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Review / Reseña

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Women, Children and State Medical Programs in Ecuador 1895-1950

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Kim Clark's new book, *Gender, State and Medicine in Highland Ecuador: Modernizing Women, Modernizing the State: 1895-1950* is a groundbreaking contribution to the study of gender and state modernization. Based on extensive archival research which includes documents from rarely researched records, Clark chose topics that needed to be studied such as child protection programs, sexuality, midwifery and nursing. All of these topics are examined within the gendered experiences of the state formation at the very end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twenty-century.

The subtitle, “Modernizing Women, Modernizing the State,” has two connotations. On one hand, it refers to the state projects that were geared to modernizing women’s behavior and the possibilities that were opened to them. On the other hand, it emphasizes that women, as active participants, were either already or were becoming modernizers. As Clark points out “[i]t was not so much that women gained new educational opportunities in Quito in the early twentieth century but that women of a specific age group did so.” Therefore, “Their actions propelled social change.”(3) This circumstance happened because state projects, which were contested, changed contexts so people could take actions. And those actions needed “personal sacrifices, courage and sheer stubbornness.” Therefore, these projects were the product of “human agency and struggle” (3).

Aside from well-known women, such as Matilde Hidalgo de Procel, Luisa Gómez de la Torre or Rosa Stacey, Clark examines the experiences of other women, who had some common elements. These women were literate, came from middle classes, were more likely to be Liberal/secular, some of them were illegitimate, and sometimes they had male protectors. The fact that they had these characteristics made them interested in taking advantage of state projects even if that meant social disapproval. After all, these females were caught between privileged and marginal spaces and needed to work to achieve a niche in society.

Because Clark has collected information from less consulted archives such as the Archivo de la Asistencia Pública: Museo Nacional de la Medicina, Archivo de la Escuela Nacional de Enfermeras, Archivo del Hospital San Juan de Dios, Archivo del Servicio de Sanidad, among others, she was able to analyze innovative data that uncovers common women who were part of these social transformations.

This book is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One, “Gendered Experiences and State Formations in Highland Ecuador,” is an introduction that explains the historical setting of this study. The starting point is the Liberal Revolution that occurred in 1895, which was a crucial event that changed the power of the State. The emergence of a coastal agro-export and commercial elites created new ways of conceiving of the State. This dominant group, interested in modernizing the economy,

also fostered the opening up of the economy. The Catholic Church lost its prominence in areas such as education and welfare establishments, and its control over the civil registry and marriage, and death records. These Liberal groups stayed in power until the *Revolución Juliana*, led by mid-ranking military officers and middle class professionals in 1925. The new dominant groups sought reforms that included the establishment of a Central Bank, the reorganization of the Servicio de Sanidad Pública, the creation of a Labor code, and the institutionalization of female suffrage. The Great Depression did not help the Ecuadorian economic and political stability. Many different heads of State occupied the Presidential offices. In the 1930s, classic populism emerged with the prominent figure of Velasco Ibarra, who came back to power with another revolution, *La Gloriosa* (1944), which aimed to bring together several sectors of the society, after Ecuador lost half of its territory in 1942. In the late 1940s, the banana boom marked a period of stability until the beginning of 1960s. However, this book ends in 1950 during Galo Plaza presidency. It would have been more interesting to either have finished the book at the end of the Plaza government (1952) or continued until Camilo Ponce's presidency to examine the changes or continuities of these state projects during this stable democratic period (1948-1960).

The book engages theoretical concepts such as bio-politics, reproductive governance, and forms of capital, and discusses themes like state practices, health issues, morality, illegitimacy and women's lives. Moreover, as an anthropologist, the author also shifts between an etic (patterns in evidence) and emic (people's own experiences and understandings) approach.

