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*To my husband Keith whose belief in me
never faltered and whose unconditional
love and support has made this work possible*

The political activism in the literature of Latin American women, like the political actions of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and similar groups has become an activity of incalculable force.

Marjorie Agosín, 1986

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Abstract

This thesis explores the interaction of gender and the construction of the Argentine state. It pays particular attention to the emergence of women's movements as well as women's writing and the way in which both reflect and express the history of the Argentine state after independence.

Beginning with a brief account of Argentine independence and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento as founding-father of the Argentine nation, part one focuses on the historical periods of the Liberal State, Peronism, and the military dictatorships of the 1960s and early 1970s. It investigates how national discourse incorporated gender discourse without including women as citizens in their full right. It then explores how women's movements articulated their ensuing discontent with the patriarchal system that attempted to ensure continuity of this exclusion.

Part two identifies and analyzes selected texts by nineteenth and twentieth century Argentine female authors. Written from a specifically female standpoint, these novels and short stories articulate women's grievances with the political developments addressed in part one.

Introduction

This thesis explores female political activism and female literary engagement in Argentina as a response by women to the Argentine state. Taking into account women's multiple identities and interests, this thesis investigates these activisms chronologically in two parts during the Liberal State, Peronism, and the military governments of the 1960s and 1970s.

The first Latin American political women's movements emerged in Argentina shortly after independence. Moreover, with an uninterrupted presence in the tradition of female authors since 1830, women's cultural activism in Argentina is one of the most potent in Latin America. In order to effect social reform, women have reacted and responded to political developments, with either civil rights campaigns or with literary production amongst others.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how both these activisms have provided a space for women to give expression to a specifically female historical perspective of Argentine culture and society. Furthermore, it underlines the need for an interdisciplinary approach in the investigation of women's activisms in order to reveal links between different forms of female expression and gain insight into specifically female concerns which have largely been disregarded by the political classes.

Chapter one is concerned with the complexity of nation-building in the Argentine republic after independence from Spain. The wars of independence in the early nineteenth century precipitated the first crisis of the cultural pattern that had been established gradually since the conquest.¹ The French Enlightenment of the

¹ From the first encounter of Spanish with indigenous culture a new cultural model emerged, heavily influenced by Catholicism, leaning towards political authoritarianism and not very open to scientific

eighteenth century, British Liberalism and, later in the nineteenth century, Auguste Comte's positivism played an important role in this process. New forms of stratification emerged that did not depend on racial criteria as had been the case until then. Scientific rationality of nineteenth century Europe began to influence the dominant Latin American classes as well as academics and intellectuals. They thought that the new scientific criteria were the only way to 'order and progress' for the new republics (Larrain, 1994:41). As the subject was replaced by the citizen and the institutions of popular sovereignty became established, it was necessary to define the populace: self government requires a community that is to be the self. The demand for popular sovereignty was accompanied by the difficult task, the fundamental problem of defining the nation or community that was to exercise this sovereignty (Kamenka, 1976:14). Establishing the self, however, requires the positioning of an 'other' against which the self can be defined and which represents everything that the self is not. An important element in that self-recognition is the position of 'liminal groups' who confuse the boundaries between the inside and the outside. As Norton has argued: "Liminars serve as mirrors for nations; at once other and alike, they provide the occasion for the nation to constitute itself in reflection upon its identity" (1988:55, cited in Dodds, 1993). In the case of the Argentine state the *gauchos*, *mestizos* by and large, Afro-Argentines or Indian peoples as well as women in general were prime examples of liminal groups. They all served as a source of identification for the state.

The chapter focuses on Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's work *Facundo*, a thesis that has characterized the Argentine nation in terms of two opposing cultural trends: urban civilization and rural barbarism. Sarmiento and the famous 'Generation of 37' delineated the parameters of the Argentine nation with the

reason. This model coexisted comfortably with slavery, the inquisition and the religious monopoly of the Catholic Church.

objective of establishing a European, urban, 'civilised' culture, which, in order to be created, needed the selection of a set of representations that involved, by inclusion and exclusion, various social sectors. The early Argentinean nation-builders perceived the violence that plagued the republic in its early stages as an inherent characteristic of its people which they, in time, came to believe was a decisive element of their destiny. With *Facundo*, Sarmiento established a dichotomous Argentine founding ethos which has influenced the country's subsequent state formations and governments in terms of exclusionary politics and the justifiable use of state violence

In Argentina, like elsewhere, cultural representations constituted a key tool in the socio-cultural construction of the 'other' and, therefore, in the creation of new identities, not only in terms of nation but also of class, race, and gender; all of which contributed to the formation of the collective imaginary which supported the 'imagined community' (Marre, 2001:29).

Chapter one also addresses the place of women within this community as imagined by Sarmiento. Despite his success in creating numerous academic institutions aimed at the advance of women's education, their instruction was limited to the improvement and expansion of traditional female activities related to the home and child-rearing. Furthermore, only women of a certain class and status became the beneficiaries of Sarmiento's educational reforms, while others remained excluded.

Further investigation into Sarmiento's exclusionary politics in terms of class, race and ethnicity as well as his aggressive suggestions and strategies to deal with undesirable sectors of society concludes chapter one. It thereby highlights the exclusion of various social sectors from the national discourse despite their significant presence during the independence struggles and their important political and economic role in the construction of the Argentine nation.

Drawing predominantly on the theory of Yuval-Davies, part one of chapter two addresses the prominent presence of gender discourse in Argentine nation-building. With respect to women, gender relations have influenced the construction of national identity, political ideologies, cultural politics, and education long before they were considered citizens, (Potthast & Scarzanella, 2001:7). A broad trend in the study of citizenship recognizes that the specific location of people in society - their group membership and categorical definition by gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, 'race', ability, age or life cycle stage - mediates the construction of their citizenship as 'different' and thus determines their access to entitlements and their capacity to exercise independent agency (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999:5).

The chapter then sheds light on the participation of women in the struggle for emancipation of the colony. Women are said to have played a minor supporting role in the fight for liberation from colonial rule as wives and daughters, or perhaps serving the soldiers as nurses, cooks or prostitutes (Williamson, 1992:237-9). They were defined as 'outside' combat even though they were present in the villages and on the battlefield. They served as camp followers and auxiliaries at the front, differentiated from men only in that they did not carry weapons. (Brewster, 2005:20). Naturally, women were present during the independence wars and formed part of the cultural and ideological plans and programmes that were to be implemented in order to construct a nation with its own national identity - not as independent agents of their own fate but rather as a part of society that served to reinforce the continuity of the colonial patriarchal hierarchy. Because women and the family are located in the private domain which is not seen as politically relevant, nationalism and nations have been discussed as part of the public domain

and the exclusion of women from that arena has led to their exclusion from that discourse as well (Yuval-Davis, 1997:14).

One important feature of continuity is procreation. A vital element in nationalist family policy, it guarantees the perpetuation of national culture, values and genetic characteristics (Yuval-Davis, 1997:14). In order to ensure a 'white' and 'civilized' Argentine nation, a variety of groups of women were marginalized, as mothers and as citizens, since they did not display the desirable qualities the state wished for in future generations. Chapter two identifies some of these female sectors and the state's manipulative strategies to render their members invisible and silent.

Staying with the themes of motherhood and citizenship, chapter two also draws on the identity theories of Charles Taylor (1989) and Axel Honneth (1995) in order to reveal the dilemma faced by women as their changing legal and social position became incompatible with the state's ambiguous requirements of women as mothers and citizens. After all, the discourses of motherhood and the particular figures and images of mothers are produced and reproduced at particular historical moments, so that motherhood has to be seen as a contingent identity, that is one produced discursively within different cultures at different times, rather than being fixed or rooted in an essentially female biology. Motherhood is an identity that can be negotiated and rearticulated within particular political, social and economic circumstances. It presents a contested identity where new figures of motherhood emerge within particular discourses in a climate of social and economic change (Woodward, 1997:281-2).

The chapter then goes on to explore how the resulting discontent led to the emergence of female political activism looking at various women's social movements of different political hue. Also important is the nascent concept of political motherhood which has been addressed within those early movements. A

brief exploration of the roles of fathers concludes chapter two in order to obtain a more rounded picture of the state's influences on family life at the time.

Chapter three is concerned with Peronism, a multifaceted historical phenomenon and a fundamental element in Argentine politics of the twentieth century, which has awarded such a particular character to Argentine society that it has generated worldwide academic interest. Inexhaustible analyses of the nature of Peronism have been produced by a large number of political scientists. Since Peronism *per se* is not the topic of this project, I have abstained from trying to produce an analysis of its nature as a political movement. However, Peronism had such a decisive impact on the Argentine women's (and working class) movement, not only at the time of its rise but until the present day, that a brief exploration of its causes and effects was essential in order to analyze the women's movement during the first Peronist period (1946-55) and beyond.

As immigration had virtually stopped by 1930, the necessary workforce now came from Argentina's rural regions and settled in the outskirts of the big cities (Halperín Donghi, 1972:21).² Although industry flourished enormously, workers did not enjoy the fruits of their activities in the same proportion. A fraudulent and corrupt state machinery headed by a powerful rural and urban elite kept wages low and working conditions inadequate (James, 1988:8). Partially due to women's integration into industry during the 1930s and early 1940s women had come to represent a considerable part of the country's industrial work force. Disproportional to both the working class' and women's contributions to the country's economy, reforms regarding their political participation were not forthcoming. At first, chapter three outlines the reforms and failures of the *Unión*

² Two thirds of these migrants were women and by 1949 women came to represent 31.37% of the capital city's industrial workers (Hollander, 1974:42). Nationwide, by 1950, women constituted 50.12% of the textile workers, 67.96% garment workers, and 31.17% of its chemical workers (Hollander, 1974:45).

Cívica Radical and the subsequent military *coup* in 1930 in order to provide the historical setting and circumstances that led to the rise of Juan Perón.

The chapter then moves to outline Perón's strategies in order to gain electoral support from the working classes. A crucial component within this endeavour was Perón's attempt to synthesize opposing elements of Argentina's founding legacies: civilization as prescribed by Sarmiento and political authority as asserted by Rosas.

The radical social reforms in favour of women and the working classes implemented by Juan and Eva Perón have also been addressed in chapter three. However, it also outlines the state's manipulation of the women's movement in as much as it underlines the fact that these reforms moved within traditional gender roles and served mainly to gain female votes.

Taking into account the politically central position held by Eva Perón, the chapter then explores her contribution to the enormous popularity of Peronism as well as some aspects of her persona that are less well documented.

Chapter four investigates female participation in urban revolutionary movements, particularly within the *Montoneros* during the late 1960s and early 1970s. At first, the chapter outlines the conception of such organizations which resulted from the severe crisis Peronism experienced for attempting to reform Argentina's socio-economic structures and the increasing authoritarian nature of the regime.

Due to the retrograde policies towards women during the military governments that followed Peronism in the 1960s as well as the emergence of second-wave feminism in the developed countries, feminist groups and movements emerged within political parties or independently across Argentina. Their interests and strategies varied significantly from those of women active in militant organizations.

Included in Chapter four is the disclosure of the discrepancies between these simultaneous movements.

Women's experiences at the time present a history in its own right which, although not independent from men's history, has to be evaluated as a history with particular characteristics and features (Pasquali, 2005:125). The chapter, therefore, addresses the relationship and ensuing complexities between the leadership of revolutionary organizations and the women active within them. This part of the chapter is based predominantly on interviews with women active at the time as documented by Marta Diana (2006) and Feijóo et al (1996). The aim of this part of the chapter is to expound on women's experiences in the attempt to effect social changes and the difficulties they faced in trying to match the traditional female image, particularly in their role as mothers, while living in a dangerous and unstable environment.

Part two of this thesis explores the ways in which female writers during each of these historical periods responded to state and government in their literary productions. To this end, the works of two women writers feature in each chapter; one who is relatively famous and a second who is less well known. This format is deliberate and sets out to enhance existing knowledge on women's literary production in Argentina through detailed engagement with women's voices which have been hitherto under-explored.

Chapter five first outlines the emergence of a number of female writers during the early decades of the nineteenth century. It explores the strategies of these pioneering authors for finding entrance into the public sphere through the publication of their work. They particularly highlight women's grievances with the political systems as profoundly different from those experienced by men, challenging, even at this early stage, the notion of separate private and public spheres.

The chapter then analyzes the work of Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818-1892), whose writings were among the most widely read in Latin America. Gorriti strongly criticised social injustices and particularly highlighted women's suffering caused by political instability and conflict. However, Gorriti never transgressed social conventions in terms of her language and style but sought to improve women's status within traditional gender relations.

Juana Manso, in contrast, whose work also has been addressed in chapter five, can be classed as an early feminist. Far ahead of her time, she advocated no less than a socio-political revolution demanding women's equality with men in all aspects of life by attempting to subvert traditional gender roles.

The final part of chapter five looks at a nineteenth century recipe book as yet another vehicle for women to enter public discourse.

Chapter six is concerned with Peronism's influence on women's literary productions and how these women articulated their experiences in this political era of profound social change.

At first, the chapter explores Perón's attitude towards Argentine literature in general. Then, it looks at the work of Marta Lynch (1925-1985) whose continuous but frustrated attempts to gain recognition on the political stage found expression in her prolific career as an author. Particular attention has been given to her novel, *La señora Ordóñez* (1968), in which Lynch conveys a woman's struggle to adapt to the rapidly changing social demands on women while at the same time trying to escape the confinements of woman's place imposed on her by a specifically female language as coined by Lakoff (1975).

The chapter also analyzes the novel *El incendio y las visperas* (1964) by Beatriz Guido (1924-1988). Unlike Lynch, who addresses the invasion of women's life by

the political system, Guido tells of the disruption by Peronism of the traditional class system and the resulting severe division of Argentine society as a whole.

Chapter seven first outlines Argentina's political development, the increasingly oppressive nature of the regime, writers' struggle to articulate the significance of this experience and, thereby, making sense of the system's deterioration. The military dictatorship of the 1970s in Argentina gave rise to the so-called Narrative of the Dirty War (Corbatta, 1999:22). Luisa Valenzuela's (1938-) novel *Cola de lagartija* (1983) belongs to this genre and has been analyzed in chapter seven. In this work, Valenzuela creates a monstrous character whose historical counterpart is José López Rega whom the writer posits within the Argentine tradition of the monster as cultural discourse. The novel has to be understood as an act of resistance which can only be expressed indirectly; it alludes to the dominant discourse but presents it as a caricature, in order to undermine its manipulative force.

The last part of chapter seven looks at some of the short stories by Liliana Heker (1938-). Her work also belongs to Dirty War-literature and is, like most of Valenzuela's work, concerned with solving the problem of relating reality in literature at a time when the state imposed a unilateral version of reality in order to purge any possible opposition to the system. Heker's protagonists all experience an invasion of their private or professional lives by the authoritarian regime. Consequently, their perception of self becomes distorted by the state's manipulations. Their tactics and motives to maintain some degree of normality varies but they all ultimately recognize that they are powerless in their efforts to retain their original identity.

Chapter 1

Sarmiento - A Tale of Two Cultures

This chapter provides the historical setting for the creation - or invention to speak in Shumway's (1991) terms - of Argentina and the foundational building blocks of its culture and politics with special focus on those social sectors that were excluded from the national project. Particular attention has been given to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's work, *Facundo, Civilización y Barbarie*, and the logic behind his reasoning which has formed the basis for the legitimization of exclusionary politics and the use of force as a means to quell popular unrest.

The chapter then explores the position of women within Sarmiento's ideology. Despite the significant improvements he effected regarding female education, reform of women's civil rights remained elusive and women continued to form the largest of the socially marginalized sectors, relegated to the home and traditional female activities.

Finally, the chapter examines Sarmiento's recommendations for the treatment of other social groups that were to be excluded from the national project, despite their decisive contributions to the success of the independence struggles and the economic development of the country.

Civilization and Barbarism

Due to the lack of a solution to the vitally important problem of national organization, national unity remained elusive after the declaration of independence even though ten years had elapsed since the colony challenged Spain's authority. The constitution in 1819, produced by the Congress of Tucumán, did not establish the form of government that was to be adopted but it showed 'unitarian' characteristics and was formulated in a way that resembled a constitutional monarchy (several of the Congress' participants were negotiating the coronation of a princess¹ in the Río de la Plata) and, although republican in form, closely maintained the colonial system (Burgin, 1946:76). The constitution reaffirmed the supremacy of Buenos Aires; it curtailed the political and fiscal autonomy of the provinces; it excluded the popular masses from political life of the nation; it assured political control to a group of men whose monarchical convictions and inclinations were widely known.

A decade of conflict between capital and provinces, between central government and regional rights, between Unitarians and Federalists followed and the political framework in the Río de la Plata collapsed. Independent republics emerged and sought to defend their interests which involved taking their struggles to Buenos Aires. After the government was practically destroyed by gaucho and Indian armies following the northern *caudillos*, the capital became drenched in almost total anarchy. In a desperate bid to liberate themselves from the lawless hordes, the *porteños* invited the *estancieros* from the south to come to their rescue. Juan Manuel de Rosas, the wealthiest and most powerful amongst them was only too ready to follow this call since it was in his own interest to avoid an advance of the northern *caudillos* to the

¹ Carlota Joaquina, sister of Fernando VII and wife of João VI, King of Portugal who by then resided in Brazil.

southern *estancias* (Lynch, 1992:85). It can be said, therefore, that it was not the case that Rosas suddenly decided to wage a war against the Unitarian capital and to subsequently oppress its population but that he was effectively asked to combat the belligerent invaders. Because of this, he was later able to justify his actions by claiming that he had acted in favour of the common good and assumed the - not entirely unjustified - title of 'restorer of the law'. In return for his services he was rewarded by the government with even more land. It can be assumed that those who solicited Rosas' help expected him to return to his *estancia* once order was restored but he, of course, seized the opportunity to acquire more military and political power². Once he was in power, he exterminated his rival *caudillos*, some of them once his allies, so that they could no longer stand in his way. The fate of the now 'masterless' peasants and workers was then placed into the hands of inept commanders incapable of disrupting his path to success and power.

Depending on political philosophies, it can be said that coalescing into a political unit took Argentina around seventy years. The country's establishment as a nation can be variously dated starting with its break from Spain in 1810 and the declaration of independence in 1816, through to the abortive constitutions of 1819 and 1826, the federal pact between the coastal provinces of 1831, the constitution of 1853³, the first constitutional government of all the provinces in 1862, up to the federalization of Buenos Aires in 1880 (see Scobie, 1964).

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-88) explained the problem as an internal cultural conflict between civilization and barbarism and as a specific condition within

² Rosas was not against constitutional, central government. In a letter to Juan Facundo Quiroga in 1834 he clearly expressed the republic's need for national organization within the framework of a constitution; however, at the time he strongly believed that regional constitutions had to be implemented in order to restore law and order before the drafting of a national constitution could be contemplated. "In this lamentable state we need now to create everything anew, working modestly at first, and then, gradually, introducing a general system that embraces everything" (Nouzeilles & Montaldo, 2002:77)

³ The constitution of 1853 is the one still in force today although it has been amended eight times since 1860 until the most recent amendment in 1994.

Argentina. A politician, journalist, and educator, Sarmiento wrote his most famous work, *Facundo, Civilización y Barbarie* while exiled in Chile during the Rosas dictatorship. The most widely read of Sarmiento's work, *Facundo* has invited myriad of comments, praise as well as criticism. With this work, a biography of the *caudillo* Facundo Quiroga (1790-1835) and at the same time an attack on Rosas, Sarmiento tries to explain Argentina's long history of civil unrest and volatile political scene.

***Facundo* - a foundational text**

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was a central intellectual figure among those who fought against Rosas. Together with other members of the *Generación del 37*⁴ he is considered one of the founding fathers of modern Argentina where, like elsewhere in Latin America, independence had given rise to the problem of establishing a political and social organization for the new nation.

The figure of Quiroga, most noticeable for his opposition to Rosas in the attempt to organize the country within the framework of a constitution is, however, only marginally important. Of much more interest are Sarmiento's ideas and his view of

⁴ A movement of young intellectuals who, in 1837, founded the *Salón Literario* in a book shop owned by Marcos Sastre in Buenos Aires. They debated cultural issues, social, political, and philosophical theories by European thinkers across the ideological spectrum. The increasing politicization of the group and its critical and reformist opinions led to the salon's closure by Rosas. Clandestinely and led by Esteban Echeverría, Juan Bautista Alberdi, and Juan María Gutierrez, the *Asociación de la Joven Generación Argentina* was founded in 1838 with the objective to resuscitate the liberal tradition of the May Revolution, stimulate material progress, and put an end to the polarization between Federalists and Unitarians by influencing the ruling classes accordingly and support them ideologically. They considered representative democracy as a long term aim and questioned the universal suffrage law implemented in Buenos Aires as early as 1821 because of the political consequences it had led to (in August of that year a new House of Representatives was elected who, in turn elected Rosas governor with 'extraordinary power'), and because they believed that the law was inadequate for Argentina's social reality at the time. To explain and understand this reality was one of the main objectives of the group. By the late 1830s, the members of the group openly opposed Rosas and many emigrated to Montevideo, Chile, Bolivia, Europe, or Argentina's interior where they founded branches of the *Joven Generación Argentina*. Apart from the ones already mentioned above, Domingo F. Sarmiento, Bartolomé Mitre, Vicente F. López, José Mármol, and Miguel Cané were amongst the most famous members of this association.

Argentina's past which he uses to unravel the country's present problems and as a prescription for how to avoid them in the future (Gandía, 1962:68).

