

59. The author was present at the interview with Muhammad Tantawi at his office in al-Azhar in Cairo in February 1997.

60. Interview with Rashida al-Qiyali by Miryam Rashid, Sana`a, September 1997. She observed that all the political parties marginalise women.

61. Interview with Muhammad Qahtan by Margot Badran, Sana`a, January 1997. Rashida al-Qiyali told Miryam Rashid: 'The good thing about Islah is that they are honest about the [woman's] issue'.

62. The women on the executive committee of the Fund include: Amat al-Razzaq Jahlaf (GPC), Amat al-Sallam Ali Raja (Islah), Amat al-Alim al-Suswa (National Women's Committee), and Raufa Hassan (independent).

63. Women constituted an important presence in the voter monitoring procedures on election day.

64. Hawla Sharaf is from Aden and Muha Basharhi from Hadhramaut.

65. Molyneux, 'Women's Rights and Political Contingency', p. 419, note 4, makes this point.

66. Members of the committee from the Center included: Muhammad al-Qabatri, a judge; Hanan Bahmaid, Abd al-Hakim al-Hamdani and Najat al-Shami, lawyers; and Fathiyya al-Haythami and Sa`id al-Mikhlaifi. There were also human rights activists, and journalists.

67. The author attended one of these meetings at the end of January 1997. In discussions with women there, and also in an interview with Suhair al-Amri and Bushra al-Mutawakkil, Sana`a, 15 January 1997, I learned about the concerns of the rising generation of professional women, whose gender consciousness, advocacy, and activism grows out of their own personal and work lives.

68. Shada Nasir emphasised this in an interview with Majda al-Qurmati and Narges Erami, Sana`a, 2 September 1997.

69. Interview with Nabila al-Mufti by Samira Muhsin and Evelyn Anoya, Sana`a, 3 September 1997.

70. When I interviewed members of the Islah Women's Division in Sana`a in January 1997, they seemed genuinely to be unaware of the draft.

71. Interview with Muhammad Qahtan by Margot Badran, Sana`a, October 1997.

72. Interview with Raufa Hassan by Rochdi Younsi, Sana`a, 2 September 1997.

73. Interview with Nabila al-Mufti by Samira Muhsin and Evelyn Anoya, Sana`a, 3 September 1997.

74. Yemen Republic Islah Party, 'Political Action Programme'. See full citation in note 44.

75. See note 16; also Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), and Stowasser, 'Gender Issues and Contemporary Qur'an Interpretation', in *Gender, Islam, and Social Change*, pp. 30–45.

76. Interview with Raufa Hassan by Rochdi Younsi, Sana`a, 2 September 1997.

77. Shada Nasir emphasised this in an interview with Majda Abd al-Qurmati and Narges Erami, Sana`a, 2 September 1997.

78. Interview with Nabila al-Mufti by Samira Muhsin and Evelyn Anoya, Sana`a, 3 September 1997.

79. This research was conducted by students from Sana`a University and the University of Chicago during the Workshop in Gender Research Skills held at the Center for Empirical Research and Women's Studies, Sana`a University in August and September 1997.

80. This is taken from the subtitle of Basu's book, *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*.

FORUM

International Feminisms: Latin American Alternatives

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Feminism was born wrapped in one great hope: that it would be good for all womankind, and able to embrace all women, to dispel all national, racial and cultural barriers. Because it was developed concurrently in many parts of the world – sometimes as a groping desire not well articulated, sometimes as a clear elaboration of much meditation – it had an apparent promise of universality that led many women and men to believe that some day it would be a global canon for all humankind. Time has proven that the femaleness of all women is not enough to achieve a unity of purpose that must overcome the many cultural factors that make gender a reality different in each society. Further, feminism, like any other ideological and cultural construct, is not held within a strict mould that remains impervious to chronological change. The aspirations of the first feminists – those who evolved roughly between 1900 and 1940 – took new courses as new generations sought different routes to solve their problems, or some of the original goals were achieved. The meaning of women's or feminists' needs vis-à-vis their own social environment therefore takes myriad subtle forms that demand careful attention to unravel. By now the pluralism of feminism is well established, and we are dealing with feminisms as an experience that is not necessarily shared in the same degree or within the same conceptual frames even at the national level, let alone in the international arena.

In the international forum, some academic cultural centres, endowed with the power of their prestige and long history of research and engagement on the topic, have become predisposed to see a 'universal' pattern of feminism, acceptable and applicable to all situations and all women. The definitions of feminism elaborated in European countries and in the United States from the mid 1850s onwards have been assumed to represent all feminist interests. We confront today many objections to a universal discourse, coming from areas that were until recently regarded as the

periphery of intellectual debates, but where the needs and the cultural heritage of most women do not fit the parameters devised elsewhere. Thus, we face international feminisms with two problematic issues. One is whether West European and North American interpretations of feminism can serve the needs of the rest of the world; the other is the possible breakdown of an ideology that has served well so many women's causes into a number of compartmentalised expressions, which serve local issues, but have lost the binding ties that permit the recognition of a common experience in womanhood.

