

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SOCIAL
CHANGE:
Coming to Terms with Complexity and Convergence

Carol Ann Drogus
Hamilton College

- STUBBORN HOPE: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND REVOLUTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA.* By Phillip Berryman. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994. Pp. 276. \$22.95 cloth, \$14.00 paper.)
- CARISMATICOS E PENTECOSTAIS: ADESÃO RELIGIOSA NA ESFERA FAMILIAR.* By Maria das Dores Campos Machado. (Campinas, S.P.: Autores Associados; São Paulo, S.P.: ANPOCS, 1996. Pp. 221.)
- THE SAME FATE AS THE POOR.* By Judith M. Noone, M.M. Revised edition. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995. Pp. 170. \$12.95 paper.)
- POPULAR RELIGION AND MODERNIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA: A DIFFERENT LOGIC.* By Cristián Parker. Translated by Robert R. Barr. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996. Pp. 292. \$45.00 cloth.)
- OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: FAITH AND EMPOWERMENT AMONG MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN.* By Jeanette Rodríguez. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994. Pp. 227. \$35.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)
- THE SOUL OF DEVELOPMENT: BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN GUATEMALA.* By Amy L. Sherman. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 214. \$45.00 cloth.)
- THE BRAZILIAN POPULAR CHURCH AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY.* By Manuel A. Vásquez. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. 302. \$64.95 cloth.)

Since at least the landmark 1968 Latin American bishops' conference at Medellín, research on religion has focused on pluralism. Much of it has been conducted with reference (explicit or implicit) to liberation theology and its prospects. The liberationist Catholic Church was itself a primary instance of pluralization in the religious arena. Then scholars began to explore the diverse ways in which the faithful had responded to its initiatives.¹ Finally, evangelical growth led scholars to explain this denominational plu-

1. Of many possible examples, see Daniel Levine's contributions to *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*, edited by Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986);

ralism in comparison with the relatively “less successful” Popular Church, as liberationist Catholicism came to be known.²

The seven works to be reviewed here focus on religious pluralism from a variety of perspectives, often with reference to the Popular Church. Most of the authors (Noone, Sherman, Machado, and Rodríguez) focus on how religious worldviews affect other attitudes and behavior. Others (Parker and Vásquez) contribute more to general understanding of the sources of religious pluralism. Berryman looks at both issues. As a group, they reveal the enormous complexity of religious belief in Latin America but also suggest areas of convergence: some Catholics and evangelicals are in certain ways becoming more similar. This fact itself will add to the difficulty of developing new theoretical frameworks in which to articulate the sources and meaning of religious pluralism.

Religious Responses to Central America's Crisis

Central America in the 1970s was both the crucible and the toughest test for the Popular Church. A generation of Catholics—pastoral workers and laity—experienced the social and political crisis in Latin America as a religious crisis as well, one that moved them to adopt a new liberationist worldview and act on it. They created the Popular Church in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, but as a growing number of studies point out, they remained a minority within the Catholic Church, and their total numbers were dwarfed by the expansion of evangelical Protestantism. Three books focus on Central America and illuminate in various ways the interrelationship between the regional crisis and the Popular Church.

The killing of four U.S. churchwomen in El Salvador on 2 December 1980 humanized the costs of a liberationist commitment for North Americans. Subsequent struggles to bring their killers to justice also publicized U.S. involvement with the Salvadoran military and U.S. complicity in the human rights abuses. The recently revised edition of *The Same Fate as the Poor* (first published in 1985) reminds readers that U.S. citizens were also involved in the conflict in solidarity work, the most significant and dangerous form of which was being in the presence of the poor.

