"STATE FEMINISM" AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS:

The Impact of Chile's Servicio Nacional de la Mujer on Women's Activism*

Susan Franceschet

Acadia University

Abstract: *Much of the literature on Latin American women's movements finds that movements have grown weaker since transitions to democracy in part because of the "institutionalization" of gender policy within states. This article advances an alternative argument drawing on evidence from the Chilean case. Using a historical institutionalist approach and the framework of state feminism, I outline the way Chile's Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM) has altered the institutional context in which women's movements act. I show that SERNAM has affected both the shape of the movement (most notably the power relations among its various segments) and the strategies that different segments employ to pursue their interests. I argue that instead of weakening the women's movement, SERNAM actually provides the movement with important resources, most notably a discourse of women's equality and a set of objectives around which to mobilize. There is evidence that Chilean women's organizations are responding to this new institutional context by linking up previously dispersed groups, using SERNAM's own discourse to pressure the state to fulfill its commitments to women and, most importantly, to ensure that, in addition to gender, class and ethnicity are also addressed as sources of women's marginalization.*

The study of social movement politics in Latin America expanded significantly during the 1970s and 1980s when most countries in the region were enduring military dictatorships. During this period, popular movements became the primary actors in the struggle for human rights, equality, and democracy. By the 1990s, however, most students of Latin

American politics commented on the demobilization of movements in the wake of transitions to democracy (Oxhorn 1994a; Hipsher 1998). Most authors place the blame for movement demobilization and fragmentation on the re-emergence of political parties (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986), while others point to the region's embrace of neoliberalism and government policy that seeks to tame potentially destabilizing movement demands by co-opting organizations (Oxhorn 1994b).

Much of the popular participation and protest that emerged under authoritarianism was led by women, however (Jaquette 1989; Schild 1994), and consequently, feminist researchers note a gendered dimension to this apparent movement demobilization. Nikki Craske explains that women have been demobilized to a much greater extent than men in recent years. The simultaneity of the transitions to democracy with neoliberal economic restructuring involves re-asserting the public/private or political/social distinctions blurred under the dictatorships when "formal" political arenas were closed and day-to-day (social) issues became politicized (1998, 111). Neoliberalism has involved the withdrawal of the state from the provision of social services, the removal of food and transportation subsidies, and fostering export competitiveness based on low-wage (often female) labor. Taken together, these policies raise greater obstacles to women's activism because they increase women's burdens and leave them even less time for political activism (114).

Women's patterns of mobilization and demobilization are thus firmly linked to the gendered division of labor and the gender stereotypes on which it is based. Under authoritarianism, women mobilize when their capacities to fulfill their social responsibilities are undermined due to state repression and/or economic policies that negatively affect living standards (Jaquette 1989; Alvarez 1990; Schild 1994). Because women are charged with the tasks of social reproduction, they are normally the main actors in the movements that emerge to oppose the dictatorships that threaten family survival. Yet women's activities in these civil society movements are not always *perceived* as political, which is exactly why they are often permitted by regimes that otherwise repress political activity. As democratization processes unfold, however, traditional actors such as political parties re-assume their central role, and a formal political arena is re-constructed and (once again) sharply delineated from the social sphere. When that happens, according to Elisabeth Friedman, women's activism fades into the (invisible) private arena largely "because their link to private life has been relied upon rather than broken during the time of political repression, [and thus] many women as well as men do not expect women's involvement in the public world of politics to continue once the crisis has passed." (1998; see also Feijoó 1989).

Another prominent explanation for the demobilization of women's movements following transitions to democracy is that women's move-

ments suffer division and fragmentation due to their institutionaliza-tion, and/or co-optation by traditional political actors. As political ac-tivity becomes more formalized during processes of democratization, all social movements must make strategic decisions about whether to focus their participation in political or civil society. Women activists are often faced with the choice between (re)joining political parties or main-taining the autonomy of their feminist organizations. Throughout Latin America, the debate over "autonomy" versus "integration" has been divisive and has split many women's movements (Alvarez 1999; Beckwith 2000; Muñoz 1996; Serrano 1990; Waylen 1994). But overall, the "integrationist" strategy seems to have been preferred by a number of activists in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Throughout the region, many feminists have moved into political par-ties, especially those on the Left, with whom alliances were forged dur-ing the anti-dictatorship and/or revolutionary struggles.

Today in Latin America, however, the debate between "autonomy" and "integration" is less often about the relationship between women's movements and political parties, and more often about the relationship between women's movements and the state. Most new democratic gov-ernments, following pressure from transnational women's movements and the United Nations, set up women's policy machineries within the state to address gender equality issues.[1] Many women previously active in grassroots women's movements migrated into these (and other) bu-reaucratic arenas to promote gender equality. Additionally, following transitions to democracy, many women's groups converted themselves into non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This happened largely due to shifts in the nature of international funding. Under authoritarian regimes, international donors often directly supported women's groups, but after the transition, funding was either diverted to needier countries or was channeled through governments. In this situation, feminist NGOs largely owe their survival to the work they carry out for governments, including research and project implementation.

Taken together, these developments have contributed to the "institu-tionalization" of women's movements, whether in states or in NGOs closely associated with states. According to many scholars, this has the effect of weakening women's movements by depriving the base of crucial leader-ship, while also diluting feminist goals that are subversive of the status quo (Alvarez 1999; Matear 1997; Schild 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Waylen 1996). According to Sonia Alvarez, "NGOs are most often consulted as experts who can evaluate gender policies and programs *rather* than as movement

---

1. As of 1997, nineteen Latin American states had some form of state agency dedi-cated to promoting women's equality. The vast majority of them were created in the late 1980s and 1990s (Valdés 2000, 101).

organizations that might facilitate citizen input and participation in the formulation and design of such policies" (1999, 192). In a similar vein, Verónica Schild (2000b, 25) argues that "the advancement of women's rights—a political goal—is being transformed into a technical task" with an overall demobilizing effect on women's movements.

This article addresses this problematic. To what extent should the "institutionalization" of gender politics within the state in Latin America be viewed in negative terms? Can the existence of state agencies to promote women's equality prove to be an advantage to Latin American women's movements or does it necessarily lead to their displacement or demobilization? I address this question using the case study of Chile, where the post-transition creation of an executive-level agency, El Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM), to promote women's equality has been credited with weakening the Chilean women's movement (Baldez 1999; Matear 1997; Schild 2000b; Waylen 1996, 2000). In this article, I evaluate these claims and put forward two alternative arguments. First, some of the existing explanations rest on problematic assumptions about the nature of women's movements. I show that taking the dictatorship-era movements as a comparative norm is problematic because the levels of public visibility and cross-class unity displayed by these movements were linked to the particular circumstances posed by dictatorships.[2] Once (a form of) democracy returns, greater division within movements is common as differently situated women pursue a variety of strategies to promote their interests— interests that may compete with those of other women.

A second claim made in this article is that, in some cases, the apparent demobilization of women's movements following a transition to democracy may be temporary. Under certain conditions, movement organizations begin to adapt to the new context, devising new strategies to pursue their interests. The Chilean case provides evidence of this. The last few years have seen the emergence of a number of important network organizations that link up previously dispersed women's groups. More importantly, these organizations are pursuing strategies that are shaped in large part by the existence of SERNAM and a state that is at least rhetorically committed to a women's rights agenda. These positive developments are occurring in Chile in part because SERNAM is staffed with

2. Indeed, it appears that movements were the most unified in countries such as Chile, where the dictatorships were the most intransigent, necessitating cross-class strategies for the return of democracy. Even in Chile, however, the movement was never totally unified or free of class tensions. For example, women allied with the radical Left (the Communist Party and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left [MIR]) were excluded from some of the more moderate pro-democracy organizations (see *Gaviola, Largo, and Palestra* 1994). As the transition to democracy proceeded, divisions intensified among the moderate and radical opposition groupings and also between the *feministas* (autonomous feminists) and the *políticas* (women party militants) (see Kirkwood 1988).

many former movement activists and has experienced some success in promoting a women's equality agenda in government. Since its creation, SERNAM has successfully introduced important legislation that criminalizes domestic violence, expands women's rights within the family, and protects women from losing their jobs, and protects pregnant teenagers from being expelled from school. SERNAM has also devised a number of ambitious programs to inform women of their legal rights and to address the gender-specific sources of poverty and unemployment.[3] In other Latin American countries, women's state agencies have less prominence, are more unstable, and have even fewer links with women's movements (see Valdés 2000, 98–103). In these cases, state feminism is less likely to have a positive effect on women's movements in that country.

