

## **INTRODUCTION: ON WOMEN AND CITIZENSHIP IN LATIN AMERICA AND MEXICO**

What has citizenship, that is to say -the recognition of rights in liberal societies- given women? As Maxine Molyneux notices, cultural representations of gender have traditionally been encoded in political discourses on citizenship in Latin America as elsewhere and these discourses have changed through history. Also changing has been the interface and boundaries between the private and the public. This interface has led to a sort of *essentialism* used as a strategy to gain rights (Molyneux 2000).

According to Pateman and Vogel women's exclusion was part of the 'deal' of the liberal project after the French Revolution: a fraternity in which the men agreed to a contract of equality among themselves and as part of this agreement they obtained the right to rule over the women at the private sphere, men became 'representatives of the family' (cited by Mouffe 1992: 374-76). Therefore citizenship became a masculine model where 'women attributes' are the excuse for their exclusion. Consequently there is the need for a "sexually differentiated concept of citizenship" giving political significance to women's capacities 'including women as women' in a context of civil equality and active citizenship. Maternity would therefore become as relevant politically as the capacity to struggle for the fatherland (Pateman 1992).

According to Dietz, "feminist maternalists" are committed to a notion of female political consciousness that is grounded in the virtues of women's private sphere, primarily in mothering. The "maternalists" want to establish the moral primacy of the family and reconsidering the liberal distinction between private and public consider the private as a "locus for a possible public morality and as model for the activity of citizenship itself" (Dietz 1998:387).

As Molyneux describes it women's struggle to attain any kind of rights in Latin America has been historically shaped by colonialism and Catholicism. The wars of independence and revolutions resulted in a limited male enfranchisement (as

Pateman notices regarding the French revolution). Therefore, women started using the arguments that justified their exclusion, the roles that society gave them, the 'special attributes' they were attributed as their most powerful tool to qualify themselves for political and legal rights (Molyneux 2000). Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they became "feminist maternalists" taking motherhood as their service to the nation that justified their getting rights. These rights were entitled *not in spite of difference but because of difference*.

The granting of rights followed closely "women's virtues" and "natural interests". Women got their first political rights at the local level as the neighbourhood became the extension of the home. In the same way, to work as a social worker was accepted as a way for women to extend their "caring virtues". Besides, social codes granting protection for women and children were among the first to become accepted by those Latin American countries that started to organize a welfare system. When women became the object of mobilization as in Peronist Argentina or Cardenist Mexico the political messages always involved motherly virtues.

So from the beginning women's rights were social rights associated to the protection of the family and the 'race': equality and protection were combined. Equality was understood as a consequence of 'feminine' responsibilities. And from history up to today all political movements adhere to these "motherist" images: from the right to the left. Even among the left and guerrillas movements the image of women is always associated to mothering.

According to Molyneux the association of feminism to citizenship in Latin America has had 2 salient features: *social character and participatory politics* (Molyneux 2000).

The *social character* has had to do with the social and political context in Latin America, the different struggles against dictatorships and social injustice. This has resulted in 'participatory politics' grassroots activism uniting middle and working classes since the 70s, survival struggles in urban marginalized sectors and citizenship struggles in the 80s-90s.

In Mexico this *social and participatory* politics is particularly evident in the 80-s and the 90s. (see Espinosa in this volume). As a reaction to the 80s economic and political crisis women from the urban popular movements became interested in feminist discourses and started forging alliances with middle class activists around certain issues. The end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s brought forward the citizenship struggle where women, once again, were the majority of the activists looking for participatory-and -social responsible versions of citizenship against corrupt and alienated politics of the state. Besides, feminists struggled to make women's participation visible and valued, to include 'lo cotidiano'-democracy permeating the private and the public (Domínguez 2001).

However, a balance of the "transforming" potential of women's participation in popular movements is not always positive, the passage from practical to strategic interests has not always been accomplished. Thus, participatory politics' potential for a democratic society has been questioned even though such participation has indeed changed many women's lives, as we shall presently see.

