

WOMEN AS POLITICAL ACTORS:
The Move from Maternalism to
Citizenship Rights and Power

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GENDER AND THE POLITICS OF RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA. Edited by Nikki Craske and Maxine Molyneux. (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2002. Pp. 226. \$62.00 cloth.)

RADICAL WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA: LEFT AND RIGHT. Edited by Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. Pp. 341. \$55.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.)

UNFINISHED TRANSITIONS: WOMEN AND THE GENDERED DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA, 1936–1996. By Elisabeth J. Friedman. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. Pp. 324. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.)

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA. By Nikki Craske. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999. Pp. 242. \$59.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.)

WOMEN AND POWER: FIGHTING PATRIARCHIES AND POVERTY. By Janet Gabriel Townsend, Emma Zapata, Joanna Rowlands, Pilar Alberti, and Marta Mercado. (London: Zed Books, 1999. Pp. 200. \$59.95 cloth, \$22.50 paper.)

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: LATIN AMERICA AND BEYOND. By Maxine Molyneux. (New York: Palgrave, 2001. Pp. 244. \$65.00 cloth.)

Almost thirty years have passed since Elsa Chaney first wrote of Latin America's *supermadres*—the concept she coined to describe women elected to public office in Peru and Chile (Chaney 1973). Her book of the same title, published in 1979, was one of the first works on women and politics in the region. Based on 167 interviews with “first generation” women in the late 1960s, Chaney proposed the following thesis:

Many women at that time thought that voting was a civic duty . . . [but] their role in electoral politics, and even their presence in the bureaucracy, [was seen]

as an extension of their motherhood role in the family to the larger family of the *municipio* or the nation . . . [They were] doing what women had always done: mothering, now in a larger arena. (Chaney 1998, 78–79)

Subsequent studies of women in politics and activism throughout the region seemed to reconfirm this political identity for women, though some researchers claimed that maternalism was thrust on women by men in politics and by society. Women were expected to “keep house” in parties and bureaucracies and to support men’s leadership.

The link between “politics and motherhood” continues to be an important focus of the books reviewed here. But each argues that women’s political activity is not reducible to mothering. Women of different classes, ethnic groups, and places engage in political activity for reasons that span the gap between the altruistic and the selfish. Women are as likely to be ambitious and competitive as they are caring and socially responsible. The issues around which women mobilize are equally diverse and not reducible to family or to gender, an important focus of the books. As a group, the books present a multi-textured history of transformations in how and why women engage in political activities throughout Latin America. This also is a history of the changing nature of politics in public and private arenas. The volumes demonstrate clearly how women have played a critical role in the reformulation of “the political” in practice, in ideology, and—albeit belatedly—in academic political theory.¹

Politics is broadly conceptualized by the authors/editors to encompass not only formal political behavior (voting, holding elected office), but also diverse social movements and citizen activism, non-governmental organizations, territorial protests, feminism, armed struggle, legislative reform campaigns, and other forms of inducing or resisting change. While this approach to the subject matter is not unusual or new (see Dore 1997; Waylen 1996; Jaquette 1989, 1994), what is important is the way in which each volume theorizes connections and differences among diverse forms of women’s political behavior, makes clear why and how they are “political,” privileges the “voices” of women themselves, and explores the barriers to and potential for alliances among women. One book, that by Townsend et al., sheds light on “the personal

1. Throughout the volumes, authors refer to “groundbreaking” works that influence and inspire their work. Among the most frequently mentioned are Sonia Alvarez (especially 1990), Jane S. Jaquette and authors from her two edited volumes (1989, 1994), Francesca Miller (1991), and Maxine Molyneux. Others whose works are cited repeatedly throughout the volumes include Maruja Barrig, Cecilia Blondet, Sylvia Chant, Norma Chinchilla, María del Carmen Feijó, Elizabeth Jelin, Jo Fisher, Temma Kaplan, Marta Lamas, Asunción Lavrín, Carol Pateman, Sarah Radcliffe, Margaret Randall, Sheila Rowbotham, Helen Safá, Kathleen Staudt, Virginia Vargas, and Georgina Waylen.

as political” by helping the reader understand the sense of empowerment peasant women associate with even very simple changes in their lives, such as “leaving the house.”