This article has three sections. The first section provides an overview of some of the theoretical issues posed by the questions I explore here, namely, how Latin American women's movements have been analyzed in the literature and the sort of relationship that have been posited between states and women's movements. I argue that the relationship between state agencies and women's movements is most usefully approached using the historical institutionalist framework which recognizes the reciprocal relationship between states and social actors, and emphasizes the way "institutions shape the goals political actors pursue and . . . structure power relations among them, privileging some and putting others at a disadvantage" (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, 2). The second and third sections address Chile's SERNAM and the 1990s women's movement. I argue that SERNAM has fundamentally altered the context in which women's movement organizations pursue their goals. Above all, its mere existence draws attention away from society-based organizing and even some women activists believe that SERNAM is the proper vehicle for promoting women's equality goals. Consequently, SERNAM has led to a decline in the public visibility, and, in some cases, activism, of Chile's women's movements.

But women's activism in Chile over the decade since the transition to democracy has not remained constant, and, in fact, no consensus exists on the state of the women's movement today. Indeed, at the time of conducting fieldwork in Santiago (1999), I was receiving conflicting accounts of whether there even was a women's movement in Chile anymore. A number of people equated the lack of public visibility of women's activism with the absence of a movement. Others believe that the movement has simply lost visibility, having been eclipsed by SERNAM and

3. These successes notwithstanding, SERNAM has failed to meet many feminist expectations given the profound opposition from the political Right and even some sections of the centrist Christian Democratic Party to policies that they view as undermining the traditional family (for example, policies such as abortion and divorce). See Blofield (2001) and Grau et al. (1997).

the return of party politics. My own view, based on interviews with women from various currents of the broader movement (e.g., autonomous feminists, community activists, NGOs, and SERNAM officials), is that women continue to be active but are having trouble finding expressions for their activism that would draw greater public attention. Ultimately, it is very difficult today to separate the common perception of movement demobilization from the reality of women's continued activism, especially at the community level. For example, Gustavo Rayo and Gonzalo de la Maza recently studied collective action at the local level and found that, "in all cases we have seen . . . it is women who are the protagonists, representing the focal point around which the interests of the community and women's aspirations come together" (2000, 423). Consequently, the problem is not that collective action has declined, but that it is less visible because, since the return of democracy, attention has shifted to the "formal" political arena and away from the "informal" arena of civil society.

The main purpose of this article is to show some of the recent trends in movement politics, which are in large part the result of the new institutional context posed by SERNAM. I argue that the last few years provide evidence that women's organizing is entering a new stage. The movement is beginning to adapt to the opportunities that grow out of SERNAM's existence. Most importantly, recently formed network organizations are slowly overcoming the fragmentation of the movement that initially resulted from the transition to democracy and are employing the state's own gender discourses to pressure governments to fulfill their commitments to women. While SERNAM has certainly not had the impact that many organized women in Chile initially desired, and in fact, must shoulder part of the blame for exacerbating existing divisions within the movement (especially class and ethnic divisions), it nonetheless provides women with certain resources, most importantly a discourse of women's rights and policy initiatives around which to mobilize.

THEORETICAL ISSUES: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND STATES IN LATIN AMERICA

Throughout Latin America, women's movements emerged under authoritarianism in the 1970s and 1980s. These origins have exerted a powerful impact not only on the trajectories of the movements themselves, but also on how they have been analyzed. The high public visibility of these movements, often on the front-lines of the anti-dictatorship struggles, and the cross-class linkages forged when movements had a common enemy (the dictatorships) and a common goal (democracy) have led to the view that movements no longer exist because they are less visible and they no longer display high levels of solidarity and cross-class unity. Holding up the dictatorship-era movements as the "norm"

is highly problematic, however, because the unity achieved in that period was bound up with the existence of authoritarianism and the struggle for democracy. Now that a form of democracy, albeit limited, has been achieved in the region, we must consider the "norm" for women's movements to be that in evidence in other democracies where movements are seldom unified and conflict among segments of the movement over strategy and ideology is common. According to Maxine Molyneux, "a women's movement does not have to have a single organizational expression, and may be characterized by a diversity of interests, forms of expression, and spatial location" (1998, 224).

Arriving at a "norm" for women's movements is difficult, however, largely because the term *women's movement* itself is elusive and has not yet been rigorously defined in the comparative literature on women and politics (Beckwith 2000, 434). Some authors only include activism and groups that are "feminist," as they define that, while others prefer the term *women in movement* (Rowbotham 1992) to encompass women's activism in general, both in women-only or mixed organizations. But while limiting the scope to "feminist" groups makes the analysis too limited, studying "women in movement" casts the net too widely. A useful option, following Sonia Alvarez, is to specify the condition of "autonomy" in defining a women's movement (1990, 23). By this definition, women's movements must be somewhat autonomous from other political or social organizations. In this sense, state-directed organizations (for example, the Mothers' Centers in Chile under Frei and Allende) and women's wings in political parties are not women's movements, although women in these structures may participate in women's movements and women's movements may develop out of state-directed or party-dominated organizations.

Movements also involve some degree of public visibility and ability to mobilize for change. According to Molyneux,

To speak of a movement . . . implies a social or political phenomenon of some significance, that significance being given both by its numerical strength but also by its capacity to effect change in some way or another whether this is expressed in legal, cultural, social, or political terms. (1998, 224)

In this sense, most Latin American countries today have women's movements, even though their capacities to effect change vary considerably. What is important, however, following Molyneux's criteria, is that movements need not be singular nor unified in nature. Indeed, the women's movements that existed in Latin America during authoritarianism were unique in the degree of unity achieved across class, ethnic, and race differences. Movements of that era, as mentioned above, were united in pursuit of common goals, namely democracy, human rights, and equal citizenship. When dictatorships withdrew and the goal of democracy was (more or less) achieved, greater fragmentation

has replaced unity as segments of movements face different opportunities to participate in the re-opened political arenas (Barrig 2001, 30). Today, the main debates in the region concern strategy, that is, should women guard the autonomy of their organizations or seek change through existing institutions such as political parties and state agencies?

The movements that exist today in Latin America, therefore, are expressions of a "normalization" of movement politics. Women of different class, race, ethnic, and regional positions face the challenge of finding ways to forge some common goals (and even strategies for achieving them) while also recognizing women's different, even competing, interests. For example, middle-class and professional women benefit from the existence of a large pool of flexible and low-paid female labor for domestic service, while domestic workers would benefit considerably from labor laws that protected their rights and expanded their wages and benefits. While the movement's fragmentation may reflect a more "normal" state of affairs (i.e., it is likely to endure as differently situated women in a democratic context not only have different ways of pursuing their interests but also have different interests), the challenge for organized women is to find issues and strategies through which common goals can be promoted and achieved. For example, despite women's differences, there is a common interest in themes such as domestic violence, women's health, and achieving juridical equality with men (as expressed in civil and criminal codes for example). How these issues are prioritized, however, may be a contentious matter among differently situated women.

Observers of women's movements in Latin America also argue that since the transitions to democracy, women's activism has become increasingly "institutionalized" or contained within women's state agencies and the NGOs and research institutions that work closely with the state, with negative effects on movements as leaders are drawn into the institutional arena, thereby depriving grassroots groups of leaders. This phenomenon is extensive in Latin America, and has been addressed at great length by scholars such as Alvarez, Schild, and Waylen. Alvarez notes that while Latin American women's movements were always characterized by professionalized segments (who worked in NGOs during the dictatorships) and by feminist collectives and associations, the difference today is in what professional activists *do*: instead of "popular education, political mobilizations, and poor and working-class women's empowerment," they are involved in "gender-policy assessment, project execution, and social services delivery" (Alvarez 1999, 182). Alvarez argues that feminist NGOs in the 1980s were successful (in terms of putting feminist issues on the agenda and achieving important goals) precisely because of their *hybrid* nature: they acted as *both* gender policy experts and advocates of feminism through movement activities (ibid.).

In the contemporary context, feminist NGOs are increasingly employed by Latin American states, as part of a "New Policy Agenda" to carry out research and even implement social programs. According to Alvarez, this trend potentially undermines the potential of feminist NGOs to "advocate feminism."

The discussion above shows that any analysis of women's movements in Latin America today must begin with an exploration of how states themselves are changing. Most importantly, gender politics today are taking place to a great extent *within* states due to the creation of state institutions to promote gender equality. Committing state resources to gender equality signals new practical considerations for feminists, many of whom have traditionally been wary of states, depicting them as thoroughly patriarchal and inimical to women's equality goals. Indeed, throughout Latin America today, many *autónomas* still consider states to be vehicles for women's subordination rather than tools to be employed in the struggle for equality.[4] But these developments also signal the need for new theoretical considerations and conceptual tools for researchers.

By the 1980s, many feminist theorists started to re-think the relationship between gender and states, especially in light of growing evidence that, in many parts of the world, women's policy machineries within states—in most cases outcomes of movement lobbying—were having a positive impact on women's lives. In this context, most feminist theorists today agree that states are not monolithic agents that act solely in the interests of a particular social group, whether male elites or the capitalist class. Instead, states are viewed as a series of arenas which are both the product of earlier social struggle and appropriate sites for the continued contestation of gender, class, and racial hierarchies (Pringle and Watson 1998). In this view, there is no *necessary* or structurally determined relationship between states and gender inequality, or any other form of inequality for that matter. That is, states possess at least relative autonomy from the social structures of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy.

