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Identity, Nation, and Revolution in Latin America

Karen Kampwirth. *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004. xv + 279 pp. ISBN 0-89680-239-6 (pb).

Magali Roy-Féquièrre. *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004. xi + 310 pp.; ill. ISBN 1-59213-230-8 (cl); 1-59213-231-6 (pb).

Julie D. Shayne. *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004. xii + 210 pp. ISBN 0-8135-3483-6 (cl); 0-8135-3484-4 (pb).

María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo. *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary: Reflections of a Former Guerrillera*. Trans. Lorena Terando. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005. xxxvi + 266 pp.; ill. ISBN 1-59213-100-X (cl); 1-59213-101-8 (pb).

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Women's relationships to the state, to their societies, and to the construction of national discourses continue to provide topics for at-times-heated debates. On the one hand, generalizing about women in such a way as to claim that all women have a particular type of connection to political or social phenomena runs the risk of subsuming certain categories of difference—racial, ethnic, class, sexual—at the same time that it attempts to highlight gender difference. On the other hand, refusing to make any kind of statement about the issues faced by groups of women as they negotiate their relationships with the political movements, countries, and social structures surrounding them also leads to a critical dead end. Four recent books walk this tightrope in varying ways as they address the topic of gender and national construction and discourse.

Roy-Féquièrre's *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico* analyzes questions of race, class, and gender in the intellectual nationalist projects of the *Generación del Treinta* (Generation of 1930), a group of writers whose works form the basis for much of the debate about Puerto Rican identity in the twentieth century. In chapter 1, Roy-Féquièrre uses Antonio S. Pedreira's highly influential 1934 essay *Insularismo* (*Insularism*), which argued that Puerto Rican national identity

depended upon racial purity and the dominance of the white descendents of the original Spanish colonists, as a jumping-off point to investigate the assumptions about race, class, and gender that underlay the vision of Puerto Rican national identity constructed by the *Generación de Treinta*. One striking aspect of Puerto Rican nationalist thought after the U.S. invasion in 1898 and subsequent U.S. possession of the island is that, unlike the vast majority of other Spanish American intellectuals, Puerto Ricans appealed to the vanished colonial, Spanish past as the basis for identity construction in the face of North American cultural domination. Roy-Féquièrre shows that these elements were part of the *Generación de Treinta's* efforts to construct a viable vision of Puerto Rican identity, as "the particular cultural memory of the descendants of the *hacendado* class is represented as a common historical and cultural patrimony" (42) not only for white elites but for rural peasants and the urban proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Beginning with the suffrage movement that started in 1917, chapter 2, "Compromising Positions: Reconstituting the Creole Gender Hierarchy," analyzes the strategies that white Puerto Rican women used to gain voice and agency. Suffrage for women met with immense opposition even though the suffragists asserted that their goal was to complement, not replace, men's activities. Middle-class women also tried to divorce their project of obtaining the vote for women from that of instituting radical changes in social structures or conventional morality. The suffragist movement of the 1920s, affirms Roy-Féquièrre, "provided a model of empowerment for women that made possible the strong presence of a number of women critics in the intellectual field" (77) in the *Generación de Treinta*. These women, however, were still constrained by—and themselves perpetuated—stereotypical notions of gender roles in which women had to strive to sublimate their sex in their intellectual work.

In the third chapter, Roy-Féquièrre further examines the tactics employed by educated women to gain access to the public sphere by reading two journals, *Índice* (Index, published 1929–1931) and the *Revista de la Asociación de Mujeres Graduadas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* (Journal of the Association of Women Graduates of the University of Puerto Rico, published 1938–1944). While the editors of *Índice* "present[ed] themselves as dispassionate observers of the Puerto Rican socio-cultural situation" (87), the journal glorified the Spanish colonial past, presenting as heroes men who were often classist and racist. Women were also underrepresented in the journal's pages; the creative writers published in and praised by *Índice* were exclusively male, and women's opinions about nationalism were neither sought nor included. When the *Revista de la Asociación de Mujeres Graduadas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* first appeared in 1938, its editors affirmed that it was not feminist in nature. At the same time, they asserted

the right of women to contribute to the construction of national identity. Roy-Féquièrè painstakingly summarizes the contents of all the issues, finding that roughly half the content related to literature and literary criticism and half to pedagogy and social work. Although in the body of the chapter she points out that the journal's contributors did not engage with questions about the poor and lower classes, she neither refers to this again in the chapter's conclusion nor explains the importance of this journal in Puerto Rican society.

