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M. Gabriela Torres

O'Connor Erin

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Framing the Final Issue on Women's Movements and the Shape of Feminist Theory and Praxis in Latin America

By M. Gabriela Torres¹ and Erin O'Connor²

Latin American Feminisms are Flourishing Today

Judith Butler has recently pointed to the particular differences in Latin American feminisms (Yancy, 2019) that distinguish them from the #MeToo movements. Butler suggests that Latin American feminisms, such as the one expressed in the #NiUnaMenos movement, draw on a collective understanding of the ways that “feminization” becomes a way to classify individuals that societies find dispensable. This she frames as a political project that draws on the region’s legacy of struggle for society-wide liberation and, importantly, in opposition to the individualized framing often attributed to #MeToo. The essays presented in both special issues of the JIWS on Latin American feminisms and activism present a complicated and unique story, yet one that is not dissimilar to the processes that shape feminisms in the U.S. today.

The last five years have seen a flurry of creative and powerful feminist protests in different areas of Latin America which have challenged the region’s misogynist cultures and the roles that states, and state institutions play in enabling systemic abuse and discrimination. In 2016, Argentinian women took to the street to protest femicide using the hashtag #NiUnaMenos to express their outrage at the costs of normalizing violence against women. In June 2018, Chilean women challenged sexism, sexual harassment and domestic violence in massive carnivalesque protests. Dressed as corpses, faces covered in white sheets, or donning painted bloody hands on their bare bodies, women claimed that “*el machismo mata*” (machismo kills). They sought transformation in the state and concrete cultural change.

More recently, Puerto Ricans overthrew their governor whose misogynist and homophobic texts with his inner circle are emblematic of the generalized disdain that the state has towards its

¹ M. Gabriela Torres is a Guatemalan-born cultural anthropologist that specializes in the study of the violence—particularly gender-based violence—and state formation. She has published widely on femicide, marital rape, and sexual violence in the academy and is editor of two volumes *Marital Rape: Consent, Marriage and Social Change in Global Perspective* (Oxford, 2016) and *Conceptualizing Sexual Violence in Marriage: Research and Policy* (Routledge, 2020). She works as professor of anthropology at Wheaton College (MA) and regularly as a pro bono expert witness on gender-based violence and country conditions in Guatemala. Her current research looks at the development of policy and practice to mitigate sexual violence in the academy.

² Erin E. O'Connor is a historian of Latin America who specializes in the intersection of gender with social and political history since 1800. Her first monograph, *Gender, Indian, Nation: The Contradictions of Making Ecuador, 1830-1925* (Arizona, 2007) explored the centrality of gender and multiple patriarchies to Indian-state relations. She has also written and edited pedagogical books, including the two-volume document collection on gender, race, and empire/nation titled *Documenting Latin America* co-edited with Leo J. Garofalo (Pearson, 2011), and *Mothers Making Latin America: Gender, Households, and Politics since 1825* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014). She is a professor of history at Bridgewater State University, and her current research interrogates the multiple meanings of domesticity in Ecuadorian politics and labor from 1850-1950.

citizens. Challenging the governor, movement leaders from the *Colectiva Feminista en Construcción* wore striking purple T-shirts defining their presence: “Antipatriarcal Feminista Lesbiana Trans Caribeña Latinoamericana” (Antipatriarchal. Feminist. Lesbian. Trans. Caribbean. Latin American). In the summer of 2019 Mexico too erupted in the so-called “glitter” protests. The alleged rape of a young woman by police fueled hundreds of thousands of protesters across the country to shout, “*No me cuidan, me violan*” (They don’t protect me, they rape me). Protesters organized in a the *Mujer+Mujer* feminist collective didn’t only take to the street but also to challenge the public discourse of the media that misrepresents women because it lacks a gender perspective (NACLA, 2019). The common thread of the regional movements that have driven women to the streets and to form feminist collectives has been the need to clearly define discrimination and violence against women as social problems that require cultural change in society and the state.

The Second Special Issue: New Directions in Latin American Feminism and a Historical Approach to Latin American Feminist Movements

This second of two special issues on Latin American feminisms continues our approach to destabilize what Cusicanqui termed the tendency of colonial scholarship to create empires within empires that work by appropriating the knowledge of the global south and limiting the languages available to express what is knowable (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). Following Cusicanqui’s critique, which calls for increasing opportunities for real and multilingual dialogue between multiple and differently situated knowledge producers, this second multilingual issue presents Latin American feminisms as they are being developed.

This issue in particular demonstrates the diversity in modes of expression as we analytically engage in the production of feminisms in practice. Ohmer’s essay focuses on the process, challenges, and inspiration to produce feminist scholarship, as her “research results” come to include the very practice of the collection of data as an object of study. She walks us through her experiences, both positive and negative, while living and conducting research in Brazil and how these inspired her to coin the term “axe-ocracy” to capture the ways in which Afro-Brazilian women combine the axes of literature, politics, and spirituality to challenge inequality and build a sense of community. Snyder and Wolff also examine Brazilian feminism, exploring how mounting national crises have brought together diverse feminist movements, creating solidarities that will be important when confronting now president Jair Bolsonaro and his policies.

As in the first issue on Latin America, scholars in this issue recognize the centrality and challenges that race and class present. Lewis and Thomas, for example, trace the development of an Afro-descendant women’s movement in Brazil from 1980 to 2015, noting that although Afro-descendant women had a long history of contributing to Afro-Peruvian movements, they had to struggle to draw attention to women’s specific issues and needs within the Black movement. Their commitment and perspectives draw upon and re-orient both Afro-Peruvian and traditional feminist movements. Figueroa’s essay on femicide/feminicide in Mexico addresses the fact that current

data and statistics on gender-based violence fail to capture violence against indigenous women. She explores indigenous women's initiatives for addressing the gender-based violence that they experience, and she calls for new models of feminist thought and scholarship that can foster alliances and address the particular needs of indigenous women. Figueroa, Lewis and Thomas, and Ohmer together, call upon the reader to explore new directions and complexities in Latin American feminism in theory and praxis.

The second set of articles narrate the historical underpinnings of Latin American feminisms as they are developed through social movements and academic collaboration. Vignoli examines a key moment in the development of Argentine feminism in the early twentieth century, in which the Consejo Nacional de Mujeres de la Republica Argentina (The National Council of Women of the Argentine Republic, or CNMA). Both the formation and fragmentation of the CNMA highlight the goals, internal divisions, and international connections that would shape the contours of Argentine feminism for years to come. The reflection essay by Harms and Mitchells showcases their work coordinating a collaborative, comprehensive project on the history of female suffrage in the Americas. Their essay demonstrates the importance of questioning the presumption that international influences on feminism flowed only north to south (from the U.S., Canada, or Western Europe into Latin America). At the same time, their path to building a comprehensive and coherent history of suffrage in the Americas speaks to the importance of feminist scholars breaking out of their country-specific studies to learn from each other and, in doing so, develop new models for understanding women's history. We conclude the second special issue on *Women's Movements and the Shape of Feminist Theory and Praxis in Latin America* with their essay as we believe it stands as a model that might inspire other feminist scholars to engage in ambitious, international collaborative projects—and it offers insight about how to persevere in the face of the numerous (and costly) challenges that such work entails.

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