

Feminist Agendas and Democracy in Latin America



Jane S. Jaquette, editor

FEMINIST AGENDAS AND DEMOCRACY
IN LATIN AMERICA

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—
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EDITED BY
JANE S. JAQUETTE

Duke University Press
DURHAM & LONDON 2009

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Printed in the United States
of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Jennifer Hill
Typeset in Minion Pro by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication data
appear on the last printed pages of this book.

In memory of Ruth Cardoso,
who devoted her life to
social justice through both
thought and action.

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✧ Acknowledgments

When I took an extensive trip to Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Peru in the spring of 2006, I was not thinking of putting together a book on what has happened to women's movements in Latin America. I had not done field research in the region since the mid-1990s, and from a distance it seemed that women's movements had declined and that women were no longer considered political actors of any consequence. Instead of focusing on women, I therefore joined my husband in a series of interviews on political and economic conditions, eager to see at close range how these democracies were evolving in general and to assess the effects of globalization.

Yet as I conducted interviews in Brazil, attended Michelle Bachelet's inauguration in Chile (and returned to Santiago for several weeks during the height of the debate on gender quotas), caught up with Peru in the period between the first and second rounds of the 2006 election, and wrestled with the Kirchner phenomenon in Argentina, I came to realize that a new book was necessary. Women's movements were not moribund, as some I interviewed had suggested, but were instead undergoing major shifts in strategy, and their agendas had changed. This book aims to capture the new directions of feminist activism and their implications for democracy and gender justice.

It would be impossible to thank all the individuals who helped along the way. My greatest debt is to the authors themselves, who were enthusiastic from the beginning, grappled with the issues, and responded with good spirit

to my editorial blandishments. Augusto Varas, then at the Ford Foundation, and Claudio Fuentes of FLACSO-Chile, provided support that made this project possible.

I also thank those whose insights I have repeatedly sought over several years: Maruja Barrig, Julio Cotler, Celso Lafer, Cecilia Blondet, Jacqueline Pitanguy, María Elena Valenzuela, María del Carmen Feijoó, Alex Wilde, Anne Perotín-Dumon, Augusto Varas, Sergio and Kenny Bitar, Genaro and Ana María Arriagada, and Manuel Antonio Garretón. Elisabeth Friedman helped connect me with feminists in Venezuela; Cynthia McClintock provided helpful feedback on an essay I wrote on Bachelet; Joan Caivano kindly included me in a conference on women's political leadership in Latin America, cosponsored by the Inter-American Dialogue; Susan Eckstein, Kevin Gallagher, and Scott Palmer invited me to present the introductory chapter of *Feminist Agendas* at Boston University.

In Latin America, many others were generous with their time and knowledge: In Brazil, Ruth Cardoso, Eva Blay, Sonia de Avelar, Danielle Ardaillon, Norman Gall, Fatima Jinnayat, Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida, Lidia Periera, David Fleischer, and the helpful staff of the Secretaria Especial de Políticas para as Mulheres. In Chile, María de los Angeles Fernández, Antoineta Saa, Lorena Frias, Sonia Montesino, Victoria Hurtado, Steve and Chris Reifenburg, María Elisa Fernández, Javier Couso, and Soledad Falabella. In Argentina, Elizabeth Jelin, Diana Maffia, Catalina Smulovitz, Laura Pautassi, Santiago O'Donnell, and Dora Barrancos. In Peru, a special thanks to Sandra Vallenás for her invitation to talk about this project at La Católica, and to Jane Henrici, a U.S. scholar doing research in Peru.

At Duke University Press I received sustained support and encouragement from Valerie Millholland, senior editor, and enjoyed the capable assistance of Miriam Angress and Pam Morrison. The book's arguments were sharpened by the work of two anonymous readers, and the final version was much improved by my student research assistant, Elizabeth Cutler, who energetically tracked down sources. My sister, Beth Von Voigt, helped me with the index.

Finally, I am deeply grateful for the ongoing intellectual stimulation and personal support I receive from Irene Tinker and Kathy Staudt, on this project as on so many others, and from my husband, Abe Lowenthal, my companion in travel, research, and life.

Introduction ↵

Jane S. Jaquette

Latin American women's movements played important roles in the democratic transitions in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil) and Peru in the 1980s, as well as in the civil wars and peace processes in Central America in the 1980s and 1990s. They put gender-equity issues on political agendas throughout the region, reforming discriminatory family and labor laws, criminalizing violence against women, and introducing gender quotas for elections to national legislatures in several countries. Democratic governments established offices or ministries within the executive branch to design legislation, monitor progress, and carry out specific programs for women.

