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Milagros Peña. *Latina Activists across Borders: Women's Grassroots Organizing in Mexico and Texas.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 208 pp. $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3951-9.

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Heading for Beijing: Latina NGOs Working Together

Milagros Peña's work, *Latina Activists across Borders*, examines women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in two communities against the backdrop of preparation for the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The women in the two areas studied, Michoacán in Mexico and Ciudad Juárez/El Paso on the U.S.-Mexico border, had previously created NGOs to address women's issues and formed differing priorities that influenced their approach to the UN conference.

Peña writes that her work examines how the NGOs formed networks while working on "Toward Beijing" endeavors that allowed for mobilization of grassroots efforts on multiple levels. This mobilization let women address women's issues while also working on broader public concerns. For example, she cites women working in NGOs that were concerned with homelessness or labor exploitation that also allowed women activists to direct efforts toward fighting domestic violence. By forming networks within their communities, not only were these Latina activists empowered to adopt women's issues, but they also increased their political voice within their communities which created a greater force directed toward achieving their goals.

One of the strengths of Peña's book is her clear explanations of the development of various NGOs. She examines the emergence of the groups individually, and allows the voices of the women involved to speak for their organizations. Her use of interviews of NGO leaders as source material is valuable in this context. The women concerned are given a chance to explain a range of situations faced by the different groups, discussing how their group was created, developed, and faced concerns and problems, or how the group had changed and matured over time. These interview excerpts provide the reader with insight into Latina women's activist groups in a way that would be difficult to supply in other ways.

Peña also traces the emergence of the NGOs categorically, based on their initial function. These organizations developed from a variety of base groups with specific areas of concern, which she details as: outreach programs, working in such areas as domestic violence or the environment; religious programs in which activists addressed the structures of their religions and the ways those structures contributed to women's issues; the health approach, which was concerned with topics of wellbeing, including AIDS, nutrition, and the connection of women's treatment with their health issues; and an indigenous approach, which associated ethnicity with gender problems. Peña does a very good job of examining these categories and discussing how different types of groups focus on different areas of concern to women, and how the various groups are able to converge into networks that address a broader range of women's issues. She devotes an entire chapter to faith-based groups and the special considerations those organizations face, especially in an area where the dominant religion is extremely patriarchal. This male-dominated social structure is a basic problem that the NGOs face, especially in the context of domestic violence and crimes against women. Peña discusses this point from the perspective of several types of organizations, but stresses that the issue is of concern to all women's NGOs in both of her research locations.

A chapter that looks at the future of these organizations is the weakest section of the work. The author concentrates her analysis on funding issues that the NGOs face and problems that are connected to economics. By focusing on money issues and different predicaments that those issues pose, the work gives the impression that an influx of capital would allow these groups to continue their efforts without any other hindrances, even in the face of the problems she discusses in previous chapters. However, Peña does present a clear description of the monetary issues experienced by the NGOs and how those

money-related issues spill over and create other issues, such as competition between the groups for funding and the possibility of outside funding sources influencing the group's mission.

Latina Activists across Borders is well researched using a solid selection of source material. Peña bases her research on interviews with NGO members and organizers, government and official documents, and NGO records, as well as a plethora of works by feminist and gender studies scholars. The work is also nicely written, clearly presenting the author's concepts.

While the Beijing Conference is present throughout the work, it is not the focal point as the introduction suggests. However, this is not an issue, because the author demonstrates how the NGOs formed networks, just not clearly in connection to the conference. *Latina Activists across Borders* is a valuable resource for those interested in Latina women's activism, NGOs, grassroots organizations, and contrasts between organizations working in border and interior communities.

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