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Advocating feminism:

THE LATIN AMERICAN FEMINIST NGO 'BOOM'¹

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Abstract

Latin American feminist NGOs have played a critical role in 'advocating feminism' by advancing a progressive policy agenda while simultaneously articulating vital linkages among larger women's movement and civil society constituencies. However, three recent developments potentially undermine NGOs' ability to promote feminist-inspired policies and social change. First, States and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) increasingly have turned to feminist NGOs as *gender experts* rather than as citizens' groups advocating on behalf of women's rights. Second, neoliberal States and IGOs often view NGOs as *surrogates for civil society*, assuming they serve as 'intermediaries' to larger societal constituencies. And third, *States increasingly subcontract feminist NGOs* to advise on or execute government women's programs. Possible strategies for rearticulating the movement-activist and technical-professional faces of NGOs in the region are explored in conclusion.

Keywords

non-governmental organizations; feminist movements; gender policy; civil society; Latin America

Neoliberal social and economic adjustment policies, State downsizing, and changing international regimes have dramatically altered the conditions under which feminist and other struggles for social justice are unfolding in Latin America today. The restructured terrain on which feminists must now wage their cultural-political battles, in turn, has triggered a significant reconfiguration of what I will refer to as the Latin American feminist movement field – favoring particular actors and types of activities while actually or potentially marginalizing others.

This article focuses on the most visible, and increasingly controversial,



actors in this reshaped movement field: feminist non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are hardly new to Latin American feminisms. From the beginnings of feminisms' second wave in the 1970s, professionalized and institutionalized² movement organizations were established alongside more informal feminist collectives or associations in many countries and both types of groups typically centered their energies on popular education, political mobilization, and poor and working-class women's empowerment. However, the 1990s witnessed a veritable 'boom' in NGOs specializing in gender policy assessment, project execution, and social services delivery, propelling them into newfound public prominence while increasingly pushing many away from earlier, more movement-oriented activities.

In the 1980s, the professionalization or 'NGOization' of significant sectors of Latin American feminist movements represented a strategic response to the return of electoral politics and (fragile and uneven) processes of democratization in much of the region. When feminists' former allies in the opposition to the national security States assumed the reigns of government in the mid-to-late 1980s and 1990s, many feminist groups began honing their applied research, lobbying and rights advocacy skills in the hopes of translating the feminist project of cultural-political transformation into concrete gender policy proposals.³ Most newly professionalized feminist groups fashioned *hybrid political strategies and identities* – developing expertise in gender policy advocacy while retaining a commitment to movement-oriented activities aimed at fostering women's empowerment and transforming prevailing gender power arrangements.⁴ In collaboration with the 'global feminist lobby', local NGOs succeeded in pressuring many Latin American governments to enact a number of feminist-inspired reforms – such as electoral quotas to enhance women's political representation and legislation to combat domestic violence.

In recent years, however, Latin American States' embrace of what has been dubbed the 'New Policy Agenda' – driven by beliefs organised around the twin poles of neoliberal economics and liberal democratic theory' (Hulme and Edwards 1997a: 5) – has inspired a less self-evidently progressive set of gender-focused policies, centered on incorporating the poorest of poor women into the market and promoting 'self-help', civil society-led strategies to address the most egregious effects of structural adjustment. As States are downsized, NGOs in general 'have come to be regarded as the vehicle of choice – the Magic Bullet for fostering {these} currently fashionable development strategies' (Gruhn 1997: 325). And local governments and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) increasingly have turned to feminist NGOs in particular to evaluate gender-focused policies and administer the targeted self-help, social service and training (*capacitación*) programs for poor and working-class women currently in vogue throughout the region. The technical-professional side of feminist NGOs hybrid identity consequently has been foregrounded and critical feminist advocacy potentially compromised, while NGOs' empowerment goals and a wide range of movement-oriented

activities are increasingly pushed onto the backburner. These developments, I shall argue, threaten to *de-hybridize* feminist NGO strategies and identities.

I begin by situating feminist NGOs within the increasingly heterogeneous Latin American feminist field, describing their varied activities, underscoring their specificity as compared to other types of feminist groups and other (non-feminist) NGOs, and mapping intra-regional differences in the pace and degree of NGOization. Whereas some critics have argued that NGOs *as such* have a depoliticizing and deradicalizing effect on movement politics,⁵ I will argue that feminist NGOs' political hybridity enabled them to play a critical role in 'advocating feminism' by advancing a progressive gender policy agenda while simultaneously articulating vital political linkages among larger women's movement and civil society constituencies.

I then turn to three recent developments that potentially undermine NGOs' ability to advocate effectively for feminist-inspired public policies and social change. First, I will suggest that States and IGOs increasingly have turned to feminist NGOs as *gender experts* rather than as citizens' groups advocating on behalf of women's rights. This trend threatens to reduce feminist NGOs' cultural-political interventions in the public debate about gender equity and women's citizenship to largely technical ones. A second and related trend is the growing tendency of neoliberal States and IGOs to view NGOs as *surrogates for civil society*. Feminist NGOs are now often (selectively) consulted on gender policy matters on the assumption that they serve as 'intermediaries' to larger societal constituencies. While many NGOs retain important linkages to such constituencies, however, other actors in the expansive Latin American women's movement field – particularly popular women's groups and feminist organizations that are publicly critical of the New {Gendered} Policy Agenda – are denied direct access to gender policy debates and thereby effectively politically silenced. Finally, I will suggest that as *States increasingly subcontract feminist NGOs* to advise on or carry out government women's programs, NGOs' ability to critically monitor policy and advocate for more thoroughgoing (perhaps more feminist?) reform may be jeopardized.

These developments deeply trouble many NGO activist-professionals and have infuriated their militantly 'autonomous' feminist critics. Many in both camps worry that growing numbers of feminist organizations seem to have been driven to focus their energies and resources on more technical, less contestatory activities, to the actual or potential detriment of more effective national or international policy advocacy and other modalities of feminist cultural-political intervention. I will conclude by suggesting that, despite adverse structural-political conditions, there is potential room for maneuver within the New *Gender Policy Agenda* and propose possible strategies for rearticulating the movement-activist and technical-professional faces of NGOs in the region.

This article draws on fieldwork and over 200 interviews conducted in Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Colombia during 1997 and 1998,⁶ as well as on previous

research on Latin American participation in the preparatory processes for the recent string of UN Summits (see Alvarez 1998). I should make clear before I go any further that I am directly implicated in the story I'm about to tell. During the three years (1993–1996) I served as Program Officer in Rights and Social Justice for the Ford Foundation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,⁷ I evaluated, selected and funded gender-related research and advocacy projects, worked closely with a wide variety of feminist NGOs, and found myself – as never before in my fairly lengthy career as a US feminist internationalist activist and student of Latin American women's/social movements – smack in the middle of transnational flows of feminist ideas and resources. The ensuing analysis therefore constitutes more than an academic exercise or an effort to solve a social scientific puzzle. It also grows out of my abiding concern as a Latina/Latin American/Latin Americanist activist-scholar to interrogate critically *our* always changing, multifaceted, and sometimes-contradictory cultural–institutional–academic *practices* as feminists.

