

literary canonicity; indeed, a section of chapter 3 discusses the ‘difficulties of being a diasporic Puerto Rican lesbian’ (p. 67). This chapter has a revelatory aspiration, whose crux lies in its analysis of *The Margarita Poems* (1987), by Luz María Umpierre. Through a reading that links Umpierre not only with contemporary feminist studies but also with the larger Hispanic literary tradition, and with a tradition of ‘queer (sex and gender radical) diasporic Puerto Rican poets . . .’ (p. 92), La Fountain-Stokes demonstrates that, despite her relative and undeserved obscurity, ‘Umpierre’s poetry and scholarship were fundamental to the growth and consolidation of U. S. Latina feminism’ (p. 65).

While the book’s first two chapters are argumentative, and the third is expository and revelatory, the fourth is as comparative as it is revelatory: it purports to ‘give us a privileged glimpse of more recent formations of queer Puerto Rican women’s diasporic culture making, and of the important differences that characterize it’ (p. 95). The chapter groups together – while taking their differences into account, particularly in relationship to feminist movements and Island politics – a triad of women who have made valuable contributions to different visual media: Frances Negrón-Muntaner, Rose Troche and Erika López. These comparisons make explicit one of *Queer Ricans*’s most valuable contributions, which is that ‘these women’s engagement with Philadelphia, New Jersey, Chicago, and California serves to decenter New York as the exclusive locus of diasporic Puerto Rican culture’ (p. 130).

In the fifth and final chapter, the critic returns to that locus by shifting the gaze away from textual productions of diasporic queer authors to analyse the performances of dancer/choreographer Arthur Avilés and performer/stand-up comedian Elizabeth Marrero, both of whom are based in New York. La Fountain-Stokes confesses that, because of its capacity to synthesise and refresh the arguments of *Queer Ricans*, the work of Avilés and Marrero ‘is the kind of artistic and community work that most appeals to me, and as such it makes a fitting conclusion to this book’ (p. 131). Sections such as ‘Toward a Theory of New York-Rican Cultural Consciousness’ and statements such as ‘many exciting things are happening in the South Bronx’ (p. 132) indicate that this chapter provides, in a way, an excuse to end the book openly by paying homage to the diversity, vibrancy and promise of queer communities of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

The success of *Queer Ricans* among reviewers in the United States signals the valuable contributions that it makes to several fields of study: Latino, Latina and Latin American studies; feminism, gender and sexuality studies; gay, lesbian and queer studies; literature and performance studies; and the study of ethnicity, race and migration. Along with these significant contributions, the book serves as an invitation for scholars to consider other transgender and gender-queer practices that La Fountain-Stokes himself has begun to explore in his latter work.

*Westfield State University*

JUAN PABLO RIVERA

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Rafael de la Dehesa, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: Sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. xvi + 300, £68.00, £16.99 pb.

*Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil* is one of those books that rarely come along, because of the way it engages the reader and the thoroughness and respect with

which it treats its subject matter. Rafael de la Dehesa's work stands out among recent studies of social movement activism around sexual identities and scholarly publications on democratisation in Latin America. It breathes fresh air into the debate on the nature and meaning of the democratisation processes in the region and provides key insights on the role that civil society groups have played in domestic and transnational contexts. Moreover, it stands out because of the breadth of knowledge from which it draws, resulting in sound political, historical, social and cultural analyses of both countries.

For anyone in the social sciences aspiring to cross disciplinary lines in a serious manner, this volume has set the bar much higher. While other analyses continue to draw primarily from Northern and narrowly defined disciplinary literatures, *Queering the Public Sphere* succeeds in skilfully incorporating what I would describe as a dream team of contemporary critical thinkers. Accordingly, it points to the relevance of the contributions of cultural critics and public intellectuals such as Nestor García-Cañalini, George Yúdice, Arjun Appadurai and Carlos Monsiváis, among others; and in particular their respective analyses of theories of hybridity extended to democratic practices, the transnational arena as a heterogeneous terrain, the differential penetration of so-called modern sexual identities, and the local realities shaping national specificities. De la Dehesa also draws from critical historians such as Enrique Dussel, John Beverly and Serge Gruzinski to support his sound historical analysis of recent social, cultural and political transformations. Furthermore, as well as framing his analysis within a solid political science literature, references to post-structuralist queer theorists such as Michael Foucault and Judith Butler enrich his analysis of HIV/AIDS and sexual diversity politics, allowing his work to engage with a wider audience.

