

Institution: University of Nottingham
Unit of Assessment: 28
Title of case study: The <i>Libertadoras</i>: Engaging and empowering audiences and communities
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Using a ground-breaking database of recovered narratives of Latin American women during the Wars of Independence,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new histories have been created and shared with audiences in Buenos Aires, London and Nottingham through exhibitions, workshops, guided city tours, theatre productions and translation programmes leading to new public knowledge and raised awareness; • drama and photography workshops have enabled a community of young Latin American migrant women in London to understand their collective heritage and cultural identity more fully, and through this understanding, to develop personal confidence and pride; • employees of Southwark Council have changed how they work with their growing Latin American community after participating in a cultural and language exchange series contributing to improved community cohesion.
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Key researcher: Professor Catherine Davies (University of Nottingham 2004-).</p> <p>The research investigates the significance of women in the Independence process in Spanish America and explores the reasons for their subsequent exclusion from political culture until recently. The importance of gender in Independence had not been thoroughly studied previously, and women's contribution had been largely overlooked. In the period leading up to 2010 and subsequently there was increased public interest in women's role in the Wars of Independence generated by the celebrations of the Bicentenaries of Independence and by women's unprecedented contemporary prominence in Latin American politics since there were at the time women Presidents in Brazil, Costa Rica, Argentina and Chile. The research, funded by the AHRB/AHRC 2001-2006, 2012-13 and by the University of Nottingham, made a seminal contribution to revisionist accounts of Independence. The project's website (3.1) is the first consolidated and comprehensive resource making publicly available information about women's participation in the Wars of Independence.</p> <p>The three core strands in the project were: a) the study of women's political culture; b) the discovery and evaluation of women's activities and writings between 1810 and 1850; and c) the analysis of the textual construction of gender in political discourse. In particular, the research addressed four key research questions: (i) how the category 'woman' was produced discursively and politically in Spanish America at the time; (ii) in what ways women were constructed ambiguously as subjects and objects in political discourse; (iii) what women's responses were to the republican discourse of individual rights that equated individuality with masculinity; and (iv) why, after Independence, political rights were still denied to over half the population according to the criterion of sexual difference.</p> <p>The key findings and insights were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that women had a hitherto unacknowledged and significant role in Spanish American culture and history between 1810 and 1850 (3.1 to 3.4); • that there were shifts in gender parameters and discourse about gender throughout the period in which the wars were fought but that subsequently there was a return to earlier positions, which have persisted until recently (3.1 to 3.4); • that aggressive and violent masculinity in militarized, post-Independence societies had a profound cultural impact and shaped the social norms deemed appropriate for women (3.2); • that the textual and visual representation of women as mythical figures and literary tropes (e.g., liberty, 'patria') rather than real, historical figures rendered their exclusion from the public sphere natural and acceptable (3.2, 3.4); • that patriarchal nationalist agendas were a driving force in male-centred historiography (3.1, 3.2, 3.3); • that there was a significant number of hitherto unstudied writings by women, including letters

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and educational texts (3.1-3.5) which revealed forgotten aspects of women's contribution to the Independence struggles.

In addition to the research outputs, there were two research meetings which helped to develop the scope of the research: an international conference co-organized with Anthony Macfarlane (Warwick), 'Unequal States: Gender and Race at Latin America Independence', funded by the universities of Warwick and Nottingham, 2004; and an international symposium, 'Women in Latin American Independence: History, Society, Culture', at the Institute for the Study of the Americas, London, 2012, funded by JISLAC in collaboration with Sara Beatriz Guardia, Director of the Centro de Estudios la Mujer en la Historia de América Latina (Universidad de San Martín de Porres, Lima).

3. References to the research

Website (including database)

3.1 On-line database of female participation in the Wars of Independence (2300 people, 3900 events, 330 images). Contains biographies of individual women, their writings, public and private culture, social networks, group activities, associated places and commemorations. Accessed via the project website: <http://www.genderlatam.org.uk/>.

Print publications (all refereed)

3.2 Davies, C., C. Brewster and H. Owen, *South American Independence: Gender, Politics, Text* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006). Davies wrote 7.5 of 11 chapters. Available on request.

3.3 Davies, C., 'Unequal States: Gender in Latin American Independence', in a special issue of *Hispanic Research Journal*, 'Unequal States: Gender in Latin American Independence', edited by C. Davies, 7.1 (2006), pp. 3-10. Available on request.

3.4 Acevedo de Gómez, Josefa, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Mothers and Housewives* [1848], edited with introduction by C. Davies. Translated from the Spanish by Sarah Sánchez (Nottingham: CCCP, 2007). 108 pp. Introduction, pp. i-xxvii. Available on request.

