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Paradoxes of an unfinished transition
Chilean Feminism(s) in the nineties:

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Presentation

More than ten years after the plebiscite that formally marked the end of military rule, the arrival of democracy has had contradictory results for Chilean feminists. Indeed, at the end of the present decade, the women who lead the reemergence of feminism[1] and the reconstruction of a broad-base women's movement, have divergent views regarding the results democracy has had for a feminist project.

Many recognized that feminism –understood as a political movement and a cultural force of change- has had a remarkable impact on Chilean society as a whole and, in the changes experienced in the situation of women in particular. Women's integration to public life has increased rapidly while the elimination of flagrant discriminations in the legal framework has significantly progressed[2]. As an array of socioeconomic indicators has demonstrated, the integration of women to public spheres responds -to a great extent- to economic and social modernization processes underway throughout the last decades[3]. In addition, a State institution responsible for equal opportunity policies for women was created, government plans have been designed, international and national agreements ratified, offices and programs for women multiplied in all public administration levels (municipalities, ministries, services, etc.), as well as at universities, trade unions and political parties.

In general terms, demands posed by previously isolated feminist voices have acquired greater social legitimacy. Nowadays, it is common that concepts, discourses and issues that had been considered taboo or without importance for society in the past are issued in the media and all sorts of public debates. These concepts and discourses, previously patrimony of a reduced group of activists and intellectuals, have spread to

[1]The term re-emergence or "second wave" feminism are used in order to distinguish the contemporary movement from the suffragist mobilization during the first half of the XX Century.

[2]In 1994 Congress approved the Intra-family Violence Law. During the nineties several labor reforms have been introduced to the Labor Code to eliminate discrimination against women and broaden their rights. The Civil Code was modified to eliminate the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children whether they were born in or out of wedlock. Furthermore, among other measures, adultery was abolished from the civil code, it was previously considered a felony only when perpetrated by women.

[3]The economically active population among women increased from 31.8% in 1990 to 36% in 1998. The level of women's schooling surpassed that of men by one year (10.6 years in comparison to 9.6). The percentage of women under the poverty line decreased in this decade from 39.2% to 22%. Maternal mortality rates were reduced to half, from 0.4 to 0.2 for every 1.000 live births.

ever increasing number of women and different sectors of Chilean society (Valenzuela, 1998; Olea, 1998; Baldez, 1999).

However, next to these achievements there is consensus in recognizing that the public presence of the women's movement[4] –including feminist organizations- has gradually dwindled as a political force[5]. As the transition to democracy "advanced", both the protagonism and visibility attained by the women's movement as part of the opposition to the military regime, were weakened. Paradoxically, feminists voices have progressively disappeared at the same time that the discourses and demands they had struggle for become increasingly incorporated in public agendas. It seems that as the modernizing discourse on "equal opportunities for women" advances, the political actor that originally created it disappears. This is the paradox that confronts Chilean feminism in the nineties, and one of the factors that explains the "apprehension" that many feminists manifest towards this period of democratic rule.

To speak of a feminist movement today is to speak of feminisms in the plural, of heterogeneity, diversity and also fragmentation. To conceptualize the *field of action* in which feminists circulate is much more complex and diffuse today than in past decades. The spheres where feminists act have multiplied and their discourses diversified. In short, traditional notions regarding the content and form of social movements are no longer adequate to understand new dynamics within this field of action (Alvarez 1998).

[4]In this work the concept of social movement refers to a specific type of collective action, as a dynamic action process, a *multipolar system or field of action* (Melucci 1992). Above all, a social movement is a fragile and heterogeneous social construction in which a great spectrum of methods, forms of solidarity and organization, as well as meanings and objectives are joined in a relatively stable manner. It is a symbolic "space" that contains actors themselves and their social and discursive interaction (Ríos y Godoy 1999).

[5]It is important to clarify that this paper centers specifically on the feminist movement and not on the women's movement in a broader sense. Feminist movement is understood as the body of actors, organizations and individuals that mobilize and/or adhere to a set of principles that recognizes the existence of a system of gender domination and is committed with its transformation. The women's movement, on the other hand, refers to collective action and to the social and political mobilization of women in general terms. Some authors have analyzed this distinction and defined the type of organizations that belong to each sphere in the Chilean context: Valdés y Frohmann 1995; Valenzuela 1998; Alvarez 1998; Ríos 1997; Baldez 1999; Vargas 1998.

The future of this movement and the transformations that it has experienced have been undoubtedly conditioned by social and political processes global in scope and, in particular, by internal transformations within the country. The process of political transition is a determinant factor to explain the current situation of social movements as well as the reconfiguration of civil society. The transition has been accompanied with changes in economic, social and cultural spheres which have paved the way to a new system of opportunities and restrictions for the development and strengthening of civil society, including collective action, citizen participation and social movements. Chilean society at the end of century is far from being the society that witnessed the emergence of a diversity of social actors at the end of the seventies and eighties, including women, human rights, and *pobladores* (shantytown duelers). Several studies have pointed to the fact that the new context has had a negative effect in these actors´ capacity to mobilize demands and represent interests in the public sphere[6]. The political regime that emerged out of the transition does not stimulate the development of social movements nor the participation of social actors that were once protagonists in the struggle to regain democracy. On the contrary, it is as though their very existence turns the diverse forms of organization and mobilization that had emerged during the old regime obsolete.

The importance of structural political factors for State society relations and for the development of social actors, is unquestionable. These factors are a product of global phenomena that cut across national frontiers and explain, to a great extent, the current situation of the feminist movement. However, this paper sustains that it is not possible to understand the current dynamics and reconfiguration of the feminist field of action as an unavoidable result of those structural factors. To understand the transformation of feminist politics and mobilization, attention must also be given to internal dynamics and processes that condition strategies to relate to the political system, to construct alliances with other social actors, as well as the capacity to react in a new social and political context. It is precisely the interaction between macro and micro levels that defines the particularity of feminist action in Chile today and therefore, what distinguishes it from similar experiences of other social actors.

[6] Moulian 1997; Garretón 1995, 1999; Drake y Jaksic 1999.

The present work seeks to put forth some initial reflections regarding two fundamental problems. The first, relates to the "paradox" that identifies Chilean feminism in the nineties, that is, the relative success in influencing the inclusion of “gender perspective” on public agendas, coupled with its increasing weakness as a political actor. And secondly, the relative importance of both external and internal factors for the transformation of the feminist field of action and the role each has played in its current situation. The proposed objective is to analyze some questions that arise from this process: What explains the absence of the feminist movement from public spheres in the present decade? Why was the creative force of the movement not translated into political power in the new democratic context? What factors have resulted in the lack of articulation among those sectors that -in the past- were able to form a visible movement for the rest of society in social, political and cultural terms? And, to what extent have structural transformations conditioned the changes experienced by this collective actor?

This article is structured in three sections. The first section analyses some of the social and political factors that have influenced the reconfiguration of the feminist field in the nineties. It seeks to understand the functioning of the political system from the perspective of social actors and identify some key elements for their development. The second concentrates on the object of study itself, that is, the **feminist movement**, its origins and development, the changes it has undergone during the transition period and especially, its presents characteristics. It attempts to reconstruct the movement’s trajectory by analyzing the different factors that have influenced its reconfiguration. Finally, some concluding remarks are provided.

I. Civil society and the unfinished transition

"The final outcome was prepared in silence, covered and protected by the walls erected by the establishment. It was designed backstage, around the negotiation table, away from public attention, still fed by a scanty diet of information."
Alfredo Jocelyn – Holt

The trajectory and characteristics of the transition to democracy in Chile have been studied extensively during the last decades[7]. Contrary to similar processes in other countries of the region, it is a well known fact that the Chilean transition was not a result of institutional breakdown nor an entirely concerted reform[8]. On the contrary, this particular political process was conditioned, and clearly defined by the mechanisms and norms set out by the military regime[9].

Most political players participated in the transitional pact. Both the political parties of the right that supported the military regime and those of the center and the left that had established a coalition to participate in the 1988 plebiscite. Only a few parties of the left, whose confrontational strategy had been defeated, remained at the margin.

