REVIEW ESSAYS

WOMEN'S POLITICAL LIVES IN LATIN AMERICA:

Reconfiguring Terrains of Theory, History, and Practice[1]

Janise Hurtig, *University of Illinois at Chicago*
Rosario Montoya, *University of Colorado, Boulder*

AFTER REVOLUTION: MAPPING GENDER AND CULTURAL POLITICS IN NEOLIBERAL NICARAGUA. By Florence E. Babb. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. Pp. viii+304. $50.00 cloth, $24.95 paper.)

WHY WOMEN PROTEST: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN CHILE. By Lisa Baldez. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xvii+234. $65.00 cloth, $23.00 paper.)

EMPOWERING WOMEN: LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA. By Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena León. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001. Pp. vii+486. $55.00 cloth, $24.95 paper.)

WOMEN AND GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS: NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR, CHIAPAS, CUBA. By Karen Kampwirth. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002. Pp. x+194. $35.00 cloth.)

RIGHT-WING WOMEN IN CHILE: FEMININE POWER AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ALLENDE 1964–1973. By Margaret Power. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002. Pp. xxii+311. $65.00 cloth, $25.00 paper.)

1. The authors would like to thank Emma Cervone and Altha Cravey for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this review.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 40, No. 1, February 2005

UN SIGLO DE LUCHAS FEMENINAS EN AMÉRICA LATINA. Edited by Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz. (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2002. Pp. ix+267. N.p.)

MUJERES, GÉNERO E HISTORIA EN AMÉRICA CENTRAL DURANTE LOS SIGLOS XVIII, XIX Y XX. Edited by Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz. (San José, Costa Rica: Plumsock Mesoamerican Studies. UNIFEM, 2002. xi+221. N.p.)

In this essay we review seven recent publications that take up the politics of Latin American women's lives and struggles from the mid-colonial period to the present. The books' diverse topics exemplify the breadth that "politics" has acquired over the past two decades as a conceptual frame in Latin American research on women and gender: from formal electoral politics to informal quotidian activities; from explicitly political protest to more subtle subversions; from demands for equality as citizens or workers to demands for reproductive freedoms. Each book contributes to our understanding of women as political actors and agents of social change. While the works vary in the ways and extent to which they deploy gender as a category of analysis, each makes an important and distinct contribution by challenging the conceptual, methodological or thematic terms that have delimited the terrains of research on women's political life in Latin America with which they engage. We review the books in relation to four research terrains: the politics of women's circumstances under neoliberal capitalism, women's place in revolutionary theory, women contesting political institutions, and the politics of women's everyday lives.

One of the qualities that marks feminist research on women, gender, and politics in Latin America as critical research is the inclination to question and revise its own accounts of women's lives, struggles and consciousness. Thus, feminist scholars have produced gendered re-readings of the historical record that call into question earlier tendencies to narrate Latin American women's changing circumstances as a story of progress, identifying instead the uneven, contradictory, and regionally varied development of gendered politics and women's material circumstances. Each of the books reviewed here contributes to this more critical, if at times unsettling, picture of women's political engagement across the region.

While scholars have readily pointed to advances in feminist theories as the basis for this more heterogeneous reading of gender politics in Latin America, few have been similarly inclined to question the progressive and equally romantic narrative about those theories. Certainly each new "wave" of feminist theory contributes new insight, but it often does so at the expense of key insights of the previous "wave," creating new theoretical blind spots rather than moving toward richer syntheses. As Mary Weismantel recently pointed out, "authors today

speak of 'identities' that combine 'fluidly'; this language may make 'difference' visible but it renders inequality so diffuse as to be impossible to analyze."[2] Elizabeth Dore similarly identified the ideological implications of the so-called postmodern turn for Latin American feminist researchers and activists.[3] Dore and Weismantel argue that a theory of positionality is compatible with the historical materialism that many third wave feminists eschew, and call for approaches that build on both sets of insights by integrating theories of difference and class analysis.

