

Peruvian Women and the Peruvian State

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INTRODUCTION

Contrary to a popular Anglo-Saxon saying that "each nation gets the government it deserves", this chapter argues that Peruvian women live under governments which are not deserved by them at least. By this I mean that their participation in the processes of government, and the type of dialogue they have established with political institutions, have not created arenas where women have effective decision-making powers. This situation is attributable more to the manner in which the Peruvian political system functions than to any characteristics of the women themselves, such as a lack of interest, an inability to articulate demands, or an incapacity to develop viable strategies of action.

Instability is the keyword in any discussion of the Peruvian political process, and it is particularly relevant when discussing questions of access and participation of new groups such as women. Thus, while Peruvian women (or, to be more precise, some sectors of Peruvian women) have struggled valiantly to engage in the political system, their efforts have largely been frustrated. As the end of the 20th century approaches, Peruvian women are still far from achieving a major breakthrough on questions of equality. The explanation for this lies in the low level of democratic consolidation, the nature of the informal political system, and in the way in which women are perceived by public policy-makers.

THE PERUVIAN CONTEXT

Peru, a country of 22 million, is characterized by multiple layers of hierarchy and exclusion. This did not begin with the Spanish Conquest in 1532, although that crucial event added several new layers of domination to a society and polity already fragmented along lines of rank and ethnicity. Although much work remains to be done by historians to correct romantic notions of the "socialist empire of the Incas", the essential rigidity of pre-Columbian society is sufficiently clear. At the same time, some women occupied important positions in the hierarchy as local and ethnic chiefs or *caciques*, benefiting from the same hereditary mechanisms as some men. Current debate on

the status of women in pre-Columbian Peru focuses on the question of duality: that is, to what extent did parallel lines of descent and power exist, creating "men's" and "women's" worlds of equal religious and symbolic prominence if not of secular authority [Isbell, 1976; 1978; Harris, 1985]. In addition to their roles as *caciques*, women were frequently the local leaders of religious cults and, in this role, seem to have commanded the most prolonged points of resistance to the Spanish invaders [Silverblatt, 1987].

Other women were carried off as domestics or as second or third "wives" in the households of the *conquistadores* and their hangers-on. The process of *mestizaje* brought with it the tense, conflictive and permanently questioned integration of two cultures and two social and political systems. Though the relative power of European-descended Peruvians and the descendants of Peru's native inhabitants was and is never in doubt, there have been shifting fashions in the degree of acceptance of this arrangement, both on the side of the invaders (more recently, immigrants from a variety of European and Near Eastern countries as well as China and Japan) and on the side of the natives. These problems are relevant to a discussion of women and policy in Peru because ethnic, racial, and cultural divisions exercise an important influence on the possibilities for women to develop a common platform. These divisions are also closely correlated with class divisions or the extreme economic inequalities that characterize Peruvian society.

A Closed Political System

Formally, Peru has been organized as a constitutional democracy since independence from Spain in 1824. Women were given the vote in 1955 and illiterates—even today some 20 percent of the population—in 1979. As these facts suggest, the political system has in practice been closed and tightly controlled. In the 19th century, political participation was limited to the land-owning oligarchy and a small group of local commercial and manufacturing interests. In the 20th century, after a period of early industrialization and the expansion of the white-collar and public service sector in the 1920s, the system opened to labor unions, middle-class organizations and interest groups, and a more diversified sector of agricultural producers. Those without effective representation are the indigenous groups in the Amazon basin (half the country's geographical area) and, except for sporadic and violent movements of protest, peasants in the Andes, particularly indigenous and peasant women.

This closed system has been periodically interrupted by military coups. In the last 50 years, Peru has experienced three periods of direct military rule (1948-1956, 1962-1963, 1968-1980).¹ Traditionally, the military have exercised a watch-dog function, ensuring that groups not legitimated as political actors remain excluded from debate and freezing conflicts that normal political processes are unable to resolve. Between 1968 and 1975, however, Peru experienced a new "Nasserite" style of military government which was closely tied to the non-aligned movement of the period. This regime was surprisingly permeable to ideas of women's equality, probably because of its strong equity thrust in relation to other groups: peasants, urban marginals, and workers in

the formal and informal sectors. Ironically, then, it was a military dictator who granted female suffrage, and a military dictatorship presided over the creation of the first national machinery for women. Indeed, its first president was the wife of a military man.

Weaknesses in Policy-making

Irrespective of rotations of military and civilian rule, and of whether presidents and parliaments represent oligarchic or more middle-class and modernizing interests, there are several enduring features of Peruvian government. One is the government's weak administrative capacity so that many elementary public services, such as police, schools, health and judiciary, fail to reach enormous geographical areas and important segments of the population. This helps to explain why the political debate is essentially urban.

Another persistent problem is the low technical capacity of nearly all the actors involved in policy-making. During periods of parliamentary rule, the technical level of legislators, with some notable exceptions, has tended to be low as has been their responsiveness to electors. The civil service is poorly trained and motivated and, following a radical structural adjustment package of 1990, wretchedly remunerated. Outside the government itself, there are further problems: public opinion is poorly informed and lacks clear channels for expression; interest groups are more practised in street demonstrations than in educating parliamentary committees; and the production of statistics and research to support policy-making is slow and partial. Under these conditions policy tends either to be the result of naked power struggles or plays to the grandstand; a "rational" consideration of needs, justice or the collective good is far in the background.

Social policy-making adds a number of new problems to the existing weaknesses in setting and implementing national goals. I have argued elsewhere that Peru's social policy is heavily influenced by Catholic social doctrine [Anderson, 1992]. Social programs, both in their conception and in their actual mode of functioning, strongly support the restriction of women to the home, and reinforce their identity as carers and, above all, mothers. The distributive rules within the family, relationships between husbands and wives (and Peru is in the process of "discovering" family violence), sisters and brothers, fathers and daughters are all protected by a strong ideology of family privacy.