The above view is consistent with the historical institutionalist approach which has become prominent in political science. According to Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, "[i]nstitutionalists are interested in the whole range of state and societal institutions that shape how political actors define their interests and that structure their relations of power to other groups" (1992, 2). But what is most useful about the historical institutionalist approach is its view of the reciprocal relationship between states and social actors. In positing this relationship, the institutionalist view does not deprive women of agency as did earlier strands of femi-

---

4. See Maruja Barrig (2001) and Ericka Beckman (2001) for discussions of the recent issues in this debate.

nist theory that cast women merely as subjects of patriarchal and capi-
talist states. As Thelen and Steinmo explain, while institutions shape
the strategies of social groups, "they are themselves also the outcome
(conscious or unintended) of deliberate political strategies, of political
conflict, and of choice" (10).

Because of its focus on the reciprocal relationship between state and
societal actors, the historical institutionalist approach is most useful to
investigating the effects of women's policy machineries on women's move-
ments. In this view, institutions are conceived as influencing both the
goals of movement actors and the power relations among them. Hence,
in the Chilean case, we can explore how movement goals and strategies
shift in response to SERNAM's creation, while also investigating how
SERNAM affects the movement itself by privileging certain groups by
extending political access to some elements of the movement and not to
others. This significantly affects movement politics by exacerbating exist-
ing internal divisions, in this case, divisions between those on the "in-
side" and those on the "outside" of the emerging gender policy networks.

An even more precise conceptual framework for investigating Chile's
post-transition context is the "state feminism" framework of Dorothy
McBride Stetson and Amy Mazur (1995). Most of the existing research
on state feminism has been concerned with how effective it is, that is, to
what extent state agencies can actually improve women's rights and/or
status. To that end, Stetson and Mazur (1995) draw on case studies mainly
from industrialized countries and identify four variables that have
proven important in determining the success of state feminism.[5] Their
findings, along with that of other researchers, confirm the importance
of a strong women's movement that can demonstrate societal support
for the goals of state feminism (Stetson and Mazur 1995, 288; Friedman
2000; Guzmán, Hola, and Ríos 1999; Waylen 2000). Elisabeth Friedman,
employing the case of Venezuela, offers evidence that state women's
agencies are "powerless without a corresponding mass movement of
the social sector [they are] established to represent" (2000, 57). This leads
to a paradox: strong women's movements are crucial to the success of
state initiatives on gender equality, but according to a number of schol-
ars of women's movements in Latin America, the institutionalization of
gender politics in the state is weakening women's movements.

In the next two sections, I examine Chile's SERNAM and show that
while it is justifiably the target of numerous criticisms (Richards, forth-
coming; Schild 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Waylen 1996, 2000), it has also pro-
vided opportunities for the women's movement to overcome some of the

---

5. These variables are the politics of the agency's creation; the form the agency takes (for
example, highly centralized or cross-sectoral); the attitudes towards the state's role in pro-
moting equality; and the form of women's movement (Stetson and Mazur 1995, 16–18).

dislocations produced by the transition to democracy and to re-mobilize around a women's rights agenda. This is manifest in the recent creation of a number of network organizations that are linking up previously dispersed groups, and the convergence around certain key themes such as citizen control as a strategy to pressure governments to fulfill their gender equality commitments. At the same time, SERNAM is clearly exacerbating existing (mainly class and ethnic) divisions in the movement by creating access to policy-making arenas for some groups—mainly feminist NGOs—while excluding others (whether intentionally or not).

STATE FEMINISM IN CHILE? EL SERVICIO NACIONAL DE LA MUJER

According to Stetson and Mazur (1995, 14, 274), women's state agencies can be comparatively assessed as state feminist according to two features: (1) policy influence: the extent to which they influence feminist policy and (2) policy access: the extent to which they open up access to societal actors (like women's movements). To what extent does SERNAM meet these goals? Existing research finds that SERNAM is not successful in terms of policy influence (Craske 1999, 185–6; Matear 1995; Waylen 1996). In terms of opening policy access to societal actors (i.e., women's movements), Craske categorizes SERNAM as a case of "high access" (ibid.). Other authors (most notably Richards, forthcoming; Schild 1997, 1998, 2000a, 2000b) are more skeptical about how much access is being created for non-state actors. My own view, outlined below, is that SERNAM is undertaking a number of well-intentioned steps to involve women's movements in the policy process, but that the success of these endeavors has been limited. While feminists in NGOs have relatively easy access to the state, some note that their autonomy to press for feminist goals is being compromised in the process.[6] There are also complaints that base-level women's groups are being left out of the process, or are being invited to participate as "clients" in such a way as to limit their real impact on the policy-making process.[7]

SERNAM'S POLICY INFLUENCE

SERNAM was established by law in 1991 "as the body responsible for working with the Executive to devise and propose general plans and

---

6. Teresa Valdés of FLACSO-Chile explained that the reduction of international funding has generated significant conflict within the women's movement as a whole and especially between organizations with access to (scarce) resources and those without such access. She also notes that the reliance of many feminist NGOs on SERNAM presents its own problems, and that NGOs which have been too critical of SERNAM have been marginalized. Personal interview, Santiago, Chile, 3 November 1999.

7. Interview with Rosana Ceorino, *Tierra Nuestra*, Santiago, Chile, 6 October 1999.

measures designed to ensure that women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men."[8] This mandate is achieved through inter-sectoral coordination, legal reforms, training public servants in a gendered perspective on public policy, designing social policy, increasing women's social and political participation, international cooperation, research aimed at producing knowledge and statistics that reveal women's situations, and strengthening equal opportunities at the community level.[9] In terms of programs, SERNAM has focused most of its attention on particular segments of women. Its main programs are Mujeres Jefas de Hogar de Escasos Recursos (Low-Income Women Heads of Households), Mujeres Trabajadoras Temporeras (Women Seasonal Workers), Prevención Violencia Interfamiliar (Domestic Violence Prevention), and Prevención Embarazo Adolescente (Teen Pregnancy Prevention). The only major program not targeted at a specific group of women is the Centros de Información de los Derechos de la Mujer (CIDEM, Women's Rights Information Centers), with an office in each of Chile's thirteen regions. Most of the programs (with the obvious exception of CIDEM) involve cross-ministerial coordination, often through the creation of inter-ministerial committees such as the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention of Family Violence and the Coordinating Committee for the Women Heads of Household. SERNAM also has agreements with other ministries, including agriculture, education, and health to initiate programs with attention to gender equity.[10] In the remainder of this section, I highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of SERNAM's structure in terms of promoting a women's rights agenda in the state.

SERNAM is not a ministry in its own right, but is housed within the Ministry of Planning and Co-operation (MIDEPLAN), which is responsible for the majority of Chile's social programs.[11] The nature of MIDEPLAN itself, a post-transition creation, tells us something about

8. Retrieved 4 February 2000. It is significant that SERNAM was established by law because it makes the agency a permanent part of the state structure in Chile, thus more difficult to reduce its role should a more conservative government come to power. Argentina's *Consejo Nacional de la Mujer,* for example, was established through presidential decree. President Carlos Menem's early support for women's rights meant that the agency had a broad mandate and generous funding. When controversy over women's rights emerged in Argentina surrounding the 1995 Beijing Conference, President Menem sided with conservative forces and drastically curtailed the *Consejo*'s activities and its budget (Waylen 2000). Likewise, in Venezuela, where women's state agencies have been created through executive decree, they have been less stable, in some cases being closed by new governments from different parties (Friedman 2000, 58–62).

9. Retrieved 31 May 1999.

10. Retrieved 31 May 1999.

11. The creation of SERNAM unleashed widespread controversy and increased tension between the Center-Left Concertación and the political Right, which was opposed to the creation of the agency. Due to very vocal opposition from the political Right and the

the underlying organizational philosophy guiding SERNAM. MIDEPLAN embodies the post-transition government's approach to addressing poverty and social exclusion in Chile. The agencies within MIDEPLAN are those dealing with Chile's socially marginalized groups—women, indigenous peoples, youth, and the urban and rural poor. Significantly, they are not intended to execute policy, but rather design and fund projects executed by other state ministries and agencies, or by private entities like NGOs or social organizations (Hardy 1997). Clarisa Hardy notes a fundamental problem at the heart of MIDEPLAN's mandate: these crucial social programs are implemented by ministries far more powerful and autonomous; hence, they have their own interests to pursue and may be less interested in devoting their energies to programs that originate elsewhere in the state (123).

