

Gender and Welfare Regime Change in Argentina: International Conventions and Feminists
Networks in a New Social Agenda *

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Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association
Toronto, Ontario
June 3, 2006

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* This paper is part of a larger project related to my doctoral dissertation focuses on reproductive rights and health. Empirical information is based on the analysis of official documents and in depth-interviews with public officials and women activists. Fieldwork done in Buenos Aires between May and December of 2005 was possible for the financial support provided by IDRC-International Development Research Centre of Canada. I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Dr. Rianne Mahon for her academic guidance and constant support.

“Our strategy was to use this opportunity to our benefit;
to make politics more accessible for women,
and then to try to change politics according
to our perspectives and ideals”¹

Introduction

This paper focuses on the internationalization of women’s issues and its impact on the Argentinean gender regime. It is argued that changes in the Argentinean gender regime are the combined result of democratization (1983), the negative effect of welfare retrenchment (structural adjustment policies) on women’s status and the international gender equality regime that has emerged from the United Nations.

In this paper I draw on the concept of political opportunity structure to link actors and institutions in a dynamic way. The political opportunity structure describes the political and institutional environment in which actors operate. As several researchers have argued, recent women’s struggles have stretched beyond national borders. The Argentinean women’s movement has also followed this path, establishing links with their international counterparts. The formulation of a gender agenda in Argentina is then related to the different opportunity structures and the use that Argentinean women have made of the new institutional arrangements. Looking at the interconnectedness of these different scales of action, I focus on the gender agendas shaped in the international and regional (Latin America) arenas and the choices made by women’s groups in Argentina. I argue that in Argentina, preferences for certain issues are the result of a combination of the gender equality discourse and historical legacies of the Argentinean welfare and gender regimes².

After introducing the international gender regime and the regionalization of women’s issues in Latin America, I analyze the different phases of the gender agenda in Argentina, focusing on the interaction between the renewed women’s movement that emerged from the democratization of the 1980s and the institutional changes that provided new opportunities for women to raise their voices. The characteristics of the Argentinean women’s movement and its relation with the state are then analyzed.

The international gender equality regime and the transnationalization of women’s interests

By international ‘opportunity structure’ I mean the emergence of the international gender regime composed of the set of formal principles, norms, legal rules and

¹ An anonymous women’s activist relating the events that anticipated the sanction of the quota law in Argentina in 1991, cited by Blonder and Nari (1995: 189)

² I use the concept of gender regime developed by feminist scholars in their critic of the welfare regime literature. Gender regime is compounded by norms, rules and policies that shape gender relations. In this regard, the welfare state plays an important role in forming particular gender relations through public policies (social benefits) (Sainsbury, 1994) (Orloff, et. Al. 1999) (McKeen, 2004)

monitoring mechanism; the compliance of state members and the development of shared understandings that forms a gender equality discourse. (Kardam, 2004)

The new institutional framework that emerged from the UN is a regime based on explicit rules, norms, conventions, and platforms for action, which the member states have ratified, committing themselves to their accomplishment. CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), which was adopted in 1979, is the ultimate legal instrument for gender equality. Its rules are based on a set of principles and norms, accompanied by decision-making procedures or monitoring mechanisms to oversee compliance. Yet national states are not simply executors of this new international framework, as international conventions like CEDAW do not enforce national states to obey all the regulations. Ratification of the treaties is voluntary, which creates tensions between the emergent international legal framework and internal forces that want to see these norms adopted in their country. One of the instruments that CEDAW has adopted is a 'monitoring' process, which involves the submission of periodical reports (every five years). The reports must include actions that the member states, "have taken to eliminate discrimination against women and specify factors and difficulties met in fulfilling their treaty obligations" (Kardam, 2004: 90). The reports are scrutinized in public meetings, where governmental representatives face questions. Although this monitoring process does not result in the imposition of sanctions, mandatory participation in the public hearings can create moral obligations when government representatives are internationally exposed to external scrutiny. NGOs are also involved as they have the right to present an alternative report. The so-called 'hidden report' or 'report in the shadow' plays an important role, providing alternative sources of information for the UN officials who will question the national representatives in the public hearings.

The third element of an international gender regime is the existence of shared understandings and common values that give rise to a 'gender equality discourse'. This discourse has been adopted by donor agencies (e.g. World Bank, UN and foundations), the global women's movement and the national member states. The way in which international agencies have interpreted women's needs, however, has not been uniform. Differences in defining gender issues vary according to each agency's goal. In her research conducted on three international donor agencies, Kardam has identified the World Bank's goals "to increase the profitability as a financial institution and to promote economic growth for developing countries (with reliance on the market mechanisms)" (Kardam, 1997:48) For instance, the World Bank has adopted the need to ensure reproductive rights as it's interests have been related to the necessity to decrease birth rates and to educate women in order to reduce fertility based on the idea that rapid population growth acts as a brake on development. In the latest years, the World Bank has developed the paradigm of the poverty reduction strategy and then the focus has been shifted to reduce poverty by providing targeted social assistance and health services³.

³ This is particularly relevant in the Argentinean case as the recent Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation Program funded by the World Bank fits within the broader agenda of poverty alleviation after the severe fiscal crisis of 2001.

NGOs have also played an important role in the development of such an international regime. While the United Nations' system constituted the structure where women's movements action occurred, the reshaping of the gender agenda and the organized participation of non-government social organizations in the official conference was constructed over two decades of advocacy and network building. Women have organized action in successive international conferences along with other social movements, especially the environmental social movement by providing new technical skills to the participants at those conferences. It was also argued that this alliance between the leaderships of the global women's movement and its associated NGOs with the United Nations system becomes central in codifying the gender equality norms and fostering a collective understanding of such norms (See Kardam, 2004: 90-91)

In international conferences the women's movement has worked to empower women in order to achieve fundamental changes in gender relations (in political, economic and social structures). Alvarez argues that the plurality and diversity of feminist practices also contributed to a redefinition of the feminist agenda for social change. (Alvarez, 1999) The 'emergent international gender regime' has as well brought new pressures on national and local states to carry out a gender equality agenda, implementing gender-focused programs in which the technical assistance and participation of women's NGO's becomes a major requirement for national states in order to access to financial assistance from multilateral agencies. (Kardam, 1991) (Alvarez, 1999) To be sure, these women had to frame their demands within the existing institutions. As Kardam has argued, "...to the extent that gender issues has been justified and presented in an instrumental way to some multilateral financial agencies like the World Bank's goals, they have been acceptable" (Kardam, 1978: 48). Nevertheless, they did contribute to a reshaping of the pre-existing institutional structure.

