

Voices of Global Mormon Women

Caroline Kline. *Mormon Women at the Crossroads: Global Narratives and the Power of Connectedness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2022. 256 pp. Paper: \$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-252-08643-4.

Reviewed by Stephanie Griswold

While some critique oral history methods, Caroline Kline's *Mormon Women at the Crossroads: Global Narratives and the Power of Connectedness* takes significant strides to substantiate the benefits of the method. Among these critiques are the role of memory in providing exacting recaps of past events and the potential for ethical issues; however, there is something to be said about the positive impact of time, information, and retrospect in recording quotidian experiences to nuance or even complicate overarching, typically top-down interpretations of history, known in the field as metanarratives. As Kline notes in her introduction and throughout the book, "oral life histories" not only serve her goal to understand the *agentive* choices of Mormon women of color but add the voices of the very people whom scholars have frequently ignored (18). While Kline admits that her feminist lens caused a faulty assumption about issues her narrators cared about, she finds ways to adjust and center these women's concerns (161). Early oral history tended to focus on people high in sociopolitical hierarchies—then assumed to be the most objective and accurate accounting of the past. However, scholars of gender and religion, as Kline details, make use of this method to add to the metanarratives that dominated the humanities for so long.

Kline's introduction explicitly outlines her positionality, research questions, and the framework of gender, race, and religion she works within. Methodologically, the opening pages offer a detailed explanation of the significant value found in conducting oral histories. The introduction further serves as a primer on Mormonism, the pertinent

historiography, and a user-friendly guide for her methodology. The case study chapters, dealing with different national experiences among women of color in Mexico, Botswana, and the United States, portray distinct reasons these women join or remain in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, culminating in what Kline calls “non-oppressive connectedness.” Non-oppressive connectedness, the vital component of Kline’s argument, is defined as “elements of female empowerment and liberation . . . characterized by a broader moral focus on fostering positive, productive, and vitalizing relationality,” and came about through “womanist and intersectional approaches” and realizations in the field when conducting interviews (3–5). Here is where Kline’s positionality discussion becomes most relevant and reveals the limiting nature of her identity and feminist lens (3–5).

Chapter 4, “Toward a Mormon Womanist Theology of Abundance,” is among the book’s central theoretical interventions, alongside the illuminating insight of the oral history portions transcribed in the text and Kline’s analysis. The conclusion authoritatively restates the argument and addresses themes found in the case studies that are important to both academic and Latter-day Saint audiences. In the conclusion, Kline again restates her positionality as a lifelong Latter-day Saint woman. Also significant in the conclusion is the follow-up with interviewees that offers insight into their current relationship with the Church, especially in response to changes in policies and abuse scandals that coincide with the initial concerns that led them to the Church. Kline reminds the reader of a few examples from the book, like Ana in Mexico, whose experience with domestic violence (DV) was “rarely and vaguely addressed in local Latter-day Saints contexts,” though abuse against women was one of the major concerns of several narrators (164). Kline connected this to scandals like White House staff secretary Rob Porter being accused of DV in 2018 or the broader issue of some bishops encouraging women to stay with their abusive husbands despite eventual updates in Church guidelines (164).

One significant contribution is the examination of Mexican LDS women. Kline's interaction with Elizabeth Brusco's work on machismo and the use of marianismo as the female gender norm is not only theoretically sound but speaks to Latina experiences that are legible to Latinas in both the LDS Church and the academy (48). Kline's scholarly interventions overlapped with my engagement with the text as a Latina. My positionality is adjacent to these narrators as a non-LDS Mexican-Nicaraguan American woman in Mormon studies. Through the interviews and subsequent analysis, I often saw myself or the women in my family and our familial and religious experiences in Kline's findings. None of the women in my family, nor I, have ever been any stripe of Mormon; however, the results of Kline's research reflect the realities of Latina religious intersections across many religious communities. Kline discusses some of those realities that display the tension between lived and institutional religion that can also be seen across faith traditions and reflect historical research on Latin American religious conversion's relationship to local realities, like those described in this text (162–64).

There has been a recent increase in research on Mormonism in Mexico, and Kline's work adds meaningful ways to discuss this particular demographic. In the conclusion, Kline asserts that her argument could be applied to "traditional religious women within other faith traditions" (161). Through her analysis of an interviewee's use of the term "mujeriego," she focuses on the ways Mormonism addresses social and familial concerns of Latina women along with cultural issues of alcoholism and infidelity (26–27, 162). These themes seem to be frequent in narratives of conversion across various conservative Christianities that assume missionary projects in Latin America. We see in this discussion theoretical and cultural terms that reflect scholarship and experiences of the broader Latina community outside of just Latter-day Saint women of Latinx descent.

The only unclear section of the book was which culture's "gender norms" she expressly referred. For example, in chapter 1, there is discussion of "machismo" and the Mexican women's experiences with that

cultural gender dynamic versus norms the US-based and predominantly white, male-led LDS Church uphold. We could benefit from a more direct explanation of the dichotomy of gender norms in each chapter. There are many forms of gender norms that traverse this text: US, Latter-day Saint, western feminist, Mexican, and Botswanan. These different cultures express both the intersections of identity for the narrators and scholars and the agentive choices these women made in their lives that eventually led to this work. Still, this is but one avenue that could be pursued academically, along with the myriad ways Kline discusses where continued scholarship is needed (20, 163). This book will prove foundational in global women's Mormonism and how we use oral history in Mormon studies.

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Faithful Pioneers and the Roots of a Global Church

F. LaMond Tullis, *Grass Roots in Mexico: Stories of Pioneering Latter-day Saints*. Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021. 331 pp. Hardcover: \$27.99. ISBN: 9781950304271.

Reviewed by Erik J. Freeman

F. LaMond Tullis's *Grass Roots in Mexico: Stories of Pioneering Latter-day Saints* explores the lives of nineteen people who influenced the founding and growth of Mormonism in Mexico. Tullis is a retired professor of