SITUATING NGOS IN THE CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN FEMINIST FIELD

How and where Latin American activists practice their feminism changed markedly in the 1990s. Feminism – like many of the so-called new social movements that took shape in the region during the 1970s and 1980s – can today more aptly be characterized as an expansive, polycentric, heterogeneous *discursive field of action* which spans into a vast array of cultural, social and political arenas.⁸ As I have argued elsewhere (Alvarez 1998), Latin American feminisms have undergone a notable process of decentering and diversification over the course of the past decade. That is, the reconfigured feminist movement field today spans well beyond social movement organizations, conventionally conceived. The 1990s saw a dramatic proliferation or multiplication of the spaces and places in which women who call themselves feminists act, and wherein, consequently, feminist discourses circulate. After over two decades of struggling to have their claims heard by male-dominant sectors of civil and political society and the State, women who proclaim themselves feminists can today be found in a wide range of public arenas – from lesbian feminist collectives to research-focused NGOs, from trade unions to Black and indigenous movements, from university women's studies programs to mainstream political parties, the State apparatus, and the international aid and development establishments.

The diverse women who transit in this wide-ranging movement field interact in a variety of alternative and official publics and through a number of media. New, more formalized modalities of articulation or networking among the multiple spaces and places of feminist politics were consolidated during the 1990s. These range from regionwide identity and issue-focused networks, like the Afro-Latin American and Caribbean Women's Network

and the Latin American Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM), to networks focused specifically on impacting the UN process, such as the Regional NGO Coordination established in preparation for the Beijing Summit.

NGOs have played a central role in setting up and sustaining these various forms of formal articulation among the vast range of actors who make up the feminist field. They have been crucial to articulating what I call social movement webs – the capillary connections among feminists and their sympathizers who now occupy a wide variety of social and political locations (Alvarez 1997; Alvarez *et al.* 1998). That is, in producing and circulating innumerable newsletters and publications, organizing issue-focused conferences and seminars, establishing electronic networks and a wide gamut of other communications media, NGOs have functioned as the key nodal points through which the spatially dispersed and organizationally fragmented feminist field remains discursively articulated.⁹ As Mansbridge suggests in the case of the US, the 'feminist movement . . . is neither an aggregation of organizations nor an aggregation of individual members but a discourse. It is a set of changing, contested aspirations and understandings that provide conscious goals, cognitive backing, and emotional support for each individual's evolving feminist identity' (1995: 27). Latin American NGOs have been vital in fashioning and circulating the discourses, transformational goals, and ethical-political principles that are *constitutive* of the movement, even as these are continually contested and resignified by the diverse women who today identify as feminists.

THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF FEMINIST NGOS

But just what exactly are feminist NGOs? What distinguishes them from non-feminist NGOs and from other actors in the broad-ranging feminist field? Though the concept of non-governmental organization is sometimes indiscriminately deployed in development discourse to refer to any social actor *not* clearly situated within the realm of the State, political society, or the market – from peasant collectives and community soup kitchens to research-oriented policy think tanks – among actors in the Latin American feminist field, the term 'feminist NGO' has come to denote particular kinds of groups with distinctive orientations and practices.

Indeed, in recent years, feminists in countries such as Brazil and Chile have ever more commonly drawn a sharp distinction between NGOs and 'the movement'. The former are typically characterized as having functionally specialized, paid, professional staff and, sometimes, a limited set of volunteers, receive funding from bilateral or multilateral agencies and (usually foreign) private foundations, and engage in pragmatic, strategic planning to develop reports or projects aimed at influencing public policies and/or providing advice or *asesoria* to the *movimiento de mujeres* (the grassroots

women's movement) and varied services to low-income women. Though sometimes engaging in similar *asesoria* and policy-oriented activities, the latter is commonly understood to be made up of feminist groups or collectives that have largely volunteer, often sporadic, participants (rather than staff), more informal organizational structures, significantly smaller operating budgets, and whose actions (rather than projects) are guided by more loosely defined, conjunctural goals or objectives. But such a stark distinction between NGOs and the movement underplays the *hybrid* character of most feminist NGOs, ignores important differences in the timing and degree of movement NGOization in different countries, and obscures the diversity of NGO activities and practices.

Prevailing characterizations of NGOs – in both movement and scholarly discourses – often fail to capture the *specificity* of those operating within the feminist field. The academic literature most commonly defines NGOs as 'intermediary organizations' that 'are typically composed of middle-class, educated and professional people who have opted for political or humanitarian reasons to work with (or on behalf of) the poor and the marginalized' (Pearce 1997: 259). These grassroots support organizations (GRSOs) 'channel international funds to {member-serving grassroots organizations or} GROs and help communities other than their own to develop' (Fisher 1998: 4).

While feminist NGOs in most Latin American countries *are* typically made up of university-educated, middle-class (and most often white or mestiza) women¹⁰ and many *do* work in some capacity with poor and working-class women's groups, they are distinct from non-feminist GRSOs in at least two key respects. First, most feminist NGOs do not see themselves as working only to 'help others' but also to alter gender power relations that circumscribe their own lives as women (see Lebon 1993, 1997 and 1998; Soares 1998). In a comprehensive survey of 97 Mexican feminist NGOs, María Luisa Tarrés found that 'a strong identitarian component . . . marked the logic of women's NGOs . . . the space created by the NGO stimulates a re-elaboration of the identity of its members as social and political subjects' (Tarrés 1997: 4).

Second, the vast majority of NGO activist-professionals also view themselves as an integral part of a larger women's movement that encompasses other feminists (in other types of organizations and '*sueltas*' or independents) as well as the poor and working-class women for or on behalf of whom they profess to work. As one interviewee affirmed, 'In Peru, NGOs have a double identity . . . we are centers and we are movement'.¹¹

This double or hybrid identity led most professionalized feminist institutions to build horizontal linkages to a wide variety of organized expressions of the larger women's movements – from women in trade unions and urban community organizations to Church-linked mothers' clubs – while constructing vertical links to global and local policy-making arenas. And it has been this two-way political articulation that arguably fueled feminist NGOs' success in advancing a progressive gender policy agenda (Alvarez 1994). The (actual or potential) backing of sizeable, organized female

constituencies proved crucial to feminist NGOs' ability to persuade political parties and government officials to endorse their women's rights and gender justice claims. Having a firm foot in the larger women's movement, in turn, kept NGOs accountable to other actors in the feminist field. The growing predominance of more technical–advisory activities, I will argue below, may be distancing NGOs from movement constituencies vital to successful advocacy.

INTRA-REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE NGOIZATION OF THE FEMINIST FIELD

The degree of NGOization of the feminist movement and the extent to which NGOs' technical face supersedes movement-oriented activities varies significantly among countries in the region¹² – reflecting the distinctive political environments in which feminisms unfolded, the country-specific priorities and preferences of international donors, and the particularities of feminist movement development in a given locality. In Brazil, for example, a sharper contrast between NGOs and 'the movement' is today drawn by many activists because early feminist groups were mostly of the more informal, feminist collective variety. Relatively few early groups received external funding or had paid administrative or professional staff. The process of institutionalization of the feminist movement in the form of more formal, professionalized groups – which only in the late 1980s came to refer to themselves as NGOs (Landim 1993) – accompanied the pace of Brazil's protracted and phased political transition process. The gradual liberalization of the political environment in which social movements operated and the gendered political opening promoted by some opposition-controlled state governments in the early to mid-1980s prompted growing numbers of feminists to formalize their organizations and develop greater policy expertise by the end of that decade.¹³ Fully 50 percent of Brazilian NGOs were created between 1980 and 1990 (Lebon 1997: 7).

