

welcome. Regardless of these misgivings, this study is a very useful addition to the scholarship on women and politics in the Americas.

*University of Sheffield*

GEORGINA WAYLEN

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Peter Birle, Wilhelm Hofmeister, Günther Maihold and Barbara Potthast (eds.), *Élites en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert Verlag, 2007), pp. 228, €28.00, pb.

Elites: who are they, have they changed, and what has been and should be their role in the makeup of the Latin American democracies and economies? These are some of the important questions raised in this book. While the media and academic scholarship are increasingly highlighting social movements and governments that derive their legitimacy from their non- or, sometimes, anti-elitist backgrounds (such as in Venezuela, Bolivia and Brazil), this book adds an important perspective, asking what elites – or those groups within society in control of power resources or in control of power itself ('Presentación', p. 7) – are up to these days. In an academic world often eager to avoid normative judgment, the book's introductory chapter (by Waldmann) also questions the absence of a moral dimension in elite studies, suggesting that responsible behaviour and social solidarity should be part of our evaluation standards.

The book has various merits that make it a must-read for Latin Americanists. Several chapters, such as those by Waldmann, Bernecker and Zoller, Sabato, and Ströbele-Gregor, trace the evolution of the concept itself, recount the history of elites, and describe studies dedicated to their analysis. This historical and sociological perspective is an important contribution to Latin American scholarship on the evolution and transformation of the makeup of domestic societies. It provides a useful background for understanding shifts in relative power within and among elites and between elites and non-elite groups. In addition, the book explores alternate or less-studied types of elites, such as intellectual and indigenous elites. The respective chapters (Niemeyer on intellectuals and Ströbele-Gregor on indigenous groups) examine in what way these groups contribute to the formation of national identities, whether they have had influence on processes of national transformation (more in the case of the intellectuals than in the case of indigenous elites, the book finds), and, finally, whether they have had the capacity to integrate their interests and views in national agendas, sometimes a euphemism for a set of rules and principles ultimately favouring elite interests.

The book includes several chapters that compile solid empirical evidence on the processes of elite formation it seeks to describe. The chapter by Adler, Pérez and Salazar on 'Globalization and New Elites in Mexico', for example, is an outstanding attempt to trace the composition, education and impact on government of what are commonly referred to as 'the technocrats'. The chapter does a good job describing the social and economic backgrounds of the Mexican version of the Chicago Boys as well as the links between global events and their domestic consequences. Specifically, the fall in oil prices in the early 1980s reduced the perks available to traditional political groups to induce loyalty and compliance. This was combined with changes in the domestic corporate structure, caused by greater penetration of foreign capital and corporate practices. Together, these phenomena allowed a

transition of elites to occur, specifically the rise in state hierarchies of non-charismatic, politically inexperienced yet technically impeccable professionals who led the implementation and professionalisation of so-called neoliberal public policies.

At the same time, the book leaves some questions unanswered and will hopefully inspire future research efforts on these important issues. On the one hand, it is surprising that the book does not include a thorough description and analysis of the archetypal economic elite, that which controls material power or the means of production, referred to by critics as the oligarchy and often held responsible for Latin America's lack of change and progress. Some chapters even leave the impression that more or less the same group of people holds the reins of economic power. While empirical evidence on land tenure, income distribution and social mobility in fact show that concentration in few hands is still a major problem, there are factors that need to be taken into consideration and which suggest that 'more of the same' may not be an accurate description of economic elites in Latin America today. How have the influx of foreign capital and the rise in illegal markets (in drugs and weapons, for example) across the subcontinent, on the one hand, and an improvement in education and the consolidation of democratic state institutions, on the other, altered the composition and pressure mechanisms of economic elites? While resilience in the face of change may be part of an answer to these questions, scholars should look more closely at these changes and their implications for the holders of material power in Latin American societies.

In addition, the reader will not find attempts to explain national variation in the makeup and histories of Latin American elites. While Latin American countries certainly share a historical and colonial background, elites formed in different ways, perpetuated politically by different means, and gave in to pressure from below at different times. What are the institutional arrangements and underpinnings specific to countries or groups of countries explaining differences among and within elites, and how did these arrangements evolve? Contexts such as the transitions from military dictatorships to democratic regimes, the adoption of neoliberal reforms, or the transitions from armed conflict to peace in several countries provide interesting points of comparison to fine-tune our understanding of how and to what effect elites resisted, adapted to or actively promoted change, often competing amongst themselves.

Finally, the reader may find that analytical rigour and robust empirical evidence is unevenly distributed among the chapters of the book. For example, the role of international cooperation in shaping the makeup of elites and their attitudes is key to our understanding of the role of external factors in shaping domestic elites, but the two chapters dealing with this subject lack depth, and many claims are not substantiated. This may be disappointing for readers aware of the impact of the Marshall Plan in Asia or the Alliance for Progress in Latin America in terms of building alliances with and thereby affecting the makeup of local elites decades ago. Future research efforts should revisit these themes in the context of cooperation efforts that have shifted their methods, operate in a different international context and face significant financial constraints.

*Universidad de los Andes*

ANGELIKA RETTBERG