From the perspective of social actors it is fundamental to highlight that, since 1986 when political negotiations between the opposition and the military regime began, political parties reassumed control over the political process. Until that moment, and specially throughout the period of massive demonstrations (1983 to 1986), traditional social and political actors did not have preeminence. Even though, the question of the leadership over the opposition movement is still a contested issue, the role of political parties was always crucial, both in terms of social recomposition and the emergence of new forms of collective action, as well as for the transition process itself. In both cases, and in spite of repression and multiple internal crises, political parties were able

[7] M.A. Garretón; A. Valenzuela; S. Valenzuela; O´Donnell, Schimtter & Whitehead; Jocelyn-Holt, Menédez-Carrión & Joignant, Drake & Jaksic, Agüero among others.
[8] For the concept of rupture and negotiated reform see: Juan J. Linz, "Transitions to Democracy," *Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1990), pp. 143-64.
[9] The regime abolished the country's Constitution and drew-up a new legal body in 1980, still in place. That Constitution defined the terms and itinerary for the transition process.

to maintain organizational and cultural relevance, even among those organizations that appeared “further apart from traditional politics"[10].

The “Chilean model”[11] of transition has not only generated a new political and institutional scenario, it has also had a relevant social and cultural impact. Chilean society is undergoing profound transformations in all its spheres. That is, the transition is not merely an institutional process, as the government had proclaimed, it represents a watershed for the "social and political matrix" fundamental for social interaction (Garretón, 1993). That is, for the relationship between the State, the system of representation and civil society on the one side, and for the political party system.

Paradoxically, as in other countries of the region, the return to a democratic regime - that eliminated repressive measures imposed by the dictatorship and opened the structure of political opportunities - had the short term effect of reducing the opportunities for the development of civil society and different forms of collective action within it.

This should not be understood as an unavoidable result of any transition processes from authoritarian to a democratic regime. On the contrary, the dynamics and effects of a transition are conditioned by specific aspects of the political system and the form in which this system - and its diverse components – interacts with civil society. In each national context the relevant factors may be diverse and multiple, depending on different dimensions of the system of political opportunities and restrictions. In the Chilean case, we argue that some key dimensions relate to policies and agendas of intergovernmental institutions and international cooperation agencies and the discourses that support those agendas; political culture; the role and characteristic of the party system and finally,

[10]Some studies have corroborated this point. In the case of popular women it has been argued that most women that joined organizations were housewives without previous political experience. However, even though many women did not have previous organizational experience, an important number of them had had direct political participation as party militants. This group constituted a significant minority since they occupied leadership positions within the organization and prominent roles as links between these organizations and other social and political actors (Marcela Rios, 1994. "*Socialización Política y Acción Colectiva: Organizaciones de Pobladoras en Chile 1973 - 1993*". Master's Thesis, FLACSO, Mexico).

[11]For a discussion regarding the quality of the Chilean transition "model" see: Paul Drake & Ivan Jaksic (comps.), *El modelo chileno: democracia y desarrollo en los noventa*, Santiago: LOM, 1999.

public policies and concrete government actions towards civil society. We will now analyze each one of these factors.

1. The international context

During the last decades we have witnessed the globalization and internationalization of production processes, as well as the transnationalization of systems of knowledge production and circulation, communication and information. The construction of political and institutional agendas has also experienced sustained globalization. The world has become and interconnected terrain, where events and phenomenon that take place at one end of the planet have an impact and are known in all other areas. Nowadays, it is common that individuals, as companies and institutions, have access to information and posses connections at an international level. New structures and agendas built by intergovernmental institutions are not restricted to institutionalized spheres of power, on the contrary, there are corresponding processes at the civil society level.

Along with these economic, social and cultural transformations, communication and exchange networks have emerged. These networks are seen as the advent of a "global civil society". In short, different civil society actors, and especially feminists, have been able to articulate themselves beyond national borders, disseminate knowledge and information, mobilize politically and organize as pressure groups and/or political movements capable of influencing agenda construction at international spheres. These communication networks have been able to reproduce and amplify dissident voices, positioning in this way alternative visions and information -marginalized until now- at the center of international debates[12].

The transformations described have resulted in a significant expansion of a global demand for professionalized feminism (Alvarez 1998). Policies and programs fostered by international organizations -specifically the United Nations system- and cooperation agencies have stimulated the emergence and consolidation of a new agenda of "rights" with gender perspective as one of its fundamental pillars. This, in turn has influenced Nation-States, leading them to implement policies and programs

[12]See the works of Sonia Alvarez and Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink cited at the end..

in tune with this new "gender friendly" approach (discourses, proposals) which has triggered two simultaneous processes. On the one hand, there is an external pressure and/or incentive in favor of promoting changes in the situation of women coming from the international community and its institutions. And, on the other, there is an expansion on the demand for expert and specialized knowledge on woman and gender at local, national and international spheres. It is precisely feminists (academics, intellectuals, technicians) who posses this knowledge and are urged to place it to the service of this new globalized process.

The series of UN summits organized during this past decade became the privileged scenarios for the unfolding of this relationship between professionalized feminists and international organizations. According to Sonia Alvarez (1997, 1998) all actors within the Latin American feminist field have had to revise the practices they originally developed to face openly hostile authoritarian political conditions towards gender equality, in order to confront more favorable international and national contexts where it is possible to influence different spheres of power. In the same line, Virginia Vargas (1996) points out that the feminist movement of the nineties has changed "its anti-establishment discourse towards a critical but negotiating stance in relation to the State and institutionalized international spheres".

On the other hand, there has been a dramatic policy turn on the part of those agencies that had traditionally supported feminist action and organization. In previous decades, these agencies had privileged programs to strengthen civil society *vis à vis* the State, and in particular those focused on the popular sectors. In order to accomplish this objective the projects fostered included areas to promote personal development and collective action, conscience-raising and popular education. Today, the resources available for this type of initiatives are increasingly scarce. As the policies for allocating resources have been modified, non governmental organizations were forced to "adapt" their strategies and institutional objectives in order to survive. At present, for development and cooperation purposes, Chile is no longer a priority. Hence, many agencies have withdrawn to concentrate on other countries of the region or in different continents all together. Those that remain have reduced their contributions and modified their agendas in search of better social returns. Their aim is to obtain

concrete and tangible results from those projects they finance as well as a greater focus on the alleviation of extreme poverty through social programs.

2. Political culture

Political culture is the second dimension of the *system of opportunities and restrictions* that effects the current situation of social actors[13]. Within this concept, traditional features of national symbolic and cultural frames coexist with other more recent trends linked to the "unfinished transition".

Among the elements of continuity in political culture, there is the extreme value assigned to institutional establishment and the role of the State for political life. Citizens tend to expect the State to assume political initiative and the solution to all their demands. According to Norbert Lechner (1993) a split has developed between the role that the State can actually perform –within a subsidiary system-, and the collective representation and expectations that citizens have of how that state should function. The tasks of coordination and state articulation go against the dominant political culture, where a certain "*statism*" prevails. This feature undermines the development of a community of citizens, autonomous from the tutelage of political parties and the State[14].

A second feature related to the previous point, is the fact that Chilean political culture tends to favor the political role of institutionalized actors, situated near centers of power, driving to the margins all those who do not participate or belong to those spheres. In Nancy Fraser's terms, the existence of a unique and hegemonic public sphere is culturally privileged, undermining the existence of "subordinate counter

[13]Political culture refers to a social construction that defines what is considered "political" in a certain society. It refers to frames of meanings and discourses that make intelligible, legitimize and order the functioning of political systems. Alvarez, Sonia, Evelina Dagnino & Arturo Escobar, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.

[14]A study conducted by the *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* found that most of the social actors interviewed expected the government to promote their collective action and participation in agenda construction processes. Women's organizations studied established more vertical than horizontal relations; that is, they privileged the establishment of links with the State and political parties rather than with other organizations within civil society. Virginia Guzman, Eugenia Hola and Marcela Ríos, *Interlocución Estado – sociedad en la implementación del Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades para las Mujeres,* Santiago: CEM, Working Paper, 1999.

publics" that might serve to balance the power of the central sphere[15]. This is particularly dangerous for subordinate groups such as the case of women, since they have greater difficulties in accessing the institutional public sphere and in constructing discourses and demands from that position.

The transition has also introduced new dimensions to this traditional political culture. One of them is the fear of conflict and the pathological search for consensus[16]. This has discouraged public discussion and caused a type of self-censorship among sectors committed with a more substantial democratization, who out of fear of authoritarian regression inhibit themselves from exposing their views in a strait forward manner.