On the other hand the strategic use of *essentialism*, basing women's rights on women's virtues can be also problematic. Those women that do not assume these roles lose all legitimacy and women as individuals are ignored. Besides, within this strategy women's participation is necessarily associated with public good and masculinity is absolved from any responsibility. Furthermore, certain rights to protection demanded by women also play as disadvantages: for example, the right to protect pregnancy has given way to the discrimination of women job seekers or to compulsory pregnancy tests. This brings forward the problem of how to combine the issues of care and rights.

A third point is that women's participation in different projects has been used by the state and international organizations as a perfect substitute of the works and the services the state was supposed to provide. Thus the 'perverse confluence' between a participatory civil society and neo-liberalisms' goals. This confluence has been studied by several specialists (See Dagnino, Schild, Alvarez in Alvarez, Escobar 1998). All coinciding on the fact that the recent interest of the World Bank

and several aid agencies on focusing on women's projects (through NGOs mediation) has to do not so much with an interest on the development of women as individuals as with the need to cover for the social services previously guaranteed by the state or by the municipalities. This is part of the "privatisation" spirit of the neo-liberal project where women are to be equipped to survive and to help to survive their families and communities.

A fourth point: the struggle for women's representation during the 80s-90s has brought forward the strategy of *politics of difference*: affirmative action and representation quotas. Whereas in the early 80s only 6 % of all parliament representatives in Latin America were women in the late 90s more than dozen countries have a candidate quota system which is supposed to guarantee that at least 30% of all candidates to different legislature positions are women. In Mexico this has been accepted by most parties thanks to the pressures of feminists that went so far as to try to organize a feminist political association, DIVERSA in 1999 or to be an essential part of a new alternative party in 2003, "Mexico Posible". Thus, at the end of the 90s an important current of political activism crystallizes and organizations like "Mujeres y Punto" or "Mujeres en lucha por la democracia" MLD consolidate and grow (See Tarrés and Domínguez chapters in this volume). However, affirmative action has and is being constantly questioned even by large groups of women that feel it is inadequate and even counterproductive to attain equality. Responding to this it is necessary to remember that this is part of a tradition of recognition of rights of representation for historically marginalized groups and that social policies to fight inequality have required measures assuming differential capacities and entitlements.

This raises however another problem: *representation*. How to represent such a heterogeneous group as women? How to avoid falling in reductive and essentialist assumptions? Here it is necessary, once again, to remember Chantal Mouffe's ideas regarding the multiplicity of identities each individual, man or woman carries inside and represents. This plurality leads to different political choices that make the representation of a group based on a certain category, in this case the sexual one, a very difficult task. But even Mouffe accepts that in spite of the

lack of a single essential feminine identity it is possible to create 'nodal points'; *the articulation of demands around the multiple forms in which the category "woman" is constructed as subordinated*. (Mouffe 1992). An example of this in Mexico was the Women's Parliament the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1998 and the diverse campaigns against sexual violence (Domínguez 2001). However, the problem remains: is subordination solved by putting more women in representative or authority positions?

The answer to such a question is related to the problem of diversity that remains and challenges most feminist movements in Latin America in general and in Mexico in particular. The traditional cleavages of class and education that resulted in so many confrontations in the 80s became more complicated by the discourses of ethnicity and sexual identity in the 90s. Nevertheless this has enriched the feminist discourses, making them more self-critical and self-reflective and has multiplied feminist strategies. Citizenship, regarding participation and claims of rights also became enriched: political rights became social rights and these led to ethnical and sexual rights. The combination of women's rights with those we have just mentioned reflected the multiplicity of identities that define women as individuals. In Mexico this became clear with the irruption of a wave of indigenous women's demands together with another wave of young radical feminists during the 90s.

Finally, women as a subordinated category, in all layers and sectors of the Latin American society learned that "they have the right to demand rights" (Dagnino 1998:48). Certainly many problems remain: an authoritarian political culture, a lack of democratisation among state institutions, a low priority given to women's problems reflecting a resistance to integrate them as subjects of public policy and not the least, a lack of a critical mass of women in positions of authority.

The volume illustrates some of the above mentioned problems. It is divided in two parts: the first one addresses the general issues of women and citizenship to follow by a second part focusing on the interface of the concepts of gender, class and ethnicity in such a multicultural country as Mexico.