While some have argued that being embedded within another ministry weakens SERNAM's potential to promote gender equality and programs that improve women's status, according to Soledad Alvear, SERNAM's first director, there were strategic reasons for creating the agency in this manner. She explains:

In the working group [of the Concertación Nacional de Mujeres por la Democracia—CNMD] where the project [of creating SERNAM] was conceived, it was concluded that the creation of a Ministry would make it more difficult to execute actions. We didn't want to create a ghetto or separate entity. . . . We wanted the creation of an entity that crosses various ministries, enabling us to act in each of them, and in this form women would be integrated into the development process. (1990)

Although SERNAM does not have status as a ministry, its director has the ranking of Minister of State and therefore can participate in cabinet meetings (Matear 1995, 95). The director, the deputy director, and all of the regional directors are appointed by the president (Alvear 1990). SERNAM has a somewhat decentralized structure; along with the national office, it has offices in each of Chile's thirteen regional administrations. SERNAM's staff participates in regional coordinating bodies to insert gendered perspectives into regional development policy planning. As part of a state project of decentralization, SERNAM has also been transferring more aspects of its programs to the municipal level. Most *municipios* (municipal governments) currently have an *Oficina de la Mujer* (Women's Office) which, although technically dependent on the municipal government, maintain some links with SERNAM. Entirely financed with resources from the municipal government (Matear 1995,

---

Catholic Church to a policy direction that threatened traditional gender relations, and President Aylwin's fears of provoking conflict or instability, SERNAM's initial mandate was watered down and its funding reduced (see Grau et al. 1997).

96), this reliance results in extremely disproportional capacities between the *Oficinas* in the wealthy communities and those in the *poblaciones*.

Stetson and Mazur find that a centralized cross-sectoral approach to gender equity in public policy is most successful, but to be most effective in terms of policy influence, agencies must be powerful in their own right and capable of coordinating gender policy with other institutions to achieve an integrative approach. Centralized agencies lacking the ability and the authority to work across other agencies are less effective, as are dispersed agencies without "a respected and influential central coordinating office" (1995, 288). The Chilean case confirms this finding—it is neither powerful in its own right nor does it have the authority to influence the agendas of other state agencies. One of the consequences of SERNAM not being its own ministry is that it is prohibited by law from implementing its own programs. Instead, SERNAM is charged with proposing and creating public policies for other ministries or agencies to implement. The only projects SERNAM can directly carry out are pilot projects, which, once proven effective, are turned over to the relevant ministry or agency for future implementation. The stated advantage of this institutional design is that SERNAM is supposed to be able to coordinate gender policy planning and promote a gender perspective throughout the state. This has not happened to date, however.

Studies have found that public servants who are supposed to co-ordinate gender policy across agencies complain that maintaining contact and a working relationship with so many other departments—for example, health, labor, and education—is far too time consuming given their already hectic schedules (SERNAM 1996, 21). A conception among municipal officials where most programs are implemented is that programs (and all the accompanying extra work) are externally imposed. As Patricia Provoste explains, "the civil servants always see it [promoting gender equity] more as SERNAM's problem rather than something essential to their own task" (1997, 49).

At the municipal level, SERNAM relies on local governments and NGOs to carry out its mandate, which has proven to be highly problematic. The effectiveness of programs at the local level depends greatly on the level of commitment exhibited by the mayor and other high-ranking local officials. Without strong support, the resources budgeted to programs are easily diverted to other "emergency" areas, and municipal officials do not feel compelled to give adequate attention to program implementation or monitoring (SERNAM 1996, 14, 40). According to SERNAM's study, the most important weakness "has to do with the characteristics of the design of the program. The focus on horizontal coordination (inter-disciplinary, inter-departmental, and of an integral character) is the exact opposite of the traditional functioning of the *municipios*: sectoral, vertical, and self-referential" (40).

POLICY ACCESS

Feminist officials in SERNAM have opportunities to create policy access for women's organizations, however, access is only being extended to certain segments of the movement. SERNAM affects the women's movement by shaping power relations among different segments, contributing to divisions between those on the inside and those on the outside of the emerging gender policy networks. SERNAM officials enjoy opportunities to expand access to movement actors because of a shift in both political discourse and the way social policy is being delivered. In Chile, both state and societal actors see it as entirely legitimate that the state facilitate the strengthening of civil society organizations in pursuit of greater development, equality and democracy. Since the mid-1990s, an important goal of the ruling Concertación has been to promote equality through the "modernization" of the state, a component of which is fostering citizen participation. The Concertación's program for its third term claims that "citizen participation must be a central basis in the new State that modernization aims at constructing" (Concertación 1999). In this context, citizen participation is emphasized as an aspect of social service delivery. This process is not unique to Chile, but part of a broader trend in social policy in Latin America in the context of economic restructuring. This shift involves state withdrawal from the socio-economic realm (wherever possible); targeted rather than universal social programs; and an emphasis on the co-delivery of anti-poverty programs through NGOs, the private sector, and poor communities themselves (Craske 1998, 104–9; Taylor 1998, 128–29, 143). While the rhetoric of citizen participation in this new policy agenda may be viewed as a strategy to legitimize state withdrawal, it nonetheless provides state officials—especially in women's agencies—with opportunities to use this focus as a way to involve women's movement organizations in policy-making, thereby creating gender policy networks comprised of both state and societal actors.

Indeed, SERNAM has taken advantage of this opportunity and has tried to increase the participation of women.[12] Since 1997, increasing women's participation and their "associative capacities" has been an important priority, manifested in the creation of the Participation Program within SERNAM.[13] One element of this program is the creation of the Civil Society Fund, to which organized women's groups can apply

12. In its "Informe Comisión Participación," SERNAM outlines its view that the state must improve the conditions that would favor women's participation as a collective actor. They suggest that SERNAM should build "measures that favor the construction of women as social subjects for women's effective access and influence in these [institutional] spaces" (1998, 1).

13. Personal interviews with Delia del Gato, SERNAM, 20 August 1999, and Valeria Ambrosio, SERNAM, 5 October 1999, Santiago, Chile.

for resources either to carry out projects or to strengthen their organization (ibid.). Another aspect of the program is to improve the capacity of women's groups to act as interlocutors in the policy-making process. According to a study of SERNAM's efforts at initiating greater state-society interlocution, SERNAM officials believe it their duty to create networks between the institution and women's groups in civil society (Guzmán, Hola, and Ríos 1999, 33). To this end, SERNAM has tried to act as a "facilitator" of women's organizing, by initiating events such as the *Mesas Rurales* at which women seasonal agricultural workers (*temporeras*), NGOs, and SERNAM officials gather and exchange ideas and information (ibid.). They have also organized annual Women's Regional Parliaments where interaction among women is specifically geared towards prioritizing and arriving at a set of collective demands (113). Likewise, based on criticisms that the first Equal Opportunity Plan (1994–2000) was written entirely without the input of the women it was meant to represent, SERNAM officials tried to make the writing of the second Plan (2000–10) more participatory and consultative. To that end, they organized town hall meetings where organized women could communicate their concerns and interests to representatives of the agency.[14]

Despite these and other good intentions on the part of SERNAM, the links between women inside and outside of SERNAM remain weak. In fact, it is apparent that while SERNAM is extending policy access to one aspect of the movement—women activists in the NGO community—little access is being created for grassroots organizations. There is evidence that links between SERNAM and the NGO community are the most solid, with a number of women moving between the two realms. Seventy percent of SERNAM's links to non-state actors are to NGOs or educational institutions, while less than ten percent are to grass-roots women's organizations (Guzmán, Hola, and Ríos 1999, 51). Likewise, SERNAM's attempts to make the writing of the second Equal Opportunity Plan more consultative have also been criticized by women left out of the process. Charges have been made that while women from the NGO community were invited to participate in consultations and town hall meetings, grassroots organizations were merely sent questionnaires by way of municipal governments where their organizations were registered.[15] Thus, the policy access being generated by state feminism is limited largely to one segment of the movement. This is fostering resentment and a sense of exclusion among women on the "outside" of these newly emerging gender policy networks. One activist, for example, is critical of the extent to which NGOs "appropriate the space of interlo-

14. Ambrosio interview.
15. Personal interviews with Mercedes Montoya, 4 October 1999; Myriam González and María Molina, 20 October 1999; and Tatania Escalera and Laura del Carmen Veloso, 8 November 1999, Santiago, Chile.

cution of the social organizations," which currently lack sufficient space to represent their interests.[16]

SERNAM officials themselves recognize that there is still a long way to go in fostering links between organized women and SERNAM. Delia del Gato, for example, admits that despite SERNAM's expanded efforts in this area, most of the contact has been with NGOs and not with base-level women's movements. As she explains:

In the last two or three years there's been a little more emphasis on how to build relationships [with women's movements]. I think it's been insufficient, and I think it's one of the self-criticisms we make of ourselves as an institution, that is, the absence of spaces being opened.[17]

Another SERNAM official, Valeria Ambrosio, says much the same thing:

We should create more mechanisms [for interaction], make it a permanent policy. What happens now, rather, is that in certain moments we call on people, but they don't come because they feel instrumentalized or used. Although I think that the truth is that there is always a good attitude on SERNAM's part.[18]

Feminist activists in NGOs are often more critical of SERNAM's intentions. According to Rosana Ceorino of Tierra Nuestra, an NGO that works with popular sector women in Santiago's southern *poblaciones*:

They [SERNAM] wanted to convert NGOs into intermediaries between the *pobladoras* of civil society and the State, and it was very manipulative. SERNAM would send a fax saying "come here women," and in the end we were getting fed up with that type of intermediation which was ultimately a manipulation or utilization on the part of the State to get the people it wanted for its events.[19]

Francisca Rodríguez, leader of a rural and indigenous women's network, Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas (ANAMURI), is also critical of the extent to which SERNAM has "coopted" NGOs and other grassroots women's organizations. Rodríguez emphasizes that ANAMURI is unwilling to become dependent on SERNAM, despite the constant struggle to find resources to finance their organization. Rodríguez explains,

We are not going to run behind this merry-go-round of being summoned for projects, because that is the characteristic of the subsidiary state, which is every day summoning [organizations] for different projects and the whole world chases after these projects because of a lack of resources and ends up applying the policies of the State and abandoning the political proposals and plans of their own organizations.[20]

16. Personal interview with Francisca Rodríguez, 31 August 1999, Santiago, Chile.
17. del Gato interview.
18. Ambrosio interview.
19. Ceorino interview.
20. Rodríguez interview.

In sum, it appears clear that the successes of state feminism in Chile are limited by the agency's structure and by its weak relationship with an important sector of the women's movement, that is, grassroots women's organizations. Nonetheless, as I show in the next section, the existence of SERNAM is also having some positive effects on the women's movement.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE 1990S

There is no consensus on the state of the women's movement in Chile today. While some argue that it has been fundamentally weakened by the return of democracy and the existence of SERNAM, others view it as currently existing in a state of "latency."[21] What is rathermore clear is that the movement today is more fragmented than it was during the dictatorship when a considerable degree of cross-class and multi-partisan solidarity was achieved in the struggle against Pinochet. Since 1990, the main differences are between the autonomous feminists and those who have chosen to work through political parties and the state. Another division that has become more important is the division be-tween those on the inside and those on the outside of the emerging gen-der policy networks. This primarily class division is a direct result of SERNAM's stronger relationship with activists in the NGO community (mainly middle-class and professional activists) and their failures, at least to date, to forge such links to grassroots women's organizations. Thus, the women's movement in Chile is very heterogeneous. Nonetheless, given the common purposes of many organized women, that is, improv-ing the concrete conditions of women's lives, it is accurate to speak of the existence of a women's movement, despite different segments of the movement working in different ways to achieve their purposes.

The transition to democracy clearly had a decisive impact on the movement. Indeed, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the movement lost visibility and internal articulation because of the dynam-ics of democratization or the creation of SERNAM, given the extent to which these two factors are intertwined. On the one hand, many of the former activists withdrew from movement activities once the main goal of democracy had been achieved.[22] Likewise, the success that feminists had in "gendering" the democratic transition and getting their demands on the public agenda allowed women to return to tasks that they had put aside during the struggle for democracy. Paulina Weber explains

21. Valdés interview and interviews with Sandra Palestro, 7 October 1999, and Paulina Weber, 21 October 1999, Santiago, Chile.
22. Indeed, interviews and informal conversations with a number of women confirm that their organizations lost a number of members who felt that the main objective was achieved after the "No" victory in the 1988 plebiscite on Pinochet's continuation in office.

that the movement initially demobilized due to a sense that most of its demands had been achieved. She notes that,

Many women that had been active in the movement participated in the proposals for the Concertación mandate, therefore this produced a confusion between what was the movement's platform and what was the program of the Concertación, and many women believed that because there were so many of women's demands contained within the government's program, that there was no longer anything to do.[23]

Other scholars specifically blame SERNAM and the Concertación government, rather than the dynamics of the transition, for the movement's demobilization. According to Lisa Baldez, the Christian Democrat-led Concertación governments (1990–94 and 1994–2000) intentionally adopted policies to weaken SERNAM's capacity to act as a representative of feminism within government because the party "had little to win by satisfying the demands of the women's movement and much to lose by supporting the movement as an autonomous political actor" (1999, 409). Baldez argues that this is due to the women's movement's association with the parties to the left of the coalition which are the main rivals of the Christian Democrats for dominance of the Concertación coalition (417). SERNAM is also blamed for weakening the movement by drawing activists from civil society to the state, thereby depriving women's organizations of crucial leadership. Weber, director of MEMCH (Movimiento Pro Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena), an NGO that works with grassroots women's groups with the aim of constructing a "social movement of women," explains that many women who became active during the dictatorship took the experience they had gained and entered the state: "therefore, there was a migration from the social organizations to the state."[24]

Another problem lies in the mandate SERNAM was given at its creation. SERNAM's mandate is to propose and create policy, *not* to work directly with women. But this more limited mandate conflicts with the earlier expectations of the women's movement, which were that SERNAM would work more directly with women's organizations. According to Ana María Ordenes of Solidaridad y Organización Social (SOL), an NGO that works with popular sector women, "right away there was this difficulty— a tension between what SERNAM was and what women wanted it to be."[25] Thus, women in grassroots organizations have felt frustrated over the lack of contact they have with the agency.

Despite the shortcomings outlined above, SERNAM's existence contributes to the strengthening of the movement in a number of ways.

---

23. Weber interview.
24. Ibid.
25. Personal interview with Ana María Ordenes, Santiago, Chile, 23 August 1999.

Above all, the current context is marked by successive governments' own commitments to gender equality as reflected in legislative initiatives and policy programs aimed at undermining some of the bases of women's marginalization.[26] A crucial resource that SERNAM provides the women's movement is a discourse of women's rights that organizations can employ to mobilize members. Through the CIDEM Program (Women's Rights Information Centers), public awareness campaigns are conducted and numerous workshops are organized to increase women's awareness of their rights and how to claim them. CIDEMs deliver information to women both individually and en masse by way of awareness campaigns using television, radio, and the print media (Guzmán, Hola, and Ríos 1999, 108–9). SERNAM's strategies of publicizing issues important to women such as domestic violence and women's rights in the family is having some impact. Survey data reveal a greater concern among Chilean women with women's rights and equality.[27]

Although under-resourced, SERNAM's Civil Society Fund provides important resources to grassroots women's organizations. The explicit goal of this fund is to strengthen women's collective activity in civil society.[28] Some women stated that resources from the Fund enabled their group to continue functioning as well as enjoy a sense of achievement from collectively designing a project and securing the financing to implement it.[29] Likewise, it was financing from the Civil Society Fund that partially contributed to the emergence of an important women's network organization, the Red de Mujeres de Organizaciones Sociales (REMOS), whose aims are to link up dispersed organizations and to pressure SERNAM to promote the interests of popular sector women.

REMOS emerged precisely because a number of organized women were concerned that while popular sector women remained active, they did so in small, isolated groups with little awareness of each others' activities.[30] Thus, there was little capacity for large-scale mobilizations that could bring government and societal attention to their problems,

26. The women's rights agenda of successive governments since 1990 has been impressive but does not reflect a consensus within the political class, and, for this reason, compromise has often been necessary, leading to watered-down legislation in certain areas. This is most evident in the failed attempts to bring about divorce legislation. See Blofield (2001) for an analysis of the politics of the divorce debates in Chile.

27. For example, in a survey of Chilean women conducted by the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres, over ninety per cent of women are aware of the 1994 law on domestic violence. Likewise, a majority of women consider that they have a right to work, to participate in politics, and to enjoy reproductive choices although the survey only considered abortion in instances of incest, rape, and physical danger to the fetus or the mother (Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres, 1999a).

