

household was beneficial for survival chances of the 'index' child compared with the presence of older brothers shows very clearly for the first time the role of the girl child as a caretaker and the 'value' of her contributions.

The final section is focused on individual behaviour, diet and obesity in developed countries. In the context where the US population is moving from 'the tallest to the fattest', it is increasingly important to observe individual factors. Alok Bhargava concludes that apart from economic factors, individual-level dietary knowledge, life style, and self control need to be emphasized to tackle the alarming obesity situation.

This book is a positive step in promoting interdisciplinary research. It is not very common to find a successful scholar that masters several disciplines. Alok Bhargava, using this volume, shows that it is possible to understand and relate various disciplines. However, some readers may find it difficult to relate various themes of this book. For instance, the first part of the volume is too complicated for social scientists like anthropologists, psychologists and nutritionists. Though sophisticated econometrics is used in some of the chapters, a non-econometrician can still benefit by addressing methodological issues to avoid spurious results, especially when it comes to policy.

The close connections between the issues and themes analysed in disciplines such as economics, nutrition, psychology, demography, anthropology, epidemiology and public health provide a sound basis for the formulation of public policies. This is what policy-oriented research should aim at, and this volume is highly recommended for researchers with policy focus.

The author himself stresses some of the potential problems of this volume such as terminological differences across disciplines. However, the author tries to please all the disciplines by including the synonyms. Most public health researchers, anthropologists, psychologists and demographers are unfamiliar with concepts like 'endogeneity' and 'heteroskedasticity'. These researchers might want to avoid this volume, especially after reading the first part. However, the preface and introduction of the book provide a summary in a systematic way to show that not all sections are full of sophisticated statistical terminology.

This volume will help health researchers – irrespective of their discipline – in understanding various methodological challenges that are taken for granted, and 'state of art' econometric solutions in dealing these issues. Personally, I found some of the examples, such as the ones using ICRISAT data, very useful. It is very difficult to sum up the book due to the magnificent amount of information. Even though methodological issues are at the heart of the chapters, one can appreciate the discussion and challenges addressed in each chapter.

ARAVINDA MEERA GUNTUPALLI  
*University of Southampton,*  
UK

**Jesus in Our Wombs. Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent.** By Rebecca J. Lester. Pp. 344. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005.) ISBN 0-520-24268-8, paperback. doi: 10.1017/S0021932008002976.

*Jesus in Our Wombs* describes the transformation that young women go through during the first year of religious training to become nuns in a Roman Catholic

convent in central Mexico. Lester's interpretation of the changes they undergo links them to two basic concepts that have long been discussed in different fields: the self and the body. It is therefore the embodiment of a creed. There are, however, two more layers to this mix: gender and modernity. The fact that the Catholic religion is practised so differently by men and women is key, Lester puts forward, to understanding it, as well as the portrayed order. Furthermore, the principles laid out by the founder of the order are a critical discourse with modernity and an outright effort to 'heal' Mexico in what he perceived as the country's identity crisis in the face of international influence (especially from the US).

The result is a fascinating tale of change: individual, religious and nationwide. By following a group of young postulants during their first eighteen months of training, Lester shows their initial doubts and fears as well as their changing opinions. She also provides a good context of Mexico and the order, which she calls the Siervas. On the one hand, she explains the complicated gender relations, meanings and practices that help explain the recent increase in vocations, after their decline in the sixties. On the other, she finds the parallels between the time of the foundation of the Siervas (the end of the nineteenth century) and when the ethnography was carried out (mid-nineties). These elements in turn provide a thick description of complex processes that lie at the base of a life dedicated to solidarity with the poor and religious devotion, with a particular view of national identity.

The volume, however, does not just describe such transformation. It also provides a theorization of how the process is actually about changing the self through control over the body. Training to become a nun entails an ongoing effort by the postulants to control their impulses, desires and habits. Lester suggests that Catholicism is actually 'a theology of bodies' (p. 34), because bodily purity is so central to the faith. This in turn includes control over the senses, in order to avoid temptation or sin. It also entails apparently trivial gestures such as learning how to move in order to avoid dropping the veil or avoiding eye contact with men. The learning process for postulants, therefore, implies a thorough training of the body as a door to further control over the self.

A theoretical exploration of power through bodies helps Lester explain certain apparently entrenched ideas about gender and roles in Mexican society. In this context, modernity was accused by the order's founder to have put at odds the order in society that Catholicism brought to Mexico. Secular rationalism and its 'liberal agenda', he argued, had infiltrated the country through business and media. This perceived corruption directly affected one of the fundamental institutions in the Catholic panorama: the family. The order portrayed, therefore, not only helped the poor but also had schools for girls in which part of the education was to teach them how to be proper women. It was an effort to heal a nation through the enhancement of a particular idea of femininity, understood as 'humanness', religiosity, faith, piety, tenderness, morality, humbleness and servitude in the face of God. Such was the ideal of the order's founder.

By reflecting on the resemblance of religious formation with psychotherapy, Lester offers an X-ray of such training. She does this through an exploration of the different stages she and the senior nuns identified as crucial in the training process she witnessed in the convent. Lester admits early in the book that her initial interest was

the transformation of women's bodies and selves through eating disorders, mainly anorexia. A few turns in her research brought her to an interest in what seemed a similar transformation: that of women training to be nuns. She clarifies that in her reading in preparation for her research, she did not find 'a detailed ethnographic account of the self-conscious, systematic use of bodily practices to reshape the (gendered) self within an elaborated system of meaning, coupled with a detailed model for understanding the psychological processes at work in this transformation' (p. 47). This volume proves to be a valuable contribution in this line.

RAÚL ACOSTA  
*ITESO University,*  
*Mexico*