The new afterword by Margaret Swedish updates readers on the aftermath of the negotiated settlement of the Salvadoran civil war as of 1994. Appendices present the findings of the Truth Commission and the U.S. Sec-

and to his *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

2. Examples include David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); John Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil: The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Arena* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); and Cecilia Mariz, *Coping with Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities in Brazil* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1994).

retary of State's Panel on El Salvador confirming senior military involvement in the killings and the cover-up.³ Judith Noone's account of the lives of Maura Clark, Ita Ford, and Carol Piette remains valuable for its insight into the experiences that led many pastoral workers to, in Phillip Berryman's words, "become more committed and to come to the point where they were willing to wager their lives for the sake of a more just society" (p. 13).⁴ Noone does not romanticize these women's lives. The most memorable thing about the three is their differences and foibles. One could be overbearing; another had to overcome meekness; all of them hesitated, struggled with their decisions, and constantly reflected on the demands of their faith in the contexts of poverty and oppression in Chile, Nicaragua, and finally El Salvador. Noone demonstrates that the journey was always one of faith—not from faith to politics—even when they risked their lives in the conflict-ridden zones of El Salvador.

Berryman too emphasizes the centrality of faith to politics and stresses that liberation theology in Central America was always fundamentally about faith. As Anna Peterson has shown recently, that faith was crucial to the birth of resistance and revolutionary movements in El Salvador. Peterson echoes Daniel Levine in claiming, "The most successful social movements do not reject religion and 'disenchant' the world but rather enlarge religious worldviews and values to confront contemporary political challenges."⁵

This assessment was indisputably true for many ordinary Christians in El Salvador and elsewhere, yet as Berryman points out in *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America*, 73 percent of Salvadorans believed that a Christian could not support the guerrillas (p. 204). They stand in contrast to Peterson's respondents and those described in other recent studies that have focused on the dynamic of liberationist religio-political action. Berryman grapples with the issue of why the liberationist Church inspired courageous commitment on the part of an important minority, while so many others in the same context of oppression chose avowedly apolitical evangelicalism or charismatic Catholicism, or even viewed their religious faith as requiring opposition to radical change, as did Nicaragua's Catholic hierarchy.⁶

3. Recent statements by members of the Guardia Nacional convicted of the killings acknowledged the Truth Commission's finding that they acted on the orders of senior officers. See "Newsbriefs," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 31, no. 6 (May–June 1998):2.

4. Maura Clark and Ita Ford were killed by the Guardia Nacional. Carol Piette drowned in September 1980. The other two women killed in December 1980 were Jean Donovan, a lay missionary, and Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel.

5. Anna Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 179.

6. Berryman makes an important contribution in considering the growing charismatic Catholic movement.

Berryman's sensitive yet evenhanded account of the Popular Church in Central America highlights without overstatement its often critical role in these struggles. He describes the roles of both conservatives and liberationists in the region's politics and never reduces either side's motives to politics or religion, seeing them instead as interconnected for all parties. Berryman thus reconfirms the ongoing importance of religious legitimation for politics of all sorts throughout Latin America. The historical chapters also provide a compelling analysis of the way that contextual factors in each of the three countries—Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala—shaped the Catholic Church's varying responses to the crisis.

Berryman joins the pastoral workers he interviewed in reflecting on why the Popular Church achieved intensive but not extensive mobilization. Comparing them with evangelicals, Berryman concludes overall that liberationists mistakenly conflated the views of highly committed activists with the views of "the people" as a whole. In contrast, the evangelicals' apolitical religious orientation may have been more in keeping with the actual spiritual needs and religious practices of most lay Catholics.

Yet the evangelicals' numerical strength does not necessarily spell the end for liberationist religion. Although many of the evangelicals Berryman spoke with seemed determinedly apolitical or conservative, others, especially from the so-called mainline Protestant churches, are creating a religious option to "enter history" in a variety of ways. At the same time, liberationists are rethinking their pastoral approaches and reaching out in new ways that may be more attuned to the spiritual needs of most poor Catholics. In the future, he believes, both Protestant and Catholic theologians may play crucial roles in keeping utopian hope alive for a more democratic and just society in the face of the globalization threat of "Big Mac democracy" and "savage capitalism" (pp. 229–31).

