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Republican Latin America

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## *Love, Gender, and Family in Late Colonial and Early Republican Latin America*

Sarah C. Chambers. *Families in War and Peace: Chile from Colony to Nation*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015. ix + 288 pp.; ISBN 978-0-8223-5898-5 (cl); ISBN 978-0-8223-5883-1 (pb).

Guiomar Dueñas-Vargas. *Of Love and Other Passions: Elites, Politics, and Family in Bogotá, Colombia, 1778–1870*. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 2015. ix + 280 pp.; ISBN 978-0-8263-5585-0 (cl).

Catherine Komisaruk. *Labor and Love in Guatemala: The Eve of Independence*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013. ix + 360 pp.; ISBN 978-0-8047-5704-1 (cl).

### **Laura Shelton**

Recent scholarship exploring the Wars of Independence and the emergence of republican governance has transformed our thinking about the significance of this period for race, class, and gender relations as well as for the persistence of a patriarchal colonial order. In earlier scholarship, the era received scant attention beyond those interested in national political history and biographies of military leaders of the Wars of Independence. If social and cultural historians mined the material and cultural underpinnings of rebellion and revolution, particularly in Mexico, their work rarely drew attention to gender as a constitutive force in historical change.<sup>1</sup> Authors Sarah Chambers, Guiomar Dueñas-Vargas, and Catherine Komisaruk offer a fresh perspective on how the reconstitution of patriarchal authority at the level of the family had profound implications for new republican political landscapes in three countries: Chile, Colombia, and Guatemala. The authors also encourage a reconsideration of what it means to study history from the “bottom-up” and reshape our understanding of elites’ roles in state-building processes. Two of the authors, Chambers and Dueñas-Vargas, provide new insights into how elites participated in the tumultuous events of revolution by focusing on the intimate lives of the most prominent families of Chile and Colombia. The third author, Komisaruk centers her research on plebeians in urban Guatemala and, in the process, makes a compelling case for “Hispanicization” as the root of change in a country long associated with persistent indigenous identities. For Komisaruk, the term refers to indigenous and African adaptations to Spanish language, religion, and

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other cultural practices, and she views the process as deeply entangled with labor recruitment and work.

Each author also addresses the inevitable issues of continuity and change that arise in any study of this politically turbulent period, and they all do so in ways that are new and insightful. Komisaruk emphasizes continuity and argues that new legislation and legal and educational reforms associated with the republican era ultimately have their roots in the daily lives and practices of the colonial era. Chambers asks if scholars have over-emphasized continuity in patriarchal systems as the region transitioned from colonial to republican rule. In her exploration of the tensions between parental obligations and patriarchal authority during the upheavals of the independence war, for example, she finds new emphasis on protecting dependents and reinforcing the obligations of household heads. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the courts and the legislature again shifted their focus to reinforcing the authority of family patriarchs. Like Chambers, Dueñas-Vargas highlights change as she uses intimate correspondence to explore the transition to companionate marriage among New Granada elites.

Chambers's work, *Families in War and Peace*, begins with the upheavals of the monarchical crisis in Spain in 1808 and the establishment of juntas across Latin America and ends with the implementation of the new Civil Code in Chile in 1857. Chambers draws heavily on private correspondence among prominent families at the forefront of Chile's independence wars. These families include the siblings Javiera, Juan José, Luis Carrera, and their heirs, all of whom played a central role in Chile's independence movement and early state-building efforts through military leadership, forging political alliances, or petitioning on behalf of new legislation that had direct bearing on property rights, pensions, and paternal authority. For Chambers, the experiences of actual families and the creation of family legislative policies have as much bearing on Chilean history as the metaphorical references to the national "family" that are more often the subject of scholarship in nineteenth-century Latin America.

Re-establishing "a new paternalist nation-state," according to Chambers, was a central project of Chile's nineteenth-century elite, one that touched all levels of Chilean society. Her close examination of pensions and alimony lawsuits by poor wives, widows, orphans, and children allows her to undercover how plebeians, peasants, and elites navigated the challenges that war and independence posed to traditional patriarchal obligations between men and women as well as between parents and children. Chambers brings analytical rigor to an impressive array of sources, including letters, petitions on behalf of imprisoned relatives, pension requests for military widows and orphans, legal transcripts of marital disputes, accusations

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of treason, petitions against property seizures, and petitions for *alimentos* (financial support). In her discussion of personal letters written during the war, for example, she points out that most people wrote letters "to locate relatives and reconstruct family networks torn apart by forced and voluntary migrations as well as acts of war" (80). It was often poor women who served as couriers and hid letters under petticoats or in bodices in hopes of getting messages past enemy lines. Chambers finds that the soldiers who captured these women were largely unsuccessful at uncovering strategic information, but she also challenges a simple dichotomy between political and personal correspondence. Chambers instead views exiling residents and separating them from their loved ones as an intentional political tactic to discourage resistance and rebellion. Women who wrote personal letters to family members and delivered them under dangerous circumstances performed acts of political defiance as "they attempted to knit together both kin networks and political communities" (88). These letters allow Chambers to explore the intersections of the personal and the political in the lives of both rebels and royalists.