Gender mainstreaming in Latin America: Towards a convergent agenda?

The diffusion of a gender agenda from the international regime to Argentina has been mediated through the regional formulation of platforms for action. The 'NGOization'⁴ of the Latin American women's movement has also made possible the absorption of 'selected' women's topics and feminist discourses and agendas into national and international policy arenas, in particular, international agencies like the World Bank and the Inter American Development Bank (IDB). In the 1990s the rapid 'absorption' of some new and 'historical' feminist ideas and issues by Latin American states was also possible due to the penetration of women activists in different institutional places at the international, national and local level of government. By penetrating the structure of the international system as 'gender experts', women contributed to shape the gender political discourse.

Within the UN system, Latin American states have developed their own regular conferences (*Conferencia Regional sobre la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe*) in the context of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean-ECLAC.

⁴ I use the concept of NGOization developed earlier by Sonia Alvarez, et.al (1998)

Consequently, Latin American states agreed on the development of a Regional Platform for Action (RPA) that seeks to complement other previous instruments for the advancement of women such as the Beijing Platform for Action.

The RPA –adopted in the Sixth Session of the Regional Conference held in Mar del Plata in 1994⁵- attempts to reflect “the changes observed in the region and their impact on women and by setting forth a basic package of priority activities for Latin America and the Caribbean that can be carried out in the next five years” (RPA, 1995:1) In particular, the document sets women’s needs in the context of the structural inequalities in the region and the “deterioration of living conditions for the majority of women, of all ages and ethnic groups; the increase in migration and the growth of the informal sector of the economy” (RPA, 1995: 3) While the RPA takes into account the general framework on human rights and women’s rights, particular consideration is given to the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development, the results of the International Conference on Population and Development of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights and the International Year of the World’s Indigenous People, the guidelines formulated on family issues and the Guidelines for a Latin American and Caribbean Consensus on the World Summit for Social Development. The RPA is based on the gains made in the region with regard to equality of opportunity and it also locates the plan for action in “the course of modernization of the government apparatus and public sector reform which is under way in virtually all the countries of the region” (RPA, 1995: 3). Thus the RPA for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, turns around eight priority areas (RPA, 1995: 4)

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- Gender equity; economic and social development with a gender perspective
- Women’s equitable share in the decisions, responsibilities and benefits of development
- Elimination of poverty
- Women’s equitable participation in decision-making and in the exercise of power in public and private life
- Human rights, peace and violence
- Shared family responsibilities; recognition of cultural plurality in the region
- International support and cooperation

Successive regional conferences of women have been held in different Latin American countries resulting in three documents: the Santiago Consensus, the Lima Consensus and the Consensus of Mexico city. Through these, the member states agreed to implement the Regional Program for Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean 1995-2001. In the Seventh Session of the Regional Conference held at Santiago, Chile, all the state members agreed to apply:

⁵ The Regional Program of Action for Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, which was approved by the Governments at the sixth session of the Regional Conference, updates the Regional Plan of Action on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted in Havana in 1977 at the first session of the Regional Conference.

“...An integrated approach linking social and economic policies in order to achieve equity, bearing in mind that, if development is to be sustainable, the gender perspective must be explicitly brought into these policies, since all plans, programmes and policies inevitably embody a certain viewpoint on gender and determine on that basis what roles individuals should play in society; to ensure that plans and programmes fully incorporate an appropriate gender perspective in their policies and decisions (‘mainstreaming’) and provide for the equitable distribution of resources in society” (Santiago Consensus, 1997: 3)

From this, four key elements with clear policy implications can be identified. Thus the document gives particular attention to the feminization of poverty as a consequence of macroeconomic and structural adjustment policies implemented in the region, urging national states to conduct “research and undertake other initiatives on women and poverty, paying particular attention to *inter alia* women’s unpaid and low-paid work” (RPA, 1995: 5) In addition, the RPA looks at increasing the employability of women through workfare programs, the implementation of reform legislation to prevent gender discrimination in the labor market and to development of a gender-sensitive approach to poverty elimination programs.

The second policy issue is the advancement of women’s political rights. It highlights the need to promote power-sharing in public and private life and to expand women’s political representation through “affirmative, positive action, including such mechanisms as establishing a minimum percentage of representation for both sexes...in political representation, boards, commissions and other public appointments” (RAP, 1995: 4) The RPA also notes the relevance of strengthening women’s organizations and networks in order to reinforce their capacity to influence public and political affairs in these countries.

A third prominent issue is in the family domain. It urges national states to encourage shared responsibility for the family, to promote public policies to address the equitable distribution of duties and rights within the household and to establish child-care centres in neighborhoods, business firms and government agencies. Also, it recommends ensuring maternity leave and promoting the extension of leave to fathers, as these actions might encourage both parents to share the responsibility for the care of their children. Finally, the RPA also addresses the need to eradicate gender-based violence and ensure reproductive health and rights through effective access for women to health care and appropriate counseling and information. It emphasizes the need to gender the bureaucratic state through the collection of statistical information disaggregated by sex, especially in national censuses, economic and household surveys.

During the Eighth Session of the Regional Conference held in Lima-Peru in 2000, the member states agreed to extend the regional Platform for Action after 2001. Two general topics were highlighted: 1) poverty, economic autonomy and gender equality; and, 2) empowerment, political participation and institutional development. It also underscored the importance of the women’s movement to the development of public policies ‘addressing a gender perspective’ in the region by taking into account the ethnic,

racial, and generational diversity, as well as to the development of new means of participation for the advancement of women at the international, regional and national levels. The negative consequences of the structural adjustment policies implemented in the region were pointed out, notably the rising levels of poverty especially among women. Consequently, the document has a negative characterization of the fragmented social policies applied in the region. An important element of this Consensus of Lima is that it calls on “the States of the region to sign, ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (RAP, 2000: 2)

