

# 1

## Introduction

### Gender and Latin American History, or: Why Motherhood?

#### Two Tales of Women and Politics

Aída de Suárez did not begin her life as a political activist. She only became politicized when her son was “disappeared” – abducted by the military government without charges or due process. His disappearance turned her world upside down, particularly when she could not find out what happened to him. She described what it was like when she tried to find answers about what happened to her son:

I had a neighbour who was a doctor and after they took my son I went to him and he gave me an injection to calm me down. They come into your house and they take your child like that – you think you’ve gone mad. The injection didn’t calm me at all. At seven in the morning I was in the police station. A guard at the entrance asked me what I wanted. I said my son had been taken away and I didn’t know by who or why. I cried so much he let me in. They took my statement. As I was leaving a policeman at the door said to me, “Señora, there’s no point in coming here. Go to the military regiments, they’re the ones who are taking people. Don’t waste your time here. We have orders so keep out of the zones of their operations.” I went straight to the regiment. They didn’t want to see me. They said that they didn’t know anything and that I should go to the Ministry of the Interior. Then one man told me to try the regiment at Ciudadela. I went there and they said I’d come to the wrong place and that I had to go to the First Army Corps in Palermo. That day I went to all those places but I didn’t find out anything.<sup>1</sup>

Aída de Suárez was like many middle-aged and older women whose adult children were disappeared when the Argentine state terrorized its own population from 1976 to 1979 in what eventually came to be known as the Dirty War. Although military violence against civilians began in the 1960s, the Dirty War started during Isabel Perón's presidency, from 1974 to 1976, and it escalated rapidly after military forces overthrew her and established an authoritarian government. By the time that the military regime fell from power in the early 1980s, tens of thousands of Argentine men and women – most of them young – had disappeared and were presumed dead.

De Suárez was among 14 women, mostly housewives who had never been involved in politics before, who met each other in various government offices while trying to find out what had happened to their adult children who had disappeared. Their trips to police, military, and government offices yielded no results, just more frustration and fear. The mothers decided to march silently together around the Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires's central square, in order to bring attention to their plight and, hopefully, to find out where their children were. The movement grew rapidly to include thousands of mothers and grandmothers from many different walks of life, religions, and political perspectives. Though they came from a variety of backgrounds, the women in the movement emphasized their identities as supposedly traditional mothers who were willing to sacrifice anything for their children, and who were more interested in family and morality than in any form of politics. In the end, the Mothers were one of the few groups able to bring international attention to state terrorism in Argentina; other protestors typically ended up among the ranks of the disappeared. The mothers' silent marching undercut the military government's claims to legitimacy, which in turn played a role in the regime's dissolution in the early 1980s.

Fast-forward to 2006, when Michelle Bachelet was elected as Chile's first woman president. In her victory speech, Bachelet stated:

Today we have witnessed the magic of democracy, amigos and amigas. Today we're all equal. The vote of the most humble person is worth the same as the vote of the most powerful. Democracy can help untangle the wishes and hopes of the people. . . .

Starting right now, your hopes are my hopes, your wishes mine. To all the people who welcomed me into their homes, all the men and women who gave me the gift of a hug and a kiss, above all so many women who gave me my victory today, on this night. To all the people from the prov-

inces, I send my greetings and my assurance that I will fulfill the vow I took in the last days of my campaign, that we would remember them when we were here celebrating and surely they are all celebrating in each of their cities our great triumph tonight.

Amigos y amigas, starting March 11, Chile will have a woman president, but it will also be the start of a new phase where we will make sure that the successes we achieve in this great country make their way into the homes of all Chileans, because I want people to remember my government as a government of all, for all. Ours is a dynamic country, with the desire to be successful, that is becoming more and more integrated into the world, a country of entrepreneurs who create prosperity with their ingenuity and creativity. But for Chilean men and women to dare to be entrepreneurial and to innovate, they must also know that the society they live in protects them.<sup>2</sup>

Later, in her first annual address, Bachelet claimed that her political victory represented the “defeat of exclusion” not just for women, but for Chileans more generally.<sup>3</sup> Bachelet was the sixth Latin American woman to hold the office of president, but she was the first to become president who had *not* been married to a high profile male political leader.<sup>4</sup> Neither did Bachelet highlight her role as a mother to grown children, as some other Latin American women leaders – most notably Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua during the 1990s – had done. Bachelet had an ambitious sociopolitical agenda, promising to achieve gender equity in her cabinet and address women’s issues in Chile as well as the needs of poor Chileans. Though she met only some of her goals, she maintained strong support throughout her presidency from 2006 to 2010, in no small part because she got Chileans through the hardships of the worldwide economic recession that hit during her term.

Since Bachelet’s successful campaign in Chile, three other Latin American women have won the presidency in their respective countries. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner won the 2007 presidential election in Argentina, following in the footsteps of her husband, Néstor Kirchner, who was president from 2003 to 2007. Fernández de Kirchner proved herself politically capable in her own right when her husband died in 2007, leaving her to rule without his support, and she made her own mark on the history of women in politics when she became the first female president in Latin America to win reelection in 2011. Two other women – Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil – ascended to the presidency via elections in 2010. Rousseff, in particular,

took power in a country with of one of the world's fastest expanding and important economies.