Assuming that feminism is a cultural construct that does not accept unquestioned transference of thoughts and answers from one period to another or from one nation or one area of the world to another, is it possible to save its 'international' character without losing the wealth generated by its internal diversity? This question has elicited many answers, and here I will simply outline some thoughts that may facilitate further discussion without attempting to cover all the facets of this complex issue.¹ As an academic historian I conceive international feminisms to be a comparative and interdisciplinary subject, which implies the exchange of theories, as well as openness to a dialogue in which the 'popular' understandings of its meanings, and 'pragmatic' approaches to reaching women at the level of their daily needs become valid objectives. The marketplace of feminisms should not take the approach of multinationals but maintain the spirit of the national and local 'economies' of womankind.

Taking the latter line of inquiry, Latin America offers an interesting case-study in the dialogue of national and international feminisms. Locked in one vast continent, these nations form within themselves an international scenario. They share some common historical, cultural, and political experiences, but have developed idiosyncratically, forcing us to focus on national and international issues whenever we attempt to tie the nations together under the banner of common gender concerns. Continental Latin America comprises a variety of ethnicities and races, social classes, economic problems, and cultural traditions, and is a macrocosm in which we find reflections of the experience of women world-wide.

Historically, Latin American feminisms have also had ties with other cultures that served as inspirational beacons. Latin American feminists developed a strong vocation for internationalism, not only as an intellectual orientation, but as a validation of their aspirations for a political and juridical personality. Francesca Miller has argued that since the beginning of the twentieth century Latin American women's participation in international conferences helped to counterbalance their alienation from politics by the local androcracy, and their ostracism from male-controlled international diplomacy conferences.² The First International Feminine Congress in Buenos Aires in 1910 was a forum for the discussion of a broad spectrum of topics, and was attended by representatives from all over Latin America as well as from Europe. Significantly, most of the discussions revolved

around social issues, not suffrage or political rights, which were beyond them at the time. What seemed to bind all women together were universal themes of family and labour, as well as a desire to come to grips with the meaning of feminism itself.³

Participation in international conferences gave personal and political strength to those returning home as well as to those who had stayed behind. For example, Sofía Alvarez de Demicheli made a news splash in her native Uruguay after her lucid participation in the 1933 Inter-American Conference, where women pressed for the recognition of women's civil rights. A committed feminist, she proceeded to help support the cause of women's suffrage in her country, where women first participated in a national election in 1938.

The history of women's presence and activities in the Pan American Union Conferences is indicative of the nature, goals, and obstacles faced by early twentieth-century feminists. They succeeded in making statements against United States imperialism in the area, but did not pursue what today we may call a North-South confrontation. Rather, they collaborated with the United States in seeking the ratification of international women's rights, such as the right to a single nationality, in The Hague International Court. The 'imperialism' of the male sex at home was never described in so many words by the participants in such conferences, but was more explicitly addressed by feminist activists in their relentless pursuit of the elimination of male supremacy in the laws defining gender relations in the family. Before 1940, feminists targeted warfare as another expression of patriarchal values enforced upon humanity in general, founding organisations to promote world peace. Unfortunately, pacifism became a 'feminine' activity, suffused with emotionalism and bound to become a lost cause in an increasingly militarised decade. The return to war in 1940, and of peace in 1945, were unique experiences that turned feminists' interests from international pacifism to issues of political 'empowerment' through suffrage, international political domination, and economic dependency. Although some countries had already adopted women's suffrage by 1945, female enfranchisement was largely a post-World War II achievement. Suffrage was a universal political concept rather than a tool for reshaping politics, insofar as many countries wavered between democratic and dictatorial regimes, and few offered a consistent channel for active female political participation in the national arena. Whether practised or not, the right to vote was an intellectually enabling tool that by the 1970s permitted the politicisation of women's activism – a consciousness of their own capabilities – and an incisive analysis of their roles in the economies and in the formulation of politics.

Before the 1960s, internationalism helped women's feminist groups to examine their own situation in the light of the values and practices of women of other cultures who, nonetheless, shared common problems owing to their gender. An analysis of the circumstances confronted by other

women led feminists to adopt for themselves whatever was adaptable to their own nations. They were also led to the consciousness of the idiosyncrasy of their respective national circumstances. Further, international meetings help self-examination at a personal level, bonding at a group level, and the softening of rough edges born of hard-core cultural assumptions. Seven international meetings known as *encuentros* have been renewed in Latin America beginning in 1981 in Bogotá, with other important ones taking place in Peru (1983), Mexico (1986), Argentina (1990), and Chile (1996). For the participants, they validate gender as a bonding element, and help identify the premises of universal female oppression. While today international conferences may not give the same feeling of 'empowerment' to women they did at the beginning of the century, they still help to define national agendas, and to redefine techniques of organisation and persuasion, after the flurry of state and private activities focused on women that followed the Decade of the Woman that began in 1975. Internationalism has not been, however, the only route open to women for political participation in the national arena. Nationalism and internationalism have coexisted with differing degrees of strength born out of circumstances over which women had no control. While a small group of middle-class educated women was projecting itself in the international arena, other women (or sometimes the same women) were founding female organisations and even women's parties, from which they launched a variety of national, social and political campaigns.