Moreover, it has been argued that progressive political forces have failed to position discourses and symbolic frames of reference sufficiently strong to question the conservative hegemony in cultural and social areas. Contrary to the transition processes experienced in other countries, conservatism and the traditional sectors that sustain it have not been culturally defeated, both in terms of the role of women in society and with respect to broader social and political liberalization. This political sector has been able to impose a set of values and norms that do not correspond with the economic and social processes of modernization that the country has experienced. As many have outlined, we live a "modernization without modernity".

The problem arises when secular and progressive sectors have not been able to build an anti - hegemonic block capable of legitimating different values and world-visions and to put forth an agenda that extends individual freedoms and a new generation of rights. In this way, the conservative hegemony imposes the parameters for public debate and, at the same time, questions and delegitimizes any attempt to advance alternative cultural projects. The impossibility to legislate on the issue of divorce and

[15]Nancy Fraser, *Iustita Interrupta: Reflexiones críticas desde la posición postsociarolea*, Santa Fe de Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores and Universidad de los Andes, 1997.
[16]In his book, *El Chile perplejo: del avanzar sin transar al transar sin parar*, Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt presents a keen analysis of this new national ethos. Refer also to the article by Norbert Lechner and Pedro Guell, "Construcción social de las memorias en la transición chilena", in Amparo Menéndez-Carrión y Alfredo Joignant eds. *La caja de pandora: el retorno de la transición chilena*, Santiago: Planeta/Ariel, 1999.

the controversy generated around the IV World Conference on Women represent examples of how these sectors have imposed their views on the rest of society[17].

Both the fear of conflicts and the relative weakness of secular progressive discourses have contributed to silence feminists voices from public political debates. Either moved by political pragmatism or pushed by fear of authoritarian regression or conflict per se, some feminists seem to have accepted the imperatives of the "new democratic model". According to Grau, Pérez and Olea (op. Cit.), a sort of "discursive accommodation" has been produced among increasing number of actors in the feminist field. This refers to the accommodation of one's own discourse to the explicit requirements of the interlocutor involved in the conflict, operating as a self imposed censorship. This phenomenon highlights the difficulties involved in attempting to articulate an autonomous line of argument that would make explicit and support the most problematic feminist discursive knots: sexuality, the family, the concept of gender[18].

3. The political party system

If there is a distinctive feature to Chilean political life throughout its history, it is undoubtedly, the political party system that emerged and consolidated during the first half of the twentieth century. A party system deeply rooted in society and solidly established in cultural and institutional terms. Political parties represented true micro cultures around which collective and individual identities were built. Before the 1973 military coup, political parties had monopolized the representation and articulation of social interests and demands. This form of State - Society interaction tended to reduced the autonomy of social actors (Garretón 1993).

This relationship between parties and society began to erode under the military regime. One of the dictatorship's explicit objectives was precisely to dismantle the party system, blamed for the *ungovernability* in which the country had fallen. Political repression and the dissemination of public spheres for political interaction, help to

[17] For a discussion regarding the Beijing Conference see: Olga Grau, Francisca Pérez y Raquel Oléa, *IV Conferencia Mundial de la Mujer, Beijing 95:actores y discursos*. Santiago: La Morada, 1997.
[18]In this regard also see, Marcela Ríos and Patricia Aravena, *Temas y estrategias en torno a los cuales se organizan las mujeres en el ámbito público*, Santiago: Final Report for SERNAM, 1997.

transform the relationship between political parties and social actors, where the eminence of the former significantly decreased. Despite these changes the party system proved to be strong enough to survive under such unfavorable conditions. As parties were proscribed and could not functioned in public spheres, a variety of social organizations began to emerge, either in response to the economic crisis, violations of human rights or to represent and articulate sectorial interests. The relative absence of parties provided greater levels of autonomy for these emerging social actors.

The struggle for democracy and the transition itself, were marked by a constant tension between parties and social actors. Once the electoral processes began (plebiscite, presidential elections) the parties were able to regain political control over the opposition movement. With the reinstatement of politics *"as usual"* parties returned to struggle to monopolize the representation and articulation of social interests, the construction of political agendas and the relationship between State and civil society.

The return to democracy does not necessarily imply a direct return to traditional forms of doing politics. On the contrary, the economic, political and social transformations that took place in the country had radical implications for political parties and for the political system in general. According to some authors, "it is not the return of political parties *per se* what makes social movements decline", but the specific form that the struggle for power takes on in a system of bipolar coalitions (Baldez: 1999). This political game accentuates traditional dynamics of exclusion within the Chilean party system. As parties main objectives turn towards State control, they need to regain social support from collective actors. In this manner parties interfere directly with the autonomy and functioning of social organizations and movements. On the other hand, the bipolar character of partisan coalitions and the struggle for power has tended to transfer the binomial logic (at the root of the electoral system) to the entire political system, excluding those parties and organizations that do not belong in either of the two main coalitions[19].

[19]The results of the 1999 Presidential election are one of the clearest examples of this tendency towards bipolirazation within the party system. The Right wing coalition and the *Concertación* emerged from the elections as the only significant political forces in the country.

The combination of traditional and newly acquired features (monopolization of interest representation, bipolar competition) in the party system has resulted in the weakening of social actors and their capacity to influence political life. Therefore, the dynamics of the political system has tended to discourage the participation of social actors in the democratic process.

4. State and government policies

Different studies have verified that the role of the State and its policies represent a vital element for the development of civil society and for the emergence and consolidation of social actors[20]. State action is a central component for the configuration of a system of opportunities, resources and restrictions confronting social actors. A system that inevitably conditions their survival over time. In this respect, the State can foster or limit the framework of opportunities and resources available for collective action and consequently, the emergence of social actors, which depends, among other factors, on: the state's capacity and will to repress dissident groups; norms and institutional procedures that regulate the emergence of organizations within civil society; specific policies and programs focused on civil society actors; the relative commitment and interest to promote or discourage citizen participation; discourses and frameworks of meanings constructed by public institutions; the relative legitimacy and acceptance of non traditional actors to represent interests; as well as strategies for inclusion or exclusion of certain issues and actors from public debates. It is not a question of weather the State –necessarily- intervenes on the organization of civil society, but the role it plays in the establishment of the rules of the political game (opportunities, resources, restrictions).

In the nineties, a specific structure of resources, opportunities and restrictions for the development of civil society has emerged[21] in Chile due –in part- to the form of State

[20] Calderón, Touraine, McAdam, McCarthy y Zald, Canel 1992, Tarrés, Melucci, Tilly among others.

[21] For example see: Gonzalo de la Maza, "Los movimientos sociales en la democratización de Chile" in Paul Drake & Iván Jaksic (comps.), *El modelo chileno: Democracia y desarrollo en los noventa*. LOM, 1999. Tomas Moulian, *Chile Actual: Anatomía de un Mito*. LOM and Universidad ARCIS, 1997. Patrick Guillaudat and Pierre Mouterde. *Los movimientos sociales en Chile, 1973 – 1993*. LOM, 1998.

intervention and the *Concertación* governments concrete policies (speeches, policies, programs and dynamics of construction of public agendas). This structure has had a negative effect on the emergence and development of social organizations and, in some cases, hindered the very survival of non governmental organizations and social actors. This is the result of a diverse set of interrelated factors. Among them, the transitional political culture and non exorcised traumas of the past, as well as a new way of conducting politics; the logic of consensus, behind closed doors with an increasingly elitist character (Fuentes, 1999). As well as other aspects such as: specific policies to promote citizen participation; resources, norms and procedures that govern the emergence of civil society organizations; the relationship established with women and feminists organizations; as well as institutional discourses regarding gender equality.

The *Concertación* governments have not shown programmatic clearness with respect to the model of society they look forth to accompany the new democratic regime. The policies and programs designed were particularly deficient in helping to recompose the social fabric, promote the development of social and non governmental organizations, or fostering greater citizen participation in democratic life. During the last decade, fragmentary and contradictory measures have been put forth, insufficient in some cases and outright adverse in others. In addition to the absence of a societal project, different and often contradictory visions coexist within the ruling coalition and amongst public institutions in conceptualizing the role of the State in the growth and development of civil society and citizen participation. This has even been recognized by governmental agents themselves[22].