Generalizing from such critiques, we propose that developments in recent feminist research on Latin American women's political engagement are more effectively rendered dialectically than linearly—as the reiterative and uneven effort to engage with, resolve, or transcend a series of vexing conceptual and theoretical dichotomies that continually reappear in new guises--much like the patriarchal social formations within and against which Latin American women struggle. As we consider how these seven works contribute to reconfiguring particular terrains of research, we focus on four dichotomies which, while by no means the exclusive preoccupation of feminist theory, have been and continue to be central to feminist scholarship on women's political lives in Latin America.

The first is the dichotomy between specificity and universality, rendered politically and culturally as (gender) difference versus (women's) solidarity or commonality of experience, and methodologically as the distinction between the case study and the comparative model. A tendency toward universality in the literature on Latin American women's political lives has led to the decontextualized use of such categories as patriarchy and motherhood and dichotomies such as machismo/marianismo, public/private, and house/street in theorizing both the nature of and basis for women's oppressions and struggles across the continent. While some recent work has begun to explore the variable meanings and uses of motherhood as a politicized identity, other constructs have not received similar critical attention, a discrepancy we take up in our concluding remarks.

The second dichotomy we consider is that between public and private (or domestic) spheres, rendered in research on women and politics as a distinction between the spheres of organized political activity

2. Mary Weismantel, "Feminist Historical Materialism Revisited." Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings, New Orleans, 2002.

3. Elizabeth Dore, "Introduction: Controversies in Gender Politics" in *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997) 9–17. See also Susan Tiano's review essay, "From Victims to Agents: A New Generation of Literature on Women in Latin America," in *Latin American Research Review* 36 (3): 183–203 (2001).

and everyday life.[4] While feminist researchers have addressed the limitations of this dichotomy primarily by acknowledging the fluidity between these spheres, the assumption persists that women have to leave the private sphere to engage in meaningful or socially transformative political activity. Increasingly, scholars have questioned the usefulness of this U.S.-European socio-spatial distinction in the analysis of Latin American women's lives. Nonetheless, as Rosario Montoya points out, most research on women and politics in contemporary Latin America continues to be framed in terms of this dichotomy, resulting in an almost exclusive focus on women's activity in the public domain.[5]

The third dualism is that of society and the individual, also rendered as the dichotomy of structure and agency or reproduction and resistance. This dualism has framed at least two literatures on gender/women and politics in Latin America. The first aims to recuperate women's political agency in the face of androcentric readings of women as oppressed victims of formal and informal political forces. A second literature is concerned with the specific qualities of women's political agency, and includes debates over the distinction between so-called feminine and feminist consciousness, or practical versus strategic gender interests.

The fourth distinction we address is that between culturalist and materialist approaches to feminist research, which we read as an instantiation of the persistent Enlightenment dualisms between mind and matter, culture and society. Despite a generalized recognition of gender as a social and political as well as a symbolic category, June Nash's 1986 call for the integration of consciousness, culture, and material conditions in the examination of gender in Latin America continues to have a place in the research agenda.[6] In particular, efforts to transcend this schism are urgently needed so that feminist scholarship can move beyond the tendency to reduce the study of gender as a sociocultural dimension to the study of "women" as a reified category of persons, and more effectively address gender as a relational construction and gender politics as "a vehicle for constructing and representing

4. The slippage between the "everyday" and the "domestic sphere" in much feminist research is indicative of the extent to which notions of women's social location continue to be theorized from an androcentric perspective.

5. Rosario Montoya, "Women's Sexuality, Knowledge, and Agency in Rural Nicaragua," in *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America*, eds. Rosario Montoya, Lessie Joe Frazier, and Janise Hurtig (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

6. June Nash, "A Decade of Research on Gender in Latin America," in *Women and Social Change in Latin America*, eds. June Nash and Helen Safa (Hadley: Westview Press, 1986). That this is a central concern of recent volumes such as *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture*, eds. Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), attests to the continuing relevance of this issue.

myriad terms of social inequality."[7] In this essay, we explore how these seven books complicate and reconfigure existing terrains of research on women and politics in Latin America in terms of their explicit or implicit engagement with these dualisms.

THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM

The two books reviewed in this section examine the socioeconomic, political, legal, and cultural dimensions of women's situations under and responses to the neoliberal capitalist regimes that began to emerge across Latin America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By examining the interconnectedness of women's struggles for material resources (redistribution) and cultural recognition, the books contribute to reconfiguring a research terrain split by the materialist/culturalist dichotomy into studies of the neoliberal political economy on the one hand, and emerging identity politics on the other.

Florence Babb's *After Revolution* is a richly documented ethnography of daily life and political organizing among women and other low-income residents of Managua during the 1990s neoliberal reform period in Nicaragua. Using a gendered analytic lens, Babb examines recent political economic transformations and the complex intersections of residents' lives through a series of essays written from distinct vantage points—from the national and transnational to the barrio and the body. Drawing on a decade of ethnographic research, the author argues that while the post-Sandinista transition saw a rolling back of some aspects of the revolution, others have "endured, and even deepened" (10). Babb shows how the critical consciousness fostered during the Sandinista era lives on and provides a key point of connection between the neoliberal political economy and independent social movements that have emerged and grown in opposition to both right-wing government policies and undemocratic left-wing practices (27).

The book takes us through Managua streets, working-class homes, women's cooperatives, government offices, and sites of social movements. In each of these places we learn of recent developments that Babb explains not as predictable outcomes of a global neoliberal capitalist culture, but rather in terms of the specificities of Nicaragua's recent history. Babb demonstrates the political significance of these places and events by showing how their materiality is enmeshed with their place-specific symbolic dimensions. For example, when development experts blamed the Sandinistas for "spoiling" workers (165) while

7. Janise Hurtig, Rosario Montoya, and Lessie Jo Frazier, "Introduction: *A Desalambrar*: Unfencing Gender's Place in Research on Latin America," in *Gender's Place*, Rosario Montoya et al. (eds.), 7.

celebrating their own policies of promoting the creation and competition of small industries as a process of "natural selection" (189), they were simultaneously disparaging the Sandinista past, promoting new neoliberal economic policies, and naturalizing those policies discursively. That this discourse was gendered is evidenced by the experts' admission that the businesses most likely to fail were those operated by women (186–189).

Babb's poignant stories reveal the disproportionately negative impact of neoliberal policies on individual women and women's microenterprises, and the tactics women resort to as they attempt to maintain some measure of economic viability. Her account of four women's collectives depicts the members' determined but ultimately unsuccessful effort to sustain the collectives against the forces of large industries, cheap imports, high-interest loans, and the evanescence of basic support services. In the midst of these somber portraits, Babb finds sources of hope in people's enduring critical consciousness, nurtured during the Sandinista era but now pried loose from party politics. For instance, Babb documents how feminist, gay, lesbian, environmental, and other social movements that grew out of the mobilization of the 1980s are successfully claiming social and political space in a struggle that is at once about economic resources and cultural recognition. These movements are also transforming everyday gender discourse and culture, as exemplified by critiques of machismo among low-income women, or by a newly established cafe in a working- and middle-class barrio advertising that it is "run by women for women" (94). Through these accounts, Babb conveys the subtle and ongoing interplay between the structures of domination and the agency of subaltern groups, as well as the fluidity between people's everyday lives and organized political struggles.

While the strength of Babb's book lies in its presentation of the neoliberal period through the particular case of Nicaragua, it also contributes to debates about gender and politics in contemporary Latin America. Most feminist research on this period has emphasized the economic aspects of neoliberalism, often depicting structural adjustment as a set of policies that negatively affect women. *After Revolution* enriches this narrowly materialist tendency by looking to the contested culture and history of a specific place in order to analyze both the power of neoliberal socio-economic processes and the forms of resistance to those processes.

Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena León's *Empowering Women* is a meticulously documented comparative study of Latin American women's land ownership and property rights in twelve Latin American countries, with an emphasis on legal reforms carried out since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Integrating the authors' extensive

research on women and agrarian issues with the knowledge and practical expertise of activists and scholars working in various Latin American countries, *Empowering Women* is an invaluable resource for feminist researchers, activists, and policymakers alike.