Methods of research are diverse and include archival analysis and surveys. But the authors emphasize, when possible, case studies, extensive interviews, and participant observation with the women discussed. This provides authors with many opportunities to document evidence that illustrates the heterogeneity of women’s political identities and behavior; and they place each experience in its relevant historical and spatial context. Most authors also make connections between what is taking place in Latin American cities, rural areas, and countries with broader, regional and global processes. Particular attention is given to whether or not cross-border organizing by feminists and human rights advocates influenced local organizing. Although most authors discuss the perspectives and experiences of Latin American women, many also pay careful attention to questions of how to research and theorize *about* women and politics and *with* the women in politics.

An overview of each book follows in which themes common to many are discussed. I emphasize the organization, content, and specific contribution to the literature of each book.

AN INFLUENTIAL BODY OF WORK IS REVISITED BY ITS AUTHOR

The work of Maxine Molyneux has greatly influenced research and policies on women in Latin America and elsewhere. Her concepts of women’s practical and strategic interests, developed in the early 1980s during analyses of gender, revolution, and state socialism, have had a profound impact on subsequent discussions of empowerment. The former concept refers to what women need to survive day to day and meet their obligations as wives, mothers, and members of their communities. The latter concept refers to what helps women increase their power relative to men and support their claims as citizens. Molyneux’s book discussed here, *Women’s Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond*, brings together newly edited key works previously published with in-depth, retrospective reflection by the author.

The focus of the book is the interaction of gender and politics in developing countries through an analysis informed by recent debates within development and political sociology. The chapters are comparative and international. Most emerged through research projects that analyzed gender politics and policy issues in relation to states and revolutions. Chapters 1 through 4 focus on specific cases of feminist politics within the context of revolutionary movements in Latin America. Chapters 5 through 7 are more comparative. They look at state socialist regimes, women’s movements, and women’s changing claims to

citizenship. Together they “address broader theoretical issues concerning the structural and political dimensions of gender inequality and organized action to oppose it, both from above by states and from below by social movements” (2). A recurrent theme throughout the chapters is “the inherently political character of women’s movements” and how they have been “associated with a variety of forms of political linkage within as well as outside institutions of party and state” (3).

Cases reviewed include an anarchist movement from Argentine history, conflicts over policy in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Nicaragua, forty years of policy experience of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas, and diverse women’s movements across a century of Latin American history. Molyneux states that the “enduring theme” of the book is the “interaction between feminism and socialism throughout the 20th century” and “advocacy of gender equality, in law and public life” (10–11). The final chapter draws on interviews and conversations that “span many years—on gender and citizenship, historical and contemporary issues . . . [and the] gendering of citizenship” (165). Throughout, Molyneux also pays attention to the language of rights and citizenship and the representation of motherhood in feminism, populism, and revolution.

A NEW AND ENGAGING TEXT

Nikki Craske’s book, *Women and Politics in Latin America*, will make a useful undergraduate text. The book gives an account of women’s political participation in Latin America since the 1940s. Craske begins by establishing the term “political” as including a “wide range of activities in which women have participated and through which they have had an effect on political institutions and practices” (1). The relationship between motherhood and citizenship and the extent to which the two are compatible are important themes in this book but are not treated as determinant of political behavior. Instead, women’s political experiences are placed in the context of the political development “of a region which has been dogged by authoritarianism and exclusion.” Craske proposes that by looking at women’s experiences, “the nature of that exclusion and the challenges are brought into greater focus.” Therefore, this is also a book “about the increasing democratization of Latin America” (1). Craske’s main argument—an important innovation that differentiates this book from most other introductions to women and politics—is that we should start from the premise that “women’s participation in all aspects of any democratic society is crucial to the quality of democracy itself” (1). This underscores all her subsequent analyses, albeit subtly.