The fourth chapter, "The New Creolism: Three Responses to Pedreira," analyzes three works that engage Pedreira's *Insularismo*. The three essays that Roy-Féquièrè discusses support the hegemony of white elites and downplay the influence of African Hispanics in Puerto Rican culture. Chapter 5, "The Nation as Male Fantasy: Emilio S. Belaval's *Los cuentos de la Universidad*" (Stories from the University), treats the representation of race—specifically of mulatto men and women—and of gender in a collection of short stories published in 1935. The stories work to legitimate white male privilege through discourses that define the Puerto Rican nation as one that is "legitimately" led by white Creoles. Roy-Féquièrè carries out some deft close readings of several stories from the collection to prove her point. She employs similar techniques in chapter 6, "A Brave New (Discursive) World: María Cadilla de Martínez's *Milestones of the Race*." Roy-Féquièrè points out that, like Belaval, Cadilla de Martínez's texts "[end] up silencing the subject" (184), at least when that subject is a racial other, although she does "reinscrib[e] women as founders of the nation" (192).

Next Roy-Féquièrè reviews the polemic about *negrismo* (blackness) in the 1920s and uses that as the backdrop for an analysis of Margot Arce's critical writings about the work of white poet Luis Palés Matos, who, along with Cuban Nicolás Guillén, was one of the most important writers proposing a positive view of African Hispanics in the Caribbean. Roy-Féquièrè's summary of the history of discourses about race repeats material she has already explicated elsewhere in the book; more to the point is her discussion of Palés's own writings about *negrismo*. While Palés privileged black culture (although he continued to consider it "other" to the elite class that dominated the island), his peers rejected the idea that blacks had anything to do with Puerto Rican national identity. Roy-Féquièrè argues that Arce's interpretation of Palés's poetry downplayed his attachment to black culture and de-emphasized Palés's critiques of Spanish colonial history—the very history that Arce and her compatriots in the *Generación de Treinta* sought to valorize.

The last chapter, "Speaking For and Speaking With: The Limits of *Negrismo*'s Cultural Discourse," continues one of the themes of the previous chapter by discussing the ideological pitfalls of *negrista* poetry produced

by such whites as Palés. Here Roy-Féquièrre carries out her own readings of some key poems to draw attention to the figure of the white onlooker in the poems, who "speak[s] of and for, as if blacks and black culture were unable to speak for themselves" (238). She then returns to her readings of other critics as she sketches a brief history of the critical reception of Palés's works. She ends by underlining yet again the contradictions inherent in the construction of Puerto Rican national identity by the men and women of the *Generación de Treinta*.

A strength of Roy-Féquièrre's book is that she draws on multiple sources from the "cultural field," to use social theorist Pierre Bourdieu's well-known term; she looks at literary works, essays, literary journals, newspaper articles, and even a survey of university students, giving a rich view of Puerto Rican intellectual activity in the early twentieth century.¹ She also never falls into the facile trap of assuming that women's writing is by definition combative or subversive; her analyses of Puerto Rican women's writing during this period demonstrate that these women were just as anxious to support racist and sexist discourses of national identity as their male counterparts. Her command of relevant theory is impressive, and her analyses are, for the most part, thorough and perceptive. They may well be too thorough, however; in her desire to give the most complete possible picture of Puerto Rican cultural discourses on race and gender at the time, she sometimes repeats information and provides multiple examples to prove one point, especially since all the writers she discusses believe in both the supremacy of the white, patriarchal ruling class and the importance of their Spanish heritage. Still, Roy-Féquièrre's careful attention to issues of race, gender, and class makes this book the definitive analysis of the construction of Puerto Rican national identity in the first half of the twentieth century.