The book's central concern is the disjuncture between the formal improvements in women's legal status in land and property rights, and the inequalities between men and women that persist in practice. The authors examine the contributions of national and international women's and indigenous movements to recent legislative changes in land ownership and women's property rights, assessing the extent to which this legislation reduces the inequities between women and men, and whether it has actually increased women's land ownership. They argue that despite increases in women's formal equality, in each of the twelve countries reviewed male privilege persists in all principal means through which property is acquired: inheritance practices, adjudication by the state, and purchase in the market.

Deere and León explain that the impetus to write this book was based in part on their concern that as the contemporary Latin American feminist movement has shifted its focus to questions of identity, difference, and women's political participation (11), it has neglected the material aspects of women's empowerment. The authors argue that existing evidence on Latin America, while incipient, points to gender equality in property as fundamental to ending women's subordination (9, 11). As their extensive documentation shows, in case after case the issue of redistribution (that is, of material resources) cannot be separated from the issue of political recognition, in that redistribution rights "promote recognition of women as full and equal citizens" (349). Deere and León make a convincing case for the urgency of this issue. As they document, since the 1980s governments across Latin America have been laying the basis for capitalist agriculture by embarking on economic reforms such as land titling projects, ironically opening the door to legal reforms that can benefit women. They also describe how and with what results the women's movement has taken advantage of this opening to push for beneficial legal reforms, focusing in particular on the gains in women's land rights that have resulted from the combined efforts of women in formal politics, rural and urban women's movements, and international agencies. One of the book's most significant claims is that while women's legal equality before the law is essential, legal reforms will not achieve their goal unless affirmative action and positive discrimination measures are also implemented. The authors hope that their findings will be useful to feminist activists in those countries where land titling still occurs.

Deere and León's comparative approach is essential to their ability to formulate guidelines for addressing issues of general purchase in

the region. At the same time, their discussion of culturally specific inheritance practices demonstrates that legal reforms must be adapted to the cultural norms and material practices of each geographic area. For example, the authors describe significant differences among men in different countries with respect to their understandings of and willingness to comply with mandatory joint titling laws. In Nicaragua and Guatemala the idea of co-ownership was so contrary to existing patriarchal ideologies that local-level functionaries had to receive gender-sensitivity training courses before the law was effectively applied (225). A less obvious example is provided by Andean inheritance practices. Despite certain cultural continuities across this region, inheritance practices differ from place to place. Recommendations for each area clearly need to respond to these cultural specificities. *Empowering Women* exemplifies how the analytic tension between the goals of accounting for specific cases and generating commonalities across cases can in fact produce useful or novel insights.

WOMEN AND GENDER RECONFIGURING REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

In *Women and Guerrilla Movements* Karen Kampwirth examines women's participation in revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Chiapas, Mexico, using gender as a category of analysis to account for the dramatic increase in women's presence in these movements, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. Because the field of revolutionary theory has for the most part been framed by research that assumes its subjects are male, Kampwirth's book is an important addition to the handful of studies whose gendered perspectives are contributing to the reconfiguration of this theoretical terrain. Through an analysis of these three cases, and a comparative discussion of Cuba as an instance of women's more limited involvement, the author builds a case for a general theory of women's involvement in revolutionary movements.

In asking what led women to join these movements, Kampwirth departs from the "single question" whose permutations have dominated revolutionary theory throughout the twentieth century, namely, "Under what circumstances do revolutionary movements succeed in seizing the state?" (5). She also breaks with the prevailing class determinism of revolutionary theory by looking at other axes of difference, including gender and age, to account for women's participation. By moving beyond the documentation of women's presence to a consideration of the motivations leading to their involvement, Kampwirth also opens a space for examining the personal factors that contributed to women's participation, adding a new dimension to revolutionary theory.

Drawing on over two hundred interviews with feminist activists who occupy (or occupied) mid-prestige positions in the revolutionary

movements of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Chiapas, Kampwirth shows that in all three cases personal factors, along with structural, ideological, and sociopolitical factors, led women toward revolutionary involvement. By approaching motivation from a gendered perspective, the author identifies how factors such as changes in family structure and membership in preexisting social networks differentially affected women and men and set the stage for women's participation. In order to study the motivations of individual women revolutionaries, Kampwirth introduces new methodologies, such as life history analysis, into a field dominated by macro-level analyses focused on social groups and classes.