Women have often played significant roles politics in several Latin American countries since the 1970s. However, the nature of their participation and the roles that they have emphasized changed considerably over the course of about 25 years. These transformations in politics have coincided with other developments for women in Latin American societies. For example, fertility rates have fallen dramatically in many Latin American countries: overall, Latin American women have gone from having an average of 5.98 children in 1960 to 2.2 children in 2010.<sup>5</sup> This drop in fertility rates, however, has not occurred evenly throughout the region. The most dramatic decline in fertility rates has been in Brazil, where women averaged 5.33 children in 1970 and only 2.46 children by 1995. In other countries, the decline was not as dramatic, such as in Guatemala, where in the same time period, women went from having an average of 6.53 children to 5.12 children.<sup>6</sup> Women in many Latin American countries are also becoming more educated, particularly among the middling and upper classes.

The changes in women's lives raise important questions about Latin American history. The history of the Mothers' movement in Argentina makes one wonder: how could politically inexperienced housewives start a protest movement that helped to bring down a violent authoritarian regime? How and why did these women create a political movement by highlighting, rather than rejecting, their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers? What political, legal, social, and cultural trends in the Latin American past made it possible for such a movement to emerge? *Why* did these women – and later political figures, such as Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua – emphasize motherhood in their political pursuits? What might have been the cost of this focus on motherhood in politics? Certainly, although one can find examples of women who used maternalist ideas to their benefit, motherhood also set limits on women's ability to gain an education, make a living, or enter political office. If maternity was a double-edged sword of both opportunity and limitation, why did so many Latin American women utilize this symbolism?

More recent developments identified here also raise questions. Does the recent rise of women presidents since 2000 indicate that Latin American women have broken the so-called glass ceiling in politics? How important is it that Bachelet and Rouseff, in particular, did not draw attention to their roles as mothers or wives, as many politically active

women did before them? Does this shift, along with dropping fertility rates, indicate that motherhood no longer holds sway over Latin American societies and politics as it once did? What can the experiences of successful women politicians and rapidly falling fertility rates tell us about what it means to be a woman in Latin America – and what do these facts *fail* to reveal about women in Latin America? In what ways have contemporary Latin American women broken with the past, and in what ways are they building upon it?

Of course, none of the questions above has a simple or straightforward answer. Whether or not women are breaking free of motherhood and overcoming longstanding limitations placed on them depends on *which women* one discusses. In addition to regional or country-specific variations, one must also consider the impact of recent changes on women of different class and race backgrounds. This book seeks, then, not to “answer” but rather to explore the questions above by examining the history of Latin American women from independence through the 1990s via the lens of motherhood. It examines both continuity and change over time, and takes class, race, and regional differences into account. In addition to deepening readers’ understanding of the history behind recent developments for women in Latin America, this book also addresses broader questions pertaining to history itself. What can an examination of women – and mothers in particular – teach one about Latin American history? How can the history of Latin America teach one more about motherhood, and in particular, how does it complicate and historicize the term “mother”?

Although Chapter 2 briefly addresses issues of gender in the colonial period, my focus in this book is on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly after Latin American countries achieved their independence. During the colonial period, although motherhood shaped women’s lives in a variety of ways, it remained more of a private or religious issue. It was only with independence that women’s identities as mothers came to have particularly powerful significance in social and political movements. The trope of motherhood is tightly intertwined with the history of modern Latin America. When nineteenth- and early twentieth-century state officials denied women the vote, they often did so by asserting that women belonged in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers, rather than in the public sphere of politics (Chapter 2). Women from middling and upper social classes did not always reject the idea that motherhood was at the center of their identities, but they used this

notion in a variety of ways that state officials had not anticipated, arguing for greater personal rights and for greater influence in public society (Chapter 4). Yet upper-class gender norms rarely reflected the lives of the majority of women, who were poor and often from non-European backgrounds. For these women, the public and private spheres were not neatly divided, and motherhood was not necessarily the only or even central aspect of their daily identities (Chapter 3). By the early to mid-twentieth century, the themes of motherhood and home life helped political and economic elites to address the dilemmas and fears regarding the dramatic changes that came with industrialization, urbanization, or revolution. Though societies experienced rapid changes, including changes to women's roles in public, official gender discourses highlighted women's ongoing roles as mothers who would uphold morality and maintain traditions (Chapter 5). Thus, motherhood has been a central theme throughout changes in Latin America since independence, though its particular meaning at any given time was subject to change – as are all historical forces. Looking at Latin America through the lens of motherhood allows one to problematize simplistic divisions between public and private spheres, continuity and change, and private lives and political events.