In Chile – where the heinous 17-year Pinochet dictatorship and shock-treatment-induced poverty made opposition movements favored recipients of international humanitarian aid and liberal foundation funds – many second-wave feminist groups, who formed an integral part of that opposition, appear, by contrast, to have been able to institutionalize their organizations fairly early on. Given State repression and government indifference to the hardships neoliberalism heaped upon poor women, most of those early feminist NGOs centered their attention on supporting the survival struggles of women of the popular classes and organizing with them against the Pinochet dictatorship.¹⁴ Since the return of civilian rule and a new 'post-social democratic' brand neoliberalism in 1989, many Chilean feminists I talked with suggested that those links to the base have been largely severed, for reasons I shall explore further below.

In yet another variation, most Colombian feminists I interviewed concurred with Maruja Barrig's assessment that 'as compared to other countries in the region, the feminist movement has not expressed itself principally through NGO channels', but rather 'small activist organizations prevail . . . which participate as such in various activities of the movement, in a *volunteer capacity*' (Barrig 1997b, emphasis in the original).¹⁵ The clientelism, corruption and '*narcodemocracia*' that permeate the Colombian regime, the historically weak presence of the State in much of the national territory, and the endemic political violence that flows from the above was hardly conducive to setting up specialized NGOs aimed at influencing public policy. Still, the post-1986 political decentralization, coupled with the 1991 Constitution (which mandates State consultation with civil society in development planning), have fueled a process of increased institutionalization in various Colombian social movement fields. And as I shall discuss below, there also seems to have been a marked increase in State sub-contracting of NGO services for policy execution and social services delivery. Several Colombian feminist activists I talked with emphasized that, 'there are two types of NGOs here: some are "historic", others more recent, which emerge after the Constitutional Assembly process, and are sometimes narrowly focused, opportunistic, and very nepotistic.'¹⁶

VARIATIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN FEMINIST NGO PRACTICES AND ACTIVITIES

While scholars have attempted to classify NGOs into distinct types or generations – distinguishing among those engaged in charity, relief and welfare activities, those pursuing small-scale development projects, and those committed to community organization, mobilization and empowerment (Clarke 1998: 42) – I maintain that most Latin American feminist and non-feminist NGOs are amalgams of these types. In any given context and over time, moreover, the activities prioritized by feminist NGOs also have varied significantly.

As in the Chilean case, most if not all NGOs emerging early in Latin American feminism's second wave focused their activities on popular education and women's empowerment or provided services and *asesoria* (advice) to poor and working-class women's organizations. Some still do. MEMCH – an umbrella organization of popular women's groups 'gone NGO' since the return of civilian rule in Chile – continues to view itself as a 'bridge between feminism and the popular classes'¹⁷ and offers a variety of training courses and other services to women from the urban periphery. *Tierra Nuestra* runs a School for Grassroots Women Leaders in Santiago's southern zone and promotes the 'autonomous organization' of the 64 grassroots women's groups with whom they continue to work.¹⁸ Similarly, Colombia's current post-Beijing coalition, coordinated by the Bogotá-based NGO, *Dialogo Mujer*,

proclaims its intention to foster a 'popular feminism of diversity'.¹⁹ Tarrés found that fully 90 percent of Mexican feminist NGOs provide direct services to their targeted publics and 'the majority claims to be oriented toward women of the popular sectors, whether they be urban residents, peasants or indigenous women' (1997: 19, 18).

Some feminist NGOs, such as CFEMEA in Brazil and *Casa de la Mujer* in Colombia, today also center their work on promoting and monitoring gender-related legislation. The latter group, for example, has worked closely with Afro-Colombian Senator Piedad Córdoba and other women parliamentarians on both women's issues and non-gender-specific public policies so that they might 'integrate gender to their general programmatic agenda'.²⁰ Still others seek to articulate grassroots work with policy-focused or more macro forms of cultural-political intervention, pursuing rights advocacy not just to promote more progressive policies but also to *engender* cultural change. Afro-Brazilian feminist NGOs, like S o Paulo-based *Geledés* and *Fala Preta*, for example, promote consciousness-raising programs for Black youth and women, while advocating for racially-sensitive gender policies and gender-sensitive and anti-racist jurisprudence and public health policies.²¹ *Themis*, a feminist NGO based in the Southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, offers legal training courses for grassroots women community leaders and organizes specialized workshops on gender, race, class, and the law for judges and other legal professionals, while also engaging in litigation to advance feminist jurisprudence.²² The regional feminist legal rights network, CLADEM (The Latin American Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights) – of which *Themis* forms part – claims to work to develop a radical critique of the law, to be more than a pressure group, to intervene in the cultural, and promote women's empowerment. CLADEM spearheaded a transnational Campaign for a Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a Gender Perspective, organized to mark the 50th anniversary of that UN Declaration, for example, but their stated objective was not only to impact the UN, but also to use the commemorative occasion as 'vehicle through which to educate the general public about women's human rights.'²³

While many feminist NGOs continue to struggle to provide *asesoria* and promote *conscientización* (consciousness-raising) among popular women's organizations and strive to push gender policy beyond the narrow parameters of Latin America's actually existing democracies, however, the material resources and political rewards for doing so appear to be drying up. The global and local premium is increasingly placed on NGO gender policy assessment, project execution, and social services delivery. Amid the heterogeneous actors that today constitute the expansive feminist movement field, *specific* types of NGOs and NGO activities have attained particular prominence. To the potential detriment of NGOs' movement-oriented advocacy, alternative development, and empowerment activities, growing numbers are concentrating on technical-advisory activities. I now turn to the factors – largely *external* to the feminist movement field – which are propelling this shift.

THE EXPANSION OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL DEMAND FOR PROFESSIONALIZED FEMINISM

A key factor in NGOs' heightened focus on technical-advisory activities has been growing State and IGO *demand* for specialized knowledge about women and gender – expertise increasingly *supplied* by the most technically adept, professionalized feminist organizations. Thanks in part to the success of local and global NGO feminist lobbying, there has been a veritable deluge of gender-focused policies and programs in recent years (for a comprehensive overview, see Htun 1998) and many governments today brandish more progressive discourses about women's rights. At least rhetorically, most Latin American States now profess a commitment to gender equity and have adopted an impressive number of policies, programs and plans focused on women.

Colombia's 'White Book on Women' asserted the Samper administration's avowed pledge to 'Pay Society's Debt to the Colombian Woman' (Presidencia de la República de Colombia 1994). And the Chilean government – the putative 'jaguar' of development in the region – professes that 'overcoming discrimination against women . . . has been necessitated by the government's three fundamental guidelines for the current period – strengthening democracy, national economic development and modernization' (SERNAM 1994: 5). National leaders from Fujimori to Cardoso to Zedillo have echoed such pledges to enhance gender equity and have similarly declared their intention to 'promote women' and 'incorporate them into development'. During the regional preparatory process for the Beijing Summit, a wide gamut of long-standing feminist-inspired reforms – ranging from more equitable participation in public and family life to reproductive rights – made their way into the language of the Latin American and Caribbean Platform for Action and thereby were elevated to the status of norms of regional governance.

Governments appear to have begun to translate some of those norms into legislation. Laws establishing quotas to ensure women's representation in elected office have been passed in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Peru and are presently under discussion in Chile and Bolivia, for example (Jones 1998). Sixteen States have adopted legislation and some have set up specialized police precincts to deter 'intra-familial violence' (Americas Watch 1991; Blondet 1995; Nelson 1996).