This historical framework helps us to understand certain 'traditional' continuities in Latin American feminisms, while underlining the departures experienced as a response to new historical circumstances. Beginning in the 1960s, Latin American nations devoted enormous energy to development, and struggled to find a way between the ideological and economic commitment to capitalism and the social inequalities that led many people to assume that Marxism was a panacea for all problems. The tension created by such antagonistic forces led many important countries to a return to authoritarian and repressive regimes. Neither Marxism nor military regimes proved to be fertile ground for the consideration of gender issues. The military encouraged a return to traditional gender roles, while engaging in new forms of violence that included activities against women. Non-military regimes and revolutionary regimes relegated gender issues to a secondary place in their agendas or failed to carry institutional changes into meaningful personal changes. The reliance on centralised states to provide answers for gender legal issues and for the welfare of women and children has maintained men in control of the most important mechanisms of social change. Latin America has the dubious distinction of being the source of the concept of overbearing masculinity or *machismo* as the signifier of male-dominated gender relations.

Yet, the same forces that led to authoritarian regimes were at the bottom of a budding redefinition of women's social and economic role, as well as

a new mode of thinking the rights of women within the universal rights of peoples. Gross economic inequalities began to affect the material structure of the family, forcing more women to assume active roles to salvage households from increasing poverty. Migrating to other countries was one alternative taken by some; becoming part of multinational industries was another; going into the streets as members of the 'informal' economy was a third option. The feminisation of poverty and the increasing number of female heads of households have raised deep concerns among segments of the economic and intellectual leadership, and have reactivated the role of 'action' feminism. After 1975 the revitalisation of international feminisms world-wide had a profound influence on Latin America. In a world of mass communications, educated middle-class as well as working women became aware of the ground swell of contemporary feminisms and began to formulate their own responses to the lingering problems of national economic decline and the solutions adopted to stall it: neoliberalism and political conservatism. In this critical period the seizure by the military of a large portion of South America activated the hidden political resources of women in the name of human rights.

There are many voices in an environment characterised by its diversity, and the attempt to coordinate them has taken time and effort. Beyond and above the different topics discussed in national and international encounters, the main agenda of these meetings has been the search for unity in diversity, the creation of personal bondings, and a better understanding of the many meanings of feminism. Nationalism and all the centrifugal forces that may cause a cacophony of noises rather than a chorus of stated purposes are serious obstacles if not threats to creating an intercontinental feminist spirit, and confrontations have been inevitable. However, the debate over finer points of ideological standing and political strategies has been aptly identified as essential for keeping channels of communication open among national groups and a venue for an ultimate mutual understanding. Internal democracy within feminist groups has been regarded as essential to maintain the vitality of feminism at the national and intercontinental levels. Also identified as an important need is learning about the social and economic conditions of the nations and the continent to give women the tools to criticise economic and political schemes and meet the most pressing challenges to themselves and society. The encounters have also reiterated a number of themes: the need to establish broader networks; the right of reproductive freedom and legal abortions; the need to secure access to the mass media; the search for stronger support to low-income women; the duty to extend the meaning of democracy (as equal participation of all and respect for the individual) to the home, the work place, and the school.⁴ These may be considered the distinguishing features of Latin American feminism in the 1990s.

The agenda of recent national and intercontinental encounters is politically very different from those congresses of nearly a century ago.

Participants have no doubts about their duty and right as women to self-determine the future of womanhood, renouncing all accommodation to traditional patriarchal values. They also realise that continental encounters cannot replace the collective reflection of problems at a regional or national level to achieve a balance of national and international interests, essential for the survival of feminism as an expression of diversity. The intense self-analysis resulting from these meetings has yielded a formula of conciliation: the respect of individuality within a feminism that is aware of the 'pluralism of difference'.

Women in Latin America were ready to assume a new role in the 1980s, and the surge of their activities is the result of a feminist thought with roots stretching back to at least the beginning of this century if not earlier, and a foundation of legislated reforms adopted between the 1920s and the mid 1970s. National and international factors pushed women towards even greater activism and a better understanding of gender roles in the 1980s, but the role of protagonist for women's causes emerged slowly and against difficult odds for women of all social sectors. Anywhere in Latin America, feminist politics are difficult to separate from national politics, given the centrality of the state and the nature of the political systems. Unlike countries with stable electoral systems, Latin America presents an assortment of political regimes which include democracies, nations subject to violent internecine political wars, local or national *caudillismo* (bossism), and nations with revolutionary regimes. This variety of political circumstances demands feminist expressions and activities suited to meet these peculiarities.

