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Critical Debates

After Democracy: Advances and Challenges for Women's Movements in Latin America

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Bennett, Vivienne, Sonia Dávila-Poblete, and María Nieves Rico, eds. *Opposing Currents: The Politics of Water and Gender in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005. Tables, maps, bibliography, index, 264 pp.; paperback \$27.95.

Franceschet, Susan. *Women and Politics in Chile*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005. Tables, bibliography, index, 203 pp.; hardcover \$49.95.

Kampwirth, Karen. *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004. Bibliography, index, 360 pp.; paperback \$28.

Lind, Amy. *Gendered Paradoxes: Women's Movements, State Restructuring, and Global Development in Ecuador*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. Bibliography, index, 224 pp.; hardcover \$55.

Shayne, Julie D. *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004. Bibliography, index, 240 pp.; hardcover \$62, paperback \$23.95.

Feminism is now firmly established in Latin America (Craske 1999). As women's movements have matured over the past decade and a half, they have grappled with a complex panorama of structural and political transformations. The region's wave of democratization, the global institutionalization of discourses of gender equality, and the increased availability of external funding for NGO women's projects have offered potential spaces and resources to expand women's political and civil rights. The parallel advance of neoliberalism, however, has deepened women's workloads, intensified gendered processes of exclusion, and undermined women's social rights.

The books reviewed in this essay both explore processes of women's empowerment and offer important insights on key social and political issues of contemporary Latin America: the nature and quality of citizenship under new democracies; the persistent gaps between formal and substantive rights; the mediated impacts of neoliberal policies; and the possibilities and limitations of identity-based mobilization. The

books' convergences in premises, approaches, and methods reflect a growing maturity and sophistication in gender research. The authors provide multilevel and nuanced analyses of feminist movements in Latin America, linking women's specific forms of making demands and mobilizing to historical processes of state formation and local, national, and transnational contexts. They are sensitive to issues of power, and they recognize the heterogeneity of women's experiences. While they explore the implications of macro-level structural changes and political opportunity structures, at the center of these works is women's own agency in reshaping and contesting gender hierarchies and roles. The authors use interviews with activists, ranging from grassroots to national-level leaders, to incorporate the voices and perspectives of Latin American women.

INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER AND WATER POLICIES

Opposing Currents is a welcome scholarly contribution to an often neglected issue central to women's daily lives: the intersection of water policies and gender. Latin America is seeing part of a deepening global water crisis, and for many of the region's poor rural and urban women, water management is a "labor-intensive, physically demanding, and even stressful part of everyday life" (17). This book's 12 chapters include case studies from Bolivia, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, and Ecuador that explore the ways in which gender ideologies, gender-differentiated access to power, and specific constructions of public-private divides profoundly influence women's access to and control over water. The book does an excellent job of linking empirical studies of the daily practices and politics of water use to wider theoretical issues, making it appealing to a wide range of readers with an interest in gender in Latin America.

The valuable theoretical overview by Margaret Zwartveen and Vivienne Bennett asserts that a number of obstacles—limited access to land, water, credit, knowledge, and technology, as well as women's heavy domestic labor load—still impede women's access to and control of water in Latin America (23). Resistance to gender equality or incorporation of women into water management persists at multiple levels of communities, NGOs, states, and transnational institutions. Dávila-Poblete and Nieves Rico's chapter notes that global discourses and declarations about water management rarely incorporate a gender perspective. This lack of explicit recognition of gender renders invisible the processes of exclusion and inequality embedded in water's gendered divisions of labor and gender ideologies. In her chapter, Vera Delgado asserts that NGO technicians' view of the Andean household "as a dualistic, harmonious arena" places "all water management issues within the

male's domain" (109–10). Case studies by Elena P. Bastidas and Stephanie Buechler illustrate how cultural norms deeply embedded in local communities, such as prohibitions on women's participation in public meetings and irrigation at night, further impede women from effective participation in water management.

The public-private divide persists as a powerful, exclusionary ideological construct in Latin America. Women's use of water is narrowly framed in terms of the domestic, private sphere of health, hygiene, and basic family needs, in contrast to the use of water for irrigation and economic production that is defined as masculine. These representations of women's use of water as purely domestic relegate women's water claims to the "apolitical" realm of social welfare and charity, limiting women's voice in water management. The rigid public-private constructions, however, are increasingly out of sync with the shifting realities of women's lives, as Buechler illustrates in her examination of the outmigration of Mexican men and women's assumption of responsibility for "masculine" agricultural and irrigation activities.

