

RESEÑA

Silvia Bermúdez & Roberta Johnson eds.

A New History of Iberian Feminism

University of Toronto Press, 2018

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The breadth and depth of *A New History of Iberian Feminisms*, edited by Silvia Bermúdez and Roberta Johnson, is remarkable. This groundbreaking volume decenters traditional, nationalist histories of feminism by exploring feminist thought and its social movements throughout the Iberian peninsula: Spain, Portugal, Galicia, Cataluña, and the Basque country. Whereas each of the six sections of the volume includes essays about the Spanish state's regional autonomies, a most welcome and altogether noteworthy endeavor, the significant –and enlightening– inclusion of Portugal reconfigures the disciplinary terrain by acknowledging the “Iberian turn’s” epistemological proposal that the peninsula be viewed as a whole. The historical scope of the book is also groundbreaking for its wide-ranging historical arc. It begins with the 18th century, an often overlooked period, and ends not only with the present, but also with Fina Birulés’ forward-looking and incisive “Epilogue” that projects Iberia’s feminisms into the future. Regrettably, the briefness of this review precludes summarizing the volume’s thirty-seven essays, penned by thirty renown feminist scholars. Suffice it to say that the essays are consistently excellent. Each finely conceived and written piece admirably synthesizes the current research on its topic and provides invaluable insights.

Thorough historical overviews introduce the six parts of the book, arranged according to a timeline that corresponds to the periods used by Iberian historiographers: the age of Enlightenment; the long nineteenth century; the Spanish and Portuguese Republics (1910-1939); the dictatorships of Oliveira de Salazar and Franco; the transition to democracy; and the period from 1996 to the present. Each part includes chapters that present the specificities of each region’s feminist social movements, including organizations and key leaders, along with the polemics that shaped feminist thought and activism not only throughout the peninsula but, also, within Western feminist ideology. While there is great consistency regarding the information produced in each section, what is truly remarkable about this hybrid book –part anthology and part encyclopedia– is that the editors have intelligently created significant thematic connections between the periods and amongst the individual chapters. These linkages provide an overarching historical perspective that offer the reader insights into both the continuities and ruptures of feminist thinking over the course of three and a half centuries. The most salient linkage is the debate surrounding what has been nominated “equality” and “difference” feminism, the two very different ways of theorizing gender that have been instrumental to the ways feminist theoreticians and activists have elaborated their political platforms and demands. This theoretical difference, moreover, shaped the manner in which they struggled against the dominant gender ideology and their strategies for liberation from gender inequality in realms such as education, the law, politics, suffrage, their bodies, and heteronormative sexualities.

Part I, coordinated by Catherine M. Jaffe, Elizabeth Franklin Lewis, and Part II, coordinated by Christine Arkininstall and the late Maryellen Bieder, cover the 18th and 19th centuries highlighting the polemics undertaken by writing women that contested the dominant gendered discourse, that is to say, debates about notions of womanhood, femininity, and masculinity. Because feminism was yet to be embodied as a social and/or political movement, these chapters mostly focus on the public profile of those women authors who resisted and strategically negotiated the dominant gender ideology, and spoke out for women’s rights in their literary and essayistic production. Thus, Parts I and II revolve mostly around the so-called “woman question” and its inscription in texts written by women authors providing the reader with a splendid synthesis of the groundbreaking scholarship that has been undertaken by feminist historians and literary critics during the past thirty years. For readers unacquainted with the formidable female authors of the 18th and 19th

centuries, these two parts of the volume serve as an introduction to the feminist perspectives and writings of Josefa Amar y Borbón, Cecilia Böhl de Faber (*Fernán Caballero*), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Carolina Coronado, Concepción Arenal, Josefa Massanés Dalmau, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Rosario de Acuña, and Concepción Gimeno de Flaquer. Additionally, two chapters present the development of the Spanish feminist press between 1822 and 1866 and the transatlantic literary networks of women writers.

Part III, coordinated by Roberta Johnson, explores Portuguese feminist thought in the early decades of the twentieth century, catalogues the first-wave feminist groups organized in Castilian-, Catalan-, and Galician-speaking Spain, and highlights those women writers who contributed to the elaboration of a feminist discourse between 1910 and 1939. This section underscores the diverse ways in which so-called “first wave feminists” (Margarita Nelken, Clara Campoamor, María Martínez Sierra, Carmen Burgos, Federica Montseny, and Dolores Ibárruri) cast their feminist gaze on women’s unequal condition and contested it through their writing and activism.

Part IV, coordinated by Roberta Johnson, is an overview of Iberian feminisms in the age of dictatorship. While several essays explore feminist writing in Spain and Portugal, others focus on the ways in which Galician, Catalan, and Basque women resisted Franco’s dictatorship, an authoritarian regime that destroyed the totality of rights won by women during the Spanish and Portuguese Republican governments between 1910 and 1939.

In Part V, coordinated by Silvia Bermúdez, the reader witnesses the emergence and blossoming of second-wave feminisms on the post-dictatorship Iberian peninsula and its chapters trace their diverse developments within individual regions. In these sections, the literary production of feminist authors recedes into the background giving way to insightful analyses of the manner in which the on-going polemic between difference and equality feminisms shaped feminist social movements and the theoretization of gender, women, their bodies, and sexualities. Signaling a major political transition beginning in 1996, Part VI, also coordinated by Silvia Bermúdez, demonstrates the important shift with regard to the issues that were undertaken by so-called post-feminism and its activists: domestic violence, abortion rights, gender equality, lesbian and queer identities, which took center stage in Spain and Portugal leaving behind issues of political representation.

The brevity of this review cannot do proper justice to this important volume nor fully underline its significance for the study of the histories of Iberian feminisms. It will become, if it hasn’t already, an indispensable tool not only for students of feminism, but also for those who seek to understand the ways in which gender ideology has shaped our modern world and how feminisms’ opposition to it, both as theory and practice, has reshaped it for the betterment of humankind.