3.5 Davies, C., 'Gendered Interpretations of Independence Poetry: Mexico and Peru, 1820-1822', in *Power, Place and Representation. Contested Sites of Dependence and Independence in Latin America*, edited by Bill Richardson and Lorraine Kelly (Oxford, Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp.129-55. Submitted to REF2.

Evidence of quality of research

- AHRB 2001-2006 (Standard Award £134k) 'Gendering Latin American Independence: Women's Political Culture and the Textual Construction of Gender 1790-1850'. (PI Davies, CI Hilary Owen, University of Manchester, RA Claire Brewster, University of Newcastle). Final outcome: **outstanding**.
- AHRB Feb-June 2005 (Research leave award £14k), to complete book, *Spanish American Independence: Gendering the Text*. Final outcome: **outstanding**.
- AHRC 2006-2007 (Pilot Dissemination Award £10.5k to PI Davies). Dissemination of the website, database and publications: translation and edition of rare book, the first in English (2007) and translations into Spanish and Portuguese of the webpage/working papers.
- AHRC April 2012-Feb 2013 (Follow-on Fund £94k) 'Women and Independence in Latin America. A New Multi-media Community-contributed Community-driven Online Resource'. (PI Davies, CI Iona Macintyre, University of Edinburgh, CI Professor Derek McAuley, Horizon Hub, Nottingham, RA Maria Thomas).

4. Details of the impact

A database of narratives of women who participated in the Latin American Wars of Independence (3.1) underpinned three strands of international public engagement activity which have effected changes in public awareness (transnationally), contributed to community cohesion (locally) and inspired pride and reflection for young migrant women.

Davies presented the *Libertadoras* project and its database (3.1) to the directors of the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) in London, the Women's Museum in Buenos Aires, the New Art Exchange (NAE), Nottingham, and Southwark Council along with key research findings (3.1-3.5). The programmes which were subsequently developed with these partners drew directly on these outputs and followed the theme of women's historical struggle for independence in Latin America and the impact of gendered political discourse. They engaged specifically with the critique of androcentric historiography and political discourse (3.2 & 3.3), and the recovered

names and stories of women who participated in the Wars of Independence, translating the research insights and findings into cultural and community events to highlight the continued relevance of the *Libertadoras* to a contemporary audience (3.2-3.5).

Sharing recovered histories to create new knowledge and raise awareness

A range of cultural activities developed in collaboration with the Women's Museum in Buenos Aires and based on Davies' research included readings and workshops using primary historical sources, round-table discussions, an exhibition of historical and contemporary art, theatre productions and a community translation programme in which volunteers translated the biographies of the women in the database from English into Spanish. The programme attracted 300 visitors from Buenos Aires, and from Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Colombia, giving people **new knowledge about and new perspectives on their history**, challenging androcentric narratives of the Wars of Independence. Participant feedback (which demonstrates a palpable sense of excitement) includes the following comments: 'I am sure there are important women from the independence struggles [in my region]. I am going to find them!'; '[The material] **helps us to recognise difficulties from the past that are also present in the current day**'; 'I intend to carry out readings with the women at the public library where I participate in events', and 'I certainly learned a lot and I was reminded of things I had studied at university. **I learnt to value the work of women that exists "behind" grand events.** For example during war. Women are essential!' (5.1).

The programme of events, *Libertadoras 19th C to 20th C: A Century of Struggle*, 15th August to 22nd September 2012, generated widespread national media coverage in Argentina, extending the reach of the research into a wider public domain. Radio stations that covered the events included Rock Nacional, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Radio Gráfica and several shows specifically targeted at women including *Monday Again* and *Mothers' Voice*. The National News Agency of Argentina, national newspaper *El Comercial*, and Yahoo Mexico's news page also all covered the exhibition (5.1). The Museum Director reflected on how Davies' research (3.1-3.6), which had been embedded in the activity, had **stimulated discussion, particularly around Independence, and the relationship between 'national' and 'personal' independence**. The participants were 'keen to express opinions and to deconstruct official points of view influenced by liberal, misogynist history that hides the participation of women in historical crises' (5.2).

Increasing confidence and self-esteem within a community of young, first-generation Latin American women in London

Young Latin American migrant women in London engaged with a programme of cultural workshops (with outputs including exhibitions and theatre performances) that had **profound personal impacts** on them. The Director of LAWRS commented that 'using the vehicle of *Las Libertadoras* to explore issues of identify and belonging, and cultural pride, has had a notable impact on these young women's sense of self and their social engagement more broadly. The project has rescued the value and courage of the *libertadoras* to inspire [...] all of us so that we can follow their example' (5.3). The LAWRS Development and Outreach Officer said: 'It was clear the young women had been inspired by the *libertadoras* and that they identified with them. This can be seen clearly in the photos too' (5.4).