In the Ninth Session (2004) of the Regional Conference for Women of Latin America and the Caribbean –celebrated in Mexico city- Latin American states approved a new document. The ‘*Consenso de Mexico*’ embraces the need to increase the collaboration between the national women’s machineries and international and regional organizations, the promotion of an egalitarian expansion of political rights of women in all spheres of decisions and the construction of full citizenship in the region. It also reaffirms its commitment to the objectives of previous international treaties, Conventions and Platforms for Action. In particular, the Mexico Consensus ratified the Plan of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, 2001) and the Millennium Declaration (New York, 2000) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly “and to all agreements reaffirming Governments’ adherence to this international agenda” (PRA, 2004: 4). The Mexico Consensus also calls for the recognition of the unpaid work of women, urging member states to “recognize the economic value of unpaid domestic and productive work, afford protection and support to women working in the informal sector, particularly in relation to care-giving services for children and elderly persons, and implement policies for reconciling family and work responsibilities, involving both men and women in this process”(RPA, 2004: 5)

It further reaffirmed the need to strengthen women’s national machineries with financial and human resources and “consolidate their institutional status at the highest possible level to ensure that they can fulfill their mandates efficiently and effectively” (RPA, 2004: 7) It also calls for strengthening the relationship between national machineries and international organizations, and with the women’s movement. It insists on the need to mainstream a gender perspective, taking racial, ethnic and generational diversity into account. “United Nations organizations and specialized agencies are urged to continue to support national efforts to ensure equal rights and create opportunities for women in the region through cooperation programmes, studies and research, among other initiatives, in accordance with their mandates” (RPA, 2004: 7).

In sum, in the Regional Conferences, particular attention has been given to the feminization of poverty as a consequence of macroeconomic reforms implemented in the region. The representatives urged national states to combat poverty, paying particular attention to women’s unpaid and low-paid work. In this sense, Latin American gender mainstreaming was shaped by the structural adjustment programs implemented in the region during the 1990s. As a consequence any issue related to gender equality - like

childcare, reproductive rights and gender-based violence - has been interpreted within the feminization of poverty framework.

This is reflected in the application of gender perspectives to social policies by several Latin American states with the goal of reducing and/or eliminating poverty. For example in Argentina, as well as in Mexico and Chile, the World Bank financially supports the implementation of programs that provide cash benefits to needy household heads. Although these programs are designed to be gender neutral, in most cases poor women are the recipients of benefits. Indeed, changes in family composition, including the growing number of single mothers and unemployed women have led to the reformulation of social programs. It can be said that the Latin American gender equality regime also emphasized women's policies as identified by the 'Women in Development' and 'Gender and Development' paradigms, which were adopted by multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank.

The historical legacies of former military regimes have also been fundamental in interpreting the internationalization of the Latin American women's movement and the consolidation of a convergent gender equality agenda in Latin America. Most of the military regimes of the 1970's - countries like Argentina, Brazil and Chile - attempted to impose a conservative model of gender relations even to the extent of taking explicitly repressive actions against women's freedom on their reproductive decisions. That was the case in Argentina with the prohibition of contraception in the 1970s. In this context, it is not difficult to understand why democratic transitions and women's activism in Latin America were accompanied by demands for democracy, rights and citizenship. As Waylen has pointed out: "...some women activists hoped that the return to democracy would bring with it a number of progressive gender reforms" (Waylen, 2003:168) Consequently, it was easy for the Latin American women's activists to find commonalities with the international discourse on gender equality and also influence the international agenda through their participation in the international organizations and international [and regional] women's conferences⁶. (Waylen, 2003: 172)

The gender agenda in Argentina: Democratization and neo-liberal policies

Coinciding with democratization, the globalization of the women's agenda and the internationalization of women's advocacy networks constituted an unprecedented opportunity structure for women's struggles within national borders. The regionalization of the Argentinean women's movement is strongly related to the Argentinean adherence during the 1980s and more enthusiastically during the 1990s to the structural adjustment policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank. The participation of the Argentinean women's movement in regional conferences and the adoption of a common discourse

⁶ Waylen (2003) compares Latin American democratic transitions with similar processes in Eastern and Central European countries to explain how in the post-communist countries, international discourses and agendas had less impact than in Latin America where most of the former military regimes were right wing oriented.

against neo-liberal policies implemented in the region contributed to reshaping the Argentinean women's demands within a new framework.

With the establishment of the first democratic government after the military regime of 1976-1983, the progressive expansion of women political rights constituted a favorable opportunity structure to raise women's issues. The recognition of 'formal' women rights by the ratification of the CEDAW by the national Congress in 1985 was a consequence of the larger public debate on human rights after the repressive period of 1976-1983. In 1986, Argentinean women started to celebrate their regular annual 'Encuentros de mujeres' (national women congress)⁷ along with the regionalization and internationalization of the women's movement. During the 1980s the debate was dominated by the need to expand women's political and civil rights. In that decade, the most significant gender equality reforms were in the domain of civil law, like the new family law that includes divorce and *patria potestad compartida*⁸.

Along with 'regionalization', the Argentinean women's movement has followed two other strategies to pursue women's interests⁹. On the one hand, the politics of 'transversality' has been important in advocating women's issues in the legislative arena by breaking party discipline, most notably in the local and national legislative battles for reproductive rights. This tool helps women to put aside political and social differences and identify themselves as part of a gender collective. The second strategy has been the 'double militancy' of their members. Several women's activists are also members of political parties. This has created opportunities to translate some of the women's demands into the political domain. This may help to explain the selective way in which women's issues have been included in the goals of state agencies and policy programs¹⁰.

These strategies have helped to alter the institutional context of representation. In 1991 the introduction of the quota law in the electoral regime increased the representation of women. The progressive inclusion of women in representative positions contributed to set women's demands and build coalitions to support gender policies¹¹. Initially, political representation of women in the National Congress was very poor. In the 1983 election, only 3.6% of the new deputies were women and this percentage was sustained in the 1985 and 1987 elections. Nevertheless, a significant institutional change in the electoral

⁷ This congress still takes place every year in a different province and it is attended by 15,000 to 20,000 women from all over the country.

⁸ The new family law acknowledged equal rights and duties for women and men, the possibility for children born either outside marriage or to parents married to other people to be recognized a legitimate by their biological fathers or mothers. In this period also women's social rights has been extended by the new pensions for women in conjugal relations but not legally married. In the domain of the political rights, women from political parties advocated for the inclusion of women's quotas in the party lists.

