Popul Vuh), puts to work his cultural knowledge and sensitivity by interpreting and rendering the original Mayan texts with a new English-reading public in mind. Despite what may be lost and gained in translation, Tedlock has put this civilization’s corpus on the map. Furthermore, he recognizes the rich production of the Mayan’s literary descendants, as exemplified in the verses of Mayan poet Humberto Ak’abal, “Lightning/ lights up the clouds, it wants to see if we are still here, below/ Then comes the revelation/— Here we are (p. 402).

Notes

1 These sentiments are also echoed by Camilla Townsend, “Reading Symbolic and Historical Representations in Early Mesoamerica,” Latin American Research Review, 2012, vol. 47.

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In the 1980s, when countries throughout Latin America began to transition from authoritarian rule, there was a great deal of optimism. It appeared to be a moment when democracy could be redefined in a way that was potentially more inclusive and substantive. Women, through human rights and feminist organizations, were prominent political actors in this transition, and it seemed likely that they would continue in this role. Yet, as time passed, this optimism has faded. Increasingly, scholars and activists have raised concerns about the quality of democracy that is enduring in the region and it seems that women’s organizations are no longer the central political actors.

In Feminist Agendas, Jane S. Jaquette addresses these issues and asks what happened to women’s activism and feminism in the region. She argues that women and women’s issues continue to be pursued in Latin America despite the fragmentation of the movement, the re-emergence of political parties, and neoliberal globalization. In this book she offers a sampling of some of the feminist successes in Latin America during the last few decades.

The chapters are organized around three themes: feminism and the state, legal strategies and democratic institutions, and international and cross-border
activism. Each of the chapters is written by an academic-activist who lives in the country she writes about. As a result, not only are the chapters well written, but they also reflect intimate knowledge of some of the successes and challenges of feminist agendas and organizing for change. The book engages politics mostly from a state perspective but with a keen eye on social movements, their role and potential role, or their absence.

The section on feminism and the state addresses three key questions often asked by students of women and politics in Latin America. First, does it matter if a country’s president is female? Marcela Río Tobar answers this question through an analysis of the presidency of Chilean Michelle Bachelet. Río explores the benefits women gain by having a female president, in this case, especially one from a Socialist party. However, she also emphasizes the opportunities lost by the president and her party by not drawing on the support and feedback of the women’s movement. The analysis touches on issues specific to gender as well as broader issues of political party and civil society relations.

The next chapter on the state explores the benefits and drawbacks of gender quotas. The authors draw from the literature on gender quotas and the electoral system to compare the cases of Brazil and Argentina. They argue that while quotas in Argentina are more successful than those in Brazil, the success is only partial. For example, women remain only minimally involved in candidate selection.

Finally, the section ends with a chapter exploring the impact of Chávez on the women’s movement in Venezuela. While the author recognizes the benefits for women that Chávez has provided, she criticizes how party loyalty has trumped women’s concern for their gender-specific rights. This chapter also explores the challenges and possibilities of cross-party feminist organizing under Chávez. All together, the first section of the book explores some key issues being debated regarding the quality of democracy in Latin American today. The chapters assess state-civil society relations, the inclusiveness and democratic functioning of the electoral process, and the impact of populism – adding a feminist perspective on each issue.

The second section of the book addresses state-civil society relations, focusing specifically on the judiciary. This astute choice reflects the increasing importance of legal activism for many civil-society organizations in the region. Overall, the three chapters express optimism about the possibilities for women’s organizations to use legal channels to enact change. Success stories are drawn from Argentina, Brazil and Peru. The chapters explore the activists’ use of both national and international courts. The chapter on Peru is particularly interesting in that it explores how gender was integrated into the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and how this inclusion re-shaped the type of abuses investigated.
A book on feminist agendas and democracy in Latin America would be remiss if it did not include a section on international organizing. While interesting, this is the weakest of the three sections. Perhaps this reflects Jaquette’s own position. She concludes that while international feminist organizing is important for exchanging ideas, resources and expanding networks, ultimately it is “accountable institutions that can deliver public goods, including personal security, social services, and legal fairness – and address issues of redistribution as well as growth” (p. 216).

Some of the chapters in this final section are stronger than others. The first chapter addresses Latin American women’s involvement in the World Social Forum. Written more from an activist perspective than an academic standpoint, the author expresses confidence in the benefits of these forums; however, the chapter does not adequately address the many critiques of these forums nor does it review the academic literature on them. In contrast, the following chapter analyzes a very specific cross-national initiative to establish a quantitative index to track states’ compliance with international agreements on women’s rights. The index is interesting, but it is not clear why this initiative, and not others, was chosen. Finally, the last chapter assesses the challenges and possibilities for cross-border feminist activism using the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso border as the case study. The chapter provides a new look at the violence in this area and encourages us to think more about why accounts of violence in the area have not adequately examined the significant issue of domestic violence.

As with her previous two edited books on women in Latin America, Jaquette has again provided a wonderful overview of feminism and women’s organizing in the region and explored women’s contribution to democracy. I would highly recommend this book for use in a course on women in Latin America, Latin American politics, women and globalization, or women and politics. The chapters provide narratives of concrete experiences that could provoke discussion among students, scholars, and activists on issues of gender and the state of democracy.

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The Peruvian elite, during the first several decades of the twentieth century, viewed industrialization as a panacea for the country’s perceived shortcomings, according to historian Paulo Drinot. They believed in industry’s talismanic power as a civilizing and modernizing force. While industrialization might have its dark