The importance of *Facundo* to the subsequent development of Argentine political ideology and literary culture must not be under-estimated. *Facundo* can be seen as the paternal text; it is the foundation of a collective image of self-representation based on violence. The relationship between a previous text and a new one brings forth the idea of paternal authority as a major theme in literature, against which the writer of the new text must struggle (Said, 1975: 108 - 10, in De Grandis). The text becomes a common point of reference and establishes kinship with subsequent writings, their authors, and their readership.

Violence and authoritarianism have characterised Argentina's origins as a modern nation. Its literature is based on a mythology in which political violence is a core feature of narratives of self-representation. Culture and nation are shaped to a great extent by representation of violence through a rich, metaphorical range of themes, myths, figures, styles, and techniques. *Facundo, Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) is the foundational myth from which debate on political violence and culture evolved. Ever since, Argentine literature has reinterpreted this myth, particularly in times of oppression (De Grandis, 2003:91). *Facundo* establishes the pattern that would be preserved from the time of its writing until the present day. Originally conceived as a scheme for the study of the precarious Argentinean cultural structure - then subjected to the bloodthirsty strictures of *caudillismo* - Sarmiento's thesis turned into a universal analysis no longer limited to Argentina but referring to specific Latin American characteristics.

For Sarmiento, Argentina's predominant ailment was its susceptibility to be ruled chaotically by tyrannical *caudillos*. However, there was little one could do about it since this receptiveness for chaos and violence was caused by three major, pre-existing conditions. First, Sarmiento looked to geography, the vast expanse of the country:

Its own extent is the evil from which the Argentine Republic suffers... Immensity is the universal characteristic of the country: the plains, the woods, the rivers, are all immense; and the horizon is always undefined, always lost in haze and delicate vapours that forbid the eye to mark the point in the distant perspective, where the land ends and the sky begins. (*Facundo*, Chapter one in *The Argentina Reader*, 81)⁵

One could not live safely in this vast emptiness; "hordes of ever watchful savages" lived to the north and south; and "when not fearful of the approach of the savage, the plainsman had equal cause to dread the keen eyes of the tiger, or the viper beneath his feet" (*The Argentina Reader*, 81). This permanent insecurity created, according to Sarmiento, a "certain stoical resignation to death by violence which is regarded as one of the inevitable probabilities of existence" (*The Argentina Reader*, 81), the ever present danger had desensitized the inhabitant of the *pampas* to killing or being killed. Sarmiento perceived similarities between the Argentine countryside and Asian or Middle Eastern regions and he compared the lines of wagons carrying travellers with caravans of camels in the desert. The way the Argentine rural population dressed, spoke, and went about daily living bore a certain resemblance for Sarmiento with Arab

⁵ Translation by Mrs. Horace Mann

Bedouins - all characteristics which, here and there, markedly distinguished the dwellers of the hinterland from the people in the cities. Leadership over such wild, insubordinate groups in this harsh and uninviting environment could only be exerted by a “man of iron will and daring to the verge of rashness, that he may hold in check the audacity and turbulence of the land pirates who are to be directed and ruled by himself alone, for no help can be summoned in the desert” (*The Argentina Reader*, 84). The emergence of local strongmen, the *caudillos*, therefore seemed a logical phenomenon to Sarmiento - the inherent tendency to anarchy of the interior could only be quelled by a brutal tyrant. Survival of the fittest was the law of the plains and forests.

Buenos Aires, on the other hand, was destined to be the “most gigantic city of the Americas one day”. This great city which served thirteen interior provinces as a port was being asphyxiated by the spirit of the *pampas* and the *caudillo* sent by the provinces: Juan Manuel de Rosas. Geographical settings had provided the city’s greatness; its misfortune was caused by the barbarism of the interior and Rosas’ despotism. The *caudillo*, Facundo Quiroga in Sarmiento’s work, was a result of geographical and climatic conditions. Another result for Sarmiento was that now, Buenos Aires took vengeance on the provinces which had gestated Rosas sending them death squads and tyrannical officials. Federalism clearly had not been successful and unitarism was imposed but not within freedom and civilization but embracing barbarism and slavery. As Shumway points out, it is no surprise, therefore, that explaining those failures, with mercilessness that borders on self-defeating negativism, characterizes much of Sarmiento’s thought (1993:51-2). For him, the clash between two irreconcilable cultures was the summary of Argentine history which, in *Facundo*, he attempted to explain (Gandía, 1962:69-70).

Another obstacle for order and progress that springs from Sarmiento's argument and that goes hand in hand with the environmental conditions emanated from the genetic make up of the rural population.

...a homogenous whole has resulted from the fusion of the above-named families [Spanish, Indian, and blacks]. It is characterized by love of idleness and incapacity for industry, except when education and the exigencies of a social position succeed in spurting it out of its customary pace. To a great extent, this unfortunate result is owing to the incorporation of the native tribes, effected by the process of colonization. The American aborigines live in idleness and show themselves incapable, even under compulsion, of hard and prolonged labour. This suggested the idea of introducing Negroes into America, which has produced such fatal results. (Facundo, *The Argentina Reader*, 85).

This is not to say that Sarmiento perceived hybridization as an erosion of an originally positive Spanishness; on the contrary, he goes on to say that "the Spanish race has not shown itself more energetic than the aborigines...in the wilds of America" (Facundo, *The Argentina Reader*, 85). He compares the settlements of Spanish natives with those of European immigrants and finds that while the former are dirty and neglected, the latter are clearly neat and pretty.

However, in relation to black people Sarmiento expressed some reservations: almost extinct in the countryside - a positive development in Sarmiento's view, since the black 'race' had left nothing but *zambos* and mulattoes, a link that connects civilized man with the denizen of the woods - those who lived in Buenos Aires and other cities

“had a tendency to become civilized and possessed talent and the finest instincts for progress (*Facundo*, *The Argentina Reader*, 85). However, even the city-dwelling black population did not escape Sarmiento’s paranoid criticism, for he suspected every black servant placed in Unitarian households to be a spy placed there purposefully by Rosas (Shumway, 1993:54). It is quite astonishing that Sarmiento did not bear in mind that it would have been totally unrealistic to expect the black population to have any political opinion or experience in voicing it considering that these people had only recently been freed from slavery, deprived even of the most basic training and education.⁶

As Shumway points out, the definition of ‘race’ is somewhat blurred in Sarmiento’s work. When he speaks of the Spanish ‘race’ he clearly uses the term in a cultural sense. When he speaks of Indians and Africans, however, the term takes on eugenic overtones, for the Indians and Africans represented many cultures and were united only by shared physical characteristics (1993:52); but it was not physical appearance that repulsed Sarmiento. The fact that a great number of mixed-‘race’ troops were active in Rosas’ militias made him draw connections between ‘inferior’ ethnic origins and the tendency to choose political allegiance to the wrong, i.e. a violent and barbaric, leader.

Moral instruction, indeed, education in general was impossible under these conditions. “Where can a school be placed for the instruction of children living ten leagues apart in all directions?” Sarmiento asks in despair. “Thus, consequently, civilization can in no way be brought about. Barbarism is the normal condition”. (*Facundo*, 2002:88).

⁶ For detailed accounts which illuminate the presence of Afro-Argentines and their role within the nation see Schávelzon, 2003, Castro, 2001, Solomianski, 2003. Reviews of these works have been provided by Cottrol, 2007:139-156

Finally, Sarmiento attributed Argentina's failure to achieve political stability within liberal constitutionalism to the Spanish tradition inherited by the former colony. That Sarmiento blamed the Spanish 'race' for populating the pampas with hybrid 'races' has already been mentioned; but his reasons for disdain went deeper than that.

It is helpful at this point to look at Spanish political reality in order to understand Sarmiento's aversion: the Bourbons returned to the Spanish throne with Ferdinand VII in 1814. Immediately, the regime turned into an absolute monarchy again as a clear manifestation of the Old Regime, rejecting the *Corte de Cádiz* and the liberal constitution of 1812.

Ferdinand's situation was difficult, to say the least, since he had a variety of problems to solve; first, he had to strengthen his position as a Bourbon monarch after a long period of absence; secondly, he had to confront the liberals who opposed his style of politics; and thirdly, he had to deal with Spain's loss of the American colonies. Consequently his government became weary, unstable, and lost support.

Subsequently, Ferdinand's policy oscillated between liberalism and absolutism until he finally committed to constitutional rule and re-established the *Corte de Cádiz*.

Between 1823 and 1833, Ferdinand's last period on the throne, he took repressive action against Freemasons and liberals; furthermore, he had to face opposition from his brother, Carlos. After Ferdinand's death, the struggles between liberalism and absolutism returned with increased force; moreover, supporters of Carlos and his descendants and the age-old fight over the succession was the subject of a number of Carlist Wars in the nineteenth century. The victorious Cristinos⁷ and the heiress to the throne, Isabel II exercised (until 1854) a moderate regime with absolutist tendencies. This was the Spain Sarmiento saw on a visit in 1847 and which he came to describe as:

⁷ Named after María Cristina, Ferdinand's wife, who became queen-regent after Ferdinand's death, since their daughter, Isabel was only three years old at the time.

...that straggler behind Europe, which lying between the Mediterranean and the ocean, between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century, united to cultured Europe by a broad isthmus and separated from barbarous Africa by a narrow strait, sways in the balance between two opposing forces, now rising on the side of free peoples, now falling with peoples ruled by despotism; now impious, now fanatical; now declaredly constitutionalist, now impudently despotic; sometimes cursing its broken chains, then standing still and crying out for the yoke which seems to be its condition and way of being. (Facundo, 2004:24)⁸

It also has to be remembered that Sarmiento profoundly believed in the ideas of the Enlightenment, the foundation of the Spirit of May. Most of eighteenth century Western Europe had started to believe in rationality. Reason became an absolute value and reigned supreme in the fields of literature, the arts and thought. The Spanish tradition, however, did not react favourably to the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. Its way of thought and way of life was fundamentally opposed to the universal vision and the basic, absolute values which this era proliferated. Brizuela maintains that Western Europe had turned to a civilization based on ideas and things; and this contrasted the Spanish tradition of 'great men'. During the eighteenth century, Spain entered a period of political, economic, and artistic decadence and the Spaniards were deeply anguished by their failure (2001:52).

⁸ Translation by Roberto González Echevarría

With the beginning of the Renaissance, Spain became the largest political force in the Western world; and the century that followed this political triumph saw the emergence of magnificent works of art and literature on the same footing with those of any other region during this era. That Golden Age in the history of Spain was followed by a period of national decadence which reduced the country to an entity with almost exclusively military and political pursuits of the worst kind and an unproductive or imitative cultural scene (Brizuela, 2002:52). It is necessary therefore, to remember the differences between the values and way of life in Spain and the values and way of life in the rest of the Western world when trying to unravel Sarmiento's dislike for Spain's legacy in her former colonies. From Sarmiento's point of view, from Spain came "the Spanish-American people's lack of ability in political and industrial matters which keeps them in constant turmoil, like a ship churning the ocean, with no support or rest in sight" (in Shumway, 1993:53). He perceived in Spain, i.e. in the colonial period, the historical cause for Argentina's condition and ultimately, its failure to achieve a state of civilization. He lamented that Argentina had not been colonized by a more civilized power, one that would have left a better foundation for political and economic development.

As can be seen, Sarmiento perceived Argentina's problems in its geography and in its people and thought that these were the elements that defined politics and history. He observed that the country's two main cities, Córdoba and Buenos Aires, distinguished themselves by their appearance of regularity, civilized way of life, and elegantly dressed inhabitants. The man of the land, on the other hand, was the complete opposite: he dressed differently, more coarsely; he held the cities in disdain; did not yield to government, and so forth. There seemed to be two societies, two peoples alien to one another.

Lamenting the absence of a 'Latin American De Tocqueville'⁹, Sarmiento takes it upon himself to classify the opposing cultural elements of the region. He exactly determines the spaces which these elements deserve to occupy - on the one hand, national consciousness burdened by Spanish heritage and on the other, the unquestionable progress enjoyed by Europe and the United States. In other words, Sarmiento seeks to elaborate a theory which clearly separates two poles of Latin American culture - indigenous barbarism and European civilization. As Moreno-Durán observes, confrontation with this claim immediately demands the choosing of 'sides' (2002:20-1). However, choosing presupposes the existence of a certain state of freedom which allows individuals to compare the alternatives on offer and make an informed decision as to where to position themselves. For Sarmiento, one could either choose to be a 'barbarian' or a 'civilized' person - there was nothing in between; and 'civilization' meant the rich and prosperous alternative offered by Europe and the United States for the successful deployment of efforts to achieve development and progress. 'Barbarism', on the other hand, described the condition of man in his natural state; the human being, not yet subjected to any social restrictions, all their instincts unleashed with primitive strength; a mass of Freudian 'ids', so to speak. Civilization's triumph over barbarism was the goal, difficult yet necessary, should he/she ever become a responsible 'I'.

So, was Sarmiento's notion of civilization and barbarism a valid tool for analysis? It can be said that whatever Sarmiento saw and described so vividly and eloquently was, of course, true. According to Young, Sarmiento's *Facundo* clearly reflects the idea, originally coined by Said's *Orientalism*, of misrepresentation of what is actually there (2001:399, cited in Rock, 2008:51). Sarmiento clearly saw what was there but did not

⁹ See Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/t/tocqueville/alexis/democracy/complete.html> (08/04/2008)

recognize its meaning. What was not true were the reasons for the conditions he so much lamented. The three categories that spring from his argument, the Spanish tradition, the expansion of the land, and hybridization, were all of a fundamentally essentialist nature - all three were facts that could not be remedied; therefore, casting the blame became a somewhat futile undertaking since it was to be found in 'natural' causes rather than in human error; however, a solution to this tragedy had to be found and reading *Facundo*, it becomes quite clear that Sarmiento saw himself as the right man for the task.

Based on his studies of Argentina's specific conditions he suggested a variety of solutions to the problems: the development of means of communication, European immigration, widespread public education, and the establishment of a representative democratic system; within this framework of law and constitutionalism he would improve people's economic situation so that material forces might not deter the process of their civilization.

Sarmiento and Women

In *Facundo* (1868), Sarmiento only mentions women on a handful of instances, mainly describing the division of labour in indigenous or gaucho communities (21, 23, 33). On other occasions, he elaborates in detailed fashion on the suffering by the population in general through the brutality displayed by General Rosas or Facundo Quiroga (50, 53, 82, 92). On page 94, however, he makes a statement that is worth quoting. A beautiful young woman, Severa Villafane, arouses Facundo's desire; in love with somebody else, however, not only is she unwilling to give in to his advances, but also is repulsed by his interest - she fiercely resists. But, says Sarmiento:

No solo es virtud lo que la hace resistir a la seducción; es repugnancia invencible, instintos bellos de mujer delicada que detesta los tipos de la fuerza brutal, porque teme que ajen su belleza.¹⁰

This passage implies that only “delicate” woman possess the beautiful instinct to be disgusted when confronted with undesired male advances and also that only the beautiful ones are disgusted by brutality. As to *why* decent women hate brute force confirms traditional perceptions of women’s minds: it is detrimental to their beauty, what else?

All in all, it can be said that in *Facundo*, Sarmiento says very little about women; what he does say is either more of the racist criticism of the rural population or well known commonplaces about women’s nature and behaviour.

Considering that *Facundo* represents the foundational text on which Argentine literature and culture are based, this exclusion of women had far-reaching, negative consequences, not least because it excluded women from the Argentine discourse altogether; and not until the socio-political women’s movements and the literary productions by women from the 1960s onwards would this issue be addressed in a meaningful way as we will see.

Of all the solutions to the national crisis Sarmiento suggested, it was the one regarding education where his achievements have to be acknowledged. The fact that in the late nineteenth century Argentina could show one of the highest rates of female literacy in

¹⁰ “It is not only virtue that makes her resist seduction; it is invincible repulsion, the beautiful instinct of a delicate woman who detests the type employing brute force, because she fears that it will make her beauty wilt”.

the world was undoubtedly due to Sarmiento's educational reforms¹¹ while occupying the country's presidency (1868-74). During his term in office, the writer Juana Manso¹² became the first female member of the *Comisión Nacional de Escuelas*. Sarmiento believed that "an intelligent woman has a natural ability to educate young minds" (1938:22). Consequently he encouraged Argentina's women to become school teachers - coeducational schools for the more progressive recruits, all-female ones for the more traditional students (Houston Luiggi, 1965:28). More such schools followed; they were the only institutions to provide secondary education for women, creating new aims and ambitions for girls; many became teachers, self-supporting or supporting whole families (Houston Luiggi, 1965:28). They learned the latest North American pedagogical philosophies and methods of teaching involving questioning and reasoning.

In *Discursos parlamentarios* (1875), Sarmiento proposes policies to end women's exploitation in the workplace. He was well aware of the fact that women received only about half the wages of their male counterparts even though they often worked more hours (208).

Nevertheless, however progressive Sarmiento's educational reforms might have been, he moved strictly within the traditional parameters appropriate for women and the requirements of nationalism. Schools emphasized the importance of self-discipline,

¹¹ Some of Sarmiento's journeys during exile led him to the United States where he established a close relationship with Horace and Mary Mann, the 'parents' of US public education. Mary Mann translated many of Sarmiento's works into English, interviewed applicants for teaching positions in Argentina, and sustained a long correspondence with him about new educational ideas and practices. Sarmiento also admired Mary's sister, Elisabeth Peabody, who trained kindergarten teachers in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Some of the women she taught helped to establish public kindergartens in Argentina. During this period Sarmiento also came into contact with the most advanced ideas on women's role in society. The impressive pace of economic development convinced him of the necessity to apply such principles in Argentina (Romero cited by Jeffress Little, 1978:126-64). Sarmiento was convinced that governmentally supported public schools would transform Argentina into a prosperous, civilized nation. He founded a normal school in Paraná in 1870, run by Dr. George Stearns, a famous New England educator. This coeducational institution provided the training ground for Argentina's first generation of normal school teachers. These men and women made a substantial contribution towards lowering Argentina's illiteracy rate from more than two-thirds in 1869 to less than one-third in 1914 (James R. Scobie, *A City and a Nation*, cited by Jeffress Little, p. 237). Sarmiento also was adamant that education be secular.

¹² The life and work of Juana Manso will be addressed in some detail in one of the following chapters.

physical fitness and manual labour as this would raise levels of culture and productivity (Chavarría, 1947:362). He was impressed by the educational system in France where women could choose to study mathematics, anatomy, or botany (*De la educación popular*, 1849:7); however it was not until 1889 that the first female doctor, Cecilia Grierson, graduated in Argentina. Sarmiento believed that progressive ideas learned by children in school could easily be undone by an ignorant home-environment. In *educación popular*, he finds that “thousands of existences could be saved from the ignorance of their mothers by raising babies in state funded infant homes.”

Las Salas de Asilo...confiadas al instinto maternal de las mujeres, dirigidas e inspeccionadas por señoras, producen además resultados sociales del más alto carácter, interesando a las mujeres de las clases superiores en la cosa pública... (8)

Besides, all women had to be educated in fitness and household duties; this was supposed to raise healthy, hard-working Argentine citizens, put an end to children being raised by ‘ignorant and superstitious’ nannies (which implies that Sarmiento also found ignorance amongst those who could afford a child-minder), and would create healthier women who would bear stronger children (*Programas de pedagogía*, 1901:19). In *De educación popular* he states on page 71:

De la educación de las mujeres depende, sin embargo, la suerte de los estados; la civilización se detiene a las puertas del hogar doméstico cuando ellas no están preparadas para recibirla. Hay más todavía, las mujeres, en su carácter de

madres, esposas, o sirvientes destruyen la educación que los niños reciben en las escuelas. Las costumbres y las preocupaciones se perpetúan por ellas, y jamás podrá alterarse la manera de ser un pueblo, sin cambiar primero las ideas y hábitos de vida de las mujeres.

What Sarmiento effectively suggests here is that, so far, women had failed in their roles as mothers, wives, and educators and that reform of national culture depended solely on them. What he is attempting to do is to change people to fit the policies and not *vice versa*. For Sarmiento, people, and women in particular, become a means to an end. In the following chapter we will see that this practice is inherent in a patriarchal society.

Sarmiento's failure

Sarmiento was a poor, self-educated provincial whose mind and thought had been formed against the background of his early reading of authors, representative of the French and North American eighteenth century Enlightenment. He had conceived a mental picture of how the world should be, which was rational and well ordered. Men should act according to moral and ethical principles and they should act politically within a structure of natural and written law that was discoverable by the rational mind.

Rationalism, however, to which the Generation of 37 fervently subscribed, perceived man as an isolated entity and therefore thought that a transformation of society could be achieved by the implementation of civil laws and constitutions. They did not recognize the evolution of society as a force that could be ignored or overcome

by mere legislation. In their attempts to change society, they paid no attention to cultural differences. Sarmiento firmly believed that the political situation, i.e. civil war and bloodshed, was caused by the inherent hostility of the rural population while in reality, their readiness to go to war was caused by political and institutional inadequacies; thus, he studied the conditions of the countryside not in order to gain knowledge about the political thought of the rural population or to find out what sort of political system they desired but to find the most fitting methods for imposing on them a way of life which he called 'civilization'.

Looking at Bertrand Russell's description of the Romantic Movement, one can only conclude that Sarmiento was a prototypical product of it

The Romantic Movement generally sought to liberate the human personality from the shackles of social conventions and social morals. Partially, these shackles were mere obstacles for desirable forms of activity since in any old state rules of conduct have been developed which have no further significance than their being traditional; but once egoistic passion is unleashed, it is difficult to force it back to submission to the demands of society. To a certain degree, Christianity managed to tame the Ego but economic, political, and intellectual causes tempted people to rebellion against the Church and through the Romantic Movement, this rebellion also spread to the field of morals. Because of its support of a new, unrestrained Ego it made social cooperation impossible and confronted its followers with the alternatives of anarchy or despotism (Russell, 2004:692).