The integration of women into political parties remains problematic, but a necessary step for feminism to achieve national validity and effective means to change local and national gender issues. The need to exercise power within the established parameters of the national state creates for each national feminist movement a problem that cannot be replicated elsewhere and that also creates serious internal divisions. How can international feminisms reconcile the disparity of political circumstances under which women live and which they must address to achieve their gender-based claims? The viability of feminist organisations depends on the degree of internal political freedom as well as the admission of women to the national dialogue as equal partners with men, who still dominate the politics of all nations world-wide. Politics may serve as the yeast that accelerates the development of feminism as a yearning for democracy within democratic regimes, as was the case with several countries in South America in the 1970s. In more stable regimes such as that of Costa Rica, or in countries where democracy seems to be thriving after many crises, such as Venezuela, the issue of how to address legal and social rights and create new mental attitudes about gender relations has become one of the key strategies to overcome ideological divisions among women and create a unified gender 'front'. The limited numerical representation of women in the congresses of certain nations has led to the formation of women's

caucuses regardless of political orientation. Argentines and Brazilians, among others, have pushed for the adoption of legislation that guarantees the election of a fixed number of women to congress, a formula that may gain in strength and popularity among other nations, although it will be a highly debated and opposed solution. At a global level these strategies may not be feasible given the disparity of political systems under which women live, but feminists and women in general must realise that looking for an insertion in the political system under which they live is essential to their success. Addressing the many slippery problems involved in the nature of the political regimes that feminists must confront is one of the greatest challenges to international feminisms, because political regimes are embedded in national or regional cultures, and are a ground with which women are not well acquainted and within which their power is limited.

Given the harrowing experience of nations under military regimes in the 1970s, the close association of Latin American feminists with the issue of human rights is not surprising. The now world-known Argentine Madres de la Plaza de Mayo and their less well known counterparts in Chile, Uruguay, Nicaragua, and Honduras, became icons of mobilisation in the name of motherhood, activating political power from the ubiquitous domestic space. They gave motherhood and family the political strength that was the dream of early twentieth-century Latin American feminists. The denunciation of torture and murder by plain women theretofore 'apolitical' had a deep ethical content and gained respect precisely because the archetype of selfless motherhood was above political commitments and had deep cultural roots. Ironically, in Latin America the model created by the Madres has received much criticism in the 1990s, especially from feminists for whom the Madres perpetuated the polarity between women-femininity-mother and men-masculinity-state. The specificity of their demands – always presented within the framework of the individual experience and the temporality of a precise situation – has been deemed insufficient to alter the power relationship between men and women. Others disagree, seeing in the Madres a potential venue for the discussion of large national problems at a pragmatic level, meaningful for those who participate in it and enhancing the power of the alliance of motherhood and human dignity in an effective way, an example worth studying by feminists elsewhere. After all, the Madres obtained global visibility and respect, and helped to weaken the military's arrogant disregard for human rights. Other Latin American Madres movements have had less visibility and less immediate success, and there is no indication that their example has been copied elsewhere. The Madres may be an idiosyncratically Latin American phenomenon. For international feminism the issue of motherhood as a political tool remains an issue of whether the value ascribed to motherhood is an asset transferable from the socialisation to the politicisation of the genders.

While the Madres did not use a feminist approach, they shared with feminist groups a thirst for human rights that has become one of the latter's

most innovative contributions to universality. In the 1980s, feminists succeeded in calling attention to the international nature of the subjection of women as well as to the fact that the violence exercised by military and authoritarian regimes affects women as much as it affects men. Up to then, the call for human rights was enunciated in terms that represented men rather than men *and* women. Feminisms world-wide may profit from the adoption of human rights as part of its agenda. Costa Rican Alda Facio, a dedicated supporter of this ideological marriage, posits that, because feminism is concerned with issues that affect all women regardless of nationality or ethnicity, it is capable of embracing and contesting all forms of discrimination. All other political ideologies have been born out of concern with male issues and have been tainted by the exercise of gender discrimination in their formulation and developing stages. In her view, a redefinition of human rights from a female viewpoint includes the rights of females and males, of rebels and conformists, of the right and the left, and is far more inclusive than other ideologies. Facio's endeavour to make feminism a universal ideology through the lens of human rights deserves attention now and in the future. She represents the direction in which some Spanish American theorists are moving today. Argentine Elizabeth Jelin, acknowledging the difficulties implied in drawing up a 'list of basic human rights, from which to locate and denounce violations against women', still concedes that the sensitivity to the violation of human rights may be converted into a strategy to deter violence and different forms of subordination and marginalisation. Feminists should try to resolve the tensions between women's rights and human rights by combining the struggle for the 'recognition of women's rights as human rights', while challenging the definition of human rights as male and Western.⁵

In the early 1980s, the late Chilean Julieta Kirkwood also travelled the political road of feminism to tie human rights, the desire for democracy, and the revindication of women, in a manner that may also serve to inspire international feminisms. In her case, Kirkwood addressed the special case of a nation with a respectable history of constitutionality that fell under the grip of a military regime in 1974. Looking at the ideology of the right and the left Kirkwood saw a world in which non-feminist ideologies incorporated women into schemes directed by men whose ideas of social redemption relegated women and gender issues to secondary and expendable places.⁶ Women remained in silence because they did not perceive themselves as the subjects of their own revindication. To counter that silence, she proposed *protagonismo*, living one's own role as a woman, a position that consciously avoided any ideology or movement in which gender was not recognised as a category of oppression.