Yet women's movements in Latin America appear to have lost momentum, unable to sustain their initial successes. The issues that mobilized women over the past few decades—equality in family law and violence against women—have been addressed by constitutional reforms and new laws in virtually every country, but the new laws are rarely adequately implemented. Women's issues are now institutionalized in government ministries, but these often remain underfunded and lack strong connections to women's organizations. Women's political representation has been promoted by quotas that require political parties to nominate women, but the laws are often evaded or ignored. Social norms have shifted markedly in favor of women's rights and toward equality for women; rural women have asserted demands

for property rights (Deere and León 2001); and rising indigenous movements have produced powerful women leaders. But persistent machismo and the opposition of the Catholic Church and of other conservative sectors of society have made it difficult to change laws regarding sexual preference or women's reproductive rights.

The essays in this book show that the need for political activism on women's issues has not diminished. Democratic politics, new constitutions and laws, and the changing international environment suggest the need for new strategies to achieve gender equity. The authors of this volume, as activists and researchers, document the ways in which feminists are pursuing their specific agendas in the Southern Cone, Peru, and Venezuela, as well as in international forums, and on the Mexico–United States border. They explore the implications of these changes for democracy in countries that are becoming more differentiated from each other in many ways—in response to economic and political crises, persistent economic inequities, underinvestment in human capital, and frayed safety nets. Trends toward decentralization, the growing political power of marginalized groups (the indigenous and the poor), and the continuing activism of environmental, human rights, and women's movements are creating a more pluralist—but also a more fragmented—politics. At the same time, the opening of Latin American economies to global forces of economic change and dramatic advances in communication technologies have created new arenas for feminist activism, with important consequences for citizenship and democracy.

Globalization, Neoliberalism, and the Democratic Deficit ↯

Although the democracies in postauthoritarian Latin America have not been overthrown by military coups, as was so often the case during the twentieth century, there is widespread concern that many Latin American democracies are facing a “democratic deficit” and that the quality of democracy is being undermined.¹ Heightened presidentialism and a failure of checks and balances among the executive, legislative, and judicial powers—a lack of horizontal accountability—is accompanied by a lack of vertical accountability as political party systems and labor unions in many cases have weakened, lessening their ability to mediate between citizens and the state (O'Donnell 2007). Parties and politicians are held in low esteem, with legislatures in opposition and often gridlocked. Clientelism and patronage politics have

not diminished, and corruption scandals have further sapped the legitimacy of democratic administrations. In many countries, indigenous groups are seeking recognition and greater autonomy from the state. Levels of state capacity vary dramatically.

Globalization has intensified all these challenges. The so-called Washington Consensus among northern industrialized countries pressed for the adoption of market-oriented economic reforms in many Latin American countries, where the debt crisis of the 1980s had weakened traditional economic nationalism. In part because they brought down inflation and attracted foreign investment, the reforms gained many adherents among the new technocratic elites in the region. They ushered in an unprecedented (but unsustainable) period of ideological accord in the hemisphere, which was reinforced by international changes that favored market-oriented development and diminished the appeal of Marxist alternatives.

The Washington Consensus promoted markets over states and trade over protectionism, which amounted to a frontal attack on the nationalist model of import-substitution industrialization that had guided development in most countries of the region from World War II until the mid-1970s. Only in Chile, however, did the prescribed economic (“structural adjustment”) reforms produce robust rates of growth, or produce them rapidly enough. Macroeconomic policies provided the greatest success: by matching government expenditures more closely with government revenues, they succeeded in reducing inflation to historically low levels. However, the privatization of government-run industries and the reduction of government budgets meant cutbacks in social services, which increased poverty and postponed needed investments in education and health.² When growth did occur, the divisions between rich and poor grew wider. Opening Latin American markets to foreign investment made them more vulnerable to international forces beyond their control, leading to a series of economic crises that shook public confidence.

A range of so-called second-stage reforms—designed to strengthen the rule of law, give legislatures greater research and policy capability, and increase investments in social capital—recognized the need for capable states. But these reforms were slow to take hold, and their effects remained diffuse or ambiguous, increasing the gap between the hopes many had during the transitions—that democracy and markets would address long-standing inequities in political representation and social justice—and the economic and political performance of elected governments.