Other diverse issues dealt with in the book are the arbitrariness of the public/private divide, factors that contribute to women’s politicization,

how women's diverse forms of organizing have been viewed erroneously by political analysts as part of the "social" sphere rather than the political sphere, and the "growing tension between identities that women have employed to get a foothold in the political arena and the diversity of the experiences that characterize their lives" (3). Craske includes women's experiences in institutional politics, the workplace, social movements, revolutionary movements, and feminism. Much of the book is concerned with the development of "meaningful citizenship and political subjectivity in the struggle for democracy" (23). She identifies this as a personal process for women, not solely an institutional or cultural process. She also raises questions regarding a general tendency for women to demobilize as the millennium approached, a theme picked up by other books reviewed here, particularly Friedman's. Her conclusions highlight two points: shifts in gender relations and the implications of politicized motherhood (193). In the end, she concludes that there is no unitary understanding of gender interests: "motherhood may dominate the construction of womanhood, [but] it . . . is understood differently by individual women as it reflects their experiences" (196). This is an argument in the other books as well.

For the classroom, the book provides necessary links across different types of organizing and different types of political systems in Latin America. The book also does a good job of laying out important political and feminist concepts and defining them. In particular, Craske distinguishes between types of feminism (maternal feminism, popular feminism, etc.) and "waves" or "streams" of feminism as conceptualized both by political theorists and by the Latin American feminists who were there. She tries to make sense of the tensions implicit to women's political behavior and the significance of heterogeneity among women (i.e., for alliances, linking class and gender, moving beyond the traditional concerns of professional women, maternalist politics). Without attributing too much importance to international influence, she links local organizing and ideology to what is taking place in the transnational feminist arena.

ON THE POLITICS OF RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY ACTIVISM

Craske and Molyneux collaborate on an edited volume, *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, in which they bring together scholars and activists from the North and the South. The book analyzes the shifting emphasis of women's claims and movements beginning in the 1980s. Specifically, the editors focus on the special value allocated to "the right to have rights" and on the "ways in which the language of rights and citizenship was deployed not only to restore or improve upon formal legal rights, but also to deepen the democratic

process" (1). Drawing on the work of Baierle, the editors support the notion of a "culture of rights" growing out of popular social movements in Latin America, movements in which women played a central role. "Rights talk" was used to raise awareness among the poor and the socially marginalized . . . [a] language of rights thus became a way of making claims for social justice . . . [and] framed such demands 'as a basic right of citizenship'" (Baierle 1998, 124, quoted on page 1). Each of the chapters sheds light on these ideas.

Contributors are Mala Htun and Mark Jones (addressing the fight for electoral quotas and greater political representation), Elisabeth Friedman (conjunctural coalition-building for legal reform in Venezuela), Fiona Macaulay (campaigns for legal reform and legal literacy training in Brazil), Niki Johnson (women's movements that demand state accountability in Uruguay), Ceri Willmott (the notion of bodily integrity as a right—reproduction and sexuality in Chile), Sarah Radcliffe (contradictions in struggles for indigenous and women's rights in the Andes), Jasmine Gideon (the gendering of economic and social rights in Central America), and Virginia Vargas (an activist's assessment of feminists' struggle for rights and autonomy in Peru and throughout the region).

Together, the editors and the contributors consider a central political issue that faces contemporary Latin American women's movements—"the potential and limits of post-authoritarian democracies as vehicles for the promotion of greater gender justice" (1). Also, the book includes chapter discussions of second wave feminism as it developed under military rule and in countries with "working" democracies. It illustrates the connections between, on the one hand, local claims and movements in a context where democracy was "far from consolidated" (7) and, on the other, transnational networks and global summits in the 1990s. The editors state that, taken together, "these studies represent a complex and contrasting picture of women's legal gains," they highlight the difficulties of rights based work, and they show how the women's movement "contributed to the development of an autonomous civil society," . . . "helped foster the spread of democratic and humanitarian values," . . . and "helped create some of the conditions for revitalizing democratic life" (2, 5). They also consider how and why some women managed to make the shift from being the opposition to "securing a stake in the new 'masculinized' democracies"—to use a term attributed to Safa (1990)—and turn the state into a site of engagement (5). The case studies also illustrate how women's political agendas were forced to take into account socioeconomic inequalities and neoliberal policies with sometimes divisive results.