What has really been attained by women in Mexico? After illustrating in a rather dramatic way women's lack of satisfaction

with their political gains in the Mexican southern state of Oaxaca María Luisa Tarrés tries to make a balance of women's struggles in Mexico. It would seem that even though the last 30 years of the XXth century Mexican women have managed to build what Chantal Mouffe would call "nodal points" around a gender identity and that certain legal and political victories were obtained such gains are part of the political elite's strategy to compensate for a mounting unrest provoked by economic crisis, neo-liberal reforms and a decreasing state responsibility in social issues. Moreover, political institutions don't change easily and women's political representation is still an unsolved issue. Nevertheless, a broad women's movement is gradually consolidated and becomes strong following what Tarrés calls "los encuentros", the "meeting points" of three crucial historical dates: 1982-1985, 1988 and 1994, that is to say economic and political crisis that prepared the country for a political transition towards a multiparty system. The 1990s brought forward several agreements concerning public policies between women's groups, female politicians and government officials that Tarrés gathers in a table where the political actors, the name and the content of the agreement are clearly explained. The view of this table makes such political and legislative conquests look rather impressive. However, the reproduction of discriminatory structures is still a fact, women continue to be a minority at all decision-making levels within the government, the legislative bodies and the judicial system not to speak about the political parties, the trade unions and other influential organizations.

Going beyond the problems of equity within political representation Mercedes Barquet and Sandra Osses explore the significance of gender for citizenship practice in the context of governability. Taking as point of departure a national survey on political culture and citizenship practices Barquet and Osses try to interpret and analyse the results in terms of interest in politics, levels of information, tolerance and participation relating these to several variables like marital status, number of children, the interaction with the public spheres through education and work outside the home and the fact of leaving or staying at the family house. This leads the authors to the construction of four groups combining some of the above mentioned variables and to some interesting findings and suggestive conclusions. One of these findings is that there are

groups of women that possess the necessary capabilities to exercise an active citizenship and still decline to do so thus contributing to a deficit of legitimacy affecting governability. But how do women react to the supposed public virtues a citizen should possess? Do women, as has been alleged by certain feminists, surpass men in the possession of such virtues? Barquet and Osses find out that women are not necessarily more tolerant to other ways of thinking or more responsible towards the community than men and, they are as sceptical as men regarding their belief in the fairness of the application of laws. There is always the issue of the validity of such a survey, of the possible mal-interpretation of the questions, however for Barquet and Osses what this surveys points out is the existence of an "underdeveloped citizenship" affecting both men and women but particularly the latter. Women seem to have not only a subordinated but also a deficient insertion regarding citizenship (in the light of the established political science parameters). Moreover, there seems to be fields prescribed as political in which women are not interested in participating and others where they participate actively but which are not considered as political acts. But more than speaking of "deficits" the authors suggest an "inconclusive process of citizenship building" limited, in a large extent, to the immediate spheres of the satisfaction of needs. This would certainly confirm the *social character* of citizenship that Molyneux has argued as one of the salient features of women's association to citizenship in Latin America.

Trying to grasp the meaning of citizenship for women who exercise it actively the author of this introduction reports in her first contribution in this volume, the final findings of her interviews with about fifty women, active participants in both women and mixed kind of organizations striving for some kind of progressive social and political changes. The initial plan of the project (involving Ines Castro Apreza in Chiapas) was to make a comparison between the perceptions of urban and indigenous women in Chiapas of the notion of citizenship. It seemed to us essential to capture these perceptions in order to test the pre-conditions for the development of a democratic culture in a country so marked by authoritarian and patriarchal political traditions. The fact that women were the majority of the grassroots participants in all kind of social protests made us interested in their experiences, ideas and expectations.

However, the comparison between urban and rural women became extremely difficult. It showed the existence of two worlds so far from each other that a systematic comparison was obviously problematic. Instead we chose to follow each of us our own path with some bridges as in the case of my article on the views of urban participant women on Zapatista women, ethnicity and class in this anthology.