In South America several presidents ran on populist platforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s, campaigning against neoliberal policies imposed by the economies of the North. Once elected, however, presidents like Fernando Collor de Melo in Brazil, Carlos Menem in Argentina, and Alberto Fujimori in Peru soon reversed themselves, coming to terms with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and foreign investors, maintaining tight controls on government budgets and promoting foreign investment and trade.³ This pattern of “bait and switch” (Stokes 2001) kept the reforms in place during the 1990s, but it put severe strains on the processes of democratic consolidation.⁴ During the so-called lost decade of debt restructuring in the 1980s, and well into the 1990s, growth rates remained feeble. A series of financial crises in the latter half of the 1990s, capped by an economic meltdown in Argentina at the end of 2001, further undermined popular support for the reforms (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2005).⁵

Although several countries were headed by social democrats during the 1990s, including Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil and the presidents of the center-left Concertación in Chile, these governments largely worked within the Washington Consensus rather than challenging it. Voter discontent thus increasingly drew electorates toward more radical candidates. But when the Brazilian Workers’ Party won the presidency in 2002, their candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a leftist with working-class origins and immense charisma, surprised analysts by maintaining Cardoso’s economic policies, although his government moved more decisively to reduce poverty (Santiso 2006).

The first serious challenge to the Washington Consensus began with Hugo Chávez’s election as the president of Venezuela in 1998. Chávez had led an attempted coup in 1992 against a government that had tried, unsuccessfully, to impose neoliberal reforms, leading to riots in several cities. Since 1998, or more accurately, since 2003 (when oil prices began to rise and Chávez began to promote his “Bolivarian” agenda more aggressively in the region), several presidents have been elected on so-called populist platforms, including Evo Morales in Bolivia (in 2004), Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2006) and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua (2006). Néstor Kirchner’s government in Argentina (since 2007 led by his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) adopted some populist economic measures in response to the country’s economic crisis of 2001–2, which put over 40 percent of Argentina’s population below the poverty line. His government cultivated a close relationship with Chávez,

and Venezuela bought billions of dollars worth of Argentine bonds. These facts, combined with close defeats of populist candidates by moderates in Peru and Mexico in 2006, prompted some analysts to ask whether Latin America was veering toward the left (Vilas 2006; Castañeda and Navia 2007). With the exception of a few *NACLA Reports*, however, there has been little attention to the feminist implications of this trend.

Women's Movements from the 1970s to the Present:

From Visibility to Fragmentation ↵

Catalyzed by the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women (1975–85), feminist and women's groups formed during the 1970s and 1980s and became involved in the resistance to military authoritarian regimes in the Southern Cone and Peru. Along with other “new social movements” (Cohen 1985; Slater 1988), women's movements helped legitimize democracy, in part by shifting the agenda away from the class politics that had polarized the region during the previous decades. However, the return to democracy meant a return to government by political parties, which pushed social movements off center stage as sources of new ideas and as arbiters of the political agenda. Conflicts between women's movements and political parties formed part of a broader pattern of disenchantment that replaced the euphoria of the transitions.

Because they originated under repressive regimes, as Maxine Molyneux (2001b) has observed, women's movements “identified themselves as oppositional and anti-state,” and for many women's groups, “autonomy became a principle of political organization” (174). The state's often inconsistent gestures toward institutionalizing women's interests within the government (in the form of gender units with varying degrees of policy influence and resources) were in some cases rejected by women's organizations as elitist and bureaucratic, sharpening conflict between “insiders” and “outsiders.”⁶

In the posttransition period groups that had been united in opposition to the military (and who were often recipients of material as well as moral support from foundations, foreign assistance agencies, and transnational NGOs) were now divided by class, race, and ethnic divisions, as well as by partisan differences. As international donors turned their attention to other issues and to other parts of the globe, women's NGOs found themselves in competition for scarce resources. Although many feminists, largely urban professional women, had participated in cross-class alliances during the transitions

and were committed to social justice, they found it increasingly difficult to maintain these cross-class connections. Working-class and poor women, who had originally rejected any association with feminism, began to see that their “practical” gender interests had “strategic,” feminist implications, but the trend toward fragmentation continued.⁷

Many of the policies prescribed by the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and 1990s, including the privatization of state-owned industries, the reduction of tariffs and barriers to foreign investment, and balanced budgets, could be justified in macroeconomic terms, as import-substitution industrialization had lost its dynamism and many countries were experiencing hyperinflation, with very negative consequences for the poor. But these measures had severe microeconomic effects, particularly for women, as government expenditures in the areas of health, education, and welfare were cut back to balance the budget (e.g., Elson 2003; Aguilar and Lacsamana 2004).⁸

As men lost their jobs, women’s participation in the labor force increased, but not on the terms women wanted. Privatization, international competition, and reductions in state spending increased male unemployment and forced many women to join the labor force to support their families. They often had to take low-wage or part-time jobs, working in the maquilas in Free Trade Zones, or in the informal sector, or doing piecework at home. Reduced social spending meant that women had to fill the gaps (Bakker 2003; Ben-ería 2003). Structural adjustment policies came under attack from women’s movements, both locally and internationally. The World Bank and other foreign aid agencies turned their attention from women and development programs to ameliorating the effects of structural adjustment on women and children.