Opposing Currents also provides evidence that the advancement of women's rights is not a linear process. As women's rights expand in certain spheres, they may diminish in others. Water control systems in Latin America have generally been managed through informal norms with high degrees of social control; women have been able to access water by developing social networks, patron-client ties, and informal cooperatives. Rhodante Ahlers, examining neoliberal measures in Mexico and Bolivia to formalize individual, private water rights, contends that these policies may undermine women's informal means of water access and perpetuate unequal gendered control of water resources.

The contributors to *Opposing Currents* emphasize women's agency in contesting neoliberal water policies and the local and national contexts that shape the form and content of women's mobilization. Norma Giarracca and Norma del Pozo describe women's participation as consumers in protests against water privatization in Tucumán, Argentina, with little explicit gender content. Discussing the well-known "water war" of Cochabamba, Bolivia, in contrast, Rocío Bustamente, Elizabeth Peredo, and María Esther Udaeta argue that women's grievances were embedded in ethnic identity, contesting the proposed fragmentation of water policies as undermining community collective decisionmaking. These two chapters also highlight women's strong and influential roles at the neighborhood level and their limited presence in higher-level arenas of political activism.

Overall, the case studies in *Opposing Currents* illustrate the structural, institutional, and ideological barriers that still impede Latin American women from fully participating in water management in particular and the public sphere more generally. When women do enter new

occupational and political fields, their activities are likely to be framed as private, apolitical, marginal, and even invisible. These gender ideologies, furthermore, are not simply a carryover from traditional belief systems; they are also reproduced by “agents of modernization,” such as international financial institutions, state officials, and NGO technicians.

FEMINISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT

The Revolution Question and *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution* offer informative and engaging analyses of the critical role that revolutionary movements have played in the individual and collective formation of second-wave feminist political identities and the interplay of class and gender-based struggles. Between them, these books cover a range of revolutionary feminist movements in Cuba and Chile (Shayne), Nicaragua and Mexico (Kampwirth), and El Salvador (both Shayne and Kampwirth). They share a premise that “revolutionary movements do not in and of themselves pose challenges to patriarchal structures, especially at the micro-level of the family” (Shayne, 8). Both authors contend that women were initially drawn into revolutionary movements not out of feminist consciousness, but instead through social networks, concerns for personal safety, and ideological commitments to socialism, nationalism, and democracy. Only in the postconflict, democratic era, as these women faced increased gender inequalities and blocked opportunities, did feminist consciousness and mobilization fully emerge.

The Revolution Question analyzes “the roles women play in revolutionary movements, how gender is exploited and transformed through such participation, and the attendant feminist movements that grow from revolutionary mobilization” (Shayne, 9). According to Shayne, women’s agency and the instrumentalism of the male leftist leadership opened spaces for women to participate as “gendered revolutionary bridges,” making strategic connections “as a result and subversion of femininity” (43). In El Salvador and Cuba, women played key intermediary roles between civilians not integrated into revolutionary movements and the armed resistance. They delivered weapons and messages, escorted males, and provided domestic support for guerrillas. Similarly, Chilean women used the space created by their “public invisibility” to mobilize against the dictatorship.

Shayne also details the challenges faced by women’s movements in postrevolutionary periods. In El Salvador and Chile, women’s behind-the-scenes revolutionary contributions were “perceived as apolitical and nontransferable to the realm of formal politics,” which weakened women’s claims to status and power (65). In Cuba, male revolutionaries have criticized feminism according to nationalist and class-based criteria, and the women’s movement remains “highly centralized, severely lack-

ing in autonomy, and at best, effective only in some circles" (154). Shayne concludes that key factors for the emergence of revolutionary feminism are "gender-bending" experiences and training of women in revolutionary movements, as well as sociopolitical cleavages, sexism, and women's unmet practical needs in the postrevolutionary period (10).

In *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*, Kampwirth addresses three shortcomings of literature on revolutions: "1) its relative inattention to the role of women in revolutions and the impact of gender relations on revolutionary movements; 2) its tendency to end analysis at the moment when the old regime is overthrown; and 3) its overemphasis on states and structures" (Kampwirth, 2). Her analysis focuses on female participants in Salvadoran and Nicaraguan revolutionary movements who experienced relative gender equality, were socialized into revolutionary culture, were exposed to international leftist thought, and acquired organizing skills. Kampwirth concurs with Shayne that in the postconflict period, female leftists shared a sense that their revolution remained incomplete, but she contends that it was women at the middle level of leadership in the revolutionary movement who were most directly affected by male leftist sexism and blocked opportunities (10). As a result, these women began to mobilize independently through pre-existing social networks, with new ways of thinking and acting on issues of women's equality and well-being.