28. Ambrosio interview.

29. Escalera and del Carmen Veloso interview.

30. Most of the information that follows comes from personal interviews with Mercedes Montoya, director of REMOS, 4 October 1999, and Ana María Ordenes, of SOL, 23 August

most notably, lack of adequate housing, and decent employment oppor-
tunities, and poor access to health care. One particular NGO, SOL, was
especially concerned with the lack of linkages among popular sector
women's groups and has worked since 1989 to support grass-roots or-
ganizations and to foster coordination among them. SOL received fund-
ing from SERNAM's Civil Society Fund which it used to offer leadership
training and citizen control strategies to leaders of popular sector
women's groups. It was out of this interaction between SOL and popu-
lar women's organizations that REMOS emerged. While REMOS formed
initially in 1996 with thirty member groups, it has grown to over fifty.
The main goal of REMOS according to Mercedes Montoya is:

to strengthen ourselves as an organization, or, rather, not that one [group] would
be over here, the other over there, and the other way over there. We have to
know how to find each other and strengthen ourselves. Interchange was what
was needed.[31]

While the emergence of REMOS is linked to the desire to overcome
the fragmentation of the popular sector women's movement, its strate-
gies are clearly linked to the context provided by SERNAM. REMOS
describes its aims as: "serv[ing] as a channel for interlocution with pub-
lic and private institutions" and "promot[ing] popular sector women's
participation in public spaces."[32] This means that members of REMOS
are aware of and making very real use of the institutional and discur-
sive transformations that have occurred over the past decade, most no-
tably, the existence of SERNAM and the discourse of "citizen control"
that it has initiated. REMOS members believe that in order to yield fur-
ther results, they need to pressure the state to fulfill its commitments.
When asked what the relationship between the state and REMOS should
be like, Montoya explains:

"we have to take part in actions that the government carries out and we have to
follow and watch. In other words, we'll be saying to them, 'listen, what's hap-
pening with this, or what's happening with that law? . . . Here, we as an organi-
zation are carrying out our goals of being an organization that concerns itself
with the government's plans.[33]

To carry this out, REMOS holds monthly or bimonthly meetings where
the member groups select issues relevant to their communities (such as
health, education, or other municipal services). The constituent groups
then pursue these issues by monitoring their municipalities' compliance

---

1999, Santiago, Chile. Additional information was drawn from numerous informal con-
versations with women whose organizations are members of REMOS.
    31. Montoya interview.
    32. These aims are stated in a pamphlet inviting popular sector women's groups to
join REMOS.
    33. Montoya interview.

with aspects of the Equal Opportunity Plan or other programs that re-
late to these issues which are implemented at the municipal level. In
this way, members generate increased awareness of the state's gender
policy and the extent to which it is being implemented effectively. This
means that the equality goals established by SERNAM become priori-
ties for REMOS—an important segment of the broader women's move-
ment. This contributes significantly to the movement's re-mobilization
around a clearer set of purposes.

There are two additional reasons why REMOS is significant. First,
the mere process of linking up dispersed organizations is crucial to the
reconstitution of the women's movement as a collective actor with a
sense of purpose. While it is still too early to measure the success of
REMOS in terms of policy outcomes, it is significant that nearly all of
the popular sector women with whom I spoke, women from at least six
different communities in Santiago, told me the importance of this new
network to the women's movement in Chile. While women could say
little at this point about concrete policy successes, they all acknowledged
that the network was re-capturing something that had been lost in the
earlier part of the decade, namely, a strong sense of their collective iden-
tity as *popular sector women* and their critical role in the nation's demo-
cratic political project. As Montoya explained to me, "we are not just
any women—we are women from the popular sectors."[34]

The second reason that that REMOS is significant lies in the above
comment. The network reminds us that "women" are not a homogenous
group. Instead, members of REMOS insist that women have different
interests depending upon their social location and, therefore, priority
must be given to both class and gender issues. To a certain extent, the
emphasis on both class and gender issues recalls the discourse of the
women's movement during the dictatorship, when there was more in-
terchange between popular sector organizations and middle-class ac-
tivists. In part, greater attention to the inter-connectedness of class and
gender issues could be expected due to the cross-class nature of the pro-
democracy movement as a whole, but it was also related to the exist-
ence of the profound economic crisis of the early 1980s when it was
impossible to ignore the overwhelming problems created by poverty
and social marginalization. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, economic
recovery, the return to democracy, and the focus on SERNAM as the
agency for dealing with gender equality issues all shifted attention away
from the needs of Chile's poor. REMOS is significant for its efforts to
draw attention back to the very real problems of poverty, unemploy-
ment, and continued social marginalization, and to insist that gender
policy address these problems.

34. Ibid.

In addition to REMOS, a second network has emerged that further focuses attention on class and ethnicity in Chile. ANAMURI is rooted in rural women's organizations and emerged due to concerns over the lack of linkages among organized women and a frustration that even though the state employed a discourse of women's equality, it was paying little attention to the particular needs of rural and indigenous women. ANAMURI formed in June 1998, initially representing fifty base organizations and regional networks of rural or indigenous women. It is firmly rooted in both the *campesino* movement and the women's movement. Consequently, its objectives incorporate gender issues into the world of rural organizing and ensure that the particularities of rural and indigenous women are addressed when discussing women's issues, especially in state institutions.[35]

Like REMOS, ANAMURI prizes its independence, yet sees interaction with the state as crucial to realizing its aims. ANAMURI is critical of the extent to which the specific needs of rural and indigenous women have been ignored by SERNAM, a lack of concern evident in their complete absence in the first plan. At the same time, however, they recognize the advantage of having an agency such as SERNAM. For example, Francisca Rodríguez explains that it is important that SERNAM exists because women "now have a point of departure that is different." She adds that women must now use this institutional space to push for greater attention to their particular concerns and to ensure that SERNAM considers class and ethnicity in addition to gender as a source of inequality and discrimination. Like REMOS, ANAMURI employs the discourse of "citizen control" and pressures the state to fulfill its commitments to women's equality. As Rodríguez explains,

The state could continue sending beautiful plans and projects without any intention of fulfilling them, while civil society is not demanding and not controlling to see that they are fulfilled. Therefore, our political role is to carry out citizen control. We reviewed the Equal Opportunity Plan and we said that this Plan doesn't represent us as *campesinas* and indigenous women. . . . So, we brought a lot of attention to this aspect and we've had results. For example, we constituted a commission to review the Plan to see what were the deficiencies and through that we pressured [SERNAM] and they had to name a rural sectoralist [for SERNAM] and we said to ourselves, "we won."[36]

Like REMOS, ANAMURI has attracted a great deal of attention recently because of its aim to re-mobilize a segment of the women's movement that was both highly visible and highly mobilized during the dictatorship.[37] Both networks formed out of a sense of frustration that

35. A statement of these objectives is found on the program for their first meeting, held 11–13, June 1998, Santiago, Chile.
36. Rodríguez interview.
37. The Departamento Femenino of the rural labor movement was critical to the

SERNAM was giving insufficient attention to issues relevant to particular sectors of women, while also admitting that SERNAM's existence was crucial to the overall struggle for women's equality in Chile. Thus, while SERNAM provides these groups with a discourse of women's rights and equality around which to mobilize, both groups are motivated by a sense that a discourse of *women's* rights is insufficient if it ignores the variety of sources of marginalization that women experience.

Both networks expressly view SERNAM, and other state agencies, as a target for pressure from civil society to ensure that commitments are fulfilled. Hence, their strategies are inextricably linked to the new institutional context that SERNAM provides. Both networks represent societal responses to state-level changes that provide opportunities for movements to mobilize while also affecting power relations among segments of the movement that privilege some while excluding others. Leaders of REMOS and ANAMURI feel that the relationship between the NGO sector and SERNAM privileges the concerns of middle-class women while weakening policy goals that take into account the needs of poor, working-class, rural, and/or indigenous women. At the same time, the responses of REMOS and ANAMURI to focus attention on the multiplicity of sources of women's inequality restore the class and indigenous issues that had been central to the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

Another development of considerable significance is the formation of an NGO network, Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres. Like Venezuela's Coordinating Committee of Women's NGOs (discussed in Friedman 2000), Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres is an umbrella organization composed of eleven NGOs, most of which are feminist NGOs. Unlike members of REMOS and ANAMURI who complain that they have insufficient access to SERNAM and other state agencies, women involved in feminist NGOs are well aware of the privileged access to the state they enjoy. Due to this access, they see their role as gathering the demands of women within civil society and presenting them to the state. The initial motivation to form Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres emerged during the preparations for the Beijing Conference, when they coordinated the activities of Chilean NGOs. After the conference, however, they decided to maintain their organization and expand their activities. Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres was aware of and concerned about the lack of spaces for women to participate in the formulation of the policy agenda of the government. Members consider their current role as a facilitator and bridge for such contact. They argue that the Chilean women's movement needs to pursue a multi-faceted

------

emergence of a women's movement in Chile in the late 1970s, and, most importantly, a movement that was firmly committed to struggling for *both* gender and class emancipation (Gaviola, Largo, and Palestra 1994, 87–88).

strategy for pursuing gender equality in which women's organizations in civil society play a much bigger role. One of their documents explains that, "today, many of the actions carried out have been focused on elaborating and presenting demands to the state, neglecting both the strengthening of the women's movement, and the construction of its own discourse which could permeate all of society" (Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres 1994, 29). Moreover, as Paulina Weber of MEMCH (an NGO member of Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres), explains, "we are convinced that SERNAM cannot be a substitute for civil society," especially because there are many issues (like abortion) that SERNAM will not raise.[38]

The Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres is perhaps the first women's lobby group that has emerged since the transition to democracy. Its main strategy is to monitor state actions and to lobby the state to fulfill commitments to women that are embodied in international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Chile's own Equal Opportunity Plans. To this end, in 1997, they successfully lobbied the government of Eduardo Frei to sign publicly an "Act of Commitment" . . . (*Acta de Compromiso*) to implement and to follow through on the commitments made at Beijing, especially in expanding the presence of women as decision-makers. The public signing of this Act in the presence of key government officials was the first part of the Grupo Iniciativa's National Forum for the Following of the Beijing Accords. In signing the Act, the government committed itself to both abstract goals, such as eliminating discrimination against women in their access to the state, as well as to concrete measures such as assigning resources to women, and especially to maintaining the Civil Society Fund (Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres 1997, 6–7).

