

Women of the Americas: The Feminization of Politics and the Politization of the Intimate

The ascendance of Donald Trump to the American presidency in 2017 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brasil the following year have provoked a considerable amount of scrutiny, in part because both of these men overtly employ a discourse that is at the same time misogynistic and anti-LGBTIQ+. Where North and South America have often been thought of as politically, culturally, and economically distinct spaces, they have recently been seen as reflecting the same reactionary politics. This issue of the French, multi-disciplinary journal *Textes & Contextes* hopes to push this thinking further in looking at the politicization of women during the twentieth century, in particular how the private sphere has been mobilized by women to give them greater access to the public and political spheres.

Women have never been as present in elected office as they are now. In several Latin American countries, the last decade has been marked by the feminization of the various national congresses and has witnessed the election of several women to the highest offices in their respective countries. In North America, the feminization of the political world has likewise progressed: the 116th Congress of the United States, elected in 2018, counts more women in its ranks than ever before, a significant number of whom come from economically, socially, and culturally diverse backgrounds.¹ In Canada, since the election of Justin Trudeau in 2015, he has set an example to the rest of the world by working with a gender-balanced cabinet, including many minority women.

Women's social capital differs from that of traditional elites: wielding their political power has been defined less by their relatively recent arrival to political office and more by their ability to mobilize around issues that have not always been integral to the larger electoral issues of the nation. The participation of women of every origin in large political events that have structured history on the continents (colonial conflicts, wars for independence, civil wars) is documented historically and speaks to women's engagement in the elaboration of their respective countries national projects. Yet, access to the public sphere has not been neutral as gender norms have exerted tremendous pressure on the construction of the modern state, and social contract theories have excluded women from politics and relegated them to the private sphere.² The most common way for women to access the public sphere, and the political sphere even more so, has been to assume a role based on a categorical construction of feminine identity

¹ *The New York Times* and *Quartz* note that the identities of these "first-ever candidates" were often diverse and could be overlapping: a Somali-American and a Palestinian-American were firsts in terms of their ethnic identities, but both also represent the first women of the Muslim faith to be elected to national office; two Native American women, one of whom is the first openly gay congressional representative from her state; the 2018 election also saw the youngest women in the nation's history elected to office. Herman, Elizabeth and Celeste Sloman. "Redefining Representation: The Women of the 116th Congress." *The New York Times*, 14 Jan. 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/14/us/politics/women-of-the-116th-congress.html>; Timmons, Heather. "History was made during the midterms as the US elected a number of 'firsts.'" *Quartz*, 7 Nov. 2018. <https://qz.com/1453553/election-history-made-with-first-gay-governor-muslim-congresswomen/>.

² Pateman, Carole. *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988..

grounded in maternity³ and giving credence to masculine norms in their private lives and political practices. In the 1960s, the feminist movements proclaimed “The personal is political,” pointing out the numerous inherent inequalities that sprung from the separation of the public and private spheres and their hierarchization.⁴ Since then, every form of interpersonal relationships has come under examination as a site in which gender power dynamics are at play. The very existence of a private sphere has been questioned because even this most intimate realm has not escaped meddling politics that have sought to control intimacy and more generally impose gender identity norms on individuals.

Throughout the twentieth century, then, we can see women’s organizations unifying to revendicate new rights, albeit on different timelines depending on the country and the issue. By and large, the most visible groups of women have tended to be those led by middle-, upper-middle-, and upper-class, white women and have expressed their corresponding worldviews. Little by little, however, other discourses have asserted themselves in the varying feminist fields. Black feminism appeared in the United States at the end of the 1960s in reaction to sexism within groups associated with the Black Power movement and as a consequence of an absence in the feminist movement, which was mostly white, to take African-American women’s concerns into account. This opened up thinking to the concept of intersectionality in the 1980s. Today, it is precisely this line of thought that feeds into, on the one hand, the feminist, decolonial, Latin-American thinking advanced by theoreticians such as Rita Segato, María Lugones, and Ochy Curiel and, on the other hand, the concrete practices seen in Bolivian *feminismo comunitario* and the movement of Zapatista women in Mexico.⁵