This is a well-integrated set of case studies with a useful and informative introduction by the editors. Even better, the chapters reflect the perspectives, and often the words, of Latin American women. This

provides clear insight into and evidence of how women became effective as they moved from “protest to proposals” throughout the region and they took advantage of the growing rhetoric of rights in the international arena.

FROM POLITICS TO POWER IN MEXICO

Women and Power: Fighting Patriarchies and Poverty focuses on Mexico. This is a most unusual book, a breath of fresh air. It is written for a broad audience, including academics, students, practitioners, policymakers, and rural women; as a result, it is very accessible but can be overly informative. For instance, each chapter has a summary of how its content is related to definitions of power and empowerment. Five official authors share responsibilities for authoring and co-authoring specific chapters. I say “official” because the authors draw heavily on the words of rural women with whom they had dialogued.

The book is the outgrowth of a week-long, intensive workshop involving the authors and women representing eight grassroots women’s organizations and non-governmental organizations in rural Mexico. Preparation for the workshop included focused visits to each organization, and the villages it involved. Several of the authors already had long-term working relationships with organizations.

The focus of the workshop was to learn about each other’s experiences with, and understanding of, “empowerment” and “power.” The perspectives of rural women were privileged from the start and it is clear from the chapters that experiences and understandings were considered within the context of each individual’s background—what she brought to the discussion. Each author introduces herself in a brief “who is writing” section—leaving the reader to decide if her background may have influenced what she has to say and what she got out of the workshop. Throughout, the authors incorporate quotes from other women who participated in the workshop.

The workshop and the book focus on self empowerment—to “put power back into development for activists, for workers in non-governmental organizations and for women’s studies scholars in rich as well as poor countries” (1). The authors state that Mexico is merely a case study.

Both the workshop and the book rely heavily on a definition of power developed through the work of Jo Rowlands with rural women in Honduras. Her definition provided a way to structure discussions. This may or may not account for the fact that the workshop discussion appears to reconfirm her definition. Here, power is conceptualized in several ways. First, there are four *forms* of power (power over, power with, power to do, and power from within). Second, there are different *levels* of power.

Here they emphasize personal, relational, and group levels, but they acknowledge that there can be alliances at the regional, national, or international levels. Finally, the authors state that power and self-empowerment “have different potential and expression in different types of organizations” (2). What is important “is what the actors think” because “rural women have something special to say to academics and practitioners about empowerment.” They don’t speak in “abstractions,” but about “real feelings in real people and real changes in real lives” (3).

The book does an excellent job of showing how women have come to see themselves as “agents in their own lives” and as “people who make a difference.” It recounts how women have taken more power into their own lives and how this is both a personal and a collective project. Their words reveal their self-confidence and self-esteem as individuals and in groups.

The authors challenge us to respect and enjoy what women have to say even though it may not fit into our preconceived notions of the “political” or “power.” The women in this book speak dramatically about the importance of “leaving the house”—the critical first step to raising self-esteem, to self-acceptance, to critical thinking. They speak of the “pleasure” they experience from leaving, learning, joining, sharing, and making changes. And they relate all these experiences to the world of “real politics”—taking command of their own lives and demanding that their opinions and needs be heard and acted upon. This leads the authors to proclaim that “joy matters in itself” (17); even what outside observers might see as “exploitation” and “overwork” can signify small gains greatly appreciated by the women involved (127).

Often, in books on women and politics, the issue of power is implicit to the discussion of women’s behavior and organizing. When addressed explicitly, power is represented by the goals associated with party politics, with institutions, with masculine “power over.” This small book and the women who gave it life remind us that “feminist conceptions of empowerment” should have “more to do with transformation than control” (180).

IS FEMINIST ANALYSIS OVERLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE LEFT?