The next three books all treat the relationship between women, feminism, and revolutions. Julie Shayne's *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba* poses this relationship as the question around which her book is organized. "What do women do for revolutions and how does revolution relate to feminism?" (3), she asks to springboard her three case studies. The key theoretical terms for her are sociologist Maxine Molyneux's distinction between "practical interests" (work that strives to meet specific, basic needs) and "strategic interests" (work that advances a particular ideological view), and historian Temma Kaplan's differentiation between "female consciousness" (the recognition of expectations placed upon women as a group) and "feminist consciousness" (contestations of patriarchal society).² Although Shayne acknowledges the gray areas that Molyneux's and Kaplan's terms elide, such terms do allow her to understand that women involved in political activity are not by necessity feminists. Shayne presents her own term, "revolutionary feminism,"

which she defines loosely as a grassroots movement that views sexism as part of larger political structures that oppress women. Each case study has two chapters, one of which answers the first half of her question and the second the latter half.

Shayne begins with El Salvador. As she does later for Chile and Cuba, she gives a brief history of the country, making her book more accessible to nonspecialists. She selects several organizations dominated by women to examine women's participation in the opposition movement; again, this is the strategy she employs in the other case studies. Shayne posits that "women of the popular movement were significant in mobilizing the base communities in support of the revolution, and as such had the power to bridge the gap between unincorporated civilians and the armed resistance" (34). Later Shayne elaborates on this idea, calling the women who "partially closed the gap between the organized left and unincorporated citizens" (43) *gendered revolutionary bridges*. By assigning "gender" only to "femininity," Shayne runs the risk of replicating social norms that see the masculine as universal and anything else as different; that is, in her terminology men seem not to have gender, or at least not to be marked by it. Otherwise her point about the function of women's activism within a revolutionary context is well made.

Shayne's second chapter treats feminism in postwar El Salvador. She claims that women's presence in the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation) challenged gender norms; that by participating in the revolution large numbers of women obtained political training; that postwar women had access to a political space; that women were dissatisfied with the revolution vis-à-vis gender issues; and that all these matters led to the development of a collective feminist consciousness. These are the five criteria she says are crucial for the presence of revolutionary feminism, and she applies them to Chile and Cuba as well.

Shayne next turns to the case of the Salvador Allende presidency and the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship in Chile—roughly twenty years before the El Salvador war; the book is organized in reverse chronological order, for reasons that remain unexplained. She justifies the inclusion of Chile by calling Allende's presidency a "partial revolution" (67), although she seems to be stretching the case here. She claims that in Chile, as in El Salvador, women were "gendered revolutionary bridges" for their roles in bringing Allende's Marxist programs to an apolitical sector of society: housewives. Revolutionary feminism was present in the Pinochet dictatorship, but since then, the movement has diminished to the point of nonexistence.

Cuba, before and after the 1959 revolution, concludes the book; the "before" period is 1952–1959, while the "after" period is 1959–1999. In her

discussion of the “before” period, Shayne again emphasizes the way in which resistance movements used femininity “to cloak women’s subversive political activities” (115). Finally, she argues that revolutionary feminism does not exist in post-1959 Cuba.

Overall, Shayne avers that male hostility to women weakens revolutions. But women’s issues, far from dividing revolutionary movements, can in fact be used to broaden their scope and appeal—and here the importance of her term “gendered revolutionary bridges” becomes clear. Shayne’s uncritical use of the word “femininity” leads her to make some problematic statements. For example, she asserts that the Fulgencio Bautista period (1940–1958) in Cuba demonstrates that “as a result of femininity, women have a revolutionary capacity to secure, promote and expand revolutionary movements in ways that would be impossible for men to imitate” (134). And in her conclusion she affirms, “the roles that women played and tasks that they performed were largely enabled by their femininity” (160). Such statements as this, however, could be read as perpetuating traditional gender norms. I would argue that women’s revolutionary capacity is not a result of femininity—their gender—in and of itself. Rather, some women have exploited the social norms—for example, that they are passive, nonviolent, and incapable of organizing—accreted around their sex. By saying that women’s gender in itself allows women to participate in revolutionary movements in the ways that she has described—supporting the “central,” male-dominated fight—Shayne runs the risk of reiterating the gendered division of labor in revolutions that she speaks of critically elsewhere in the book, as, for example, when she calls into question the social system that devalorizes so-called “women’s work” in the domestic sphere.