The many local feminist NGOs who focused their energies on promoting women's legal rights consequent to democratization certainly had a major hand in fostering this apparent gendered political opening. And the 'global women's lobby' – in which Latin American feminist NGOs have increasingly participated since they hosted the Women's Forum at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 (Sikkink 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998) – has been instrumental in fostering what feminist international relations scholars have dubbed an 'emergent international women's regime' (Kardam 1997: 2). The increased gendering of international regimes, in turn, has brought new pressures to

bear on local States, which further helps account for the recent flood of gender-focused policies and programs. As one Chilean interviewee put it, 'globalization requires that the State demonstrate sensitivity to gender... resources come tied to that.'²⁴

In virtually all countries in the region, specialized State machineries charged with proposing and monitoring (though seldom implementing) gender-focused programs and policies have been established.²⁵ In some cases, such as those of Chile's SERNAM (*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*) and Brazil's CNDM (*Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher*), significant sectors of the feminist movements actively advocated the creation of State women's offices – though the ultimate mandate, design and performance of the specialized agencies actually created typically fell far short of feminist expectations (Valenzuela 1997; Schumacher and Vargas 1993). In other cases, such as the *Consejería para la Juventud, la Mujer, y la Familia* established in Gaviria's Colombia or Fujimori's recently created PROMUDEH (*Ministério de Promoción de la Mujer y del Desarrollo Humano*), the founding of such women's State institutions appears to have been motivated by more pragmatic, when not outright opportunistic, considerations – such as the fact that bilateral and multilateral grants and loans now often require evidence of government sensitivity to women's role in development.

GENDERED CITIZENS OR GENDER EXPERTS?

Most governments have adopted this gendered dimension of the New Policy Agenda and many now view poor women's integration into the market as crucial to neoliberal 'development'. Gender therefore has come to be seen as a key *technical* dimension of State efforts to privatize social welfare provision, rationalize social policy and mount 'poverty alleviation programmes (PAPs) to ameliorate the negative fallout of SAPs {structural adjustment policies} and to contain social discontent' (Craske 1998: 104). While, as noted above, feminist rights advocates have scored significant victories in areas such as political representation and violence against women, much recent Latin American 'policy with a gender perspective' forms an integral part of what we might call gendered 'social adjustment' strategies – 'programs targeted at those groups most clearly excluded or victimized by {SAPs}' (Alvarez *et al.* 1998: 22). In the name of promoting gender equity, many States have mounted social adjustment programs targeting the poorest of poor women, such as those aimed at women heads-of-household in Chile, Colombia, and Peru or temporary agro-export workers in Chile.²⁶ And feminist NGOs now are increasingly summoned to supply the expertise governments need to evaluate and implement such 'gender-sensitive' programs.

Despite the local and global feminist lobbies' central role in advocating for the changed international gender norms that help foster gender-friendly State discourses, then, the terms of women's incorporation into neoliberal

development are not necessarily feminist-inspired. One Colombian local government official neatly summed up how feminists' political indictment of women's subordination is often translated or tergiversated by State bureaucrats: 'now things have changed, it's no longer that radical feminism of the 1970s, now it's policies with a gender perspective'.²⁷ Among many staff members of the women's government machineries I interviewed, gender seems to have become part of the lexicon of technical planning, a power-neutral indicator of 'modernity' and 'development' rather than a power-laden field of unequal relations between women and men (Largo 1998; Sánchez 1996; Alvarez 1999). As the Director of SERNAM in the Santiago Metropolitan Region emphasized in our conversation, 'our work is as technical as possible . . . and there is a great deal of work to be done on the operational side of gender.'²⁸

Since targeted social adjustment programs require specialized knowledge about female populations heretofore largely ignored by State and IGO bureaucracies alike, the new imperative to incorporate gender into PAPs and other forms of neoliberal development planning seems to have led States and IGOs to tap local and transnational feminist NGOs for their technical capabilities and 'gender expertise'. In an era of State downsizing, the gender-planning competency of government bureaucracies have not been expanded and many States have relied instead on contracting private consulting firms and NGOs to advise them on gender matters. Even Chile's SERNAM – which with its over 350 employees is perhaps the largest of the region's specialized State machineries – regularly turns to feminist NGOs to conduct research on indicators of gender inequality, draft policy statements, or evaluate the effectiveness of its various targeted social programs. As women's offices in most of the rest of the region typically lack staff with requisite gender expertise and are generally understaffed and underfunded, global pressures and the technical exigencies of gender planning increasingly have led many to rely on feminist NGOs to provide gender policy assessments and evaluate targeted women's programs.²⁹

In many cases, the policy or program evaluations solicited from NGOs differ little from those provided by private consulting firms or academic gender specialists. That is, governments typically hire specialized NGO research teams to conduct policy impact studies or needs assessments surveys, but seldom encourage, much less require, wider *political* debate with the civil society constituencies with the highest stakes in gender-focused programs or with other actors in the feminist field. NGOs are most often consulted as experts who can evaluate gender policies and programs *rather* than as movement organizations that might facilitate citizen input and participation in the formulation and design of such policies. Feminist NGOs' technical involvement in policy assessment, then, does not necessarily translate into effectual gender policy or women's rights *advocacy* and, as I will suggest below, NGOs' growing contractual relationship with the State may in fact compromise their effectiveness in advocating for feminist reforms.

REPRESENTATIVES OF OR SURROGATES FOR WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN CIVIL SOCIETY?

The recent turn towards feminist NGOs is also inspired by many neoliberal governments' professed intention to promote 'the incorporation and participation of all civil society in the task of generating new gender social relations' (SERNAM 1994: 7). And among the diverse organizations that make up feminist civil society, NGOs are now often hailed as key 'intermediaries' for female social constituencies.

During the Cairo and Beijing Summits, for example, many Latin American governments invited select feminist NGOs to participate in the official preparatory process, thereby presumably heeding the UN's call for greater civil society participation in those processes. Some NGOs, along with gender specialists from the academy, also were contracted to prepare studies evaluating progress toward gender equity over the last two decades. And in keeping with the New Policy Agenda's view of NGOs 'as vehicles for "democratisation" and essential components of a thriving "civil society" ' (Hulme and Edwards 1997a: 6), a veritable UN-Summits bonanza of grant funds was channeled from Northern-based private donors and bilateral and multilateral agencies to those feminist NGOs willing and able (and judged to be technically competent) to work as intermediaries in promoting the involvement of civil society in the official and parallel preparatory processes for these World Conferences.

Despite governments', donors' and IGOs' professed zeal for encouraging a 'thriving civil society', however, the criteria adopted in determining which NGOs would participate in the preparatory process or which would be consulted or funded seldom prioritized the extent to which such organizations actually functioned as intermediaries or conduits for the larger civil society constituencies officials presumed them to represent. In most countries, those NGOs who possessed policy-specialized staff, had previous experience in the UN process, and earned handsome foreign funding – irrespective of their links to larger social constituencies – were usually the ones selected to participate in the official preparatory processes. Governments and donors alike seldom required more than token consultations with NGOs' presumed constituencies – such as a public conference or seminar – as evidence of intermediation. Those funded or consulted were typically those feminist NGOs judged best able to 'maximize impact' with monies allotted or to have the technical capabilities deemed necessary for policy evaluation rather than those judged most *politically* capable of meaningfully involving women citizens in the UN process.