As in the case of the study of Barquet and Osses, in the interviews with urban participant women several variables were taken into account, age, educational level, family situation, religion and kind of organization to which these women belonged. Even though this was not a representative sample, the resulting profile of these participant women would fulfil the "individuation" criteria created by Tarrés and mentioned by Barquet and Osses: most of these women have no small children to take care of, they have a middle or high education level, a middle or high level of information on public issues, they are economically active or students, and few are active or semi-active Catholics. Also, those women from the urban-popular movements are the less inclined to be identified as feminists even though their views can be considered as such.

Most of these women associate citizenship with rights and participation, thus confirming Molyneux's second feature of women and citizenship in Latin America, *participatory politics*. Interestingly, the rights they mention are not always the same and some rights seem to lead to others, for example civil rights to sexual or to ethnic rights. Regarding their own reflections on gender the majority of these women point to the interiorised and external obstacles that women, in contrast to men, have to surmount in order to participate. And, most of them idealize women's public virtues even though those participating in women organizations are less inclined to do so. Another point of agreement is the identification of political power as extremely masculine and authoritarian and the need to create a "new political style" to which women's public virtues would necessarily contribute.

Participation is mostly associated with positive and enriching experiences. There is however another side of the coin. Some of these women refer to the personal costs in terms of marital conflicts sometimes leading to ruptures and others to struggles



of power which would prove wrong the association women and public virtues, specially those regarding tolerance, honesty and solidarity. Whatever the balance of these experiences of participation it seems clear that the findings of this study would reinforce the conclusions of the previously mentioned chapters as to the need to increase the engagement of women and their representation in order to break the authoritarian political culture existing today.

The lack of positive role models regarding women leaders is something that has been discussed several times before. The fact that many of the modern female state or government heads have inherited their position through the political career of their male family members has legitimised more than challenged the typical role models regarding women and power. Women inheriting these high positions have rarely reclaimed themselves as feminists, on the contrary, their task has been regarded as the fulfilment of the same kind of duties they had as wives, daughters or mothers. As Christina Alnevall writes regarding stories about presidents and their wives, "the construction of femininity should be understood in relation to the construction of masculinity, a heterosexual tango where the men's moves govern and the women's steps are adapted to them". However, Alnevall wants to test this description through the discourse analysis of a biographic portrait of Mexico's current first lady, Martha Sahagún de Fox.

Through the analysis of this biographical text, Alnevall finds a contradictory image where the classical female virtues, seen as complement of the male ones, mix with a masculine power-seeking pattern. Saint-like images are put together with the desperate need for control, charity and sacrifice with disregard for poor women's conditions, claims of equality within marriage with portraits of a traditional wife. The analysed text portrays Martha Sahagún as engaged in the service of "her people" in voluntary political work that was clearly orientated towards a political career. Her class belonging and luxury tastes are also contrasted to her social engagement in the model of a "Mexican Evita". These different competing roles show the need to legitimise and somehow disguise, make more palatable the track of a woman's political career that would otherwise confront such a conservative political establishment that curtails even women belonging to the elite. This reminds us of the

gender- focused strategies that according to Molyneux Latin American women used in order to obtain their rights and that are used here to obtain power.

Gender as a concept, as a notion is always contingent, contextualized. Having presented the general problems women in Mexico confront in their claims towards an active citizenship and fair political representation we proceed towards the interface gender, class and ethnicity.

As we have already noticed, the middle class feminist movement from the 60s and 70s reaches finally the urban popular movement in the 80s and the indigenous movement in the 90s. In her chapter on “popular feminism” and citizenship Gisela Espinosa Damián gives us a unique historical analysis of the birth and development of the “feminist popular” movements in Mexico, their relationship to “historical and ‘civil’ feminism” and to the left organizations, their internal contradictions and finally their encounter with citizenship struggles during the 90s. But what encompasses the notion of “popular feminism”? According to Espinosa Damián this includes women from both popular-urban movement (struggling for housing and survival rights), the peasant movement, lower employees and workers organizations. Among the factors that contributed to the rise of the movement we have the crisis of the 80s and the action of feminist and left activists, some of them linked to the liberation theology groups of those years. As a consequence, “popular feminism” would always have two important points of reference: the feminist movement and the left. This reference would be both supporting and problematic, several contradictions would arise from the beginning affecting all the movements involved.

