions and debates become even more heated.

Scholars interested in these questions will find two recent publications to be particularly refreshing. Linden Lewis's most recent work, *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* is a welcome collection of essays that showcases a range of new scholarship on masculinity, sexuality, and gender from both well-established and younger scholars from across the region. Where Lewis's work is primarily intended for a scholarly audience, Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez's *Women Writing Resistance: Essays on Latin America and the Caribbean* is a much more

personal and activist work. It features a range of reflective essays, poems and vignettes by female authors from across the Caribbean and Latin America. Some of the contributors, like Ruth Behar and Browdy de Hernandez are scholars. Others, like Julia Alvarez, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jamaica Kincaid, and Edwidge Danticat are well known and widely read authors. Contributions by community activists, journalists, and visual artists are included as well.

The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean begins with an introductory essay by Lewis, providing a snapshot "state of the field" on Caribbean gender studies. Among the issues he tackles is the debate over just where the Caribbean region begins and ends, including the longstanding importance of migration and diaspora, and the place of masculinity and sexuality studies within the "context of Caribbean social reality" (p. 4). This is, of course, no easy task. In an observation that will certainly be appreciated by Florida historians, Lewis notes that:

"what constitutes the Caribbean has long been a contested issue but has nevertheless masqueraded as settled and unproblematic.... Given that migration has served as a safety valve for most of the region, at least initially, there is a huge and important Caribbean diaspora, every bit as big as the population in the region and in some cases perhaps even bigger" (pp. 1-2).

To what extent North and South American studies overlap, where the region begins and ends, and even what constitutes “Caribbean culture” all remain important points to consider. Equally problematic, Lewis argues, are debates about the validity of sexual orientation, third or other gender studies, and masculinity. “There is in fact a very cautious and conservative orientation pervading the scholarship on gender in the Caribbean ... [that] constrains the intellectual horizon of the agenda in the region,” Lewis writes (p. 5). Women’s sexuality and homosexuality remain areas in need of further study as well.

Rather than just addressing these holes or providing examples of model work, the essays this volume are clearly selected to move the field forward by exploring new theoretical frameworks and paths of study. The first three essays in the work examine the three theoretical areas of study Lewis believes are in need of the greatest amount attention. Violet Eudine Barrieteau focuses specifically on the project of modernity within the English-speaking Caribbean and the new gendered “systems” created through this process. Rather than focusing on the oppressive influence of outside forces, however, her analysis takes a much different tack. In her words, she “holds states and governments accountable for the gendered features of civic and political life that continue and are sustained beyond the formal dismantling of the colonial relationship” (p. 35). This perspective shapes how she periodizes the creation of these gendered systems as well. Rather than focusing exclusively on political developments or independence movements, Eudine Barrieteau’s analysis integrates political and economic transformations with cultural influence.

This emphasis on Caribbean-generated ideologies also frame Hilbourne Watson’s and Linden Lewis’s essays. Watson’s “The Globalization of the Discourse on Gender” links ideologies of gender and power with those of nationalism to explain how specific patriarchal ideologies have developed within the English and Spanish speaking Caribbean. For Watson, capitalist relations are central to understanding gender relations at the national and international levels. He is critical of Eudine Barrieteau’s analysis as well, noting that “while Barrieteau argues that gender and gender relations are socially constructed, she infuses gender relations with a primacy that places them ahead of all historicosocial relations and identities” (pp. 58-59). He also critiques Barrieteau’s tendency to treat women as a uniform group, ignoring differences of family status, age, ethnicity, and class. “Post-modern body politics misses the point that under capi-

talism women’s labor power is a political economy category that transcends their bodies as an ontological factor,” he writes (p. 60). Analyses of Kevin Yelvington, Lois M. Smith, and Alfred Padula form key points of discussion in his essay as well.

Linden Lewis’s essay on “Caribbean Masculinity: Unpacking the Narrative” locates how men construct their own identities in opposition to, or in dialogue with women. For him, gender-like other identities—is multi-layered. And it is a fundamentally important to Caribbean scholarship. “Understanding masculinity in the context of the Caribbean is not simply about creating a new or expanded academic agenda,” Lewis writes. “An important political foundation is necessary for the realization of gender equality. It is therefore incumbent upon those of us whose scholarly focus is the Caribbean to unpack the narrative of masculinity carefully if we are to do justice to any prospect for reconstruction” (p. 123).