Kampwirth's consideration of individual women's motivations to join the guerrilla movements leaves further questions about women's participation in and impact on these movements after the guerrilla and revolutionary wars unanswered. While Kampwirth has reserved the exploration of these questions for a manuscript in progress and does not take them up directly in this book (5–6), the progression of her work illustrates how introducing women and gender into an androcentric field can bring about a shift toward a more nuanced, processual, and potentially more historically and geographically specific approach to revolutionary theory. Moreover, the de-essentialization of gender that Kampwirth partially accomplishes through her attention to personal factors can lead to a similar reconsideration of class. She begins this process by looking at class factors as varying by individuals according to particular aspects of their biographies.

This book is most illuminating when it delves into the details of particular women's lives. The stories show how women come to their decisions to join the movements as well as the contingent nature of those decisions. The tension in Kampwirth's work between explaining individual women's decisions and searching for factors that can be generalized across cases is key to its ability to reconfigure the terrain of revolutionary theory. It also makes this book a useful complement to the literature on life histories and *testimonios* of revolutionaries by providing a structural framework for reading particular life stories.

WOMEN CONTESTING POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Two books and several essays in the edited collections we review here take up women's organized efforts to participate in or transform patriarchal political structures while operating at least partially within their patriarchal terms. The two volumes edited by Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz—*Un siglo de luchas femeninas en América Latina* and *Mujeres, género e historia en América Central*—are significant in their own right, presenting groundbreaking historical research on women's roles in Central

American societies from the seventeenth century to the present. The works present women as agents of social change in arenas that are either not normally associated with women, or with social change. While each chapter offers just a glimmer of the larger work from which it draws, the volumes provide a sense of the diverse feminist historical scholarship on Central America being carried out by Central American and U.S. scholars. A useful chapter by the editor in the 2002 volume reviews this still incipient but developing terrain of historical research.

Several chapters in these collections challenge historical depictions of women as passive victims of a patriarchal state or instruments of political parties. In *Mujeres, género e historia* Victoria González discusses Somocista women's role in shaping Nicaraguan political culture, arguing that women's understanding of and support for Somocismo was grounded in interests shaped by their biographies as classed and gendered subjects. Other chapters explore the contributions of Salvadoran and Guatemalan women's organizations to their countries' recent histories. The essay by Ana Silvia Monzón opens up the discussion on Guatemalan women's political participation in the Revolution of 1944–1954, an historiographic terrain from which women had been absent.

Un siglo de luchas femeninas includes twelve chapters that explore how the suffrage, feminist, and women's movements have contributed to broadening women's political and civic participation since the late nineteenth century in Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and among U.S. Chicanas. Asunción Lavrín's introductory chapter reviews the efforts of Latin American feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to gain the vote for women. Lavrín discusses the significance of suffrage for women of the times, using gender as a category of analysis to explore the cultural construction of "citizenship" and "women."

These chapters and the two books we review in this section challenge assumptions of both androcentric and feminist research about which women engage in formal political protest, why, and with what impact, reconfiguring conventional depictions of women as passive objects of political processes and reforms. Each study offers compelling examples of groups of women harnessing the power of gender imagery: they not only describe historical instances of women's determinative role in political change when organizing on their own terms "as women," but also the creative and variable ways in which they construct womanhood and maternity as political identities. Among the historical essays, Rosalila Herrera Zavaleta's chapter presents the case of a group of schoolteachers who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s to fight for social change, proposing a radical vision of motherhood in which maternity would be ennobled through political militancy (136). Excerpts from the teachers' writings convey their efforts to synthesize

the terms and demands of both the feminist movement and radical political protest. The teachers also grappled with whether or not working women should mobilize around their class or gender interests and did so in terms that resonate with contemporary debates.