Although motherhood has been an important theme throughout the course of modern Latin American history, it did not have the same meaning in all time periods, let alone in all regions of Latin America or among Latin Americans of different race or class backgrounds. Political, economic, and intellectual elites had a great deal of power to define the parameters of how gender and motherhood discourses developed, but they did not always agree with each other. Even more important, women developed many of their own ideas about what motherhood meant and how it should intersect with politics and the economy. Wealthy or middle-class women were the most likely to take advantage of elite notions about motherhood, in part because it was these women whom politicians and intellectuals identified as “good mothers.” Poor women and those of indigenous or African descent utilized certain aspects of elite gender norms regarding motherhood, but they also developed their own ideas about what made one a good mother, and what influence that gave women (or should give women) in society. The particular ways in which women and men of different class, race, and political perspectives engaged the theme of motherhood was further influenced by broader contextual changes in Latin American governments and economies.

Writing a book to address an all-encompassing theme like motherhood in Latin America since independence is an ambitious undertaking, and there is no way to “do everything.” Indeed, it is a mistake to try to do so with such a broad topic. Therefore, while readers will find many themes and historiographical works discussed, I lay no claim to summarizing or including the entire field of historical gender studies for Latin America. Similarly, although I take examples from a variety of Latin American countries, I do not attempt to include all of them, nor do I address every revolution, women’s movement, or class-specific issue. Some of these other topics are referenced in the bibliography, and all of those not included in this narrative offer a rich set of possibilities for educators’ own lectures, or for students’ research projects.

## Gender as a Category for Historical Analysis

Though many people associate the term gender with women and presume it is based on biology, gender is instead a social construction that pertains to the ideas a particular society holds about what it means to be a man or a woman. More precisely, groups that exercise the greatest political, economic, and social control define the dominant gender norms in a given society. Gender lessons begin extremely early in a child’s life, when parents buy clothes and toys that they deem “gender appropriate” for him or her, or when they react negatively if a child crosses over accepted gender boundaries in his or her behavior. Because one learns gender rules so early and consistently, and often subtly rather than directly, by adulthood, gender norms often seem “natural” rather than socially constructed. Motherhood, as a subcategory of gender, is no different. Although one often hears references to “mothers’ instincts” and how motherly urges and agendas are natural, in fact, motherhood is as much socially constructed and learned as any other aspect of gender.

In the 1980s, historian Joan Scott developed the now-standard definition of gender when she described it as both “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes,” and “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.”<sup>7</sup> The first part of Scott’s definition indicates that gender is learned rather than natural, and that it influences all of one’s social relationships. That means that the relationships between men and women, or any individual’s place within the family or society, were (and are) patterned

by the gender norms learned in childhood. The second part of Scott's definition, that gender bolsters or expresses power, suggests that individuals and groups can manipulate gender ideas either to demonstrate or try to increase their power relative to others. Gender often functions this way in politics, and not only when women are involved. For example, many constitutions in nineteenth-century Latin America did not allow men to vote who were in a so-called dependent economic position, such as servants and indebted workers; this exclusion stemmed in part from the notion that these men's employers were not simply their bosses, but also father figures who could tell them how to vote. Therefore, ideas about manliness (and the extent to which an individual became a "true man" or remained in "child-like dependence") often influenced voting laws. Because gender is one of the main building blocks in both society and politics, understanding how gender functioned and changed over time is a crucial part of studying history, regardless of the world region or time period on which one focuses.

Motherhood, in particular, is a useful theme for examining "the reproduction of power and the power of reproduction."<sup>8</sup> Reproduction refers to much more than simply women's ability to bear and raise children. Reproduction is a powerful and sometimes contentious force because it is at the heart not just of maintaining and growing families or broader populations, but because it is essential to passing down social and cultural norms. Motherhood is also a means through which power, including political power, is debated, constructed, and maintained. Contraceptive and reproductive laws in Latin America often intersected, for example, with particular cultural agendas in politics during the twentieth century, although sometimes in surprising ways (Chapter 9). State officials' ideas about "good" versus "bad" mothers (which overlapped with their race and class prejudices) were also essential to the development of nineteenth-century nation-making agendas (Chapters 2 and 4). Medical, social, and moral arguments about so-called traditional motherhood were central to easing elite anxieties over the growth of cities and industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chapters 5 and 6). Even revolutionary leaders manipulated motherhood images in order to advance their broader political agendas (Chapter 7). Finally, although women have sometimes achieved recognition in diverse political movements since the 1970s, and there have been several women presidents in Latin America, motherhood continues to complicate women's overall advancement in national politics (Chapters 8 and 10).

When discussing Latin American gender relations, one often hears about *machismo* and *marianismo*. Though these labels are extreme and problematic – it is difficult, for example, to find individuals (let alone groups) who embody all of the stereotypes associated with such identities – they are commonly used terms and therefore need to be addressed. To do that, it is important first to identify these stereotypes and then analyze the extent to which they do or do not reflect on Latin American gender realities. *Machismo* is perhaps the better known term in the United States, conjuring up images of hypermasculinity among Latin American (or Latino) men who take insult easily. While it is true that machismo is associated with exaggerated masculinity that denies men any access to supposedly “feminine” emotions or actions, the macho also often represents a caring and loving head of household, although often as a strict patriarch. *Marianismo* is in some ways the counterpart of machismo, while in other ways it refers to its own distinct identity. Taking the ideal of the Virgin Mary, who gave her life over to her son Jesus Christ, a marianista is a woman who is ultrafeminine (often described as submissive), self-sacrificing, modest, and deeply religious. She is focused entirely on her husband’s and children’s needs rather than her own. Motherhood is at the core of this identity; indeed, the idea of marianismo often suggests that a woman has no other identity than that of wife and mother. Children, and sons especially, often become devoted to their saint-like marianista mothers once grown.