⁹ Several interviews conducted in Buenos Aires with activist of the women's movement were used to reconstruct these strategies.

¹⁰ In a comparison between Chile and Mexico, Franceschet and MacDonald compare 'double militancy' and 'autonomy' as opposite strategies used by the Latin American women's movement during the democratic transition. (See Franceschet and MacDonald, 2004)

¹¹ Since 1983, women from political parties started to advocate for the inclusion of women's quotas in the party lists. In particular, Peronist women called for their own party (not successfully though) to restore the 33% of women representation that Eva Peron installed in 1947.

system was introduced that resulted in a big raise in the number of women deputies. The quota law (*Ley de cupos*) was passed in 1991, stipulating that at least 30% of all electoral candidates had to be women, placed in ‘winnable’ positions on the closed party lists. Although there was resistance at the beginning, the quota law introduced important changes leading to a significant rise in the number of women elected. With the inclusion of the quota law in the reformed Constitution of 1994, the newly created National Women’s Council-CNM (*Consejo Nacional de la Mujer*) and the women’s advocates were allowed court challenges of the party lists. As a result, the compliance rate increased, with the majority of parties placing women in winnable positions. In 1995, 27.7% of elected deputies were women. What is notable about the institutionalization of the quota law is the contagion effect that has resulted in the inclusion of women quota in trade unions; with vary degrees of compliance and its diffusion to other Latin American countries¹².

Women’s actions to obtain the approval of the quota law were an important example of the politics of transversality. On the occasion of the sanction of the law by the national Congress, women politicians (called themselves as ‘*Red de Feministas Políticas*’ – Network of Political Feminists) mobilized together across party lines by targeting particular deputies and pushing them to approve the bill¹³. The women’s coalition was also supported by the CNM, which participated actively in the political campaign. Part of the feminist strategy to obtain the law was “...to stress that quotas would help to make Argentina a modern and fully democratic society and as such they were attempting to use the opportunities afforded by the political context of consolidation”¹⁴. (Waylen, 2000: 776)

The quota law was subjected to tough critiques such as its ‘antidemocratic’ character and its usefulness to improve gender equality. In particular, the lack of feminist commitment or even attention to women’s issues by women politicians has raised concerns among autonomous feminists. Additionally political parties still keep strict control of the appointment procedures through the use of party lists, which might negatively affect the chances of feminist women being nominated. The effectiveness of the women’s quota was however evident in one of the central debates during the national constitutional reform of 1994. On that occasion, women’s representatives were 26% of the constitutional convention and their active participation in the debate (together with the lobby of the women’s movement) were key determinants in rejecting the inclusion of an explicit antiabortion clause in the new Constitution fostered by President Menem, the Catholic Church and other conservative groups. Also, women’s advocacy was critical to the inclusion of CEDAW in the Argentinean Constitution becoming Argentina the only member state to include that international Convention in its own Constitution.

¹² Argentina was a pioneer in Latin America in forcing political parties to adopt women’s quota by law. Although some academics are skeptical as to the benefits of this ‘fast track’ way to increase women’s representation, others argue that, “a gender shock” [a quick and large increase in the number of women in parliament] increases the opportunities for women to change the rules and content of politics” (Dahlerup and Fridenvall, 2005: 43)

¹³ Some of the women activists of that time tell they were for 12 hours in the chamber shouting and claiming to their male colleagues for the approval of the law.

¹⁴ Argentinean feminists interviewed by Georgina Waylen in Buenos Aires in 1996 (See Waylen, 2000)

Furthermore after a decade of struggles, the quota law was important in promoting specific women's issues such as gender-based violence and the new 'Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation Program' (2003), a law which attempts (at least in part) to ensure reproductive rights by access to contraception and counseling.

Despite its success in pursuing political and reproductive rights, the women's movement has remained divided along party, social and cultural lines. Women activists identify themselves as feminist and non-feminists (maternalists), politicians and autonomous individuals. In addition, generational and class differences emerged in the 1990s with the appearance of women from the '*popular sector*' who denounced economic injustice as a consequence of structural adjustment policies. As a result, the Argentinean women's movement is very diverse and heterogeneous. This creates a 'mosaic' of ideas and interests that are not easy to reconcile.

Over the last 25 years, political democratization and economic liberalization in Argentina have shown themselves to have paradoxical effects on women's citizenship. While in the 1980s and early 1990s women have achieved an expansion of their political rights, the 1990s led to reduction of economic rights along with a 'radicalization' of the reproductive rights debate. Structural adjustment policies implemented during the 1990s affected women in several ways. For example, women's participation in the labor market increased as a result of the need to stabilize household income. At the same time, Argentinean women were particularly affected by the reduction of social and health insurance due to the inclusion of women in flexible jobs without social insurance. Indeed, this situation has contributed to shaping women's demands within a new framework. Feminized poverty has shaped the gender discourse to the extent that any other women's topic has been linked to the negative effects of the structural adjustment policies. In this regard, a special emphasis emerges on the eradication of poverty (especially the generalized concern with women in poverty). In this scenario, issues such as childcare, the value of the unpaid work of women and most especially gender-based violence have acquired an increased significance in the recent years. As I said in the previous section, this is particularly relevant in the Latin American context and it has a similar influence in Argentina. Yet, women's activists have been divided between those who critique the neo-liberal paradigm and those who accept women's policies and programs promoted under the context of the poverty reduction strategy¹⁵. This tension has been reflected in the different political projects of the Argentinean governments; visible in their interpretation of women's issues and the role that women politicians and 'femocrats' are playing in the bureaucracy.