"Normal" social policy—public health services, the public school system, minimal facilities for dealing with problems such as drug addiction and family abandonment—is almost entirely disconnected from sporadic attempts to use state power and resources to tackle poverty. Thus, the current discussion on the need for an emergency social program to cushion the effects of structural adjustment is carried out in isolation from the discussion on the state's role in providing social services. The latter role is being drastically curtailed, partly through the neo-liberal wave sweeping Latin America and partly as a consequence of strikes against low pay by teachers, nurses, and administrators which close down health and education services for weeks on end. At present, government social spending stands at US\$12 per capita per annum. Social poli-

cy is residual in Peru: development has never been understood to depend vitally on social investment, social justice or even social peace.

The standard of living and the quality of life fell drastically during the 1980s for the vast majority of Peruvians. The real value of salaries has dropped back to the level of the early 1970s. Multilateral agencies categorize half the Peruvian population as being in poverty or extreme poverty. As numerous studies show, the burden of diminished purchasing power, reduced public services, and increased poverty falls disproportionately on women.

WOMEN AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN THE 1970s

The first manifestation of the Peruvian government's will to promote change in the status of women was the extensive and progressive educational reform in 1972. The Education Reform Act called for school texts to "revalue" the role of women and to "dignify" women as persons. It also authorized an expansion of technical and vocational education to promote women's access to new occupational fields. Most audacious was its drive to eradicate gender differences in the basic curriculum. Thus, boys in primary school take part in knitting and sewing classes (by hand as no sewing machines and often no electrical current is available in most Peruvian schools), while girls can sign up for courses in electrical installations and simple mechanics. Simultaneously, the government set goals for a gradual shift to co-education in Peru's predominantly sex-segregated public and private schools.

COTREM: Innovatory Thinking on Women

As part of the reform, a Technical Committee for the Advancement of Women (*Comité Técnico para la Revaloración de la Mujer*—COTREM) was established in the Ministry of Education. Composed of men and women members, COTREM was both creative and energetic. An advisory council that included feminist activists and researchers helped to ensure that its "line" accorded with international thinking on the situation of women. COTREM produced discussion papers and teaching aids accessible to educational administrators and teachers; it prepared materials for a national re-training program for teachers; it monitored the content of messages on gender roles in television programs produced by the Ministry of Education; and, to a lesser degree, it worked in developing new textbooks.

In the Peruvian context, COTREM was an astonishing innovation, and even more so when judged against developments in other Latin American countries which are more cosmopolitan and socially less conservative than Peru. Part of the reason for its brief but productive career lies in the progressive nature of the Education Reform Act itself, although this was ultimately to prove its undoing. (The reform was "deactivated" in 1981 following a hasty evaluation whose results were never made public.) An additional reason lay in the group of intellectuals and educational theorists who briefly gained control of the educational apparatus at the time when these reforms were being prepared. They included a philosopher married to a Norwegian feminist and other members who had studied in Europe and been influenced by the femi-

nist movement there. A final factor was the climate of social innovation fostered by the military government and its suppression of some of the more retrograde elements of the Catholic Church and the social oligarchy which had traditionally had privileged access to such sensitive areas of policy as education. Interestingly, while parents were slow to support the shift to co-education, they were generally pleased with their sons learning to sew on buttons and their daughters gaining access to technical careers.

National Commission for Peruvian Women

The military government's experience with COTREM led to an increased institutional commitment to changing the status of women, expressed in the creation of the National Commission for Peruvian Women (*Comisión Nacional de la Mujer Peruana*—CONAMUP). The immediate motive for establishing CONAMUP was the pending UN conference as part of the UN Decade for Women held in Mexico City in 1975. The Peruvian delegation was hastily assembled from amongst CONAMUP staff and persons close to it, none of whom, however, had a significant history of involvement with women's issues.

The performance of CONAMUP reflects an uneasy alliance between two opposing visions of what its role should be. On the one hand, the CONAMUP acted as the promoter of what could only be called women's development projects. In this role, it entered into relations with women's organizations (such as groups of peasant women, labor unions, traditional mothers' clubs, handicraft producers), provided some funding, made the necessary connections for training and technical assistance, and publicized the group's products and achievements. On the other hand, CONAMUP carried out sectoral analyses and presented policy recommendations in the fields of health, education and agriculture to the relevant ministries, suggesting how their programs should be changed in order to take women's interests into account. Reports were presented to working groups in the respective sectors, and were backed up by lobbying which, if lacking in force and continuity, was a novel development.

These two conflicting tendencies within CONAMUP reflected both the composition of its personnel and the limited instruments available for drawing up clear strategies for women in Peru in the mid-1970s. As part of the Ministry of the Presidency, CONAMUP had a high profile in the government and considerable authority over other government departments. In addition to the military wives who presided over it, the top staff was comprised of specialists designated by a number of ministries. These women, with lengthy experience in the public administration, generally favoured a strategy of putting pressure on policy-makers at sensitive points. Other staff or advisors were drawn from those with a background in women's or community organizations and these advocated a "bottom up" strategy to raise the level of organization and stimulate the demands of grassroots women.

However, prevailing conditions did not guarantee the success of either of these strategies. The "policy change" strategy ran up against the incomprehension and inertia of public administrators who were pressurised by numerous

other agendas for change. The "grassroots" strategy was frustrated by the paucity of existing women's organizations, the limited scope of their projects, and the low level of gender awareness in their demands. In addition, budget and staff limitations meant that CONAMUP's relations with women's organizations followed the pattern of the Peruvian central government's relations with subordinated groups in the interior: the chance of securing funding and support stood in direct relation to how often the organization in question could muster the resources to send representatives to Lima to press their case.