The remaining eight case studies focus on the variety of questions and problems raised by the theoretical essays. They are organized into three main subcategories—“The Political Terrain of Gender and Sexuality,” “Sexual Orientation and Male Socialization in the Caribbean,” and “Gender, Sexuality, and Historical Considerations.” The authors represented here include both well-established and newer scholars. Although few authors expand their case study across language areas, taken together Anglo, Hispanic, and French-speaking regions of the Caribbean are all included. The end result is a very readable collection that will undoubtedly lend itself well to scholarly consideration and teaching alike.

Jennifer Browdy de Hernandez’s *Women Writing Resistance* is a very different kind of book. But it is no less exciting. Conceived as a collective “Declaration of Resistance” the collection grew out of Browdy de Hernandez’s years of teaching about women’s writing in Latin America and the Caribbean. In her words, the work “appears in a time of intense awareness of the effects of globalization—the transnational movements of capital and of people—and a heightened awareness of the porousness that used to seem firm” (p. 1). Remaining true to the ethnic and geographical diversity of the region, the authors and artists included here include Latinas of a wide range of national originals, writers of the anglophone and francophone Caribbean, members of the hispanic Jewish diaspora, Chicanas, Puerto Riqueñas, and even one North American writer of European Jewish descent whose lifetime commitment to social justice across the Americas makes her “an inveterate border crosser”

as well. The fact that all of the contributions are written in English also testifies to the role of migration and diaspora (as much as the power of audience), both past and present.

Like the Lewis collection, Browdy de Hernandez's work is concerned—first and foremost—with giving voice to the people of the Caribbean and Latin America themselves. The book is less about the legacy of economic and political colonization than it is about the many forms resistance can take and envisioning new social realities and the dynamism of everyday women's lives. "As women writers who understand their writing as a form of resistance to the intertwined and complex oppressions of imperialism, elitism, racism, and sexism, they have been practicing transnational or global feminism *avant la lettre*, long before these terms became fashionable in the U.S. academy," Browdy de Hernandez writes (pp. 4-5). This process is highlighted in the contributions of three generations of women in the Portnoy family whose lives were transformed by the kidnapping and torture of Alicia Portnoy during Argentina's "Dirty War." Reflections by Alicia, who chronicled her experiences in a published monograph, *The Little School*, are included here, as are essays by her mother, Raquel, and daughter, Ruth, who ultimately fled with her parents to the United States. It is equally clear in works like Aurora Levins Morales piece, "Revision" which explores the multifaceted aspects of Puerto Rique's realities and Emma Sepveda's reflections on peace, war, and pain in Vietnam and in Chile during the 1960s, in "The Dream of Nunca Más."

Both of these collections fill important holes in Caribbean gender studies. For teachers of women's or gender history, each book serves well the need for more article length and literary pieces to illustrate the broad assortment of political and cultural perspectives of Caribbean peoples. Each is also thoroughly engaging, though in much different ways. While the Browdy de Hernandez work fills an important void, it does not aim to move the scholarly literature in a new direction or to make a theoretical contribution. This makes it no less valuable, however, because it does underscore the ongoing

need for women's voices—many of which have simply not been available to such a wide audience before. As Browdy de Hernandez notes:

"I have learned so much as a feminist activist through my years of reading and interacting with Latina and Caribeña women of color, and it is my hope that this collection will stimulate North American students and enthusiasts of Latin American and Caribbean culture to explore this rich field of cultural knowledge and literary production further, and perhaps to start seeing the world through a radically different lens than that offered by the mainstream media and literature of the U.S." (p. 8).

On this score, her work is marvelously successful. The need for this collection underscore just how much more work remains to be done in the field of women's studies as well.

If Browdy de Hernandez gives voice to the women of the Caribbean and Latin America, it is the framework provided by Lewis's collection that completes the chorus. By providing a framework for further study and introducing readers to some of the strongest examples of new work currently underway, Linden Lewis offers us a work that will certainly interest scholars of the Caribbean, Diaspora, and gender studies alike. And he does so in a way that directly addresses the issue of gendered power so central to women's history. In Linden's own words, "Understanding masculinity in the context of the Caribbean is not simply about creating a new or expanded academic agenda... [It] is necessary for the realization of gender equality" (p. 123). His work brings us one important step closer to that promise.

Notes

[1]. Bryce Traister, "American Viagra: The Rise of Masculinity Studies," *American Quarterly*, 52, no. 2 (2000): pp. 274-304.

[2]. Toby Ditz, "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Remedies from Early American Gender History," *Gender and History*, 16 (2004): pp. 1-16.

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