

Marta Raquel Zabaleta. *Feminine Stereotypes and Roles in Theory and Practice in Argentina Before and After the First Lady Eva Perón.* Lewiston, N.Y.; Queenston, Ontario; Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000. 405 pages. ISBN 0-88946-488-X. Hard Cover. \$109.95.

A political refugee from persecution in Chile and Argentina, Marta Zabaleta speaks with the authority of both extensive research and personal experience in this volume assessing the effect of Juan and Eva Perón on women's empowerment in Argentina. Zabaleta's interest in Perón derives from women's gaining suffrage during his presidency and their massive support of him in 1951, when they first exercised the vote. Her interest was further piqued by the fact that her own mother was one of the early supporters of Juan Perón. Zabaleta provides convincing answers to questions about the quality and quantity of women's rights under Perón, about the class and gender interests of the working class and lower middle-class women who constituted the bulk of his female supporters, and about why Argentine women had failed to gain suffrage under different earlier feminist and socialist ideologies. Zabaleta explodes two misconceptions about Latin American women: (1) that they are inherently conservative in politics; (2) that they subscribe to *marianismo* and embrace the concept of the supermother, while at the same time accepting the *machismo* of their men. She also endeavors to correct stereotypes about Eva Perón, who was neither the saint created by her admirers nor the pro-Nazi whore attacked by her detractors.

Both Eva and Diana, Princess of Wales, were semi-victims and semi-accomplices of the media and political parties (specifically the Labor Parties) of their countries. They helped to perpetuate the *status quo* even though they sincerely wanted to remain in soul and body at the heart of ordinary people. Zabaleta believes that both, but especially Eva Perón, did succeed in making political authorities adopt a more humanitarian stance and in making the masses redistribute some power between the masculine and the feminine genders.

Zabaleta, now senior lecturer at Middlesex University, has gained excellent command of the English language during her years of exile in England; she communicates effectively with her readers in this carefully organized volume. Chapter 1 gives an overview of her conclusions about the Peróns and their attitude towards women; Chapters 2 and 3 present the theoretical underpinning of her study; Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide an historical overview of the three stages of Perón's political career; Chapter 7 deals with Perón's emphasis on the family as primary unity of political organization and the roles of men and women within that unit; Chapter 8 analyzes the

characteristics and consequences of Peronist women's political participation; Chapter 9 presents textual analysis of the speeches of Juan and Eva Perón in relation to their attitude towards women; Chapter 10 presents conclusions about Peronist populism and women's political consciousness. In the "Epilogue" Zabaleta compares Eva Perón with Diana, Princess of Wales.

The book also contains six appendices which will prove invaluable for readers who wish to make a quick survey of Latin American feminism: (1) "Modern Examples of Women's Struggles in Latin America;" (2) "Different Historical Forms of Women's Political Subordination;" (3) "Minimum Programme of Women's Demands" from the First International Congress of Free Thinking (1906); (4) Luisa Bravo's report on the evils of kissing and drinking maté, made to the First International Feminist Congress of 1910; (5) "The Twenty Truths of Justicialism;" (6) the text of Law No. 13.010 (1947): Women's Suffrage. The volume ends with a 26 page bibliography and a 14 page General Index.

Claiming to work for women's "emancipation," Perón viewed "frivolous" bourgeois ladies and "ugly" middle and upper-class feminists as enemies of his program. His primary goal was to raise workers' wages so that each could provide for the basic needs of his family: good nutrition, home ownership, access to public transport, clothing, health, children's education, and entertainment. Perón sponsored legislation which stipulated that women receive at least 80% of men's salary for the same work, a law which put Argentina into the forefront of nations for reduction of disparity between men's and women's wages. His paternalistic attitude was manifested in "protective" legislation which applied only to women: extended maternity leave before and after childbirth and the reduction of women's workweek to 35 hours, in comparison to men's 40 hours. Perón also passed child labor laws and legalized divorce and prostitution. Perón in his platform of "Justicialismo" advocated keeping wives within the home; however, he recognized the value of their unpaid labor and encouraged their political involvement. The wife should function not only as the family's conscience (in harmony with Catholic doctrine), but as overseer of the family budget, educator of her children, guardian of family health and nutrition, and political activist.