Nevertheless, the folding up of CONAMUP in 1978 owed less to its internal contradictions and somewhat meagre results than to other, more systemic factors. It disappeared as part of the transitional military government's wider withdrawal from the social projects of its "revolutionary" predecessor. A new constitution was being drawn up in 1979, and there were calls for open elections and a return to civilian government, so that the content of political debate, which was now set by the groups coming back into power, had shifted notably. Gender equity, together with most other equity issues except those relating to organized labor, dropped out of the discussion. While the traditional centre and right continued to be dominant, the groups which reoccupied the political scene included a strong leftist presence. Indeed, Peru's leftist parties were beginning to rise to the central position they would occupy in the first half of the 1980s.

THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST GROUPS

In addition to these important initiatives at government level, the 1970s saw the birth of a number of feminist groups. Concentrated in Lima, they tended to focus on consciousness raising and promoting ideological change in the wider society. These first feminist groups² had very little policy vision: the government was remote from their concerns and daily activities. Indeed it would have been extremely difficult for feminists to develop public policy proposals as the research in which to ground their recommendations had not been done and the necessary technical expertise was not available. The 1970s' feminists probably made their greatest public impact (though not necessarily receiving the greatest public approval) during their protest of the Miss Peru contest in 1976.

As the 1970s closed, a new kind of women's group emerged from the women's sections of militant leftist organizations. Members included the wives and partners of the leaders of parties with varying degrees of sympathy for violent action to overthrow the existing system. These women, with varying histories of sacrificing personal and family life "for the revolution", underwent an evolution similar to that experienced by women members of civil rights and New Left groups in the United States. They began to question what "the revolution" had to offer them, and to question the nature of relations between men and women within the parties that promoted it. In tune with the feminist groups, they began to look inward and to express long-suppressed and barely legitimated needs and concerns. Coming from the educated middle class and being committed political militants, these women took their first steps to-

wards their liberation with a heavy burden of guilt both for having seemingly abandoned the poor masses to their fate and for having weakened and divided the leftist movement.

These disparate currents converged to create a new type of women's organization which came to dominate in the 1980s. To this we now turn.

TRANSITION: FROM FEMINIST GROUPS TO WOMEN'S NGOS

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, women's projects were in the air in Peru as in many other parts of the developing world. Development, or more particularly a kind of development attuned to women's specific needs, was seen to be the answer to improving women's lives. Indigenous women's groups were the instrument for achieving this as they were considered most able to operate efficiently and effectively in the local context and most likely to ensure that projects responded to local definitions of problems and that solutions were appropriate.

As the Peruvian economy deteriorated, Peru became one of the principal targets of international development cooperation in Latin America. Its NGO (non-governmental organization) sector has grown rapidly from some 30 to 40 groups in 1976, to 300 groups in 1986 and 450 in 1988 [Soberón, 1987; Padrón et al., 1988]. In 1990 it was estimated there were 700 NGOs in the country. Women's NGOs (which specialize in projects with women) comprised about a fifth of the total NGOs based in Lima, according to a 1986 study [Ruiz Bravo, 1990]; a proportion which has probably been maintained to this day if not bettered. Although concentrated in the national capital, women's NGOs also sprang up in many regional capitals and intermediate cities, and experimented with development projects which focused on some of the most forgotten sectors: the rural women of the Andean heartland. Feminist consciousness raising and the advancement of a feminist political project were almost completely displaced by this development activism.

How did this change come about? Peru's enormous social, economic and regional inequalities eclipsed gender inequalities for both the women who enthusiastically entered the arena of development projects and for the international agencies which financed them. In a real sense, this was a necessary phase, which enabled feminist leaders, drawn from relatively privileged, urban, middle-class backgrounds, to learn about the needs, the language, and cultural style of women less privileged than they, and initiate the process of constructing an alliance. At the same time, the women's NGOs of the 1980s were able to benefit from the earlier efforts of CONAMUP. Former CONAMUP staff, especially those who had supported a grassroots strategy, gravitated to the women's NGOs. Likewise, members of the early feminist groups came to fill positions as communications or public relations officers but it was the former leftist political militants who made up the most numerous element.

Model of Action

All converged on a model of action which was small-scale, short-term, directed at immediate needs, implemented in poor urban neighborhoods or, less frequently, rural communities, heavily weighted towards training (*capacitación*), and funded by international cooperation agencies. Little effort was made to commit local resources, except insofar as the high levels of dedication and the low salaries of the promoters or the time and effort committed by the beneficiaries are taken into account. (In the final reckoning, this was a very high contribution indeed.) Yet it is equally important here to note that the operation of women's projects under this scheme, especially the limited pressure they could exert in bringing local resources into play—including government resources, such as infrastructure and public sector workers—meant that they functioned with very little local connection of any kind. As self-enclosed bubbles of change, many projects quickly burst.

The implications of developments in the 1980s for the women's movement are still being sifted. Not all evaluations are positive. One setback was the exposure of a vast, apparently insuperable, gulf in understanding between promoters in the women's NGOs and the so-called beneficiaries of their projects. Another concerned the limited demonstrable, long-term impact of much of the work that was carried out [Guzmán and Pinzás, 1995; Backhaus, 1988; Ruiz Bravo, 1990]. It is also clear that during this period in which development projects were at their height, the national policy arena was dropped from sight or was relegated until after the pilot experiments had been perfected. Consequently, government decisions to halt moves towards mixed-sex education until adequate sanitary facilities were installed in schools throughout the country, and to dismantle the educational reform with its strong gender equity thrust went unheeded by feminists distracted by popular education projects in the urban shantytowns.