The CNM and its changing role

After the ratification of CEDAW in 1985, President Raul Alfonsín created the first women's office in Argentina in 1987. The '*Subsecretaria de la Mujer*' (Women Sub-

¹⁵ I wish to clarify the difference between women's policies and gender policy. The first one implies that women are the recipients of most social programs, usually the targeted social assistance program. On the contrary, gender policy attempts to reformulate gender (asymmetrical) relations. The latter is identified with a gender mainstreaming approach.

secretariat) was, however, under the control of the Ministry of Social Action and did not play a central role in addressing gender equality issues. This is likely explained by the fact that reshaping the gender equality agenda in the international arena was slow in its early stages. In contrast to the '*Subsecretaria de la Mujer*,' the National Women Council (CNM) can be seen as the Argentinean women's policy machinery—an example of 'state feminism'. Women politicians, particularly women who belonged to the newly elected Peronist government, prompted its creation in 1992. The CNM's creation was part of the modernization of the state, aiming to improve administrative performance in the bureaucracy and introduce positive measures to include women in the public sector. Its establishment, by presidential decree of Carlos Menem, coincided, however, with the adoption of the neo-liberal agenda promoted by the Washington Consensus.¹⁶

The foundation of the CNM is also part of a global process of installing women's state machineries with the purpose of promoting and monitoring a 'gender perspective' across all public policies. Such specialized machineries were also created in Chile (SERNAM-*Servicio Nacional de la Mujer*) and Brazil (CNDM-*Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher*). These agencies, however, are usually understaffed and lack the material resources in developing countries. Goetz (1997) and Kardam (1997) have noted that paradoxically the lack of empowerment and resources of these agencies has motivated their leaders to establish links with civil society organizations and become more receptive to women's demands. This is only partially true in the Argentinean case. In actual fact, the CNM was progressively disempowered from its initial goal and isolated from the women's movement and its demands. Yet its poor performance and political weakness were also caused by the persistent political instability of the new Argentinean democracy and the consequent lack of continuity of its staff and the policies implemented.

The CNM in the 1990s: State's modernization and a 'women's friendly' policy

Initially, the CNM under the presidency of Virginia Franganillo (a referent of the Peronist women movement) promoted an ongoing interaction with women's associations, produced an equal opportunities plan for 1993-4, and established a number of programs to increase women's political participation. It also played an important role in the Beijing women's conference. During this period the national Congress approved a national law to combat domestic violence (passed in 1994, but not regulated by national decree until 1996) and the President approved a national decree against sexual harassment in the public administration in 1993. Since its creation, the CNM had developed programs in the area of reproductive and sexual health. In addressing reproductive rights, the CNM had attempted to influence policies in different areas such as education and health. Furthermore, after the implementation of the quota law, women politicians started to

¹⁶ In actual fact, there are three different phases in the creation of the CNM. Originally a presidential decree created the '*Consejo Coordinador de Políticas Públicas para la Mujer*' (Coordinative Council of Public Policies for Women) in 1991. One year later, in 1992 the National Women Council was created as a 'Sub-secretariat', depending on the executive. One year later however, the CNM was empowered acquiring the status of 'Secretariat of State' with the specific mission to implement the quota law and the Plan of Equality of Opportunities for Women and Men.

work together in developing the first ever law to address reproductive rights in the national Congress and also to support women in different provinces on this issue. This commitment by the CNM to reproductive rights found itself up against the emerging alliance between Menem and the Catholic Church, which aimed to stop all attempts to legalize abortion¹⁷. Additionally, Menem attempted to introduce a clause against abortion in the Constitutional reform of 1994. As a consequence, a significant conflict between the head of the CNM, Virginia Franganillo, and President Menem occurred with regard to reproductive rights; the CNM was heavily involved in the campaign against the Presidential attempt to include an antiabortion clause into the new Constitution. Such opposition to the President forced Franganillo's resignation from the CNM in 1994.

In 1995, Menem created an ad-hoc Commission for the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later in 1996 he appointed Esther Schiavone, an enthusiastic Menemist activist who also held antiabortion positions. During Schiavone's leadership of the CNM, the executive branch of government implemented a \$14 million Inter-American Development Bank-funded plan to establish the *Programa Federal de la Mujer*, through which provincial women's offices were created¹⁸. The agenda of the CNM was enhanced by the development of a gender equality agenda oriented mainly towards mainstreaming parity between sexes in the work place and the reconciliation of work and family life. In 1998, Menem implemented, by executive decree, a new National Plan of Equality of Opportunities between men and women in the work place. The decree found its antecedents in CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action but also in the Treaty 156 of the International Organization of Labour-IOL on the equality of treatment and opportunity between men and women workers and in particular for workers with 'familiar responsibilities'. As part of this policy, Menem also created in 1998 the Trilateral Commission of Equal Treatment and Opportunities between men and women in the work place, in the Ministry of Work, Employment and Social Security. The Plan's goal was to increase women opportunities in the labour market through the creation of special employment programs like microfinance credits for women, work training oriented towards workfare and equal payment for equal work. It also included the regularization of domestic employment and the implementation of a national survey to know the availability and functioning of childcare services and day care facilities. (*Jardines maternas y guarderías*) In 1997, another executive decree had already established equality of treatment for public servants and the regulation of parental leaves. Both plans were only partially implemented, in part due to the structural constraints of the labour market. With the establishment of these two decrees in 1997 and 1998, Menem's government attempted to obey (at least on select issues) the Beijing and CEDAW directives and locate Argentina within the group of democratic countries that promote gender equality and the reconciliation of work and family life agenda. Yet, this agenda had been ambiguous from a gender perspective. Like

¹⁷ In 1994 Menem for the first time publicly revealed his position against abortion in accordance with the goals of UNICEF in the protection of mothers and children.

¹⁸ They are also executing the PHRD for Gender Technical Assistance Capacity Building Initiative, a project on gender in the health sector financed by the Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean (*Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe*) and a project to strengthen communication strategies (United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM).

in other international cases, (e.g. the European directives to advance gender equality), ‘reconciliation’ has been reformulated to “mean improving women’s ability to combine paid work and family work in their own lives, [...] but reconciliation now served the goal of legitimating more flexible work conditions rather than changing gender relations within the family” (Stratigaki, 2004: 32) In actual fact, the gender discourse of Menem’s government never attempted to reformulate gender relations within the family. As Stratigaki pointed out, this paradigm “[...] left the existing gender division of labour within families out of consideration and thus failed to challenge stereotyped gender relations” (Stratigaki, 2004: 50)

This gender agenda did not have a welcome reception within the women’s movement. Despite Menem’s attempts to reflect a women-friendly policy, the official opposition to the reproductive rights agenda in several international conferences and his isolation from the women’s movement resulted in the de-legitimation of the CNM to advance gender equality as an issue. This also explains the radicalization of the reproductive rights debate that started in the 1990s. While Menem’s agenda explicitly excluded this topic, the Argentinean women’s movement worked together principally to build a reproductive rights discourse. Indeed, the unity of the Argentinean women’s movement was higher around political rights and reproductive rights than on other women’s issues. Other gender issues did not receive the same level of attention due to the conflictive scenario created due to Menem’s international alliance with the Vatican and other conservative states. (See McIntosh & Finkle, 1995)

