
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

SONIA E. ALVAREZ, JEFFREY W. RUBIN, MILLIE THAYER, GIANPAOLO BAIOCCHI & AGUSTÍN LAÓ-MONTES (eds.): *Beyond Civil Society: Activism, Participation, and Protest in Latin America*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

One of many case studies in *Beyond Civil Society* tells the story of the Rural Women's Movement in Rio Grande Do Sul, Brazil. Jeffrey Rubin writes that the movement came out of male-led struggles to address rural inequality and dispossession, connecting these class-based concerns to claims around women's rights. In the 1990s, women organized to make sure new constitutional rights to pensions, maternity leaves, and health care benefits were granted, combining civil strategies, such as signature-gathering and lobbying, with uncivic actions like occupying the state legislature. However, in the early 2000s, the movement fragmented, in part over "whether to do politics in the streets or the institutions" (221). Rubin concludes that to maintain themselves in democratic contexts, movements should have the flexibility and diversity to do what the Rural Women's Movement could not: "work simultaneously within and outside the institutions, in civil and uncivic ways, and in so doing bring ongoing energy and force to democratic politics" (231).

This tension between civic participation and uncivic activism is one of the book's central themes, underlying its collection of 15 different case studies on social movements and political activism in South America. The book comes out of a specific historical context around the turn of the twenty-first century, in which both new leftist governments and international institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations began to promote civic participation as the solution to deepening democracy, tackling inequality, and addressing the concerns of marginalized groups. As the editors write in the introduction, where before civil society had been harnessed for leftist counterhegemonic projects "born of social conflict to carry out contestation, now civil society was the *solution* to social conflict" (8). What the authors refer to as the Civil Society Agenda became hegemonic, promoting actions within specific institutional frameworks as permitted, while casting other kinds of uncivic activism as not permitted, and, indeed, as a threat to democracy. Nonetheless, the book's case studies repeatedly show the importance of activism that refuses to be contained. In the book's final chapter, Sonia Alvarez argues for the necessity of political contention that isn't

“civilized, well-mannered, and cooperative in relation to governing ourselves and others” (329).

A major question posed in *Beyond Civil Society* is what happens to citizens and groups that channel their actions through social movement versus those who opt for civic participation. In describing how a “feminist people” emerged in Argentina through female activism in movements around class-based interests, Graciela Di Marco writes that “uncivic, untamed identities took shape through the process carried out by social movements” (137). If social movements produce untamed identities that challenge dominant interests, the book casts civic participation as a taming force that can sanitize and depoliticize movements. Agustín Laó-Montes describes the significant gains made by Afro-Latin American movements to compel states to recognize and address racial inequality. But the programs organized by governments and international NGOs often restrain anti-systemic activism by integrating Black activism into the state and “helping neoliberal projects of disciplining subjects and promoting conformed citizens” (113). Nevertheless, Laó-Montes shows that arguments that civic participation simply coopts activism are too simplistic; these arguments discount how civic participation also creates political openings for activists to leverage within the state.

This analysis and its practical implications for activists is one example of how the book and its authors come from a tradition of scholar-activism that rejects the detachment of academic research from social movement participation. The book is explicitly intended not just for academics, but also to “help provide a framework to navigate puzzles and dilemmas confronting activists, a forward-facing analytic that is politically helpful” (xv). Consequently, multiple chapters offer practical insights for activists alongside theoretical findings. Chapter 1, authored by Gianpaolo Baiocchi, describes the history of participatory budgeting in Brazil, showing how the government’s control of the process turned it into a project of “governmentality from below” (43). But rather than dismissing participatory institutions, he raises questions of “how to engage them strategically so as to leverage equality and inclusion to political ends” (44). Millie Thayer argues in Chapter 8 that relations between international donors and social movements in the region took on the form of vertical shadow commodity chains in which international funders traded financial support for discursive commodities such as “images of successful cooperatives, well-attended meetings, and productive campaigns—backed by the involvement of authentic working-class women” (169-170) from grassroots organizations. While Thayer details how the financial backing of Western donors removed autonomy from activists and forced them to engage with market-based discourses, she also suggests a leverage point for social movement actors in “the symbolic capital that they themselves produced and that they exchanged for material resources at every site along the chain” (164).

While still valuable, the conclusions of *Beyond Civil Society* are somewhat constrained by the fact that its analysis is rooted within a regional and temporal context marked by a political turn to the left. Seven of the fifteen case studies focus on Brazil, mostly under the leadership of the left-wing Workers' Party. Other chapters deal with similar contexts under "Pink Tide" governments in Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Argentina. What are the consequences for movements and civic participation as the region has increasingly turned to more right-wing leadership? Thayer and Rubin mention in the conclusion that what they call "an emerging postneoliberal Right" (333) has used similar strategies and discourses around civil society participation. Indeed, the book's chapter on Black social movements in Colombia shows how the Civil Society Agenda was also meaningful under a right-wing government during the same era. More explicit discussion of how to extend the book's analysis to non-Pink Tide contexts would have served to highlight its contributions as more than just documenting a moment that may well have passed. Nonetheless, the individual case studies of *Beyond Civil Society* include rich detail that will be of interest to activists and scholars of social movements alike, and the book's discussion of the Civil Society Agenda and its consequences is an important contribution to scholarship on Latin America, democracy, and collective action.

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PETER WADE: *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, Multiculturalism, and Race in Latin America*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017.

"Race is a social construct, not a biological reality." For almost a century, humanists, social scientists, and biological scientists have attempted to counteract long-standing stereotypes and social constructs that for centuries had divided human societies into distinct races. Peter Wade's *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom* tackles this complex process in Latin America. He argues that, although Latin American nations have tried to move past the racialized frameworks of *mestizaje-mestiçagem* that have defined their citizens, the cultural legacies of those modes of thinking continue to influence the ways that Latin American scientists approach genomic research into human diversity.

Wade's research probes the nexus of cutting-edge scientific research, historical memory, and socio-cultural scholarship. His goal is to understand how the assemblages that have supported racialized thinking continue to mediate the scientific study of human diversity in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. Wade uses