The most fascinating of Chambers's sources are the alimony lawsuits she discovered in the records of local civil courts; these lawsuits were filed against parents who failed to support their children according to expected social station. Chambers traces an increase of these cases during the 1830s and 1840s, and she finds that many of these claims by adult children were successful during a critical period in the early republic when both families and the courts established the contours of family law. The conflict between adult children and their parents for financial support provides new insights into the breadth of patriarchal obligations within families during the mid-nineteenth century. Chambers rightly suggests these kinds of primary sources deserve further scholarly attention in the future.

In *Of Love and Other Passions*, Dueñas-Vargas focuses on the personal correspondence of leading political and literary families of New Granada to understand the changing significance of love and marriage from the late colonial period to the 1870s. She argues that "the political, social, and cultural changes that took place in New Granada from the end of the colonial era until 1870 helped transform the meaning of love in the sense of 'purifying' it and making it compatible with the sacred aims of marriage and family" (9). For Dueñas-Vargas, these changes had important consequences for how people defined and performed masculinity and femininity within a social order that increasingly embraced middle-class norms. Each chapter focuses on the specific marriage or relationship of a prominent member of New Granadan society, drawing threads between each succeeding generation over the course of the long nineteenth century. This is a work of collective

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biographies, and its subjects were among the most powerful families in New Granada.

Using diaries, letters, newspapers, and novels, Dueñas-Vargas's book is centered on understanding the interior lives of the literate and literary elites. What makes her approach novel is how she frames their experiences within the larger context of the history of emotion and gender relations. She begins with the marriage of the celebrated astronomer Francisco José de Caldas to Manuela Barahona, a relationship she characterizes as rooted in traditional norms of piety and honor, not passionate love or companionship. According to Dueñas-Vargas, Caldas found much of his emotional and intellectual fulfillment in his male friendships with fellow scientists and scholars instead of his young wife.

In the first of her biographical studies, Dueñas-Vargas establishes a theme of tension that runs throughout her inquiry—that of erotic desire and physical lust versus spiritual love and virtue (16). She explores how the turbulence of the independence movement marked a temporary break with tradition and patriarchal norms, as seen in the sexual restlessness of young nationalist and later president Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera and in the extramarital affair between Nicolasa Ibáñez—the daughter of a prominent political family based in Ocaña—and war hero General Francisco de Paula Santander. By the middle of the nineteenth century, she finds a more conservative model of marriage and domesticity that celebrated a restrained masculinity based on reason and moderation and practices of femininity rooted in deference to patriarchy.

Traditional morality became tied to national stability in the minds of Conservative statesmen and journalists like Rufino Cuero, although even Conservative members of the elite tended to consult their peers in matters of love and marriage, and not their parents and priests as was the case with their grandparents in the colonial era (98). Thus, Chambers demonstrates that the dramatic upheavals of the independence period did bring about important changes in the gender order and undermined the patriarchy for a time, even if the country embraced conservatism again by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Dueñas-Vargas is also attentive to the emergence of alternative movements in domesticity, including the idealization of romantic love among New Granada's literary elite. Drawing on the passionate courtship and marriage of celebrated woman of letters—Soledad Acosta with her husband José María Samper—Dueñas-Vargas makes excellent use of Acosta's diary to interrogate romanticism's influence on gender relations and the interior lives of mid-century youth. While diaries are a rare genre in Latin America relative to Europe and the United States, Dueñas-Vargas demonstrates that when found they deserve more attention from historians to deepen our

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understanding of the intersections of politics, cultural trends, and gendered emotional expressions.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Dueñas-Vargas uncovers an emerging bourgeois ideal of companionate marriage through the representative lives of Liberal author and politician Manuel Ancízar and his wife Agripina Samper Agudelo. Using letters between Manuel and Agripina over the course of their twenty-five-year marriage, Dueñas-Vargas finds a relationship founded on emotional and intellectual affinity. The couple demonstrated genuine affection for each other and toward their children and a mutual respect for one another's political instincts during a delicate period of conflict between Liberals and Conservatives over the role of the Church.