In 1999, a moderated center-left coalition (*Alianza UCR-FREPASO*) took power in the middle of a deep economic recession. The coalition was internally fragile due to ideological differences and barely unified enough to address institutional transparency concerns left over Menem’s government had been denounced for corruption. Politically and technically bound to introduce macroeconomic reforms to overcome the financial crisis, De La Rúa’s government collapsed in December of 2001. Regarding the CNM, the women of the Alianza were also divided on how proceed a gender agenda¹⁹. Later, the Argentinean women’s machinery was progressively disempowered due to successive changes of institutional location and political importance within the executive branch of government²⁰. The resultant political instability at the beginning of the new century has also had a disempowering effect on the CNM. But more importantly was the progressive state isolation from the women’s movement and its original demands as the Council’s mission was to oversee gender equality compliance across all public policies.

A shift to the ‘left’ and a new social agenda: Implications for gender policy

¹⁹ Carmen Storani’s role as the new CNM’s head (a member of the women’s movement and an activist of the Radical party) was criticized by the women’s movement for not being ‘committed’ enough to advancing a gender agenda due to her political identification with the executive. Tensions between women from the Radical party and the Prepaso also weakened the role of the CNM within the government.

²⁰ Actually, since its beginnings the CNM –established by a presidential decree- was part of the presidential office. According to Waylen, “...it was part of the government of the day and not as a permanent part of the state apparatus”. (Waylen, 2000: 779)

With the election of President Nestor Kirchner in 2003, a new role and mission was afforded to the CNM. It was relocated within the National Council for Social Policy Coordination, originally headed by the President's sister, Alicia Kirchner. The new President of the CNM, Maria Lucila Colombo, was originally an activist of the '*Movimiento de Amas de Casa*' (housewives social movement) and she supported explicitly anti-abortion positions during the legislative debate on reproductive health (2000) when she was a representative in the Buenos Aires city legislature²¹. She belonged to the *Nueva Dirigencia Party*, created by the former Minister of Interior Gustavo Beliz, an activist catholic with strong links to the official church. The new mission of the CNM is set in the new social agenda focused on the need to strengthen the role of the family in a context of economic and social fragmentation, while reformulating traditional gender roles. Rather than focusing on individual actors (child, woman, poor, etc.) the new approach attempts to include these actors in a comprehensive and integrative perspective on the family. The conflict-ridden situation that emerged from the financial crisis of 2001 also accelerated the need to reform social assistance programs, this time with a focus on reconstituting the "family" as the primary social unit. In Colombo's own words: "The State had a crucial role to play in renewing the commitment to the social inclusion of men and women and strengthening, preserving and assisting the family unit". (CEDAW/C/SR.660, 2004: 2) This new social agenda is also part of the Post Washington Consensus. From the perspective of this strategy, the new focus of targeted benefits became not just the child or the poor, but rather poor families themselves. In Argentina in particular, this second wave of reforms involved the development of 'activation' policies to reduce welfare dependency and eradicate traditional "clientelistic" relations in social provision. The new Argentinean government reorganized the pre-existing social programs into a federal network composed by three core plans: The National Food Security Plan, The National Plan for Local Development and Social Economy and the Comprehensive Family and Community Plan. In Colombo's own words: "The reconstruction of the country required a comprehensive programme aimed at achieving social inclusion and fighting poverty. One of the Government's key strategies was to ensure that men and women could exercise their right to obtain a decent job, support their families, educate their children and care for their elderly relatives" (CEDAW/C/SR.660, 2004: 2)

As an example of this renewed focus on families, Argentina had received a World Bank loan as part of the so-called Post Washington Consensus and the poverty reduction agenda. The "*PROFAM – Argentina: Family Strengthening and Social Capital Promotion Project*" was a particular project funded by the World Bank with \$5 million American dollars and executed through the CNM. According to the World Bank, the CNM was selected to become the executor of the program because it is "...an autonomous organization, which seeks to decentralize its community interventions to the grassroots level, maintaining only the administrative functions and those responsibilities related to the articulation of social policy formulation at the central level". It also

²¹ She was however the author of one of the two bills presented in the Legislature on reproductive rights and health. In her bill she established a difference with the other bill supported by the feminist politicians represented in the legislature and the feminists within the women's movement. As a left-catholic activist, her position is closer to the concept of family-planning and rejects abortion.

includes the adoption of a “social capital” approach, which assumes that communities with higher levels of social capital are more likely to organize, define and pursue common goals. The social capital approach emphasises the need of partnership at the local level, arguing, “... The first strategic choice was to build on the existence of community social capital rather than existing centralized government institutions.” (PROFAM, 2001: 5) The emphasis on innovation and learning now is said to “...provide opportunities to learn from the implementation of a community-based perspective by CNM with the participation of beneficiaries. The LIL will also provide important lessons on whether and under what conditions empowered community groups can play a central role in the promotion of equitable gender and family roles and anti-violence interventions” (PROFAM, 2001: 5) The *Programa Equidad* is the principal activity of PROFAM. It is a demand-driven grant program for the development of small sub-projects, which promote and strengthen the capacity of families actively to function within their community. This program targets the poor communities in Argentina where “...domestic violence against women and children, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and substance and alcohol abuse are higher. It will also target poor areas where there is a lack of access to reproductive health information and options, including childcare” (PROFAM, 2001: 21)

Along with the renewed focus on the family as the primary social unit and changing gender roles, the Argentinean government reoriented its international positions regarding reproductive rights. Through the representation of the Ambassador Juliana Di Tulio, Argentina sustained positions in favour of reproductive rights of women according to the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW. It also took a more active role in the regional Latin American conferences of Women by becoming the voice speaker of the Grupo Rio²² in the 49 Session of the UN Commission on the legal and social Condition of Women in the world. In this context, active participation of the women’s movement from Latin America was important in pushing national governments to ratify their commitment to Beijing 1995²³. The ‘*Consenso de Mexico*’ approved in June of 2004 during the 9th Regional Conference held in Mexico City also constitutes a landmark for the advancement of women in Argentina since the new Argentinean government for the first time agreed to all the elements without reservation, including reproductive rights and the optional protocol of CEDAW²⁴. The new government also had deepened the regional integration of MERCOSUR and femocrats of the southern cone countries held regular meetings in the context of MERCOSUR + Chile²⁵.