Kirkwood understood that male authoritarianism was more than a political or a military experience. It was also a familiar situation experienced by women at home, at school, and at work. Its ubiquity, she thought, gave women the opportunity to analyse the politics of gender relations and

understand the essence of the exercise of power within patriarchal societies. The struggle against political authority could and should be taken into the realms of the family, sexuality, and the sexual division of work. She also supported a feminism without class barriers. The goal of feminism was to learn how to recognise oppression, its reasons and effects, and to assume the praxis of doing what was necessary to eliminate it. Her formula to activate women in a political sense was to make them conscious of what was denying them their sociopolitical participation, and, by 'saying no to don't', to deny the man-created alterity of women. Her formula may be fruitfully put to the test and used in areas which are either suffering from the same political woes or are emerging from them. The situation of Eastern European countries where, after decades of Marxist authoritarianism, women are returning to self-analysis without ideological shackles, is comparable to the post-dictatorship period that Kirkwood anticipated for Latin American feminists. While democracy may be a desirable political system, it is not a global reality, and international feminisms must seek formulations, like those evolved in Latin America, to provide alternatives suited to the specific social and political realities of women. For women under authoritarian regimes, engendering human rights is a feasible goal that will find a sympathetic hearing in a world increasingly sensitised to discuss the polyvalent meaning of 'human'. Kirkwood's challenge demands that women take a decision born out of personal reflection that can be nurtured in 'popular' movements of poor and working-class people, as well as those self-identified as feminist. In both instances the personal awareness must relate to the political situation in a realistic manner, cogent to the culture where it develops, and must be defined by the actors themselves. The key to both is the creation of an atmosphere of social respect for women as human beings, out of which may evolve self-respect and introspection by women, the source of strength envisioned by Kirkwood and other Latin American feminists. One cannot forget, however, that while the struggle against authoritarian (and traditionally patriarchal and paternalistic) regimes may call for female solidarity, the latter does not guarantee an immediate or amicable resolution of all problems affecting women.

Class and race remain among the most divisive factors in national and international feminisms. The issue of race has not always been present or discussed in Latin American feminisms. Poverty, as a significant feature in many women's lives, has been regarded as powerful enough to become the central theme for numberless organisations dealing with poor women. Yet, race as an underlying factor has recently become an issue in some areas such as the Andean countries, where a *majority* of the women are indigenous, or in areas with a strong component of peoples of African descent, such as Brazil. The terrain of race is ambiguous, because race itself is ambiguous in a continent with 500 years of racial mixing, and in which political violence and instability, and economic struggle are powerful enough to obscure the meaning of race.⁷ If, in the past, race has been

'subverted' or neglected at the national level as part of ideological, political, or even economic programmes, it is apparent that it is beginning to emerge as an element of consciousness among black and indigenous women's groups. Race is a potentially divisive factor because it is associated with strong cultural elements that separate world-views and create different interpretations of women's roles and gender relations. For example, Andean indigenous groups have traditionally mobilised around unions and labour issues in which women have collaborated with men against a well defined economic and social exploiter. The class solidarity created by the struggle plus the historically traditional social concept of gender complementarity leads them to believe that a feminism based exclusively on the assertion of women's rights is alien, especially if it is spelled by an urban and mostly white middle class. Although development and labour studies focusing on women identify poor women in terms of class and not race, the latter may act as a wedge within the elaboration of national or international feminisms.

Some representatives of indigenous nationalism separate themselves from any form of feminism, which they feel is white and 'foreign' to their cultural heritage. Recently, Vivian Arteaga Montenero, a veteran Bolivian feminist, and María Eugenia Choque Quispe, an Aymara of the work-group on Andean Oral History, came into conflict over the issue of the validity of feminism for all women. Choque Quispe assumed an antagonistic position against 'Western' feminism with clear racial connotations. She denounced non-indigenous women as exercising a form of domination seeking to change the nature of indigenous society, to which feminism was an alien and unnecessary ideology. 'The contradictions implicit in feminism do not reach the Indian woman of the ayllu because ayllu and feminism are antagonistic systems.' Hers could be the voice of many non-Western or non-white women elsewhere. Arteaga Montenero argued the relevance of gender over any other factor and denounced the nationalism of indigenous ideologies as hiding the existence of gender domination among Aymara and Quechua men.⁶ This split illustrates the divisiveness that may debilitate feminisms, nationally and internationally. However, we cannot establish that all indigenous women feel like Choque Quispe. Numerous successful consciousness-raising workshops have been carried out among indigenous women, and it is also possible to detect significant changes in their attitude on gender and oppression.

