

BOOK REVIEWS

Parker, R.G. *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

Richard Parker's first book keeps the attention of readers interested in sexual culture and gender studies. The author, trained as an anthropologist, has published many articles about the social construction of gay identity in Brazil, and recently evaluated the impact of AIDS policies on the sexual behaviour of Brazilians. *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions* originates from his Doctoral dissertation. His main argument is that Brazilian sexuality is a social construction influenced by a unique historical condition. He also emphasized that the experience of sexual life in different settings is shaped as much by the cultural context as by the physiology of the species.

In the opening chapters, the author traces a portrait of the history of Brazil and how slavery influenced relations between men and women. The author believes that the miscegenation that occurs between the colonizers, slaves and the indigenous population had an impact on the sexual culture of Brazilians. His analysis relies mostly on the controversial works of Gilberto Freyre that depict a patriarchal social order in the 19th century. By analyzing sexual practices in contemporary Brazil, Parker, influenced by structuralism, explores the "ideology of the erotic" by scrutinizing the linguistic code that delimits the boundaries of sexual conduct. What can astonish readers is the extensive variations in the Brazilian sexual code. For instance in North America one drop of homosexuality de-masculinizes a man, while in Brazil the scenario appears to be different. Same-sex activities are tolerated and even encouraged as far as the hierarchical social order remains. The author suggests that the "real" man is the active partner and consequently will not be condemned by society, while the passive one receives a derogatory label. Nevertheless the scheme of a patriarchal and sexist society persists despite the resurgence of feminist movements; women endure oppression and discrimination both in rural and urban areas. The sexual roles are clearly defined as active/passive whether it is an heterosexual or homosexual encounter. Also, according to Parker's investigation bisexuality is widespread in Brazil. This supports one aspect of the machismo ideology that implies that a man can have numerous encounters with both women and men.

The presentation of the author is clear and he enhances his "propos" with extracts from thirty-one informants interviewed. My main criticism relies on two essential aspects that are underestimated in Parker's study. Firstly he does not make a clear differentiation on the sexual meanings between social class and "milieu". Only in the conclusion Parker specified that his study focuses on sexual culture in urban Brazil and not all Brazil. I

believe that a sharper analysis would enrich the debate. I also feel uncomfortable by the assumption of the author that the sexual linguistic code is singular to Brazil. Some of the vocables used in English and French have a similar connotation.

In conclusion *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions* is well documented with an extensive bibliography. For scholars pursuing fieldwork abroad, the appendix on his notes in the field are particularly useful. Parker's book will delight people who believe that sexuality does rely solely on biology and physiological processes, but like many aspects of life is socially constructed and encompasses a political component.

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