Besides these general considerations, it is necessary to analyze the form of interaction between state institutions and the women's movement (feminists in particular). President Aylwin´s government, responding to a demand posed by the *Concertación*

[22]A document produced by the Interministerial Workshop on Participation in Social Policies postulates that "the manner in which participation is conceived within the ministries and services is disparate. This is the result of the absence of governmental policy regarding this subject matter" (MIDEPLAN and Secretaría General de Gobierno 1995). At least two other recent investigations reach similar conclusions. Dagmar Raczynsky, Claudia Serrano and Carolina Rojas, "*Concepciones sobre la noción de participación con que trabaja la institucionalidad pública y como se define el rol de la mujer*". Santiago, Final Report for SERNAM, 1999. Virginia Guzmán, Eugenia Hola and Marcela Ríos, "*Interlocución entre Estado y Sociedad en la Implementación del Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades para las Mujeres*". Working Paper, Centro de Estudios de la Mujer, 1999.

of Women for Democracy, created the National Woman's Service (SERNAM) as a public institution responsible for promoting the participation of women in all spheres of national life and equality of opportunities between the sexes. This Institution, and the policies that it coordinates in conjunction with other institutions, has influenced and shaped the system of opportunities and restrictions that the women's movement has confronted under democracy.

SERNAM´s mission and objectives were a source of political conflict since its establishment. Throughout the parliamentary discussion regarding the organic law that created it, right wing parties, who viewed SERNAM as a concession to feminism, attempted to limit its power by restricting its mission to the coordination of public policies and away from direct interaction with women's organizations (María E. Valenzuela 1998). On the government's side, despite its commitment with the creation of SERNAM, the content of feminists´ demands has always encountered ambivalence and resistance. The Christian Democracy, the hegemonic party within the alliance, has not shown the same degree of opening and adherence to those demands than its partners of the left. Indeed, Christian Democrats have been in opposition to some important issues of the feminist agenda. Conflicts within the ruling coalition are also present in SERNAM itself, in so far as the Institution's structure and personnel closely follow the governing parties power arrangements. Moreover, these conflicts have conditioned the way in which the institution relates to feminists and women's organizations (Valenzuela 1998).

On its part, SERNAM has not had a clear policy toward civil society (including women's organizations and non governmental organizations). A study conducted by the *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* has produced interesting results regarding the type of relations established by SERNAM with diverse social and political actors. In their conclusions, the authors state that:

> *"The strategy of SERNAM has sought to establish links with those actors who might transfer it with power, specially different types of expertise in the gender domain... There are minor efforts aimed at fostering the association and social and political participation of women situated in other social spheres and to generate formalized channels of communication with civil society" (1999: 133).*

Furthermore, during the last decades both the role of the State and the implementation of social policies has been dramatically transformed. This change has had a direct impact on the survival and development of non governmental organizations. NGOS are considered privileged partners in the new development model, they are encouraged to actively participate as executors of public policies and programs. Consequently, relationships between feminists NGO's and the State has become more complex than ever before, limiting the levels of independence of some of these organizations and generating a fierce competition for scarce resources the State provides through these means within civil society[23].

Lastly, different authors have analyzed the relationship between the State and women's non governmental organizations in Chile, concluding that in general terms the State, and SERNAM in particular, are eager to relate with these organizations as technical experts who might support state initiatives but not as citizens "representatives" of civil society[24]. Moreover, State institutions privilege links with those organizations that can comply with the strict standards and requirements involved in public policy-making. By legitimating NGOs only as professional experts, the State undermines their political importance and their historic hybrid identity as part of a social movement.

[23] For a discussion of the changes in NGO practices and strategies see the article by Maruja Barrig, "De Cal y Arena: ONGs y Movimiento de Mujeres en Chile", 1997.
[24] Valenzuela 1998; Alvarez 1998, 1997; Guzmán, Hola and Ríos 1999.

II. Feminism in the nineties: from the "glorious history" to the present.

"Today, the question is posed to a new context. How may the political questions that give historical continuity to women's will to be active producers of culture and society be reformulated under democracy? What can the new realities that arise in a society, surrendered to the free market and the interests and forms of production of late capitalism, mean for women? How do we sustain the recognition of new individual and citizen rights in these new contexts? How do we verbalize new desires, new words?
Raquel Olea

There is no question that in the nineties, uncertainty and malaise irrupts with force into feminist voices and discourses. What happened to us *Zavalita*? an activist wondered[25]. Many others seek answers, they are perplexed at the absence of a collective referent that in the past gave meaning to their political action, their ideals and passions. What happened to those twenty thousand women that in 1989 filled the Santa Laura Stadium to commemorate International Women's Day and celebrate the return to democracy?[26]. Subjects, apparently absent from the public sphere during the first years after the transition. Only in 1998 and due –in part- to the former dictator's imminent assumption as a senator for life, feminists and other women's organizations were visible in the streets again. Close to five thousand women marched on March 8th of that year, under the slogan "*Democracy is in Debt with Women*", to protest against what they perceived as a symbol of the precariousness of democracy that had been attained. Discontent breathes with force.

In this section we want to reconstruct the trajectory that Chilean feminism has followed from its (re)emergence at the end of seventies up to the present. The reconstruction seeks to understand feminism's most important landmarks and its development in light of the transformation the country has experienced during that same period. We want to argue that although external factors described previously have conditioned the opportunities for the continuation of collective referents and, to

[25] Eliana Largo, Encuentro of the Tertulia Feminista in 1996, La Morada.
[26] That year a broad-based coalition of women's organizations organized the March 8th celebration under the slogan "Democracy goes because women are present" ("*La Democracia va porque la Mujer esta*"). The celebration was an artistic and political event, where the different roles that women carryout in society were represented (artists, workers, students, mothers). It ended with the birth of the "new woman". This was one of the most concrete expressions of the vitality and mobilization capability of the women's movement that had emerged under the dictatorship.

a certain degree, blocked feminists´ efforts to rebuild a viable political force, its disarticulation and weakness as a disruptive counter hegemonic force in society cannot only be attributed to external pressures. The internal dynamics, political strategies, discourses and options that feminists have adopted throughout their trajectory as a movement, should also be understood as explanatory factors for the current situation.

There is a vast academic and testimonial production on the emergence of feminist organizations during the military regime. Thanks to the intellectual and academic endeavors of many feminists, it has been possible to reconstruct the organizational history of Chilean women throughout the country's history[27]. These studies have not only significantly contributed towards our knowledge of different forms of women's organization, but also enlarged the issues usually considered by historiography. The wealth of knowledge has slowly converged into a collective discourse, a type of "official story" of Chilean feminism with Julieta Kirkwood as its main representative.

Following Kirkwood, the collective story recognizes that the feminist movement has been characterized by two distinct phases or periods: the first, since the beginning of

[27]There is a broad production in this area, here is a sample of this work: Julieta Kirkwood, *Ser política en Chile. Las feministas y los partidos políticos*, Santiago: FLACSO, 1986. Edda Gaviola, Ximena Jiles, Lorella Lopresti and Claudia Rojas, *Queremos votar en las próximas elecciones: Historia del movimiento femenino en Chile 1913-1952*, Santiago: CEM, La Morada, Librería Lila, 1986. Paz Covarrubias, "El movimiento feminista chileno". in: Franco y Covarrubias comp. *Chile, mujer y sociedad*. Santiago: UNICEF, 1978. Teresa Marshall, *Mujeres de la ciudad. Historias de vida en doce episodios*, Santiago: SUR, 1984. Corinne Antezana-Pernet, "El MEMCH en provincia. Movilización femenina y sus obstáculos, 1935-1942". Godoy, Hutchison, Rosemblatt y Zárate. *Disciplina y Desacato. Construcción de Identidad en Chile, siglos XIX y XX*. Santiago: SUR-CEDEM, 1995. Patricia Chuchryk, *Protest, Politics and Personal Life: the emergence of feminism in a military dictatorship, Chile 1973 – 1983*. Toronto: Doctoral Thesis, York University, 1984. Alicia Frohman and Teresa Valdés. "Democracy in the country and in the home: Women's movement Chile". in *Serie Estudios Sociales* Nº55, Santiago: FLACSO, 1993. Marcela Ríos, "Socialización política y acción colectiva: Organizaciones de pobladoras en Chile 1973 – 1993". Master's Thesis, Mexico: FLACSO, 1994. Josefina Rossetti, *Las mujeres y el feminismo*. Santiago: Cuadernos del Círculo de Estudios de la Mujer, 1993. Teresa Valdés, "Movimiento de mujeres y producción de conocimientos de género, 1978-1989". in: Magdalena León comp. *Mujeres y participación política. Avances y desafíos en América Latina*. Bogotá: TM Editores, 1994. Teresa Valdés and Marisa Weinstein. *Mujeres que sueñan: Las organizaciones de pobladoras en Chile 1973-1990*. Santiago: FLACSO, 1993.

the century until the 1950's, guided by a suffragist struggle; and the second, between the nineteen seventies until the end of the eighties, in which the movement positioned itself in opposition to the military regime. Kirkwood developed a chronology distinguishing three stages in the first wave of feminist organization: formation (1915 to 1930), ascent (1931 to 1949), and disintegration (1949-1952) of the movement. The years after 1950 until the 1970's, are characterized by Kirkwood as a period of *feminist silence*, in which the problem of gender inequality appears only as a secondary issue. The first wave extends until 1931, when the right to vote in the municipal elections is granted to women, and it is characterized by the timid beginning of the fight for civil rights. The second period, "ascent", is marked by the suffrage struggle and it is, without a doubt, the greatest feminine mobilization that the country had seen in its history[28]. Once the right to vote was conquered, the period known as the *feminist silence began.* After high presence of autonomous women's groups, the movement is atomized, "all the organizations that were not strictly charitable in nature were dissolved; the feminist concept is abandoned" (ibid.).