It is also interesting to notice how “popular feminism” takes feminist ideas and reconstructs them around the central subjects in their struggles: paid work, trade union organization, agrarian property rights and living conditions in poor rural and urban communities. Class and gender enter into an alliance that had problems to find a balance, “popular feminism” and “historical feminism” pulling towards different sides. But “popular feminism” had its own contradictions, the movement is complex and diverse and this heterogeneity became also an obstacle to the creation of unified fronts in the middle and long term.

Finally, the citizenship and electoral struggles of the 90s proved to be too challenging for “popular feminism”. At the same time that “historical feminism” and feminist NGOs became active in these struggles and elaborated a new ‘feminist citizen’ discourse with the aim to influence public policies and reclaim political representation, “popular feminism” had to jump from social to political mobilization and from informal to formal politics. This challenge implied a certain deconstruction of identities and a reconstruction of their experiences to match these with citizen struggles. This could easily be illustrated with one of the interviews accounted for in chapter three in this volume. When a woman from a housing organization is asked to explain what is the meaning of citizenship for her she explains that it is the duty to help those that are being dislodged from their houses, to advise them as to the alternatives they had. Unfortunately, according to Espinosa Damián these challenges broke “popular feminism”, some groups became part of “*clientelar*” networks serving the state or diverse political parties, other continued their social demands struggles while still others joined the centre-left opposition. Nevertheless, the participation experience of this movement remains essential for any kind of democratisation process.

The contradictions and conflicts between what Espinosa called “historic feminism”, and the Zapatista women’s movement introduces the crossroads of gender and ethnicity in this volume. This is the second chapter in this volume that reports the findings of the already mentioned project on women and citizenship in Mexico based on semi-structured interviews with urban participant and non-participant women from different cities in Mexico (see above). Following a discussion on gender and racism in Mexico this chapter analyses and compares the reactions and positions of members of “the hegemonic feminism” and interviewed grass root women to both the Zapatista movement and to the demands of the indigenous women within it.

As in the cases presented by Espinosa Damián regarding the relationship “historical-popular feminism” we find again a very critical view from the part of well known-established feminists towards both the Zapatista movement in general, criticising their use of armed tactics, and the indigenous women’s demands

disqualifying them as feminist. This position is highly suspicious of the authenticity of these demands thus expressing serious doubts as to the indigenous women's capability of developing a feminist discourse. This reinforces consequently the image of indigenous people as "minors". There are of course other positions even among urban feminists and certainly among the interviewed women. These positions go from uncritical to critical support depending on such factors as participation, belonging to a woman or mixed organization, level of information, age and educational level. I found a more uncritical support associated to low levels of information and belonging to mixed urban-popular organizations. It is here one can also notice a more self-critical attitude and a deeper solidarity engagement with indigenous women whose capabilities are re-valued. At the other end we find feminist participants, with a higher level of information, sceptical as to the possibilities of Zapatista women to change the gender patterns in their communities and questioning the radicalism and feminism of these indigenous women's claims.

To conclude I argue that even if we accept the existence of serious obstacles to the process of change of gender patterns in the indigenous communities (as we shall presently see), the findings I have just presented would require from the "hegemonic feminism" serious reflections on its flexibility and tolerance of other kind of feminisms and on its own responsibility in the perpetuation of embedded racist structures.

The final two chapters in this volume make important contributions to the discussion on gender and ethnicity. Both Inés Castro Apreza and Isabel Altamirano are interested in exploring the concept of customary law, "*usos y costumbres*", and how this affects gender relationships in indigenous communities.

Inés Castro Apreza who also took part in the project of women and citizenship in Mexico already mentioned, takes as point of departure the development of the concept of *civil society* among Chiapas indigenous mobilizations since the irruption of the Zapatista movement. This term, re-signified as a citizenship practice, has been appropriated by the indigenous communities replacing all other concepts of social organizations. It has also given otherwise marginalized groups, the possibility of

participation. This is the case of peasants lacking land rights and specially of women. At the same time, the *civil society* conception and the new practices generated by the Zapatista movement have not solved the problem of exclusion and intolerance that continue to be legitimised by tradition, the so called “*usos y costumbres*” in the communities. These traditions often contradict in practice, in the daily life, the Zapatista revolutionary laws for women that nevertheless are gaining ground.