As with most stereotypes, references to machismo and marianismo are overstated, oversimplified, and lack a sense of historical context and change. These particular labels appeal most to individuals and groups outside of Latin America, because they allow them to point to things that are supposedly “wrong” in another culture while ignoring similar problems in their own. Although an exhaustive discussion of these stereotypes is outside of the purview of this book, a few main points are important to establish. In addition to the extreme oversimplification of these stereotypes, these typecasts do not fit the evidence one finds in a closer examination of Latin American societies and histories. Although there is evidence dating back to the colonial period of men fighting with each other over access to women or individual pride, these were moments of transgression from ordinary life, not necessarily daily events that defined the men’s identity.<sup>9</sup> Generalized references to machismo also fail to account for class and race differentials in male power and attitudes. Large estate owners, for example, made a regular

practice of emasculating male workers by both punishing them like children for real or perceived transgressions, and by claiming sexual access to their male employees' wives, sisters, and daughters (see Chapter 2). Further, Latin American history offers examples of men who viewed women as partners and allies, rather than simply as objects of desire or a means to express power. The same man who fought with another at a bar over sexual access to a particular woman might at another time ally himself with both that man and woman in order to protest unfair taxes or other exploitation by powerful elites.

Marianismo is even more heatedly disputed among scholars of Latin America than machismo. Evelyn Stevens first coined the term in 1973 as a way of referring to ideals of the long-suffering woman in Latin America, asserting that this identity allowed women a certain spiritual superiority over men even as it encouraged them to be passive.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars picked up on Stevens' use of marianismo (which ordinarily would simply refer to the cult of the Virgin Mary) as a way of describing women and women's history in Latin America. Though some of them criticized Stevens' use of marianismo as too extreme to fit women's lives and views, they accepted many of her assumptions about marianismo. In 2002, however, Marysa Navarro contended that the concept of marianismo itself was "seriously flawed" as a way of describing women in Latin America, present or past.<sup>11</sup> Among her many arguments against using the term, Navarro asserted that Stevens' work was not well grounded in historical reality. Navarro was particularly critical of the concept of marianismo as both timeless and presenting Latin American women as powerless. She also took issue with Stevens referring to ideas of women's higher morality and spirituality (which she asserted as part of marianismo) as "female chauvinism," indicating that Stevens' work did not take feminist critiques of gender roles into account.<sup>12</sup> Navarro's criticisms of marianismo have a great deal of merit, but at the same time there are numerous examples in Latin American history since independence of political, intellectual, and religious elites who identified women with the home and with self-sacrifice, particularly with regard to their (supposedly natural and central) identities as mothers. Although women's lives certainly did not always fit this stereotype, and many women in Latin American history struggled against it, there were also many ways that women engaged the idea of themselves as long-suffering mothers in order to advance their own interests. Therefore, while Stevens' assertions might be flawed if we take them at face value, many scholars since her

essay was written have used the term *marianismo* to refer to these stereotypes that powerful elites used to justify women's subordination, noting that even when women rejected all or part of this imagery, they were forced to grapple with it.

Therefore, while the terms *machismo* and *marianismo* rarely appear in *Mothers Making Latin America* due to their problems and the stereotypes they represent, they remain terms that both scholars and the general public, particularly outside of Latin America, continue to grapple with when trying to understand Latin American gender norms. It is my hope that the discussion and analysis of motherhood presented in this book might allow readers to push past simplistic stereotypes or labels in order to understand and appreciate the complexity of Latin American gender ideas, experiences, and struggles on a more meaningful level.

Even aside from using a term like *marianismo*, one must be careful when analyzing the politically charged topic of motherhood in modern Latin American history. Despite many elite references to women as long-suffering mothers who willingly sacrificed their own interests for others, there was and is no "natural unity" to women's experiences of motherhood in Latin America, past or present. Political scientist Lorraine Bayard de Volo captured this well in her book on motherhood and politics in Nicaragua from 1979 to 1999, when she wrote, "Because 'women's difference' implies a sense of connection and solidarity with women everywhere, the temptation to conflate gender identities into fixed, pre-political categories can be strong." Yet she warns that although women's identities, particularly around motherhood, may be ever-present, they do not reflect women's varied experiences and agendas. Bayard de Volo therefore asserted that "[i]nstead of focusing on whether women were more peace-loving, relational, and other-oriented than men, I examine when such claims are made, who makes them, and why."<sup>13</sup> *Mothers Making Latin America* takes the same approach: while not assuming that elite discourses on motherhood revealed "the truth" about women's experiences, this book does examine how and why particular elite discourses emerged, and how they changed over time. It also considers how and why women ignored, manipulated, rejected, or altered dominant social ideas about motherhood.

