Foreword

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This exceptional collection is the fruit of the very processes it analyzes: the growth and vitality of Latin American and Caribbean feminist organizing and scholarship over the course of the past four decades and the concomitant configuration of vibrant, multifaceted feminist academic and activist fields spanning the Americas and beyond. While privileging the voices of feminists from South and Central America in translation, this book is the product of ongoing transnational, transdisciplinary conversations among feminists working to bridge North and South, politics and culture, the academy and the movement. Indeed, *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean* grows out of the always lively and productive debates enacted in an arena that has done much to facilitate transnational processes of feminist translation across the Americas: the Gender and Feminist Studies Section of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), a space that has fostered a diverse and expansive network of scholars and activist-intellectuals engaged in sustained dialogue across geopolitical, disciplinary and other borders.¹

This first truly comprehensive anthology on Latin American women's movements and politics features essays by consecrated founding mothers of the field and newer voices alike. Taken together, they offer a richly detailed and analytically discerning overview of feminist cultural and political interventions in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Unprecedented in breadth and depth, the collection provides a vivid, multidimensional picture of the heterogeneous arenas, actions, and actors found today among the wide-ranging expressions of feminist and women's movement organizing across the region, while affording unparalleled insight into trends in evidence in a number of countries. The editors' incisive introductory essays and those in the opening section on globalization, women's work, and female-headed households, moreover, offer an overview of the complex socioeconomic, political, and cultural context in which women's struggles for citizenship and social justice have unfolded over the past four decades.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of the region-wide trends documented in the chapters that follow is the pronounced visibility and expressive expansion of what the editors and contributors variously refer to as third-wave feminism, complex-identity feminisms, or the feminism of shifting identities. The very women whom the hegemonic feminism of the so-called second wave viewed as "others"—poor and working-class women, Afro-descendant and indigenous women, and lesbians—have translated and radically transformed some of its core tenets and fashioned other feminisms, "*feminismos con apellidos*" (Ríos et al. 2003) that are deeply

entwined, and sometimes contentiously entangled, with national and global struggles against all forms of inequality and for social, sexual, and racial justice.

As is in the case of the United States, moreover, the wave metaphor is rendered problematic by the narratives collected here, as black women, lesbians, and those “othered” are shown to have been on the frontlines of feminist organizing for decades, even when they often enacted their feminisms in autonomous or mixed movement spaces. These diverse feminisms—together with young women from all social groups and classes who proclaim themselves *feministas jóvenes*, with agendas distinct from earlier generations—have produced effervescent movement currents that proffer trenchant critiques of enduring inequalities *among women*, as well as between women and men of diverse racial and social groups, thereby expanding the scope and reach of feminist messages and revitalizing women’s cultural and policy interventions across the region.

To be sure, one clear outcome of these profound and productive critiques of hegemonic feminism has been what we might call the sidestreaming of feminist politics—a second trend amply in evidence in the essays assembled in *Women’s Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean*. “Trickling up, down, and sideways,” as in Fiona Macaulay’s apt depiction of Brazil’s “multinodal women’s movement” and “gender-policy community,” feminism in many, if not most, countries in the region today not only has been “mainstreamed” so that it extends vertically across different levels of government, traverses much of the party spectrum, and engages with a variety of national and international policy arenas; feminism also spreads horizontally into a wide array of class and racial-ethnic communities and social and cultural spaces, including parallel social movement publics.

An emergent and internally heterogeneous *pueblo feminista*—to borrow Graciela Di Marco’s evocative characterization of the “popular feminism” embraced by Argentinean *piqueteras* (picketers), women workers in recovered factories, and mothers who organize against police brutality—is brought from the margins to the center of feminist analysis in this anthology and is a marked presence in the stories here told.² Racial, ethnic, sexual, generational, and class differences color and variegate that pueblo’s distinctive feminist politics, bringing diversity to the forefront of women’s organizing.