In *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, historian Margaret Power tells the compelling, if disturbing, story of how conservative Chilean women became increasingly powerful protagonists in the opposition to and eventual military overthrow of Socialist president Salvador Allende in 1973. This well-documented, thoughtful account is an important addition to a growing number of studies about the political activity of conservative women, which together "[dispel] the idea that women are naturally more inclined than men to seek social justice and work for peace" (4). Drawing on archival records, popular media, electoral data and life history interviews with Chilean women and men representing a range of political opinions and class positions, Power offers an engaging narrative account of how this group of right-wing, middle-class, and elite women were able to rally broad-based female support and justify their political actions. By representing their political goals in terms of "restoring the family" and "defending the nation"—and thus both "apolitical" and appropriately feminine—the right-wing women's groups were able to claim that they represented the general interests of women as mothers and wives, creating the ideological basis to mobilize large groups of women across class and party lines (252–253).

Integrating class and gender analysis, Power tacks between discussions of government policies, political parties, and U.S.-supported propaganda campaigns and economic sanctions on the one hand, and conservative women's responses to those formal political structures and practices on the other, to show how a small group of right-wing women activists was able to garner the support of working class and rural women, and affect political decision making among the male-dominant political parties. The book is particularly effective in illuminating the material and cultural dimensions of these women's political efficacy. For instance, they politicized the food shortages and long bread lines that caused particular hardship for poor women, portraying these as the results of communist policies that undermined women's ability to take care of their families.

Like *After Revolution*, *Right-Wing Women in Chile* is forceful as a single case because it conveys the historical specificity of Chilean right-wing women's garnering political power. At the same time, by reading the case in relation to accounts such as those in the Rodríguez collections, we come to understand how crucial it was for right-wing Chilean women to project themselves and their cause as apolitical. In contrast to the Costa Rican case, for instance, where there had been periodic efforts by intellectuals and feminists to portray women as legitimate

citizens, Power documents a Chilean history of consistently conservative gender politics, where the Church, Christian ethics, and patriarchal family values "affirmed women's identities as mothers and wives and did not question their subordinate status in society" (53).

In her conclusion, Power engages the tension between specificity and universality by identifying similarities between the successful political tactics of these Chilean right-wing women and those of ideologically, geographically, and culturally distant women's organizations, such as the progressive Chicago Liberation Union of the 1960s and 1970s (254). In doing so she raises a theoretical conundrum as to whether there are general tendencies for women's formal political protest to transcend the specific contexts and issues they address. Lisa Baldez' comparative study, *Why Women Protest*, addresses that conundrum. Drawing on interviews with activists, academics, and political figures as well as archival material from the media and the protest movements themselves, Baldez compares the organized protest of right-wing Chilean women against the progressive Allende government with the mobilization of women in opposition to Pinochet's dictatorship. Eschewing the tendency in feminist political analysis to focus on differences between women's protest movements, Baldez highlights the similarities between these two "most different cases" (xv) as the basis for developing a model for understanding "the emergence and evolution of women's protest movements" (3–4).

Baldez applies the concepts of "tipping," "timing," and "framing" from the literature on political institutions and protest movements to show how the formation of two ideologically distinct women's movements depended on similar political conditions and cultural processes. Specifically, she claims that both movements emerged under conditions of partisan realignment (timing) which not only facilitated political opportunities for women to organize, but also led women to perceive those opportunities in gendered terms (framing). In her succinct but comprehensive narratives of the development of each protest movement, the author identifies key events that "tipped" women's groups toward becoming full-blown protest movements.

Baldez's interest in constructing a predictive model to explain "why women mobilize as *women*" (4) across space and time draws upon the universalizing impulse in feminist scholarship to offer generalizable explanations of women's lives. At the same time, the conceptual framework she uses highlights the historically specific relationship between the structural and cultural factors of each movement to show how "women's interests" are not given, but come to be defined and redefined as the movements coalesce. For instance, where the right-wing women organized around and sought to bolster traditional patriarchal notions of family and motherhood, the liberal and progressive women

who organized initially as "mothers" and "wives" of disappeared men came to question and draw connections between the fascist state and patriarchal family, eventually construing "women's interests" in terms quite different from those of the right-wing women's groups.