The second chapter examines child health and welfare and how mothers acted as key actors while the State engaged in a modernization process. The two state institutions were significant in these area were the Junta de Beneficencia and the Servicio de Sanidad. The first one was associated with establishments for the destitute poor and the mentally ill as well as orphanages. The second institution managed preventive medicine by organizing campaigns against infectious diseases. There were also private establishments such as La Sociedad de Gota de Leche and Sociedad

Protectora de la Infancia. The chapter is full of stories of mothers who sought help in child welfare programs. One of the conclusions is that medical doctors emphasized that the mother, not the father, was responsible for the well-being of their children. Therefore, the state engaged in campaigns of awareness and the mothers began to turn to the state for health assistance. However, there were other voices, such as the Dr. Antonio Bastidas', who "argue[d] forcefully that the father and mother contributed equally to the biological make-up of the child" (77). Therefore, these arguments, as Clark points out, could reorient the assumption that children were closer to mothers than fathers.

The third chapter discusses how the state controlled prostitution and venereal diseases and how and why women engaged in this situation. A very interesting insight was that Ecuador saw the control of prostitution as matter of medical concern as opposed to a moral danger. This was a consequence of Ecuador engaging late in control policies. The reasons why women engaged in prostitution included: "illiteracy, lack of economic opportunities and rejection by their parents or by the respectable society if they ever faltered in their moral (that is sexual) conduct (109). Once they entered this field, some of them used prostitution to support themselves and their families; for others, this productive activity was temporary. Probably most of them sought relationships with men who were willing to support them without holding their past against them. While this chapter explains how the State provided some laws and education to protect this type of women's labor, it could have also dealt with the type of "clients" these women served.

The fourth and fifth chapters are intertwined. The first one analyses midwifery, whereas the second deals with nursing. The field of midwifery (in Spanish *obstetricia*), attracted women who were either single, widowed or divorced. According to the statistics (120), most of them were "socially marginalized" either by illegitimate birth or by being orphans or widows, therefore, the author argues they might be more sensitive to unwanted pregnancies. Clark found a case of Carmela Granja, who did not have a midwifery degree, but was known for practicing abortions. What makes this case, interesting is the fact that there were several attempts to send this

woman to jail. She was able to escape jail by threatening to spread those who used her services. Moreover, she stated “no elite family in Quito could escape scandal, if this lists were made public” (139). Another noteworthy finding is, because these midwives or *obstetrices* usually assisted in childbirth at home, they worked independently rather than as nurses who worked under the supervision of a physician. The independence of the midwives produced an apparent tension between midwives and doctors. The State also played a contradictory role with regards to midwives. On one hand, the State provided midwives with work, and on the other hand, it monitored their work and behavior. Midwives were expected to assist in at least one hundred deliveries and have legal proof of good conduct prior to graduation. This fact is more noticeable when compared to requirements for medical students, which included the assistance at six deliveries to obtain medical license. Therefore, I wonder if physicians were content sending midwives abortions requests, as they might not have been interested in performing them because they were illegal. As intriguing as the relationship between medical doctors and midwives is, it clearly merited further study.

The last chapter analyzes the transformation of Ecuadorian nursing, a role that had been occupied by *Hermanas de la Caridad*. As with midwives, the Nursing School required professional nurses’ students to be single, but the restrictions were more severe. They could not have children or be divorced. They also had to have a proper moral behavior. Because the Nursing school was affiliated with the US Army, many students acquired an almost military style discipline in their work. The hierarchy has presented as part of a strict adherence to the authority of medical doctors. Nurses followed rules regarding how to behave, how to interact, and even how to think. Moreover, they could not date medical students, flirt, or laugh with them. All these rules were geared to increase their self-esteem, underscore their professional status, and divert attention from them as sexual beings. However, if these rules were applied uniformly, how do we explain the numerous marriages between physicians and nurses?

Several common themes run thought-out all the chapters, including morality, illegitimacy, state training, and work. All of these chapters, then,

have the voices of women who were willing to engage in these new economic activities in order to be productive citizens. Even though women experienced different types of work, they saw the state as a father figure which provided a substitute for would be male supporters.

Clark's fascinating analysis through the eyes of females, such as the midwife Consuelo Rueda, the nurse and professor Ligia Gomezjurado as well as physicians who supported their professional training such as Isidro Ayora, Carlos Andrade Marin or Carlos Miño, provides an educational study of the development of these women's work.