Amy Sherman's hope is that Protestantism will make Guatemalans better suited for democracy and capitalist development. For *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Economic Transformation in Guatemala*, she conducted a large-scale survey to verify whether the evangelical worldview was conducive to capitalism.⁷ She concludes that the premodern, syncretic Mayan religious worldview of "cristo-pagans" is inimical to capitalist development. The further one's religious worldviews are from cristo-paganism, the more economic success one seems to achieve. Evangelicals and also orthodox Catholics (those who reject Mayan beliefs most decisively) are most likely to succeed.⁸ More important, Sherman identifies

7. Sherman hopes to provide empirical support for David Martin's earlier conclusions in *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

8. Included in this group are charismatic Catholics, whom Sherman perhaps unfairly calls "hidden converts."

a significant group of syncretic evangelicals whose faith resembles folk Catholicism. Syncretic evangelicals and folk Catholics alike are more successful economically than *cristo-pagans*, but less so than orthodox evangelicals or Catholics.

The finding that orthodoxy and syncretism cross denominations is especially significant evidence that the pluralism noted in studies of Catholicism extends also to “conversion religions.” Like Catholicism, evangelicalism appears to be a source of multifaceted religious symbols that the faithful reinterpret and act on in a variety of ways. If Sherman’s findings of evangelical diversity are accurate, future studies will need to focus more on religious worldview—on faith—and less on religious affiliation. The commonly used dividing line between Catholics and evangelicals or even the division of evangelicals along denominational lines will no longer enlighten observers much about the political, social, or economic impact of religion—if indeed it ever did.

Sherman’s interpretation of the meaning of this pluralism for economic development and democratic politics is on weaker ground, however. Her indicator of orthodoxy correlates with other characteristics that also predict economic success: speaking Spanish, literacy, education, and *ladino* ethnicity. At times, she seems to imply that religious conversion is the source of these characteristics, yet her survey does not demonstrate such causality. It is not only possible but likely that more literate and more educated Spanish-speaking *ladinos* are more orthodox. It should be relatively easy to establish whether orthodox women’s education reflects the status gained by conversion, as Sherman asserts, or whether it indicates that more educated women are attracted to more orthodox religious worldviews. Sherman does not disentangle the variables sufficiently to do so in *The Soul of Development*, however.

Sherman also takes pains to portray evangelicals as bearers of democratic values. She is right that they have often been erroneously tarred as apolitical or authoritarian, a point others confirm as well. Sherman is also correct that the political views of Guatemala’s evangelical community should not be conflated with the actions of its evangelical presidents, notably former military ruler Efraín Ríos Montt.⁹ But when Sherman tries to salvage Ríos Montt’s democratic credentials by arguing that he supports the basic principle of democracy—the rule of law—she betrays a disconcerting credulity about a man who ruthlessly disregarded the law and basic human rights during his bloody tenure. Moreover, her definition of democracy is too limited: respect for law is crucial to the functioning of all kinds of polities. What distinguishes democracy is how laws are made and legitimized.

Most students of religion share Sherman’s belief that religion shapes

9. Jorge Serrano, who attempted an *auto-golpe* in 1993, is also an evangelical.

the way that individuals behave politically and economically. That is why changes in religious worldviews are important. Sherman carries her argument regarding religion's impact on "modernization" further than most, however, and in so doing risks ignoring contextual factors.¹⁰ Some of her own examples suggest that individuals pursue education and other skills as these become economically practical, not just for religious reasons. For example, in the many circumstances in Guatemala that leave little hope for indigenous Guatemalans to profit from "capitalism," they may be unlikely to pursue the needed skills regardless of religion (pp. 119–20). Do "cristopagans" reject orthodox religion and adaptation to the market because they misunderstand capitalism, as Sherman asserts, or because they understand all too well how a capitalist economy functions, with a handful at the top controlling wealth and land (p. 15)? In contrast to Sherman, Cristián Parker and Manuel Vásquez argue that the uneven impact of global capital accounts for the differing religious choices of those facing different economic options.

