

## Book review

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Falquet, Jules, (2020). *Imbricación. Mujeres, raza y clase en los movimientos sociales*. Buenos Aires, Editorial Madreselva.

This book by the sociologist Jules Falquet presents the history of the organization, the claims, and the theoretical reflections of different groups of women and feminist groups in the Americas, or Abya Yala.<sup>1</sup> The author invites us to understand how these groups, most of them racialized, have thought about and produced various theories about the multiple oppressions they experience, which has allowed them to conceptualize the articulation of social relations of sex, race, and class. Through six chapters that present six case studies, the author analyzes the opposition between class and sex interests. Her reference points are the experiences of female guerrillas in El Salvador; the attempt to unify women's and indigenous demands through the Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws in Mexico; the analysis of the various overlapping systems of oppression through the texts of Boston's Combahee River Collective; examination of the conceptualization of race and the anti-racist struggles in Brazil and the Dominican Republic, conceived on the basis of identity or as the construction of a new "Afro" cultural synthesis; and finally, continental feminist meetings and the nascence of the autonomous and decolonial strands of feminism.

Through a socio-historical and anthropological analysis, the author explains the specificity of the historical, political, and social context occupied by these groups that "resist the overlapping of injustices" (p.13), to stress how they are a product of a range of contexts and activist experiences (leftist, feminist, antiracist, etc.). Falquet also highlights the characteristics of each of the group members and their biographies, but not without locating their struggles in the rest of the Abya Yala and the world (given that they act in globalized contexts). The author shows us how theoretical concepts are generated based on certain practices, as well as how the social movements that have emerged question academic terms such as "intersectionality" and

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1 Translator's note: Abya Yala is the oldest known indigenous name of the territory we call the Americas.

“decoloniality” to propose concepts such as the “interweaving of social relations,” “Amerficanity,” and “community feminism.” Thus, this book succeeds in rethinking the idea of intersectionality beyond the Anglophone academia in which it arose, allowing us to apply the concept to contexts that are removed from the individualist liberal tradition that marks out its space in academia.

The book also presents groups of women to whom the author is close: they have formed part of her academic career, which included long-term research in their respective countries; she also participated in the groups as a feminist activist. Before discussing her cases studies, the author explains the epistemological and methodological foundations of her work and stresses her commitment to decolonial and French materialist feminist theories. Following Colette Guillaumin, the author revisits theories about the diversity of women’s movements, as well as the links between race, sex, and social class. Falquet also borrows from Nicole Claude Mathieu’s approach to thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality in different ways based on different eras and cultures.

The author begins the book with two chapters about women combatants organized within two mixed-gender armed movements: the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMNL; El Salvador) and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN; Mexico). Falquet stresses the process of organization process of the Salvadoran combatants and their awakening as political subjects during the revolution. The author explains how the FMNL women question not only social class relations but also their place, as women, in society and within the movement (and how they are accused of trying to divide the revolutionary cause). She also describes the influence of the combatants’ dual formation, by the Theology of Liberation and by leftist organizations, and how a process of ideological and organizational autonomy played out during the “time of peace,” allowing the reappearance of the Salvadoran feminist movement.

In the second chapter, Falquet analyzes the complexity of the strategies used by the EZLN’s women combatants as a group dominated by the interweaving social relations of sex, race, and class in their communities and in the mestizo world, within the framework of a neoliberal Mexico that promotes the privatization of land. The Zapatista women manage to get their claims supported and implemented by the organization, even though certain demands appear to run counter to “their cultures.” Thus, Falquet analyzes the changes between the two Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Laws (1993 and 1996), which seek to reconcile their interests as women but also as indigenous people. Falquet explains the content of the laws based on

the need for alliances between the combatants and their communities, in a context in which access to land is crucial to the group's survival.

In the third and fourth chapters, the author reflects on movements in which there is unity between sex and race, drawing on the theoretical contributions of Black feminism in the United States, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. First, she presents the Combahee River Collective (CRC; Boston) and its members, who were the first to formulate the idea of “overlapping systems of oppression” (racist, patriarchal, capitalist, and heterosexual), which must be combated simultaneously. Falquet provides a detailed explanation of the social and political context of the struggle for civil rights and black feminism, among other aspects, and the influence they have on the members of the CRC. She then presents an analysis of the group's social composition. The author explains the collective process and the actions that allowed the members to create a space in which “they can be all that they are, all in the same place” (p.118)<sup>2</sup> and to then put the theory into practice by seeking alliances with other groups. She also explains the concept of identity politics, noting that the collective's strategy of autonomy and coalition, “borne of their experiences as Black women” (p.144), has been undermined by being understood as such.

In regard to the formation, theories, and contributions of a sector of black feminism in Latin America and the Caribbean, the author underlines the finesse with which they analyze “Black” identity as a collective, historical, and personal task. At the same time, these movements allow culture to be seen as a political construct and an instrument for struggle. Employing the theories of the Brazilian scholar Lelia González and the Dominican Ochy Curiel, the author explains the importance to these movements of ensuring that the struggle “becomes black”—in contexts in which racism by denial and mestizaje prevail—by making visible the contributions of Afro-descendants in the continent. She also explores the concept of *Amefricanity* (González, 1988) and the spiritual/political/ethical dimension that Black feminism proffers, which allows non-Western figures of power and history to be referents (Yoruba, Fon, or Ewé) and thus permits the development of an alternative episteme.

The last two chapters of the book address groups composed exclusively of women with different “race and class” positions. The fifth chapter presents the formation of the “feminism of the popular sectors” through a historical review of the Latin American and Caribbean continental feminist meetings

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2 All translations from Spanish are by *Apuntes*.

since the 1980s, as well as the NGOification and institutionalization of a sector of feminism. The author expounds on “the feminism of the popular sectors, which seeks to unite an analysis of “sex and class,” the weight of the leftist inheritance on activists, and the shift of this current toward an “inclusion of poor women” (p.203). Falquet also explains that the continental feminist meetings take place in a context of social and political changes and stresses the impact of neoliberal globalization on the movement by way of UN conferences (Mexico, Beijing, etc.), which will result in the social ascent of certain members to self-proclaimed spokespersons of these spaces. The modes of financing are shifting to the international private sector and to alliances, which results in the institutionalization and professionalization of part of feminism.

The final chapter outlines the history and the theoretical contributions of the autonomous and decolonial feminist movement, which has laid the foundations of counter-hegemonic feminist and lesbian thought, as well as analysis of the interweaving of social relations, through the incorporation of the anticolonial perspective. Falquet explains the collective dimension of the production of analysis, its links with concrete practice in social movements, the alliances these movements forge, and their criticism of “development” and its links with neoliberalism. This positions itself against the “NGOizing” branch of feminism, and also questions the concept of “the neoliberal gender.” To explain the analysis of the group (given its diversity, its lack of visibility, and its limited documentation), the author returns to the analysis of feminists “of the South” such as Julieta Paredes and Ochy Curiel, as well as the region’s major groups: “Las Cómplices,” “Próximas” and “Mujeres Creando,” as well as the GLEFAS study group.

In the epilogue, the author attempts to synthesize the history and theoretical contributions of each of these groups, to culminate in the proposal to “interweave structural social power relations” as an alternative to the US (and more individual) concept of intersectionality. In so doing, Falquet shows us how the Abya Yala represents a space of epistemic privilege for analyzing the transformations in capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and social struggles through critical “inside” perspectives that interweave practice and theory. Thus, the book urges us to understand the different ways of thinking and theorizing in relation to the interweaving of social relations.

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