Sarmiento had a predilection for biographical writing and his accounts of the lives of *Aldao*, *Facundo Quiroga*, and *Dominguito* are all thinly disguised opportunities for him

to speak about himself (Alonso, 1994:39). Reading Sarmiento's works one finishes confused and puzzled. As Alonso has noticed, this is a textual universe where contradictions proliferate, inconsistencies flourish, outlandish turns of phrase or metaphors arise unexpectedly, wrongly attributed or incomplete quotations¹³ abound, digressions multiply, and where tone can shift from the sublime to the maudlin or crass in the space of a single sentence (1994:36).

It has to be remembered that Sarmiento is lauded in Argentina to this very day; on the date of his death (11 September), the National Day of the Teacher is celebrated and his writings form part of the national curriculum. Argentinean government websites and most of the academic ones teem with praise for this founding father of the modern nation. Criticism is rare and limited to private sites or those of a more dubious nature which have to be dismissed for their lack of references. However, some of Sarmiento's vicious outpourings are documented and reveal a side of him that the school text books probably do not contain.

According to the poet and essayist Leopoldo Lugones, "Facundo constitutes Sarmiento's entire programme: his literary ideas, his political propaganda, his educational plans, his historical concept, they are all there" (1945:165). Crow notes that Sarmiento, in search of the ideal civilizer, displays exaggerated hatred towards the inhumanity of the gaucho whose elimination he desires (1992:578). This is also corroborated by Eduardo Galeano who cites a letter by Sarmiento to President Mitre in 1862: "Do not spare gaucho blood - it is the only human trait they have; it will serve as a fertilizer to enrich the land and make it useful" (1972:289). In the same year, Mitre unleashed a campaign to exterminate the gauchos actively supported by Sarmiento. In

¹³ In the introduction to *Recuerdos de Provincia* he attributes a quote from *Macbeth* to *Hamlet* - "Es este un cuento que con aspavientos y gritos, refiere un loco que no significa nada" (*Proyecto Sarmentino, Recuerdos de Provincia, 1850:3*)

his *obras completas*, Mitre himself expresses his plans to eradicate the barbarism of the desert in order to “sow the seeds of civilization”.¹⁴

It has to be remembered that on the eve of independence the popular sectors displayed such an ethnically diverse complexity that future attempts to create cohesive national communities were destined to run into difficulties. However, although the racial composition of the different Spanish American societies varied in mix according to province and region it can be said that indigenous peoples, mestizos, mulattos, *pardos*, and *morenos* were actively involved, in one form or another, in the wars of independence.¹⁵ They became the foot soldiers, cavalymen, muleteers, pioneers, and labourers on both sides. Archer points out that military leaders like Bolívar could not have won independence in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, or New Spain without their support while the Spanish army had also recruited men from most racial backgrounds since 1764¹⁶ (2000:8 - 9). It can be said that tactics and motives varied across the region but, by and large, marginalized groups united behind a Creole leadership in a struggle against colonial rule defending a range of interests so diverse that existing class discrepancies and race antagonisms were temporarily transcended. This unity, however, could not be of a permanent nature since the dissident elites, anxious to recruit the popular classes, were at the same time opposed to granting any meaningful social reforms. This is important because it serves to explain the subsequent struggles to create viable nations within states implementing exclusionary politics. In this sense, it was only the communities of the

¹⁴ The obsession with creating an Argentine civilization led to legislation in 1869 to fence large areas of the *pampas* with barb wire brought by the Englishman Richard Newton. For the *gauchos* this mission constituted a fight for life and death since they could not conceive of their existence without horses and open land in a fenced in environment. In 1879, General Julio Roca successfully subjugated the last Amerindians in Patagonia in a massacre aided by an army mostly composed of *gauchos* (Crow, 1992:594).

¹⁵ Women’s participation in the independence struggles will be addressed in the following chapter.

¹⁶ Although initially blacks and Indians were exempt from military service, confusion about racial origins increasingly blurred distinctions and eventually ‘all colours’ were admitted as long as no more than one third of a company belonged to one racial type (Archer, 2000:9)

ruling classes that would represent the nation as a whole since this elite claimed the success of the independence struggle exclusively for itself (McGann, 1953:156). The communities of those on the periphery, therefore, did not figure in the national imaginary and continued to move in and out of their marginality according to their strategic usefulness to those of the centre.

Sarmiento's hatred for those marginal groups is well documented and his intended treatment of them displays exactly the barbarism he wanted to eliminate from national culture. The historian Federico Martín Maglio provides some of Sarmiento's ferocious quotes:

On the indigenous:

El Indígena: "¿Lograremos exterminar los indios? Por los salvajes de América siento una invencible repugnancia sin poderlo remediar. Esa calaña no son más que unos indios asquerosos a quienes mandaría colgar ahora si reapareciesen. Lautaro y Caupolicán son unos indios piojosos, porque así son todos. Incapaces de progreso. Su exterminio es providencial y útil, sublime y grande. Se los debe exterminar sin ni siquiera perdonar al pequeño, que tiene ya el odio instintivo al hombre civilizado. "El Progreso", 27/09/1844, "El Nacional", 19/05/1887, 25/11/1876 y 08/02/1879.

El Pueblo Paraguayo: "Estamos por dudar de que exista el Paraguay. Descendientes de razas guaraníes, indios salvajes y esclavos que obran por instinto a falta de razón. En ellos se perpetúa la barbarie primitiva y colonial. Son unos perros ignorantes de los cuales ya han muerto ciento cincuenta mil. Su avance, capitaneados por descendientes degenerados de españoles, traería la detención de todo progreso y un retroceso a la barbarie... Al frenético, idiota, bruto y feroz borracho Solano López lo acompañan miles de animales que le obedecen y mueren de miedo. Es providencial que un tirano

haya hecho morir a todo ese pueblo guaraní. Era preciso purgar la tierra de toda esa excrecencia humana: raza perdida de cuyo contagio hay que librarse. (Carta a Mitre de 1872).

These statements confirm Rock's opinion that while independence ultimately was the outcome of the long lasting resistance against the Spanish colonizers, it was also the beginning of chronic struggles between modernizing Creole elites, the agents of coercive westernization and popular indigenous resistance (Rock, 2008:51); so-called liberals like Sarmiento found no discrepancy between proclaiming liberal, anti-colonial values and waging the most savage campaign against the indigenous peoples in order to appropriate their land.

As Moreno-Durán points out, apart from the original meaning of 'barbarism' as cultural inferiority, Sarmiento clearly adds to it a certain abstruse moral twist that justifies the disqualification of those who stand outside civilization which in turn takes on an implicit notion of political and economic predominance (2002:23). His following quotes about marginalized groups make that quite clear:

On orphans:

Huérfanos: "Si los pobres de los hospitales, de los asilos de mendigos y de las casas de huérfanos se han de morir, que se mueran: porque el Estado no tiene caridad, no tiene alma. El mendigo es un insecto, como la hormiga. Recoge los desperdicios. De manera que es útil sin necesidad de que se le dé dinero. ¿Qué importa que el Estado deje morir al que no puede vivir por sus defectos? ¿Los huérfanos son los últimos seres de la sociedad, hijos de padres viciosos, no se les debe dar más que de comer. (Del discurso en el Senado de la Provincia de

Buenos Aires, 13/09/1859).

On social class:

Tengo odio a la barbarie popular... La chusma y el pueblo gaucho nos es hostil... Mientras haya un chiripá no habrá ciudadanos, ¿son acaso las masas la única fuente de poder y legitimidad?. El poncho, el chiripá y el rancho son de origen salvaje y forman una división entre la ciudad culta y el pueblo, haciendo que los cristianos se degraden... Usted tendrá la gloria de establecer en toda la República el poder de la clase culta aniquilando el levantamiento de las masas. (Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, En Buenos Aires, 1853; Carta a Batolomé Mitre del 24 de Septiembre 1861; en EE.UU., 1865)

Cuando decimos pueblo, entendemos los notables, activos, inteligentes: clase gobernante. Somos gentes decentes. Patricios a cuya clase pertenecemos nosotros, pues, no ha de verse en nuestra Cámara (Diputados y Senadores) ni gauchos, ni negros, ni pobres. Somos la gente decente, es decir, patriota. (Domingo Faustino Sarmiento Discurso de 1866).

These quotes really speak for themselves and need no further comment. However, it is very interesting indeed that the collection *Sarmiento - Mitre Correspondencia (1846-1868)* within the 'Proyecto Sarmiento', a site that enjoys sponsorship from the *Biblioteca virtual Miguel de Cervantes* and *Proyecto Gutenberg* (University of Illinois), does not contain any of the above letters.

Eduardo Pogoriles, from the daily *El Clarin*, is therefore right in saying that Sarmiento, for various reasons, continues to be a stranger for Argentines, be it because of official indifference or the lack of funds. His article tells of the Argentine government's plans to increase its holdings of Sarmiento's work, many of which remain unpublished in inaccessible archives.

Just how much importance the government lends to Sarmiento's writings becomes clear when realizing that in 1999, a law (25.159) for the re-edition and re-printing of Sarmiento's work was passed in parliament. The original work was contained in fifty two volumes; the new edition was to comprise sixty. However, the project was subsequently abandoned, supposedly for lack of funds (28/01/2006). One can only speculate about the real motives. It is quite feasible that, confronted with the economic crisis in 2001, cultural projects were put on hold; but it is also quite possible that quotes like the ones above would have been quite uncomfortable for a government that still hails Sarmiento as one of the founding fathers of the nation.

Concluding this chapter it can be said that literary, cultural, and political references to the nineteenth century form a framework to connect previous periods of dominance of liberal ideology with the current one. From this connection, a thesis on nation formation as a failed project of the Enlightenment is consolidated and developed in order to explain not only the continuous internal struggles that have marked the country's own history, but most importantly, the endemic faults of Argentine nationalism. Crises have been perceived as re-enactments of past 'guiding fictions' (Shumway, 1991:92).

One of the constants in studies of Argentine culture is the contribution to an understanding of national character, gained by analyzing the ideological, thematic, or

semantic elements surrounding the founding of the Republic. Many discover preludes in the nineteenth century to the disastrous institutional and personal life experienced by Argentines during various periods of the twentieth century (Foster, 1995:135-6).

The intelligentsia of the May Revolution in 1810 configured a model of political action and representation based on political divisiveness and on the inability to adapt successfully the ideas of the Enlightenment in Latin America. This ideological legacy is somehow a mythology of exclusion rather than a call for pluralist consensus and keeps manifesting itself throughout the historical transformation of Argentina as a nation (De Grandis, 2003:92). Continuity can be found between early tyrannies in the past and subsequent dictatorships.

However, it seems that insisting on these continuities, which can be found in many interpretations of Argentina's past and subsequent development, has been instrumental to diagnosing the 'inferior' quality of democracy in Argentina. That is not to say, that the past should be ignored by any means, on the contrary, but constantly referring to the mistakes of the revolutionaries and the tyrannies of the early nineteenth century somehow turns these tragedies into a sort of historical destiny. Oppression, brutality, and death camps thus become an essential element in national culture; something that is inherently Argentinean - not unlike how Sarmiento viewed geographical conditions and other unchangeable givens.

There exists a vast amount of literature, mainly novels, about dictatorships and dictators since the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly about Chile, Argentina, and Central America (see for example Paley Francescato, 1979) Now, the topic has extended to include domestic conflicts, gender issues, and other displays of violence connected with neo-liberal economics (Moraña, 2002b; Rotker, 2002, in De

Grandis, 2003:91). These issues cannot be resolved if violence is perceived as a fundamental characteristic of *argentinidad*.

As Jopling observes, political violence is central to a nation's questioning its own being in its quest for self-knowledge and understanding. Self-knowledge is an instrument of value in terms of promoting ethical action and a basis upon which other virtues can be cultivated (2000:3). In this sense, *Facundo* clearly has to cease as a paternal text on the national curriculum.

A clear duality can be observed in Sarmiento's attitude to women. In theory, his implementation of educational policies and the building of a large number of schools for girls were, without a doubt, his most significant achievement and certainly a progressive step forward. In practice however, his ideological motivation behind these reforms prohibited female education beyond the established parameters. Thus, what could have been a helpful early tool in women's struggle for equality only reinforced female subordination to traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, for Sarmiento, female education seems to have been contingent on geographical and economic conditions. Although evidence suggests that there were pockets of educational provision in the country's interior at the time, it is reasonable to assume that he did not place particular emphasis on the diffusion of such facilities amongst the more remote rural population (male or female) who remained largely neglected in this respect since he dismissed them as citizens in the first place.

Chapter 2

Part 1

Gender and Nation

Nationalisms have been overwhelmingly male ideologies; not because women are less nationalist than men but because the strength and power of a nation is often perceived as equivalent with the strength and efficiency of its armed forces, clearly masculine domains. Within traditional gender imagery, men die in armed combat mainly in their role as protectors and defenders of the women and children. Women's long-established task is the biological and social reproduction of the nation¹⁷; they are, thus, mothers and wives and as such their personhood and identity are not autonomous.¹⁸ Procreation is a vital element in nationalist family policy since it guarantees the perpetuation of national culture, values and genetic characteristics. Classical theories of 'the social contract' are widely influential and have laid the foundations of a common sense understanding of state and society. These theories divide the sphere of civil society into the private and public domains. Women and the family are located in the private domain which is not seen as politically relevant. Nationalism and nations have been discussed as part of the public domain and the

¹⁷ Both these descriptions of male and female gender roles belong to traditional views and facts which have been challenged constantly by different views and alternative facts.

¹⁸ In the 17th century, John Locke examined the conditions that constitute responsible personhood when he posed the questions under what circumstances people can be autonomous citizens and in what way sovereign power could be distributed among them. The exclusion of women and men without property is based on their being dependent, not fully autonomous. Since they will be led, not by their own reasoning but by those they depend on for their livelihood, they cannot voice an opinion of their own. Thus, their identity is derived from that of their 'guardians' (Dunn, 1984: 370, II, §128).

exclusion of women from that arena has led to their exclusion from that discourse as well (Yuval-Davis, 1997:14).

Enlightenment principles of egalitarian citizenship, one of the fundamental ideological building blocks of the independence movements, were clearly at odds with the maintenance of the traditional family, entrenched as a male-headed corporate unit, the role women occupied within it and their position in wider society in general. Yuval-Davis and Werbner point out that the inconsistencies between the principles upholding family and citizenship led to the kind of *ad hoc* rationalizations and secondary elaborations of belief recognized as commonsense reasoning. These sustained gendered inequalities and exclusionary practices while simultaneously continuing to assert the primacy of universal equality and freedom (Yuval Davis, 1997:6-7). For Argentine nation-builders it was relatively easy to dismiss inconsistencies because of their eclectic selection of philosophies and political schools of thought that formed the basis of their programmes. The desire to define American-ness and, within it, *argentinidad* as a distinct and unique identity justified their practice of 'pick-and-choose'. Thus, they did not find a discrepancy between referring to the 'Spirit of May', which had sprung from Enlightenment principles of universal equality and freedom, as a core element of their politics and the perpetuation of inequalities and exclusion of certain social groups.

Many studies which have not, so far, taken into account the influences that gender has on the state and its institutions, emphasised mostly the gradual progress regarding women's rights and the elimination of traditional restrictions they experienced with respect to their participation in public life. Dore, for example, particularly mentions historians stressing the liberating effect of secularisation, arguing that the expansion of women's rights was due to a great extent to the church relinquishing power in

favour of the state (2000:5). The Liberal State in Latin America seems to be particularly supported by this analysis. According to Dore, however, it is debatable whether liberalism signified 'Order and Progress' for gender relations. In fact, she argues that the relationship between state politics and gender politics and the general direction of change in nineteenth century Latin America was regressive rather than progressive (2000:5). In Argentina it continued to be so far beyond the nineteenth century as will be seen throughout part one of this work.

In the present chapter, focusing on the Argentine state in particular, it will be demonstrated that the pragmatics of commonsense reasoning with respect to the position of women was a practice the Liberal State frequently engaged in. In this context it is necessary to view this particular kind of reasoning with respect to gender politics not only in terms of laws implemented and abolished by the government but also in terms of more abstract cultural concepts like moral values, gender imagery and gender practices whose meanings have been subjected to constant changes during the period in question. These concepts experienced alterations simultaneously with ideological changes the state sought to engender and it is not unreasonable to say that the impact they had on women's status in society were at least as significant as the law making process.

Part one starts with a look at women's contributions to the Wars of Independence. Despite women's significant efforts and contributions to the creation of the Argentine republic that extended well beyond their traditional roles as mothers and home-makers, their participation in these conflicts has not been recognized until recently. Following on from the discussion of concepts and practices of exclusion in chapter one

it then moves to determine which groups of women in particular have been excluded from the national project and the underlying reasons for this exclusion.

Part two will focus on the importance of women's role as mothers and on the extent to which the state manipulated the institution of motherhood in order to construct the national image. The last section addresses the early Argentine social and feminist movements which can be understood as early collective attempts to articulate a female response to state and government.

Women in the Independence Wars

It cannot be disputed that during the colonial era across Spanish America women were legally subordinate to men. The colonial state regarded families dominated by patriarchs as an indispensable prerequisite for an orderly state. From the time of the conquest a number of royal decrees codified men's supreme rule over the household and its members. Women's and children's legal status was regulated by law as subordinate which imposed restrictions but also intended to guarantee protection. Obviously, the issue of equality in legal and social terms was not a matter of public discussion, since men's superiority was considered a 'natural' law to the same extent as women's submission and inequality.

The importance of the family unit as a stabilising factor in society is further demonstrated by a royal decree issued by Charles V by which any married male had to arrange for his wife to join him from Spain in order to resume an orderly family life in the colonies. Failure to do so resulted in heavy fines or even jail sentences which often had devastating effects on businesses and livelihoods. Married men with the

intention to embark for the colonies were legally obliged to do so only when accompanied by their wives (Baudot, 1992, cited in López de Mariscal, 2002:89).

However, it seems to be a myth that women in colonial times had no rights at all or that they were generally denied legal personhood. The rights they were entitled to depended by and large on class, race, and marital status, but certain women enjoyed a more advanced legal position than their European counterparts. Unlike European women at the time, women in colonial Latin America had the right to sign contracts, appear as witnesses in court, ratify official documents, and make wills. They were also allowed to own and administer property¹⁹.

At the lower levels of colonial Hispanic society, men still dominated in public activities, but women's opportunities seem to have been modestly greater in the sense that their economic prospects appear to have been less limited to any possible inheritance. There were no laws that prevented women from earning an independent living or from administering their own finances and property. There are some known cases of women who acted as independent traders and merchants who, although dependent on the local elite patriarch for merchandise and credit, were not accountable to their male relatives for their economic activities (Tutino, 1983:379).

Despite the desire to incorporate the new ideas of reason and liberalism, the white male-dominated structure of society remained largely unchanged when the Creole-

¹⁹ In colonial Mexico, for example, and admittedly only in a few notable cases, elite women exercised great power while men and women lived as their dependents (Tutino, 1983:359, Socolow, 2000:9)¹⁹. In general, narrow patriarchal rule predominated in both the initial activities aimed to amass wealth and the subsequent control of the estates aimed to ensure the perpetuation of the families' elite status; however, once a patriarch died, rules of succession rarely excluded women who had realistic chances to inherit entailed properties. They also regularly inherited shares of unentailed wealth which remained subject to laws of partible inheritance. Thus, women in established landed families often held legal title to important estates (Tutino, 1983:366). However, if women did find themselves in a position of power it was normally hidden from public eyes and they were represented by a trusted man at public meetings or ceremonies. It is true that such women only were able to personally control and independently exercise power over their estates as long as they remained unmarried or were widowed and even then only in a minority of cases they escaped male, patriarchal rule over their economic affairs but this seems to be due mainly to social customs, like the wish to marry, rather than to laws implemented by the state (Tutino, 1983:374).

elite took the place of their Spanish predecessors. Women were not included in the constitution of the nascent republics, nor were they deliberately excluded - they were largely ignored. As Inés Quintero points out, during the independence struggles and immediately after, documentation of these conflicts did incorporate the contributions of women to the war effort, albeit as a mere gesture to the new freedom. Their participation was associated with their extraordinary moral virtues and their patriotism. No differentiation was made between them; proclaimed heroines they found their way into history but at the same time they were stripped of their individuality, their specific life stories, and their personalities. Furthermore, although their contributions to the war were generally recorded in a way that admitted their vital role in the conflict, it always happened within the parameters of values and qualities traditionally ascribed to women²⁰. It had to be this way because once the confrontation was over, the social order had to be recovered, primarily the customary practices and values in respect to women's position (2001:57). When the independence movements first erupted, a modification of this age-old position was not on the agenda. Like in other revolutions and political processes, women did not officially form part of the issues that were to be solved. Nevertheless, the impact of independence was of such magnitude that it changed the life of society as a whole; not only socially, economically and politically, but also in respect to everyday- life. Family life became subjected to the exigencies of war; women, mothers, wives and daughters of those involved in the conflict could not be isolated and they responded to the new situation. Inevitably, in doing so they violated the conventions and precepts

²⁰Quintero particularly refers to Manuela Sáenz who was a political activist for the independence cause but also Simón Bolívar's lover. Sáenz led an unconventional, rather colorful life and frequently transgressed social norms, not least because of her illicit affair. Nonetheless, in historical records she is portrayed as a woman who, motivated by her love for the fatherland, dedicated her services and female virtues to the republican cause - from the position she was destined to occupy as a woman, namely her home.

that prescribed and shaped their behaviour within society. Once independence was achieved, they were expected to return to their homes (Quintero, 2001:58).