Inés Castro Apreza illustrates these issues with the personal history of a Tzeltal couple in the village of Petalcingo, in the Northern, tropical forest area of Chiapas. This is a region where Zapatista and popular organizations, *the civil society* have gained influence giving way to an increased women participation in public life, provoking resistance and creating violence that not only affects women and children but also those men that cannot cope with these changes. The conflicts and dramatic fate of Pepe and Aurora, the couple chosen by Castro Apreza, reflect this process. We can thus observe the enormous obstacles that social change has to surmount in such traditional communities even in favourable political circumstances. And as Castro Apreza remarks, “social change is always possible but it is not always as swift as social actors within and outside the community would wish”.

The discussion on traditional norms and customary law continues with Isabel Altamirano’s article on the situation of indigenous women in Oaxaca. Isabel Altamirano discusses the paradoxes of the “*política de la tradición*” that is customary law, can be detrimental for marginalized groups within the communities themselves. As in the case of Chiapas, indigenous groups in Oaxaca have claimed the right of governing themselves according to these traditional norms and have obtained important legal reforms in this sense since the mid 90s. However, these traditional norms exclude women from land property and hence from political and civil participation and even if socio-economic conditions –men’s migration in search of jobs- have increased women’s participation, this has only been in their capacity of temporary “replacements” of their family men. Thus, women’s responsibilities have increased but not their rights.

Nevertheless, argues Altamirano, the discrimination women suffer within their communities is also a reflection of the general gender discrimination women in general suffer in Mexico reinforced by processes like the feminization of poverty. Fortunately, the same popular forces that reclaim their right to the recognition of customary law have also given way to women's mobilizations that in spite of the obstacles illustrated by Inés Castro Apreza's article, seem difficult to stop (as the picture illustrating this volume shows).

As we can see, the images given by this volume are rich and contradictory, they portray processes of advance and retreat, gains and backlashes, alliances and conflicts. Women construct and reconstruct a citizenship participation that reclaims to be 'gendered' in order to be exercised but confronts structural and unavoidable obstacles from the community to the highest levels of society. On the other hand, Mexican women, as elsewhere is far from being an homogenous group and internal divides that have to do with class, ethnicity but also with political positions and other kind of affiliation (including feminism), experiences and even age, weaken but also enrich their gender struggles. What we are witnessing is a process, a kind of war in which battles are important but not definite. Important advances have been made and even if backlashes are unavoidable, the process, hopefully, shall continue.

Edmé Domínguez  
Editor

#### Referencias

**Alvarez, Sonia** (1998) "Latin American Feminisms 'Go global': Trends of the 1990s and Challenges for the New Millenium" en Alvarez Sonia, Dagnino Evelina and Escobar Arturo, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of culture*, US: Westview Press.

**Dagnino, Evelina** (1998) "Culture, Citizenship and Democracy" en Alvarez Sonia, Dagnino Evelina and Escobar Arturo, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of culture*, US: Westview Press.

**Dietz, Mary** (1998) Context is all: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship" en Phillips A. *Feminism and Politics*, Oxford University Press.

**Domínguez R., Edmé; Castro A., Inés** (2001) "Citizenship and Women in Mexico: Searching for a New Political Culture? Views and Experiences of Participants and Non-Participants" en *Political Action in Discussing Women's Empowerment, Theory and Practice*. Sida studies no. 3.

**Mouffe, Chantal** (1992) "Feminism, Citizenship and radical Democratic Politics" en Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Routledge.

**Molyneux, Maxine** (2000) "Gender and Citizenship in Latin America: historical and contemporary issues" en Molyneux, (ed.) *Women's movements in International Perspective*, Palgrave.

**Pateman, Carole** (1992) "Equality, Difference, Subordination, the Politics of Motherhood and Women's Citizenship" en Bock and James, (eds.), *Beyond Equality and Difference. Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, Routledge. London and New York.

Phillips, Anne (1991b) "Citizenship and Feminist Theory" en Geoff Andrews (ed.) *Citizenship*, Lawrence & Wishart, London.