²² Rio group: representatives of all Latin American Countries

²³ All the countries opposed to the official position of the US regarding the Beijing Platform for action. In this regard, the US government understood that ‘Beijing might induce governments to legalize abortion’.

²⁴ Despite the pressure from the women’s movement and the action of some women political representatives, Argentina has not ratified yet the optional protocol. The strong opposition of the right along with the Catholic Church blocks any legislative initiative to promote its ratification. The main argument of opposition to the protocol is that the protocol affects national sovereignty and ‘opens the door’ to abortion.

²⁵ MERCOSUR is the economic block comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Chile is an associated member state.

In spite of these changes, the new government is developing a dual gender policy. On the one hand, the CNM has been downgraded and it has definitely lost its original mainstreaming purpose. Yet, Colombo's policy has addressed several of the women's issues brought forward as part of the international and regional gender agenda. Currently the CNM is actively involved in issues such as domestic violence and the CEPAL recommendations on the value of unpaid women's work. Although Colombo identifies herself as being part of the women's movement she has kept distance from its organizations. On the other hand, women activists -invited by the women representative to the UN, Ambassador Juliana Di Tulio- participate in the *Foro de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil*, a regular meeting celebrated between women's organizations and the Women's office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to government officials, this *Foro* was created to provide a 'space' to articulate the demands of civil society organizations. While women's activists see this space as a new opportunity to raise their voices, a few of them (the most autonomous from the party system) feel the risk of being 'captured' by the state. In addition, since its creation under Menem's government, the ad-hoc Commission to follow-up on Beijing is located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the CNM is still the women's machinery accountable to the UN. This institutional dispersion and the lack of coordination of the different women's offices have negatively affected the advancement of a coherent gender equality agenda.

Women have gained political representation and this has been significant to moving ahead on some gender issues. It has proven difficult however for women to penetrate the bureaucratic structure of the state. Thus, uneven state support of the gender agenda, weaknesses of the 'femocrats' divided along party lines, and the isolation of the women's organizations have predominated in the recent years.

Some women's organizations have nonetheless penetrated the international system of human rights, perhaps more successfully than the national state. This was possible through a new opportunity provided by the international gender regime, which gave voice to the associations that submitted alternative reports. As Tarrow points out, "domestic actors, frustrated at their inability to gain redress from their own governments, have long sought the support of external allies" (Tarrow, 2005: 145) By providing information to the UN officials, women's organizations has been able to pronounce the real status of Argentinean women and to press the national government to move ahead the gender agenda²⁶.

The Argentinean State and the UN system: monitoring, compliance and the role of the women's movement

In this section I focus on the interaction between the Argentinean state and the UN system through the successive follow-up reports submitted to the CEDAW and the public hearings conducted to question the Argentinean delegations to the UN. The

²⁶ Argentina and other countries of Latin America like Chile have a tradition of externalizing calls for action in the domain of human rights. In particular, during the last military dictatorships several domestic actors were able to denounce human rights violations in the country. Sydney Tarrow calls this path of externalization, 'information transmission and monitoring'. (See Tarrow, 2005)

intricate nexus of the national state, the UN system and women's associations is exemplified by looking at the relevant issues contended in the gender agenda.

It is clear that international conventions like CEDAW do not force national states to comply with all the regulations stated in the norms. Yet, "a certain level of international pressure and the desire to avoid embarrassment at an international arena may prompt state representatives to go along with decisions taken at international conferences" (Kardam, 2000: 8) The impact of CEDAW recommendations is evident in the Argentinean case since in recent latest years the most relevant gender issues are the same as those put forward by other countries and in the international debates.

The first Argentinean report was submitted in 1988 during Alfonsín's government. Overall, the issues of monitoring were derived from the Convention. Still particular issues such as reproductive rights and feminized poverty did not play a central role in the debates established between the Argentinean representatives and the Committee. CEDAW's observations denote the weaknesses of the report due to the absence of statistical information and relevant data on the status of women in the country and more broadly questions were asked on the availability of day care centres and abortion rights. The Argentinean representatives on the other hand stressed the democratization of Argentina and the ongoing process of change in legislation to equalize civil rights of men and women. (See CEDAW, 1988)

In 1997, during Menem's government, the questions and recommendations of CEDAW were much more specific regarding the status of women in the country, possibly due to the fact that several Argentinean NGO's had submitted hidden reports and the UN representatives based their questions on that report and the follow-up to the Convention. The principal areas of concern for CEDAW were the increasing levels of female unemployment after the structural adjustment policies, the gender segregation of the labour market and the lack of special legislation to penalize sexual harassment in the work place. In addition, CEDAW addressed the high levels of maternal mortality and morbidity due to childbirth and the fact that abortion remained high 'despite the economic and social development of the country' (CEDAW, 1997) As a result, they recommended actions to reduce maternal mortality, including revision of legislation to decriminalize abortion, among other issues included in the gender equality agenda such as the quantification of unpaid women work, parental sharing of common duties and responsibilities in the household, regulation of childcare, regulation of domestic employees and violence against women, in particular sexual harassment in the work place.

In 1998 (Second and Third periodic reports), the questioning of CEDAW was much more focused on reproductive health matters, perhaps due to the increasing debate on the international agenda after Cairo Conference of 1994 and the pressure of the Argentinean women's movement due to the conservative positions of Menem's government²⁷. In particular, the Assembly chairperson, Ms. Castillo asked if "the

²⁷ Information on the 1997 first 'hidden' report could not be found. Nevertheless, some information was obtained through interviews with women activists.

government intended to review its policy of permitting sterilization of women only with the express consent of their husbands or partners and only in life-threatening situations, and if not, what its reasons were to continue to permit that legal obstacle to the exercise of women's reproductive rights' (CEDAW, 1998: Art. 12). Furthermore, she was also "alarmed that abortion and obstetrical complications were the principal cause of death among Argentine women" (CEDAW, 1998) The Argentinean government representative and President of the CNM, Esther Schiavone, on the other hand said "women had the right to decide how many children they had and the spacing between them. However, there were disparities in the information and counselling services available as, owing to the decentralization of health care, such programs were implemented at the municipal and provincial level" (CEDAW, 1998, Art. 16)

After Menem's period in government, two periodic reports were submitted, one in 2002 (Fourth and Five periodic reports) just after the financial crisis and the Argentinean government was required to submit a complementary report on 2004 due to the concern of CEDAW on the status of women regarding increasing poverty, the lessening of health and social insurance, high levels of maternal mortality and the increase of HIV/AIDS among women. The hidden report submitted by the Argentinean NGO's was critical in addressing social concerns with increasing poverty and the lack of coordinated national policies on reproductive health and rights and the ongoing disempowerment of the CNM as the main mechanism to coordinate and monitor the implementation of a gender equity agenda across all public policies.