In contrast to the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran cases, Kampwirth affirms that the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) incorporated explicit references to gender from the outset, partly reflecting the growth of global discourses on women's rights from the 1980s on. Class differences, as well as inter- and intraethnic tensions (centered on the relationship between indigenous women and female mestiza advisers and indigenous traditions that negatively impacted women) also influenced the forms and content of women's participation in the EZLN. By the late 1990s, despite strong pressures of clientelism, cooptation, and repression from the Mexican government, indigenous women EZLN members were mobilizing to expand revolutionary practices to include gender equality and to push the concept of autonomy beyond the public sphere to the private spaces of household and community.

Kampwirth's and Shayne's case studies suggest that conditions of civil war (Nicaragua, El Salvador), external siege (Cuba), and deep internal political polarization (Chile), which appear to threaten the very survival of revolutionary movements or regimes, tend to lead to the marginalization of women's issues as dangerously "divisive." Yet they also provide evidence that resistance, individual and collective, to gender equality among male leftists is more profound than political exigency. It persists through peace settlements and democratization processes. Kampwirth and Shayne broadly agree that revolutionary ideologies have

informed feminism, and emphasize socialization in revolutionary movements as key to the formation of feminist leaders. They also suggest that some degree of autonomy from leftist movements has been a necessary step for the development of revolutionary feminism, and they illustrate the tensions faced by women who practice “double militancy.”

This raises an interesting question for further exploration: how did early experiences of class-based mobilization influence the content and claims of the feminist movements that have followed? In particular, what are the implications for class tensions within feminist movements? Is feminism that is influenced by revolutionary ideologies more likely, in practice, to be representative of and accountable to the issues and perspectives of poorer women than feminism formed in more mainstream crucibles? Another issue, not fully addressed in these volumes, is the structural and ideological processes that serve to perpetuate or transform sexist beliefs and practices among the male-dominated left. In particular, just as the left has shaped feminism, under what conditions might feminist ideologies and practices further democratize and transform the left?

NEOLIBERALISM IN ECUADOR

Gendered Paradoxes is a theoretically informed and grounded exploration of the complexities of gendered cultural politics of neoliberalism, women’s individual and collective survival strategies, and community-based mobilization to oppose neoliberalism in Ecuador (54.) Amy Lind links Ecuador’s recent neoliberal project to a broader process of state modernization, and emphasizes that the state’s often paradoxical policies have served to legitimate struggles for certain women’s rights, even as its Eurocentric ideologies have reinforced the class and race privileges of elite women.

Gender biases in the neoliberal model include its nonrecognition or undervaluing of women’s unpaid domestic labor and its assumption that women have endless time available to pick up the increased labor burdens of readjustment (Gideon 2002). Neoliberal policies negatively affect women through increased un- and underemployment, depressed wages, and increased prices of consumer goods and services (Afshar and Dennis 1991). Lind echoes and expands these critiques, arguing that Ecuadorian neoliberal policies have redrawn public-private boundaries and restructured not only the economy, but everyday life (Lind, 93). Poor women have carried the heaviest burden of economic restructuring, partly because of their role in social reproduction and their marginal positions in the paid, capitalist economy (9). In particular, the Ecuadorian state has relied on women’s unpaid, “volunteer” labor as social welfare service delivery has been privatized. Women’s community caretaking and survival activities have become permanent and institutionalized.

Aided by the increased external funding available to women's NGOs, women "mothered" Ecuador's economic readjustment, using their traditional gender roles and specific constructions of gender, family, and motherhood in "multiple material and symbolic ways" both to preserve and to challenge values, traditions, and inequalities (95). In the late 1990s, women also contributed to "remaking the nation" through participation in the national strike for the removal of president Abdala Bucaram, the redrafting of the 1998 Constitution, and more broadly challenging the neoliberal project's "universal notion of citizenship and unicultural identity" (4).

The opening of political opportunities for women in the Ecuadorian state has intensified debates throughout Latin America on the autonomy of feminist movements. On the one hand, Lind suggests that the National Women's Council (CONAMU) has been an important source of interpretive power and resistance to state hegemony, and that Ecuador now has a well-developed women's policy network that has helped establish policies and laws favorable to women. Yet Lind also provides evidence that the gains of institutional space under neoliberalism have not benefited all women equally.

GENDERED CITIZENSHIP IN CHILE

That theme is also central to *Women and Politics in Chile*. Franceschet's monograph is an articulate, well-organized, and insightful examination of Chilean gendered citizenship. It places the relationship between the state and feminism in historical perspective and explores key contemporary issues, including political strategies of gender difference, tensions between autonomy and double militancy, women's participation in electoral politics, state feminism, and the links between political opportunity structures and women's agency.