In the last few years, the American continents have witnessed a tremendous groundswell in social feminist movements denouncing gender-based violence as well as the difficulty for the victims to speak out and be heard because of cultural, social, and economic norms that maintain women in a subordinate position and feed into the impunity and the reproduction of this violence. Since 2015, many Latin and South American nations have experienced an unprecedented wave of activism as women have mobilized against sexual and domestic violence and for abortion rights. Born in Argentina after the murder of a woman, *#Niunamenos* spread rapidly to Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela where women and sexual minorities rose to denounce femicide and the multiple forms of violence inflicted on women and sexual minorities as well as public indifference to these problems.⁶ Since, we have seen *#Vivasnosqueremos* and *#NoEstamosSolos* emerge as

³ Molyneux, Maxine. “Mobilization without Emancipation. Women’s Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua”. *Feminist Studies*, 1985, Vol. 11, n°. 2, pp. 227-254.

⁴ Shulamith Firestone et Anne Koedt, Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation, New York: Radical Feminist, 1970.

⁵ See for example Segato, Rita. “La norma y el sexo. Frente estatal, patriarcado, desposesión, colonialidad”, in Karina Bidaseca. *Genealogías críticas de la colonialidad en América Latina, África, Oriente*, Buenos Aires, CLACSO. 2016; Lugones, María. “Toward a decolonial feminism.” *Hypatia*, 2010, vol.25 n°4, p.742-759; Curiel, Ochy and Maria Galindo. *Descolonización y despatriarcalización de y desde los feminismos de Abya Yala*, ACSUR- Las Segovias, 2015.

⁶ Boesten, Jelke. “Ni una menos Stares Down Conservative Reaction/ Ni una menos enfrenta una reacción conservadora.” *NACLA*. 8 May 2018. <https://nacla.org/news/2018/07/03/ni-una-menos-stares-down-conservative-reaction-ni-una-menos-enfrenta-una-reacci%C3%B3n>.

well. Initiated in the United States in 2017, *#MeToo* gave voice to women who had experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape. All of these movements have been characterized by their desire to think about the collective experience which results from the individual experience of different forms of violence in order to bring attention to the ways in which patriarchal culture is interwoven with the structural oppression of women and sexual minorities. Additionally, this activism has taken on international dimensions via New Information and Communication Technologies, which have facilitated the emergence of transnational networks of solidarity and given these issues visibility.

If the relationship between the intimate and identity politics can be seen in the slogans and discourse of activists, it can also be read in sources that have been given less attention or neglected all together⁷ because of their gendered nature; these sources are considered less important politically or less scientifically-based because they speak of the “feminine.” From diaries to autobiographies, from letters to posts on social media, the numerous ego-documents available take on a political dimension in their evocation of intimacy and the conflicts they attest to between lived identities and imposed gender norms. This issue of *Textes & Contextes* (15.2) scheduled to appear in November 2020, thus, hopes to mobilize a variety of social science scholarship and/or research from the humanities looking to explore the comparisons and contrasts between intimacy/intimacies and identity politics and the appropriation of these two concepts by Latin-American women and/or North American women since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Abstracts of 300 to 500 words in French, English, or Spanish must be sent by September 15, 2019 to the guest editors, Christen Bryson, Elodie Gamache, Olivier Maheo et Anne-Claire Sanz-Gavillon, at the following address: femmesameriques@gmail.com

The abstract should include the article’s provisional title and 5 to 6 key words as well as a short biographic presentation of the author.

Proposals will be selected, and their authors notified no later than October 30, 2019.

Completed articles, not exceeding 10,000 words, must be received by February 15, 2020 for peer review.

Submissions must follow the in-house style guide: <https://preo.u-bourgogne.fr/textesetcontextes/index.php?id=1719>

⁷ Pastinelli, Madeleine. « Pour en finir avec l’ethnographie du virtuel ! Des enjeux méthodologiques de l’enquête de terrain en ligne », *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, 2011, vol. 35, n° 1-2, p. 35-52.