Typically non-membership organizations, most Latin American feminist NGOs are, of course, acutely aware of the fact that they don't represent anyone. Yet for many local States and IGOs alike, professionalized NGOs appear to have become convenient *surrogates for civil society*. In the Chilean case, María Elena Valenzuela argues that 'SERNAM has privileged interlocution

with institutions made up of experts and professionals which have contributed through evaluations and studies to design the themes and options of public policy' and further maintains that through this strategy 'SERNAM has tried to make up for its lack of interlocution with grassroots women's organizations, whose demands are expressed in mediated form through the knowledge produced by NGOs' (1997: 22).

That is, the more professionalized, technically adept NGOs seem to have become privileged interlocutors of States and IGOs on gender policy matters. In pronouncing them intermediaries, neoliberal governments effectively have circumvented the need to establish public forums or other democratic mechanisms through which those most affected by gender policies might directly voice their needs and concerns. And as I shall argue below, NGOs and other women's movement organizations openly critical of government incumbents are seldom among the States' designated 'partners' in the implementation of gender and social welfare programs and policies.

NEOLIBERAL STATES AND THE BOOM IN NGO SUB-CONTRACTING

A discourse of State and civil society's 'co-responsibility' for social welfare pervades neoliberalism's recent quest to establish partnerships with NGOs. As virtually all but targeted or 'emergency' social programs are slashed, governments have promoted 'self-help strategies for combating poverty and providing welfare at the local level' (Craske 1998: 105; Barrig 1996). Civil society in general and NGOs in particular are enjoined to help implement such strategies and take on 'the responsibilities now eschewed by neoliberalism's shrinking state' (Alvarez *et al.* 1998: 1).

Among the most striking local examples I found of the growing tendency to rely on professionalized organizations in civil society to implement government programs was the 'NGO-State Coalition' discourse of the municipality of Santiago de Cali in Colombia. In a brochure entitled, 'The Social Face of Cali', the local government celebrated 'the existence of a great number of non-governmental organizations' in the city while stressing that

Over the years, the work of many of these NGOs has become more complex. To their initial ideological convictions, they have incorporated an ever more technical professional dimension in approaching their work, such that along with promoting the development of social subjects, they are equally interested in generating new institutional forms (Alcaldía Santiago de Cali 1997: 6).

The same document goes on to state that 'NGOs are professionalizing themselves and they are beginning to introduce efficiency criteria in their work, which allows them in their contractual relation with the Administration to develop and execute social projects directed at the most vulnerable populations' (Ibid.: 8).

According to David Hulme and Michael Edwards, such discourse is fully in keeping with the shrinking State role in the realm of social policy – a key feature of the New Policy Agenda:

{M}arkets and private initiative are seen as the most efficient mechanisms for achieving economic growth and providing most services to most people . . . because of their supposed cost-effectiveness in reaching the poorest, official agencies support NGOs in providing welfare services to those who cannot be reached by markets. . . . NGOs have a long history of providing welfare services to poor people in countries where governments lacked the resources to ensure universal coverage in health and education; the difference is that now they are seen as the preferred channel for service-provision in deliberate substitution for the state (1997a, 6).

In interviews with Cali public officials, I learned that NGOs had become a panacea in the city government's efforts to become 'more than an *executor* . . . a coordinator and orienting force in/of social policies' (Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali: 6). The local Secretary of Social Welfare and Community Action raved about how efficient it was to hire NGOs to execute government programs: 'I could contract 1,000 public servants' but instead 'I hire 200 NGOs . . . There are no resources . . . and that way we can do more in the social realm.'³⁰ The head of The municipal Division for Women and Gender stressed, 'We don't execute or implement anything . . . we work with NGOs, but not with all of them.'³¹

Since, as I was told, most feminist groups in the city didn't fit the requisite technical profile, municipal officials turned to GRSOs with 'women's programs', as well as the local university's women's studies center for technical assistance on gender matters. The Division of Women and Gender contracted three NGOs – charged with assessing poor women's health needs, promoting community participation, and training health personnel in 'gender perspectives' – to set up its Program for Integral Women's Health (which, despite its title, focused on birth control). Other NGOs were hired to train 'vulnerable' women heads-of-household in hotel and gastronomical services and the care of children and the elderly, for the municipality's Work Training Program.

In Chile, 'training with a gender perspective' (*capacitación con perspectiva de género*) – offered by feminist and non-feminist NGOs, women's GROs, private consulting firms, and many government agencies – has become a major growth industry. Much of this involves job training programs aimed at the poorest of the poor, particularly women heads-of-household, in an effort to keep them from slipping through the wide fissures at the bottom of the bottom of the neoliberal economic barrel. As one former feminist activist who now coordinates the Women's Office in one of Santiago's poorest municipal sub-divisions told me, 'Chile's Subsidiary State tries to promote people with entrepreneurial capacity' to compete in the free market; those deemed to be

lacking that capacity are simply further economically marginalized or disenfranchised.³² Another argued that 'the Chilean State has begun to work only with social pathologies'. Like many other neoliberal Latin American governments, it has recodified policies toward women by treating the structural and cultural consequences of unequal gender power relations and market-induced exclusion as though they were 'extreme situations'. Violence against women is thus seen as a pathological condition rather than as an expression of women's subordination; and while women heads-of-household have always existed, their 'situation' is now framed as a social ailment that must be cured to achieve 'modernization'.³³

Most feminists I talked with in Santiago were acutely aware of the problematic motives driving the burgeoning local *capacitación* market, but many also noted that diminishing funding from private donors and bilateral and multilateral agencies has pushed NGOs to increase their supply of training programs and other sub-contracted services. Indeed, the Chilean government's much-touted economic success story has led many donors to redirect funds away from local NGOs towards others in 'needier' societies in the South or East. And those agencies that still work in Chile now often channel funds for gender programs into SERNAM, which in turn contracts NGO services, while reserving some (relatively limited) funds to distribute to NGOs and researchers through grant competitions. Verónica Schild maintains that 'often, NGOs are put in the position of having to compete with SERNAM for funding. . . . As a result of . . . changing priorities of foreign and domestic funding, most women's NGOs, and indeed most local or community-based NGOs, are either scrambling to survive or disappearing altogether. Those that remain are increasingly dependent on government-funded programs to survive' (Schild 1998: 105). Barrig estimated that State funds today account for between 10 and 25 percent of the operating budgets of many Chilean feminist NGOs (1997a: 12).

In the case of Colombia, Barrig found that 'depending on the size and mission of the institution, as well as its technical profile, 40–50 percent of the budget of NGOs comes from State sources' (1997b: 10). In Brazil, this trend is as yet less accentuated. As of 1993, only 3.2 percent of feminist NGO monies came from Brazilian government sources (Lebon 1998: 267). But there, too, sub-contracting may be on the rise: diminishing international funding has also led many Brazilian feminist NGOs to pursue contracts with state and municipal governments. And at the federal level, the Cardoso administration's social adjustment program, *Comunidade Solidária*, has proclaimed a desire to work in partnership with NGOs to improve social services and provide job training for the poor.