Women’s movements today are not seen as significant actors in Latin American politics. But that is not to say that women’s—or feminist—activism has ceased. Rather, progress on women’s issues has depended on the concerted actions of a few: feminist and/or grass-roots groups, both urban and rural; women in political parties; elected women; and so-called femocrats in government bureaucracies. They rarely achieve the level of coordination and consensus that the term *movement* implies. Parties have not made addressing women’s issues a high priority, although many have adopted voluntary gender quotas, and several legislatures have passed gender quota laws (Htun and Jones 2002; Krook 2007). The Argentine quota law passed in 1992 became a model for the rest of the region, but it depended critically on the support of

the Argentine president, Carlos Menem, who actively opposed other goals of the women's movement.

Women's movements have also suffered a loss of momentum as a result of their successes. Cultural beliefs concerning gender relations have undergone a sea change. The legal subordination of women is no longer taken as natural or just, and there is solid support for policies ending discrimination and for criminalizing violence against women. Surveys suggest that many Latin Americans think that women make more honest and even more capable political leaders than men (Htun 2001:13). Attitudes about women's reproductive rights are also changing, and it is increasingly possible to engage in public debate on the issues of abortion and sexual preference (NACLA 2007; Mongrovejo 2006; Mariner 2005), topics once taboo.⁹

Although women's movements are no longer as visible as they were during the transitions in the 1980s, women continue to organize and press for change in a variety of local and national arenas. Feminist activism has also gone global, a shift made possible by changes in communication technologies and by three decades of UN conferences that brought women together to debate, share experiences, and build networks. Latin American women's movements helped create a transnational feminist movement, a process that began during the first UN conference on women in Mexico City in 1975 and grew steadily through the fourth conference in Beijing in 1995 (Meyer and Prügl 1999; Lebon and Maier 2006). Latin American feminists have met in regional meetings (*encuentros*), held every two or three years since 1981 (Sternbach et al. 1992), and there have been several subregional and national feminist conferences on a variety of issues.

Under the aegis of the UN Decade for Women (1975–85), new international norms emerged to promote women's equality by ending discrimination in employment, education, and family law, while also recognizing that women are different due to their reproductive roles and in their vulnerability to certain forms of violence. This norm-setting process gained additional momentum in the 1990s as women's NGOs from many countries participated actively in a series of UN conferences on global issues ranging from the environment (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) to human rights (Vienna, 1993), population (Cairo, 1994), and sustainable development (Copenhagen, 1995). The documents produced by the decade and other UN conferences, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), signed in 1979 and subsequently ratified by all Latin American

states, commit governments to make specific reforms to their laws and to adopt proactive policies (Winslow 1995). Drawing on European models, many Latin American countries adopted gender quotas for elections, and gender was increasingly seen as an appropriate criterion for appointments to cabinet posts and other executive positions (Krook 2007; Craske 2003; Del Campo 2005; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Htun and Jones 2002).

The commitments made by Latin American countries at UN and regional conferences have become an important basis for feminist initiatives. Like organizations that promote changes in human rights or environmental practices, women's groups have been able to use their governments' international obligations as leverage to change laws and establish new policies. Regional institutions and conventions have also played a role, particularly the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (known as the Convention of Belém do Pará), and the UN CEDAW Committee, which regularly produces country reports (Barrig 2001:31; see also the essays by Kohen, Piovesan, and Valdés and Donoso, this volume). Regional offices of the UN Development Program and the International Labor Organization have provided research and policy recommendations to improve the conditions of women's employment and political participation.

Feminist Activism and Democracy ❧

The authors of this volume were asked to look at how women's movements have adapted to the political and economic changes outlined above and at how feminists are pursuing their agendas in the Southern Cone, Venezuela, Peru, and internationally. They were asked to assess what strategies work, what impact they have in terms of feminist goals, and how feminist activism affects the dynamics of democratic change.¹⁰ Their essays can be grouped under three broad topical headings: women and the state (part 1), legal strategies (part 2), and the international arena (part 3), although the categories overlap in significant and interesting ways.