In *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas*, Karen Kampwirth treats many of the same topics that Shayne does, but with a rather more nuanced approach. Her interest lies in what happens to guerrillas after their wars have ended. Kampwirth argues that previous work on revolutions has ignored women’s roles and has tended “to end analysis at the moment when the old regime is overthrown” (2). These are gaps that Shayne’s work also fills, although Shayne does not stake that claim as explicitly as Kampwirth. As Shayne does, Kampwirth argues that guerrilla wars contribute to the rise of feminist movements. Also like Shayne, Kampwirth asserts that guerrillas who became feminists had learned both political socialization and organizing skills in their revolutionary movements. She also focuses her analysis on examinations of why particular women became feminists due to their guerrilla experiences, and of the types of feminist movements that resulted. Kampwirth points to the international influence in the development of Central American feminisms, but takes care to note that Latin American feminisms differ in several key ways from U.S.

or European feminisms.

In the case of Nicaragua, the Sandinista government claimed that the position of women would automatically be improved by extending the revolution. Indeed, the revolution did cause many changes in the way family life and gender power relations were conceived. The contra war (1982–1986) caused a national crisis, to which women's groups responded in one of two ways: by arguing that the war could not be won without gender equality, or by softening demands for gender equality on the grounds that the war effort was more important than women's concerns. Kampwirth's analysis of the gendered imagery deployed by Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista candidate, and Violeta Chamorro, the opposition candidate, in the 1989 elections is particularly telling. Her second chapter deals with feminist reactions to Chamorro's victory and to antifeminist policies in the 1990s. Here she summarizes some of the major policy issues of the post-Sandinista presidencies and the reactions by women's groups to them, and highlights the increased visibility of feminist groups.

Turning to El Salvador, Kampwirth treats the period following the 1992 peace accords. As women's groups mobilized and gained autonomy from political parties, they also worked to influence electoral politics with, Kampwirth argues, indirect if not direct success. Tracing feminist activism to the leftist guerrilla movement, she also indicates that such a massive social movement did affect Salvadoran society, although the leftists did not overthrow the government. She discusses the connections between Nicaraguan and Salvadoran feminisms as well in an illuminating section.

Kampwirth's last case study is Chiapas, Mexico, where women's issues formed part of the Zapatista revolutionary platform from the outset. Kampwirth also indicates that the Zapatistas sought radical democracy, not a Marxist-Leninist revolution as in El Salvador and Nicaragua; hence, autonomy for various sectors of civil society—including women's rights groups—was prized rather than suppressed. As indigenous rights came to the forefront of the Zapatista movement, however, conflicts between feminist movements and traditional indigenous culture, which tended to subordinate women, arose. Here Kampwirth's analysis digresses into lengthy discussions about the demands by the Zapatistas for indigenous rights, and the Mexican federal government's response; the relationship between the struggle for indigenous rights and feminism is not always clear, although she does discuss the organizations particular to indigenous women in Chiapas.

In her conclusion, Kampwirth points to the examples of Iran and Poland to underscore that revolutions do not inevitably lead to feminism—a subtlety that escapes Shayne. She also looks to the study of Cuba to project some possibilities for feminism in other Latin American countries that have

gone through revolutions. Kampwirth's analysis is richer and more nuanced than Shayne's; her more fluid prose style communicates her sophisticated arguments well, and her focus on Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Chiapas makes more sense than Shayne's reverse chronological examination of El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba.

A recent autobiography by a Colombian ex-guerrillera brings home many of the issues raised by Shayne and Kampwirth. Vásquez Perdomo writes of her life within and after the *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19; the April 19 Movement), a revolutionary socialist guerrilla group active in Colombia from 1970 until the late 1980s, when its members gave up its arms and began participating in legal politics. Her narrative is straightforward—perhaps almost too straightforward, as she makes little effort to elucidate the political and ideological issues motivating her and M-19. Historian Arthur Schmidt's introduction works to remedy this deficiency, as he places Vásquez Perdomo's story in the context of the revolutionary movements in Colombia, providing useful background to readers who may not be familiar with the history of the leftist insurgency in that country.

Vásquez Perdomo explains that her autobiography is the result of a project undertaken after she returned to the Universidad Nacional of Colombia to study anthropology. The resulting text is, apparently, purely a product of her memory; she did not rely on any secondary texts, such as newspaper reports or interviews with others, to jog her memory or to flesh out her account. Only toward the end of the book does she mention that she traveled to places she had lived as a child in preparing to write the autobiography, and that her mother gave her old family photographs to study. Despite her emphasis on the writing process, there is no effort at transparency; she does not elucidate the means by which she reconstructed her own past, beyond the idea that she took a literal trip down memory lane.

