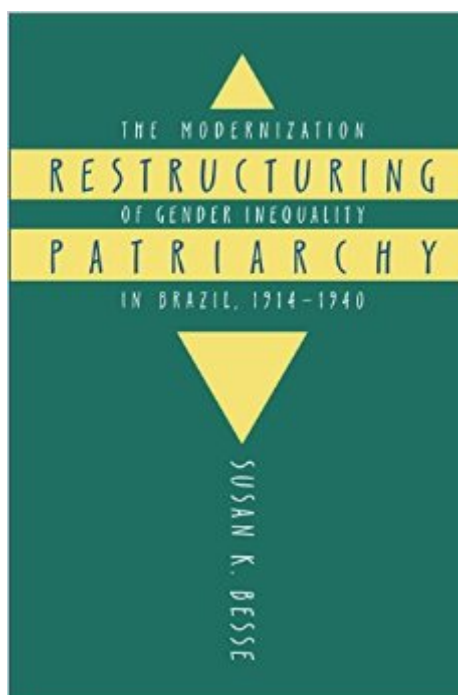


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Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization Of Gender Inequality In Brazil, 1914-1940



Synopsis

Susan K. Besse broadens our understanding of the political by establishing the relevance of gender for the construction of state hegemony in Brazil after World War I. *Restructuring Patriarchy* demonstrates that the consolidation and legitimization of power by President Getulio Vargas's Estado Novo depended to a large extent on the reorganization of social relations in the private sphere. New expectations and patterns of behavior for women emerged in postwar Brazil from heated debates between men and women, housewives and career women, feminists and antifeminists, reformist professionals and conservative clerics, and industrialists and bureaucrats. But as urban middle- and upper-class women challenged patriarchal authority at home and assumed new roles in public, prominent intellectuals, professionals, and politicians defined and imposed new 'hygienic,' rational, and scientific gender norms. Thus, modernization of the gender system within Brazil's rising urban-industrial society accommodated new necessities and opportunities for women without fundamentally changing the gender inequality that underlay the larger structure of social inequality in Brazil.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this review I would like to concentrate in the Besse's contribution to the study of marriage patrons in Brazil between post World War I period and 1940s offered by Susan Besse in her book *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940*. Susan Besse shows how changing economic necessities and social norms brought new opportunities for urban middle and upper class women for higher education and paid employment in Brazil's post

World War I era. This process was seen by the conservative elites as a menace to the "traditional Brazilian family", generating a public concern and a state ideology of wifehood and motherhood that succeeded in incorporating these changes to the maintenance of patriarchal dominance. Based on an ideological and discursive analysis that underlay the consolidation of the new authoritarian bourgeois order of the late 1930s, part of Besse's study is dedicated to the institution of marriage which seems to be in a "crisis" after the World War I period even when the rate of marriage was more widespread than before. This "crisis" is confronted by the elite in a discursive effort to solve "the low rate of nuptiality among the poor and the instability of poor families" (Besse, 39), through a national discussion about the topic in the media, scientific circles, the law, and government policies. The effort to promote different values among the lower classes is part of national concern to "civilize" the country and the creation of a national identity based on the ideal of racial and class democracy.

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