

Patricia Richards. *Pobladoras, Indígenas, and the State: Difference, Equality, and Women's Rights in Chile*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8135-3422-4.

Pobladoras, Indígenas, and the State studies the relationship between the Chilean state and women in social movements. More concretely, Patricia Richards analyzes the interactions between the gender-equality institution called the National Women's Service (*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*, SERNAM) and indigenous Mapuche women and *pobladoras*. These are women who have mobilized in poor neighborhoods and shantytowns (*poblaciones*) in order to improve the conditions in which they and their families live. *Pobladoras* and Mapuche women assert that their priorities are basically absent in the discourse and policy making of SERNAM. SERNAM's definitions of women's interests are usually made from the point of view of women who are middle class, educated and light-skinned. The marked class differences that separate SERNAM bureaucrats from *pobladoras*, the absence of *pobladoras* in the SERNAM decision-making process and the fact that SERNAM policies have to be in line with the neoliberal economic and social policies of the Government as a whole has meant that SERNAM officials have not adequately satisfied *pobladoras'* demands. Similarly, Chilean femocrats have generally not addressed Mapuche women's concerns, and have not integrated Mapuche women into the SERNAM decision-making mechanisms. Furthermore, SERNAM policies have to fit with the general policies of the Chilean state that have scarcely recognized the rights of indigenous peoples, including that of self-determination.

At least two reasons make this book an outstanding contribution to the literature on gender and the state: the importance of the topic, and the *finesse* of

the analysis. Richards' work fills an important gap in the literature on social movements. Some social movement scholars have paid serious attention to the internal heterogeneity of the women's movement in various countries. However, the ways in which the state deals with such internal diversity has hardly been researched. This topic is of great importance because many strands of the women's movement advance their demands at the state and see the satisfaction of these demands as a necessary step to improve women's lives.

With respect to the *finesse* of the analysis, Richards follows the symbolic interactionist exhortation of trying to understand how the actors studied make sense of their own behaviors and those of the others. Richards' descriptions of the actions and thoughts of SERNAM officials, *pobladoras* and Mapuche women are rich, nuanced and well balanced. Only scholars with a high capacity to listen and understand others are able to elaborate empirical descriptions and analyses as exact, sophisticated and brilliant as the ones contained in this book.

One aspect of this book is debatable. The author makes strong and numerous criticisms of SERNAM's discourses and actions toward *pobladoras* and Mapuche women. By contrast, she seldom criticizes the discourses and actions of working-class *pobladoras* and indigenous Mapuche women toward SERNAM. She recognizes that it is impossible for the current Chilean state to appropriately satisfy *pobladoras'* demands because these necessarily imply a radical income redistribution in Chilean society – something that is not included in the electoral platforms of any of the main political parties. Similar problems are evident in the claims advanced by the Mapuche women because these are focused largely on the recognition of a Mapuche right to self-determination. And yet, the exercise of this right may perhaps undermine the very existence of this indigenous people within the Chilean state altogether. The SERNAM mandate is not to formulate general economic and social policies or to draw-up the state's approach to indigenous peoples, but to insert gender-equality goals into the policy making of all state units. Questions need to be raised, therefore, about the extent to which the criticism of SERNAM itself is justified. SERNAM may well be unable to deal with the problems faced by Mapuche women and *pobladoras*, but this has more to do with the wider political and economic context within which the organization operates.

In brief, because of the importance of the topic, the skillful analysis and the lines fruitfully opened for future research, *Pobladoras, Indígenas, and the State* is a very welcome, necessary and first-class addition to the literature of gender and the state. This book will be of great value not only for Latin Americanists, but also for any social science scholars interested in the ways in which the state deals with different groups of women mobilized in society.

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