Nevertheless, the focus on the immediate welfare issues of poor urban and rural women yielded unexpected connections to the political arena. The history of the program known as "*Vaso de Leche*" (Glass of Milk) and the world-famous *comedores* or communal kitchens illustrate the point.

Case Study: Vaso de Leche and the Comedores

The *comedores*³ first appeared in Lima in the late 1970s, and by the early 1980s they numbered about 200. From there they began a rapid if irregular process of expansion in Lima and other urban centres. In general, they are associated with increasing economic pressure on the poor and the restriction of employment opportunities, particularly for women. It is estimated that some 40 percent of Lima's poor now depend on the *comedores* for some of their meals, some of the time. At the same time the *comedores* have gradually become a channel of distribution for many foreign food donors (USAID, World Food Program) and their local distributors (international NGOs, Caritas, OFASA). Unlike the *comedores*, the *Vaso de Leche* program did not arise from the popular movement, but was an initiative introduced by a group of city officials and politicians of the United Left party coalition, which presided

over Metropolitan Lima between 1983 and 1986. The program was intended to provide a nutritional supplement (8 ounces of milk per day mixed with sugar, oatmeal, and quinoa when available) to all needy pre-school children, estimated to be 1,000,000 in Lima. A small administrative office was set up in the municipal government, but the program was implemented at local level by community organizations, preferably the *comité vecinal* (neighborhood committee), an organization set up at the time when the land was first occupied and linked to the local district government. Almost always comprised of men, the *comité vecinal* formed the *Vaso de Leche* committees by appealing to the women interested in participating from each housing block. Committee members took turns in preparing the powdered milk provided and serving it to the local children enrolled in the program. These were the children of other mothers who were willing to meet the small payments for fuel and bus fares, to take their turn in preparing the milk, and to participate in the occasional political demonstration.

These two programs can be treated as a single "case" for the purposes of analyzing women's access to policy-making and the part played in this by women's NGOs and popular women's organizations. My initial arguments about the closed nature of the Peruvian political system should be recalled. In addition to organized labor and the left parties which represented it, by the late 1970s and early 1980s the system had incorporated the residential-based organizations of the urban poor, the *comités vecinales*.⁴ Connected to second- and third-level organizations representing ever broader expanses of poor housing tracts and ever greater numbers of poor persons, this pyramidal structure was almost exclusively male. Women in the shanties were organized, if at all, in mothers' clubs connected to social assistance agencies, food-for-work brigades, or Catholic parishes. Very rarely was there a *comité femenino* (women's committee) working alongside the *comité vecinal*, and even more rarely was a woman elected to an executive position in the *comité vecinal*.

The Involvement of Women's NGOs

As the *comedor* movement and the *Vaso de Leche* program gathered momentum, the women's NGOs began to see the potential of these programs as a vehicle for poor women to move into positions of visibility and power in the local community. The NGOs rose to the challenge of consolidating the final and weakest link in the two chains of service-delivery, the local women's organizations themselves; that is, the individual *comedores* and the *Vaso de Leche* committees. These organizations needed several kinds of assistance if they were to weather such storms as fluctuating leadership, irregular supplies, accusations of corruption, incomprehension of husbands, grievances of users of their services, and attempts to manipulate these by political parties which also saw in them an opportunity to extend their influence. Women's NGOs (along with many "general purpose" NGOs which "discovered" women in the process) began to offer training courses and free consultancy services, and to accompany the women in the task of food preparation, book-keeping, and organizational meetings. They attempted to lighten the burden of getting sup-

plies to the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* committees by establishing bulk buying systems and assisting with transportation. All these efforts, however, could not compensate for a major structural weakness of both programs; women's labor was voluntary. No allowance had been made in the design of either initiative for payment to the women who, when their turn came, dedicated 4 to 8 hours a day to preparing food for a large group of beneficiaries. These included their own families but extended way beyond this to cover dozens, sometimes hundreds, of neighborhood children and adults. The women's NGOs tended not to raise this crucial issue; some may have been reproducing widespread social assumptions about the noble purity of women's service to others. Irrespectively, none had the power to affect the decisions of the municipal governments or donors who had structured the programs on this basis.

The confidence which women's NGOs placed in these two initiatives as a vehicle for women's political participation proved well-founded. As the male-dominated community organizations lost ground, owing to wider changes in the stage they were forced to play on, women's organizations came to the fore. Much of the change in context relates to Peru's deepening economic crisis. Faced with mass unemployment, a freeze on public investment, and spreading hunger, the *comités vecinales* had few local improvements to offer. The women's organizations, by contrast, were addressing such vital concerns as food and social assistance and, furthermore, were doing this with remarkable efficiency and dedication.

Links to National Political Arena

At the same time, the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* committees became increasingly tied to important actors on the national political scene. The *comedores* developed a second tier of organizations which grouped them together by district or by donor. From there, with difficulty and with considerable material and moral assistance from the NGOs, these came together in a metropolitan coordinating committee able to negotiate with the city government, representatives of the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, and, later with those who presided over a succession of frustrated attempts to implement an emergency social compensation program.

The *Vaso de Leche* program had a longer experience in developing a city-wide, pyramidal structure whose pinnacle was a 12-member coordinating committee. *Vaso de Leche* was one of the few programs which mayors and city council members could consistently boast about. Openings in the district-level leadership tended to attract extremely capable women,⁵ many of whom were militants in the United Left. This Left connection deprived the *Vaso de Leche* of some of the presence that the *comedores* were able to gain. For example, when a pluralistic steering committee was established to advise on the emergency program of 1989, the *comedores* were assigned a seat but the participation of the *Vaso de Leche* was vetoed by the representative of the Catholic Church.