More recently, the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres has developed concrete "tools" for carrying out "citizen control," which, like REMOS and ANAMURI, they see as one of their main tasks. One of the key criticisms of SERNAM has been the difficulty of actually measuring or evaluating the extent to which it is effective.[39] Thus, the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres— which is composed of many research-oriented NGOs like the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) and Centro de Estudios de la Mujer (CEM)—elaborated the *Indice de Compromiso Cumplido* (Index of Fulfilled Commitments), which includes a system of indicators through which they can measure the state's compliance with various international agreements and SERNAM's Equal Opportunity Plan. (Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres 1999b). One of the benefits of this system is that evaluations of government initiatives can be somewhat more objective than previous evaluations which relied on subjective indicators such as interviews with

38. Weber interview.
39. Ibid.

program beneficiaries and opinion polls of citizens. Teresa Valdés explains that increased objectivity can also lead to greater autonomy for the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres in its dealings with the state.[40]

Perhaps the most important priority of the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres is to articulate the demands of the women's movement as a whole, using public spaces such as the media. To that end, the Grupo elaborated the *Nueva Agenda* (New Agenda) of the women's movement for the new millennium and published it as a supplement in one of Chile's newspapers, "hop[ing] to contribute to the strengthening of civil society's role in the construction of democracy" (Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres 1999c, 2). This document is important for two reasons. First, because it emanates from civil society, the demands for women's equality are more radical than those made from within the state, either in the Equal Opportunity Plan or embodied in legislation proposed by SERNAM or women parliamentarians. The *Nueva Agenda* therefore could and did raise the issue that women's sexual and reproductive rights are key to women's equality. They could also highlight the growing inequality among women produced by the state's neoliberal policies, and strongly denounce the massive inequality suffered by indigenous, rural, and popular sector women.

A second reason for the document's significance lies in the process by which it was designed. The Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres, composed of NGOs staffed by professional women, enjoys greater success at obtaining international financing than grassroots women's organizations. International financing allowed Grupo Iniciativa to organize meetings throughout the length of the country in which the needs and demands of differently situated women could be gathered and later organized into a coherent set of priorities. In writing the *Nueva Agenda*, each NGO in the organization worked on a particular section, dealing with a specific topic, such as women's health, environmental concerns, or women's access to decision-making spheres. The final document was sent to organized women's groups, including REMOS and ANAMURI. Once the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres had gathered and incorporated the suggestions of women outside of the NGOs into the document, they presented the *Nueva Agenda* as the set of demands emanating from the Chilean women's movement as a whole.[41] This process of interchange and goal identification is critical to a movement seeking to recover its sense of purpose and find ways to express its demands.

In sum, the Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres, REMOS, and ANAMURI, are indicators of the movement's reconstitution. Their existence, along with the strategies they employ, indicate that earlier pronouncements that the institutionalization of gender politics in the state weakens women's movements

40. Valdés interview.
41. Ibid.

are no longer accurate in the case of Chile. Over the last few years in Chile, the isolation of smaller women's groups is slowly being overcome, and network organizations are employing SERNAM's own discourses to mobilize women and to pressure the state to fulfill its commitments to women. Even more importantly, these networks go beyond SERNAM's priorities and re-focus attention on class and ethnicity as bases of women's marginalization that need to be addressed as well as gender.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to explore some of the effects of SERNAM on women's activism in Chile. This task is an important one because there is a wide body of research that shows the importance of strong women's movements to the success of state feminism. On the other hand, scholars of Latin American women's movements have argued that the institutionalization of gender politics weakens and demobilizes women's movements. What the Chilean case shows, however, is that women's policy machineries can have a positive effect on women's movements. Chile's SERNAM provides the women's movement with crucial resources, notably a discourse of women's rights and a set of priorities around which to mobilize. The recent formation of network organizations that use the language of "citizen control" indicates that current movement strategies are indeed shaped by the new institutional context provided by SERNAM.

This article has further shown how SERNAM affects the power relations within the movement. The well-developed relations between feminists in SERNAM and the NGO community mean that professional women in NGOs enjoy greater access to gender policy networks than do non-professional activists in grassroots women's organizations. But, as I show in the article, instead of weakening the women's movement overall, the relative marginalization of one segment of the movement from the emerging gender policy networks is having the effect of re-mobilizing popular sector, rural, and indigenous women around a women's rights agenda that also focuses on class and ethnicity. It appears, therefore, that the Chilean women's movement is entering a new stage, one where a diverse and heterogeneous movement composed of various currents ensures that women's different interests are promoted. While it is still too early to tell the long-term results of this, the fact that networks like ANAMURI are committed to working with SERNAM to pressure the agency to address class and ethnicity are encouraging signs.

The Chilean case presented in this article thus confirms the importance of institutional changes on the shape and strategies of social movements. It shows that in certain instances state feminism can encourage the strengthening of women's movement organizations. Indeed, Chile's

SERNAM has yet to fully exploit the opportunities it faces in promoting policy access to movement organizations. This bears further monitoring. I would like to conclude, however, by cautioning the limits to generalizing from the Chilean case. While nearly all countries have created women's policy machinery, the mandates, institutional structures, and effectiveness of these agencies vary considerably. Chile's SERNAM is located within a state that is highly institutionalized. It has also been occupied by successive governments committed to a women's rights agenda. A true test of SERNAM's effectiveness will be a change of government from the ruling center-left coalition to the rightist coalition.[42] One of the ways in which Chile's SERNAM differs from women's state agencies elsewhere is the extent to which is has been stable since its creation. In Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, agencies created under one government have been dismantled or substantially reformed under new governments. This significantly weakens their potential to create stable gender policy networks composed of both state and civil society actors, in turn, undermining the possibility of strengthening women's movements by creating stable policy access to movement actors. Frequent institutional changes also undermine the capacity for state agencies to mobilize women's movements around a clear set of objectives where objectives change dramatically each time the institution is recreated. Feminists in SERNAM have sought to avoid this possible scenario by further institutionalizing a gender equality agenda in the state.[43] In sum, the greater success of SERNAM is partially dependent on governments' commitments to women's equality issues. When this changes, SERNAM's capacity to generate opportunities for women's movements will also likely be reduced. Hopefully, networks such as REMOS, ANAMURI, and Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres can continue to grow and mobilize sufficient resources to pressure any future governments that may seek to roll back some of the gains that Chilean women have made.

42. Many observers predict that the next government in Chile will be composed of the two main rightist parties, the moderate National Renovation (RN) and the more conservative Independent Democratic Union (UDI). In fact, current Socialist president Ricardo Lagos barely defeated UDI candidate Joaquín Lavin for the presidency in the 2000 elections. Over the last few years, the right has been making impressive gains, and the recent parliamentary elections of December 16, 2001, confirm that the UDI made the greatest electoral gains, improving its share of the popular vote from 14.45 per cent in 1997 to 25.19 per cent (*El Mercurio*, 20 December 2001).

43. When the second Equal Opportunity Plan was created, it was given a ten-year time span, which, according to Valeria Ambrosio, would protect the Plan's objectives against a government less committed to women's rights. Ambrosio explained that this idea came from feminists in Spain, who successfully pursued a similar strategy (Ambrosio interview).