At age nineteen, Vásquez Perdomo became an active member of a violent clandestine movement. Schmidt claims in the introduction that she suppressed her personal life, and she herself writes of her reciprocated interest in a fellow student-soldier: "Reason overcame us and we abandoned the thought of falling in love because of the break we made between the political and the personal" (53). Then, of her first lover, she says, "With a man like this, feelings could be supported in [political] theory" (54). Still, when she had a baby, they reverted to a traditional relationship in which Vásquez Perdomo kept house and her partner worked outside the home and maintained his involvement in politics; she had been excluded from revolutionary activities once her pregnancy was obvious. She eventually demanded to be activated once more, thus calling into question her male companions' assumptions about motherhood.

Vásquez Perdomo's narrative consistently interweaves the political

and the personal, despite her earlier avowal to have broken the two apart. Her lovers were all active militants and, in such statements as the following, she connects political activism for women with a more general social activism: "Making political decisions that put our lives in danger led us, in spite of the contradictions, to take control of our bodies with respect to sexuality and maternity" (76). In this way she relates her revolutionary activities to a series of personal behaviors that Colombian society considered almost equally transgressive and threatening. Many of Vásquez Perdomo's activities fell into the realm of logistics. Such tasks as transporting weapons, hiding fellow combatants, and delivering messages were tasks that, as Shayne argues and Vásquez Perdomo underscores, are often more successfully undertaken by women due to societal expectations about gendered behavior. Soldiers are unlikely to suspect that a woman's shopping bag conceals weapons, for example.

Toward the end of her narrative, Vásquez Perdomo comments explicitly on what it meant to be a woman within the male-dominated M-19, discussing the ways in which M-19 women subverted traditional gender norms by rethinking marriage and women's roles even as they perpetuated those roles by tending to domestic chores and privileging men's work above their own. This echoes themes in the works by Shayne and Kampwirth. The book concludes with Vásquez Perdomo's decision to formally leave the M-19 and find her own path, and a brief epilogue describes her current work in defense of women's rights. This new career would also seem to support Shayne's and Kampwirth's claims about the ways in which participating in revolutions has led women to feminist activism, although Vásquez Perdomo herself does not explore this.

The book includes thorough footnotes that gloss terms specific to Colombia and expand on Vásquez Perdomo's references to Colombian history and politics. There is also a "Chronology of Major M-19 Actions" at the end. Both these paratextual elements seem to have been provided by the translator, Lorena Terando, although there is neither a note to indicate this nor any kind of translator's note about her role in bringing Vásquez Perdomo's text to an English-speaking audience. A glossary would have been helpful for readers who cannot remember the translation of a particular word over several hundred pages, as well as to remind them of what the many acronyms employed represent. Both Shayne's and Kampwirth's books include such useful lists of abbreviations and acronyms.

A cursory examination of Shayne's, Kampwirth's, and Vásquez Perdomo's books might suggest that women are always the standard bearers of radical ideology, moving readily from revolutions to feminist reshaping of society. Roy-Féquièrre's timely reminder that women have often been, and continue to be, actively involved in shaping and perpetuating conservative

ideologies that replicate racist, classist, and even sexist discourses, helps militate against such a facile reading; and indeed, Shayne, Kampwirth, and Vásquez Perdomo are careful to suggest no such thing. Shayne and Kampwirth even include analyses of ways in which women have participated in counterrevolutionary activities. All four books contribute to our understanding of the complex ways in which gender is implicated in discourses of nation building and consolidation.

NOTES

¹Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

²Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilisation without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies* 2, no. 2 (1985): 227–54; and Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910–1918," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 3 (1982): 545–66.

the resultant international campaigns for racial equality. She has published widely on nationalism, citizenship, colonialism, gender, and race, with chapters in several international collections, including Joan Landes, ed., *Feminism: The Public and the Private* (Oxford University Press, 1988); Ida Blom et al., eds., *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berg, 2000) and Barbara Hobson, ed., *Recognition Struggles and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). Her most recent book is *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, co-edited with Ann Curthoys (Australian National University Press, 2006).

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