Yet while diversity may be embraced by today’s enduring, if now more scattered, feminist hegemonies, much remains to be done to challenge inequalities, redress power imbalances, and dismantle racial, class, and generational privilege and heteronormativity in politics and society and *within* the region’s women’s movements, as a number of the authors assembled here make painfully clear (see also Grewal and Kaplan 1994). Whereas some activists lament the dispersion and disarticulation of feminist and women’s movements consequent to the decentering and pluralization of movement fields, Ana Lorena Carrillo and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla admonish against the all-too-common tendency to conflate diversity with dispersion. In the place of facile platitudes that recognize and even celebrate diversity, we need concerted political efforts by *all* feminists to put redistributive teeth into now fashionable discourses on multiculturalism—such as promoting

positive discrimination and other public policies to reduce racial, class, and other inequalities.³

The “upward, downward, and sideways” dispersion of feminist interventions into a multiplicity of spaces and places, moreover, must be understood as at least part of what accounts for the region’s feminisms’ not-insignificant success in the policy and cultural realms. And the chapters make abundantly clear that feminist and women’s movements have exercised considerable influence in key democratizing conjunctures: from Central American national liberation struggles and ensuing peace accords, to the transition process in Brazil and the Southern Cone, to contemporary constitutional refoundations in the Andean region.

Nonetheless, the more widespread *diffusion* and potential “massification” of feminist discourses, such as their mainstreaming into the state and policy arenas, always runs a risk of being politically *defused*—a dilemma that will continue to animate feminist debate and confound our practices.⁴ Indeed, the trials and tribulations of what has been variously dubbed “institutionalized” or “state” feminism since the 1990s signal a third overarching trend covered by these collected essays. From the embattled local women’s machineries of Mexico, discussed by María Luisa Tarrés, many of which have been purposefully colonized by explicitly antifeminist conservative currents, to the tergiversation of feminist understandings of violence against women evident in Costa Rican legislation, poignantly critiqued by Montserrat Sagot, many chapters attest to the fact that despite some significant policy gains the institutional terrain since the 1990s has been a slippery, when not treacherous, one for most of the region’s feminisms. Several also document policy retrenchments and political backlashes that have emerged over the past decade—including the consolidation of antichoice forces in some countries.

But a fourth trend culled from the pages of this volume concerns the new challenges and opportunities that the current turn toward the Left and Center-Left and the resurgence of the National-Popular (or according to some, the rise of neopopulism) pose for feminist and women’s movements in the region. If chapters by Karen Kampwirth, Morena Herrera, and Ana Lorena Carrillo and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla on the Central American liberation struggles make clear that feminism and the Left have proven strange bedfellows historically, they also show conclusively that revolutionary struggles of the 1970s and 1980s provided fertile terrain for the development of feminisms in a variety of often unrecognized ways. Several essays explore the extent to which what some have called the “Pink Tide” that has swept much of the region since the late 1990s—spanning more or less intense shades of leftist “red” governments from Venezuela to Paraguay to Brazil to Chile and backed, as in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, by previously marginalized ethno-racial majorities—might similarly offer fresh opportunities for feminist interventions in institutional and extrainstitutional political arenas, perhaps especially generating further space for other feminisms to flourish.⁵

Finally, *Women’s Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean* highlights the manifold ways in which transnational processes—such as the periodic regional Encuentros Feministas de América Latina y el Caribe (Latin American and

Caribbean Feminist Encuentros), the string of United Nations conferences of the 1990s and their follow-up processes, feminist engagements with the anti- or alter-globalization movements and the World Social Forums, and other translocal feminist practices—have also markedly expanded the spaces for feminist and women’s movement activism and influence over the past two decades. The coconstitutive dynamics of local, national, regional, and global feminisms are amply in evidence in the chapters that follow.

In sum, this invaluable collection is brimming with compelling conceptual innovations, fresh empirical insights, and provocative political analysis, setting new parameters for future studies of feminist and other social movements in politics in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is certain to become required reading for specialists and students of feminist studies, Latin American studies, comparative politics and sociology, cultural studies, critical race studies, and development studies, as well as for feminist activists and policy advocates worldwide.

NOTES

1. For more on the history of the Gender and Feminist Studies Section, see the preface of this volume.
2. Di Marco (forthcoming) develops a provocative analysis of the notion of “pueblo feminista” in her essay “Social Movement Demands, beyond Civil Society.”
3. On neoliberal multiculturalism, see especially Hale (2002) and Hale and Millamán (2006).
4. Reed (2005) develops the tension between diffusion and defusion of social movement discourses.
5. On feminism, LGBTI movements, and the Pink Tide, see Friedman (2007).

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