FEMINISMS AND THE STATE:

CHILE, VENEZUELA, ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL

In the opening essay Marcela Ríos Tobar explores the reasons why Michelle Bachelet, a divorced mother of three, a militant socialist, and a declared

agnostic, was elected president of Chile, a country known for its political and religious conservatism, as well as the impact of her election on gender equity. Ríos analyzes the problems the women's movement faced after the transition to democracy in 1990. Although the government has been run by a center-left coalition (the Concertación) since 1990, the agenda developed by the women's coalition within the Concertación has met with strong resistance from the Christian Democrats, which for several years was the strongest party in the governing coalition, with close ties to an increasingly conservative Vatican. The government did establish a women's ministry, the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, or SERNAM, but it was unable to act decisively on issues relating to family law and reproductive rights. Efforts to reform the divorce law, for example, met with stiff resistance in the Chilean congress.

During this period women's activism became more decentralized, moving outside of Santiago to other cities in Chile. SERNAM's attempts to address issues of poverty, adolescent pregnancy, and the plight of rural women soon came under attack from popular women's groups who felt excluded from decision making and from feminist and women's groups critical of the idea that the leftist governing coalition would continue to follow a neoliberal economic agenda. A national *encuentro* organized in 2004 (after a ten-year hiatus) brought together over five hundred participants, but it did not succeed in creating a new consensus and did not agree to endorse Bachelet.

Bachelet made gender parity an important part of her campaign, and she fulfilled a number of her promises early in her term. As president, however, Bachelet faced harsh criticism for the way she dealt with a series of crises. During these times of trial, Ríos observes, Bachelet has not been able to call on the support of the women's movement, which remains divided.

Although women put gender issues on the political agenda during the transitions (Jaquette 1994; Waylen 2007), few women were elected to national legislatures or appointed to cabinet positions once democratic institutions were again in place. Over time, however, political leaders and popular opinion came to accept the argument that gender quotas would be good both for women and for democracy.

Gender quotas address gaps in political representation, an important element of democratic quality (Hagopian 2005). Feminists who have studied the issue tend to favor quotas, but with reservations. Having more women in positions of power is critical to the consolidation of women's rights and the achievement of their social agendas. However, there is concern that quotas

may ghettoize women representatives and relieve men of the responsibility of taking up women's issues. There is also no guarantee that women who are elected will be sympathetic to feminist concerns (Phillips 1995).

Jutta Marx, Jutta Borner, and Mariana Caminotti, authors of an in-depth study comparing gender quota laws in Argentina and Brazil (2007), analyze why the 1991 *Ley de Cupo Femenino* in Argentina has been so much more successful in increasing the number of women in Congress than the quota laws passed in Brazil.

The comparison is instructive, and it depends on features of both electoral systems, loopholes in Brazilian law, and the strict enforcement of the requirement that women be placed in winnable decisions on party lists in Argentina, which now has one of the highest levels of women's legislative participation in the world. By contrast, Brazil's quota laws have only marginally increased the percentage of women elected to the national legislature. Ironically, the authors note, during their study a higher percentage of women served in the Senate, where quotas did not apply, than in the Chamber of Deputies, where they did.

But Marx, Borner, and Caminotti do not think the Argentine experience is an unqualified success. Drawing on interviews with women deputies in both countries, they note that, after a decade and a half of experience with the quota law, women are still largely excluded from the critical process of candidate selection. Their finding is consistent with recent research showing that, despite quotas, women are excluded from powerful committees and leadership roles in Latin American legislatures (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, and Taylor-Robinson 2005). The relative success of the Argentine quota proves, however, that women's family responsibilities are not an insurmountable barrier to increasing women's formal representation. Rather, the costs of campaigning and the unwillingness of the parties to actively recruit women discourage Brazilian women from seeking political office.

Gioconda Espina's essay shows how changes in the Venezuelan political system under Chávez are shaping feminist options. She reviews the history of feminist activism in Venezuela, noting the role of a "flexible core" of women who, although divided by principles and party loyalties, have repeatedly united to support legislation for women. Recounting the periods of polarization and political mobilization from Chávez's election in 1998 to the present, she observes that although tens of thousands of women have gone to

the streets as supporters of or in opposition to the Chávez government, they have not done so as women or to demonstrate for women's rights. Indeed, she argues, most women in Venezuela are unaware of their rights and even of the policies the Chávez government has formally adopted with regard to women.