Contrary to the prevailing ideology, women's labour was crucial to the daily conduct of war, even when engaging in non-combat activities²¹. Thus, women's work was multiplied significantly by the war and gives lie to the general assumption that they had to do this work anyway. Claire Brewster lists the political activism of a large number of women from both of the republican and the royalist camps. These ranged from raising money for arms, sewing uniforms, giving shelter and hiding refugees and spies, to passing on information and distributing proclamations and pamphlets. Many middle and upper-class women donated money and jewellery to their cause and hosted tertulias²² at which the nobility had the freedom to discuss revolutionary themes (2005:26-8).

The separation of women from the battlefield had important political and ideological implications. By increasing men's sense of entitlement to rewards from conflicts, women's marginalization from status and rewards and political struggle helped to disguise any ethnic or class cracks that might otherwise separate male combatants; because only men's participation in combat was defined as contribution to the war, the marginalization of women increased the size of the rewards in the shape of land and post-war political participation²³.

²¹ Using the records of two Mexican towns, Tetela and Xochiapulco, Florencia Mallon finds that women of these towns made between 1,800 and 2,400 tortillas for the guerrillas every day, additional to their usual work. One must not forget that no mechanized corn mills, let alone any modern cooking aids and appliances were available at the time and to arrive from the basic corn to the stage where usable dough can be made into a tortilla required a large number of staggering tasks (1995:77).

²² See also Sahra C. Chambers, who looks at the unpublished writing (letters) and social lives of three women, Manuela Sáenz, Mariquita Sánchez and Carmen Arriagada all of whom hosted literary salons which counted amongst the most important venues for the exchange of ideas and revolutionary strategies (2003).

²³ Latin American women did not gain the vote until well into the twentieth century, ranging from 1929 in Ecuador and as late as 1961 in Paraguay, with Mexico and Central American countries in the 1950s.

This is not to say that women's efforts in the struggles were not acknowledged; San Martín and Bolívar both praised female contributions on various occasions. San Martín worked with several women during the conflict and ensured that they received national recognition for their efforts; in 1821, 180 women in Peru were nominated for receiving the medal of the *Orden del Sol*, a reward scheme set up by San Martín for civil and military merits (Brewster, 2005:31). Praising the contribution of women from Trujillo Province (Venezuela) Bolívar said in 1813:

Vencedores del Carache, sabed que el pueblo que venís a rescatar es tan digno de vuestros heroicos sacrificios que todo él está lidiando por la libertad, o padeciendo por ella, hasta el sexo bello, las delicias del género humano, nuestras amazonas han combatido contra los tiranos de San Carlos, con un valor divino aunque sin suceso. Los monstruos y tigres de la España han colmado la medida de la cobardía de su nación, han dirigido las infames armas contra los cándidos femeninos pechos de nuestras beldades: han derramado su sangre: han hecho expirar a muchas de ellas, y las han cargado de cadenas, porque concibieron el sublime designio de libertar a su adorada patria. ¡Las mujeres, sí soldados, las mujeres del país que estáis pisando combaten los opresores y nos disputan la gloria de vencerlos! Y con estos ejemplos de singular heroísmo en los fastos de la historia ¿habría un solo hombre en Colombia, tan indigno en este nombre, que no corra veloz a engrosar nuestras filas, que deben marchar a San Carlos, a romper las prisiones en que gimen esas verdaderas Belonas? ¡No, no! Todo hombre será soldado puesto que las mujeres se han convertido

*en guerreras y cada soldado será un héroe, por salvar pueblos que
prefieren la libertad a la vida. (Bolívar in Lecuna, 1939:36-7)*

Bolívar's approach to women can be interpreted in different ways. Cherpak suggests that his emphasis on women's participation in the wars served to motivate men to do the same by shaming them into joining the revolutionary armies (1978:222). Earle maintains that he saw women as either "amazons or innocents" rather than human beings; his use of 'nuestras' amazonas suggests that he saw women as possessions and not individuals (2000:139).

Both Cherpak's and Earle's observations are undoubtedly correct. However, despite Bolívar's praise of women, this speech is all about men - not only those who are standing before him but men in general; he reminds them of the traditional gender role they have to perform. Bolívar certainly points to women as an example for bravery; but at the same time he also touches on the image of the male which first and foremost was one of manliness. Faced with the courage displayed by women in this conflict and not participating with due enthusiasm, would lower men to a level 'below' that of a woman; unable or unwilling to fulfill their 'natural' role of protectors. Bolívar's appeal to the *macho*-instinct probably recruited more men to his lines than any ideological reasoning would have done. He cleverly and respectfully says 'naïve female breasts'²⁴, reminding the soldiers what they were defending - the bodies of their women, their property. The image of a Spanish soldier directing his bayonet against a woman's chest was probably followed immediately, in the mind of Bolívar's troops, by one of the woman being raped. The women he refers to in his speech are of

²⁴ 'Pechos' can mean chests or breasts in Spanish. By adding the adjectives 'naïve' (innocent) and 'female' he conjures up the image of breasts while remaining perfectly within acceptable language.

only secondary importance; they are, of course, all beautiful and they all weep inside the prisons. No wonder, the plan these women had hatched might have been 'sublime', yet it ended in disaster because of the women's naivety. How could they even remotely have thought that they could succeed against the Spanish troops! The speech's real purpose, therefore, was to re-address and re-entrench traditional gender roles while at the same time increasing the number of fighters for the independence cause.

Bolívar differed little from other men of his times in as much as he thought that a woman's place was in her home - "Es muy impropio de señoras mezclarse en los negocios políticos" he wrote to his sister in July 1826 (Lecuna, 1929:13-14) and "...una mujer debe ser neutral en los negocios públicos" only one month later (Lecuna, 1929:53) and one can detect a large measure of contradiction in Bolívar's approach to women in the independence wars; but looking at the different contexts in which these statements were made, a certain political pragmatism becomes clearly visible. It could be reasonable to assume, for example, that by saying "...y nos disputan la gloria de vencerlos" he already had in mind a future post-war situation when women would be able to partly lay claim to victory and demand a fair share of the spoils. In the cited letter to his sister he says "señoras" which might imply that he differentiated between "guerreras" - women in combat who came largely from a working-class or peasant background and "señoras" whose connections and higher level of education enabled them to mingle in politics. In this context it could be suggested that Bolívar had mixed feelings about women's participation in the revolutions but opted for a pragmatic attitude. While in 1813, the year of the above speech, fighting was still very much in progress and women's involvement was crucial to success, their temporary setting aside of traditional female values was perfectly acceptable in favour of the greater

good. In 1826, the year of the cited letter, the last remnants of Spanish forces had long been defeated and women should have found their way back into their homes by then.

All these attempts to explain Bolívar's (and his male contemporaries') position towards the status of women in society are, of course, purely speculative; but from his comments, the manipulation of women's role in order to fit the gender-hierarchy the state desired to establish was already taking roots.

Women between civilisation and barbarism

Captives, chinas, and criollas

“Order and Progress”, as is well known, was the *leitmotiv* for state and nation-building during the Liberal period. In a changing society, for the dynamics of its growth, when the transgression of norms was a sign of disorder, it was a priority for the state to impose values and norms for behaviour that clearly defined “the masculine” and “the feminine”. Within this framework of liberal thought, the state endorsed models of citizenship for men and women (Lionetti, 2001:223). Men as heads of and providers for the family should uphold their civic duties - political participation by means of the vote and the defence of fatherland and nation in case of armed conflict. Women in contrast would not enjoy full citizenship. To the extent the state intended to populate the country with “racially pure” individuals, the bodies of women of European origin became inscribed in nationalist texts as means to eliminate the undesirable characteristics of the minorities. On the other hand, they were meant to be models of citizenship that depended on the female population as the guardians of “race” and

republic in order to assure the nation's continuity and prosperity. In this sense, it was crucial to insist on women's efficiency as "good" daughters, wives, and mothers who would reproduce orderliness in their children (Lionetti, 2001:223).

The relationship between the female part of the population and the emerging nation state in Argentina was not limited to the problems of citizenship and women's right to vote or to the volatile dividing line between the private and the public sphere; it also contained issues of civil rights, education and the economy, as well as family politics, sexuality and healthcare. As was clearly the case in Argentina, the nation is often constructed by elites, who have the power to define the nation in ways that further their own interests, the same elites are also able to define who is central and who is marginal to the national project (Mayer, 2000:12)²⁵. In the intersection of nation, gender and sexuality the nation is constructed to respect a "moral code" which is often based on masculinity and heterosexuality. This is why leaders of the nation may try to represent their nation as 'modest' and in turn speak in terms of the ideals of the nation in imposing on women a traditional moral code (see Mosse, 1985, introduction). The nation has been symbolically figured as a family and as such has acquired a patriarchal hierarchy within which members are assigned distinct roles in accordance with their gender. Like the patriarchal family, for the nation to sustain itself it needs both masculinity and femininity; both are indispensable for their mutual existence and without them the nation as we know it would not exist (McClintock, 1993:62). It can be said, therefore, that nations depend on powerful constructions of gender. Despite nationalism's emphasis on popular unity most nations owe their very existence to the legitimisation of gender difference. Access to the same rights and

²⁵ The construction and spread of a nationality in Latin America has primarily been attributed to the state, as Nicola Miller points out (1999:12), and the elites, due to their economic power, have exerted a strong influence on matters of government and the state in Argentina as well as elsewhere until the present day.

resources of the nation state is never equally distributed between men and women of the same nation.

The state also is often symbolically depicted as a family; most people refer to authority relations in the private sphere, the hierarchical family structure, to interpret and justify authority relations in the public domain. Generally, governments across the political spectrum refer to well ordered families as the building blocks for smoothly functioning states. Joan Scott suggested that one cannot separate politics from gender (1986:1070 ff.) and seen in this light, gendered rhetoric and policies can symbolise and express important facets of the desired political and social orders. The legal regulation of gender, for example the changes in family and property law, demonstrate how states use gender relations to promote a certain state formation and its desired moral values, gender practices, social structures, and cultural identity (McGee Deutsch, 1991a:260).

Continuity in gender politics from the colonial era to the formation of the nation state in Argentina can be observed with the marginalisation of '*la china*' (female inhabitant of the *pampas*) in the construction of the Argentine nation. The idea of civilisation as opposed to savagery and barbarism did not first appear after independence, that is to say, with the publication of the famous writings of Sarmiento and Alberdi, but had already found roots in the texts of Spanish authors who described the regions in their travel journals in the second half of the eighteenth century. They established 'city' and 'civilisation' as synonymous. These texts, which can be considered fundamental for the construction of Argentine national identity, identified the rural population of the Río de la Plata region with an 'uncivilised' and 'barbaric' way of life, whose representatives were the *gaucho* and his female counterpart *la china* (Potthast &

Scarzanella, 2001:9). But while the gaucho later became transformed into a national symbol, this was not the same in the case of *la china*. This was mainly due to the fact that these rural women could not be categorised as belonging to a single ethnic group; they could be white, indigenous, or *mestizas* and were, therefore, unsuitable for the construction of a white, cultured image of the nation. The same was, of course, true for the *gauchos* but it can be assumed that because of their skilful handling of cattle which was necessary to produce the main export products of the region, leather, tallow, and fats, they enjoyed at least some degree of respect within the social hierarchy. Their women, however, were perceived as the personification of female laziness in the eyes of the white traveller and demonstrated the insolence that characterised barbarism. It was particularly their perceived lack of housewifely skills that aroused criticism - European women took pride in their home making and elaborate cooking which, through the ample use of condiments, was a clear sign of high civilisation. *Las chinas*, on the other hand, did not lend that much attention to these female duties²⁶. Furthermore, they displayed a far more relaxed attitude to sexual relations than would have been deemed proper in European circles. They often granted sexual favours to the winners of local contests, their union with men was not formalised through marriage and they were, therefore, useless, even damaging, to the state because their children did not experience the stabilising effects of an intact family life. Following the moving cattle herds they did not form stable settlements

²⁶ In his travel writings, the government official, Alonso Carrió de la Vandra (c. 1775), particularly criticised the prevailing division of labour among the gauchos. ...”While the men roasted the meat on fires they had difficulty to build and with hardly any seasoning, the women made *mate* and doled out slices of watermelon. Then they sat on ropes that had been tied hammock style between some trees and enjoyed swinging to and fro” (1973:248, in Marre, p. 44). Had Carrió visited some indigenous tribes, he would have found that they remedied the lack of fuel in a quite ingenious way. In his article *El menu de la selva*, Horacio Guido explains that many Amerindians not only used salt, they also employed clever cooking methods, for example for ostriches which they filled with hot stones before tying them up and roasting them; they also collected the cooking juices for gravy (1968:86-9).

capable of defence against invading 'Indians'. In other words, *las chinas* were unsuitable as biological reproducers of the civilised, urban culture, modelled on European cities that the liberal state was trying to establish as Argentine-ness. Thus, these women fundamentally represented the 'other' in the construction of the Argentine nation.

By stressing the opposing characteristics of urban/rural during the liberal state, nation-builders neglected the necessity of efforts to effect social changes that would end the divisions European/indigenous which were synonymous with modern/backward. Rural women were termed as inferior because of their indigenous heritage, unsophisticated life style, and perceived low moral standards; but at the same time they were a much needed element in the process of the construction of national identity in order to clearly distinguish the desirable characteristics of the urban population.

Another group of women, whose existences have been omitted in the writing of the nation and have successfully been erased from collective memory, are the white captive women. In times of peace, indigenous people frequently worked on the large estates of the white settlers as a seasonal work force. In war times, one of their strategies was to rape and kidnap white women, a custom which, practised over a long period, produced a considerable number of individuals who were 'white and fair' (Ulloa, 1990:313 cited by Marre, 2000:36). According to Rotker, the capture and rape of white women were not isolated occurrences but happened on a frequent basis. Little is known about the fate of these women who, unlike those captured by North American 'Indians', left no personal stories, although stories were told about them (2002). An important strategy during the invasion of the interior regions was to

populate the conquered land with white descendants of the conquerors. To this end, the rape of indigenous women by the Spanish soldiers was officially encouraged; on the other hand, the coupling of white women with indigenous males was completely inadmissible.

“Marta Riquelme”, by William Henry Hudson, is one of the few stories that evoke the exclusion and suffering the captives had to endure. It is the tragic tale of a beautiful white woman who was captured by ‘Indians’ and subsequently forced to live within the tribe and bear three children to the chief. She finally is allowed to leave but has changed beyond recognition when she arrives in her native village: “Was this woman indeed Marta, once the pride of Yala! It was hard to believe it, so darkened with the burning suns and winds of years was her face, once so fair; so wasted and furrowed with grief and the many hardships she had undergone! Her figure, worn almost to a skeleton, was clothed with ragged garments, while her head, bowed down with sorrow and despair, was divested of that golden crown which had been her chief ornament”. Marta’s husband rejects her and she finally becomes a *kakué*, a bird of the pampas who terrifies people with its agonising shrieks.²⁷

As in the case of the *chinas*, it becomes obvious here, that underlying the oppression of the ‘other’ is the fear of the unstable and the nomadic, not only the fear of ‘racial’ difference. Once captured and raped by the savages, the women became devoid of the clean, chaste image that builders of the nation held of the female who was to reproduce this image in her offspring. Mothers of mixed-blood children clearly did not fit into this building of a white nation²⁸.

²⁷ The captive white woman as an object of dispute and negotiation between two antagonistic cultures had already been the subject of colonial historiography in Ruy Díaz de Guzmán’s (1554-1629) *Lucía Miranda*. For more detail on “Marta Riquelme” also see Frederick, 1989:7-18.

²⁸ Rotker points out that in terms of erasure from collective memory Afro Argentines as well as indigenous peoples experienced the same fate as the white captive women. While in paintings produced at the time of the settlement of Argentina’s interior, black people, ‘Indians’, and scenes depicting the capture of

More than 230 years have passed since Carrijo de la Vandera ate his bland meal of roast meat in the Argentine *pampas* and it can be assumed that the gaucho-cuisine has experienced some changes since. Astonishingly though, attitudes towards certain rural women have not. In a study by Kristi Ann Stølen published in 1996 she explores the relationship between gender discourses and gender relations in Santa Cecilia, a multi-ethnic rural community in Argentina. Composed of middle-class farmers (*gringos*), descendants of immigrants who arrived in the 1880s and seasonal labourers (*criollos*), descendants of indigenous people, the community engages in agricultural production. The sexual division of labour within the farmers' household is the traditional one: the husband's role is to ensure the material welfare of his wife and children. This implies having access to land and planning, cultivating, and selling agricultural produce. Men also control the family's finances. Domestic work and childcare are women's domains and defined as complementary to agricultural work. 'Atender y ser mantenida/mantener y ser atendido'²⁹ summarizes the way in which *gringos* talk about their marital arrangements.

Categorized as either permanent or seasonal workers, the *criollos* make their living as farmhands mainly in the cultivation of cotton. Among the *criollos* there is no rigid sexual division of labour. Paid work as well as housework is normally shared by both sexes. Unlike the *gringas*, the *criollas* administer the family's finances. In material terms, the resident *criollos*, and to an even larger extent the seasonal ones

white women were frequently present; subsequently, these groups of people completely vanished from any representation. Rotker likens these 'disappearing acts' to the disappearances during the dirty wars of the most recent dictatorship. One who has disappeared is not an entity, is neither dead nor alive; officially, they have never existed at all (2002:3). It is also interesting to note that in Argentina the period of the Dirty War still is referred to as "*proceso militar de reorganización nacional*" (military process of national reorganization), a euphemism used by the junta for the violent measures to reinforce their power; an example of how the dominant system manipulates language (Díaz, www.luisavalenzuela.com, 05/08/2009).

²⁹ To attend and be maintained/ to maintain and be attended to.

(*golondrinas*)³⁰, have a far lower standard of living. In general, a distinction is made between two categories of people: ‘colonos/gringos/blancos’ on the one hand and ‘cosecheros/criollos/negros’ on the other, which invariably can be translated into the occupation, class, and ethnicity of the bearers of these denominations: land owner/wealthy/white as opposed to labourer/poor/black.

The *gringos* are proud of their dominant economic and social position, and consider it absolutely justified. They see their wealth as a result of hard work and the observance of Catholic values and practices. They consider themselves the moral superiors of the *criollos*, whom they depict as lazy, wasteful, addicted to drinking, and ‘without morals’. Sexual behaviour - particularly female sexual behaviour - is an important distinguishing factor. Whereas *gringas* are normally *caseras* (household and home loving), staunchly Catholic, and decent unless proved otherwise, *criollas* are deemed to be *fáciles* (easy). *Gringos* maintain that this derives from the *criollas*’ *sangre caliente* (hot blood) and an upbringing that lacks control of their sexual desire and urges. They also believe that this is due to the *criollo* children’s early exposure to sexual activity since in many cases they have to share a bedroom with adult members of the family.

Unfortunately we do not know what the *chinas* thought of the Europeans since the colonial travellers did not consider it worthwhile to ask them. Stølen, however, inquired about the *criollas*’ opinion of the *gringos*, who are perceived as a quite boring lot, incapable of having a good time; a lifestyle they would not swap for their own even if they could.

³⁰ Swallows

Rural labourers and urban sex-workers

The economy of Argentina's interior provinces relied almost entirely on women who pursued traditional crafts producing textiles and ranching utensils until the 1870s. These activities were not limited to working-class women but middle-class women also often provided the bulk of family income through embroidery and weaving. In many of these regions there were more female than male inhabitants due to military conscription, the tendency of male immigrants to remain at the coast, to the migration of native males from the interior to the littoral and to the casualties of the civil war. The industrial and pastoral development of the coastal regions, particularly the province of Buenos Aires after 1813 caused a fundamental transformation of Argentina's labour patterns in rural and coastal areas (Solberg, 1970, cited in Archetti, 1999:30-1).

The rise of the free market economy and international trade as well as the increased importance of cash crops and meat virtually made the cottage industry of the interior redundant. The shortage of male labour in the province of Córdoba, for example, led to the implementation of the anti-vagrancy law which specifically discriminated against women. This law had existed since 1772 but had so far not included provisions specifically related to women. After 1813, however, new regulations enabled authorities to enact special female anti-vagrancy laws, predominantly under the pretext of safeguarding women's morality, implying that any woman facing financial difficulties would, sooner or later, turn to prostitution. Under this law, poor and unemployed women could be charged with idleness or immoral behaviour and subsequently put to work on public projects ranging from road building to work in factories which were run by the local police (Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de

Córdoba). In this way, authorities were able to regulate the scarce labour supply and ensure sufficient numbers of workers for critical areas of the economy (Guy, 1981:69).

Other regions soon followed suit; in Tucumán province, the law was implemented in 1823 and amended in 1832, then called 'forced labour law' which stipulated that women be led away from immoral earnings by placing them into honest work. According to this law an arrested woman had to seek employment within eight days or be considered vagrant. Police were instructed to find them employment and were also entitled to determine their salary. In 1889, the number of women arrested for offences other than drunkenness totalled 175; 148 of them were charged with vagrancy; no adult male faced similar charges in that year. Statistics for 1882 in the same province show that 55% of women arrested were charged with vagrancy. Men charged with the same offence presented 0.5% of total male arrests. In short, the anti-vagrancy law was applied with much greater frequency to women than to men (Guy, 1981:74).