REFERENCES

ALVAREZ, SONIA E.
1990   *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
1999   "Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'Boom'." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 (2): 181–209.
ALVEAR, SOLEDAD
1990   *Ideas para la acción, informe final de la concertación de mujeres por la democracia.* Santiago: El Canelo de Nos.
ANAMURI
2000   *Mujeres rurales e indígenas en marcha hacia un nuevo milenio.* Santiago, Chile.
BALDEZ, LISA
1999   "La Política Partidista y los Límites del Feminismo de Estado en Chile." In *El Modelo Chileno: Democracia y Desarrollo en los Noventa,* edited by Paul Drake and Iván Jaksic, 407–33. Santiago: LOM Ediciones.
BARRIG, MARUJA
2001   "Latin American Feminism: Gains, Losses and Hard Times." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34 (5): 29–34.
BECKMAN, ERICKA
2001   "The Eighth Encuentro." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34 (5): 32–3.
BECKWITH, KAREN
2000   "Beyond Compare? Women's Movements in Comparative Perspective." *European Journal of Political Research* 37: 431–68.
BLOFIELD, MERIKE
2001   *The Politics of "Moral Sin": A study of abortion and divorce in Catholic Chile since 1990.* Santiago: FLACSO-Chile.
CONCERTACIÓN
1999   "Iniciar el siglo XXI con más democracia y más derechos." Bases programáticos de la Concertación.
CRASKE, NIKKI
1998   "Remasculinization and the Neoliberal State in Latin America." In *Gender, Politics and the State,* edited by Vicky Randall and Georgina Waylen, 100–20. London: Routledge.
1999   *Women and Politics in Latin America.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
FEIJOÓ, MARÍA DEL CARMEN
1989   "The Challenge of Constructing Civilian Peace: Women and Democracy in Argentina." In *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy,* edited by Jane Jaquette, 72–94. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
FRIEDMAN, ELISABETH J.
1998   "Paradoxes of Gendered Political Opportunity in the Venezuelan Transition to Democracy." *Latin American Research Review* 33 (3): 87–135.
2000   *Unfinished Transitions: Women and the Gendered Development of Democracy in Venezuela, 1936–1996.* University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
GAVIOLA, EDDA, ELIANA LARGO, AND SANDRA PALESTRO
1994   *Una historia necesaria: mujeres en Chile, 1973–1990.* Santiago: Akí y Aora.
GRAU, OLGA, RIET DELSING, EUGENIA BRITO, AND ALEJANDRA FARÍAS
1997   *Discurso, género, poder: discursos públicos en Chile, 1978–1993.* Santiago: La Morada, Universidad ARCIS, Lom Ediciones.
GRUPO INICIATIVA MUJERES
1994   "Mujeres: ciudadanía, cultura y desarrollo en el Chile de los noventa." Santiago, Chile.
1997   "Acta de la primera sesión: las mujeres en el ejercicio del poder y la toma de decisiones." Foro nacional para el seguimiento de los acuerdos de Beijing. Santiago, Chile.

1999a   "Encuesta nacional opinión y actitudes de las mujeres chilenas sobre la condición de género." Santiago, Chile.
1999b   "Indice de compromiso cumplido: un instrumento de control ciudadano para las mujeres." Santiago, Chile.
1999c   "Propuesta Política de las Mujeres para el Tercer Milenio." *La Nación*. 12 November. Santiago, Chile.

GUZMÁN, VIRGINIA, EUGENIA HOLA, AND MARCELA RÍOS
1998   "La equidad de género como tema de debate y de políticas públicas." In *Género en el estado, estado del género*, edited by Eliana Largo, 55–70. Santiago: ISIS Internacional.
1999   "Interlocución estado y sociedad en la implementación del Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades para las mujeres." Santiago: CEM.

HARDY, CLARISA
1997   "Las políticas sociales en chile." In *Chile '96: análisis y opiniones*. Santiago: FLACSO-Chile, 119–135.

HIPSHER, PATRICIA L.
1998   "Democratic Transitions and Social Movement Outcomes: The Chilean Shantytown Dwellers' Movement in Comparative Perspective." In *From Contention to Democracy*, edited by Marco C. Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly, 149–67. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

ISIS INTERNACIONAL
1996   "Evaluación cualitativa del Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades Para las Mujeres 1994–99: Percepciones de mujeres líderes de opinión y beneficiarias del Plan Región Metropolitana y Región del Maule." Santiago, Chile: ISIS Internacional.

JAQUETTE, JANE S., ED.
1989   *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

JAQUETTE, JANE S., AND SHARON L. WOLCHIK, EDS.
1998   *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

KIRKWOOD, JULIETA
1988   "Feministas y Políticas." In *Mujeres latinoamericanas: diez ensayos y una historia colectiva*, edited by Celina Albaro, et al., 17–27. Lima: Flora Tristán, Centro de la Mujer Peruana.

MACAULAY, FIONA
1998   "Localities of Power: Gender, Parties and Democracy in Chile and Brazil" In *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World*, edited by Haleh Afshar, 86–109. New York: St. Martin's Press.

MATEAR, ANN
1995   "The Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM): Women and the Process of Democratic Transition in Chile 1990–94." In *Neo-Liberalism with a Human Face? The Politics and Economics of the Chilean Model*, edited by David E. Hojman, 93–117. Liverpool: Institute of Latin American Studies.
1997   "Desde la Protesta a la Propuesta: The Institutionalization of the Women's Movement in Chile." In *Gender Politics in Latin America*, edited by Elizabeth Dore, 84–100. New York: Monthly Review Press.

MOLYNEUX, MAXINE
1998   "Analyzing Women's Movements." *Development and Change* 29, no. 2: 219–45.

MUÑOZ, ADRIANA
1996   "Mujer y política: complejidades y ambivalencias." Santiago: CEPAL.

O'DONNELL, GUILLERMO, AND PHILLIPE C. SCHMITTER
1986   *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

OXHORN, PHILIP
1994a   "Where Did All the Protestors Go? Popular Mobilization and the Transition to Democracy in Chile." *Latin American Perspectives* 21 (3): 49–68.
1994b   "Understanding Political Change after Authoritarian Rule: the Popular Sectors and Chile's New Democratic Regime." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26 (3): 737–59.

PRINGLE, ROSEMARY, AND SOPHIE WATSON
  1998   "'Women's Interests' and the Post-Structuralist State." In *Feminism and Politics,* edited by Anne Phillips, 203–23. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
PROVOSTE, PATRICIA
  1997   "Los servicios públicos y los derechos de las mujeres: hacia una modernización democrática de la gestión pública". In *Veredas por cruzar: 10 años/Instituto de la Mujer,* edited by Guadalupe Santa Cruz, 43–64. Santiago: Instituto de la Mujer.
RAYO, GUSTAVO, AND GONZALO DE LA MAZA
  2000   "Urban Action: Collective Efforts at the Grassroots Level." In *Chile in the Nineties,* edited by Cristián Toloza and Eugenio Lahera, 409–54. Stanford University Libraries.
REMOS
  n.d.   Information Pamphlet. Mission, Objectives, and Member Groups.
RICHARDS, PATRICIA
  Forthcoming   "Expanding Notions of Citizenship? Visión de Pueblo and the Representation of Mapuche Women in Chile's National Women's Service." *Latin American Perspectives.*
ROWBOTHAM, SHEILA
  1992   *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action.* New York: Routledge.
SCHILD, VERÓNICA
  1994   "Recasting 'Popular' Movements: Gender and Learning in Neighborhood Organizations in Chile." *Latin American Perspectives* 21 (2): 59–80.
  1998   "Market Citizenship and the New Democracies: The Ambiguous Legacies of the Contemporary Chilean Women's Movement." *Social Politics* 5 (2): 232–49.
  2000a   "Neoliberalism's New Gendered Market Citizens: The 'Civilizing' Dimension of Social Programs in Chile." *Citizenship Studies* 4 (3): 275–305.
  2000b   "Gender Equity without Social Justice: Women's Rights in the Neoliberal Age." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34 (1): 25–8.
SERNAM
  1994   *Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades Para las Mujeres.* Santiago, Chile.
  1996   "Seguimiento evaluativo de la implementación municipal del Programa de Apoyo a Mujeres Jefas de Hogar."
  1998   "Informe Comisión Participación". Santiago, Chile.
  2000   *Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades Entre Mujeres y Hombres, 2000–2010.* Santiago: SERNAM.
SERRANO, CLAUDIA
  1990   "Entre la autonomía y la integración". In *Transiciones: mujeres en los procesos democráticos,* 99–105. Santiago: ISIS Internacional.
STETSON MCBRIDE, DOROTHY, AND AMY G. MAZUR, EDS.
  1995   *Comparative State Feminism.* London: Sage Publications.
TAYLOR, LUCY
  1998   *Citizenship, Participation and Democracy: Changing Dynamics in Chile and Argentina.* London: Macmillan Press.
THELEN, KATHLEEN, AND SVEN STEINMO
  1992   "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics." In *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis,* edited by Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth, 1–32. Cambridge University Press.
VALDÉS, TERESA
  2000   *De lo Social a lo Político: La Acción de las Mujeres Latinoamericanas.* Santiago: LOM Ediciones.
VALDÉS, TERESA, AND ENRIQUE GOMARIZ
  1995   *Mujeres Latinoamericanas en cifras: tomo comparativo.* Spain: Instituto de la Mujer.
VALENZUELA, MARÍA ELENA
  1994   "El Programa Nacional de Apoyo a Jefas de Hogar de Escasos Recursos." In *De mujer sola a jefa de hogar: género, pobreza, y políticas públicas,* edited by María Elena Valenzuela, 187–214. Santiago: SERNAM.

WAYLEN, GEORGINA
  1994   "Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition
          Politics." *World Politics* 46 (3): 327–54.
  1996   "Women's Movements, the State and Democratization in Chile: The Establish-
          ment of SERNAM." In *Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development*, ed-
          ited by Anne Marie Goetz, 90–103. London: Zed Books.
  2000   "Gender and Democratic Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Consolidation in
          Argentina and Chile." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32: 765–93.