During that long twenty year period feminist voices disappeared from the public sphere. Little information exists regarding the collective action of those women during that period, what is clear is that they did not organize based on their gender identity. The *feminist silence* comes to an end during the darkest years of the military repression, when fear and social disintegration had set-in after the coup. A process of social rearticulation begins with women organizing collectively in different spheres of national life: within the National Trade Union Coordinator, the Human Rights Commission, in the shanty towns to face economic crisis, in reflection and consciousness-raising groups. Moreover, political parties of the left and center who oppose the dictatorship began to organize women's fronts as part of their political strategy to regain leadership of social actors. The rearticulation of a broad based women's movement begins as these three sectors converge: human rights organizations, popular economic organizations and women's groups in the shantytowns (*talleres de mujeres pobladoras*), in addition to strictly feminist organizations.

[28]In that period the most relevant organizations were: Partido Cívico Femenino (founded in 1919), the Partido Femenino Chileno (founded in 1946), the Movimiento de Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena (MEMCH founded in 1935), the Comité Pro Derechos de la Mujer, and the coordination of women's organizations, Federación Chilena de Instituciones Femeninas (FECHIF).

Patricia Chuchryk states that in August 11th 1983, the first feminist public appearance of that period, took place. A group of sixty women met in front of the National Library and extended a banner that read: "*Democracy Now! Feminist Movement of Chile*". The leading feminist organizations created during that period were: the Circle of Woman's Studies, the Feminist Movement and Women for Socialism. All of them composed mainly by professional middle class women. Women from the popular sectors also created feminist organizations, the best known were: Movement of Popular Woman (MOMUPO), the *Domitilas*, and the Collective of Women from Peñalolen.

The feminist project that begins to emerge is preoccupied, above all, with authoritarianism (Chuchryk, 1991). It is a rejection of all the authoritarianism(s) present in Chilean society, from the brutal authoritarianism imposed by the military regime in political, economic and social terms, to the that present in private spheres of family life in all social classes. As in the rest of Latin America, the feminism that emerges in this period is heir to the political tradition of the left. The women who support this nascent feminist movement are mostly militants from that political sector, therefore, they logically assume an important part of that ideological legacy. This close relationship between feminism and the left is crucial for understanding the strategies and discourses characteristic of second wave feminists. Contrary to what happened in more industrialized countries, Chilean feminism is born as a socialist project, linking theoretically and politically the transformation of gender relationships of dominance with that of social capitalist structures. Patricia Chuchryk calls the attention on the tremendous homogeneity surrounding this fundamental ethos. For her, there were no liberal or radical feminists in Chile. With more or less emphasis, most feminists considered themselves "socialist feminist". No one doubted the necessity to transform capitalism as part of the emancipation project against patriarchy[29].

In practice this implied that the left (especially its parties) became a type of omnipresent *interlocutor* for feminism. The relationship between feminists and the structure and militants of the left was always complex and conflicting. While some

[29] On this issue see also Gina Vargas works.

feminists attempted to break-off all ties in order to defend the autonomy of the movement, others looked for ways to reconcile their double militancy and link their daily political struggle for class and gender equality. There is scarce information regarding the concrete relational dynamics between feminist organizations and the different political parties during that period. However, both organizational spheres were always linked, crossed by a constant flow of people, communication, discourses, and social and political exchanges.

In synthesis, second wave feminists always conceived their political struggle as part of the opposition movement to the military regime. The political strategies and internal conflicts that characterized the movement were always conditioned and informed by general political processes. This commitment with the struggle to regain democracy served as the merging point between feminists and other sectors of the women's movement. Women's involvement in the opposition proved to be a significant historical milestone for the women's movement by setting the stage for an unprecedented degree of articulation and visibility within the national public arena.

In spite of representing a minority, feminism provided symbolic identity sustenance for this mobilization. The slogan *"Democracy in the country and in the home"*[30] coined by feminists and adopted by the women's movement, accounts for feminist discursive and ideological leadership within that movement. Within the women's movement, both theoretical understandings and identity construction on gender relations were a direct result of feminist action. However, adherence to feminist principles was always uneven and often conflicting amongst women's organizations. Despite the convergence of political objectives, it was extremely difficult to establish alliances around specific gender issues, strong enough to support and maintain the articulation within a broader movement during and after the transition (Ríos 1994). Cleavages and conflicts that had been historically present within the movement re-emerged with renewed force as the transition process advanced.

The most severe conflicts took place towards the end of the dictatorship, nevertheless Chilean feminism had been historically strained by profound political and class

[30]"Democracia en el país y en la casa". Slogan created by Julieta Kirkwood and adopted by the Feminist Movement.

cleavages. According to Manuel Antonio Garretón, "at the end of the [military] regime, party fragmentation or the conformation of political blocks was transferred to social organizations. In this way, sectorial, organizational and other struggles were subordinated to a central political goal for which there was no strategy nor intermediate steps. All of this weakened the collective action that organizations, lacking true autonomy, could undertake" (1993: 416).

The internal dynamics within the feminist movement during the transition process have seldom been researched. Most of the studies that focused on that period highlight the problems between party women and feminists or between the latter and popular women (*pobladoras)*. However, there is uncertainty regarding how the feminist field began to loose its previous articulation and what actors were involved in internal conflicts. The most substantial differences appeared to be related more to the selection of political strategies than to ideological confrontations between different feminist projects. This refers to the original ethos of Chilean feminism, that is to say, its permanent and obstinate relationship with party politics and national political projects. In concrete terms, electoral processes, partisan conflicts and alliances had a determinant role in shaping feminist discourses and actions.

Feminist academic production during the last decade has tended to overemphasize and to a certain extent, idealize the movement's unity and articulation during the past. History has been rewritten from the perspective of a specific sector of the women's and feminist movement, linked to the political parties that won the presidential elections of 1989, overshadowing the conflicts and trajectories of others sectors of the movement. Hence, most of the narrative regarding the transition states as follow: "the women's movement created the *Concertación* of Women for Democracy to present their demands to the new democratic government, feminists (re)entered the parties and the State, others remained in the NGOs". Even though all of this happened, it is also true that an important number of feminists did not agree or were not invited to participate in the *Concertación* of Women for Democracy. Many did neither enter the State nor political parties, on the contrary, many opted for individual strategies of marginality or insertion both with respect to the political system and civil society. What is important is to recognize that feminists followed a multiplicity of trajectories throughout the transition period, different paths and strategies that have in turned,

conformed the present field of action, including conflicting political strategies and a contested reconstruction of a collective history.

The changes taking place in the feminist field of action during the last decade lead us to believe that with the return to a democratic regime (after 1990) begins a third phase in the history of the movement. Moreover, there is consensus in recognizing that the movement has lost the articulation and visibility that it had achieved in the previous phase[31]. In this regard, Maruja Barrig (1997) has written that the movement (women / feminist) does not move much, renews itself little, and congregates in the streets even less".

