
This is a fascinating and powerful testimonial document of the life, experiences, and thoughts of a Bolivian working woman, based on interviews by a Brazilian journalist. The central figure, Domitila Barrios, could not be taken for a typical woman of the mines. Although she is a reflection of her people, she is also an exceptional and articulate leader who has risen above the expected destiny of most women growing up in the Bolivian altiplano. Domitila’s leadership developed slowly, eventually graduating to socialism and class consciousness after years of hard labor and poverty. Her ideology is simple: more justice and power for those who work in the mines and the fields.

This book brings a special understanding to the problems of mine women at home and in society at large. Personally, Domitila rejects feminism as alien to the interests of the workers. Yet, she has done much to earn a higher status for the women of the mines as well as to earn the respect of their men and the government by organizing the Housewives’ Committee and becoming an influential labor and political figure. A brief review cannot do justice to the many themes suggested by this work, all revolving around Domitila’s own experience: the inner workings of the miners’ union; the daily life of the miners’ families, with a poignant view of women’s role at home and the process of their politicization in the 1960s and 1970s; the split between the MNR, COMIBOL, and the radicalized miners; the impact of the military dictatorship on the mines; and the personal persecution suffered by her and many others. This work bears resemblance to Carolina Maria de Jesus’ Child of the Dark (1962) and Oscar Lewis’ Four Women (1977). Like them, its most important contribution is the portrayal of women’s experience and perceptions, a rare and welcome gift to students of women in Latin American societies.

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Asunción Lavrin


At first glance, Helmut Blume’s The Caribbean Islands appears