Religion and Globalization

Parker's *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America: A Different Logic* is largely theoretical, but he marshals statistical evidence to support his claim that Latin America remains a highly religious, even highly Christian region despite the evident religious pluralization. Popular religion remains vital, but it is harder than ever to say what popular religion is. At this point, it encompasses such diverse categories as "rational popular Catholics," "renewed traditional Catholics," and "renewed popular Catholics" (liberationists), as well as evangelicals and other smaller groups (pp. 138–39).

Parker attributes this pluralization to dependent development's highly fragmented class system, which produces heterogeneous religious worldviews corresponding roughly to class position.¹¹ The wealthy few become secularized. Popular groups exposed to rationality and renewal of the Catholic Church combine faith and reason in liberation theology. Those further removed from "rationalizing institutions" and from the socioeconomic mainstream try to access supernatural powers through folk Catholicism or Pentecostalism to fulfill needs unmet by society, like matters of health (p. 74).

Despite this heterogeneity, Parker envisions popular religion overall as a counterculture whose unifying theme is resistance to the negative impacts of modernity. It is neither premodern nor postmodern but simultaneously coexists with and critiques modernity (p. 115). The diversity of pop-

10. Sherman's framework is based on traditional cultural modernization theory, but other works reviewed here also ask at times whether religious views are "modernizing."

11. Berryman and others have noted class affinities among different evangelical groups.

ular religion typifies Latin American syncretism and is irreversible. Yet it contains a core of unifying, counterhegemonic values—ecologism, holism, maternalism—that could make it a source of democratization and resistance to “savage capitalism.” This outcome is not inevitable, however. Parker shares Berryman’s concern for finding ways to revitalize social movements based on religion by making them resonate with a broader spectrum of popular religion.

Parker’s theorizing in *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America* is innovative, and he reconfirms general awareness that religious pluralism in Latin America extends beyond the diversification of denominational affiliation. His evidence on the persistence and pluralization of popular religion is persuasive, but his argument about its core values remains abstract. Moreover, although Parker’s claim of a rough correspondence between religiosity and class position is plausible, one finds little to substantiate it and wonders if it can be sustained without succumbing to determinism. Still, Parker’s fresh approach deserves empirical studies to follow up on his innovations.

Manuel Vásquez’s *The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity* sets the agenda for future research along similar lines. Like Parker, Vásquez wants to understand how the crisis of modernity—the combined impact of transnational capitalism and the local persistence of premodern economic forms and patrimonialism—is affecting popular religiosity. His book is richer, however, for its specific contention that this crisis is largely responsible for the inability of the Brazilian Popular Church to sustain and expand participation.

Vásquez’s thesis is that neoliberal reforms and redemocratization produced socioeconomic conditions in Brazil that rendered the liberationist project less viable. That project was modern in emphasizing the possibility of individual action in history to achieve intrahistorical transcendence. But the economic crisis of the 1980s and the return to democracy in a context that perpetuated patrimonialism rendered the poor less able to act historically, particularly in the class-based social movements posited by the Popular Church. Instead, the poor have faced conditions of uncertainty and exclusion from the political institutions that might help them with problems of health, education, and employment. In this context, Pentecostalism’s emphasis on religious transcendence and divine healing when combined with a resort to patrimonial politics proved better adapted to their circumstances.

Vásquez’s lucid and compelling application of the themes of globalization to religion in Latin America presents a comprehensive and highly nuanced approach to understanding the relative decline of the Popular Church. Vásquez rejects the standard progressive and conservative explanations as well as the dichotomization that characterizes the Popular Church as secularizing and Pentecostals as sacralizing. Instead, he looks at the impact of the crisis of modernity while recognizing the importance of institu-

tional politics of the Catholic Church. Sympathetic to the liberationist project, he concludes by reflecting on how it might be salvaged in the face of an increasingly diverse popular class. While consciousness-raising *grupos pequenos* will work for some, the Popular Church must also come to terms with the need to provide immediate relief for problems and the desire of many poor people for otherworldly transcendence. The Popular Church may never revolutionize, but it could help the poor to find survival strategies that are democratizing in going beyond merely utilizing the current structures of patrimonial politics (p. 274).