♦ Feminism(s) in the nineties

The feminist movement has experienced a considerable transformation during the last two decades. Traditional forms of political organization and mobilization have declined or transformed as new organizational and discursive dynamics and structures emerge. At present, it is more accurate to speak of a field of action rather than a traditional social movement; a field based on discursive and symbolic exchanges, concrete social political practices and mobilization strategies, "expansive, polycentric and heterogeneous, that extends beyond the organizations or groups characteristic of a movement" (Alvarez 1998). Sonia Alvarez argues that the spaces where women that declared themselves feminists act or may act have multiplied, "it is no longer only on the streets, autonomous or conscience raising groups, workshops for popular education, etc. Although feminists continue to be in those spaces today, they are also in a wide range of other cultural, social and political arenas: in the corridors of the UN, in the academy, state institutions, the media, non governmental organisms among others.

[31]This is repetitively pointed out in the publication of a seminar held in Santiago at the beginning of 1998. In this publication Sonia Alvarez, Raquel Olea, María Elena Valenzuela, Susana Cubillos, Marcela Ríos and Elizabeth Guerrero, among other authors, corroborate the absence of a feminist political referent. *Reflexiones teóricas y comparativas sobre los feminismos en Chile y América Latina*, Santiago: Seminar Notes, 1998. Also see the publication of the Seminar "Barreras y potencialidades del movimiento de mujeres en Chile", Santiago: MEMCH, 1998. And, Especial/Fempress, *Feminismos de Fin de Siglo*, Santiago, 1999.

At the same time, feminist organizations, discursive structures, political strategies and articulation with other social actors have experienced significant changes in this period. Although the new field of action has diversified and enlarged feminist action as such, it has had the paradoxical effect of turning that action less visible for the rest of society. Next we will analyze the most significant trends of change and continuity in the feminist field of action in Chile of the nineties.

- ***The massification of feminist discourses***

During the last two decades feminist discourses, concepts and debates which had been confined to the opposition movement have been increasingly incorporated to public discourses and agendas in Chilean society. Nowadays, feminist discourses and demands have been embraced by women from diverse sectors of society, they have receive the attention of the media, within academic circles and in political debates. The variety of spaces and spheres where these discourses transit across has also increased. Moreover, while in past decades feminist organization was concentrated in a few urban centers (Santiago, Valparaíso, Concepción), today we find feminists active in different parts of the country, either linked to certain institutions or working on individual projects. This has produced the loss of a sole geographical and thematic focus, giving place to a multiplicity of micro focuses of action at local, regional and national levels.

Therefore, feminists confront an increasing expansion and diversification of issues and spheres of action, especially when compared to the previous period. Patricia Chuchryk (1993) states that in the country by the mid 1980`s, there were no more than two to three hundred women who identified themselves as feminists, most of them in Santiago acting on clearly identifiable organizations and spheres. Nowadays, it is impossible to estimate the number of women that say/feel/adhered to feminism in the country, they are present throughout the nation in a variety of institutional and organizational spheres. The majority of these women explicitly identify themselves as feminists, while others – individually or collectively – do not identify themselves as such, but do mobilize to improve women's conditions and transform unequal gender relations. Undoubtedly, a definite success for feminism. Nevertheless, this expansion poses new and more complex challenges for feminists, both in relation to the circulation of information and knowledge, and for the articulation between different sectors within the field of action.

A second trend prevalent in the feminist field –related to the previous point- is the growing multiplicity of discourses and programmatic objectives. That is to say, academic production, political action and articulation among feminists is increasingly conducted around specific issues and not behind a single project of change. At present, we witness the emergence of many issues and micro-projects which address concrete demands and mobilize around specific identities. This refers to the thematic specialization of organizations and networks in areas such as domestic violence, reproductive and sexual rights, feminization of poverty, the rights of women, among others, as well as the mobilization of certain groups of women around their specific identities: sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, generation among others.

Hence, the feminist field is confronted with a two way process; an increasing diversity of interests, identities and projects and, at the same time, the weakening of a single overarching project capable of articulating and mobilizing a majority of feminists. Once again this poses a complex, and to a certain degree, contradictory scenario. This growing plurality and heterogeneity sets the stage for greater participation of groups of women who traditionally had not mobilized around their gender identity. Consequently, legitimizing and making visible within their discourses and demands, as well as the specificity of their gendered life experience. However, this plurality also results in fragmentation and lack of articulation between diverse sectors and components of the feminist field of action. Each group, each network, mobilizes around its specific objectives, organizes its own actions, elaborates discourses, strategies, proposals without them being necessarily complemented, informed or coordinated with that of other organizations. Often times, there is a weak and conflicting dialogue between different sectors and therefore, a low capacity to mobilize and act on certain issues or problems of interest to all. This is indicative of a global trend towards the weakening of general projects for social change, at the same time that the construction of particular identities and demands becomes central[32].

- ***Political – Ideological transformation***

[32] Regarding this point see, Nancy Fraser, Introduction. Op. cit.

The reemergence of feminism in Chile was closely related to a socialist project, and therefore, since its inception it had a clear anti-systemic orientation. This original bond between feminism and socialism has gradually disappeared, among other factors due to feminist growing distance from its Marxist origins, the left's ideological reformation and the cultural and political transformations brought about by the fall of the Berlin wall. The point is that today it is no longer possible to speak of a singular feminist ideological project, it is necessary to speak of feminisms in plural, with a multiplicity of ideological positions from liberal to radical, through a wide range of intermediate diversity.

The second wave of feminism that emerged at the end of the seventies was confronted with the institutional political order and the economic model imposed by the military dictatorship. Facing an authoritarian regime that offered neither spaces nor incentives for dialogue or participation and used repression as a weapon for political discipline, feminist had to be articulated and maintain cohesion. However, once the political context changed after the transition, and the "common enemy" disappeared, the contestatory orientation ceased to play an articulating role within the movement. On the contrary, even though many feminists manifest their dissatisfaction with the type of "democracy" achieved, they do not share a common position with respect to the State or the economic model. While some have actively participated in the *Concertación* governments, others continue to criticize and oppose the policies put forth by these governments. While the former argue that democratic governments have adopted (at least in part) the demands posed by the women's movement, the latter denounce that those demands have been distorted.

- ***Organizational forms: continuity and change***

Another transformation closely related to the above-mentioned processes, relates to changes in feminist organizational structures. The informal organizations, groups and workshops under which feminist had come together during the last decade, gave way to different forms of collective action and a growing diversification in the type of spaces where feminists may be found. These transformations have been triggered – among other factors- by changes within the organizations themselves, in terms of their objectives, structures, membership, political strategies and articulation with other social actors.

In the first place, traditional collective structures have experienced an increase professionalization and institutionalization. An important number of feminist organizations that emerged during the dictatorship, showed early signs of institutionalization by legalizing their status, formalizing internal procedures and specializing in certain issues. This, in an effort to provide the organizations with stability and continuance, to assure their survival in a context of rapid social and economic transformations and to increase their impact over society as a whole. Many organizations created as collectives for reflection and political mobilization considered their transformation into non governmental organizations as a necessary step towards consolidation. Sonia Alvarez has referred to this process as the "*ngoization"* (*onegización*) of the feminist field. This phenomenon is evident throughout Latin America, yet in Chile it has had a particularly strong impact[33].

Currently, non governmental organizations represent one of the most common organizational expressions in the feminist field of action. Within this organizational form there is great diversity of institutional arrangements, forms of operation, political strategies and composition. NGO's do not represent a homogeneous organizational type nor are they one-dimensional; hence any analytical effort to understand feminism in the nineties should take into account this plurality of expressions and how these diverse organizations relate amongst each other[34].

In addition to non governmental organizations, there is a great variety of other types of women's organizations. Some of them identify themselves as feminists, while others, although committed to women's rights and empowerment, do not assume an explicit feminist stance. Among these organizations we find what have been known as "women's houses", which emerged as an organizational form within the feminist field by the end of the military regime. They were initially supported by international cooperation agencies that tried to provide venues, infrastructure and resources for the organization of local women. They are basically gathering places for women from

[33]On this point see the works of Sonia Alvarez and Maruja Barig cited in the bibliography.
[34]There has been little empirical research on this issue. However, and according to the 1999 institutional directory (*Guía Silver)* there are 24 NGOs dedicated exclusively to women's issues in the country, and another 16 specific programs within NGO's dedicated to general development projects. For further discussion on women's NGOS in Chile see the work Maruja Barig previously cited.

popular sectors, usually used to conduct seminars and workshops on personal development, labor training courses, reflection meetings as well as a variety of self help and social development programs[35].