González and Kampwirth’s edited volume, *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right*, is groundbreaking. It considers in a single volume women’s political activities and alliances on the left and the right. In doing so, they challenge stereotypes of men “as inherently violent and women as peaceful.” They make it clear that there is no “automatic sisterhood” among women, even among those of the same class and ethnicity. But they show that there can be similarities and shared issues that unite women, “even across immense political divides” (1). This book

benefits from chapters that draw on authors' participant observation and extensive interviews with women.

The editors explain why they believe that the women whose experiences are documented in the book's ten chapters can be considered radical—something many feminist analysts have rejected for women of the right. They are radical because of “tactics and goals, beyond electoral politics,” because they used “unconventional tactics to *transform*, rather than merely *reform*, their societies” (italics mine, 1).

Though it is hard to define right and left because “meanings change over time,” the editors use ideological orientation to distinguish between women of the right and left. “Left is characterized primarily by its call for social justice and strong stance in favor of state intervention to promote social and economic equality . . . [They] supported class struggle historically” (2). The right, on the other hand, is designated as anticommunist, characterized by “opposition to class struggle and favoring of hierarchical survival strategies like patron-clientelism.” Women on the right are in favor of “individual justice” (meritocracies) (2).

Four themes are emphasized in the book: (1) the relationship of the political left and right to organized feminism; (2) the extent of women's autonomy from male-dominated organizations; (3) possibilities for coalition-building between left- and right-wing women; and (4) how and why women justify their political actions. The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 focuses on radical women in Central America—Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Part 2 focuses on South America—Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Chronologies of major political events are presented at the beginning of each part. Most of the case studies focus on periods that span the 1970s and 1980s or even before. Only three cases focus on the 1990s. Contributors to part 1 include Victoria González (Somocista women and feminist politics), Karen Kampwirth (armed struggle, Sandinistas and Contras compared), María Teresa Blandón (an alliance of left-wing women, right-wing women, and radical feminists in Nicaragua), Patricia Hipsher (right- and left-wing women in post-revolutionary El Salvador: autonomy and alliance building for gender equality), Kelley Ready (feminist reconstruction of parenthood within neoliberal constraints in El Salvador), and Ilja Luciak (Guatemala's experience of gender equality, democratization, and the revolutionary left). Contributors to part 2 are Sandra Deutsch (right-wing patriotism, femininity and morality in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, 1900–1940), Liesl Haas (feminist participation in the Brazilian Workers' Party), Lisa Baldez (nonpartisanship as a strategy of women of the left, center, and right in Chile), and Margaret Power (conservative women in Pinochet's Chile and the 1988 plebiscite).

In their helpful concluding chapter, González and Kampwirth draw from the cases to highlight common themes. They argue that the case

studies reaffirm that women of both the left and the right used maternalist discourses (11). They also find that maternal discourse is “malleable and compatible with other discourses” (25) and that it creates contradictions and reinforces stereotypes that become problematic for women’s political claims. Nonetheless, the editors ask whether or not the widespread use of the language of motherhood by activists might mean that “maternalism has some inherent political content? Is it so malleable it can be all things to all people?” Or is it “just a way to justify women’s decisions, a way to facilitate radical activism that would not be socially acceptable otherwise?” (325–6). Eventually, they conclude that maternalism has lost its importance over time and the “feminine”—formerly cherished—is being replaced by “feminism”—a process made difficult by feminism’s overt identification with the left.

One of the current debates among Latin American feminists is whether or not autonomy is necessary to a feminist movement. González and Kampwirth find that both right- and left-wing women struggled for autonomy. They did not want to be manipulated to men’s ends. But autonomy, which often means refusing to accept funding, can benefit leadership roles for educated, middle-class women. This, in turn, can exacerbate tensions among women of different classes and certainly interferes with coalition-building across party and ideological divides. Though rare, coalitions sometimes take place around issues of gender inequality like quotas or domestic violence.

Finally, the editors critique some widely accepted conceptual tools used by feminist political analysts. For example, Molyneux’s concepts of practical and strategic gender interests were not useful to the case study analyses because they “do not take us far in analysis of cross politics coalitions” that involve women of the left and the right (328).