*Patriarchy* is another term that frequently comes up with reference to Latin American gender relations. Patriarchy indicates a set of social and legal structures in which men are dominant and privileged. Historian Bianca Premo notes that patriarchy "evokes the complex of legal and

social relations of power that joined normative models of household governance to the larger legitimacy of [political] rule.” In other words, ideas about the supposedly natural authority of parents (particularly fathers) over children, or husbands over wives, were often extended to justify broader political, social, and economic inequalities. One often sees this pattern with regard to slavery in Latin America: elites viewed African-descended slave adults as perpetual children who required the firm control of their so-called European-descended superiors just as children needed to be under their parents’ rule.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike machismo or marianismo, patriarchy is a term that refers to a complex set of beliefs and experiences in society and history; it is therefore analytically useful to scholars who evaluate gender ideas and relations around the world. To identify a society as patriarchal does not necessarily indicate that men are all-powerful or that women are completely powerless, nor is patriarchy a fixed or unchanging category in history. Instead, like other aspects of gender, patriarchy is fluid and flexible: the gender laws, ideas, and structures supporting male power systems change over the course of time. In fact, it might be better to think in terms of *patriarchies* in the plural, because ideas and policies of male dominance not only change over time, but also vary according to region and culture. Patriarchy therefore does not refer to an unchanging “thing” in history, but rather to a set of structures and historical processes helping to shape social and political relations of power. It is intricately tied to, and a manifestation of, broader gender ideas and relations as defined by Joan Scott. For Latin America, historian Heidi Tinsman astutely noted that patriarchy has remained vital because of its ties to political power and principle, but in ways that have undergone constant revision and which are, often, contradictory in nature.<sup>15</sup> Although patriarchy is frequently associated more with certain societies and cultures than others, one finds variations of patriarchal models around the world. Consider, for example, that although women can enter any profession in the United States, they still typically make 77 cents on the dollar in relation to men, even in female-dominated fields. Moreover, the best-paying jobs and most powerful political positions are overwhelmingly staffed by men. One should be wary, therefore, of focusing on whether Latin America is “more” or “less” patriarchal than the United States or other regions. It is more analytically sound to attend to the ways in which patriarchy has developed in particular cultures, political situations, and economic con-

ditions. Historians generally find that it is more useful – and results in better history – to analyze societies of the past in their own terms in order to understand how they functioned, rather than to judge them on moral or cultural bases. Gender is yet one more facet in which historians need to be careful to do this.

## Relationships, Influences, and Terms

Gender cannot stand alone as a category of analysis, because race and class also helped to determine one's social relations, access to power, and rights within society. Race, like gender, is socially constructed rather than biological. Even when biologists and other scientists discussed race, their descriptions were always shaped by cultural assumptions. For example, scientists, doctors, and politicians who supported the early twentieth-century eugenics movements claimed that scientific methods “proved” the inferiority of nonwhite races, but in fact, the studies were conducted in a way in which the outcome was predetermined by racist assumptions (Chapter 5). Race is also distinct from phenotype, or color. This is particularly evident in Latin America, where a person who has dark skin – but is wealthy and educated – might be considered “whiter” than a lighter-skinned individual who is poor and uneducated. And although class is based on material conditions, how a person's wealth or poverty intersected with rights or reputation was, and remains, a definitively social process.

Thus, what it meant to be a woman, and how a woman was thought of in different parts of society, depended on her race and class status as well as her gender. For instance, in both the colonial period and in the nineteenth century, state officials considered an elite women of European descent as automatically “honorable,” whereas they assumed that poor women of African or indigenous descent were dishonorable. This could influence a woman's ability to defend her interests in court, and in particular her rights and needs relative to men in her life: a poor indigenous woman would have to work hard, and provide many witnesses (particularly outside of her own class and race) to convince a judge that she had a good and honorable reputation, whereas the judge would be predisposed to seeing an elite European woman as honorable and therefore deserving of the court's assistance and protection (Chapter 2). Such rules

were not absolute, however, and one can find evidence of judges and other administrative officials who intervened on behalf of poor, non-European women and men. Yet even when they did so, state officials' actions were often based on gendered notions about their responsibilities to protect weaker groups within society.

The history of gender in Latin America since independence has often intersected with concepts such as *progress*, *tradition*, and *modernity*. Anthropologists frequently refer to the fact that traditions are always changing – there are virtually no practices or customs that remain constant over time. Yet the perceptions and beliefs about tradition and modernity impact how people think of and categorize themselves and others. On the surface level, traditional motherhood in Latin America had to do with the idea that women remained in the home and tended to children, rather than going out into the workforce or being involved in politics. It also associated women with Catholic devotion and strict moral codes. Mostly, these ideas centered on the lives of women of the middling or wealthy sectors: poorer women had to work outside the home, so the public and private spheres continually overlapped for them. State officials and intellectual elites also often highlighted women's supposedly natural association with the home more emphatically in times of change when more women were going outside of the home to work, especially in factories (Chapters 5 and 6). Ideas about motherhood continued to influence women's engagements with politics, especially national politics, throughout the twentieth century, and in some ways into the present day (Chapters 8 and 10).