The alternative report was written and submitted by six Argentinean women's organizations (ADEUEM, CLADEM Argentina, FEIM, ISPM, Feministas en Accion, Asociacion Mujeres en Accion and CELS (a broader human rights advocacy NGO). Some of these organizations (above all CLADEM, FEIM and CELS) have better access to the international system as well as having strong links with other international activists. These organizations are comprised of highly professional staff. Other organizations are comprised of women with 'double militancy' in political parties and the women's movement. The hidden report of 2002 provides a detailed analysis of the status of women in Argentina. Among topics of importance, the report remarks the need to implement policies to deal with violence, including sexual harassment and domestic violence, the reduction to social and health insurance, the reduction in the level of family allowances and the lack of regulation of domestic workers. Particular attention is given to the 'deficient' situation within the health sector and the reproductive rights of women.

An important topic, which emerged after the financial crisis of 2001, was the institutional situation of the CNM within the national government. The NGO's report informed to the Committee that CNM had "suffered an institutional and financial downgrading becoming since January of 2002 to be a program of the National Council of Social Policies. The CNM suffers since 1998 ongoing budget reductions and the loosening of management autonomy, situation aggravated since 2002" (CONTRAINFORME CEDAW, 2002: 4) In the report the associations also revealed that "there are no mechanisms of articulation and coordination of the different state agencies, in particular between the CNM, the Women's Office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and the women's movement" (CONTRAINFORME CEDAW, 2002: 4) In the public hearing held in 2002, UN officials alerted the Argentinean government to the "attempt to downgrade the National Women's Council and the lack of a formal strategy for coordination of the different State agencies. The Committee notes the importance of continuity, autonomy management and coordination of the national mechanism for the advancement of women at this time of crisis in the country and recommends that they should be strengthened" (CEDAW, 2002)

Another topic on which the NGO's report places emphasis is reproductive rights. The NGOs noted that since 1997 the situation has not been modified. "Historically Argentinean women have seen their free choice of having or not children, how many, when and how have them. Despite CEDAW and other international instruments of human rights the situation has not changed. The Argentinean state has a persistent pro-natalist tradition and it is sensitive to the pressures of conservative groups inside and outside the Catholic Church. As a result, the Argentinean State has not being able to carry out comprehensive and persistent public policies to guarantee reproductive rights. Since the last report submitted to CEDAW in 1997 this situation has not changed" (CONTRAINFORME CEDAW, 2002: 16) In this report, the associations also informed that "according to official data, in Argentina there are 400,000 abortions performed by year. Obstetrical complications for abortions are the first cause of hospitalization in gynaecological services". (CONTRAINFORME CEDAW, 2002: 18) Based on this information, CEDAW's representatives questioned the Argentinean representatives about the asymmetries of uneven reproductive health policy implementation.

Two years later, in 2004 the Argentinean state was required to submit a complementary report as a consequence the economic crisis that the country suffered in 2001. This report focused on the negative consequences of the crisis on women's status and it listed the specific measures that the new Argentinean government, having emerged from the crisis, had taken to deal with those problems. Overall, the situation had not changed since 2002. CEDAW questioned deals with the same topics as in the past (the high levels of maternal mortality and morbidity, the impact of the economic crisis on women's lives like the reductions to social and health insurance and the increase in women with HIV, the uneven implementation of social assistance programs directed to women and the downgrading of the women's machinery, the CNM). In that occasion, the new head of the CNM Lucila Colombo emphatically justified the new government's plan to relocate the CNM within the new social agenda of Kirchner's government.

Conclusions

The democratization process -began in 1983- provided Argentinean women the opportunity to alter the structure of representation through several institutional changes. These institutional changes affected the electoral regime (women's quota) and involved the creation of women's machineries at the national and provincial levels of government. The formation of a comprehensive gender agenda has however been uneven, subjected to the political instability of Argentinean democracy, the fragmentation of the women's movement and the rigidities of the bureaucratic apparatus. Yet, opportunities provided

through the international context have contributed to an increased domestic focus gender based programs and policies. In addition, by providing information to the UN officials, women's associations have externalized their demands and pushed the national state to comply with international norms. The relationship between the Argentinean state and the UN system also reveals a peculiarity in that domestic resistance to change. While Argentina has ratified the international conventions to ensure women's rights in the larger context of democratization, the reception of this agenda within national borders through the explicit adoption of policies and programs was mitigated by the different political projects of the democratic government since 1983. Thus, the Argentinean gender agenda of the 1990s was shaped by the neoliberal project that predominated in that decade; by the selectivity of the elements of the Beijing agenda and its reinterpretation vis-à-vis the neoliberal paradigm. The new social agenda has addressed some other elements of international gender discourse but with gender equality now subsumed within a 'familial discourse' on the need to reconstitute the family and adjust changing gender roles. In actual fact, changes in gender relations have been more the result of the effects of welfare retrenchment policies on families and women than the result of the implementation of a state gender equality agenda. In addition, the new government agenda is pragmatically more concerned with developing social programs oriented to women (women's policies) than with altering gender relations through mainstreaming (gender policies).

Finally, it can be said that the adoption of a comprehensive gender agenda has been effectively thwarted over the last 20 years. Yet, a political environment more receptive to women's demands has developed, notably in the maturity of a more sophisticated gender discourse within the women's movement. While the fragmentation of the women's movement also makes it difficult to advance a gender agenda, the state opposition to the reproductive rights during the 1990s and the opportunities provided by the emergence of the international gender regime fostered unity among women's groups on several issues; this unity contributed, at least in part, to a shift in the Argentinean gender regime.

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