



## BOOK REVIEWS

*WORKING WOMEN, ENTREPRENEURS, AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION: THE COFFEE CULTURE OF CÓRDOBA, VERACRUZ.* By Heather Fowler-Salamini. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013, p. 440, \$45.00.

In this meticulously researched book, Heather Fowler-Salamini places women at the center of a history about labor in the state of Veracruz and the international coffee economy. Covering over fifty years, from the late Porfiriato to the 1950s, she examines entrepreneurs who established a successful coffee export industry in the city of Córdoba and the female sorters who collectivized into unions that wielded significant power. Fowler-Salamini shows that these women created a strong working culture headed by female *cacicas* within a “regional agro-export economy in the midst of revolution and modernization within the Atlantic economy” (15–16). In the process, she clearly demonstrates that women deserve more scholarly attention in the history of labor in Mexico, challenging male-dominated norms and narratives. This “history from below” is one of the finer works to come out on the history of Veracruz in recent years.

Fowler-Salamini builds this history from an impressive array of sources. She uses hundreds of documents obtained from more than twenty different archival and library collections. She also uses a large number of interviews that she conducted herself, interweaving these oral histories with archival materials in a seamless fashion, creating not only a well-argued, but also a well-crafted, manuscript. Fowler-Salamini exhibits similar skill in her photo selection and the creation of a number of simple but useful graphs about the Córdoba coffee industry and the people that made it happen.

Fowler-Salamini gives credit to the rise of the coffee industry in Córdoba to a group of ambitious Spanish immigrants. The region’s “coffee planters were true entrepreneurs, technologically far more advanced in the cultivation and preparation of coffee than anywhere else in the republic” (25). The region was also geographically well-placed. It was close to Mexico’s most important port city: Veracruz. Unlike some other enterprises, coffee exportation was not dramatically affected by the Revolution, though the conflict did bring hardship to some coffee merchants. Meanwhile, working women obtained a “new sense of self-worth and self-awareness” (84).

The Revolution galvanized solidarity among Córdoba’s female coffee sorters. While Venustiano Carranza attempted to regain a favorable military and political position during the last half of the 1910s, women of all ages formed the Union of Coffee Sorters of Córdoba. In desperate need of support and a stable economy, Carranza’s forces generally supported the union in order to keep exports stable and to minimize problems. “The gender of the striking workers was immaterial. In short, women unions

resulted in greater regulation and the number of cooperatives, which made peasant action more visible and vulnerable to *caciquismo*.

The second section traces successive leaders' efforts to "industrialize" the forest in the name of economic "modernization." This entailed both mechanizing production processes and—through the promotion of sawmills, resin distilleries, and paper plants—converting woodland ecosystems into raw materials for commercial operations. Accordingly, leaders passed new forestry codes that suppressed cooperatives in favor of private companies, many of which received exclusive access to timberlands in exchange for pledges to manage resources sustainably and improve social services and transportation infrastructure. Refusing to keep these companies at their word, the ruling party "essentially became an environmental kleptocracy" (167). In the face of popular unrest, Luis Echeverría responded by instituting a regime of "state forestry," a bureaucratic network of publicly owned institutions meant to ease access to land, equipment, and credit. In practice, state forestry furthered bureaucratic forms of dominance by rendering natural resources bargaining chips to ameliorate rural demands. State forestry's greatest failure, according to Boyer, derived from its insistence on "subordinat[ing] the material needs and social aspirations of rural people to a model of development that treated economic growth as an end unto itself and privileged the nation's most influential commercial and political interests" (251). The only saving grace Boyer finds is that Mexico's rate of deforestation, the highest in the Americas in the 1990s, in the past decade has slowed, the result more of migration and viable alternatives to clandestine logging than of direct policy initiatives.

Boyer's notion of "political landscapes" may sound familiar to those concerned with ecology and commodity production. Nonetheless, Boyer's book represents a signal achievement by persuasively documenting the ways forests in Mexico were shaped less by market forces, management policies, or population pressures than by the effects of political negotiation among the people and institutions that vied to determine how and for whose benefit they would be used. This book should be required reading for anyone interested in postrevolutionary Mexico and is ideal for use in upper-division undergraduate classes.

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**TAKING RISKS: FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND RESEARCH IN THE AMERICAS.** By Julie Shayne (ed.) Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014, p. 383, \$27.95.

*Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas*, edited by Julie Shayne, profiles recent scholarship on feminist activism in the

Americas, interrogating important questions about how researchers engage in feminist activist research methodology. The contributors closely examine the lives and histories of women activists taking risks in the hemisphere to demand social, political, and cultural change. The volume also considers the career-related risks that feminist scholars take in engaging in non-traditional research methodologies. At its heart, this is a volume concerned with feminist methodology. Through example, the contributors create a vision for transnational feminist activist scholarship in the Americas.

A project that came out of an interdisciplinary conference, Julie Shayne brings together a collection of essays written by seasoned scholars such as herself, as well as by undergraduate and graduate students. In the introduction to the text, Shayne states, "regardless of the preferred label, the commonality in activist scholarship lies in the starting point that methodology, activism, theoretical insights, and reflection are inseparable" (xix). All of the authors featured in this volume offer self-reflection on their research processes, seeking an answer to the question of what it means to be an anti-oppressive researcher. In their self-reflection, authors explore their own personal relationships to both the research process and to the individuals with whom they work, revealing the personal and political commitments to their research. By engaging in participant observation and conducting interviews, the contributors to *Taking Risks* highlight the voices of Latin American and Latina activists involved in contemporary feminist movements. Incorporating the activists into the research process, many of the researchers sought feedback from their interviewees before publishing their work. Some of the authors also created video and radio archives to preserve these interviews.

The book is divided into three sections. Part 1 examines textual representations of transnational feminist activism in the Americas. Several articles in this section are in conversation with one another, and most of the authors have a scholarly relationship to Shayne. A Chilean exile and founding member of the Vancouver based *Aquelarre* Collective and the *Aquelarre* Magazine, a bilingual, feminist, and socialist publication which provided a forum for communication between Latin American women in Canada, Latin America, and around the world from the late 1980s until the early 1990s, Carmen Rodriguez reflects on her own experiences of writing as activism. In this regard, she states, "language is not only a sophisticated tool for reflection and communication, but also a weapon loaded with power" (8). In her chapter, "Chilean Exiles and Their Feminist Stories," through interviews with participants, Shayne analyzes the significance of this same magazine in the transnational Chilean solidarity movement, revealing the ways in which it worked "creating and maintaining a feminist dialogue across the Americas" (88).

Part II examines performed stories as sites of empowerment that can serve to create dialogue, educate, and strengthen social justice movements. The authors in this section explain the political significance of telling and

archiving the stories of Latin American women through the mediums of TV, radio, and theatre. In her essay "Echoes of Injustice," on "artistic activism," theatre scholar and director Christina Marín explains how, through plays that deal with the topic of femicide "we actively bear witness... and denounce the impunity that plagues Ciudad Juárez" (186). By encouraging the spectators to critically reflect, she asserts that theatre productions such as these can be a source of education for performers and spectators alike.

The focus of Part III is on recording the stories of organizers themselves, highlighting the formation of their "oppositional consciousness," a term coined by Chicana feminist scholar Chela Sandoval. Similar to Marín, part of what draws anthropologist Erica Lorraine Williams to her research on Brazilian sex workers is inspired by personal experience, namely the fact that each author could be and, in Williams's case, actually was, mistaken for one of the subjects of their research. In turn, in "Feminist Tensions," Williams explores how "my racialized and gendered body was implicated in the context of my research in multiple and shifting ways—from being seen as a sexually available Brazilian woman by Italian tourists, to a sexually available *negringa* (foreign black woman) by *caca-gringas* (Bahian male hustlers,) and even to my political identities of being a sex worker rights advocate," revealing that for many women academics of color, "taking risks" in their research is not a choice (216).

The strength of this volume lies in the intersection of fascinating case studies on contemporary feminist activism in the Americas with ample conversation about feminist methodological practices. As Shelly Grabe elucidates in her article "Rural feminism and Revolution in Nicaragua," "I entered into these relationships with no formal training in feminism and rather, became a student of activists who have devoted their lives to social change. In doing so, I learned a women of color, decolonial, rural feminism that largely influences most of the work I do today" (284). Each author argues for the importance of self-reflexivity in research and models feminist activist methodology as a commitment to justice. This reflection of methodological practices can be highly useful for graduate students, junior and more senior scholars who want to ensure that their research is accountable to and useful for the communities that they study.

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***THE ANOMIE OF THE EARTH: PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, AND AUTONOMY IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS.* Federico Luisetti, John Pickles, and Wilson Kaiser (eds.). Durham and London: Duke UP, 2015, p. 260, \$24.95.**

Luisetti, Pickles, and Kaiser have put together a provocative collection of essays determined to identify and theorize an emerging anomic