During this decade, the role and character of these organizations has slowly changed as the State –especially through Municipalities– has contributed to their emergence and financing. Just like the NGOS, these organizations show significant differences among themselves, either by their relationship to the State, objectives, forms of organization and/or adherence to a feminist identity. Their inclusion as part of the feminist field of action continues to be a contested issue. However, it is important to recognize the work that they carry out to promote popular women's collective action and improve their living conditions.

Another important organizational form within the feminist field are issue oriented *advocacy networks*. They have been able to consolidate themselves as a new form of feminist organization committed to the establishment of inter-institutional and transnational links. Currently, there are at least seven such networks in Chile, formed by social organizations, NGOS and individuals involved in areas such as: domestic and sexual violence, reproductive rights, health, women's rights, education, and information for women, among others[36].

In another area, the emergence of gender studies programs in different universities and professional institutes throughout the country, accounts for the growing legitimacy that the study of gender relations has gain as a public issue. This is yet another expression of the social and cultural openness fostered by the transition to a democratic regime. As political democratization advances, academic institutions have had to adapt their structures to meet the new requirements of a changing society and

[35]The list of women's social organization in the 1999 *Guía Silver* includes 20 "women's house" in 9 cities of the country (of them 12 are located in Santiago).

[36]Chilean Network against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Information Network on the Rights of Women (RIDEM), Latin American Network of Women's Health, Women's Alternative Communication Network in Latin America (FEMPRESS), Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and Women's Network of Popular Education (REPEM). There are also networks of social organizations of women such as the Network of Women's Social Organizations (REMOS), and the Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (ANAMURI).

to incorporate debates, discourses and knowledge that had been silenced during the dictatorship. By the end of the nineties there were at least fourteen gender studies programs in thirteen public and private universities in the country (in seven different cities)[37]. Most of these programs are located within faculties of social sciences or humanities, combining teaching and research activities. Furthermore, they differ in the scope of resources at their disposition (both material and human), as well as with respect to their legitimacy and stability within the respective academic institutions. It is important to highlight that the women who created these programs are academics and in contrast to the history of many non governmental organizations, these professionals do not necessarily have a trajectory of classic political activism within the movement.

Together with these transformations there is also continuity with respect to organizational forms and structures within the feminist field. Specifically, there are still a significant number of more informal type organizations, with non formalized procedures and structures and different levels of cohesiveness and stability, as well as with a clear feminist identity. Among them there are two distinct sectors. The first, a majority within this type of organizations is linked to the "autonomous current"[38] . In the other sector there are a number of small informally organized groups that do not necessarily adhere to a specific ideological current[39]. In the case of the latter groups, many have been established during the second half of the decade by women from different social and generational backgrounds than the "historical" militants.

Despite the existence of such organizations, the global trend during this past decade has been marked by their slow demobilization. The feminist political scenario

[37]There are regional programs at the Universities of: Concepción , La Serena y Valdivia, Arturo Prat in Iquique, José Santos Ossa from Antofagasta, Playa Ancha in Valparaíso and De la Frontera in Temuco. And in Santiago at the Social Science and Philosophy and Humanities Faculties at the University of Chile; at the History Institute of the Catholic University; at the Institute for Advance Studies in the University of Santiago; and at the Universities of Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, Bolivariana and Cardenal Silva Herníquez (ex Blas Cañas).

[38]The organizing Commission of the VII Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe was composed by some of these organizations. A few of the groups that remain active are: the Collectives Clorindas y Agridulce, Autonomous Feminist Movement (MFA) and Movement for Autonomy among others.

[39]Such is the case of Feminist Collectives Bajo Sospecha in Santiago, Kaleidas in Valparaíso, Enredadas in Valdívia, Al Borde in Concepción among others.

evidences a clear absence of referents for political coordination (as MEMCH´83 in the previous phase), of reflection/action groups and of social organizations structured based on their members voluntary participation; in sum, by the lack of social and political militancy understood in its more conventional sense. The disarticulation of these type of political spheres was particularly severe during the initial period after the transition but seems to be reverting during the latter part of the decade.

Finally, a significant number of feminists has opted to pursue individual strategies for action. These self proclaimed independent feminists attest to the diversity of individual trajectories and political strategies for participation present throughout this period.

- ***Restructuring the feminist field***

The transformations of this field have been influenced by other factors other than organizational and structural changes to feminist collective action. There have been a series of other processes that have significantly modified what was considered to be a social movement.

One of these trends refers to the growing professionalization and specialization of feminist organizations. The national and international demand for gender expertise as well as new challenges posed by democratization processes have stimulated the professionalization and specialization of both feminist activists and academics and their organizations. Eager to contribute and participate in how gender inequality is addressed as a social issue, feminist have quickly moved to produce knowledge, information and concrete proposals. This has in turn lead to specialization and the preeminence of lobby strategies over other political work. The construction of public agendas, development programs and projects from a gender perspective requires the participation of well qualified and properly trained professionals, and not necessarily that of voluntary militants. The profesionalization of feminist organizations –that need to implement programs for governments and international cooperation agencies- has been stimulated by two connected processes. First, the imperatives of a market economy and, secondly, the lack of policies to stimulate local funding of social and non governmental organizations (including the financial crisis prevalent in post secondary education).

Both processes –institutionalization and professionalization- have dramatically transformed feminist political action during the last decade. They have significantly stimulated the production of knowledge and information necessary to legitimate feminist demands and to adapt their discourses and proposals to the complex reality of a rapidly modernizing society. Furthermore, the improved capacity for negotiation and lobby in diverse institutional spheres, has contributed to the relative success in the inclusion of feminist's demands in public and institutional agendas in the post transition period.

However, these same processes have had contradictory effects for internal dynamics within feminist organizations and inter-group articulation. The move towards formalization and professionalization has meant –in practice- that those organizational spaces are reserved for professional activists, considered pioneers on that type of work in past decades. As these organizations profesionalize and institutionalize, there has been a closure of traditional recruitment mechanisms for women who are from different social origins and generations than the "historical" activists. Moreover, communication networks and information exchanges are built upon institutional relations or within academic and professionalized circuits that are relatively restricted in their membership.

Along with these processes the feminist field has witnessed the weakening of internal communication, the increasing absence of articulation among diverse components and individuals within it and between these and other progressive civil society actors. Today, after the return of politics "as usual", the recovery of past articulation has proven difficult to achieve. Hence, historical cleavages continue to play a central role towards fragmentation. Feminists –individualized, collectively, institutional or not- are desegregated. They act from their own particular "subject positions" and organizational spheres, from their expertise and specific identities.

Changes in political strategies are also an important trend for the reconstruction of feminist action in the nineties. Even though, feminist strategic options are seriously constrained by the political institutional environment and the opportunities and resources that it provides, there still room to maneuver (for agency). Political and historical contexts offer the possibility to choose different strategies and modify

courses of action. In this way, the strategies and options that diverse feminist sectors (and individuals) have adopted during the transition period have had a significant impact in shaping the role of feminism in Chile today.

An important sector of the movement, mainly formal institutions (NGOs, gender studies programs, organized party militants, etc.), have followed a relatively coherent strategy from the beginning of the transition until now. That is, to influence the construction of political and institutional agendas on every possible sphere of society, especially those of governments and international institutions. This sector[40] sought to construct a political referent that would allow the women's movement to include its demands in the *Concertacion* government's first program. Since the new regime began, these women have tried to participate in the design and implementation of policies designed by democratic governments, to influence international debates and agenda building processes and to establish alliances and networks with other Latin American and world women in order to strengthen their negotiating capacities.

The decision to concentrate efforts in the construction of agendas has been intimately related to the trend towards improving technical and political capacities of feminists´ organizations. The reverse side of this strategy has been the relative abandonment of consciousness raising strategies directed at women themselves as well as a move away from classical political mobilization, both characteristic of the previous phase. Several studies support this findings with respect to changes in the type of projects and actions that women's NGOS carry out[41]. Institutional missions have been transformed in order to adjust to new national and international requirements. Incentives for this type of change are not only related to those provided by governments and international spheres, they are no doubt also responding to changes in policy and resource allocation on the part of cooperation agencies.

For their part, other feminist sectors, especially those that did not participate in the transitional pact, have not had the same level of coherence in their selection of strategies. They have not been able to generate an alternative anti-hegemonic political

[40]We used the term “sector” in a purely semantic sense. It does not refer to organized nor homogeneous collectives, it only serves a heuristic tool to identify a certain type of trajectory followed by many feminists.
[41]Among them those of Maruja Barig and Sonia Alvarez previously cited.

project suitable for the new circumstances. The diversity of trajectories, experiences and positions are such that it is difficult to identify a single homogeneous path, equivalent to that followed by the "institutional" sector. However, in spite of this heterogeneity, there are some shared trends within this group.