Espina is an active member of the core group of feminists, which has been shaken by the degree of polarization and the pace of political change in Venezuela, as well as by the challenge of dealing with a government that has become increasingly centralized and personalist. Nonetheless, the government is giving long overdue recognition and voice to the poor and the marginalized. Venezuelan feminists are cautious, cooperating when possible with those in the government and in the coalition of *chavista* parties who care about feminist issues. They have begun to seek new alliances, especially with groups supporting the rights of gays and lesbians. Although Chávez lost a December 2007 referendum, which would have allowed his indefinite reelection, he achieved this goal in a second referendum in March 2009. It is not clear how much space there will be for independent feminist activism in the future.

These three chapters show that the state proves critical to feminist advocacy, but also that national political contexts differ significantly in the opportunities they present, and the barriers they offer, to feminist activism. Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Venezuela are moving along different paths of democratic change. Analyzing how feminist and women's groups interact with the state can provide an important indicator of how well democratic institutions are working in each country—and where they are falling short.

LEGAL STRATEGIES IN ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, AND PERU

The essays in part 2 address the use of litigation to address feminist goals. Beatriz Kohen, the cofounder of the Latin American Group on Justice and Gender (Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género, ELA), analyzes the progress made using litigation to improve the odds that women can actually enjoy the rights granted to them by domestic law and international agreements. Although Argentine democracy has survived a series of economic and political crises, it is, in Kohen's view, under stress. Political parties and unions no longer prove very effective in mediating among conflicting interests and channeling popular demands. This has led to the judicialization of conflict,

as people turn to the courts to resolve issues that in the past would have been negotiated in the legislative or executive branches of government.

Kohen argues that the litigation strategy is more powerful than many assume because, although cases do not set precedents in the same way under the Argentine legal system as they do under the common law system in the United States, decisions in one case can influence legal discourse, affect the views of legislators, and shape public opinion. She then analyzes a range of gender-equity cases, from family law to violence against women, reproductive rights, and the gender-quota law, noting that pro-life and other antifeminist groups have also begun to use the courts to press their agendas. Kohen believes that the greatest barrier to the litigation strategy is that most women in Argentina do not know their rights. Many women resist the idea of legal confrontation, while others who might be willing to take their cases to court lack the financial resources to do so.

Flávia Piovesan is a feminist activist and law professor; her essay describes how the women's movement used a legal strategy to strengthen Brazil's law on violence against women. Although the legal and cultural environment for gender equity has changed dramatically in favor of women's rights, many laws remain weak or unenforced. The women's movement in Brazil chose the case of Maria da Penha to push for more effective laws against domestic violence. Penha's husband abused her and twice attempted to kill her, leaving her a paraplegic at age thirty-eight. Although a local court convicted him, the husband was not imprisoned, a sign, as Piovesan notes, that Brazil did not take the issue of violence against women seriously. Several groups in Brazil and internationally joined in an initiative to take the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and in 2001 the commission found the Brazilian state guilty of "negligence and failure to take action against domestic violence."

The judgment provided the impetus for passing a new law that changed the definition of violence against women from a minor offense to a human rights violation with serious penalties. The law makes sexual orientation irrelevant, thereby accepting a broader definition of "family" than has customarily been the case and establishing integrated prevention measures.¹¹ The Penha case provides an example of how the litigation strategy can be used successfully to pressure states to make good on the international commitments they make. Piovesan emphasizes that the international feminist and human rights communities gave Brazilian feminists the additional leverage they needed.

Julissa Mantilla Falcón served as an advisor on gender issues to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established to document human rights violations after the civil war between the Peruvian state and Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), a Maoist guerrilla group. The Peruvian case differs from the Southern Cone cases of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in that the violence leading to a repressive response did not occur under a military authoritarian regime, but under the civilian democratic governments of Alan García and Alberto Fujimori. The leftist military government of General Velasco Alvarado implemented an agrarian reform, but its economic plans failed and elections were held in 1980. The return to democracy coincided with the rise of the Shining Path (Gorriti 1990) and later of the MRTA (Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement). Sendero's Maoist ideology, its violent, even grisly treatment of its enemies, and its increasing ability to terrorize Lima led civilian governments to encourage the armed forces to do whatever necessary to stop the insurgency. Sendero collapsed in 1992 when its leader, Abimael Guzmán, was captured in the Peruvian capital by an elite intelligence unit of the police, then imprisoned, and publicly humiliated by a triumphant President Fujimori. But it was not until the Truth and Reconciliation Commission carried out its work several years later that the shocking extent of the killings emerged: sixty-nine thousand people had died in the conflict.

