

## Book Reviews

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Sonia E. Álvarez, Jeffrey W. Rubin, Millie Thayer, Gianpaolo Baiocchi, and Augustín Lao-Montes, eds., *Beyond Civil Society: Activism, Participation, and Protest in Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. Tables, figures, bibliography, index, 408 pp.; hardcover \$104.95, paperback \$28.95.

Civil society and social movements have formed parallel research agendas that hardly intersect. In Latin America, this reflects two separate phenomena: democratization and experiments of civil society participation in the state, and the increasing visibility of mass mobilization and other forms of confrontational collective action by social movements. This volume seeks to bridge these divides.

The introduction presents the conceptual framework: The “Civil Society Agenda” and “Uncivic Activism.” The former coincides with rampant neoliberalism in the region, promoting a hegemonic yet contested form of civic participation. Contentious social movement actions that do not follow its prescriptions are seen as uncivic and transgressive. The book challenges assumptions of the virtuosity of civic participation and the dangers of protest while disputing opposite assumptions that unruly protest is beneficial to democracy whereas civic participation is not. Instead of forms and venues of activism, the editors propose the categories of *lo permitido* and *lo no permitido*—the authorized and its “other.” What distinguishes the two is their political effects in relation to dominant discourses and constellations of power: whether activism disrupts hierarchies or reinforces inequalities. Movements’ effects can be contradictory, just as movements do not map easily onto the civic and the uncivic, but instead adopt these two facets of social change.

The volume offers genealogies of the concepts of civil society and participation, provincializing European and American literatures. By historicizing civil society as it was deployed in Latin America, the authors are able to explain its relation to other important concepts, such as the people, and specific forms of perceiving the nexus to the state in the region. Particularly interesting is the genealogy of the neoliberal version of civil society and its expansion through development aid. Nevertheless, civil society in Latin America is more complex and ambivalent than *tout court* criticisms of its expressions, as neoliberal governmentality would suggest. A Gramscian civil society version has also inspired social innovations in Latin America, ranging from movements for democratization to policies from “Pink Tide” governments.

The first part of the book explores the civil society agenda in Brazil. Reconstructing the genealogy of participatory budgeting, Gianpaolo Baiocchi concludes that there is always something subversive in participation, and that the question facing activists today is not whether to engage with the state but how to do it strategically. Leonardo Avritzer argues that in Latin America, civil society emerged in reaction to authoritarian states and antisocietal forms of social organization. Describing two

phases of state and society interaction in Brazil, he maintains that civil society remained semiautonomous. Unpacking the normative narrative of civil society in a case study of a health council in northern Brazil, Andrea Cornwall contends that a vibrant democratic participatory site was transformed into an “empty space,” deprived of its democratic possibilities. In his ethnography on women community leaders in Porto Alegre engaged in participatory budgeting and the World Social Forum, Benjamin Junge discusses the ambivalences in the “civic” and “uncivil” political subjectivities that build “the subject of participatory politics.”

Part 2 maps movement sectors and emergent fields. Augustín Lao-Montes reviews the contested field of Afro-Latin American politics and identifies the contradictions between black conservative elites that support neoliberal governments and the socioeconomic situation of the majority of black people in this very unequal region, which form the bases for black racial and social justice movements. Graciela Di Marco argues that the articulation of feminism and working-class women in the picketers, the Popular Assemblies, and the Recovered and Self-Managed Companies generated a counterhegemonic field to the church’s political influence. Graciela Monteagudo accompanied an assembly of citizens in opposition to the pulp mills in Uruguay. She calls this field “politics by other means” to convey the use of diverse protest repertoires when conventional ones failed to halt neoliberal policies. Millie Thayer proposes a historical account of rural women’s movements’ and feminist NGOs’ relationships in a “shadow commodity chain” to donor agencies, extending the use of the concept of gray zones to analyze contested encounters between movements and capitalist markets.

Part 3 explores the nexus between civic and uncivic politics. In his analysis of a self-organized referendum on mining in the region of Ayavaca, Peru, Raphael Hoetmer argues that this nexus is complex and dynamic, relating social, state, and private actors in conflict and negotiation. Assessing the contradictory outcomes of Afro-Colombian social movements from 1990 to 2010, Kiran Asher sheds doubt on the emancipatory potential of civic participation, arguing against romancitizing resistance, and also against reducing it to structural effects. Jeffrey W. Rubin uses the concept “movements-in-democracy” to illuminate the nexus between civic and uncivic politics in the rural women’s movement in southern Brazil. In Amalia Pallares’s chapter about the case of Santa Elena, Ecuador, the civil and political society relate in new ways, combining contentious and noncontentious strategies to achieve higher self-determination.