In Buenos Aires prostitution also became the target for new legislation. By 1875 the city had experienced a decade of rapid urbanisation and population growth due to increased migration from the countryside and to massive immigration from abroad. This population growth, characterised by a high proportion of unmarried men, had created problems of social control and public health issues that had to be addressed by the authorities. In order to improve public health, they legalised female sexual commerce within authorised bordellos which kept prostitutes off the streets and at the same time provided lucrative revenue for the city treasury through expensive licence fees for such establishments. During the following thirteen years these fees were also imposed on café and hotel owners who employed waitresses who, in turn, also had to

register as prostitutes. Female domestic servants and wet-nurses also came under scrutiny and had to register (Guy, 1988:60). Needless to say, this drastically reduced female employment, even though it was 'honest' work. Despite extensive evidence of male prostitution, nobody ever suggested mandatory registration of male prostitutes, nor criminalising homosexual activity. Doctors who acted as official consultants for the government in this matter represented the view that male homosexual prostitutes - unlike inherently immoral female prostitutes - had acquired their sexual preferences and were temporarily mentally ill because they misunderstood female sexuality (Guy, 1988:65). It was female prostitutes that came to be seen as the origin of urban disorder instead of its economic and social consequence. The problem of controlling prostitution thereby was conflated with the more general issue of the potentially revolutionary working classes, and it formed the core of debates about political authority, gender and class relations (Guy, 1991:75). The ideas of officials seeking to control this female disorder underscored how gender operated in their thought. Physicians, for example, believed, even after modern insight into germ theory had been gained, that venereal diseases could be eliminated by treating women alone and practically denied the existence of male prostitution and the fact that female prostitutes often became infected by their customers. At the end of the nineteenth century doctors and politicians were able to scientifically or socially explain male criminality and yet, they seemed to be unable to shake off gender-based moral judgement of women.

Laqueur states that "whoring" had long been regarded as wicked and detrimental to the common good, like other disturbances of the peace like drunkenness and blasphemy but in the nineteenth century it rose to be *the* social evil, a particularly disruptive vice (1992:212). Particularly in relation to motherhood and women's role as

reproducers of the nation it can be seen why prostitutes especially became outcasts of society: in accordance with scientific belief at the time, prostitutes were believed to be barren or, in any case, very unlikely to bear children because so much traffic passed over their reproductive organs; because their ovaries, through overstimulation, were seldom without morbid lesions; because their fallopian tubes were closed by too frequent intercourse; and, most tellingly, because they did not feel any affection towards the men they had sex with (1992:213). In this sense prostitutes were considered an unproductive commodity and therefore, no valuable asset for the nation.

Examining the phenomenon of the changing representation of women from the field of Argentine literature, Masiello states that “when the state finds itself in transition from one form of government to another, or from a period of traditionalism to a more modernising programme, we find an alteration in the representation of gender - “a different configuration of male and female emerges” (1992:8). To superimpose Jonathan Rutherford’s thought on this picture, targeting female prostitutes averted the public eye from the state’s inadequacy to deal with change, effectively creating an ‘enemy’ who was to blame for all that was ‘not right’ in society (1990:10). Safeguarding morality was nothing but a smoke screen - the real goal of the law was to control independent, lower-class females at the same time that unsupervised women workers were being removed from the urban workplace and weeding out, so to speak, those women whose offspring could not be deemed valuable citizens.

Reform and Continuity

The civil laws defining individual and family rights in Argentina did not change significantly with independence, nor were the regulations of the internal affairs of the Church and its relationship with the state altered. Those laws regulating gender relations, however, clearly had a negative effect on women's legal status. The state's admiration for European culture also spread into areas of administration and legislation and between 1858 and 1879 Argentina adopted civil codes inspired by the Napoleonic Code and contemporary English law (Lavrin, 1995:193). Under these laws women could not enter into any legal action, assume or relinquish a contract, or sell or mortgage their property, unless authorised by their husbands; any suit against a married woman was addressed to her husband; she could not enter a legal suit against his will, unless authorised by a judge. Husbands retained the right to oppose their wives' activities and obtain an injunction against any commercial or professional transaction. A husband also had the right to control his wife's earnings (Lavrin, 1995: 195). In Argentina, these restrictions for women remained in force until the Civil Code was reformed in 1926; the changes reflected many years of debate and incorporated the essential elements of female juridical emancipation as understood at the time. Although its objective was to free women from legal impediments, it still left significant concessions to the husband, regarding property; for example, he still had the right to administer his wife's property without accounting for it, only after the reform, could she register her will to the contrary.

The pursuit of industrialisation by the Liberal State as well as the free market economy also had detrimental effects on women. The evolution of women's work in Argentina provides an ideal historical example of the effects of economic

modernisation on females. Consequences of this modernisation process prompted the state to implement laws that clearly presented a regressive step in terms of women's rights and equality before the law.

The decline of the cottage industry in the interior of the country as well as the spectacular economic development of the coastal region resulted in a drastic reduction of the percentage of adult women who either claimed a profession or received payment for their labour. In both regions, distinct patterns of labour legislation related to peonage and the advent of modern protective industrial legislation influenced by European conditions created trends that led to the channelling of women into domestic service or unemployment (Guy, 1981:67)

The ideology that women should not work at all, let alone in industrial settings, also found expression with the industrial labour legislation implemented in and around Buenos Aires at a relatively early stage of industrialisation. Intended to protect working women from abusive conditions such labour legislation often resulted in discouraging the expansion of industries that relied on female labour, particularly the Argentine textile industry. Specific industrial legislation came into force in 1918 which made jobs in thirtysix industries inaccessible to women (Guy, 1981:84). Typically female jobs, however, were exempt from protective laws as well as from regular work inspections. So, for example, domestic servants, women working in hospitals, hotels, boarding houses, and bath houses had no legal protection from dangerous or unhealthy working conditions, nor did they have a mandatory day of rest. In rural areas, agricultural processing plants were also closed to women workers. There, the minority of women who did find work earned appalling wages for laundering and ironing at wealthier households (Guy, 1981:82). In the provinces, pockets of prosperity started to emerge resulting from the budding wine and sugar industries while half the female

population was struggling for daily sustenance. The social pattern that gradually started to emerge then has characterised Argentina until the present day.

While the Positivists were enthusiastic about progress and clearly enamoured by the idea of incorporating the nation into the mainstream of technology and international trade, they had doubts about women's role in society. The female/feminist wing of the Socialist Party contributed in the elaboration of reform bills to broaden women's civil rights that were proposed on a number of occasions; politicians, however, were still unsure about the meaning of feminism. They commonly shared the feeling that women's equality could be achieved through juridical changes that would not challenge prevailing notions of gender roles. The law was to be used as leverage to eliminate some inequalities stemming from gender and class that stifled women's intellectual and economic abilities. Legislators recognised the incompatibility of work and submission, but their perception of independence was incomplete insofar as it considered women's ability to earn money, and not the true value of those earnings in the economy of the family. Therefore, all proposals for reform of the Civil Codes were based on the assumption that women should have the same rights as men, but under a set of carefully spelled out conditions (Lavrin, 1995:201-7).

The legislation specifically regarding women during the Liberal State was marked by constant push and pull action. Legislators and thinkers of the famous generation of 1837, like Sarmiento were convinced that access for women to education and their entering into the professions was a fundamental prerequisite for Argentina's economic prosperity on the one hand and for the reproduction of healthy, responsible citizens on the other (República Argentina, 1901:19). Juan Bautista Alberdi saw the need to free women from Spanish law and customs which subjugated them to fathers' and

husbands' control. Women should be able to assume full duties of citizens to contribute to the country's economic growth (1886-7:396-7); and it is true that many women benefited from this new ideology particularly with respect to the opportunity to receive education. And yet, the loss of control over their persons, their property, their movement, their ability to exercise their own will, and their children was the main source of discomfort for married women at the turn of the century. Whether factory workers or university professors, married women were equally restricted by the law (Lavrin, 1995:196). The attempts to link Argentine national identity to the city, particularly the city of Buenos Aires, excluded all those who did not share certain domestic and sexual practices, that is to say, all those incapable of or resistant to taking part in a project of cultural homogenisation which would eradicate their own cultural particularities as well as their way of life. This 'non-cooperation' in the national project, led by a group of intellectuals, freed, to a significant extent, the Buenos Aires metropolis from the responsibilities to solve the internal conflicts that divided the Argentine nation. The very structure of the Liberals' arguments presupposed that the promise of modernity was male and the inertia of tradition was female. This was a significant distinction in Argentina, where intellectuals, who strongly influenced the government, were determined to build the new nation against the past rather than on its foundations, (Tulio Halperín Donghi, 1987, cited in Mead, 1997:647).

Part 2

The Identity of Motherhood

“Being a mother” and “motherhood” have been constantly changing concepts which are expansive in the sense that they came to represent a wide range of issues within the emerging women’s organizations in nineteenth century Argentina³¹. It is therefore no simple tasks to pinpoint what it meant for these women to be mothers and why and how their position as mothers served as a point of departure for social movements. To disentangle the identity of motherhood one has to look at the intersection of culture, politics, modernization, and at the way in which political identities intersected with ethnicity, gender, class, and nationalism in relation to national histories and systems of governance.

Having briefly outlined the Argentine state’s approach to women, it is important at this point to draw attention to the ways women responded to the systems and institutions that asserted dominance and control over them because these reactions presented the beginnings of what would develop into women’s social and political movements.

One route that women used to overcome their construction as ‘different’ and often as non-rational was to stress their superior ‘maternal’ qualities of caring, responsibility, and compassion as key constituents of citizenship (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999:7), but, as Werbner argues, the point is not whether men are compassionate and loyal or women rational and objective; the point is that all these

³¹ I would like to point out that my analysis could probably be applicable across Latin America as well as elsewhere but has been undertaken in a specifically Argentinean context.

qualities embody and objectify the ideal of citizenship and their absence delegitimizes the state and its political authority (1999:227).

The strength of political motherhood³² as an evolving social movement has been to introduce new human qualities into the public sphere and to define them as equally foundational in the legitimization of the political community. However, even though women's role as mothers in relation to social change was a frequently discussed issue in Argentina at the time, women who organized in women's movements did not do so specifically *as mothers*³³. Nevertheless, they joined political organizations as workers and employees, mainly in order to achieve higher pay and better working conditions. Having said that, even in this early participation in social movements, women took advantage of the state's emphasis on their roles as mothers precisely because existing policies, or the lack of them, made this role increasingly difficult. In doing so, they posed less of a threat to the establishment than women in feminist organizations who demanded women's entry into male power structures. Or, in Icken Safa's words, "as women move away from practical to strategic interests, they are likely to encounter more opposition on both gender and class lines from established interest groups who are unwilling to grant them the same legitimacy as men in the public arena" (1990:367)³⁴.

³² This term was coined by Jennifer Schirmer in her article on 'motherist' movements in El Salvador and Guatemala (in Westwood & Radcliffe, 1993, 30-64)

³³ Not until the late 1970s, when the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo took up their protests would such a strategy emerge. Taylor argues that in relation to the Madres that "the mother's movement did not begin when the individual mothers became acquainted in their search for their children; it originated when the women consciously decided to protest and agitate *as mothers*. That *as* marks the conceptual distance between the essentialist notion of motherhood attributed to the Madres and the self-conscious manipulation of the maternal role - understood as performative - that makes the movement the powerful and intensely dramatic spectacle that it is." (1997:194, in Stephen, 2001:59)

³⁴ On the other hand, this line of reasoning suggests that movements that are associated with traditional meanings of gender will be more acceptable than those that resist such meanings. Political participation has been seen as "normal" for men; in contrast, women's participation is perceived as anomalous, ineffective, and inappropriate because it contradicts gender expectations (Einwohner et al., 2000:681). In this sense, Taylor argues, group demonstrations of public motherhood engender a contradiction that allows those performing motherhood to be reclassified as whores or madwomen (1997, in Stephen, 2001:60).

While it is clear to women in social movements that participation is a constant process of negotiating difference, the need to create unitary names, symbols and goals can result in the essentialization of women as mothers; and organizing requires the projection of sameness to outsiders (Stephen, 2001:54). Pinpointing one's identity becomes a major factor in political mobilisation because it involves claiming one's identity as a member of an oppressed or marginalized group as a political point of departure. It also involves the celebration of a group's uniqueness as well as analysis of its particular oppression (Stephen, 2001:54). However, as Hall has noted, unity based on identity is not natural or inevitable but the result of the continual construction of artificial closure against the constant grain of difference (1996:5). However, the fact that political recognition of women (and other marginalized groups) requires political action on the basis of essentialized identity categories points to at least an initial strategy based on affirmative action rather than on abstract notions of universal citizenship (Stephen, 2001:67).

Women and the state

As already mentioned, the positivist intellectuals in Argentina exerted considerable influence on government policy during the Liberal State. In their attempts to create "Argentine-ness" they established a 'grid', so to speak, in which to fit all social and political groups - an order that would lead to progress and an organized national consciousness. Women presented a particular troublesome group to them because on the one hand they supported reform of social services for women in terms of access to education, health and childcare, but on the other hand their understanding of social groups as well as political economy was based in biology and evolutionary Darwinism.

Although all the reformers shared a belief in the elevation of women's status through education, they had not abandoned the main assumption underlying all education for women: their preparation was to serve their ultimate destiny as wives and mothers in an improved manner (Lavrin, 1978:304). The science adopted by the positivists served progress but at the same time upheld inequalities as naturally given, unchangeable and therefore moral (Haraway, 1991, cited in Mead). There is no doubt that the state intervened (and still does so, in Argentina and elsewhere) in the private sphere of the family for the sake of larger, sometimes open and sometimes disguised, national projects (Plummer, 1995). The state also has a major role to play in articulating masculinities, femininities and the role of women through a series of discourses which position women as family members, mothers, and as class subjects (Alvarez, 1990, in Westwood & Radcliffe). But it is also the case that these discourses are racialized and thereby privilege specific ethnicities. In Argentina, only certain women are celebrated as mothers of the nation and idealized against the position of all 'other' women who are non-white or do not subscribe to the dominant way of life. In addition, the state and political parties have sought to articulate discourses around the family and motherhood in relation to the powerful Catholic Church in Latin America. The symbol of the mother in Latin America has been used both to signal opposition and resistance to the excesses of the state and to represent the epitome of the national subject. (Westwood & Radcliffe, 1993:12).

Mothers in particular, as reproducers of the nation, are often the target of bio-political discourses and eugenic policies as we have seen in the case of *las chinas* and the *criolla* women. These can vary in their means from gentle persuasion and propaganda to bribes and coercion - from viewing 'people as power' to a Malthusian perspective which constructs every baby born as a threat (Yuval-Davis, 1996),

according to the economic situation or class and ethnic background of the newborns. Often, different populations are distinguished by their positive or negative biological 'contribution' to the national project.

The social value that is awarded to contributions to the common good, biological or otherwise, is, according to Taylor, determined by 'imagined' frameworks which provide the space and the horizon within which one can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what one endorses or opposes (1989:27). These frameworks, as Taylor points out, provide the background, whether explicit or implicit, for our moral judgement, institutions or reactions. To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating the boundaries within which we think. Doing without them is utterly impossible for us; in other words, the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them always include strong qualitative discrimination. For example, there is no question that one of the core elements of the frameworks within which nineteenth century Argentines conducted discourses related to all kinds of social groups was Catholic doctrine. Religious scriptures and their interpretation have undoubtedly influenced their thinking to a great extent since they have presented, for many hundreds of years, a moral guideline for human behaviour and the ideal way in which people should interact. These influences, as pointed out by Schüssler Fiorenza, are not only important for religious communities but are fundamental building blocks of Western culture as a whole. As such they will always be involved in the

development of thought that influences the systems that regulate society, be they of an oppressive authoritarian nature or of the kind that subscribe to emancipation and liberation (1997:344)³⁵. In this sense, Catholic teaching provided moral foundations for both the women who stressed their motherhood as a justification for their demands of rights and the positivists who stated women's female-ness as the reason for denying them those rights. On the one hand they rejected feminized Catholicism as opposed to their own masculine rationality in their attempts to make positivism a vehicle to order and progress, replacing religious views of reality; on the other hand they supported one of the most fundamental aspects of Catholic teachings, that of androcentric interpretation of the social order, female subordination and traditional gender roles.

Equally as entrenched in Catholic teachings as male dominance are the notions of motherhood, self-sacrifice, and domesticity as the most celebrated elements of female virtues as contained within the *Marianismo* ideal. Without going into too much detail here about what exactly constitutes *Marianismo* it has to be pointed out that it does not present any inherently biological female markers but is a socially constructed concept denoting 'appropriate' female behaviour (Melhuus & Stølen, 1996:11-12). According to Stevens, it proclaims the semi-divinity of all women because of their ability to live a life of suffering, their silent submissiveness, humility and self-denial. Followers of *marianismo* claim that women's 'natural' moral superiority acts as a counter balance to men's 'natural' wickedness (*machismo*) and will ultimately redeem them before the eyes of God for their transgressions. In other words, women will suffer willingly for men's sins and achieve absolution for them with their prayers (1973, in Pescatello). The *marianismo/machismo* model of gender relations is also

³⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is a leading feminist theologian. She identifies as Catholic and her work is generally in the context of Christianity, although much of her work has broader applicability. Her work focuses on questions of biblical, theological, and feminist epistemology, hermeneutics, rhetoric, the politics of religious/scriptural interpretation, and on issues of theological education, equality, and democracy.

often resorted to in order to answer the question as to why women put up with bad male behaviour.

It can be seen here why the woman-question was so important for policy makers, and why gender is an indispensable concept in the analysis of political-cultural movements, of transition, and of social change. It is in the context of the intensification of religious, cultural, ethnic, and national identity - itself a function of uneven development and social change - that we see the politicization of gender, the family and the position of women. The ideal woman and the ideal society seem to go hand in hand, although the specific status of women depends very much upon the specific vision of the ideal society.

Because of their reproductive capacity, women are seen as the transmitters of group values and traditions, and as agents of socialisation of the young. When group identity becomes intensified, women are elevated to the status of symbol of the community and are compelled to assume the burden of the reproduction of the group. Their roles as wives and especially mothers are exalted, even fetishized - in the Argentine case supported by a thoroughly entrenched following of the *marianismo* ideal. Women's place in the home is lauded. It is woman as wife and mother - not woman as citizen, student, worker, and so forth - who is ideologically constructed in the discourse and programme of the nationalist project.

Nari notes that mothers became a political object of the state which, beyond its specific goals, allowed the political classes to impose or reinforce a female identity linked to motherhood. Furthermore, these questions became the subject of public debate because they were constructed as issues that were central to the future of society, the nation and "race". Motherhood became politicized and on this public/political stage it was re-introduced from different perspectives and for

different reasons, often antagonistic ones (2004:150). The most significant politics of motherhood focused on the implementation of new legislation and justifications for such actions abounded - from claiming rights that legitimately were considered as pertaining to women to the notion that public health, particularly that of future citizens, was a duty of the state. In this sense, women came to be perceived as the nation's reproductive asset. Their persons and bodies practically ceased to belong to them; it was not they but society that decided over them (2004:151).³⁶

This is why women's behaviour becomes so important for the nationalist movement and why it becomes so important to establish an appropriate role for women (ordained by nature or by divine will) and to put women in their place. Women who resist this role are accused of disloyalty (Moghadam, 1994:18).

Papanek's observations can be applied very fittingly to the Argentine developments at the time when she says that there is a paradox here that places women in a double bind: many societies make women the carriers of tradition or the centre of the family, insisting that, especially during periods of rapid social change, their actions and appearance should alter less quickly than that of men, or should not be seen to change at all. Demands for family stability and an unchanging role for women may be especially strong when the processes of change are perceived as coming from 'outside' the group and somehow alien, threatening existing patterns of life (1994:47). In nineteenth century Argentina, the large immigrant population and their role in economic and political and thus also social change clearly was perceived as a threat from the 'outside'; the blame for the decline of morality was almost solely put at the

³⁶ It is worth noting that this sort of legislation and its application was also demanded by those who supported women's emancipation in granting them those rights they deserved precisely because they were mothers; out of the notion that motherhood was a function, a practice, and a fundamental value of humanity (Nari, 2004:151)

feet of foreign women or “alien” women since this line of reasoning included all those women who were different to the prevailing image of the female.

The demands on women to strictly adhere to their traditional roles even though the social environment is rapidly changing presuppose a high degree of female conformity to male controls, particularly in the Argentine context because those women were supposed to maintain their typical female roles on the one hand and contribute to the nation’s progress on the other by entering education and the labour market; this clearly is a further example of the push and pull policies towards women by the liberal state that has already been mentioned above. Female compliance, Papanek argues further, in turn, provides men with a sense of mastery over events that seem to be out of control. The double bind of greater ‘normal’ exposure to identity change and greater responsibility for maintaining group stability through their conformity contributes to women’s difficulties (1994:47).

According to Charles Taylor, to identify oneself is a kind of determining where one stands; but it also involves the existence of others whose opinions, expectations and appraisals in respect to the self one internalizes (1992:27). These expectations of others are transformed into self-expectations (Gerth & Wright Mills, 1964:80); and in the light of the situation experienced by Argentine women as described above they clearly could not have determined where exactly they were standing or what exactly was expected of them because of the mixed messages the state was sending out. I would like to argue therefore that this uncertainty presented an obstacle to their self-recognition - another crucial element for achieving a sense of personal identity as Honneth points out (1995:18-23). Self-recognition, in turn, takes three forms: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem.³⁷ Simultaneously, Honneth argues that

³⁷ Whereas self-respect is a matter of viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person, self-esteem involves a sense of what it is to make one special, unique and

there are three forms of disrespect which coexist with the three forms of recognition, and which would contribute to the creation of social conflicts and to a 'struggle for recognition' on the part of social sectors deprived of these forms of respect. They are physical abuse or threats to the physical integrity of a person which affects the subject's self-confidence; the systematic structural exclusion of a person from having certain rights, which damages their self-respect; and the cultural devaluation of certain modes of life or beliefs which are considered to be inferior or deficient, which prevents the subject from giving social value or esteem to his or her abilities and contributions (1995:138). Therefore, as Taylor states, 'due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people; it is a vital human need' (1992:26).