Vásquez reserves his harshest criticism in *The Brazilian Popular Church* for what he calls the “unreflexive celebration of the micro,” studies that attempt to represent “popular voices” without considering how these are affected by larger sociopolitical processes (p. 229). Yet his own case study shows that even before the crisis, members of *comunidades eclesiais de base* (CEBs) differed significantly in their relationship to the divine and to the Popular Church. This finding does not invalidate the search for overall explanatory patterns, but it suggests that in any attempt to explain religious phenomena, scholars must also be sensitive to differing individual religious psychologies regardless of external circumstances. The question might be how circumstances lead individuals to channel their varying religiosity. Such a formulation overcomes the potentially depoliticizing impact of the observation that “everybody is different,” while recognizing the difficulties of targeting pastoral, religious, or consciousness-raising strategies at even subgroups of “the poor.”

Religion, Gender, and Family

Vásquez recommends that the Popular Church reconsider its strategies by paying greater attention to the conditions of poor women, the core members of many CEBs who were hurt most by the socioeconomic crisis of the 1980s. Could the Catholic Church learn something in this regard from Pentecostals? Maria das Dores Campos Machado takes up the issue of how charismatic Catholicism and Pentecostalism help Brazilian women to make sense of contemporary anxieties regarding changing gender roles. Like Parker and Vásquez, she perceives Pentecostalism and charismatic Catholicism as simultaneously sacralizing and modernizing, with unintended consequences for patriarchal gender roles.

Machado's *Carismáticos e pentecostais: Adesão religiosa na esfera familiar* is particularly important in considering the underresearched Charismatic Catholic Renewal.¹² Because charismatics are more middle-class than

12. Berryman and Sherman also highlight the increasing significance of charismatic Catholics.

Pentecostals, she divided her respondents not only by religion but by class, generating interesting insights into the way the same religious affiliation differs across classes. Machado also interviewed both men and women and considered their partners' religion. This approach enables her to demonstrate differences in male-female conversion patterns as well as to show the tensions inherent when only the woman converts (particularly to Pentecostalism). Earlier studies concluded that many women convert in order to gain "peace in the home." Machado suggests that lone conversions gain this end by changing the woman's behavior. Changing the family ethos requires joint conversion, but this pattern is not the norm.

Carismáticos e pentecostais provides a series of provocative insights into the unintended "modernizing consequences" of religious conversion, such as Pentecostalism's acceptance of birth control, and the specific circumstances under which these occur. Although her sample of interviewees was small, it was chosen carefully and her conclusions are persuasive. Future research might profitably examine her conclusions on a larger scale.

In *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican American Women*, Jeanette Rodríguez asks how religion, specifically devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, helps Mexican-American women cope with the tensions inherent in their "borderland" situation. A theologian, Rodríguez surveyed twenty women to begin reflecting on their lived reality. As she admits, this approach is statistically a "pre-test" with little validity, but it is of some interest because of the paucity of data on women's religiosity.

Surprisingly, the survey reveals little connection on the part of these women with Our Lady, perhaps because it focused on "official" religious practice while her worship is more "popular." As a result, Rodríguez bases much of her theological argument about Our Lady's empowering and liberating potential on interviews. This theological argument and its pastoral implications are persuasively presented in a final chapter. At times, however, Rodríguez also seems to make claims about Our Lady's actual symbolic meaning in the interviewees' lives that the data support only weakly. In light of the survey results and small sample size, social scientists will be unpersuaded at times by her inferences and wish to see the interview information presented more systematically. Rodríguez's work is not a social science inquiry, however. And despite its methodological shortcomings from that perspective, she deserves credit for her attempt—unusual even within liberation theology—to begin theologizing from an empirical grounding in the worldview of her "subjects." Rodríguez's contribution is her reconceptualization of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the pastoral innovations that it may inspire.