The last part of the book describes polarization dynamics in the region and proposes a conceptual framework for state-society relations. Margarita López Maya and Luis E. Lander use protest event analysis to reconstruct how both middle-class and working-class organizations in Venezuela have relied on civic and uncivic repertoires for different purposes and with different state responses. Baiocchi and Ana Claudia Teixeira’s essay on the June 2013 protests in Brazil assesses the contradictory legacy of those events. José Antonio Lucero explores how pro- and antigovernment forces disputed meanings of violence and death in a confrontation in Cochabamba, Bolivia. He argues that those dynamics contributed to a discouraging trend in which an

indigenous project from above generates new exclusions. Sonia Álvarez formulates an analytical framework to disentangle the different prescriptions of civic participation: governability, governance, governmentality, and cogovernance. She uses this grid heuristically to examine the power effects of each regime in generating varied political citizen-subjects. Relying on various empirical cases in the region, she argues for the need for conflict and contention in order to go beyond the civil society agenda in the pursuit of democracy.

Thayer and Rubin's excellent conclusion draws out the main lessons about state-society relations in twenty-first-century Latin America and the contradictions of Pink Tide governments. The securitization and criminalization of activism, together with the civil society agenda, produces the "permissible citizen" and proscribes and invisibilizes the *no permitido*. At the same time, public policies that incorporate identity-based demands foster inclusion in permissible degrees. Summarizing findings, the authors argue that activists deployed heterogeneous political forms, within the bounds of the civil society agenda and beyond it, through unconventional activism; however, they "overflowed" both, experimenting with new protest repertoires, including violent ones, to achieve concrete gains and transform politics. This invited contributors also to transpose analytical categories, such as social movement, searching for open concepts, such as fields, counterpublics, pueblos, and public spaces (335).

Thayer and Rubin hold that the book's contribution to scholarship beyond the region lies in this attentiveness to emergent multiple forms of mobilization that challenge received forms of activism, restrictive containment structures, and delimiting concepts. In Latin America, the outcomes of such political excess have been varied, deepening democratic possibilities but shrinking the boundaries of the *permitido* and generating splits within movements.

Although the book was clearly not intended to offer an all-encompassing panorama of activism in Latin America, one would have wished nonetheless to see how the authors relate democracy to social justice. Given the role of social justice claims in intersection with categories of difference, more attention to class, to the political system, and to the political economy would be crucial to assess when inclusion follows neoliberal prescriptions and when it transforms structural inequalities. By focusing on the civic society and social movements divide, the authors often miss the relational perspective needed to understand the limits and possibilities of struggles. A good illustration of this shortcoming is Baiocchi and Teixeira's chapter. Although they refer to the conservative political forces in the Brazilian Congress (292), they do not incorporate a class analysis of the political crisis in Brazil, beyond the June events, that would allow a broader understanding of the political reform beyond the civil society agenda.

Among the book's many strengths are its interdisciplinarity, its combination of various methods and data, and the lively conceptual debate between its chapters. The book deserves praise for pursuing a much-needed analysis of civic participation during the Pink Tide governments, affirming its fragile gains and high costs. Considering the conservative backlash in the region, the book invites more engagement

with politics against a wave of “antipolitics” without surrendering autonomy from governments or contentious repertoires. The contributors do not to stop at description and explanation but see themselves as entangled in the processes that they analyze: “It has always been our goal . . . [to] help provide a framework to navigate puzzles and dilemmas confronting activists, a forward-facing analytic that is politically helpful” (xv). They have surely achieved this goal.

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Verónica Gago, *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*. Translated by Liz Mason-Deese. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. Notes, bibliography, index, 288 pp; cloth \$94.95, paperback \$25.95, ebook.

Verónica Gago’s book is a tour de force through more than a century of economic and political thought—as well as Buenos Aires’s La Salada market, clandestine textile workshops, and migrant labor networks. It should be on the reading list of any scholar working with themes of informality, neoliberalism, or developmentalism.

Gago challenges the prevailing notion of neoliberalism as a package of reforms imposed from above by large, powerful actors, such as the national government, international banks, and international organizations. She argues that scholars should pay attention to individual and collective strategies of resistance and calculation that undermine and question neoliberal regulations. Further, she argues that scholars should think about how neoliberalism persists through the actions of regular people, who respond to economic crises and subsequent reforms with self-employment, migration, and informal business. She terms this dynamic “neoliberalism from below” and argues that the concept is “a set of conditions materialized beyond the will of a government” (6). Gago points out that millions of people weather crises with these survival strategies and, in the process, fill in the gap left by the state’s retreat from healthcare, education, and other services. These strategies embody and perpetuate the neoliberal logic of individual responsibility and a thin state—even as administrations across the region roll back unpopular reforms.

To demonstrate how people come to embody neoliberal logic, Gago analyzes the strategies, relationships of production, and migrant networks that constitute La Salada market. Bolivian and Argentine microentrepreneurs founded La Salada in the 1990s, and the market ballooned as a center of attainable, popular consumption during the 2001 economic crisis. The market continues to grow—and with it, the webs of clandestine textile workshops, migrant workers, festivals, and autoconstructed neighborhoods reproduce themselves. Gago traces the perpetuation of neoliberal logic through the market itself and individuals’ strategies in chapter 1, the textile workshops and Bolivian labor networks that staff them in chapters 2 and 3, and the neighborhoods that house workers and workshops in chapters 4 and 5. The progression explores the evolution and redeployment of neoliberal strategies at the individual, firm, and community levels. Gago supports her analysis with reports,