The process of acquiring racial or ethnic consciousness within Latin American feminism is very recent, and most groups have been formed in the late 1980s or early 1990s. The first international encounter of black women took place in the Dominican Republic in 1992, in an attempt to build a politically oriented body that would give voice and exposure to the problems specific to black women.⁹ Such meetings are feminist in nature but address specificities that other women must recognise, as well as a desire to establish paradigms of self-identity. Is this a possible model to give

a voice to groups marginalised within international feminism? It is perhaps too soon to tell, but not too soon to assume that we must find a place to discuss how racial and class differences affect the perception of feminism and may lead to further fragmentation and less unity. One key concern is how to maintain a balance between the issues of race and the imperative of gender that must remain a constant to preserve the political objectives of feminism. On the other hand, the lack of resolution to concerns expressed by indigenous women and women of African ancestry may produce painful rifts. This may happen if racial or ethnic nuances are not addressed upfront with the intention of accommodating them. In Latin America race and class are very intertwined. Dark-skinned women are often at the lower rungs of the educational and economic ladder, but dark skin per se is not a precondition for poverty or social marginalisation. Feminism has to avoid conflating poverty and colour under gender, and assume that gender will be strong enough to iron out differences that, while not ignored, have not been adequately addressed. By itself, gender self-consciousness does not enable women to overcome negative individual circumstances of race or ethnic affiliation and which demand a social awareness that feminists must espouse. Since the late 1980s, Latin American feminist groups have proclaimed the need to broaden their social base to ensure that class and race are taken into consideration in the construction of an inclusive movement, overcoming lingering fears that too much specificity may weaken the view of feminism as based on gender solidarity aiming at global transformation. Choque Quispe notwithstanding, non-white and non-affluent women's nuclei have not rejected feminist venues for self-expression, while the *encuentros* have reiterated the need to nurture the concept that each economic group, each nationality, and each race, brings its own share of wealth into the definition and practice of feminism.¹⁰

The realisation that feminisms everywhere confront serious class and ethnic challenges should lead us to consider the need to understand how non-academic women understand feminism, what guides them to join those 'women movements' that sporadically agitate our nations, and how we could establish bridges of understanding between the diverse elements that form our societies, to assume positions vis-à-vis national and international feminisms. Women from the lowest levels of the educational rungs are today conscious of the oppression exercised by men in the name of *machismo* and traditional rights. However, their solutions to this problem are as varied as their educational, economic and ethnic backgrounds. In 1991, Colombian Eulalia Yagarí González, an indigenous Chami woman running for a place in a regional parliament, expressed nationalist sentiments when she stated that 'we need a policy for liberating women, but I don't mean a policy like the ones introduced here from Europe and North America'.¹¹ In her own direct way she expressed the same distrust of 'foreignness' stated by other women elsewhere in Latin America. Does this mean a rejection of internationalism per se and an endorsement of a

narrow nationalism? Not necessarily. The liberation of women is acknowledged as a universal principle, but Yagarí González underlined the need to search for solutions to problems specifically Colombian. In 1984, a leading Nicaraguan intellectual Milú Vargas Escobar defined her hopes for a 'society in which we may see with our own eyes; touch the world with our own hands; translate experiences in our own minds ... remove the mask of exploitation, illiteracy, discrimination, hunger and poverty that has been imposed upon us and became encrusted in our skin throughout centuries of being exploited by imperialism'.¹² Within the framework of an ongoing *national* revolutionary regime, Vargas Escobar was reiterating the subjective nature of women's liberation. Vargas's words describe a political and a personal imperialism, both signified and enforced by men, foreign and national. These women represent the ambivalent attitudes of many Latin American women who desire a liberation designed by themselves for the universal problem of male domination as they experience it in their countries and their homes.

It has been argued that theory is necessary to feminisms for opening channels of understanding across national boundaries because theory has the universal quality that makes feminism international. This may be true among women of similar levels of education. Yet, the dilemma of how to make theories accessible to women without formal education becomes more puzzling the more sophisticated the theories become. When one turns the pages of such media publications as *Feminaria*, produced in Buenos Aires, or *Género y Sociedad*, produced in the Dominican Republic, the erudite academic discussions of the latest theoretical North American and European feminists certainly exude the aroma of exotic hothouse flowers. Doubtless, some of the principles discussed in academic circles have found their ways downward in a remarkable process of simplification and adjustment to daily life, as well as social service to the community of women. Women participating in *encuentros*, meeting in spaces beyond their homes or their countries, searched for a personal understanding of feminism and the diversity and unity among women, and for practical solutions to make feminism work with all women. One may say that theoretical constructs have been less discussed than the practical purposes of self-discovery, the understanding of the daily life problems of other women, and the understanding of how national politics impinge upon women's lives. Perhaps the most important task of international feminism is to find that ample theoretical framework capable of embracing the largest number of female *experiences*.

The articulation of the personal, the regional, and the national into a universal formula understood by the largest number of women remains the most elusive objective of the feminist search for an international consensus. Yet, there is hope. While in the past the difficulty of global communication hindered the search for mutual recognition, today we have much better tools to engage in the process of understanding the differences among the

multiple manifestations of women's activities and the place that 'feminism' occupies in their agenda. As some Chilean feminists put it: think globally and act locally. For some leading feminists, the issue is how to avoid being 'named' or defined from centres of intellectual power outside their own experience before they learn all they need about themselves. As writer and academician Lucía Guerra Cunningham states, 'approaching the problems of Latin American women from the parameters already extensively elaborated in Europe and the United States implies, in our opinion, recycling them in a uterine space of violence and dispossession'.¹³ Peruvian Virginia Vargas, an advocate of international feminisms acknowledges that 'the experiences of oppression and subordination, and the resistance to them, are expressed in so many different ways that there cannot be one global explanation which encompasses all conflicts'. The emancipation process must articulate more than one exclusive and privileged axis. It may well be that the flexibility that postmodernist analyses permit will accommodate a diversity of feminist voices, but much depends on the ability of postmodernist analysts to make themselves understood.