Working class and middle-class women participated actively in demonstrations during Perón's rise to power, for he appealed to their class interests. Improvement of the workers' conditions meant improvement of their dependents' situation. Perón created a female branch of his party and made Eva its chief. Her success in mobilizing women throughout the country into administrative units and disseminating the Perón mystique was nothing short of amazing. These units sponsored activities for women (such as classes on domestic tasks, nutrition, health), while also serving as policing mechanisms

for evaluation of the political correctness of all members and of the economic well-being of neighborhood families. These working-class women took over the charity work formerly occupying only well-to-do women. Eva, as head of the Foundation for Aid and Social Assistance, administered a huge budget for relief to the poor (including unwed mothers, widows, orphans, and poor families), the provision of scholarships, and the extension of leisure resources, such as resorts and spas, to the working classes.

Through manipulation of the media, the precise staging of political events and demonstrations, and the distribution of printed material, badges, uniforms, political songs and slogans, Juan and Eva Perón built a loyal following throughout the country. Perón demanded loyalty from his followers and punished those who deviated from his program. Zabaleta points out that Perón had power to veto any proposals emanating from the ranks of his party, including the female branch. Eva constantly urged women to demonstrate their gratitude for all Perón had accomplished on their behalf.

Zabaleta brings a sophisticated combination of political, sociological, psychological, and historical theories to bear on her feminist analysis of Peronism, an analysis tailored to the realities of Latin American, not simply adopted directly from North America and Western Europe. She refers to the works of A. Gramsci and L. Althusser in her definition of Perón's populist nationalism and the middle course he sought between Capitalism and Communism. She diverges from Althusser in the belief that ideological consent always rests on a material substratum. She is particularly interested in the convergence and divergence of class and gender interests and their material bases. Here she supports the feminine analysis of C. Mouffe and M. Molyneux.

Zabaleta uses Lacán to define the psychological substratum of Peronist discourse in regard to the national "Argentine" self. Analysis of Juan and Eva's speeches reveals that each saw the nation as the "other;" the internal other was the sum of the opposition. Eva perceived Perón as the "other of the other," i.e. as God, while she assumed the role of the Virgin Mother in relation to the nation. After her death, many Argentines actually set up altars to Saint Evita in their homes. Zabaleta contends that Evita was "the national populist equivalent of the Islas Malvinas" (page 15), desired by Argentines and regarded as their own in their imperialist thrust. Men placed the concept of sacrificial motherhood at the center of their national symbolism. Eva, while gradually moving closer to some feminist goals, was not a feminist, for she supported Perón's subordination of female to male in her discourse and her actions, even though she was the first wife of a president to accompany her husband on the speaker's platform and to make speeches on his behalf. Zabaleta contends that Eva's renunciation of running as Perón's Vice-

Presidential candidate in 1951, despite her immense popularity, marked Perón's rightward shift, which became more apparent following her death. Nevertheless, a greater percentage of women than men remained loyal to Perón, even after his forced exile. Zabaleta credits Eva for a large measure of Perón's success.

Zabaleta regards the Peronist phenomenon, not as an exception, but as a typical "populist movement of the bourgeois nationalist type" (page 323). While Argentine women did not achieve equality with men under Perón, they did make considerable social advances and certainly became active participants in political processes. The brief compass of this review prevents thorough analysis of all Zabaleta's evidence and arguments, especially her exegesis of Perón's "discourse of arrival." Because of Zabaleta's command of the history, economics, psychology, and sociology of the Perón era, this text should be required reading for all students of this momentous period in Argentine history.

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