Progress and modernity are also dynamic, complex terms. For example, in late nineteenth-century Latin America, middle-class and elite notions of "progress" focused on emulating European (and US) economic, political, and cultural institutions and practices. These ideas about progress gave certain men of the middling and wealthy sectors new and broader roles in the public sphere, but their impact on women was quite mixed. Some women – mostly from the middling sectors in society – used notions of Europeanized progress to argue for better education and the right to work, and sometimes they succeeded in gaining new rights within marriage and the economy (Chapter 4). Yet in other ways, even middle-sector women were excluded from progress, and many women even experienced a tightening of male authority in their lives (Chapters 2 and 4). For poor women, particularly those of non-European heritage, so-called progress did more than simply leave

them behind: elite-driven ideas about progress often identified them, especially in their roles as mothers who allegedly lacked integrity and honor, as threatening to drag the nation down into backwardness. These stereotypes did not necessarily reflect the reality of motherhood among nonelite women, but they did often determine the parameters of poor women's options to address their own or their children's needs (Chapters 2 and 3).

Between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, many Latin American societies experienced processes of modernization, and middling and powerful groups often embraced ideas about *modernity*. Some countries, such as Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, began to industrialize which, in turn, brought urban growth. New roads had to be built to accommodate the rising number of cars and trucks in countries. More consumer goods were available, from movies to modern clothing fashions to home appliances. Science gained extraordinary influence over public policy – and vice versa – as governments struggled to solve problems such as epidemics or urban waste, and to meet the medical needs of people in expanding cities. Doctors gained more power in local and even national government institutions than ever before, particularly with regard to newly created health or social service departments.

Even among elite groups, there were “winners” and “losers” in these processes of urbanization and modernization. In general, states and state officials benefited from these changes, because expanding state institutions – including welfare, education, and health – allowed states to reach into the everyday lives of citizens on an unprecedented level. Scientists and medical professionals also gained a great deal more respect and influence in formal politics during this period. It was not only powerful state, scientific, economic, or medical officials who benefited, however: the expanding state apparatus required a host of new lower- and mid-level officials to carry out new programs and policies, and to staff new state institutions. Because many medical and social welfare institutions concerned themselves with child health and family matters that elites considered part of women's natural domain, women (mostly from middling sectors) were often important contributors – and sometimes leaders – for initiating and maintaining new policies and state-run organizations. Other social and political sectors did not fare as well with urbanization, industrialization, and state expansion. One of the main groups to experience decline was the Catholic Church. It was not that Latin Americans were necessarily less religious than before

these processes of modernization, but rather that the state took over many of the charitable and educative roles that the Church once held.

Modern industrial and urban developments also had a mixed impact on the poor. On the one hand, movement from the countryside to the city meant, for some individuals, a release from long-standing social rules and community constraints. On the other hand, urban growth sometimes weakened built-in social obligations that could help one through hard times. Additionally, material conveniences and pleasures – such as new appliances, movie halls, or fashions – that allowed members of the urban middle and upper classes to measure their success or escape everyday reality were out of reach for poor urbanites. Instead, they often struggled with insufficient or unsafe housing, and underemployment or poor pay. It was also the urban poor who suffered the most from epidemics and other health problems. Furthermore, most people continued to live in the countryside, where it was far more difficult to receive new health, educational, and social services than it was in cities.

Women were often caught between tradition and modernity in this period. A so-called modern working woman, especially from one of the middling economic groups, often felt pressure to maintain traditional home-bound values: if she did not, she might face criticism for abandoning her moral and maternal duties (Chapter 5). A woman who stayed at home faced pressure to modernize her mothering by incorporating the latest scientific practices in child-rearing. In the early twentieth century, mothers might be expected to learn very specific and “modern” hygiene practices, and to buy newly available (and expensive) appliances and other consumer goods. In general, women typically faced more criticism than men if they embraced modern ways at the expense of their so-called traditional roles (Chapter 5). Poor mothers fared worse: new medical and state discourses often blamed poor mothers themselves for unhygienic or unsafe conditions that put their children in jeopardy, rather than looking to poverty as the cause for child illness and mortality (Chapter 6).

## What’s Feminism Got to Do With It?

Although scholars have long discussed and debated the relationships between motherhood and feminism, it is easy to find references – in

newspapers, on television, or on the internet – that asserts a strong correlation between motherhood and so-called antifeminism. This association presumes that feminism is aimed primarily at rejecting all traditional gender norms and focuses on women's roles in the economy and politics. Yet both motherhood and feminism are more complicated than this, particularly in Latin America, where the term feminism is intertwined with multifaceted class–race and international issues, as well as with politics and values.