I believe that we are closer to the creation of feminist paradigms in close touch with the broader features of Latin American culture than may be assumed. In my understanding, the large feminist and women-oriented literature across the disciplines is an expression of a cultural self-recognition that bears an indisputable Latin American character, despite the many national and political approaches of such writings. The construction of a supra-national category of gender, comprising a body of women-citizens speaking in multiple voices, is a reality that has been taking shape in the last twenty years, but with strong historical roots that go back over one hundred years.

Latin American women's writings and voices tell us that we should not approach contemporary feminisms in that area through a 'post-colonial' lens applicable to other parts of the world. The colonial past of the area is chronologically 'remote', insofar as independence from Spain was achieved by 1825 – with the exception of Cuba and Puerto Rico, which remained as colonial enclaves until the end of that century. Explanations of women's status or gender relations using colonialism as an experience within memory become more difficult than for other areas. The model of 'foreign' elements diametrically opposed to a native culture becomes questionable as we learn that Spaniards, Portuguese, indigenous people and Africans exchanged cultural traits and engaged in a biological and cultural *mestizaje* (blending). However, we may engage the concept of colonialism fruitfully if we recall that social and economic walls, constructed around the ruling colonial European elite, gave priority to its objectives and pre-eminence to its values, and created models of gender behaviour and relations that became a model for several centuries and are still detectable in our societies. Is it possible to speak of North American or Euro-centred feminisms exercising undue influence as a form of cultural imperialism – on

Latin America? I believe that the longstanding influence of leftist ideologies, the nationalist undercurrents of Latin American nations, and the socio-economic problems of our nations help prevent a take-over of theories constructed elsewhere, without previous rewording and adaptation to our own needs. Revolutionary regimes, such as those of Cuba and Nicaragua, resorted to the political power of Marxism, to offer strong resistance to 'bourgeois', i.e. North American and European formulated, feminisms. In Nicaragua some feminists were working on the reformulation of the regime's position vis-à-vis concepts of international feminism when the political revolution 'collapsed' in its first elective trial. In Cuba, the duration of the regime has allowed its leadership to formulate and reformulate positions that have changed from vociferous opposition to feminism to an official 'hospitality' attitude towards it in the mid 1990s. In neither country did the mobilisation of women generate any special sympathy for foreign models, and the adjustments that took place in gender relations had more to do with their internal political needs than with international ideological pressure. In non-revolutionary countries, nationalism is but one element conspiring against the wholesale import of ideas. Traditional conservatism and cultural machismo are strong obstacles to the development of feminism itself that will inevitably – even as they lose ground – exert pressure for a reformulation of feminism more attuned to regional and national cultural features. These are some of the reasons why I argue that Latin American feminisms are responding, as they must, to national and cultural pressures, even as they ponder on the universal values of gender-constructed ideologies.

Under historical analysis, the possibilities of revealing the multifaceted nature of Latin American feminisms will allow us not only to stretch the boundaries of our own understanding, but to welcome the experience of women elsewhere, as well as let them see that the mirror of womanhood reflects an imperfect but challenging view that comprises multi-ethnic and multi-racial components. Latin American feminisms have given some key concepts and experiences to the debate of feminisms in the international arena: the extension of the concept of the struggle for political democracy to the home as the initial step in eroding the patriarchal grip of husbands and fathers; the need to engender the concept of human rights to formulate a global concept of female as human and therefore respectable; the debate over the validity of empowering women by casting maternal images (*marianismo*) in critical national as well as in daily political circumstances; the validation of women's economic role in society by academic analyses, whose ultimate symbolism lies in contesting the intellectual hegemony of national and international male economic planners; the reflection on how behavioural stereotypes remain in the allocation of power to women even in 'revolutionary' regimes. Not all feminists believe in using the image of a sacrificial but powerful mother (as Mary, the mother of Christ and thus *marianismo*) as a satisfactory way of politically empowering women, but

the fact that in some instances the maternalist position has yielded significant power in Latin America remains a challenge for feminists everywhere because maternalism may not necessarily have the same significance and ability to empower women in other parts of the world. Since two important revolutionary regimes have attempted to (and in one case succeeded) reshape social and economic structures without undue change in gender relations, international feminisms of the twenty-first century should take note that 'revolutionary' ideology must include gender to be a true venue of change for women's status. It is also crucial to remember that the cultural weight of androcentrism can become a substantial obstacle to strictly political ideological solutions to change in gender relations.