The esteem accorded for a certain task hinges on a range of particular cultural factors. If, for example, homemaking is considered an insignificant contribution for the common good, then homemakers will lack the evaluative resources in terms of which they can acquire a sense of personal accomplishment. In this sense, the social conditions for esteem are determined by the prevailing sense of what is to count as a worthwhile contribution to society. Honneth situates esteem within the horizon of values of a particular culture and opens up the possibility of conceiving of the conditions for self-esteem as a field of contestation and cultural struggle for the recognition of previously denigrated contributors to the common good (1995:122).

Although Argentine women's contribution to society as mothers and home makers was recognized, it was recognition based solely on essentialist, biological claims and as such restricted them to the home and the role of moral guardian, even though on the

'particular'. This cannot be based on a set of trivial or negative characteristics. What distinguishes one from others must be something valuable. Accordingly, to have the sense that one has nothing of value to offer is to lack any basis for developing a sense of one's own identity. Individuality and self-esteem are therefore linked (Honneth, 1995).

face of it this 'natural' female role was celebrated. Motherhood was idealized to the extent of becoming mythological and part of the cultural meaning system (see Woodward, 1997:6) but in practice, and because it was perceived as 'natural', it was also perceived as not requiring a physical or intellectual effort on the part of women. One did not require anything other than natural instincts to be a mother and since motherhood does not attract any financial remuneration, it was situated within an abstract, spiritual space that did not merit political participation.

Moral motives for revolt and resistance - that is, those based on a tacit understanding of what one *deserves* - do not only emerge in the defence of traditional ways of life but also in situations where those ways of life have become intolerable. Because key forms of exclusion, insult, and denigration can be seen as violating self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem, the negative emotional reactions generated by these experiences reflect not just the idiosyncratic misfortune of individuals but experiences shared by many others, the potential emerges for collective action aimed at actually expanding social patterns of recognition. Here, the symbolic resources of social movements play a crucial role in showing this disrespect to be typical of an entire group of people, thereby helping to establish the cultural conditions for resistance and revolt (Honneth, 1995:138).

The lack of universal suffrage or non-recognition of female intellectual abilities, when experienced long-term, can certainly be interpreted as disrespect and can make life intolerable. Looking at working-class women's predicament in industrializing nineteenth century Argentina, however, is more illustrative of the insult and denigration Honneth talks about. While it is important to recognize that the entry of women into the paid labour force was historically progressive, because it offered

women the opportunity to attain a degree of independence from the family and to enter into direct relationships with other members of the working class, Argentine women were as exploited by domestic and foreign capitalists as their counterparts elsewhere in industrializing settings. Receiving on average only about half of what men earned for the same jobs and the fact that women were more subordinate and had lower rates of absence from work than men (Bialet Masse, 1904, cited in Guy, 1981:82) made women workers very appealing to employers and by 1895, 30% of the paid work force in Buenos Aires was composed of women (Hollander, 1977:182). Most of them, due to long working hours and filthy conditions, acquired chronic diseases shortly after beginning to work, such as menstrual irregularities, rheumatism, sciatica, and tuberculosis. Not until 1907, with the promulgation of Law 5291 which regulated working conditions of women and minors, were these issues officially addressed; and even then the law existed mainly on paper and was hardly ever enforced³⁸. The labour legislation towards women as well as that regarding civil rights as touched upon further above underscored legally the idealized image of women in Argentine culture which remained that of the housewife-mother. Paradoxically, as pointed out by Hollander, often the very men who spoke of women as the 'weaker sex' in need of male protection found no inconsistency in their positions as the owners of industry in which women of the working class were so exploited (1973:144). Additionally it could be said that the state, who promoted motherhood to such a large extent, made it very difficult indeed to bear and raise children; and considering that it was working-class

³⁸ Law 5291 also provided for maternity leave and daily rest periods for breast feeding. Ironically, if not surprisingly, even today this fundamental right is being increasingly violated. According to a report by the Human Rights Commission of the UN, globalization and flexibilization of the labour market have practically led to the loss of paid maternity leave while at the same time introducing the possibility of instant dismissal upon the knowledge of pregnancy in non-registered workers - a situation which affects circa 40% of women workers. Despite the legislation currently in force, even in formal employment the reduction of the working day in order to breast feed is the exception rather than the norm (2005:3)

women (who were composed to a large extent by rural women seeking work in the cities) in particular who were faced with such difficulties, one is tempted to suspect a covert eugenic politics on part of the state³⁹.

Women, mothers, and social movements

Due to the expansion of industry women entered paid labour in large numbers and constituted a growing sector of the urban workforce; in particular the textile, shoe, and food industries as well as the meat packing plants required female employees. In the second decade of the twentieth century they came to include telephone operators and administrative posts in government institutions. The bulk of the female labour force in this period was constituted by teachers, domestics, and women who worked from their homes for the manufacturing industries; however, these women remained at the margins of the labour force in terms of their mobilization (Lavrin, 1989:91)⁴⁰. The entry of women into the labour market soon gave rise to debates about the personal, familial, and social aspects of this new phenomenon, particularly the compatibility of motherhood and paid work.

³⁹ In her discussion of motherhood and population policies in the United States, but undoubtedly applicable to any other racialized nation states, Patricia Hill Collins highlights the state's differential attitudes to the birth rates of different populations. Women as mothers and citizens, she demonstrates, are constructed as the bearers of either negative or positive futures. Selective population policies are thus applied to middle-class or working class white women, to African-American women and to undocumented Latinas (1999, 118-129). Ideas about idealized and stigmatized motherhood within family rhetoric contribute to the links between family, race and nation. As a result, the issue of who will control women's mothering experiences lies at the heart of state family planning decisions. When attached to state policy in a racialized nation state, this question of controlling the fertility of women within different race, class and citizenship groups becomes politicized (Davis, 1981). Eugenics movements illustrate the thinking underlying population policies designed to control the motherhood of different groups of women for reasons of nationality and/or race (Haller, 1984). Davis and Haller cited in Hill Collins (1999:119, in Yuval-Davis & Werbner).

⁴⁰ Not until much later were teachers and domestic workers included in unions or other organized groups and even then it was a question of class and social perception. The mostly middle-class teachers did not feel any solidarity with the domestic or industrial workers; the domestic labourers were too isolated, uneducated, and poor that few organizations ever considered their inclusion (Lavrin, 1989:91).

Factory workers were absorbed to a large extent into both socialist and anarchist organizations that already represented male workers. Amongst the revolutionary groups active at the time, the Anarchists stood out in as much as they were the main undertakers of public agitating until the Socialists emerged on the scene at the turn of the century (Molyneux, 1986:122). Female participation within the Anarchist movement has to be given special recognition because it belongs to one of the first recorded instances in Latin America where feminist ideas merged with working-class and revolutionary orientation (Molyneux, 1986:119).

The first issue of *La voz de la mujer*⁴¹ clearly expressed women's grievances with the system. They strongly identified the object of their attacks and the roots of their discontent: authority in all its forms but particularly the religious (God), the socio-economic (boss), and the familial (husband) - hence their slogan "Ni dios, ni patrón, ni marido" (No God, No Boss, No Husband). Against each of these forms of oppression the women who wrote in *La Voz* proposed radical changes; not only did they hope for the explosion of revolution in society, they also demanded a revolution in the home and family and in the conduct of every-day life (Ateneo Virtual). This is not to say that they rejected motherhood but that they demanded the freedom to decide their circumstances. By politicizing the private sphere, these women redefined rather than rejected their domestic role and extended their struggle against the state beyond the workplace into the home and the community (Safa, 1990:367).

⁴¹ Paper with anarchist orientation published between 1896-7, written by women for working-class women. The writers of this paper clearly distanced themselves from those feminist ideas or the ideas of other middle-class and educated women who struggled for equality with men but without actually changing the traditional social order (Ateneo virtual, http://www.alasbarricadas.org/ateneovirtual/index.php/La_Voz_de_la_Mujer, 20/06/2006). One year earlier, in 1895, the pamphlet by the Italian Ana María Mozón, *Propaganda anarquista entre las mujeres*, appeared in Buenos Aires and raised issues like *La Voz* did later: free love, the family, exploitation in the work place, different forms of violence. "We want to free ourselves of the bosses' greed that exploits us, the priests who lie in wait to fill your head with superstitions, the authority of the husband who mistreats you".

However, the response by male Anarchists to these demands ranged from silence to hostility to praise; the latter mainly in relation to practical interests in the workplace and the family but, with respect to strategic interests, Anarchist men were clearly opposed to women's ideas (Ateneo Virtual). The Anarchists welcomed women as militants for the Anarchist cause but they were given less encouragement to struggle for feminist demands and none at all to form autonomous feminist groups (Molyneux, 1986:129).

In 1902, however, the women Anarchists did found a female group, *Las libertarias*, whose intention was to search for alternative ways of resistance for working women. Two years later, the Comité de huelga femenina emerged, a female branch of the *Federación Obrera Anarquista*, albeit the group was short lived, due to the very opposing nature of Anarchism to institutional organization. At the same time the female group Alcalá del Valle was created which changed its name to *Centro Femenino Anarquista* in 1907. Numbers of women who participated in these groups on a regular basis, however, were rather low. However, the low number of women amongst the higher ranking Anarchist leadership also reflected the participation of women in these newly emerging women's groups. Not many attended meetings on a regular basis which was due in part to the fact that the same few leaders were active at the same time in resistance organizations, women's centres, and strike committees (Belucci, 2006)

Despite these restrictions, Molyneux further observes, there were a number of reasons that attracted women to Anarchism: its main struggle was against authority and feminists struggled against power being exercised over women in the home and family. The Anarchists' emphasis on oppression and power relations opened up a space within

which these women could rebel against oppression by the state and by male authority (Molyneux, 1986:129). Ultimately, however, as Barranco notes, the discrepancies between mainstream and feminist Anarchists could not be reconciled; precisely because of Anarchism's opposition to the juridical and institutional order it could hardly support women's demands for the vote. Following the same reasoning, the Anarchists could not campaign for the right to divorce based on the fact that they saw no necessity for legal marriage in the first place (1997). She therefore has described Anarchist policies towards women as "a peculiar feminism, more like a reform in the domestic, intimate domain" (Barranco, 1997).

Anarchists tended to romanticize the role of women - to them the idea of woman as emotional support to the alienated male worker took priority above women's own pursuits in the labour market. They further believed that capitalist exploitation of women was detrimental to the role of men as protector of the family. The employment of women was perceived as a distortion of the traditional sexual division of labour that prevented men from earning a decent living. To an extent, they also criticized the Church for its conservative position with respect to marriage and so forth but the Church could not be held responsible for low wages that hampered men in the fulfilment of their duties as providers for their families. The Church, therefore, did not receive much direct criticism from the Anarchist camp (Carlson, 1988:123). Stressing women's role as mothers as a key requisite for full citizenship rights Anarchist ideology, at least in this respect, conformed to Catholic doctrine⁴².

The number of women in socialist organizations was much higher than those with Anarchist orientation and their policies much more appealing to women which was also

⁴² It is important in this context to note that the anarchists were composed mostly of foreign workers, originally from other Catholic countries. Italians presented the largest, Spaniards the second largest immigrant groups (Molyneux, 1986:121).

reflected in their internal structures. By 1904 the socialists had founded a female branch within the workers' union in which some women occupied important positions⁴³.

In time, women's association with socialism increased even further and led to the creation of more female groups and even though they sometimes competed amongst themselves, they remained linked with respect to the most fundamental party issues (Barrancos, 1997). Many female university students became socialist feminists, not least because they knew of women's difficult position in male-dominated environments like universities. Some of them became medical doctors and between 1889 and 1921, twelve of them wrote their doctoral theses on topics closely related to women's health. Perhaps the most well-known of these women were Cecilia Grierson (first female medical doctor in Argentina), Elvira Rawson, and Julieta Lanteri⁴⁴ (Lobato, in Nari, 2004:14).

It seems important, however, to point out that the few women who were active in any prominent role within Socialism were all related to male Socialists; in fact, the whole leadership, male and female, seems to have been inter-related⁴⁵ and they all, with the exception of Carolina Muzzilli who came from working-class immigrant stock, belonged to middle-class backgrounds. However, it can be assumed that Muzzilli was not the only participant from working-class origins. According to Lavrin, we cannot be

⁴³ Because of the high number of organized female workers the Socialists had to re-structure their organizations. It is worth noting that one of the founders and main director of the Unión Gremial Femenina also was a woman, Cecilia Baldovino, a socialist activist who frequently gave speeches to union members and at other public venues. Later, Gabriela L. Coni and Carolina Muzzilli dedicated themselves to the improvement of working and living conditions of working class women and their children - issues that figured prominently in the Socialists' programme (Barrancos, 1987:10). The latter, a consumptive worker, who attended Socialist-sponsored educational programmes, provided reports on the conditions for female workers in factories that were used in the 1906 campaign for protective legislation (Carlson, 1988:130).

⁴⁴ Lanteri later founded the *Partido Feminista Nacional* (National Feminist Party) and in 1921 staged a mock-election with a mock-female electorate (see Carlson, 1988).

⁴⁵ Carlson explains the complicated family relations in more detail (1988).

sure of the social origins of the anarchist women, but all indications are that they emerged from the ranks of the workers (1989:102).

The input of socialism into the early development of feminist and female groups was of great importance since it introduced a focus on welfare and other social services that would transcend and outlive the vicissitudes of the campaigns for suffrage that emerged in the early twentieth century (Lavrin, 1989:97).

At the other end of the political spectrum, a number of women's organizations emerged that were strongly associated with the Catholic Church and engaged in debates about the same questions. It can immediately be seen that the use of maternal symbolism presents a coin with two faces since it often is used by opposing ideologies alike; after all, apart from being a mother there is a whole array of other identities a woman might call her own such as political principles.

The institutional Catholic reaction to the changes associated with modern life tended to conflate the role of women and the role of the masses. According to Sandra McGee Deutsch, "the two issues were so intertwined that the Catholic views of the female status not only indicated attitudes about women but also symbolized and expressed attitudes about the labourers' 'rightful' lowly place in society" (1991b:320). Her work also shows, however, that many local clerics and lay thinkers endorsed a somewhat surprising range of activities for women, including wage work and the vote, because these activities did not necessarily interfere with a hierarchical organization of society. Although they often supported anti-democratic political groups, many Catholic spokespersons viewed the situation of poor women "compassionately and, for the most part, realistically" (McGee Deutsch, 1991b:319).

The Church, moreover, in keeping with its vision of the family as the basis and model for all social hierarchies, did not ignore the power of mothers. Women owed “honorable and dignified” obedience to their husbands, “chief of the family and head of the wife”, but she, in turn could expect love and obedience from sons and daughters⁴⁶. It is of course difficult to determine how far poor women benefited from such pronouncements in terms of their own empowerment but many privileged women took such visions as an encouragement to organize associations after 1880 whose members saw themselves as mothers of the poor - a role Eva Perón would take on later and never tire to reiterate in order to promote Peronism - as they went about their charity work and evangelical mission. During this period the number of Catholic women’s associations increased drastically.

It is interesting that this increase in number should coincide with the positivists’ most vehement efforts to curb the influence of the Church on the state. Mead states that this movement can best be understood as a response to the immigrant-driven social changes occurring in the cities (1997:654). But in addition to this argument I would like to suggest a further explanation. Without a social function, states Elias (1978), human life remains meaningless. If life is too restricted, and the surrounding political and social culture lacks ideals and vision the need for meaning will be frustrated. It might then express itself in spiritual or political radicalism, because the need for broader perspectives is not integrated into everyday life. A political culture and mentality that expresses only the basic needs of human existence bears significant dangers (1990, cited in Rommelspacher). This might be especially true for women, who are ‘damned to immanence’ (de Beauvoir, 1986). The need for transcendence is a particularly frustrated one for women (de Beauvoir, 1986). This might help to explain

⁴⁶ Quote by Pope Leo XIII, encyclical, 1880, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, (in McGee Deutsch, 1991:309).

many women's readiness to participate in religious or spiritual movements, and also in radical right-wing activities (Rommelspacher, 1999:57); and the ideological basis of the vast majority of these new women's organisations was Catholic doctrine and right-wing politics. Their field of activity was marked by very rigid and restricted boundaries and the political and social culture of the liberal state, although not lacking visions and ideals, did not include publicly active women and was altogether too limited to cope with social change in a way that would have created a more cohesive society in terms of increased gender and class equality.

Middle-class women did not have any broader perspectives than their work as home makers and mothers and therefore saw only their basic needs satisfied (not in a material sense but in terms of fulfilment and self-realisation). Activity on the basis of Christianity allowed these women to carve out a public space for themselves from which the need for reform could be voiced without antagonizing those in power. The public demand for extending political and legal rights to women satisfied their need for a social function in a much broader sense than that of sole housewife and mother. But despite their perception of themselves as feminists and reformers they only acted within existing traditional patriarchal power structures, supported by the male headed Church and state. This, and the fact that they had practically nothing in common with their working-class counterparts might help to explain why they had difficulties in recruiting working-class women who preferred secular, leftist organisations as their representatives. Not until after the financial crash of 1890 did female workers join the Catholic associations in any significant number (see McGee Deutsch, 1991b:317-19). It can be assumed that this was due to the fact that hitherto their emphasis was placed on long-term strategic interests like universal suffrage and legal reform while after

1890 this was accompanied by practical support in the form of financial aid and the provision of medical, legal, and educational services.

It could be said, therefore, that the emergence of women's movements was due to a struggle for recognition by women in order to acquire self-esteem. Such a struggle, in which the dimension of esteem is central, can be seen as attempts to end social patterns of denigration in order to make new forms of distinctive identity possible. Argentine women at the time were clearly seeking a new, distinctive identity - one of which motherhood was a component but would also allow space for additional identities such as women as workers, professionals, and citizens. Esteem is accorded on the basis of an individual's contribution to a shared project; thus the elimination of demeaning cultural images does not provide esteem directly but rather establishes the conditions under which members of certain groups can then build self-esteem by contributing to the community. In this sense, the underlying motivation for women's movements in Argentina seem to allude to even more profound reasons than just self-esteem; it could well be argued that what women demanded first and foremost was a serious revision of the Argentine discourse that excluded a vast number of women from the "imagined community" (see Anderson, 1983) that was the Argentine nation as prescribed by Sarmiento and his contemporaries.

Stuart Hall proposes that we think of identity in a detotalized and deconstructed form. He also suggests that we focus on the process of identification which he sees as a construction, a process never completed. In the end identification is "conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference...Identification is, then, a process of articulation, suturing, an over-determination, not a subsumption...And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive

work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects' (1996:2-3). In this sense, Argentine women identified themselves first and foremost as mothers since this was the only identity that could collectively be applied across differences of class or ethnicity and that was supported by the system - Church and state; but motherhood also allowed them to mark the boundaries and create the frontiers Hall talks about since their ability to give birth clearly distinguished them from men.

The potential of motherhood as identity to transcend class and ethnicity facilitated identification with a much larger group, although in the context of the early Argentine women's movements that group could have been much more extensive than it actually was, not least due to antagonisms within the Left and the patriarchal nature of their male leaders, as well as the discrepancies between the practical interests of women workers and the strategic interests of middle-class feminists. As Woodward states, a group's uniqueness, which is the basis of its political solidarity, can be translated into essentialist claims based on women's identity and unique qualities which men *per se* cannot possess. There are, of course, different ways of understanding and defining that 'uniqueness'. It may involve appeals to biologically given features of identity; for example, the claim that women's biological role as mothers make them inherently more caring and peaceful (1997:24). These early women's movements, it can be said, claimed their right to full citizenship through a claim to something about the position of women which has remained fixed and unchanged by history and which applied equally to all women as a kind of trans-historical truth. Or, as Werbner puts it, women's active citizenship starts from pre-established cultural domains of female power and rightful ownership or responsibility. These culturally defined domains, or the attack upon them, create the conditions of possibility for women's civic activism

which, in the face of male resistance, comes progressively to challenge authoritarian structures of power, usually controlled by men (in Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999:221).

We begin to see at this point that the dilemma concerning the women-question that liberal governments and intellectuals were faced with included all women - on the one end of the scale the prostitutes, foreign or domestic, which have been mentioned above who functioned as potent symbols of social disorder; rural and working-class women who did not fit the image of the ideal mother; and at the other end the Catholic matrons who symbolized another social order, equally abhorrent to the intellectuals since they represented an archaic social doctrine, inappropriate and detrimental to the visions of progress the liberals had made their purpose. To embrace the traditional family as the core element of a well functioning state and as a metaphor for the modern nation therefore was a more difficult challenge than it first appeared. Prior to promoting the family as a cure for social disorder, the blame for which was put at the feet of women (and the popular classes in general, one might add), the positivists, as Mead has recognized, had to empty the notion of motherhood in particular, and female in general, of any association with a kind of power that could be manipulated by women themselves (1997:654). This power could have been used much more effectively had the different women's organisations worked more closely together and had, therefore, been able to identify with a much larger group of women; instead, although feminism, both socialist and bourgeois offered women a framework in which to place their activities, Argentine feminism failed to create a solid front by not integrating women from all classes into their movement (Jeffress Little, 1978:249). Political motherhood in Argentina did not achieve any meaningful recognition until the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo initiated their protests against the military dictatorship in the 1970s. Hegemonic gender construction did allow these

women to tread on political terrain where others dared not go under repressive times. Their roles as wives and mothers justified their protests because it somehow legitimized their anger and frustration (Jelin, 1987) in the sense that even though the state insisted on their efficiency in these roles, it effectively deprived them of this role because their children had been taken away.