There is risk in using a small sample of couples to comment on larger trends in gender norms and changing ideals of marriage, but Dueñas-Vargas largely avoids these pitfalls by providing rich and beautifully written biographical renderings of her subjects and by qualifying what may have made them exceptional among their peers. What her sources do not reveal, however, is the degree to which new ideals of romanticism and companionate marriage became models of masculine and feminine practice among New Granada's urban and rural poor or among an emerging lower middle class, many of whom lacked access to books and newspapers. Dueñas-Vargas would have needed to take up the question of literacy among the popular classes to assess the broader appeal of romanticism.

In contrast, Komisaruk's work, *Labor and Love in Guatemala*, explores the intersections of late colonial governance, gendered daily practice, and ethnic identity formation from the bottom up, focusing on the lives of plebian families from Antigua (then Santiago), Guatemala between 1760 and 1821. For Komisaruk, labor migration and Hispanicization were intertwined and interdependent processes, and they resulted in part from Santiago's particular history. Santiago was a major trading center and held legal jurisdiction over what is today Chiapas and all of Central America. Its destruction in the 1773 earthquake and the construction of a new colonial capital, Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, in a different location, contributed to migration patterns and labor relations that had profound implications for the organization of families and their constitutive capacities, both culturally and biologically. Komisaruk organizes her work into four broad themes, including the shifting indigenous identities, decline of slavery, processes of Hispanicization, and role of sexuality and gender in expediting the spread of Hispanicization across social groups.

Through these themes, Komisaruk makes a number of important contributions to Guatemalan historiography, including demonstrating that early republican legal practices like the elimination of Indian tribute and the abolition of slavery had their roots in the quotidian social relationships

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of the city's laboring classes during the colonial period. For her, local conditions had a larger influence on the region's legal reforms and practices than Enlightenment ideals and liberalism imported from afar. Komisaruk intertwines gender and labor history when she argues that gendered relationships at the level of the household, among working families, had a profound impact on the formation of a Hispanicized ethnic identity in one of Guatemala's most important urban centers. She examines, for example, how young female indigenous servants learned Spanish and adopted Hispanic cultural practices, even as they maintained their familial and cultural ties to rural communities through marriage and religious institutions like confraternities. Given Guatemala's strong identity as a largely indigenous and rural country, her work complicates our understanding of the region by paying attention to its urban history and to the contributions of *castas* (people of a variety of mixed ethnic identities) and slaves to the local economy and the country's cultural and ethnic makeup. Komisaruk goes further to explain why slaves and free people of African descent have been absent from Guatemala's historical memory in the first place. Taking up the historian Murdo McLeod's observation that scholars do not fully comprehend what happened to the descendants of the region's large slave and free black population, Komisaruk attempts "to address this question using notarial and judicial records to depict the movement of people of African descent from slavery to freedom. The move into freedom . . . necessitated a transformation of identity that helps explain the disappearance of blacks and mulattos from the region's consciousness over the course of the colonial years" (4).<sup>2</sup>

Civil and criminal judicial cases form the foundation of Komisaruk's important work. She makes expert use of census data and notary records, including wills and slave sales, to depict the daily lives of plebeians as they navigated their labor relationships with employers, their legal status with the state, and their complex ties with one another as parents, lovers, children, and business partners. In her discussion of a criminal assault case involving market women in Nueva Guatemala's main market square, for example, Komisaruk uncovers intricate family networks imbedded in the small businesses responsible for raising, processing, and selling pork (170). Her close analysis of such trials allows her to uncover hierarchies among entrepreneurial families who owned expensive shops in under arched *portales* versus those who rented stalls under makeshift covers and others who operated mobile food stands. She finds a level of vertical integration within food sales more frequently associated with regional elites, not plebeians.

These works collectively provide insight into the interior lives of political elites and plebeians who contributed to nation building through their writing, their participation in the legal system, military campaigns, work,

and reproductive labor. The authors demonstrate that gender and the reinvention of patriarchal authority were central to the social and political order during the tumultuous independence wars and the early republic. They ask imaginative new questions of traditional sources like judicial records, and they find significance in sources other scholars have overlooked. They model the importance of continuing to integrate subfields of history and multidisciplinary approaches to understand the construction of national identities and republican governance. These books point the way for future scholarship by demonstrating that labor history is more nuanced with gender analysis, that gender history is richer when scholars use anthropological methodologies in their research, and that it is worthwhile to revisit traditional historical genres like biography with a fresh theoretical lens.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Eric Van Young, *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810–1821* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 21–34.

<sup>2</sup>Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520–1720* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 [1973]), xxvii.