The impact of the performance and the exhibitions that were the outcome of the LAWRS activity extended beyond the individual women involved, to the audiences who engaged with the work through its performance/display, providing **new awareness of the nature and experiences of the immigrant Latin American community in London**. The play, written and produced by the young women (with the support of a drama teacher and LAWRS youth workers), was entitled 'Razones por las que luchar' (Reasons for Fighting). It was based on re-enactments of the lives of individual *Libertadoras* that the women had selected from the database (3.1). The play was performed at the LAWRS AGM (November 2012) with an attendance of c. 150 women from the Latin American community and at the Institute of the Americas, UCL (May 2013) to an audience of c. 50 including parents and friends. Attendees' feedback focussed on the link between the histories presented and contemporary politics and culture: '...the performance was important for young Latin Americans who were born in the UK to remember their roots. [These projects are] an awakening for our Latin American community, for us to improve our conditions and have a better future'; '[...] **it is good to**

get back in touch with history in order to understand and change the political processes of the present' (5.5).

4,040 attended the exhibition *Empowerment through Art: Photography and Latin American Girls*, at the NAE in March/April 2013 and at Southwark Council premises in May/June 2013 (curated by British-Mexican photographer Pablo Allison in collaboration with Roxana Allison). The exhibition featured 11 portraits of the girls and their own photographs on the theme of women's independence. The girls were photographed in the pose of 'heroines' having seen the images of 'heroínas' in the image bank. Visitor feedback attested to the effect of the work in raising awareness about Latin American culture in general, and about gender identity within the Latin American community more specifically: 'The exhibition **provoked me to reflect on gender and ethnic identities**'; 'I learned about new depths and richness in terms of Latin culture, history and identity'; 'I had no idea there were so many Latin Americans in the UK and that the girls need support.' Visitors who spoke to the young women 'got a real sense that the project had raised the awareness, but also expectations, of the young women involved' (5.6). A Southwark Councillor and cabinet member for communities and economic wellbeing said: 'We are thrilled to have supported such an imaginative and inspiring project. I hope visitors of all backgrounds will be encouraged by the stories and go on to fulfil their own potential in a way that positively impacts upon the local community' (5.7). The NAE curator reported that 'audience feedback was positive and the idea of how art can be a tool for empowerment especially for recent immigrants was appreciated by all those who saw the exhibition' (5.8).

Contributing to community cohesion in Southwark: the cultural and language exchange

Southwark Council identified a need to improve communication with Latin American migrants to their community, and invited Thomas (a Post-doctoral researcher working with Davies on the project) to run a series of workshops for its employees. The aim was to help them better understand the cultural, linguistic and social profile of its Latin American community. As part of these workshops, participants were introduced to the image bank and database (3.1). Feedback from council employees demonstrates the wide-ranging influence of the talks, which they praised for increasing knowledge and understanding, helping the teams to build networks with the Latin American community and identify contacts within it. A council employee commented: 'The sessions have definitely **helped with my job** as I now have contacts with South American organisations that I can refer some of our private tenants to [...]. The sessions have **helped my team to build networks with the South American community in Southwark**'. A Development Manager for the Safeguarding Children Board said 'The photographic presentation and meeting [with the Director of] LAWRS [...] really **gave me insight into Spanish and Latin American culture**. It also gave me a good connection with the LA community which I know I will be returning to in my professional life.' Local community groups have been so pleased with the effects that they have requested the project continues (5.9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1. Translation of Evaluation Data from Buenos Aires Women's Museum on *Libertadoras 19th C to 20th C: A Century of Struggle* (available on request).
- 5.2. Director of the Women's Museum, Buenos Aires (Factual Statement, available on request).
- 5.3. Director of Latin American Women's Rights Service (Factual Statement, available on request).
- 5.4. Development and Outreach Officer of LAWRS (Factual Statement, available on request).
- 5.5. Feedback from Performances at the Institute of the Americas, UCL (available on request).
- 5.6. Feedback from photography exhibition at New Art Exchange (available on request).
- 5.7. *Empowerment Through Art: Photography and Latin American Migrant Girls in London*, 17/05/13
<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/news/article/1250/empowerment-through-art-photography-and-latin-american-migrant-girls-in-london>, accessed 19th September 2013.
- 5.8. Curator *Empowerment through Art: Photography and Latin American Girls*, New Art Exchange (Factual Statement, available on request).
- 5.9. Feedback from Southwark council employees (available on request).