Although the international public has become increasingly aware of the use of rape as a weapon of war, Mantilla points out that truth and reconciliation commissions rarely take gender into account. The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission found several cases of sexual mutilation, sexual molestation, sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and forced nudity. The commission's work not only shone a strong light on the human rights violations committed by the army and the guerrillas during the war, it highlighted the kinds of torture and abuse to which women, particularly women from racially or ethnically marginalized groups, are especially vulnerable.¹²

The essays in part 2 suggest that litigation can prove an effective strategy for feminist activists who can bring cases to ensure that the laws women's movements have often worked hard to pass are publicized and enforced, and that the gendered biases of the legal system are challenged. Although the state may sometimes take the initiative, in Latin America gender justice often depends on women's groups who have the motivation, expertise, and finan-

cial resources to pursue cases with a broad impact. The use of legal strategies also marks a shift from popular mobilization to the professionalization of social movement advocacy.

INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS-BORDER ACTIVISM

Ever since the first UN Conference on Women in 1975, feminist activism has had an international dimension. Part III begins with Virginia Vargas's essay analyzing feminist participation in the World Social Forum (wsf), where Vargas has served as a member of the International Council and is one of the organizers of the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* (AFM), a Latin American-based caucus within the forum.

Because the UN has been weakened by the rise of new global economic powers and by U.S. interventionism, Vargas believes that there is a strong need for a new international forum to develop emancipatory strategies against the hegemonic power of neoliberal capitalism and its privatizing and consumerist ideologies. The wsf has been a learning process for feminists. Although Latin American women came to the forum with experience gained during the UN Decade for Women, regional *encuentros*, and at UN conferences in Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing, they had not faced the kinds of challenges that the pluralist environment of the World Social Forum presents.

Participants in the wsf are united in their opposition to globalization, but they remain divided in many other ways: by age, political experiences, gender and sexual orientation, and regional and cultural differences. These differences are vital to the pluralist dialogues of the wsf, Vargas argues, where many reject older ideological approaches and seek new visions. Feminists have organized into various *articulaciones*, or caucuses. They have had to fight for space, but gender panels, marches, and proposals for action now form an integral part of the wsf.

Recent meetings of the wsf have begun to attract participants opposing feminist agendas, however, including so-called pro-life groups. Using some examples of their attacks on feminists at the wsf meeting in Nairobi, Vargas asks whether an organization committed to pluralism can exclude those who wish to exclude others.

The essay by Teresa Valdés and Alina Donoso describes a very different form of international feminist activism. Valdés played a critical role in designing a project that would enable women's organizations in various countries to create a national *Indice de Compromiso Cumplido* (Indices of Commitments

Fulfilled), or ICC. Valdés and her team drew on earlier work that assembled and analyzed sex-disaggregated data for Latin America to develop a project that would give women the tools to hold their governments accountable for the promises they made in Cairo and Beijing (Valdés et al. 2005, 2007). The concept of “active citizenship,” which “places a high value on rights, but also on the responsibilities individuals have to the political communities to which they belong,” is at the core of the project. In creating ICCs, women’s organizations become “political subjects” who can make “realizable” demands and who are capable of “developing practices that are autonomous, deliberative, and participatory.” The ICCs provide a way to grasp complex social processes and to track outcomes shaped by multiple actors: governments, corporations, the media, and individuals and groups in civil society. By 2005 eighteen Latin American countries had participated in the project, and Valdés and Donoso here present and review the results obtained in three different cases: Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico.

The ICCs do not challenge powerful global actors with new visions or attack global capitalism, but they suggest a different kind of radical approach: giving women the resources to hold their governments accountable. Using quantitative methods for progressive purposes runs counter to much contemporary feminist and postmodern theory, which rejects “empiricist” social science.¹³ But as Valdés and Donoso observe, having a political strategy to change laws and policies is not enough. “It is necessary to proceed with an idea of rights that will enable the state to express popular sovereignty beyond its own technocratic and bureaucratic dynamics,” that is, by actually meeting the commitments it has signed onto and that have consequences for women’s lives.

The ICCs and the WSF offer contrasting responses to the challenges of globalization and to changing concepts of citizenship, but both follow logically from the experiences feminists gained during the UN Decade for Women and the UN conferences of the 1990s. The WSF follows the dialogic tradition of the NGO forums at UN conferences, which were highly charged with intense debates and cultural clashes as well as with the excitement of making new connections and planning new strategies. The ICCs, on the other hand, build on the experiences many feminists had in the national and regional preparatory meetings that took place prior to each UN conference. These brought women’s groups and experts together, created cross-party and cross-class coalitions and regional networks, and improved the collection of sex-

disaggregated data to develop new policies and demands. Together, these two kinds of efforts made the last thirty years an unprecedented era of women's mobilization and feminist advance on a global scale.