As long as the United Left controlled the municipal government of Lima, the *Vaso de Leche* leadership's access to power was understandably great. The

United Left administration staked much of its reputation for a successful first-time-ever occupancy of Peru's second most important political office on its ability to keep its promise of a mass program of nutritional support to Lima's poor. Furthermore, as the United Left's period of office in the city government coincided with its moment of greatest strength in the national congress, they could use this national platform to publicize the *Vaso de Leche* program and increase material support for it; for example, by pressuring for an increase in city governments' share of the national budget. The streets of Lima were open to *Vaso de Leche* committees to demonstrate their grievances and demands, and Congress was their frequent sounding board. A bill to extend the *Vaso de Leche* program to all Peru's municipalities was drafted and a campaign initiated that led to its final approval by parliament.

Rise and Decline of the Programs

The *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* provide a clear and dramatic case of women gaining access to policy-making in Peru. Yet it was a singular success story and thereby it is important to analyze the ingredients which account for its achievement. One factor was that the women's organizations in question were working in an area of service delivery which suddenly became central to the welfare of innumerable families. With the help of the NGOs, they had developed a reliable "technology" for the task. At the same time they were able to structure themselves in a way which legitimized their representation on an equal level with such interlocutors as the city government, major NGOs, congressional committees, the powerful Catholic Church, and directors of the emergency program. As the embodiment of a promising strategy for attacking poverty and redistributing resources, they received strong backing from the United Left as well as from other parties and individual politicians with populist leanings. In addition, both initiatives had capable, legitimate and often charismatic leaders, who were characterized by a particular leadership "style".

However, under the new terms set by the Fujimori regime (1990), the *comedores* and, particularly, the *Vaso de Leche* quickly lost presence and access to power. As frequently occurs throughout the Peruvian public administration, in the changed political climate most municipalities simply ignored the law obliging them to allocate resources from their budgets for the *Vaso de Leche* program. The metropolitan government, however, did not find it so easy to withdraw support as women's organizations were stronger in Lima and the United Left still controlled some district governments in the capital. Nonetheless, accusations of corruption and abuse of power in the operation of the program were launched to challenge its legitimacy. The city government carried out a hostile campaign, obstructing the purchase and delivery of supplies so that all too often women from the committees arrived at the distribution points, only to hear anew the weak promise of "*mañana*" (tomorrow).

Most damning of all, neither the *comedores* nor the *Vaso de Leche* program was given a role in the social emergency program instituted by the Fujimori government in compliance with the recommendations of the World Bank, In-

ternational Monetary Fund, and the Interamerican Development Bank for such programs to be set up alongside structural adjustment measures such as Peru initiated in August 1990. The day after the first measures were announced, the price of basic foods, cooking fuel, and transportation rose by 500 or 600 percent. Many poor families subsisted on sweet potatoes, sugar and tea until they could locate a new niche for one or two household members in the labor market. The queues for the *comedores* rapidly swelled. The women in charge responded by reducing rations and distributing these free to neighbors who were completely indigent, but they rapidly ran through their stocks. The Catholic Church led the effort to maintain the distribution of food and salvage the emergency program until the end of 1990. The *comedores* were assigned increased supplies in exchange for adding a score or more of non-paying "social cases" to their rolls. Yet in the course of 1991, as successive emergency boards attempted to piece together a viable and credible program which would satisfy foreign donors, the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* program dropped out of the picture. Even after several millions of dollars was earmarked from the national budget for the emergency program, the director of the emergency board announced a shift of emphasis towards stimulating short-term employment. Emergency food assistance in any form, she said, would not be supported as it did not offer an enduring solution to poverty. Apparently, women's work in the *comedores* bore no conceivable relation to the creation of employment.

These events posed a series of dilemmas for the women's movement and for women's NGOs. In a country where no serious critique has taken place about the customary and, to women, oppressive domestic division of labor, how far should a program which mobilized women specifically around food preparation be defended? To what extent was the lack of remuneration significant? How far were these negative aspects offset by the obvious success of the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* in projecting women onto the national political scene, and giving them real influence over policy-making?

In the end, the political context left little room to manoeuvre in defense of the programs and to resolve these dilemmas. Yet the case illustrates a further barrier to women gaining permanent access to formulating policies and implementing programs which are of interest to them. When push came to shove, the evidence necessary for demonstrating the actual impact of emergency feeding programs in the context of urban poverty was lacking. Feminists and women NGOs, who had worked alongside the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* committees for several years, had made no attempt to gather data on the significance of the programs for the family economy or for the nutritional status of recipients. When multilateral agencies became directly involved in the policy-making process, it might have been possible to retain political and financial support for the two programs, had their defendants been able to demonstrate their efficacy. For example, foreign technical advisors may not have balked at the left connotations of the *Vaso de Leche* program if they had had reliable evidence of its nutritional impact.

Vaso de Leche and (less clearly) the *comedores* can be regarded as entitlement programs which are of particular interest to women because the onus of feeding family members falls on women and because they might, with time, have evolved into a source of employment. Their fate shows how easily entitlements can be withdrawn under the Peruvian system, and how few instruments women (and the poor more generally) have for defending their entitlements. As the 1990s progressed, the need for women to turn their attention anew to the national political arena became evident.

NATIONAL MACHINERY FOR WOMEN IN THE 1980s

Subsequent initiatives to resuscitate machinery for the promotion of women at governmental level took place in the mid-1980s. In 1984 a Special Commission on Women's Rights (*Comisión Especial de Derechos de la Mujer*) was set up in the Ministry of Justice. The Commission lay dormant, however, until a young and energetic Justice Minister, leader of the Christian Democratic party which was governing in uneasy alliance with Alan García's APRA, assumed office. The Special Commission began to awaken hopes. Women's NGOs were invited to elect a representative to its advisory council, composed primarily of civil servants whose activities were particularly relevant to women. Popular women's organizations, both urban and rural, also elected national representatives, a fact which represented something of a diplomatic coup on the part of the Commission's staff.