While in cases such as that of Chile, donors' shifting regional priorities have pushed NGOs toward greater reliance on State contracts and consultancies, donors also have had a strong hand in the recent turn toward more technical, less movement-oriented kinds of activities in many countries in the region. My fieldwork (and my experience at the Ford Foundation)

suggested that funding for projects centered on feminist mobilization and '*concientizacion*' has become more difficult to secure. The global donor community or what the NGO world dubs 'international cooperation' has changed its priorities over time: 'The 60s were the decade of development and the green revolution, the 70s one of solidarity. The 80s was the partnership decade, and now, in the 90s, what prevails is professionalism, impact, results' (Reich 1995, cited in Lebon 1998: 276). The factors behind this reorientation are well beyond the scope of the present essay. But again my experience as part of the donor community confirms this heightened emphasis on visible impact and quantifiable project results. In insisting on measurable outcomes and national or even transnational 'policy relevance', donors (however inadvertently and sometimes reluctantly) have helped reorient the activities and internal dynamics of many NGOs.³⁴

I am not trying to suggest that there's something *intrinsically wrong* with feminist NGOs sub-contracting their services as experts or executors of government programs or abiding by donors' exigencies to demonstrate measurable impacts or results – especially when organizational survival and personal livelihoods are increasingly at stake. Nor am I endorsing the facile populism that often pervades social movement discourse, which invokes radical egalitarian ideals to proclaim it immoral and anti-democratic for some actors to play specialized roles within heterogeneous movement fields. However, I am suggesting that the above-outlined trends increasingly threaten to *de-hybridize* the heretofore-dual identity of most Latin American feminist NGOs. And as I argued above, it is precisely that hybrid identity that up to now has formed the mainstay of feminist NGOs' critical ability to contest pathologized versions of neoliberal State policies 'with a gender perspective', advocate for alternative understandings of women's rights, and promote gendered social justice into the 21st century.

A GROWING CHASM BETWEEN THE TECHNICAL–PROFESSIONAL AND MOVEMENT–ACTIVIST FACES OF FEMINIST NGOS?

The competitive local and global gender projects markets, coupled with the shifting exigencies of international cooperation, may make it increasingly difficult for Latin American feminist NGOs to maintain the delicate balance between movement-oriented, contestatory activities and their expanding technical-advisory relationship to donors, States and IGOs. Executing State programs for 'at-risk' women or evaluating the effects of fashionable 'policies with a gender perspective' still brings many feminist NGOs into regular contact with the poor and working-class women's organizations that were once their core constituencies. But the nature of those linkages seems to be changing. Professionalized feminist groups are now perhaps more typically present in Santiago's *poblaciones* or S o Paulo's *favelas* to administer short-term training courses or conduct surveys to assess the poverty levels of

female-headed households. And as many interviewees noted, this has worked to distance feminist NGO activist-professionals from *'las mujeres'*.

The movement side of NGO identity is being challenged by their contractual relationships to States and donors who expect visible, short-term results on gender projects. Such exigencies may undermine NGOs' ability to pursue more process-oriented forms of feminist cultural-political intervention – such as consciousness-raising, popular education or other strategies aimed at transforming those gender power relations manifest in the realms of public discourse, culture and daily life – forms of gendered injustice that defy gender-planning quick fixes.

The technical-professional face of NGOs simultaneously has been foregrounded by shifting donor and IGO expectations and State sub-contracting. While the policy-relevant knowledge produced by NGOs sometimes has enabled feminists to mount credible challenges to pathologized gender policies, there is growing concern within the feminist field that the critical voice of the States' privileged interlocutors on gender policy may be increasingly muted. Comparative studies suggest that 'the ability of NGOs to articulate approaches, ideas, language, and values that run counter to official orthodoxies . . . may be compromised' and their willingness 'to speak out on issues that are unpopular with governments will be diluted by their growing dependence on official aid' (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 7). Sabine Lang's compelling analysis of the political effects of the NGOization of feminism in Germany, where the State has become the major source of funding for many feminist organizations, similarly suggests that increased reliance on State funding may lead NGOs to lose their critical edge: 'If NGOs don't want only to engage in social repair work, but actually want to change structural features of a certain political agenda, how successful can they be when they are dependent on exactly the structures that need to be transformed?' (1997: 112–113).

Many feminists I interviewed maintained, moreover, that irrespective of their technical competence, NGOs that refuse to play by the rules of the game or whose discourses and practices run counter to the official orthodoxies of the day may be losing out in the gender projects market and are often silenced or marginalized from the public debate. Others further noted that, despite official claims to the contrary, less-than-technical criteria are too often employed by governments when sub-contracting services or hiring NGOs as gender experts: 'the relationship with the State has been privatized'. When feminist NGOs are critical of the government, they are, predictably, less likely to get contracts or grants, which some claim results in a tendency toward 'self-censorship beyond even that which the State requires of you'.³⁵ Resource allocations and contracts are thus skewed towards those deemed to be politically trustworthy. Those resources, in turn, provide some NGOs with greater access to national and global policy microphones than others. Moreover, as Schild argues in the case of Chile, 'vital information {about State contracts or funding for women's projects} circulates in a network that is

highly stratified and that has expanded to women in government ministries and other agencies, at the same time marginalizing others who are closer to the grass roots. These “popular” women’s NGOs are quite literally struggling to survive’ (1998: 106–107).

Many feminists I talked with, including activist-professionals from the very NGOs most regularly summoned for State or IGO gender consultancies, project or policy assessments, or *capacitación*, seemed acutely aware of this growing bias in favor of particular types of feminist organizations and activities. Some were critical of the increased ‘valorization of institutionalized NGOs’ while ‘the rest are not even consulted’.³⁶ Recent scholarly analyses of NGOs would seem to confirm the bias perceived by many in the feminist field: ‘the popularity of certain forms of NGOs (large, able to absorb donor funding, quiescent) with donors {and, I would add, local States} may lead to a widening rift between well-resourced service providers and poorly-funded social mobilization agencies’ (Hulme and Edwards 1997b: 281). Such a rift is increasingly in evidence in the contemporary Latin American feminist movement field.

BUSTING THE NGO BOOM? MANEUVERING WITHIN THE NEW GENDERED POLICY AGENDA AND REARTICULATING THE ACTIVIST AND PROFESSIONAL DIMENSIONS OF FEMINIST NGOS

The most vehement critics of feminist NGOs are the *feministas autónomas*³⁷ – a recent, relatively small, but highly vocal political current within the Latin American feminist field who claim that NGOs have ‘institutionalized’ the women’s movement and ‘sold out’ to the forces of ‘neoliberal patriarchy’. During the most recent of the regionwide Latin American and Caribbean Feminist meetings or *Encuentros*, the seventh since 1981, held in Cartagena, Chile, in November 1996, Chilean *autónomas* who organized the gathering brought their scathing critique of ‘professionalized feminism’ into the center of debate within the regionwide feminist field.³⁸

At the Cartagena meeting, the *autónomas* proclaimed NGOs to be ‘decorative and functional complements of patriarchal policies’ who constitute a ‘gender technocracy’.³⁹ Accusing NGOs of having ‘indecent relations with the State’,⁴⁰ they denied the women they pejoratively dub ‘*las institucionales*’ (the institutionalists) membership in the feminist fold: ‘we do not think that NGOs as NGOs, that is, as institutions . . . are constitutive parts of the movement. We believe there may be feminist women working in these institutions but little by little the institutionalized and technocratic tendencies will destroy them.’⁴¹ Others affirmed ‘that these institutions are not neutral, that they belong to the system and sustain it, and that money thereby becomes a political instrument.’⁴²

This is kind of Manichean logic is belied by the heterogeneity of origins, the diversity of practices and the hybrid identity that still characterizes many

feminist NGOs, most of whose members are quite self-consciously grappling with some of the very contradictions so vehemently condemned by the *autónomas*. Indeed, many women the *autónomas* identified with 'institutionalized feminism' expressed concern that 'the women's movement's agenda is becoming indistinguishable from that of the government.' Others even echoed their radical critics' claim that some feminist institutions were 'being functional as NGOs; it's not good or bad, it's just a reality. But we must ask ourselves, functional to an agenda constructed by whom?'⁴³

Most expressed an urgent need to reassess their current practices as feminists, to rearticulate the two faces of NGOs' heretofore dual identity. Still, many were distressed that the weight of the New Gender Policy Agenda was forcing NGOs to privilege technical-advisory activities and to neglect other dimensions of 'movement work' so central to feminist visions of social transformation shared by most NGOers and others in the feminist field.