A MUCH NEEDED CASE STUDY

Elisabeth Friedman’s book, *Unfinished Transitions: Women and the Gendered Development of Democracy in Venezuela, 1936–1996*, is unusual for two reasons. First, she focuses on Venezuela, one of the most understudied countries in Latin America and a place where many women activists and feminists believe there is not and never has been a “women’s movement” (Espina and Rakowski 2002). Second, she constructs her analysis and history of women’s political activity through a series of experiences of women’s conjunctural coalition-building and decline and the institutionalization of the feminist agenda. These experiences reflect important moments in Venezuela’s transition to democracy.

The book uses a political opportunity approach to reveal how “Venezuelan democracy is gendered.” In doing so, Friedman reveals “the hitherto hidden history of [women’s] political participation.” She also

shows how formal politics marginalized women even as parties courted labor and peasants, a fact that led women to develop “unique strategies for political organizing and collective action.” These strategies emphasized coalition-building, despite ongoing debates among women regarding “how to define their interests and goals” (10).

The book is organized in seven chapters. The first lays out the theoretical framework and the concept of unfinished transitions. Chapter 2 focuses on the first transition to democracy (1936–48), and chapter 3 the second transition to democracy (1948–73) which includes a period of struggle against the last dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, overthrown in 1958. Chapter 4 examines coalition building in a period of democratic consolidation (1974–82). Chapter 5 focuses on the institutionalization of the feminist agenda through collaborations between civil society and the state. Chapter 6 focuses on a period of decline in women’s coalitions which coincided with a period of democratic crisis and deepening economic crisis (1989–95). The final chapter uses the Venezuelan case to speculate about gendered opportunities and women’s organizing in Latin American democratization.

Friedman addresses two hypotheses in this book. She proposes that the Venezuelan case shows that political parties and the executive branch contribute to political crises by manipulating civil society. She rightly concludes that party politics, seen by scholars and practitioners of democratization as “the answer,” can short circuit other forms of representation in civil society and the state.² She provides evidence from women’s experiences in a variety of organizations.

Friedman also proposes that women’s movements are not always explained by changes in socio-demographic trends such as declining fertility rates, higher education, and rising labor force participation (9). She looks, instead, to political opportunities and barriers for an explanation. She comes dangerously close to overstating the importance of opportunities, particularly since the book argues that coalitions were the initiative of primarily “elite” women. Nonetheless, she presents us with a focused analysis of the interaction between women’s movements and formal political institutions, and she links local organizing to broader regional and global processes (neoliberalism, decentralization as a strategy for improving democracies) and events (women’s networking, conferences, and funding). In each case, women took advantage of instability and opportunities or created their own opportunities when needed. She also pays special attention to language and political discourse, showing

2. In 2002 Venezuelan parties symbolize corruption and are considered by many voters to be “anti-democratic”—though some pine for the heyday of the efficient, petroleum-driven patron-client system.

how Venezuelan women—often backed by international organizations—changed the discourse.³

Friedman writes in an engaging manner, and her research combines extensive interviews with long-term participant observation, which includes “hanging out” with many of the principal actors, and impressive document research. She is able to illustrate how women “regendered institutions in political and civil society and the state” and how they innovated and gendered political discourse. She also identifies the challenges that women faced in coalition-building. She emphasizes clientelism and centralism, class differences among women, the changing nature of state-civil society relations, the loss of autonomy through funding, and the alienation of grassroots women. Her research answers “no” to the question of “are women an interest group?”

CONCLUSION

Several themes run through all the books and respond to empirical gaps and contemporary theoretical debates. The overview of each book deliberately highlights these themes when relevant. First, all books consider the role that motherhood or “maternalism” plays in women’s and Latin America’s political life. Several authors explore the significance of maternalism and caring for women’s legitimacy as political actors and question its continued relevance. Overall, the books indicate both the importance of the language of motherhood in the past and its declining relevance in light of the growing legitimacy of claims to citizen rights by previously marginalized groups, including women. Because of diversity among women, it would be a mistake to generalize across the region or across groups of women. However, the many case studies suggest that researchers and students must use caution in assuming that women’s social roles as mothers can explain their political behavior or goals, and they should search for other explanations.