Shortly afterwards, the National Planning Institute began to show signs of interest in the condition of women and their opportunities for participation. The national development plan of 1986-1990 explicitly referred to the promotion of women in its chapter on Social Development.⁶ The Planning Institute was one of the government agencies closest to President Alan García and a favored tool for mobilizing political support for some of his more controversial ideas for reshaping Peruvian society. A small group of women, middle-level functionaries in the Planning Institute and linked to its directors through close social and even marital ties, secured support for a consultant's report on ways of improving the situation and level of participation of women in Peru. Its recommendations formed the topic of a sequence of working meetings with feminists, researchers and women from the NGO community.

Controversy over the Commission's Role

However, it soon became apparent that the personnel and resources assigned to the Special Commission on Women's Rights were completely inadequate and that there was lack of agreement over its role. The Justice Ministry sought to restrict the Commission to a purely advisory role and closely monitored its outreach to the women's community. Those organizations external to the government regarded the Commission as a point of entry to the administrative process of the government as a whole. Yet they were working on many other fronts simultaneously and remained sceptical about the benefits to be gained from investing time and effort at national government level.

The executive secretary of the Special Commission on Women's Rights had her own ideas about its potential. Having many years' experience in the Peruvian public administration, she was well versed in the art of survival if not in feminist discourse. With Ford Foundation funding, in 1986 she organized an important national seminar reviewing the position of women in diverse areas of Peruvian life. The Commission, guided by a group of informal advisors from the women's movement, exploited the network of women's grassroots organizations throughout the country to give the seminar something of the legitimacy of a representative national women's congress. Under the headings of "Education", "Health", "Employment", "Law" and "Urban Services", the seminar prepared the ground for subsequent diagnoses of women's needs.

However, both these initiatives were put on the back burner by a downturn in the fortunes of the APRA government. The brief economic recovery of 1986-87 was reversed and a new and more dramatic cycle of poverty and joblessness began for the poor. Shining Path and the more "classic" insurgent group *Túpac Amaru* heightened their presence in the capital city, whilst carrying out bombings and assassinations in the countryside, small towns and cities of the interior.⁷

Women's demands no longer commanded attention in this transformed political context. The Special Commission entered a phase of inactivity; the Planning Institute directors left in disgrace. As the decade closed, the focus of government interest in women's issues shifted to the National Population Council. In line with a now established pattern, external funding (this time provided by Pathfinder Fund) provided the stimulus to develop and implement a program of activities for women. Nonetheless, given the unlikelihood of these programs surviving after the approaching presidential and parliamentary elections, the centre of gravity on women's issues shifted back to the women's NGOs.⁸

National Population Council's Program for Women

At the start of the 1990s, the specific interests of Peruvian women were officially addressed by the National Population Council, which also had responsibility for young people and for coordinating the nation's population policy. Indeed, the youth program occupied as much time and staff as that for women so that yet again the actual commitment of government resources to women's machinery was minimal. A major input into designing the Council's program for women was made by a formally constituted committee of women's representatives elected from Peru's regions. To achieve this representation, organizers and advisors (almost in their entirety professional women based in NGOs in Lima) had had to travel to regional capitals and mount a major exercise in self-diagnosis of local women's needs. This paved the way for establishing a regional committee for the promotion of women which reported in turn to the national coordinating committee.⁹

The philosophy and activities of the national committee for the promotion of women were heavily influenced by the ideas of Caroline Moser and

her colleagues at the Development Planning Unit, University College London on "planning with a gender perspective". Teams from Lima dispersed over the countryside and set up training courses for regional committee members in which women's "practical gender interests" were differentiated from their "strategic gender interests" and in which the concept of women's "triple role" was deployed. Under the influence of a handful of the most active participants in the national network, the demands and proposals generated by this protracted and, in many ways, unique process of consultation and coordination, emphasized issues of basic infrastructure and public services. Although, undoubtedly important, these may not have been the most critical for many urban and rural women.

While the National Population Council formally retains its program for the promotion of women, responsibility for keeping up its momentum has fallen squarely on the non-governmental participants. Organized into a National Network for the Promotion of Women, they keep a finger on the pulse of women's concerns and reach consensus on priorities through personal visits, regional-level meetings and an annual assembly. It is ironic that, at a moment when levels of terrorist violence have reached new heights, and when the political struggle has acquired a stridency extreme even for Peru, the Network adopted as its 1992 program priority the combatting of violence against women. Its voice tends to be drowned in the cacophony.

Women in Parliament

A final official channel for raising women's concerns should expectably be the Peruvian Parliament, divided into a House of Deputies and the Senate. Women members of Parliament have held on average about 5 percent of total seats since the 1960s. Some veteran women parliamentarians are frequent faces on television. In 1990, women made up 120 out of the 960 candidates for Senate, but only 4 women senators and 12 women deputies were elected. In line with the established pattern, most women parliamentarians come from centre and rightist parties. Although two feminists were included in left-wing lists for the 1985 parliamentary elections, Peru's leftist parties have been extremely reticent to associate themselves with women's rights issues or to admit women to positions of influence within their ranks.

Nonetheless it is encouraging to note that women parliamentarians who assumed office in 1990 formed a coordinating body, the Women Parliamentarians' Group, which established a nexus to the women's movement. Amongst others, this Group debated important draft laws for speeding up the implementation of co-education and for curtailing family violence. This initiative, backed by women from various political parties and groupings, was discussed with the wider women's community. A channel of communication was established via an inter-NGO body called the Women's Forum, but the discussion extended to women's centres and individuals beyond its bounds.