Conclusions

This group of books reveals the dilemma that will continue to face researchers on religion and society: how do we recognize and affirm the enormous complexity, the near individuality of popular religious belief and expression and yet make sense of overall patterns? Some answers seem clear. Given the convergence that Berryman, Sherman, Machado, Vásquez, and Parker perceive in different ways, future research must recognize intra-evangelical pluralism much as we do intra-Catholic pluralism. One way to do so would be to focus on religious worldview or personality, as distinct from denominational affiliation or behavior, as a factor in changing attitudes and behavior. Such an approach might help explain the varied ways in which the religious worldviews of Latin America's poor lead them to respond economically and politically to globalization or to changing gender roles.

A more contentious agenda is set by Vásquez and Parker. Recent explanations for the availability of various religious options and receptivity to them have tended to focus on "the middle range": institutional factors, community formation, demographic variables, and the interaction of all three. Parker and Vásquez ambitiously frame pluralization in terms of the impact of contemporary capitalism and the diverse class-related religious responses that it generates. Despite their obvious sensitivity to recognizing the autonomy of religious belief, some readers will consider these analyses as functionalist. Those who would carry Vásquez and Parker's research agenda forward must exercise care to avoid reducing religious belief to class position.

Many authors here—Vásquez, Berryman, Parker, Rodríguez—share a concern for reaffirming and revitalizing the religious basis of social movements. Perhaps the most fruitful path for research and for those who would encourage religious sources of social change is to view the broad dynamic of globalization interacting with the personal religiosity described here. Future research can verify whether diverse class groups respond to "the crisis of modernity" in broadly similar ways. Yet the individuality of religious faith is likely to temper any such findings and deserves theoretical as well as practical recognition.