What, then, is feminism? The term first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, though it did not take on its modern meaning until the early decades of the twentieth century. It was only with the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term came to be used regularly as a reference to those working to improve women's rights within society and to oppose women's oppression. Like motherhood, feminism has had many different definitions and meanings over the course of history, and even within a particular historical period or world region. Historian Karen Offen's article on divergent definitions and paths of feminism in the United States and Britain versus France and continental Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides a particularly insightful discussion of how and why feminism is difficult to define. On the one hand, British and US feminists focused on what Offen labeled *individualist feminism*, in which women's rights advocates sought political, legal, and economic rights that were equal to those of men. Offen interpreted this as using the "standard of male adulthood" as the norm for women's goals. This approach to women's rights, and subsequent definition of feminism, resulted from historical contexts that were specific to Britain and the United States in the late nineteenth century, such as having a relatively large population of single, educated women who wanted greater individual autonomy in their lives. Also important was the fact that these two nations benefited from the growth of industrial capitalism that led to a prosperous middle class. On the other hand, in France and other parts of continental Europe, women's rights advocates concentrated on what Offen calls *relational feminism*, which emphasized giving women increased rights "as women" rather than trying to gain rights equal to men. This approach often emphasized women's roles as mothers, and accepted that women and men were inherently different and that their distinctive labors complemented each other. Relational feminists on the European continent were less concerned with

winning equal rights as they were with improving women's rights as mothers and wives. By the twentieth century, Offen notes, these two divergent tracks of feminism conflicted more often, with individualist feminists accusing relational feminists of being "antifeminist" and upholding male privilege, whereas relational feminists often criticized individualist feminists for being egotistical and "unwomanly."<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, it was the British- and US-style individualist feminism that became the model on which definitions of feminism developed. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, for example, defined feminism as working for women's rights based on the idea of equality between the sexes.<sup>17</sup>

Offen proposed a broader definition of feminism that could encompass these two divergent movements. She viewed feminism as an ideology in its own right (not simply attached to other sociopolitical movements) "based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination in a given society." Therefore, she considered that anyone who was a feminist who recognized the "validity of women's own interpretations of lived experiences and needs," sought to eliminate injustices of women by men, and challenged the gender status quo.<sup>18</sup> Although her definition and comparisons were based only on women's movements in Europe and the United States, Offen's analysis and definition of feminism provide a useful starting point for contemplating the role of feminists and feminism in Latin American history and, in particular, how they related to the theme of motherhood.

Latin American women's movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had more in common with relational than individualist feminism. While one can find evidence of feminists who sought equal rights with men, far more women's rights advocates of the period emphasized women's motherhood roles as important to the nation and used this as the basis on which to argue for better education and rights within marriage (Chapter 4). By the early twentieth century, divisions emerged among women's rights advocates, with some groups beginning to emphasize gaining equal political and economic rights with men. The association of women's rights and importance with motherhood did not necessarily endure throughout the twentieth century among all feminist groups, but these historical foundations do help to explain the emergence of maternalist political movements in the late twentieth century (Chapter 8). However, one should be careful not to assume that Latin American feminists were simply following the path of relational feminists in

Europe. Instead, Latin American women's rights groups developed their ideas out of the specific historical, political, and social contexts in which they lived.

By the early twentieth century, socialist feminism had also taken root in many Latin American countries, especially those that were undergoing processes of industrialization. Unlike moderate feminists who sought only greater rights as women within existing political and economic systems, socialist feminists embraced Marxist (or Marxist-Leninist) arguments that in order to change social inequalities, it was first necessary to overthrow capitalism and the governments that buoyed capitalist production. In particular, socialist feminists paid more attention to the plight of working-class women, and especially women factory workers, than more moderate (usually middle-class) feminists generally did. However, although socialist leaders were in theory committed to women's equality, they often prioritized economic issues that were more relevant to men than to problems that they deemed exclusively "women's concerns."

Not all women's rights advocates have embraced feminism, either as a term for describing their goals or as a label on which to hang their identity. Resistance to the term came from both conservative and radical ends of the political spectrum. By the mid- to late twentieth century, most conservative women viewed feminism as going against woman's nature and flying in the face of what they saw as an "inherent" difference between the sexes. Even if they sought political power, these women were careful to identify themselves more with traditional women's roles, and particularly with home life (Chapter 8). Feminism also continued to be both central to and problematic within socialism, even (perhaps especially) in countries in which socialist revolutions occurred (in Latin America, this included Cuba, Nicaragua, and – briefly – Chile). Although socialist governments usually claim to seek gender equality, they have sometimes reinforced rather than eradicated gender differences (Chapter 7). Moreover, socialists often continue to reject the term feminism itself due to their association with a focus on women's rights as bourgeois.

Many poor women – particularly those of indigenous or African descent – likewise refuse to identify as feminists. Historically, there seemed to be no political space in feminist movements for indigenous or Afro-Latin American poor women. Feminists, usually from the middle sectors of society, often ignored the persistent economic problems that

were central in poor women's daily lives, and most refused to acknowledge how racism affected women. Socialist leaders claimed to support women's equality, but in practice tended to marginalize these concerns. Many socialists – though not all – also ignored how racism influenced class and gender experiences. Since the 1970s and 1980s, however, ethnic-based political activism has been on the rise, especially among Latin American indigenous groups. These activists have combined class and cultural concerns, and women have sometimes achieved high leadership positions. Even so, feminism remains largely taboo among these groups, because they associate the term with western values and upper-class agendas. Many indigenous or Afro-Latin American women assume that “feminism” indicates a war between women and men, and they assert that they are interested in working alongside their male peers rather than fighting against them. Even though indigenous and Afro-American women's goals often overlap with feminist goals, the two groups have remained largely separate (Chapter 8).