Kathleen Staudt and Gabriela Montoya are both active in groups that link women across the border between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to deal with domestic violence. They argue that the notorious femicides in Ciudad Juárez should be understood in the border context. El Paso–Ciudad Juárez constitutes an important gateway for North–South trade, as well as for trafficking drugs and people. The border is permeable: people from both sides cross every day to work, shop, and connect with family and friends. But it is also a harsh environment, especially for women migrants, who are often isolated, lack education, and do not know their rights or are afraid to demand them.

The problems faced by the organizations trying to assist victims of domestic violence do not arise, as might be expected, from cultural, language, or class differences, but from the structural difficulties of working in two different political, legal, and law-enforcement systems. Rising sentiment against unauthorized immigrants in the United States has made their task more difficult. As Staudt and Montoya observe, the murders that have received so much international publicity are the ones that involve some form of sexual mutilation, about a third of the total. There has been much less concern, however, for women who die from “ordinary” domestic violence, or for the thousands of women who have disappeared, perhaps voluntarily, or perhaps because their bones “have not yet been found in the desert.”

The essays in part III illustrate the rich variety of forms international feminist activism has taken and, along with the articles in part II, they show how such efforts complement what women are doing at national and local levels to change constitutions, write new laws, press for their implementation, and engage in ongoing debates about social values and changing gender roles. They show the connections between the global and the local, yet they also underline the roles that only states can play, bringing us full circle to the theme of part I, women's representation in the state. The essays in this volume make it clear that feminist activism is alive and well, and they offer concrete examples of successes and barriers as feminists try new strategies, rethink their goals, and seek new allies. The process of changing norms and institutions to promote gender justice in Latin America is often frustrating and has become largely invisible to those outside the region. But feminist

activism continues, and it has achieved important successes, often against great odds.

Notes ↵

- 1 President Fujimori's *auto-golpe*, or self-initiated coup, in Peru in 1992 was not a military coup in the classical sense; with military support, Fujimori closed the Congress from April to November 1992, when a new Congress was elected and a new constitution was approved by referendum in 1993 (Tanaka 2005:263). Coups and *auto-golpes* (presidential coups occurring with the support of the armed forces) were successfully blocked by regional pressures in Paraguay and Guatemala, through the Organization of American States.
- 2 However, as Frances Hagopian observes, the worst cutbacks occurred in pensions and transfer payments; health and education spending were less vulnerable, but not high enough to begin with. Latin American publics are generally supportive of more state involvement (2005:339). There are some signs that market policies are beginning to produce higher rates of growth, lower levels of poverty, and small improvements in income distribution, although much of this is due to high global demand for commodities.
- 3 Venezuela is an important exception. Although Carlos Andrés Pérez tried to bait and switch, austerity policies produced riots and looting in Venezuelan cities, as well as a coup attempt, led by Hugo Chávez, in 1992. Between 1994 and 1998 the party system collapsed, and Chávez easily won the presidential election of 1998. Increases in the price of oil gave him abundant resources to back his "Bolivarian" alternative to neoliberal policies and U.S. dominance (McCoy and Myers 2004), but oil prices fell again in 2008.
- 4 For a detailed analysis of public opinion and democracy in Latin America, see Hagopian 2005; Stokes 2001; and Kurtz 2004.
- 5 Particularly devastating were the currency crises in Mexico, Russia, and Asia, the Brazilian devaluation of 1998, and the crisis in Argentina in 2001–2 that wiped out middle-class savings and more than doubled the rate of people living in poverty, to over 40 percent. Although short-lived, the drop in Argentina's economy was dramatic and produced a political crisis but did not provoke a military response. The U.S. dismissal of Argentines as incompetent, and the U.S. refusal to provide short-term assistance, as provided to Mexico in 1998, has had long-term effects. A 2007 survey by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll shows that 69 percent of Argentines think the United States "cannot be trusted at all" (Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2007:30–31).
- 6 The case of SERNAM in Chile has been widely debated (see Valenzuela 1998; Schild 2000; Franceschet 2003). Insiders run the risk of being or appearing co-opted, while bureaucratization and elitism, perhaps both inevitable results as institutions mature, have repeatedly drawn criticism from feminists and women's