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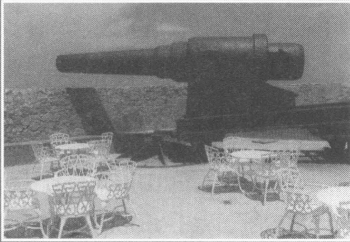
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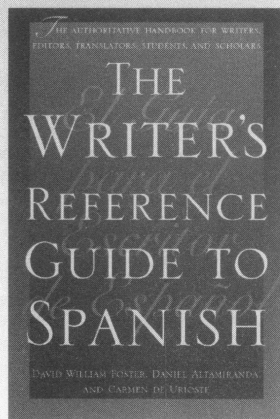
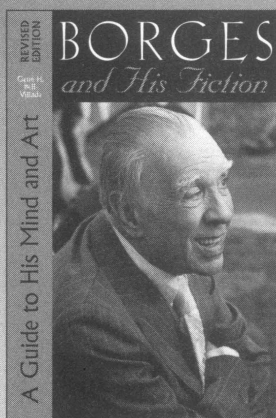
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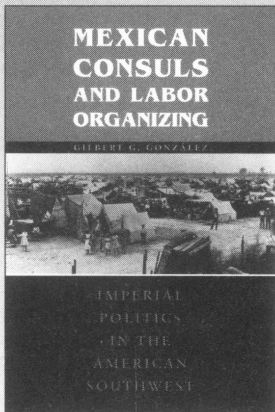
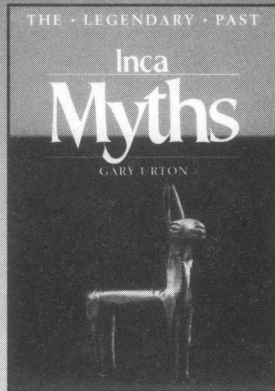
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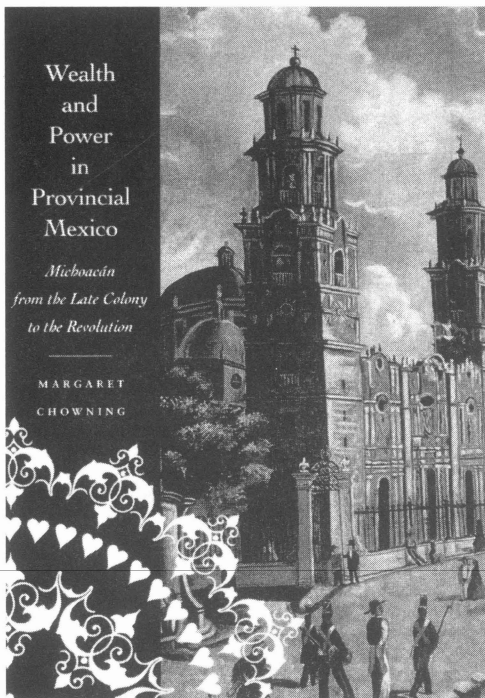
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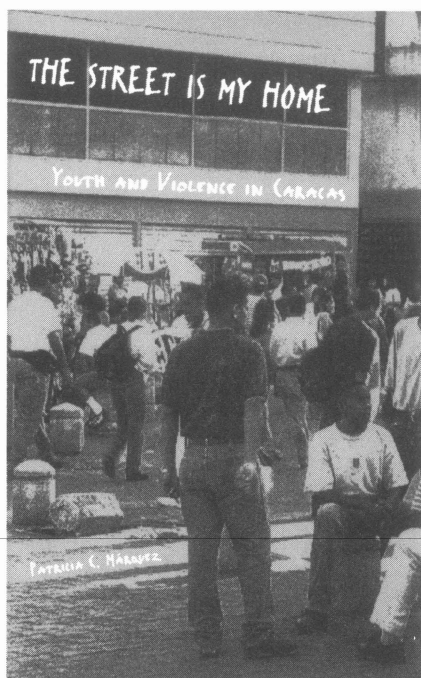
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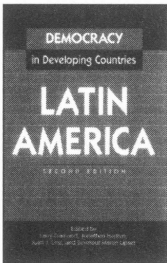
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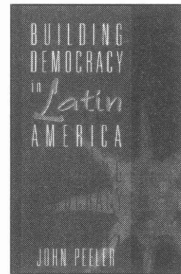
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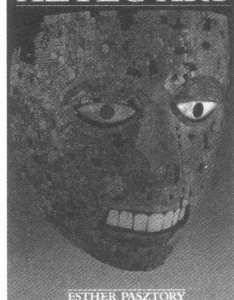
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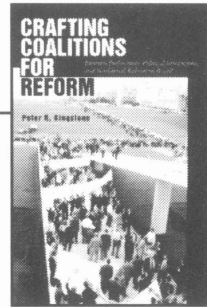
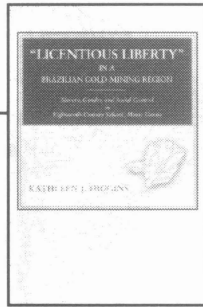
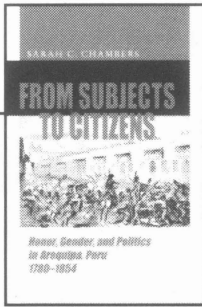
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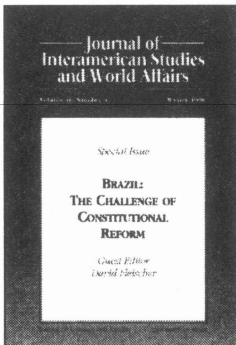
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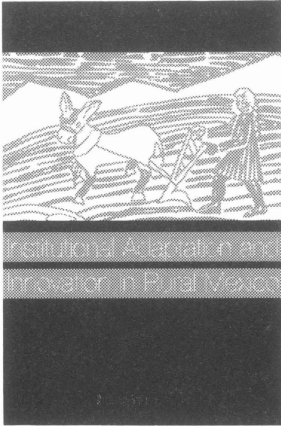
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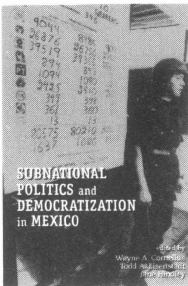
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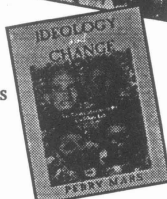
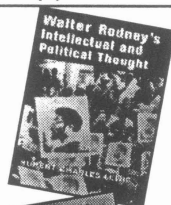
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