I would submit, by way of conclusion, that feminist NGOs are hardly doomed to become a part of what some critics have dubbed the 'anti-politics machine' of development (Ferguson 1994) or the 'community face of neoliberalism' (Petras 1997). Blanket assessments of feminist NGOs as handmaidens of neoliberal planetary patriarchy, as the *autónomas* would have it, fail to capture the ambiguities and variations in both the local implementation of the New Gender Policy Agenda and in and among NGOs themselves.

Such variations would surely influence just how much room may be available for NGOs to maneuver within the confines of the restructured late modern, post-transition, and post-Beijing terrain of local and global gender politics. The extent to which NGOs' contractual relationship to the State constrains their critical capacity, for instance, is likely to vary in different global and local political conjunctures and according to the specific characteristics of local States. Barrig's findings (1997b) suggest that Colombian NGOs' autonomy seems to have been significantly less compromised, despite a growing dependence on State funding, in large part due to the Colombian State's own lack of institutionalization and consequent lack of disciplinary or regulatory capacities. The highly institutionalized, legalistic, and rigorously disciplinary contemporary Chilean State, by contrast, may more narrowly constrain NGOs' ability to advocate for more feminist gender policies and sustain a dual identity while doing business with the government.

To enhance their room for maneuver (or *jogo de cintura*, as the Brazilians might put it – loosely translated as 'swing of the hips'), however, feminists would have to devise *collective* strategies to resist the de-hybridization of NGOs and enable them perhaps to serve as more genuine intermediaries for larger civil society constituencies. To attain both goals, NGOs would have to reaffirm their commitment to widely consulting other actors in the feminist field when they themselves are tapped for policy assessments or project administration by governments and NGOs. Beyond the token policy seminar, this might entail NGO involvement in the establishment or revitalization of ongoing public forums open to the full range of actors in the feminist

movement field and their democratic allies in civil society. Most feminists I interviewed expressed an urgent need for more regularized public spaces in which feminists of all stripes could regularly debate and critique prevailing 'policies with a gender perspective', demand accountability from NGOs' regarding their State-contracted and donor-funded projects, and perhaps even (re)invent more transgressive public interventions that would move beyond the policy realm and thereby help revitalize the movement face of NGOs. Towards the end of the 1990s, some local feminist NGOs, like the Centro Flora Tristan in Lima, had begun investing renewed energies in revitalizing just such spaces.

In navigating the inevitably muddy waters of neoliberal State gender politics, many NGO activist-professionals suggested that it *is* still possible to retain a dual identity while doing business with particular governments on '*proyectos puntuales*' (punctual or specific projects). But many insisted that it is imperative for feminists to continually evaluate and interrogate their contractual and political relationship with official arenas rather than adopt rigid, 'principled' positions *a priori*. Successfully negotiating such '*jogos de cintura*', however, would be more feasible if NGOs can invoke collective gendered citizenship claims and count on the support of other sectors of civil society within and without the feminist field than when they try to 'go it alone' in local and global gender projects markets. This, many women suggested, would require enhanced horizontal NGO accountability to the larger feminist field and to popular women's movement constituencies.

Many also expressed a pressing need for NGOs to devise ways of negotiating collectively with States and donors, not just about resources and time-lines for projects, but also to secure longer-term programmatic lines of action and set more movement-oriented project priorities. Funding agencies and government bureaucrats alike too often simply 'expect contracted outputs to be achieved and are less interested in a learning process. . . . Time and space for reflection may be reduced . . .' (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 7). As *public* advocates for women's citizenship, feminist NGOs rightfully might also insist that donors and State officials allow them the political space to more thoroughly and meaningfully involve broader sectors of movement and civil society constituencies in their technical evaluations of gender policies and programs, allowing them more time for consultation, genuine interlocation, and critical reflection than impact- or results-driven project timetables typically permit. Such measures might help draw a clearer *political line* between feminist NGOs established to pursue the *public* interest and *private* consulting enterprises or individuals who market their policy expertise, thereby enabling NGOs to serve as more effective intermediaries of the societal constituencies which governments claim they want NGOs to represent.

Finally, those of us in the North who consider ourselves part of the so-called 'global women's movement' could take NGOs, Northern States and donors to task on their professed intention to promote a 'thriving civil society'

that would foster gender equity and expand democratization in Latin America. If as my findings and other critical studies suggest, donors have had a strong hand in skewing the feminist movement field toward more technical-professional endeavors, then they might surely tilt the scales at least a bit more in the other direction. Those of us who are social scientists and area specialists could summon our own 'technical expertise' to argue that increased NGO involvement in social service delivery, project execution, and policy assessment does not exhaust their potential contributions to 'strengthening civil society'. Establishing funding criteria that would strengthen rather than obstruct Latin American feminist NGOs' historically hybrid political identities and enhance their ability to be more genuine intermediaries would surely be a step in the right direction.

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Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was prepared for presentation as the Fourth Annual Schomburg-Moreno Lecture, sponsored by the Latin American Studies Program, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, 2 March 1998. I also was extremely fortunate to be able to debate some of the findings and ideas presented here with Latin American feminist activists and scholars - many of whom I'd interviewed for this study - in workshops at the Universidad de Chile in Santiago (April 1998), the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (May 1998), and the Universidade de S o Paulo (August 1998). I am grateful for their invaluable feedback and challenging critiques which helped me refine the present argument. I also wish thank Claudia de Lima Costa, Maruja Barrig, Vera Soares, Magdalena León, Marcela Ríos Tobar, Elizabeth Friedman, Gwendolyn Mink, Natalie Lebon, Peter Houtzinger, and Isbell Gruhn for their incisive comments on earlier versions of this text, and the two anonymous reviewers for IjFP for their helpful suggestions for revision. All errors of fact or interpretation are, of course, my own.
- 2 I use the term institutionalization in the Weberian sense to denote the rationalization and routinization of an organization's procedures and norms.
- 3 For a comparative overview of the emergence, development and dynamics of feminisms in Latin America, see Jaquette (1994), Jaquette and Wolchik (1998), León (1994), Nijeholt, Vargas and Wieringa (1996) and Olea Mauleón (1998).
- 4 Ferree and Martin similarly argue that formal feminist institutions or organizations in the US 'are an amalgam, a blend of institutionalized and social movement practices' (1995: 7-8). For a compelling analysis of the hybrid character

of feminist NGOs and the most comprehensive ethnographic study of Brazilian feminist NGOs to date, see Lebon (1998).