It can be observed that there existed a large number of groups and organizations that demanded women's right to be active in the public sphere; however, as Barranco has noted, deep down, nobody really liked women's pursuit of public activity; nobody really wanted them to leave their homes and go to work. There are not many sources that show a great initiative by anybody to facilitate women's entry into the labour market. Socialist and Anarchists promoted women's rights in relation to wages and working conditions but their efforts were not as enthusiastic as might have been expected from the political Left. If women could stay at home, so much the better, was the opinion amongst all classes and political hues; the most progressive ones as well as those who proposed moderate reform and, of course, those from the Catholic camp, all proclaimed their reservations with respect to female work (1997).

Fatherhood:

It is important to say a few words about fatherhood at this point in order to obtain a more complete picture about the interference by the state into the private sphere of its citizens and also to avoid the impression that only the role of women was/is manipulated by the authorities. Furthermore, mentioning the fact that not only

femininities but also masculinities are constructed and negotiated rather than given has a place here.

Research exploring this topic across Latin America has shown that gender roles and imagery have varied according to age, class, 'race', and locality over time (see Chant, 2003). As for the latter three, the example of the *criollo* and *gringo* communities investigated by Stølen (see above) shows that there is much more fluidity in family relations, and much less in the way of formal marriage, monogamy, and so forth amongst the *mestizo* population than amongst the whites who also demonstrate a more pronounced gendered division of labour than their *criollo* counterparts.

If female behaviour was regulated within the constraints of the *marianismo* ideal, men were allowed to behave according to the almost unrestricted concept of *machismo*⁴⁷. Investigating gender relations in Latin America one can find an abundance of accounts describing bad male behaviour. These tales range from unfaithfulness, drunkenness and violence to irresponsible mismanagement of financial resources (Bachrach Ehlers, 1991:1). While it has to be recognised that Latin America is not the only region in the world where many men behave in this manner, it is there where these descriptions constitute the stereotypical picture of maleness. Broadly speaking, *machismo* can be understood as a cult of exaggerated masculinity. Apart from awarding men *carte blanche* to assert power and control over women and other men, it also posits virility and male sexuality at the centre of the symbolic representation of men⁴⁸. The most

⁴⁷ Literature about machismo is extensive; see, for example Gutman, 1996, Gonzales López, 2005, Stevens, 1965.

⁴⁸ Pegging extreme sexism to one or another culture is not only counterproductive in academic research, it also bears racist connotations. In contemporary Western Europe and the United States the machismo mystique is regularly employed to imply that somehow Hispanic men, and particularly Hispanic heterosexual men, are more prone than men from other cultural backgrounds to sexist language, actions, and relationships. This is in large part a result of scholarship by 'western' academics, who have gone to Latin America to study questions of family, kinship, and gender/sexuality and through this research have developed interpretations and paradigms consistent with hegemonic notions of studying down—that is,

publicly visible proof of a man's virility is becoming a father. Despite the differences between men, their duty to provide for their offspring can be seen as a unifying element of fatherhood. This obligation transcends differences of ethnicity and class and defines a man's characteristics: his manliness, his gender, as is supported by appropriate legislation; the continuity of his place in society throughout history approved by the majority. The position of man as the provider and maintainer of the household has been synonymous with maturity, respectability, and masculinity. These perceptions are closely associated with the way men see themselves. For them, their children represent responsibility, an investment in the future, an obligation, and also hope; they are the greatest contribution by men to the world and a justification for their existence.

The pressure on men to get involved in productive activities in order to maintain their families must therefore not be underestimated when looking at the working-class movement in Argentina and elsewhere. While it is clear that men took part in these movements as workers in order to gain political recognition for their contributions to the economy, the satisfaction of their demands for better pay and working conditions also has to be understood as an enhanced ability to fulfil their role as fathers and providers - a role prescribed to them by society, the Church, and the state.

Argentina in the late nineteenth century, as described above, was a place where women's activities were widening - in terms of participation in the labour market as well as in terms of demands for civil and political rights; but although this growing

looking at populations that have been marginalized and oppressed (as opposed to "studying up"; that is, examining the ruling classes)—and finding political, social, and cultural fault with oppressed others. If a Mexican man, for instance, is abusive and aggressive, he will be labeled a macho. If a Mexican woman quietly endures such an abusive relationship, her behaviour is automatically examined within the *marianismo* paradigm. But if a white man and a white woman display similar behaviour, they are seldom analyzed in so simplistic and generalizing a fashion. I use both terms here (machismo and marianismo) because of their widespread recognition but would like to maintain that not all men, regardless of their culture, behave in this way and that behaviour associated with the terms is not inherent to a particular culture.

visibility of women in the public sphere undoubtedly had positive effects on women with respect to their increased independence and personal empowerment, in most cases it also meant a much heavier burden in the form of 'double' and often 'triple' shifts. One reason for men's unwillingness to participate in reproductive tasks can be found in their desire to protect their masculine identity since women were obviously invading their 'masculine sphere'. Moreover, as families increasingly came to rely on women's income in order to make ends meet, men's traditional role as provider, head of household and therefore masculinity itself became threatened.

One of the most significant debates in Argentine social politics in the twentieth century has been the debate about the maintenance and modification of the concept of *patria potestad*. There are few examples of Latin American countries that have engaged in a discussion of this topic as early as the Río de la Plata region. In fact, it was the only region where the term was legally employed and where records show early efforts by different tribunals to revoke *patria potestad* in cases of irresponsible fathers or mothers, in accordance with the state's perspective. Furthermore, the Río de la Plata region was the only place where fathers could be forced to appear before a tribunal in order to explain their points of view with respect to the upbringing of their daughters (Guy, 1996).

In Argentina, the basic structure of patriarchy is rooted in the legal term known in Latin as *patria potestad*. Naturally, every culture has its own definition as to 'what is a father or a mother' but for those adhering to the Roman code of law the term derives from that code and also from other legal traditions. The ideal Argentine family in the second half of the nineteenth century was based on marriage and all the children born within it had the right to inherit from both parents. In return, it was the

children's duty to obey their parents and, eventually, to help in the household without receiving financial compensation for their work. This is important because orphans who were placed in a family had the right to receive 'wages', a custom which distinguished an adopted child from a biological one. The parents were expected to provide maintenance as well as education for their children, with the right to exert control over them until they married, in the case of girls, or until they reached adulthood. The father was the head of the family, so that only fathers or single mothers could be called to court if they failed to meet their obligations.

In those cases where families were formed outside wedlock, the situation was more complicated. Children of such families were seen as either the product of natural, illegitimate, incestuous, sacrilegious, or adulterous union and were not recognized before the law as equal to children born within marriage⁴⁹. In turn, in many cases their parents did not have the control over them and were not allowed by law to leave any inheritance to them, even if they wanted to.

Children born within such relationships were literally at the mercy of their parents. They could be recognized or rejected by their mother or father which deprived them of any possible inheritance. Single mothers experienced additional impediments since they could not claim any recognition of paternity from the child's father, only the child him/herself could do so. In these cases fathers assumed this role only if they opted in favour of it. However, once they admitted fatherhood, they were expected to provide for their, so-called, natural children. This was the basic content of the civil law. Reality was often very different: Did men really rightfully control their children? Were these 'natural' rights, inherent to all men, or were they subject to the interpretation of individual cases? To the dismay of lawyers and fathers alike, the

⁴⁹ This law was not changed until 1948.

Argentine law was never very clear about how far paternal authority was allowed to reach. Unlike in other countries⁵⁰, the Argentine civil code applied male prerogatives in a more moderate way. Men were not allowed to display violent behaviour and they could be called before a tribunal if they did not meet their obligations. The Argentine Civil Code reserved the right of the state to revoke a father's authority over his children if he abused them, abandoned the family, or lacked in moral behaviour. The concept of *patria potestad* was included in the Civil Code as a privilege rather than a biological right, even though it was not totally accepted as such by all men, of course.

In order to illustrate how the Civil Code in relation to the *patria potestad* law worked in reality, I will follow with a few case studies brilliantly provided by Donna Guy (1996):

Paternity, as already mentioned, was intimately associated with the right to inheritance and therefore some children legally had no parents. Blanca Gontrán and her ex-lover Miguel Laní discovered this unpleasant truth in 1897. Blanca appeared in court in order to claim custody for her daughter Julia Artemisa. Blanca argued that she never knew that Miguel was married, maintaining that she had been cheated, and that Miguel had taken her daughter from her when the child was only five years old - an age when children heavily depend on their mother's care.

Miguel presented a very different point of view, explaining that Blanca knew he was married and that she had abandoned him and the little girl. He reinforced his argument saying: "A loving and affectionate father cannot be deprived of his child in order to be handed over to a mother who has not shown any affection towards it, who instead has treated the child badly from the first moment; a father of impeccable

⁵⁰ The Brazilian interpretation of *patria potestad*, for example, endowed men with extreme power over their families - they even could kill an unfaithful wife with impunity.

conduct who holds all the necessary resources to provide adequately for his daughter, who has given her his name and who works hard to make sure she is comfortable cannot be deprived of his child in order to be given to the mother”. In his statement, Miguel underlines his affectionate and emotional bonds with his daughter as well as his ability to look after her; unfortunately for the child, he also had to admit to an adulterous relationship and the judge argued that neither of the parents had a right to *patria potestad* over the child and decided to award custody of Julia Artemisa to a third person who was not related to either of the parents.

Not all men expressed the desire to care for their children, an attitude that was also often considered part of their rights by men. Some of them simply refused to take on the role of fatherhood. If a single woman became pregnant by a single man, the law did not oblige him to admit paternity or to be a father to the child. In 1880, Servilana Alegre claimed alimony from her father, Pedro. Although Pedro admitted to having had a child with Servilana’s mother, the child in question had died and that he was not related in any way to Servilana. The judge decided in Pedro’s favour concluding that: “Paternity is a matter of nature which is a mystery”. For this judge, the freedom to recognize or reject a ‘natural child’ was a central aspect of masculinity; if the man denied responsibility, nobody could force him to. It was not until the 1940s that such children gained certain rights.

Women hardly ever won *patria potestad* disputes before a tribunal against their husbands. In the following case, therefore, the plaintiff was very lucky to at least retain custody of her children: In 1899, Estela Spraggon D’Amico went to court in order for paternal rights to be revoked from her husband Santiago. The husband had not

contributed to the household in any way since 1891, disappeared for five to six months at the time after which he returned for a short while, mostly in a drunken state. He usually threatened to kill her before leaving again. All in all, he had never been interested in the welfare or education of his children. In his defence, Santiago maintained, that his wife had been antagonizing the children against him, even though he was the person who had legal authority over them. Nevertheless, according to Estela's lawyer, Santiago had agreed to leave his family in peace, if his wife paid him the sum of 4,000 Pesos.

As in many instances, this case reappeared in court over some years. In 1903, the judge came to a decision: even though he considered the fact that Santiago had practically tried to sell his children deplorable, he was of the strict opinion that neither *patria potestad* nor marriage were negotiable. He declined Estela's petition despite the evidence she presented. The judge admitted that the breakdown of the D'Amico's marriage was not Estela's fault, but he also considered it inappropriate that a wife should go to court accusing her husband. He said: "...and having demonstrated that she is not a good wife, how can she be a good mother?" On these grounds he decided that Santiago should retain his rights as a father.

It would be excessive here to cite all the cases addressed in Guy's paper, let alone all those stored in the Argentine National Archive. Suffice it to say that thousands of cases with similar content appeared before the Argentine family courts every year and despite the fact that joint *patria potestad* was established in 1985 (Guy, 2000:189), certain legal practices dealing with the issue remain in force until today. However, as early as 1894 supporters for the legal reform of children's rights defined *patria potestad* as an already obsolete juridical principle. They pointed out that the law

protected abusive fathers rather than the children under their care. One of these reformers, the physician Dr. Benjamín Dupont declared that *patria potestad* was ...”a sort of feudal right which in our epoch of equality is one of the last vestiges of autocratic times” (in Guy, 1996, <http://www.mininterior.gov.ar/agn/guy.pdf>, 05/08/2004). Fathers should be able to enjoy these rights only as long as they are good fathers, said Dupont, but in the case of bad fathers, the indifferent ones and the criminals, “in their hands, this law presents a grave social danger.”⁵¹

In conclusion it can be said that many Argentine men, most probably the majority, conceived of *patria potestad* as something far beyond the mere maintenance of their children, sacrificing much of their own comfort in order to add to that of their families. Others in contrast, refused to share their income and property with any of their children or their wives. Many believed that *patria potestad* awarded them complete control over any minors who lived under their roof and others again gave preference to their own personal welfare above the financial duties towards their families.

Although women contributed actively to the establishment of the republic and the construction of the nation they remained, by and large, a group at the periphery in terms of civil rights and citizenship. The degree of their marginalization depended on

⁵¹ As laudable as Dupont’s efforts to protect children might have been, it has to be pointed out that his principal work was rather more dubious since he was concerned with the scientific analysis of the inferior condition of the native people of the Pampa and Patagonia. Dupont and other physicians, like Paolo Mantegazza, José Franceschi and Lucio Meléndez, supported a typical positivist ideology in mid 19th Century Argentina, connected with the elaboration and application of a biological theory for the elimination of native people (see DiLiscia, 2002:183-200, <http://asclepio.revistas.csic.es/index.php/asclepio/article/viewFile/125/124> , 05/08/2004). One is tempted, therefore, to assume that with ‘indifferent’ and ‘criminal’ he mainly meant fathers belonging to social and ethnic minorities.

class, race, and location and determined the desirability of their children as Argentine citizens.

The manipulation of women's role as mothers by the state established Argentine feminism as a movement that politicized motherhood and merged practical and strategic gender interests in order to position maternity on an equal level with men's contributions to society. The reforms implemented by the Liberal State with respect to women's civil rights facilitated an increased economic and social exploitation and marginalization of women rather than their liberation and inclusion.

In the next chapter it will be demonstrated that this attitude persisted well into the twentieth century and will explain why women presented an easy target in the Peronist strategy to gain female electoral support.

Chapter 3

Peronism

Lo que movilizó las masas hacia Perón no fue el resentimiento, fue la esperanza. Recuerde usted aquellas multitudes de octubre del '45, dueñas de la ciudad durante dos días, que no rompieron una vidriera y cuyo mayor crimen fue lavarse los pies en la Plaza de Mayo, provocando la indignación de la señora de Oyuela, rodeada de artefactos sanitarios. Recuerde esas multitudes, aún en circunstancias trágicas y las recordará siempre cantando en coro –cosa absolutamente inusitada entre nosotros– y tan cantores todavía, que les han tenido que prohibir el canto por decreto-ley. No eran resentidos. Eran criollos alegres porque podían tirar las alpargatas para comprar zapatos y hasta libros, discos fonográficos, veranear, concurrir a los restaurantes, tener seguro el pan y el techo y asomar siquiera a formas de vida "occidentales" que hasta entonces les habían sido negadas.

(Jauretche, 1968, *Los profetas del odio*)

The political parties emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century were marked by a clear differentiation as to their supporters. However, all of them represented a masculine image and relegated women to the domestic sphere. The persistence of this division legitimated a political culture that was characterized by the exclusion of female participation (Maffia & Kuschnir, 1994:124). Nevertheless, it was not until the appearance of Eva Perón that women gained a relevant role in national politics. Law 13010 of 1947 which implemented women's right to vote inaugurated an era of political rights for Argentine women (Feijoó , Nari, & Fierro 1996:9).

Whether the Peronist state is to be perceived as a fascist, repressive regime or a progressive nationalist movement has been the subject of debates ever since it came into existence. What can hardly be denied is the extent to which its ideology stressed the equality and dignity of the working classes and Peronism's ability to politically mobilize women.

This chapter will first explore the political circumstances that allowed Perón's rise to power in order to establish the historical setting. It will then focus on the strategies he employed in order to gain a large number of supporters, the same strategies that mobilized an equally vast number of opponents. Part two will address the reforms Peronism effected in terms of legislation in relation to women. It then moves to explore the role of Eva Perón in Argentine politics at the time. Since Eva remains a controversial figure till today, research about her is often contradictory and despite the vast quantity of material available it still remains incomplete; in order to broaden existing knowledge the final section of this chapter will focus on Eva's powerful political influence which, it will be argued, was at least as decisive for the phenomenon of Peronism as the figure of Perón himself.

Radical Argentina

Argentina in the 1930s responded to the worldwide recession by implementing the policy of Import Substitution Industry to encourage the growth of domestic industrial output of manufactured goods that had previously been imported. High tariff barriers and state loans to home-grown industries supplemented this programme. As a result industrial production more than doubled in the period from 1930 to 1949. World War II had deprived the country of a great number of essential imports and practically forced

Argentine inventiveness to replace manufactured goods, to build machinery, to substitute fuel: the result was an expensive industry of dismal quality; but *per se* it was a positive development not only towards the diversification of the national economy but also towards the creation of an economic base (Luna, 1972:24, Ranis, 1979:314).

As in other countries which are moving from traditional to modern ways of life, Argentine society experienced an overall process of change which happened to substantial parts of the population. Economic growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had already led to the appearance of a large and disparate middle class, many of whose members joined with other groups to form the *Unión Cívica Radical*. The advent of the Radical government marked a revolutionary change in the style of Argentine politics. The staid, closeted atmosphere of the oligarchy was swiftly swept away in a wave of popular euphoria. Through his dependence on novel methods of leadership and through his control over a mass party with ramifications throughout the country, President Yrigoyen (1916 - 22 and 1928 - 30) came to occupy a very different position from that of his predecessors. Although there had been previous tendencies to personalize policies and issues, in particular in relation to General Rosas, with Yrigoyen this became one of the central stylistic elements of Argentine politics (Rock, in *The Argentina Reader*, 2002:235). Yrigoyen represented an opposing trend to the pre-1916 political leadership - an oligarchy whose liberalism was strictly elitist and increasingly authoritarian. Yrigoyen's movement democratized this liberalism and tentatively welded it to a populist ethos (Winston, 1983:309).

The Radicals' emphasis on contact with and welfare for the people indicates that they were aiming to achieve political integration and a state of class harmony. They

intended to maintain the existing socioeconomic framework but promote institutionalized political participation outside the ruling class. These objectives involved the government with two key groups, the “dependent” professional middle class⁵², which already had become an important component of Radicalism before 1916, and, second, with the urban working class (Rock, 1975:67 - 9). During Yrigoyen’s first presidency, the most important sphere of conflict was the government’s manipulating of the working-class movement, that is to say, its efforts to gain the workers’ electoral support while simultaneously undermining the influence of the Socialist Party by favouring the negotiating position of the syndicates during strike action (Agozino, 1997:12). At the same time, the Radical Party never presented a threat to the interests of the conservative elite. In fact, the Radical administration took over a number of policies from the conservative government before them; and while it is true that social changes at the time brought effective political participation to some segments of the middle classes, the lower class was virtually excluded from politics (Smith, 1969:34). The main friction that persisted between the Radicals and the Conservatives lay in their different perceptions of the new democracy which the Saenz Peña Law (universal suffrage) had initiated. While the conservatives envisaged a government under a multi-party framework, the Radicals aimed for the active support by all sectors of the population for one single party. This was one of the most salient strategies later adopted by Perón (Rock, 1975:70 - 4).

In other words, the advent of Radicalism drastically widened political participation by incorporating the middle classes into the political process; nevertheless, it was still

⁵² A considerable number of urban middle-class members were active in fields strongly related to the commodity producing economy, i.e. in overseas commerce and services. In other words, their livelihood depended directly on the success of the oligarchy. Statistics of the time show that this sector of the middle-class was as large as industrial proprietors and private employees. This suggests that the Radicals in Argentina emerged out of the joint interests of the elite and large parts of the middle-classes (Rock, 1975:67-9).

a far cry from being 'universal', particularly because women and foreigners, for example, were completely marginalized from political activities since they did not have the right to vote (Agozino, 1997:17).

Important changes in legislation in favour of the working classes and women's civil rights took place during Marcelo T. de Alvear's presidency (Yrigoyen's successor in 1922). So for example, night shifts in bakeries were newly regulated; pensions were extended to include employees of commerce and industry as well as journalists and graphic designers. Furthermore, in 1926⁵³ de Alvear appointed a commission to draft a reform of the Civil Code, particularly Article 190 of the 1869 Civil Code, regulating women's civil rights. Juan Antonio Bibiloni, head of the commission, mentions in his notes that women's entry into the paid workforce had become an irreversible reality; however, he maintained that it was appropriate to retain the clause of mandatory authorization of the husband if a married woman wished to seek employment. Bibiloni justified this position on the basis that sooner or later after getting married, women would become mothers and the damage that the neglect of the home was causing was, after all, common knowledge (Queirolo, 2006). Once 'maternalized',⁵⁴ female waged work turned from a civil rights issue into a situation that seriously threatened an important conjugal obligation: "The duty of personally attending the common household" (Article 605, Civil Code of 1869, in Queirolo, 2006). In short, Bibiloni recommended that women's traditional gender roles be kept for the common good. However, despite his report, the reform was approved and married women were granted equal rights with adult men; unwed mothers were granted parental rights over

⁵³ One year earlier, law 11.317 was passed, effectively limiting women's working hours to 48 hours a week. It also outlawed night-work for women (except for domestics and entertainers). Furthermore, women and children could no longer be hired for dangerous or unhealthy jobs. The law also included limited maternity protection. Encouraged by this success, feminists joined with some Radicals, Socialists and Conservatives to attempt a reform of the Civil Code and a coalition of congressmen were willing to push such legislation through both houses (Carlson, 1988:166).