Motherhood was an ever-present, though sometimes muted, part of these feminist organizations, both advancing their agendas and setting limits on their achievements. Nineteenth-century feminists, for example, celebrated women's roles as mothers and accepted that motherhood gave women a different destiny from men, one ultimately geared toward the private sphere (Chapter 4). In the twentieth century, feminists often conflicted more directly with notions that women should remain at home and identify mainly with motherhood. Their supposedly “modern” notions often came under criticism from conservative politicians and social thinkers (Chapter 5). Assumptions about motherhood also shaped resistance to feminism on the other end of the political spectrum. In Cuba, for example, socialist leaders rejected ideas about women staying in the home with children and pressured them to enter the wage labor force – promising structural support to enable mothers to work, but often falling short of providing adequate facilities (Chapter 7). Within indigenous organizations, motherhood is both highlighted and problematic: on the one hand, women's association with motherhood makes them important bearers of cultural continuity; on the other hand, motherhood responsibilities often make it difficult for women to participate actively in politics (Chapter 8).

Since the 1980s and 1990s, many Latin American feminists have strived to overcome earlier limitations, particularly around race and class dynamics, and one sometimes sees overtures rather than conflict between

feminist and class- or ethnic-based political movements. All the while, motherhood remains an important undercurrent in Latin American politics, either by encouraging individuals and groups to overcome differences or by exacerbating political divisions.

## Motherhood and the Course of Latin American History

Rather than indicate “only what happened in homes,” the theme of motherhood challenges historians to think beyond neat divides between public and private spheres. In order to understand the significance of home life, and how women’s experiences changed over time, one must place domestic concerns within the broader context of political, economic, social, and demographic changes over the course of Latin American history. Consideration of culturally specific gender and family ideas is also necessary. Yet broad historical shifts were themselves influenced by both ideas about motherhood and by mothers, and this too requires attention. The chapters that follow both question historical events and seek to deepen readers’ understanding of them. Early chapters follow a roughly chronological order, paying close attention to class–race differences in the history of motherhood. Later chapters deal primarily with themes that have dominated gender history in Latin America in the mid- to late twentieth century, considering their influences on women of a variety of backgrounds within each chapter. All of these chapters aim to help readers better understand how this history helps to explain why motherhood – in Latin America and around the world – remains a politically important and charged subject in the current day, a concern which is addressed in the epilogue.

## Notes

- 1 Jo Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 18–19.
- 2 The translation of this excerpt from Bachelet’s victory speech is from Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, “Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria: A Woman President,” in Erin E. O’Connor and Leo J. Garofalo, eds, *Documenting Latin America, Volume 2: Gender, Race, and Nation* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall/Pearson, 2011), especially pp. 264–265.

- 3 This quotation appears in Marcel Ríos Tobar, “Chilean Feminism and Social Democracy from the Democratic Transition to Bachelet,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 40:2 (March–April 2007), p. 25.
- 4 Susan Franceschet, “El triunfo de Bachelet y el ascenso político de las mujeres,” *Nueva Sociedad* 202 (Marzo–Abril 2006), p. 14. Other women presidents included Isabel Perón in Argentina (1974–1976), Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua (1990–1997), and Mireya Moscoso in Panama (1999–2004). There were also two other women who filled the presidential seat on an interim basis: Lidia Gueiler Tejada in Bolivia (1979–1980) and Rosalia Arteaga in Ecuador (1997).
- 5 Samuel Schleier, “Latin America’s Demographic Divergence,” <http://www.newgeography.com/content/002874-latin-america%E2%80%99s-demographic-divergence> (last accessed November 7, 2013).
- 6 Alicia Adsera and Alicia Menendez, “Fertility Changes in Latin America in the Context of Economic and Political Uncertainty,” at <http://paa2006.princeton.edu/papers/61407> (last accessed November 7, 2013).
- 7 Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis” in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 42, 45.
- 8 Marcia Stephenson, *Gender and Modernity in Andean Bolivia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 20.
- 9 One of the ground-breaking examinations of masculinity and male violence is William B. Taylor’s book, *Drinking, Homicide, and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979). Taylor does discuss masculine pride in fights and homicide between men, but he identifies this as taking place in “time out” situations while drinking, especially for men who were drinking outside of their home communities in Mexico City.
- 10 Evelyn P. Stevens, “Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo,” in Ann Pescatello ed., *Female and Male in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1973), pp. 89–101.
- 11 Marysa Navarro, “Against Marianismo,” in Rosario Montoya, Lessie Jo Frazier, and Janise Hurtig, eds, *Gender’s Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 257.
- 12 Navarro, pp. 267–268 for Navarro’s reference to “female chauvinism” versus feminist discourses. Other claims were made throughout the essay.
- 13 Lorraine Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity and Politics in Nicaragua, 1979–1999* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 15.
- 14 Bianca Premo, *Children of the Father King: Youth, Authority, and Legal Minority in Colonial Lima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 10.

- 15 Heidi Tinsman, "A Paradigm of Our Own: Joan Scott in Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 113:5 (December 2008), p. 1368.
- 16 Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14:1 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 119–157.
- 17 "Topics in Feminism," from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-topics> (last accessed November 7, 2012).
- 18 Offen, pp. 151–152.