- 5 See especially Petras (1997), Ferguson (1994), Lang (1997) and Pisano (1996).
- 6 Research in Chile, Peru, and Colombia during July and August 1997 formed part of a commissioned study supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation – Andean and Southern Cone Office in Santiago de Chile. I thank Bonnie Shepard and Augusto Varas for their helpful insights and suggestions about local feminist politics and Mireya Díaz and Loló Villamizar for their invaluable logistical support in Santiago, Santa Fé de Bogotá, Santiago de Cali, and Medellín. My debt of gratitude to my collaborator on this project, Peruvian feminist scholar, Maruja Barrig, is immeasurable. Maruja generously shared her extensive contacts with and archival materials on Peruvian, Chilean, and Colombian feminists and advised me on everything from the weather in Cali to research and interview strategies that maximized the insights I was able to glean from my brief research trips to these various sites. Marcela Ríos, Elizabeth Guerrero, and Ruben González in Santiago and Magdalena León and Jennifer Newton in Bogotá deserve special thanks for both orienting me to the field and making my fieldwork experience both personally and culturally enriching. Claudia de Lima Costa similarly deserves particular thanks for providing ‘spiritual’ and intellectual support and a welcoming home base for me in Florianópolis, Brazil, while I intermittently scurried about the continent on this project. With the support of the UCSC Social Sciences Division, I conducted further interviews with feminists in the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro, S o Paulo, and Porto Alegre between July and September of 1998. I am, as always, deeply grateful to the feminist movement activists and NGO professionals who conceded interviews or otherwise gave graciously of their time to this project.
- 7 The ideas contained in this essay, of course, are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ford Foundation.
- 8 In her analysis of contemporary feminisms in India, Raka Ray argues that women’s movements operate within political fields shaped by distinctive political cultures and particular distributions of power. She maintains that ‘a political field can be thought of as a structured, unequal, and socially constructed environment *within* which organizations are embedded and *to* which organizations and activists constantly respond’ (1999: 6, emphasis in the original). In my own conception (see Alvarez 1998, 1997b), movements themselves constitute fields in a similar sense: they construct alternative publics in which particular ‘ways of doing politics’ and cultural–political meanings are fashioned and continually contested and in relation to which people who identify with the movement and are situated in a wide range of social and political spaces constantly renegotiate their political identities and practices.
- 9 Ferree and Martin (1995a, 1995b) make a similar point regarding the contributions of institutionalized feminist organizations to the US women’s movement.
- 10 In a survey of 97 Mexican women’s NGOs, María Luisa Tarrés found that ‘81% of participants have B.A. degrees (*licenciatura*), 4% have master’s or doctoral studies, and 12% have high school degrees’ (1997: 28). In some countries – such as Brazil and Colombia – Black feminists have increasingly formed NGOs as well.

- 11 Interview 35, Lima, Peru, 19 August, 1997. Not all NGO professionals I interviewed, however, shared in this hybrid identity. Some understood NGOs as providing 'a critical voice of a technical and professional character that contributes to the movement'. Interview 10, Santiago de Chile, 10 July, 1997.
- 12 I thank Maruja Barrig for suggesting that I emphasize and elaborate upon local variations in rates and degrees of NGOization in distinct national feminist fields.
- 13 On women's movements and the gradual development of more professionalized feminist groups in Brazil, see Lebon (1993), Heilborn and Arruda (1995), Alvarez (1990, 1994), Soares *et al.* (1995) and Soares (1998).
- 14 On Chilean feminist movement dynamics, see Frohmann and Valdés (1995), Gaviola, Largo and Palestro (1994), Chuchryk (1994), Schuurman and Heer (1992) and Schild (1994).
- 15 On the Colombian feminist movement, Luna and Villareal (1994), Villareal (1994) and Barrig (1997b).
- 16 Interview 45, Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia, 22 August, 1997.
- 17 Interview 4, Santiago de Chile, 8 July, 1997.
- 18 Interview 17, Santiago de Chile, 11 July 1997.
- 19 Interview 39, Santa Fé de Bogotá, 21 August, 1997.
- 20 Interview 49, Santa Fé de Bogotá, 20 August, 1997.
- 21 Interviews BR 98-6 and 7, S o Paulo, Brazil, 1 September 1998; Interview BR 98-8, 3 September, 1998.
- 22 Interview BR 98-2 and 3, Porto Alegre, Brazil 24 August, 1998.
- 23 Interview 34, Lima, Peru, 16 August, 1997.
- 24 Interview 1, Santiago de Chile, 8 July, 1997.
- 25 Waylen (1996); Lind (1995); Schumaker and Vargas (1993); Friedman (1997).
- 26 On social adjustment and anti-poverty programs targeting women, see Barrig (1996), Craske (1998), Schild (1998) and Ríos Tobar (1998).
- 27 Interview 48, Santiago de Cali, Colombia 25 August, 1997.
- 28 Interview 20, Santiago de Chile, 14 July 1997.
- 29 Lind (1995: 145). On feminist NGOs relationship to the State, see also Friedman (1997), Schild (1998), Frohmann and Valdés (1995), Valdés and Weinstein (1997), Craske (1998) and Barrig (1997a, 1997b).
- 30 Interview 48, Santiago de Cali, 25 August, 1997.
- 31 Interview 51, Santiago de Cali, 26 August, 1997.
- 32 Interview 29, Santiago de Chile, 17 July, 1997.
- 33 During one of our several working sessions in Lima in August of 1997, Maruja Barrig attributed the first part of this formulation to a Chilean feminist NGO researcher; I owe the latter insight regarding the recodification of gender policies to Maruja.
- 34 On NGOs' relationship to donors, see Hulme and Edward (1997a, 1997b), Lebon (1998), Motta (1995), McDonald (1995, 1997) and Barrig (1997a).
- 35 Interview 34, Lima, Peru, 16 August, 1997.
- 36 Interview 13, Santiago de Chile, 10 July, 1997.
- 37 Interviews 33, 5, 26 and 32, Santiago de Chile, July 1997.
- 38 Long-brewing tensions surrounding the growing NGOization and institutionalization of feminisms in the region came to a head during the VII *Encuentro*.

The regional *Encuentros* had always served as 'historical markers, highlighting the strategic, organizational, and theoretical debates that have characterized the political trajectory of contemporary Latin American feminisms' (Sternbach *et al.* 1992: 208). And this one proved to be a veritable watershed, giving rise to three distinctive, and seemingly antagonistic, political currents or tendencies within the Latin American feminist field: the *feministas autónomas*, those pejoratively dubbed the '*feministas institucionales*' by their *autónoma* foes, and a third grouping (encompassing the vast majority of Encuentro participants) who provocatively referred to themselves as '*Ni Las Unas, Ni Las Otras*' ('neither one nor the other'). On the debates triggered by the Encuentro, see special issues of *Cotidiano Mujer* (Uruguay), nos. 22 (May 1996) and 23 (March 1997); *Enfoque Feminista* (Brasil), No. 10, Año VI (May 1997); *Brujas* (Argentina), 16, 24 (March 1997); and *Feminária* (Argentina), 10, 19 (June 1997) and Olea Mauleón (1998).

- 39 Speech delivered at the VII Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro, Cartagena, Chile, November 1996.
- 40 In her presentation on the dynamics of the VII Encuentro on a panel on 'Feminist NGOs and Global Civil Society: Critical Perspectives', at the 1997 Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Guadalajara, México, April 19–21, feminist historian, Marysa Navarro, aptly captured in this interpretive phrase the often vituperative nature of the *autónomas*' critique of NGOs.
- 41 Speech delivered at the VII Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro, Cartagena, Chile, November 1996.
- 42 Speech delivered at the VII Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro, Cartagena, Chile, November 1996.
- 43 Interview 37, Santa Fé de Bogotá, 20 August, 1997.

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