Second, careful attention is paid to issues of context in the volumes. This includes placing case studies within local history, Latin American history, and global change processes. It also includes attention to particular conjunctural moments—both political and economic. Feminist coalitions in Venezuela are linked to conjunctural moments. But at least one coalition in Mexico fell apart during a period of grave electoral crisis (see Rodríguez [1998]). The issue of context encourages consideration of different opportunities and barriers faced by women in some,

3. Further evidence for women’s success is presented by the new Constitution which contains almost all the demands made by women since 1958 and contains non-sexist language throughout. See Espina and Rakowski (2002) and Rakowski (2003).

but not all, situations. It also situates broader processes of democratization and claims to rights and justice and shows how women perceive, take advantage of or even resist when “advances” do not take them into account and do not create a space for them as citizens.

Third, all authors consider and evaluate the significance of the diverse strategies and tactics that women have used in their political struggles. Some that receive long overdue attention here are coalition-building, the shift from being the opposition to links/collaboration with the state, competing rhetorical strategies, partisan versus nonpartisanship, the emphasis in the 1990s on rights and gender justice, and others. Many of the chapters and books include thoughtful consideration of language and discourse—how it is used against women and how women both use it and regender it to their advantage. Since the theorizing of democracy depends so much on concepts and philosophy, the focus on language and discourse is crucial here. This suggests that more political analysts should pay attention to language as it is understood and used by citizens as individuals and in groups.

Fourth, the authors of each book struggle with how to deal with the heterogeneity among women and what it means for women’s alliances and their potential to act “as an interest group.” This heterogeneity includes competing ideological positions, loyalties, and goals as well as tensions related to class and ethnic diversity. In some cases, the reader is left to draw conclusions through the analysis of very different case studies. In others, the authors and editors address heterogeneity directly. Regrettably, the issue, though acknowledged, is not always explored in depth given the particular cases studied and discussed. That is one reason why the edited volume on radical women and the book on rural women and power are so important. Heterogeneity is an important focus of discussion and analysis.

Fifth, issues of power infuse all books. It is explicit in some discussions (i.e., empowerment) while implicit in others such as quotas or claims to rights. The discussions of power give attention to less tangible expressions of individual, relational, and group power as well as to formal measures such as electoral outcomes, legislation, and public policies. Where power is addressed explicitly, the authors have illustrated its importance. After reading *Women and Power*, the absence of power in some of the other discussions seems glaring. In the future, feminist research and political science as a discipline would benefit from exploring in greater depth the different issues of power that play a role in women’s political behavior and goals, and the different ways that women, men, and diverse groups conceptualize and aspire (or not) to power.

Finally, many authors address the ways in which women have contributed and continue to contribute to the form and content of democ-

racy in their respective countries. The usual questions are raised about the role that women can and have played in their respective political systems. But new questions are raised regarding how women's claims to rights may have been critical to the nature of democracy in formerly authoritarian, exclusionary, (and still) "masculine" political systems. Each of the books reviewed makes its own specific contribution to the literature. As a set, they complement each other with remarkably few contradictions. They lead to what seem like inescapable conclusions:

Democracy cannot be understood completely unless we understand who it marginalizes and who it benefits and why or how;

Democracy cannot be understood completely unless we consider the struggles of those it marginalizes, the claims they make, and the ways in which they seek to change the system;

Democracy and politics are best understood through an approach that contrasts the different experiences and perspectives of different groups, or a detailed, multi-dimensional view;

Formal politics is only one of many forms of doing politics, so women's marginalization from formal politics has not prevented them from being political actors; and

Women's experiences of politics can reveal the basic flaws such as inequality and narrowness of politics and democracy as conceptualized by those who have dominated the practice of politics and theorizing about politics, failing to include or understand the importance of the full range of political behavior and the range of possible, alternative democratic values.

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