The Women Parliamentarians' Group adopted a code of honour whereby any draft law approved by it was to be presented to Parliament as a multi-party, women's initiative. Speculation as to who would be the first to break

rank ended in 1992 when a long-time APRA party parliamentarian (and former Minister of Education) did so. However, one can only speculate about the possible development of the Women Parliamentarians' Group as shortly thereafter President Fujimori dissolved Parliament and implanted a hybrid, transitional "Government of National Reconstruction".

The Women's Forum has since become the focal point for discussions about the role of the women's movement in the event of a return to democracy. One issue concerns the attitude to take towards the *de facto* regime of Fujimori and his Cabinet. Does continuing to work with the Ministry of Health and the National Population Council imply a degree of collaboration that women would do better to withhold? Another concerns participation in the constitutional congress, not primarily as candidates but as a women's lobby with a capacity to make proposals. Finally, there is the question of how best to take advantage of the new government mechanisms to be adopted after the congress has concluded its deliberations. The outcome of most of these processes is beyond the control of women, and provides a further illustration of how Peruvian women live under "governments not deserved". It further illustrates how progress towards increasing women's access to government is in permanent danger of being thwarted by the instability of Peruvian political life.

CURRENT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGES

Peru has recently undergone important changes relating to the direction of economic policy, globalization, and the entrenchment of a limited form of democracy, whose style is determined above all by the philosophy and preferences of President Alberto Fujimori, now serving a second five-year term. Low wages, the disappearance of "good" jobs and the expansion of the informal sector continue to fuel the incorporation of women into unimagined niches of the economy. Despite being one of the Third World's most orthodox and obedient followers of IMF structural adjustment recommendations, Peru's takeoff into development and prosperity is far from assured.

Half the population are officially categorized as "poor" or "extremely poor". Yet relief measures, such as the Social Emergency or Social Compensation mechanism, increasingly involve emergency employment for men in road-building and construction of community infrastructure. Programs of food distribution are further downplayed to an extent that the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* are in jeopardy. NGOs can act as technical advisors to community groups which propose projects to the social emergency fund, but women's NGOs have not found ways of exploiting this mechanism to support a community-level women's agenda.

Any such strategy is made difficult by the continuing harassment of community leaders, especially of those outspoken women who valiantly defended the autonomy of urban poor communities and rural municipalities during the struggle between insurgent terrorist groups and the military. Although reduced to a minuscule and poorly coordinated collection of political fanatics and common criminals settling old scores, Shining Path continues to carry out

selective assassinations and prominent women leaders, such as Pascuala Rosado, the most recent victim, are prime targets. They receive no protection from the Peruvian police. Many popular leaders continue to live in exile in other Latin American countries or in Europe. Neighborhood and workers' organizations have been demobilized in the present context, and popular women's organizations have even more reason to be so. It will take a long time for a new generation of leaders to emerge and develop an agenda capable of mobilizing women to the same extent as did the *comedores* and the *Vaso de Leche* program.

Within the Peruvian government, the Ministry of Justice is once again the focus of official activities for promoting gender equity. The commission on human rights in this Ministry has a sub-commission on women's rights which has sought a dialogue with women's NGOs and achieved some access to the news media. The percentage of women elected to the new unicameral legislature in the 1995 elections has fallen compared to preceding parliaments. Women's representation among mayors and municipal council members has also fallen. This marks in some sense a return to "normality" after several years of unusually high levels of representation (though never surpassing 10 percent of mayors and council members) when such officials were threatened by Shining Path.

Women's NGOs, as well as a growing number of "mixed" NGOs, continue to undertake a large number of development projects focused on women; the promotion of women in microenterprises absorbing the largest proportion of resources at present. The NGO sector has become leaner and more efficient during the past few years as the amount of international cooperation has fallen. Women's NGOs are now involved in some large-scale projects funded by the Interamerican Development Bank and USAID. Correspondingly, their role as technical advisors and intermediaries vis-à-vis large international agencies has eclipsed their solidarity effort to build a cross-class political and cultural movement. Gender equity is increasingly invisible as an objective, both at the level of official discourse and action. Within the prevailing neoliberal framework, women-centred activities or positive discrimination suggest special privileges extended to favored groups. Such a stance is seen as characterizing the populist regimes of the past and to be held responsible for frustrating Peru's development, increasing poverty and political chaos. Equal opportunity is seen to be a desirable future goal and a fair description of the current state of affairs.

The present situation poses enormous challenges for Peruvian women. There is the problem of how to rethink our own long-held truths and adjust to the truly progressive changes of the present. There is the question of repositioning ourselves in relation to the Peruvian state in a way which advances the democratic participation of all. Above all, there is the challenge of developing proposals which will unite women and give real political weight to a gender-sensitive public agenda which offers alternatives for the poor and discriminated in these perilous times.

CONCLUSION

I have chosen to conclude this chapter with some final reflections on the way in which Peruvian women tend to be perceived by governments and on the types of demands which are viable in this context. Undoubtedly, the task of making the Peruvian government more responsive to women—and, correspondingly, Peruvian women more responsible for and thereby "deserving of" their government—involves extending the boundaries of the way women have traditionally been seen.

This traditional vision is essentially focused on need and assistance. The substance of most normative social legislation and of government programs which specifically address women are concerned with situations of irregularity, deficiency, poverty, and need. The government's capacity to reach women under such programs is also far more developed than its capacity to promote women's advancement through any conception of equity or equality. For example, policies to increase women's access to more highly qualified and better paid jobs, to equity in education and in social security provision are effectively non-existent. The principle of equal opportunity, fundamental in other countries (including some Latin American countries), is hardly apparent in Peruvian government policy and usually occurs in policies and programs that have no real application. Similarly, in Peru there has been no serious public discussion about the place or usefulness of positive discrimination.