The best known is the project fostered by the self denominated "autonomous feminists". This group has opted to remain on the margins of the political institutional system, relating mainly with other anti-establishment groups, most of them primarily from the political left with a clear class discourse. Their political proposal seeks to generate "autonomous" spaces for feminist political action and to strengthen the movement as a social actor. In practice, this proposal has been weakened by the extreme dogmatism and political rigidity that has, on the one hand, blocked the establishment of alliances and, on the other, translated in multiple internal conflicts and a weakening of the organizations that had emerged within this current. The *autonomas* main success during this period is of a symbolic discursive nature. That is to say, the advent of autonomous feminism has transformed the discourses and debates within the Chilean and Latin American feminist field at the same time that it forced a long postponed assessment of feminist political practices. Moreover, it has generated opinion trends well beyond national frontiers[42]. The *autonomas* moment of greater preeminence was clearly signaled by the organization of the VII Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter held in 1996 at Cartagena, Chile.

Other feminists active in a wide range of organizational spheres, have maintained more traditional strategies aimed at women's empowerment and collective development. They have sought relations both with the State and civil society actors. Most of them have concentrated on specific issues such as domestic violence, reproductive rights and labor training, among others. They have also kept a relative distance from the ideological dispute between "*autonomas* and institutionals".

Lastly, many women who identify as feminism are not involved in strictly movement-type political organizations, but rather, conduct their feminist "militancy" in cultural

[42]This sector organized between 1991 and 1997, 3 national meetings and 5 forums (Cubillos, 1998). Furthermore, in 1998 the first Latin-American Feminist Autonomous Encuentro was held in Bolivia. This current is present in different countries of the region, including Mexico, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina and the Dominican Republic.

spheres. The two main areas where they are active are: either in communications - maintaining alternative media: radio programs, bulletins, magazines among others- or in the cultural and artistic world, creating, interpreting, expressing through feminist eyes. This is certainly another form of political and cultural intervention, yet it is constructed from a non political logic. It is therefore, a fundamental contribution to a feminist project for social change. According to some authors, this cultural production represents the only way to strengthen feminism in our era, "a new world can not be initiated without new words, without new forms" (Collin, 1999).

III. Some Final Remarks

In this work we have tried to analyze and revise the processes and trends that have shaped the development of a feminist movement in Chile during the last decade. We have argued that after the transition to democracy this movement is bewildered by a paradox. At the same time that feminist discourses and demands have received widespread public attention and gender equity has made some important inroads within institutional agendas; we witness a notorious weakness of feminism as a social actor. A sustained deterioration in its capacity to intervene in the public sphere, to support and pressure an agenda of its own and to maintain visibility with respect to the rest of society as a subject with interests, discourses and proposals.

Throughout this discussion we have argued that the seeming paradox that confronts Chilean feminism, is a product of the interaction between the system of political opportunities and restrains, on the one hand, and internal dynamics developed within the movement on the other. In this way, both the functioning of the political system installed after the transition to democracy, and world trends previously described, have stimulated and favored the participation of feminist activists in the construction of public and institutional agendas at the national and international levels.

Factors such as the reconfiguration of State - Civil Society relations, government policies that influence the opportunities available for the development of civil society actors as well as the prevailing political culture have generated unfavorable conditions for social mobilization. The increasing legitimization of a discourse of rights and

equal opportunities coupled with the *Concertación* governments modernizing project have privileged the interaction with civil society actors as technical and professional experts rather than as citizens and political actors. Moreover, social and political conditions in post transition Chile have eroded pre existing links between intermediary civil society actors (such as NGO and trade unions) and grass roots organizations and the citizens whom those actors propose to represent and promote.

During this past decade, the role of the Chilean State and that of the democratically elected governments, has negatively influenced the reconfiguration of the feminist field. Both the lack of clear policies regarding civil society and decreasing incentives for the development of social organizations and citizen participation have been critical factors in this process. By legitimizing only one sector of feminists as a valid interlocutor, the Government has accentuated internal strives and conflicts, excluded other feminists sectors from public debates, silencing their views and making their existence invisible for the rest of society.

Moreover, the political system has at the same time, encouraged and converged with processes developing within the feminist movement itself. These refer to: the broadening of discursive and thematic frontiers, professionalization, specialization and institutionalization, deterioration of internal communication and articulation within the feminist field, as well as changes in the political strategies prioritized.

One of these processes refers to the disarticulation of internal links within the feminist field. Even though this field never constituted a unified and homogeneous social actor, exempt from internal conflicts, the individuals and organizations that conformed it had reached a significant degree of articulation and cohesion around a common objective: to reclaim democracy and participate in defining the contents it would adopt. Once the fundamental principles for unity disappeared, breakdown became imminent. What was at stake was a rupture in the ideological ethos that had characterized Chilean and Latin American feminism: its identification with socialism. Hence, the emergence of a multiplicity of ideological positions, non of which was able to transform itself into an organizational referent with the capacity to articulate and mobilize a majority of the movement.

On the other hand, political strategies and organizational dynamics have slowly been transformed, distancing feminist action from that characteristic of social movements in past decades. Nowadays, many of these organizations function more like “interest groups” than social actors in a traditional sense. This is particularly relevant in the case of some of the most prevalent organizational forms during this period: non governmental organizations and advocacy networks. These prevalent organizational dynamics have resulted in relative success at the policy level, coupled with a definite weakness to summon and facilitate democratic participation for women from wider sectors of society and to generate stable links with other social and political actors. Both NGOS and gender studies programs have shown inability to promote and articulate autonomous political mobilization from civil society.

In that manner, the transformations in organizational forms and, the increasing trend towards institutionalization have hindered the participation of women who until now had remained at the borders of the feminist field. At present, information, knowledge, discourses and articulations among feminists remain reserved for a group of “initiated militants”. This field and its networks are built and strengthened by women that in one way or another participated in the re-emergence of feminism in past decades. Consequently, the incorporation of new generations and that of other women from different trajectories and origins has always been problematic. This is due to “transmission obstacles or errors, whose current weakness seems to reside in the impossibility to communicate experiences from one generation to another” (Bellesi 1999). The present challenge is “how to open spaces for new generations, but also for women who are just beginning to search for political expressions that may identify them? (Ríos y Guerrero 1998).

While an important sector of feminists has strive to adapt their strategies and proposals to new national and international scenarios, particularly in order to influence agenda construction, there has been a certain abandonment of more classical strategies for political mobilization and pressure. This has provoked in turn “a prioritization of certain aspects of political citizenship, neglecting its ‘disputed’ contents, diluting demands for democratization, neglecting strategies for cultural and political transformation and civil society sites for contestation” (Vargas1998). These trends have contributed towards the decline of an autonomous agenda, hindered the

reconfiguration of a social base rooted in civil society, capable of sustaining and strengthening feminist political action as well as pressuring for political and cultural changes necessary to transform the patriarchal order.

Lastly, the debate on autonomy vs. institutionalization has been added to prevalent historical cleavages and represents, ultimately, a new dispute over political strategies between sectors excluded and those included by the political system. The impossibility to deal with these cleavages in a constructive manner, as expressions of feminist diversity and plurality at the end of this century and not as insurmountable fractures that operate as obstacles for building alliances, explains, to a great extent, the inability of feminism to constitute itself into a political force in the post transition scenario.

The re-configuration of the feminist field represents a theoretical and political challenge for all those interested in strengthening civil society *vis-a-vis* the State and to advance towards greater democratization in our societies. Although there have been advances regarding certain feminists demands posed in past decades, current trends present us with complex challenges. Recognizing the impossibility to reconstruct past strategies and scenarios, rejecting the platonic nostalgia of an idealized past. Is it possible to expect the emergence of counter hegemonic social actors with the necessary political force to foster democratization projects from civil society? Considering, the heterogeneity of the feminist field, the multiplicity of organizational expressions, discourses, identities and its increasing fragmentation, Is it possible to expect political responses to the advance of conservative forces that seek to revert present achievements in the situation of women in our countries?

Present political strategies and dynamics within the feminist field call our attention to these and other questions. Undoubtedly, the manner in which feminists themselves confront present challenges will be the key for the future of this political actor and its capacity to influence social and political processes of transformation in course.

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