

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Resources for Reform: Oil and Neoliberalism in Argentina by Elana Shever

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Women's Party, strictly controlled by Evita Perón, Peronism won the elections, and women not only voted for the first time in Argentine history but were also elected for the first time to Congress. In an ironic twist, feminists, who had been advocating for these rights for five decades, withdrew their support for the suffrage law on the basis of their opposition to the Peronist government. As Hammond points out, the division between the suffragists and Peronists lay on the one hand with party politics, as feminists were all members of parties that opposed Peronism from its beginnings. On the other hand, the antagonism also emerged from Perón's social division between the people and 'the oligarchs', with suffragists being considered among the latter and consequently as enemies of the *descamisados*. Ultimately, it was Peronism's allure among the working classes, with Perón providing for material benefits while Evita created a personal and solid bond with working-class women, that explains, according to Hammond, the triumph of Peronism over feminism on the issue of engendering extensive support for political rights. Hammond argues that eventually, while the emergence of a strong leader such as Perón, who co-opted the feminist cause and discourse, explicates the timing of suffrage in Argentina, it is the existence of suffrage advocates who had already paved the way for such a claim that explains Peronism's embrace of the cause in the first place.

This book will appeal to both students and specialists working on women and Latin American social and political history. Although feminism in Argentina is a well-research topic, this work provides a good synthesis of the history of the suffrage movement and, specifically, of its conflictive relationship with Peronism. Political participation, however, was one of the many claims of the women's movement, and the reader would at times expect a deeper study of feminist goals that were intrinsically bonded to suffrage, such as efforts to promote public health and education. Overall, Hammond's study is very effective in analysing the relationship between political movements and suffragist organisations, providing a skilful examination of the reasons behind granting female political rights. As such, it is a welcome contribution to Argentine women's history.

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Elana Shever, *Resources for Reform: Oil and Neoliberalism in Argentina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. xiii + 231, \$70.00 hb, \$22.95 pb and e-book.

In April 2012, Argentine president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner announced the expropriation of the assets of the Spanish oil multinational Repsol owned in the Argentine firm Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF). This move shocked the international business community and caused a diplomatic row between Argentina and Spain, while left-wing politicians in other Latin American countries celebrated the Argentine government's action. The Argentine government referred to the expropriation as the 'recovery' of Argentine oil resources, denoting the fact that from 1922 (the year in which YPF was established) until its privatisation in 1993 by President Carlos Menem, YPF had been a state-owned enterprise. YPF was not just one more of the many Latin American state-owned enterprises, however. It was the first vertically integrated state-owned company in the non-communist world, and its privatisation was one of the largest operations of its kind in history. This means that

the move made by President Fernández de Kirchner was not only economically important but also highly symbolic.

In her book *Resources for Reform*, Elana Shever (who teaches at Colgate University) examines how societies adapt to neoliberal policies by studying the case of YPF's employees and the communities that had been shaped for decades by the firm's operations after the privatisation. The book shows how those groups traditionally considered the 'victims' of neoliberal policies played a role in consolidating this set of policies by adopting its logic and language. Shever conducted extensive fieldwork in the oil towns of Argentine Patagonia and in shanty towns surrounding the Dock Sud refinery in Buenos Aires. Her interviews included employees, former employees, leaders of former employees' organisations and people in the community who had never worked for YPF but were always affected by its operations. In addition, she interviewed individuals from management consulting firms in charge of facilitating the transition to privatisation.