Franceschet links women's inclusion in formal politics to Chilean state transformations and a distinct national political culture characterized by strong parties, centralized government, and a strong class basis. Her findings for the Chilean case mesh with Craske's contention (1999) that periods of transition and revolutionary struggles, when political structures and terrains are under negotiation, offer the greatest openings for women to advance their demands. Chile's return to democracy and masculinist, formal "politics as usual," by contrast, has been less hospitable to women.

Women and Politics in Chile also illustrates the fluid extent and content of formal and informal politics and that the formal-informal divide has reinforced class, racial, and ethnic inequalities. Under the Pinochet regime, women's collective actions in neighborhoods became a focal point of political resistance. With redemocratization, the neighborhood

mobilizations of poor and indigenous women against neoliberalism and in favor of practical gender interests have been redefined as apolitical. In contrast, middle- and upper-class, well-educated, and light-skinned women have gained the most access to formal politics. Franceschet argues that formal politics must become more broadly accessible to women and women's issues and that stronger, more substantive, and more democratic linkages should be developed between informal and formal arenas of political action.

The implications of women's political mobilization as mothers in Latin America have been widely debated. Motherhood may be employed in militant and subversive ways or, as Power (2002) notes, it may be utilized in defense of patriarchal, authoritarian nationalism. Franceschet suggests that the possibilities and limitations of motherhood mobilization are not predetermined, but instead shift with prevailing historical, institutional, and political contexts. She takes a similarly nuanced approach to Chile's complex divisions between feminist *autónomas* and *institucionales*.

Franceschet shares the concerns of other feminist scholars and activists that such new forms of formal inclusion of women may serve to fragment the women's movement along class, racial, and political lines. Her assessment of Chile's National Women's Service (SERNAM) is mixed. SERNAM faces obstacles to influencing state apparatus, yet is well placed in the executive branch to initiate gender-egalitarian legislation. Franceschet also notes the tensions between the middle- and upper-class women generally employed by SERNAM, who have appropriated new social spaces, and women at the grassroots, who have lost access to the material resources once provided by NGOs.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

The books reviewed in this essay advance our understanding of three interesting themes related to women's movements in Latin America that will probably be subjects of further research: the complexities of feminist engagement with the state, the framing strategies women use to advance their self-defined interests, and the processes that shape women's diverse political identities. All the authors recognize the risks of feminist participation in state agencies and male-dominated political parties—co-optation of feminist leadership, fragmentation of movements, corruption, demobilization, and so on. Yet none argues for complete disengagement. Instead, together they make a strong case that states are still central to feminist organizing and demand making in Latin America. States remain gendered spaces and play a critical role in shaping and reinforcing gender identities and ideologies in society as a whole. Even as globalization processes constrain states, states remain

contested sites of policy formation and legislation on important gender issues of family, property rights, discrimination, and material redistribution, with specific content and a scope distinct from that of civil society.

Several authors also point out that state withdrawal under neoliberalism, specifically in the areas of subsidies and services, leaves intact, and indeed may exacerbate, the gendered inequalities of markets. These volumes also suggest that although the state may be a necessary component in the process of achieving gender equality, it is insufficient by itself. Informal politics, "confronting everyday institutionalized patterns and practices that deny social groups participatory citizenship" (Hobson 2003, 3), and the mobilizing frames, strategies, and organizational forms used by women in communities and daily life also remain key to women's empowerment.

Molyneux notes a critical distinction "between women's movements which premise their strategic visions on the minimization of the difference between the sexes, and those which argue for the enhancement of women's place in society through an appreciation of the differences between the sexes" (1998, 237). These cross-national cases suggest further refinements to our understanding of mobilizing frames of difference. Such frames are employed instrumentally by women and also embedded in Latin America's patterns of gender socialization and resulting gender identities, whose reconfiguration is a complex medium- to long-term process. For some women, frames of difference have intrinsic value. They enable women to assert and protect the status, sense of meaning, and psychological and social well-being associated with traditional feminine identities. In strategic terms, because frames of gender difference do not fundamentally challenge embedded gender ideologies, at least in the short term, they may appeal to wider groups of women and men. In addition, demands based on gender difference are more easily framed as additive rights, the creation or fortification of distinct, parallel spaces occupied by women, which do not directly threaten individual and collective male privilege and the stake that some women have in existing male privilege.