In learning about the possibility of alternative forms of expressing power, and of envisioning gender roles under different cultural circumstances, we can see the value of the study of a region such as Latin America, where feminisms reflect the pluralism of the rest of the world. The amplification and revalidation of international feminisms will not necessarily mean a globalisation of feminism as a hegemonic force, but an understanding of the fact that globalisation means recognition of the national and the supra-national in a fruitful exchange of mutual appreciation.

Notes

1. See, Peter Waterman, 'Hidden from Herstory: Women, Feminism and New Global Solidarity', *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 30 October 1993, and 'Feminism and Internationalism in Latin America: A suitable case for treatment?', unpublished, 1996. For the history of Latin American feminisms, see June Hahner, *Emancipating the Female Sex: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Brazil, 1850–1940* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1990); K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1991); Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890–1940* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1995), and 'Unfolding Feminism: Spanish American Women's Writing, 1970–1990', in *Feminisms in the Academy*, ed. Domna C. Stanton and Abigail J. Stewart (The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1995), pp. 248–73; Virginia Vargas, 'The Feminist Movement in Peru: Inventory and Perspectives', in *Women's Struggles and Strategies*, ed. Saskia Wieringa (Gower, Brookfield, 1988), pp. 136–55. This short bibliography by no means exhausts the topic. A key channel for international communication is *mujer/fempres* a monthly magazine edited in Santiago de Chile as an alterative feminist network.
2. Francesca Miller, 'Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena', in *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990), pp. 10–26.
3. See Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change*, ch. 1.
4. See, for example, *Memoria del IV Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe* (n.e., Taxco, Mexico, 1987); Nancy Saporta Sternbach et al., 'Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogotá to San Bernardo', *Signs*, 17 (1992), pp. 393–434; Diana Bellesi

et al., 'VII Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe', *Feminaria*, 10 (1997), pp. 28–36.

5. Alda Facio, 'Repensarnos como mujeres para reconceptualizar los derechos humanos', *Género y Sociedad*, 3 (1995), pp. 1–54; Elizabeth Jelin, 'Engendering Human Rights', in *Gender Politics in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Dore (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1997), pp. 65–83.

6. Julieta Kirkwood, *Ser política en Chile. Las feministas y los partidos* (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO, Santiago de Chile, 1986).

7. In a homogeneously black country such as Haiti, poverty subverts gender in the perception of self-appointed feminist women. Olga Benoit, Haitian head of a forum for rural women and market sellers, identifies the institutionalisation of male domination, *machismo*, as the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of feminist premises at even the lowest levels. See interview with Olga Benoit and Marie Frantz Joachim in Gaby Koppers (ed.), *Compañeras: Voices from the Latin American Women's Movement* (Latin America Bureau, London, 1994), pp. 34–9.

8. Vivian Arteaga Montenero, 'Jornada sobre feminismo y política', in *Feminismo y política*, (Coordinadora de la Mujer, La Paz, 1986), pp. 63–5.

9. See *Especial/Fempres*, 1995, a special edition of the Chilean-based feminist magazine, dedicated to discuss issues raised by black women across Latin America. Also, *mujer/fempres*, no. 131 (September 1992), p. 7.

10. *Memoria del IV Encuentro*, p. 96; 'El feminismo de los 90: Desafíos y propuestas', summary for the *V Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe*, in *mujer/fempres*, no. 111 (January 1991), pp. 4–6.

11. Koppers, *Compañeras*, p. 143.

12. Ileana Rodríguez, *Registradas en la Historia: 10 años del quehacer feminista en Nicaragua* (CIAM, Managua, 1990), p. 154.

13. Lucía Guerra Cunningham, 'Alternativas ideológicas del feminismo latinoamericano', *Feminaria*, 5 (1992), pp. 1–2.

FORUM RESPONDENTS

Feminisms and Internationalism: A View from the Centre

LEILA J. RUPP

As numerous literary works and films, as well as feminist standpoint theory, have reminded us, our understanding of what has happened in the past or what is happening now depends heavily on the angle of vision provided by our particular vantage points. Asunción Lavrin provides us here with a thought-provoking portrait of feminisms – 'born wrapped in one great hope' – from the perspective of Latin American women's history. I picture her standing somewhere between Mexico and Argentina, circling slowly in order to survey what goes on around her. When she turns her gaze to the far north and northeast, feminisms in the United States and in Western Europe look very different from her southern standpoint.

What I would like to do here is to fix my vision on some of the same subjects from a different angle. I am, I guess, on a ship in the Atlantic, a ship that is theoretically able to sail to any continent but in fact inclined to ply the seas between North America, Britain, and northern Europe. I look, that is, from the perspective of the major international women's organisations that formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the cautious and inclusive International Council of Women (1888), the feminist International Alliance of Women (1904), and the progressive Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1915).¹ Theoretically open to women all across the globe, these groups primarily organised elite, Christian, older women of European origin. Yet in the 1920s and 1930s the three bodies did succeed in adding national sections in such places as Argentina, Egypt, India, and Rhodesia. However limited their internationalism might have been in practice, their commitment to global organising makes the view from their vantage point at the very least supra-national. From this perspective, I would like to consider four issues that Lavrin raises in her essay: the relationship of nationalism and internationalism, the definition of