Policies and programs simply have no relevance if women are defined as persons with no relation to the state. Vast sectors of Peruvian public opinion and the great majority of policy-makers regard Peruvian women as being duly represented by their fathers and spouses, or by "men" in general when it comes to affairs of state. Within this viewpoint, it is the family which is the object of social policy-making; women are buried within it as part of a collective of beneficiaries. For many, women should be spared the perplexities of politics or dealing with the state, just as they should ideally be spared the burden of remunerated work. Attempts to use the state apparatus to resolve questions of rights or welfare suggests that a woman's dependence on her appropriate male representatives has broken down, and she is regarded as a pitiable case indeed.

Given the workings of the Peruvian political system and the assumptions described above, Peruvian women are "entitled but not enfranchised" [Agarwal, 1991]. They possess entitlements but they cannot be sure of being able to exercise them. Most of the machinery for the promotion of women, and a large part of NGOs' activities have sought to expand women's entitlements to education, health, public services, communications, and even employment and income. Very rarely has the question of expanding their enfranchisement been addressed so as to ensure that women have the capacity to defend their rights and entitlements, at the national level, in their communities, and within the family. Women are not the only group in the Peruvian political system to confront these problems. A strategy which has not as yet been much exploited is that of forging alliances with other disenfranchised groups. As this process develops, the divided loyalties of native-descended women, black wom-

en, women from ethnic groups in the Amazon basin, rural women in general, and those of other excluded or discriminated segments of the population will undoubtedly emerge with force as has been the case in other settings. In the meantime, the disenfranchised share a common interest in the consolidation of a genuine and stable democracy which respects and enforces rights and entitlements. Only when these conditions are met, can Peruvian women be said to have the government they deserve.

ENDNOTES

1. After President Fujimori closed Parliament and intervened in the judicial system on April 5, 1992, most analysts regard the military as forming a shadow government.
2. As elsewhere, in Peru one can identify a first and a second wave of feminism. The impact of the suffragist movement was particularly evident in Peru in the 1920s. This and the following decade produced a number of notable feminists, who were active in the cultural sphere, in reforming and extending women's access to education, and on the labor front. The groups discussed in this chapter therefore represent a resurgence of Peruvian feminism after 40 years of quiescence.
3. I retain the Spanish word here because of the difficulty of finding an exact English equivalent. "Communal kitchens" is not appropriate because only the preparation of food is done collectively; families usually take their rations home to eat. "Soup kitchen" is also misleading because of its connotations of government subsidy and of social distance between those who prepare the food and those who consume it. The *comedores* are based on a membership—typically 20 to 50 families—who finance themselves from membership quotas and increasingly from the rations sold to non-members. The task of preparing food was originally rotated amongst members but has since tended to fall on those women with the fewest competing demands on their time, either because their household is somewhat more economically secure or because they have fewer skills to offer in the job market.
4. The *comités vecinales* do not occupy a formal position in Peruvian government structure, but they tend to have strong connections to local district governments and to enjoy a legitimacy thereby. They can usually enforce such gate-keeping functions as deciding which development projects should enter the community, determine the use of community plots and infrastructure, and represent the community to outside agencies and actors. Political parties compete to have their members and sympathizers elected onto the committees.
5. María Elena Moyano, a brilliant leader dedicated to the cause of poor women, began her public career as a leader of the *Vaso de Leche* program in Villa El Salvador and went on to become deputy mayor of that populous district. She was assassinated by *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) terrorists in February 1992 as part of that organization's attempt to control the *comedores* and *Vaso de Leche* committees.

The Women's Movement and Public Policy in Brazil

Jacqueline Pitanguy

INTRODUCTION

The recent political history of Latin America has followed a broadly similar pattern. In many countries, the elected governments of the early 1960s were subsequently overthrown by military coup d'états which imposed authoritarian rule over most of the continent. For many Latin Americans, the 1960s and 1970s were years of harsh military repression, involving the systematic use of violence by the state, and the suppression or control of the legislature, political parties, the press, trade unions and other organizations of civil society. For many citizens, these were years of exile and resistance. Some sectors of the opposition resorted to armed struggle to combat the dictatorial state.

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, trade unions re-emerged with new agendas and civil society was enriched by the appearance of new political actors. Defined generically as social movements, these new forms of political practice grew up and took root outside the established institutional framework of political parties or trade unions, and raised issues which went beyond the "classic" questioning of both Marxism and liberalism. The political trajectory of Latin America converged again towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s when fierce resistance to militarism brought an end to the years of military hegemony in the continent and presidential elections were held throughout the region.¹

At present, many Latin America countries face the challenge of reconciling political democratization with a profound economic crisis. Whilst democratic institutions have been restored and reinforced in most Latin American countries, the economic crisis in the 1990s has made it difficult for the state to govern. The decrease in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per inhabitant between 1981 to 1989 in many countries, clearly shows the extent of the crisis. During this period Latin America as a whole had a negative growth rate of -8.3 percent [CEPAL, Anuarios Estadísticos]. With few exceptions, most Latin American countries continue to confront structural economic problems and financial crises. Neo-liberal policies, advocating state reform and the expansion of free trade agreements, form the dominant ideological orientation of this

6. This had echoes of the development plans of military governments in the early 1970s, in which the notorious "Point 24" alluded to women.
7. Shining Path displays relatively little "gender bias" in its choice of victims or method of assassination. With Old Testament vengeance, it often kills entire families. Local APRA party mayors and minor political functionaries were amongst its favorite targets during the final years of García's government. Many mayors were women, pressured to stand as candidates when the dangers became increasingly clear to male party leaders. The strong presence of women among the membership of Shining Path is a new topic of research. Women have always been important figures on the organization's central committee and many liquidation squads have been led by women.
8. It was in this context that the workshop which gave rise to this book was organized.
9. Contrary to prevailing stereotypes of rampant *machismo* in the interior, it proved much easier to bring men in outlying areas into the regional committees than it did to involve men in Lima.

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