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Betancort, Sonia *et al.* *Oriente en femenino: literatas, eruditas
y viajeras hispanas (siglos XIX y XX)*

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**BETANCORT, SONIA; FIGUEROA, ÓSCAR; ORTIZ WALLNER,
ALEXANDRA Y RODRÍGUEZ DE LA VEGA, LÍA
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I received a copy of this book just in time for my first research trip to India, and it could not have been more appropriate. As the first 10-hour flight to New Delhi went by, I began reading the prologue, where Araceli Tinajero recounts being strongly advised by a taxi driver in Agra not to go out at night under any circumstances. She reflects that, while it may sound like a stereotype to suggest that a woman traveling alone faces danger in the 21st century, such risks can still be very real. This idea helped me understand not only the context of the book, but also my own experience as a Latin American woman and researcher on India, now traveling to India as the women portrayed in this volume did.

The book *Oriente en femenino: Literatas, eruditas y viajeras hispanas (Siglos XIX y XX)* is a collective work that seeks to rethink the history of Orientalism from an unexpected perspective: that of Latin American and Hispanic American women who, from the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth, looked toward Asia, particularly India, with their own eyes. Far from being mere recipients of European images, these travelers, writers, mystics, and scholars shaped peripheral and feminist Orientalisms, as well as South-South perspectives that challenge the Eurocentric canon. In this sense, the book stands out for its novelty in a field dominated by masculine and metropolitan narratives.

The core of the book lies in reconstructing the intellectual trajectories of women who produced knowledge about Asia from Latin America, combining personal experiences with textual production and institutional action. Organized into four thematic sections, such as “Forerunners”, “Icons”, “Expeditioners” and “Educators” the volume analyzes representative figures through their biographies, letters, diaries, novels, and academic works. In “Expeditioners”, travelers such as Adelina del Carril, Alicia Jurado, Elisa Serrana, and María Cruz stand out, whose stays in India not only produced texts on Hindu or Buddhist spirituality, but also transformed their subjectivities, intertwining feminism, ecology, and pacifism. Del Carril, for example, presided over the Ramakrishna Ashram in Argentina and forged a “cosmopolitan feminism” in dialogue with

figures such as Victoria Ocampo. I highlight this pair of figures because, on a previous occasion, while speaking with Aarti Madan, author of the chapter on Adelina del Carril, she pointed out how difficult it is today to research and find sources on these women. Hence the importance of continuing to discuss and produce content such as the one presented in this book.

The section “Educators” focuses on scholars such as Carmen Dragonetti, Graciela de la Lama, Hilda Chen Apuy, and Ludwika Jarocka, pioneers in the institutionalization of Asian studies in countries such as Argentina, Mexico, and Costa Rica. Dragonetti published the first dissertation in Spanish on Pāli Hīnayāna Buddhism in Peru in 1963, while De la Lama founded Casa de la India in Mexico and coordinated the Afro-Asian Bibliography in Spanish (1981), promoting Spanish as a scientific language against Anglo-Saxon monopoly. Each chapter integrates literary analysis, archival work, and historical context to reveal how gender, class, and geopolitics shaped these views of Asia.

Within the social sciences and humanities, the book makes a crucial intervention by making visible female genealogies ignored in Latin American Intellectual History. It deploys categories such as affect, interpersonal networks, and spirituality to show that knowledge is not only rational, but also relational and embodied: the letters and memoirs of these women show how friendly and collaborative ties, often among women, generated “egalitarian affective semantics” that anticipated contemporary models of leadership.

It also challenges Eurocentric narratives of Orientalism (Said, 1978) by proposing an approach situated in the Global South, where Asian otherness is read alongside local experiences of colonialism, patriarchy, and migration. This enriches debates on decoloniality, ecofeminism, and affect theory, showing how authors such as Jurado intertwined Orientalism with ecological critique, linking female and racial oppression. In this sense, the work also illustrates the professionalization of women in fields such as diplomacy and higher education, broadening the canon of Latin American Humanities.

For Asian studies, the volume documents “peripheral Orientalisms” that reconfigure Said’s paradigm: not as European domination, but as South-South dialogues critical of colonialism. It analyzes the appropriation of Hindu and Buddhist concepts, such as *karma* or *dharma*, in Latin American contexts, from María Cruz’s theosophical mysticism to Hilda Chen Apuy’s pacifist universalism, which dismantled prejudice against Asian immigration in Costa Rica.

It also highlights milestones such as Gabriela De la Lama’s work at El Colegio de México, which expanded the academic canon with Spanish-language sources dating back to the sixteenth century, and Jarocka’s comparative thesis on Cervantes and medieval Oriental tales. These contributions institutionalized Asian studies in Latin America, fostering intercultural exchanges and breaking Eurocentric isolation through South-South alliances.

Its novelty also lies in its shift of focus: from the European male subject to the Latin American female margin, where marginality, both gendered and geopolitical, enables critical observation. It incorporates little-explored primary sources such as private archives and interviews to reconstruct invisible networks and complex subjectivities, revealing tensions between exotic fascination and emancipatory critique.

Also, the book proposes Spanish as a vehicular language for knowledge about Asia, reclaiming a renewed tradition in the face of English or German, among which ecofeminism and spirituality are also included. Finally, it connects past and present: in an era of climate crisis and globalization, these voices offer ethics of care, pacifism, and interculturality that challenge constructions of otherness.

Thus, *Oriente en femenino* not only rescues forgotten women, but also transforms Orientalism into a field contested by female and Latin American perspectives. Its contributions bring fresh air to the humanities and Asian studies, while its innovative approach invites us to rethink knowledge as a living and situated practice. In an interconnected world, this book demonstrates that the margins produce transformative forms of knowledge.



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