Baldez's and Power's accounts, along with the historical chapters on women's political mobilization, challenge many assumptions about and images underlying research on Latin American women's political activity and its relation to formal political institutions. In addition, by looking at how and why women mobilize across class and party lines, these studies decenter conventional constructions of political parties and the ideologies and interests they represent by showing how formal political distinctions represent a set of political categories and positions that are operative from an androcentric point of view, but often are not directly relevant to women's gender-based demands. This is not to say that conventional partisan distinctions are irrelevant to women, but rather that their relevance may be perceived and utilized differently by women than by men in organizing protest movements.

THE POLITICS AND PLACES OF WOMEN'S EVERYDAY STRUGGLES

For nearly two decades feminist historians have offered subtle analyses of the politics of the domestic sphere and everyday life in Latin America. This body of feminist scholarship has broadened our conceptions of what counts as "political" by examining cultural production and the activities of daily life as arenas of meaningful political engagement and social change. The two historical volumes reviewed here contribute to that literature.

Several chapters in *Mujeres, género e historia* contribute to this literature by examining these themes in as yet unexplored places and time periods in Central America. Two chapters offer glimpses into Dominican and Guatemalan women's dynamic economic activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; other chapters document Costa Rican and Guatemalan women's use of divorce between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries as a means of obtaining greater control over their own lives or conjugal relationships. In their attention to the power of gender imagery, these two volumes contribute to a small but growing literature that aims explicitly to bridge materialist and culturalist approaches to gender and politics in Latin America by looking at the politics of symbolic production in literature, visual art, and popular culture.

In *Mujeres, género e historia* these chapters range from a fascinating study of the first women's newspaper in Guatemala, to analyses of mechanisms of exclusion of the feminine in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Honduran art and culture, to an analysis of the story of the Ciguanaba in contemporary El Salvador. *Un siglo de luchas femeninas*

includes an account of the changing representation of women in a Costa Rican cultural magazine, focusing on how those representations were used to argue for or against women's political engagement. Another chapter considers the construction of femininity in early twentieth-century Costa Rican girls' schools. Many chapters in these volumes effectively deploy gender as both a category of analysis and a symbolic dimension of power and social life; others offer evidence that the call by second-wave feminists to "write women in" to the historical record is an ongoing endeavor that has not yet been superceded by refinements in our theoretical frameworks for understanding the conditions of women's lives.

RECONFIGURING RESEARCH TERRAINS: SUSTAINING THE POWER OF GENDER

These seven books contribute to reconfiguring terrains of research on women and politics in Latin America by adopting a gendered perspective that leads them to confront old conceptual dualisms in new ways. This is not surprising, given that the concept of gender itself was developed by second-wave feminists to transcend the tension between the commonality of female oppression and the culturally specific ways in which women have experienced and struggled against that oppression across time and place. In many cases these books begin to synthesize or transcend old dualisms; indeed, we would argue that the extent to which they do so is related to their effectiveness in theorizing gender critically: that is, as both a category of social analysis and a dimension of power.

Nonetheless, we would encourage the authors to identify tendencies within their work to acquiesce to old conceptual dualisms and essentialisms, such that their gendered lens loses its critical focus. One tendency is to reduce a gendered analysis to the study of women's political lives. This is not to say that feminist scholars should no longer focus their studies on women. Our point is, first, that a gendered analysis of women's political power requires the concomitant theorization of men as gendered political actors; and second, that the category of gender cannot be theorized apart from other socially meaningful dimensions such as race, class, or age, lest we return to an essentialization of "women" and abandon the contribution of third-wave theories.

Similarly, the emphasis in each of these books on women's political agency contributes to the move away from reproductionist approaches to political life that characterize subaltern groups negatively—that is, without agency in the face of dominant structures of power. However, we cannot transcend the dualism of structure and agency by gendering agency and evading structure. In other words, the extent and limits of women's political creativity and agency cannot be fully understood

without a theorization of how the structural field of social hierarchies within which women operate are supported by historically and geographically specific gender ideologies. Only this kind of persistently synthetic, contextualized and generative gender analysis will move the field past the limits of dualisms and provide a critical understanding of the politics of Latin American women's lives.

https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2005.0005 Published online by Cambridge University Press