Shever shows the complexities of the transition process in the Patagonia oil towns, places where for decades YPF built a paternalistic system in which the employees assumed that their hard work and loyalty to the firm were always going to be rewarded with stability and economic security for themselves and their families. In fact, Shever shows how both in terms of discourse and action YPF created a sense of belonging of all workers to what was considered a 'family'. This, naturally, also created a strong sense of kinship among YPF workers (chapter 1). Shever argues that YPF's privatisation did not immediately end this perception among workers. One of the ways by which the Argentine government sought to decrease hostility against privatisation (particularly among those workers who were going to be laid off as part of the process) was through the organisation of start-ups (or *emprendimientos*) among former YPF employees who would be subcontracted by the privatised firm. Shever shows that those working for these *emprendimientos* initially assumed YPF was going to have the same paternalistic relationship with them that it had when they worked for the company. In fact, the author argues, the first contracts between YPF and the *emprendimientos* were signed assuming this kinship relationship, something that led some *emprendimientos* to sign contracts that were not as favourable as they could have been had the *emprendimientos* assumed a different type of relationship with YPF. Even within the *emprendimientos* themselves, Shever shows how managers used the same language of 'family relationships' and kinship previously used when YPF belonged to the state. Obviously, Repsol's management did not have any interest in keeping this type of relationship and dealt with the *emprendimientos* as simple business partners. Once the *emprendimientos* realised things were not going to be as they were before, they organised themselves to confront the new YPF using the language and training learned from management consultants previously hired to facilitate YPF's former employees' creation and running of the *emprendimientos*. This included using terms and strategies learned from articles in the *Harvard Business Review*, taught to them by the management consultants (chapter 2). Shever interprets this process as evidence of how the former employees of a state-owned enterprise adopted neoliberal language and methods, eventually reinforcing neoliberalism.

Shever finds a similar adoption to neoliberalism in her study of the demonstrations against energy prices in 2005. According to her analysis, the demonstrators' demands show an adoption and acceptance of the discourse developed by Menem's finance minister Domingo Cavallo, who explicitly redefined what a 'public company' meant, from its traditional meaning of a state-owned company into a company owned

by stockholders. Cavallo promoted this idea (and the privatisations that it entailed) by using the same language previously used by those opposing the military dictatorship of the 1970s. Cavallo defended privatisations as a way to ‘democratise’ the Argentine economy through ‘popular ownership’ – that is, stock ownership – of former state-owned companies. Shever shows how these demonstrators used Cavallo’s language, demanding a stake in the private company’s profits (chapters 1 and 2).

Shever also shows how the Argentine population adopted neoliberal ideology when analysing President Néstor Kirchner’s call for a boycott of Shell in 2005. According to Shever, the fact that the boycott aimed to benefit a privatised company and that it used the language of ‘consumer democracy’ (consistent with traditional Peronism) shows that the population had accepted basic neoliberal notions of citizenship through consumption and the fact that privatisation was there to stay (chapter 3). She uses a similar rationale to understand why communities in shanty towns accepted and adopted projects designed by Shell as part of the firm’s corporate social responsibility programmes (chapter 4).

This is a provocative study that might generate controversy. For instance, it is clear that most strategies used by former employees or shanty town communities were developed under the framework of an economy that had been dramatically changed under Menem’s neoliberal reforms. It is clear that most of the actors studied by Shever did not have much of a choice and needed to develop survival strategies under the existing system. However, we also need to take into account that while they chose to operate within the system, they also supported political movements (like the one led by the Kirchners themselves) that wanted to push back some of the neoliberal reforms. Some readers might also have reservations about the author’s choice of using the Spanish word *neoliberalismo* to refer to the neoliberal reforms, a move the author justifies as preserving the domestic specificities of this project – yet insisting too much on the home-grown character of neoliberalismo runs the risk of minimising the key role played by Argentina in the global turn toward neoliberal policies.

In a similar manner, the book sometimes assumes the novelty of popular responses to crises in the energy sector. For example, in the opening paragraph the author describes a Buenos Aires demonstration over oil prices to assert that ‘debates over oil politics now have spread far beyond boardrooms and courtrooms to public plazas, residential neighbourhoods, and even shanty settlements’ (p. 4). And yet poor people in most of the world have long been aware that increases in energy prices will translate into higher transportation costs, which will in turn affect food prices, public transportation prices and so on; likewise, demonstrations against energy price hikes had taken place decades before neoliberalism. Finally, it is worth noting the absence of the most important recent book on YPF’s history, Nicolás Gadano’s *Historia del petróleo en la Argentina* (Edhasa, 2006), which provides detailed explanations of most processes studied by Shever.

*Resources for Reform* is a highly interesting study that will very likely become an obligatory reference for scholars studying the effects of privatisation policies in Latin America and those interested in understanding the framework of Argentina’s current oil policy. Its dynamic style makes it accessible to both graduate and undergraduate students.

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