The five books reviewed here offer a mixed assessment of Latin America's most pervasive, powerful, and malleable frame of gender difference, motherhood. On the one hand, women bring creativity and agency to their individual and collective performances of motherhood, opening spaces and pushing forward claims. Motherhood mobilization frames, however, with their implicit and explicit essentialism, may reinforce rigid gender roles and gender ideologies, limit the universality of women's claims, and overshadow or negate women's other identities or potential identities.

Several additional frames of gender difference can be identified in these volumes. Closely linked to maternal frames are gender-specific

social welfare claims for material and physical well-being. The fulfillment of such self-limiting claims for redistribution and modification of male behavior does not necessarily displace, but instead may reinforce paternalistic male roles and power. Shayne and the contributors to *Opposing Currents* in particular argue for women's rights from a frame of efficiency and the instrumental value of women's contributions. Here, women's gendered incorporation into labor markets, political movements, and institutions is framed as a means to advance larger, external, generally male-defined goals, such as nation building, economic modernization and growth, revolutionary transformation, overcoming crisis, or democratic consolidation. When used by institutions like the World Bank, this frame may serve as a means to extract greater labor and sacrifice from women. Yet it may also be used by women to gain inclusion, status, power, and access to material resources.

The research in these volumes supports the notion that practical and strategic gender interests are not dichotomous but complex and intertwined. Similarly, it can be argued that frames that challenge or minimize gender difference are not necessarily strategic, mirror images of practical gender interests; nor are they inherently transformative. Increasingly in Latin America, claims for gender equality have been applied to limited areas, such as legal reforms to promote formal equality under the law. While this is an important advance for Latin American women, it leaves intact, and indeed may serve to mask and depoliticize, gender inequalities which persist, as detailed by these authors, in economic structures, institutions, private-public constructions, gendered divisions of labor, and gender ideologies of everyday life. Frames of gender nondifference and equality become transformative only when they recognize and confront gender inequality in all spheres, formal and informal. As these are also claims for a more profound redistribution of power and material wealth, they are likely to generate resistance from powerful interests on grounds of both gender and class, in contrast to limited gender claims compatible with neoliberalism.

Claims made by women and the frames they use are closely tied to identities. The authors of these books have taken great care not to approach Latin American women as a unified group. They have tried to incorporate women's class differences and, to a lesser degree, racial and ethnic diversity into their analyses. In the countries covered here, when leadership and employment openings have occurred—in political parties, national women's offices, NGOs, and revolutionary movements—middle- and upper-class, lighter-skinned women have been most able to take advantage of them. Likewise, such women are more able to shield themselves from the negative consequences of neoliberalism. These hierarchies of location in economic structures and forms of institutional access raise serious questions about the parameters and content

of “women’s interests,” representation, and accountability. Who speaks for women, defines the priorities for feminine or feminist struggles, and determines mobilization strategies? On what issues can we speak of women’s common cross-class interests, and on what issues will women’s interests diverge?

These volumes caution against trying to read women’s interests simplistically from their class or racial sources. They raise interesting questions about the formation of women’s political identity. Several authors suggest that middle- and upper-class feminists’ political formation is a complex process linked to social networks, group and institutional socialization, and leadership opportunities, experiences not necessarily accessible to poor, Afro-Latina, or indigenous women. The books included here focus primarily on Latin America’s women of the left. An additional axis of identity, however, is women’s diverse political affiliations. Just as women may accommodate gender hierarchies with the “patriarchal bargain,” so, under certain circumstances, women may ally themselves with conservative movements and choose to accommodate class and racial hierarchies and even authoritarianism.

Radcliffe (2002) points out the limitations of mobilization, political demands, and legislation linked to a single axis of women’s identity. When demands are made on a class basis, women are marginalized as workers with an invisible double shift. In indigenous mobilization, women’s concerns at the community and household levels may be silenced. Given women’s multifaceted identities, we need greater exploration of the processes—political opportunity structures, institutions, social movements, informal interactions—that influence which women’s identities become salient at particular junctures and take priority in claims and action. Likewise, how do women themselves, as individuals and collectively, strategically manage intersecting identities, the ways identities may both overlap and contradict themselves? An important task for feminist scholars and activists is the exploration of processes and spaces through which women’s representations and interests on a local, national, and transnational scale can be negotiated and more deeply democratized.

Taken together, these books provide a very solid framework for understanding both the achievements of Latin American women’s movements over the past several decades and the challenges still to be confronted. They demonstrate that issues of women’s rights and gender equality are inseparable from the complex political, social, and economic processes that are transforming the region. These volumes are models of compelling and committed scholarship and valuable additions to the rich, dynamic literature on gender in Latin America.

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