In my view, the leitmotif of de la Dehesa's book is to paint a nuanced picture of the evolving transnational construction of sexual rights and its interaction with national legislations. In doing so, the book brings together institutional and cultural analyses of political parties and civil society, using the electoral field, as a space where meanings are challenged and identities change, to account for the diversity of social movements. The comparative analysis of Mexico and Brazil allows him to show that, as suggested by Appadurai in his book *Modernity at Large* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), the terms of liberal modernity have evolved and loosened across national boundaries, responding to local imperatives and constraints. Thus, for instance, social activists in Brazil have advanced homosexual citizenship, and their leadership on sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS advocacy has been refracted on to the international field. This new dynamics, de la Dehesa argues, represents a paradigm shift from the 1980s concept of homosexual liberation to one defined by the human rights discourse. This reality showcases the emergence of competing dissident globalisations that are producing new transnational repertoires: see Yúdice's *Expediency of Culture* (Duke University Press, 2003). Similarly, the Mexican case represents another example of the resonance of a rights-based discourse and the symbolic capital offered by legislatures, resulting in what the author calls legislative activism. As is true of other contexts, he demonstrates that the Mexican feminist movement has been a crucial ally, opening doorways into legislatures and public spaces for previously excluded groups. Among some concrete gains, the anti-discrimination law approved unanimously by the Chamber of Deputies in 2003 was heralded as a significant step in the consolidation of Mexico's democratic political culture.

In both cases, the HIV/AIDS epidemic transformed the activists' relationship with the executive powers as well, as demonstrated in the book's detailed account of some of the precise mechanisms of the process of policy-making. As suggested by de la Dehesa himself, 'the purportedly politically neutral frame of public health opened limited opportunities for gay activists to articulate linkages with the state' (p. 154). This represents what he calls a technocratic alternative to political parties through health sector bureaucracies. Yet the author also warns that little attention has been paid to the neoliberal components of globalisation in the campaigns and efforts of some of those 'successful' sexual diversity groups, and recognises that there are multiple genealogies underlying their projects. In fact, there have been compromising engagements, due in part to the activists' limited organisational scope and resources, which explain some of their limitations, such as the emphasis on legally enforced tolerance as opposed to aiming at the transformation of broader relations of power. Along the same lines, he cautions against an over-celebratory tone by underscoring the fact that *de jure* expressions of formal equality are routinely negated in practice by relations of power in the private sphere, partly as a consequence of stratified forms of citizenship and persisting class cleavages. However, he also reminds us that laws on paper do create symbolic resources that can be used in contesting existing practices and in subsequent political efforts.

De la Dehesa also points out the uncertainties posed by democratisation, especially towards the end of the book (p. 217), where he recalls the remarks of O'Donnell and Schmitter, in their *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), on the nature of the formal arrangements that emerged from the transition processes, which were deliberately designed to reduce the scope of debate, limit accountability to the citizenry and safeguard entrenched economic interests. He also reminds us that elections have become symbolic – though potentially contested – boundaries of legitimate public debate. However, given de la Dehesa's emphasis on the national–transnational dynamic and serious historical account, there is a surprising lack of emphasis on the external constraints and obstacles that indigenous or home-grown democratic processes have encountered in their own trajectories. For instance, I am thinking here of the often-neglected episode of Francisco I. Madero's assassination and the US government's meddling in the democratisation process of that momentous period in modern Mexican history. Similarly, I would have welcomed a few critical words on the centrality of the global human rights discourse that has been so appealing to social activists, particularly as regards some of the problematic modernist and northern-centred tones it carries.

Ultimately, *Queering the Public Sphere* provides a thought-provoking analysis, which engages 'mainstream' political science with other fields. Moreover, de la Dehesa shows that one can respectfully engage in a dialogue with the 'subaltern', questioning master narratives within and outside academia. Personally, I look forward to reading more about the technocratic alternative to political parties, since it raises central questions on the apparent obsolescence of representative democracy and parties themselves. Without any doubt this will soon become a seminal piece for anyone interested in interdisciplinary and comparative analyses, North and South.

York University, Toronto

ANTONIO TORRES-RUIZ