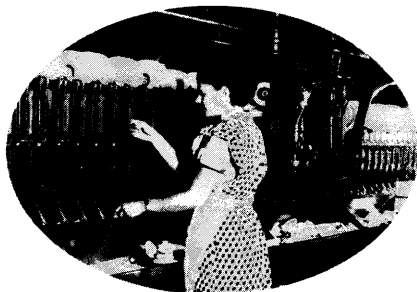


DULCINEA IN THE FACTORY



Myths, Morals, Men, and Women
in Colombia's Industrial Experiment,

1905–1960

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK EXPLORES two intertwined historical processes closely associated with worldwide modernity: the geographic expansion of factory production and the transformation of gender roles, whether real or potential, that is implied by women's waged labor. As a history of the social relationships and cultural understandings that shaped industrial work in a prosperous Latin American city, it is meant as a corrective to overly simple generalizations about "import-substitution industrialization" or "third world women workers." Wherever foreign or native entrepreneurs imported factory machines from Europe and the United States, they also imported ideas and practices associated with that machinery. Such ideas and practices were intermingled with entrepreneurs' more or less self-conscious plans for remaking local economic relationships. In Colombia, for example, many early industrialists saw themselves as social engineers. Yet factory owners nowhere controlled the social and cultural activity by which industrialism was made local. I begin by asking how people on the ground (and in the workrooms built to house newly arrived machines) experienced, understood, and changed the meaning of factory labor in the first half-century of Colombia's industrial experiment.

Although its name is now synonymous with drug trafficking and urban violence, Medellín, capital of the Colombian province of Antioquia, once enjoyed a very different reputation. If Bogotá, the country's capital, claimed to be the "Athens" of South America, Medellín presented itself as the region's "Manchester," where local capital had transformed a mountain town into the birthplace of an urbanized, industrial Colombia. Between 1905, when the city's first cotton mill began production, and the early 1960s, when

Antioqueño industry was widely recognized as a pacesetter for Latin American manufacturing more generally, a compressed process of textile-led industrialization transformed the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Medellín's mills became known for an intensely Catholic paternalism, by which the largest employers presented themselves as the moral guardians of female workers. Medellín industrialists developed this disciplinary form only gradually, adopting it both in response to the direct possibility of labor activism and as a solution to what had become a vexed local dilemma: that the everyday reality of factories where women and men worked side by side contradicted deeply held beliefs about the immorality of sexual mixing.

This study traces the role of gender in shaping the way Colombian mill-owners solved a general problem of capitalist exploitation: how to ensure an element of consent in the relationship between those who labor for a wage and those who profit from the difference between labor's price and the price of labor's product. Nevertheless, my interest is in the idiosyncrasies of Antioquia's industrial history. Why did the chastity of female workers become the focal point of industrial discipline? Why, over time, were women then excluded from textile production? In the 1940s, when the workforce was evenly split between male and female workers, being seen dancing in the wrong part of town or wearing skirts considered "too short" would get a woman in trouble at work; getting pregnant would get her fired. By the 1950s, however, textile jobs were being redefined as "men's jobs," and the focus of work rules shifted. A disciplinary system that had centered on workers' gendered bodies gave way to one that revolved around the stopwatch of the industrial engineer. In the timing and shape of changing forms of factory control, the Medellín case has relevance for historians interested in the varied ways that gender has shaped industrial paternalism, Fordism, and neo-Taylorist management in different national contexts.

Beyond its comparative value, the story this book tells for Colombia provides evidence of the need to continue rethinking gender as an analytical category. In Medellín's mills, especially during the 1930s and 1940s, the difference between "good" and "bad" women was culturally as important as that between men and women. It underlay a moral code that shaped workingwomen's self-perceptions, as well as the self-perceptions of men who labored in mixed-sex workplaces, and it organized the local labor market almost as thoroughly as did the male/female distinction per se. Conceptually, the difference between the proper and improper behaviors of gendered subjects is generally understood as being dependent upon the cultural dichotomy of female versus male. I have instead attempted to understand the normative work of sexuality, by which a range of stereotypes are attached to gendered bodies, as being part of the process of gender differentiation itself. Although the reference in the title is to Don Quijote's fantasy that the village

girl Aldonza is the chaste queen of his dreams, Dulcinea, one might point to more “modern” and less light-hearted examples: the “pure” white woman of racist fantasies, European reformers’ images of the tubercular factory girl, or the hypersexualized images of *la mulata* in the Hispanic Caribbean and of African American men in the United States. This book is an examination of women’s and men’s experiences in a particular, and limited, set of workplaces. Nevertheless, the richness of the sources available for Medellín has the potential to contribute to a range of discussions within feminist scholarship: about the instability of the term “women”; about the role of sexuality in shaping social hierarchies, such as class and race; and about the usefulness of historical approaches that focus on human subjectivity.