⁵⁴ Marcela Nari's expression: 'maternalizadas' (2004).

their children; married women were given the right to exercise the same rights and occupy public functions (for example, being a witness in court), to enter professions and dispose of their earnings without their husbands' consent, and to enter civil contracts. Widows were granted authority over their children and over the estates of minor children, regardless of whether these women remarried or not (Queirolo, 2006). These changes reflected many years of debate and incorporated the essential elements of female juridical emancipation as understood at the time. Although its objective was to free women from legal impediments, it still left significant concessions to the husband⁵⁵.

De Alvear also effected important changes with respect to state support of import-substituting industries by raising tariffs for imports by up to 60%. His objective was to achieve a degree of domestic industrialization that would allow a solution to the balance of payment deficit while at the same time opening new spaces for the social mobility of the middle strata of the population. These measures, according to Agozino, were *ad hoc* decisions and were not part of a Radical economic development strategy, and although Alvear later abandoned protectionist policies, his early actions demonstrated that there was room within Radicalism to extend the transformation of society which had been initiated by the legal reforms of the political system because the country's industrialization would have consolidated the democratization process (1997:14).

Radicalism recognized the dependent character of the Argentine economy, heavily criticized the official patronage system which nurtured an ever growing bureaucracy,

⁵⁵ Article Six of the new law stipulated that women must demand these civil rights through legal action if they had no prenuptial agreements. Unless the wife demanded her share of conjugal property through the courts, the husband continued to be the legal holder of this property and had no obligation to share it (Queirolo, 2006)). Laws of this kind are particularly hard to enforce, if at all - unless a woman was prepared to risk domestic peace, she would hardly insist on legally asserting her rights.

and suggested that Argentina's economic crisis could be overcome with the expansion of state-induced industry (Hayek, 2003:5-7). This incipient movement represented a new form of nationalist economy - it would later include the nationalization of the oil industry and an attempt to make up necessary quantities by imports from the Soviet Union in order to break dependence from the USA and Great Britain. For the Radicals, industrialization represented the possibility to offer new prospects to the middle classes without seriously threatening the interests of the traditional elite (Agozino, 1997:14-15).

The most significant error the Radicals committed, however, was Yrigoyen's resuming the presidency in 1928. By then 76 years old, his leadership was weak and the government was unable to cope with the economic decline caused by the stock market crash of 1929. Constitutional government, in practice since the fall of General Rosas in 1853, came to an end with the military coup in 1930 (Blanksten, 1953:36-7).

The leader of the uprising, José F. Uriburu, declared himself president of the republic without giving any clues as to the social content of this revolt at first; after three months of uncertainty, however, Uriburu denounced a number of pro-labour legislations, amongst others the minimum wage law, and declared the Saenz Peña law "a pernicious piece of legislation". It became clear that the 1930 coup was supported by the country's landed gentry, the old oligarchy that had been out of power since the Radicals' election in 1916, and by a number of banks (Blanksten, 1953:36-7). The truth is that the liberal elite, which had grudgingly granted the Saenz Peña law, never reconciled itself to democratization and sought to reassert political control.

The following thirteen years became known in Argentina as the 'infamous decade'. In this period, the government was composed of a coalition of Conservatives,

antipersonalista Radicals, and independent Socialists, collectively known as *la Concordancia*.

Within the context of the worldwide recession this period was characterized by systematic electoral fraud, repression of the opposition, the proscription of the *Unión Cívica Radical*, corrupt politics, and Argentina's economic dependence on Great Britain became more pronounced.⁵⁶ Economic policy in general showed an increased tendency to favour foreign capital and some traditional elite sectors. Within the new social policy, a decree was issued in 1936 which banned immigration of any person considered 'dangerous to public physical or moral health' or who was perceived to 'conspire against institutional stability' (Giordano, 2006:16).

In 1933, married women's rights contained in the Civil Code, once again became the subject of debate in Congress. In 1936 another reform of the Civil Code was proposed: article 333 was aimed at revising the legislative gains made in 1926 by once again reducing the married woman's status to that of a minor (Hollander, 1977:185).

"This proposal was met by a vast female mobilization which found institutional expression in the creation of the *Unión Argentina de Mujeres*⁵⁷ in which eventually not only the Socialists but also, and even more intensively, a new crop of militant Communists displaying precisely that enthusiastic and tenacious zeal that so alarmed Franceschi⁵⁸ participated" (Halperín Donghi, 2004:209-10).

Middle-class women from a wide range of party associations met in the *Unión*: communists, socialists, Radicals and those without party affiliations. Gradually the UMA increased in size - sub-commissions were created in cities of the interior and

⁵⁶ Roca-Runciman Pact: Britain guaranteed the purchase of Argentinean meat in exchange for significant economic concessions; amongst others the handing over of the entire public transport system to a British company (Corporación de Transportes).

⁵⁷ The writer and journalist Victoria Ocampo was elected president of this organization. She later resigned from this position when the *Unión* became increasingly associated with the Communist Party.

⁵⁸ Gustavo Franceschi - prominent member of the Catholic Church and strong advocate of Argentine nationalism; in 1928 he became editor of the right-wing Catholic journal *Criterio*, a post he occupied for 25 years (Metz, 1993:207).

pamphlets publicizing the *Unión's* pursuits were printed; they did not solely concentrate on efforts to avoid the reform of the civil code but also demanded an increase of protective laws for women working in industry, agriculture, and domestic services; protective maternity laws; the legal protection of minors; opportunities for the cultural and spiritual development of women; world peace; and the prevention of prostitution⁵⁹.

The proposed reform of the civil code in 1936 was rejected and married women retained their civil rights as stipulated in the 1926 reform⁶⁰.

The crisis of the 1930s effected a number of changes in the political system which influenced the course of the development of women's civil rights in the long term. The proposal of the reform project of 1936 as well as its rejection and silent demise finds explanation within these changes: According to Ansaldo (1995), the coup of 1930 constituted an 'organic crisis' corresponding to the pattern 'dictatorship-developing-into-fraudulent-democracy'. The changes taking place during the 'infamous decade' opened spaces for structural movements throughout the country. The political class took priority over civil society while the political parties and parliament only occupied a weak mediating position between the two. This generally weakened the conditions for the development of 'real' democracy and favoured a polarized political culture: supporters of the state and pro-coup elements. In effect, the over-evaluation of the state as a space for representation and the negotiation of opposing political objectives through a military coup as the preferred instrument weakened the party system. Fractures in political formations as well as in unions became frequent and coalitions and alliances abounded; and congress was unable to consolidate its mediating role and

⁵⁹ See history of the Unión Argentina de Mujeres at their website at <http://www.uma.org.ar> (30/03/2009)

⁶⁰ In practice, this law (11357) was not very effective, if not to say counterproductive: maintaining the limited freedom of married women and at the same time increasing the number of instances in which they could fully exercise their rights confused the legal community and, more importantly, gave way to anti-emancipatory interpretations with respect to women's role in the home (Giordano, 2006).

reproduced the oligarchic mechanisms (1995:25). A fitting example of this mechanism is the rejection of the divorce law in 1932. Despite fervent opposition from Conservatives and the Church both the bill for legal divorce and women's suffrage were approved by the House of Representatives; but in the Senate, where the Conservatives held the absolute majority, neither of the bills were ever even discussed (Barrancos, 2006:133).

As Smith points out, the growing urban masses - and this also applied for other social movements, one might add - could express their demands through the national Congress, which was appreciated as a relatively open arena for political competition. The Socialist Party in particular⁶¹ had sizeable delegations in Congress and offered articulate and competent mediation for their cause - but were stopped at every turn by the ruling *Concordancia*. The critical point is that socially and politically mobilized groups sought participation in the political process but were not given access to power since the political institutions, particularly Congress, became increasingly discredited and restrained (1969:35, 48).

The pluralistic composition of the leadership of the *Unión Argentina de Mujeres* can be seen as its strength since it maintained relations with the Socialists and the Communists but at the same time also its weakness because later, when communism was increasingly perceived as a threat within the general political climate resulting in reprisals for its followers, these relations unsettled many *Unión* members particularly those from the conservative and Catholic sectors (Giordano, 2006). Once the *Unión Argentina de Mujeres* became more and more associated with the Communist Party it was difficult to maintain relations with sympathizers outside their immediate circle of followers. According to Halperín Donghi, the *Unión* experienced the same fate as many

⁶¹ It must be remembered that the Radical Party and important sectors of liberal forces which had been absorbed by it abstained from reappearing in elections for some years in protest against the military coup of 1930.

other organizations that emerged out of an oppositional front in that period. They were composed of individuals from the dominant classes who congregated around limited, short-term objectives which they achieved in the majority of cases but who sooner or later, lost the ability to maintain cohesion (2004:210).

Initially the collective action of the *Unión* successfully responded to the political situation of the infamous decade and efforts to pass the reform bill of the Civil Code were silenced; but the organization itself was short lived and important modification in women's rights like *patria potestad*, legal divorce, or suffrage would take many years to be implemented.

While liberal doctrine had guided the organization of Argentina as a nation and played a key role in politics from the mid-nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth, liberalism had always displayed some conservative characteristics: the participation of the popular sectors presented unknown territory and was therefore viewed with distrust. The immigrant workers from Europe were essential for the country's economy but in all other aspects had proved disappointing and even threatening - rather than the cultivated, nicely dressed Europeans that Sarmiento and Alberdi had envisaged populating Argentine cities, the newcomers brought with them ideas of Socialism and Anarchism and overall displayed cultural traits that did not fit into the Argentine image that nationalists sought to promote. These perceptions restricted the democratic system; liberalism also encouraged moral standards and social conventions that were quite similar to those of the Conservatives - women's status in particular was affected by these politics - while it was recognized that women's participation in the modernizing process was a crucial element, the legal reforms implemented in their favour only moved within boundaries which would

preserve traditional gender roles and did not threaten patriarchal interests. In Argentina, traditional conceptions have prevailed over progressive ideas and although the country underwent a dramatic and rapid modernization process, this must not be confused with its entering modernity (Barrancos, 2006:126). As García Canclini has pointed out, “modernization” refers to technical and technological changes and material transformations, while “modernity” implies changes in subjectivity, attitudes, and behaviours. The persistence of material and symbolic traditional imagery in Argentina, and Latin America for that matter, has been an obstacle to sustaining a broad modernity. Canclini therefore speaks of ‘hybrid cultures’ (1995).

Argentina’s difficulties in achieving political modernity can be traced to the unresolved conflict originating in the nineteenth century between Unitarian modernists and federalist traditionalists. Continuing into the twentieth century, this conflict developed into two mutually exclusive paths to political modernity and contrasting perceptions of cultural identity (Spektorowski, 2000:82). Yrigoyen’s ambitious attempts at political and social reform presented a subversion of established national-cultural norms that radicalized this long standing antagonism between two exclusive images of collective identity and political practice. The military coup in 1930 has to be understood as a culmination of this conflict and as a rebellion which formed the basis for the delegitimization of the liberal version of Argentine nationalism which would turn into a populist version under Perón (Spektorowski, 1994:155).

Peronist nationalism can only be comprehended within the context of the old Unitarian/federalist conflict during the early years of the republic.

Perón's strategies

Perón took from each Argentine ethos only what suited him and ignored the most divisive and potentially disruptive aspects of both traditions. From the heritage of Rivadavia and Sarmiento he extracted the concepts of freedom, civilization, *conducción* versus *caudillaje* and, most important of all, political legitimacy. From the legacy of Rosas and Martín Fierro he emphasized *Argentinidad*, populism, political authority and the twin pillars of his regime, social justice and economic nationalism (Winston, 1983:315).

While he attempted to pose as heir of both Rosas and Sarmiento, he was careful not to associate himself explicitly with either. For large parts of the population Rosas epitomized crude tyranny and oppression - it would have been very unwise for any leader to emphatically evoke the General's legacy. On the other hand, Perón could not fully embrace Sarmiento - the working classes, particularly the migrants from the interior who believed in nativist values would hardly have supported a leader who associated himself with a man who suggested spreading *gaucho* blood over the *pampas*. Writing during the last years of the first Peronist period, Blanksten states that "Argentines are not quite certain of which of the two Argentinas is Perón's; on some questions it is evident that Perón has attempted to straddle the two" (1953:230).

Neither Rosas nor Sarmiento could be referred to by Perón as a national myth or symbol - preference for one or the other would have alienated either group of supporters of the divisive national dichotomy. This explains why Perón preferred to evoke José de San Martín when referring to Argentina's past - as the hero of the Independence Struggle and Liberator of the Argentine nation he was respected by both camps (Winston, 1983:328).

With a historical lineage to San Martín, Rosas, and Yrigoyen, Peronism represented the “greatest and most complete attempt to realize the national-popular project” in contrast to the “oligarchical project” which would count amongst its predecessors Rivadavia, Sarmiento, Alberdi, Mitre, the *antirosistas*, and conservative liberalism (Buchrucker, 1998:13); but generally it can be said that Perón attempted a daring balancing act of interests across class and demographic boundaries.

It seems important, however, to point to the underlying significance of the two opposing national projects. It is undoubtedly correct that the antagonism between *porteño* liberals and provincial traditionalists had its origins in their different perceptions of national consciousness and national culture; but it is crucial here to understand that these antagonistic concepts of the ‘two Argentinas’ were not as abstract and imagined as they might seem to an outsider; after all, it must not be overlooked that this was a conflict of opposing economic interests - the age-old struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, which made this cultural dichotomy a daily reality. The working class was conscious of that fact and therefore had very real and rational reasons for supporting Perón. As Germani notes, the workers had achieved a sense of “real freedom completely unknown and impossible before the establishment of the nationalist-populist regime” (1978:116-17, 237). After all, apart from the incompatible perceptions of national culture, predominant within the popular tradition were ideas of more equitable distribution of power and improvement in wages, working conditions, and educational opportunities. The oligarchic-project served the preservation of the position of the ruling classes and the protection of their vested interests. It seems feasible therefore, that first and foremost, Perón gained the huge support from the working classes because he took rapid and effective action to improve the workers’ living standards; consequently, because of Perón’s attempt to

reconcile the 'two Argentinas', members of the working class rose in status and were able to assert their rights as citizens and gain inclusion into the national project fundamentally changing the Argentine discourse. In 1977, Alicia Moreau de Justo admitted that she and her colleagues in the Socialist Party never grasped the importance of nationalism to the Argentine people. The Socialists had rallied against the caudillo tradition without understanding the importance of this tradition to the masses, who had historically responded to any strong leader who offered them an escape from the country's rigid class system (Carlson, 1988:197).

Analyzing the political activities of the workers in the Buenos Aires meat packing houses, Smith sheds light on Perón's strategy to gain the support of the workers. Although there were around forty thousand meat packers in the city - and it is not unreasonable to assume that this workforce was composed of 'old' and 'new' proletariat⁶² - they possessed neither economic nor political strength in the early 1930s⁶³(see Smith, 1969:30-49). There were unions - but for each packinghouse individually, not for the entire industry; and although a Federation of Workers of the Meat Industry was set up by the Communist José Peter - achieving notable but limited improvements - the packing house workers remained relatively disorganized. Until 1943 there were several attempts to pass legislation in Congress in favour of the workers; however, none of the political efforts by socialist deputies or union leaders bore any results because their proposals were turned down in the Senate which was

⁶² After all, internal migrants constituted 29% of the total Greater Buenos Aires population (Smith, 1969:33)

⁶³ Packing house managers paid pitiful wages, ignored any existing labour laws, hired and fired at will, blacklisted labour organizers and frequently resorted to violence as their method of reprisal. Working conditions were dismal and constantly put workers at risk of contamination and accidents in the cutting and coping areas.

composed predominantly of members of the meat producing industry and the agro-aristocracy.

After becoming secretary of labour and welfare, Perón put an end to the organizational problems of the meat packers. He created a syndicate - Federation of Labour Unions of the Meat Industry - which included workers at every level of employment and included all the packing houses. After some workers were laid off in 1944, a strike was held at one of the plants. Perón himself proposed a settlement that would have included a wage rise, holiday regulations, a minimum amount of working hours, and cessation of brutality by the foremen. The terms were refused by the management and Perón took decisive action; a government decree put a compulsory end to the strike and the proposed settlement had to be accepted.

This kind of intervention soon became the norm in labour disputes. In 1945, a general strike was called in all packing plants over the suspension of thousands of workers for financial reasons. The government intervened and ordered the managements to take them back; if this proved impossible for lack of funds, the state would pay the workers' wages for as long as three months as a matter of social justice. In the end, this programme cost the Argentine government nearly ten million pesos.

The appeal of the Peronist movement to the masses lay in its power to improve their real economic conditions and to articulate their passionate resentment of the traditional oligarchy which materially exploited them throughout Argentine history. Before Perón, the entrenched futility of constitutional procedures presented an obstacle to any attempt at fruitful representation of workers' interests; once in power, Perón institutionalized the access to and the availability of political power. However, as Ranis points out, Perón elevated the status of organized workers and redistributed the national income in their favour, while at the same time avoiding the

attempt to change the traditional social structures, to modify the benefit system, or to radically redefine the national economic priorities. He extolled the role of the new urban proletariat which, at the same time, would precariously be led by the military and the traditional elite (1975:163-4) and even though he could maintain this uneasy set up for a time, it seems to have been clear, even to Perón himself, that the antagonisms that were simmering beneath sooner or later would surface and erupt. Shortly after coming to power Perón is said to have made a statement which basically sums up his own concerns: “In order to sustain myself in power, I need ‘insurance’ of one million workers to obey me blindly and with whom I will be able to defend myself from whatever action by the military; and ‘reassurance’ of one hundred thousand bayonets to impede excessive advances by the popular masses.” (Goldwert,1972:101).

Women and Peronism

Women’s organizations and their efforts to promote their interests basically had experienced the same obstacles as the workers’ movement before Perón. The political mobilization of women within Peronism was unprecedented in Argentine history. Coming on the heels of long years of struggle by other feminist and female organizations, Peronism distinguished itself from them by its ability to appeal to the masses of Argentine women. It developed partially in response to the integration of women into the paid workforce and built a national women’s movement which not only improved the living standards of working women, but raised the status of all women in Argentina by giving them political equality with men and providing them with the opportunity to organize themselves politically in a women’s party within the Peronist movement (Hollander, 1974:42).

Within the context of Peronism, the women's movement became more nationalistic and popularly based than the previous feminist movement had been. Its ideology continually linked the rights of women with the interests of the masses and maintained that only with Argentina's national liberation would women win the opportunity to real equality (Hollander, 1974:45).

What distinguished the attempts during Peron's presidency to legalize women's suffrage from previous periods was the fact that the President and his followers were vocally in favour of the principle. Equally important was the active campaign waged by Eva Perón in order to enfranchise women. Eva's arguments paralleled those of earlier Argentine feminists who justified women's suffrage in terms of the important role women played within the family and the dominant role they had in socializing each succeeding generation of Argentines. Like many feminists before her, Eva identified the women's struggle with the struggle of the working classes in general and demanded a political voice for women as just retribution for their historic oppression by the ruling class (Hollander, 1974:46-7).

The liberal state, far from representing equality, excluded the popular sectors and women almost in their entirety. During various decades of criticising the limitations of liberalism, women achieved the right to administer their own property, access to universities and public office - as we have seen, significant improvements occurred during the Radical period - but they did not achieve the right to vote until Juan Perón came to power.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Strictly speaking, Perón was not the first Argentine politician who gave women the right to vote. In the province of San Juan, following a change of the constitution in 1927, all women, regardless of social background or level of education, were granted suffrage. The provincial governor, Aldo Cantoni, maintained that "voting Argentine women - native or naturalized - would change the physiognomy of our constitution adapting it to the demands of our era and incorporating a wider spectrum of the population. There is no reason for denying them rights that are only fair to recognize and that they are perfectly capable of exercising." According to the new constitution, women also could be elected to public positions. In April 1928, women of San Juan voted for the first time - 97 percent of women registered casted their vote compared to 90 percent of men. Furthermore, one woman, Emilia Collado, was elected

In 1944⁶⁵ Perón created the first special Women's Division of Labour and Assistance. It would be responsible for important legislation affecting working women its main objective being the improvement of working conditions and wages. Subsequently, a number of labour laws were implemented to precisely this end. In 1944, piecework became illegal in all branches of industry. The principle of equal pay for equal work was established, although not implemented. Women who worked from home for employers came under a minimum wage regulation. In 1945, protective legislation contained in the 1926 reform was extended to include women in a wider range of occupations; in the same year fixed minimum wages were introduced for workers in the food industry and gave women a minimum wage 20% below that of male wages⁶⁶ (Hollander, 1974:45). In 1949, women textile workers were given the right to equal pay with men. By 1959 Argentine women workers earned on average 7 to 15 percent less than men which, at the time, was one of the lowest differences in the non-socialist world (Hollander, 1974:46).

Women also gained significant civil rights during the Perón years. In 1949 married women were given constitutional guarantees of equality in marriage with their husbands; inheritance rights were given to all children; furthermore, laws were passed that allowed divorce and permitted complete legal adoption (Guy, 2000:189). In 1954 Perón actively supported a law which gave illegitimate children the same rights and

public administrator in Calingasta and another, Erna Acosta, her deputy. However, later the same year, president Yrigoyen intervened in the province's politics, Cantoni was imprisoned, and the female vote repealed. The reasons as stated in the subsequent report: Cantoni supported the weaker classes in exchange for the honour of a great number of young women whom it was necessary to isolate because once on the path towards vice their freedom would turn into a permanent danger for public health and morals...the female committees, constituted mostly of administrative employees, regularly held parties and attendance was compulsory under the threat of dismissal. These parties practically degenerated into orgies as a gift for the governor's cronies..." (Fundación Bataller [society for the recuperation of the history of San Juan]).

⁶⁵ At the time, Perón occupied the position of Secretary of Labour and Social Welfare.

⁶⁶ This might not seem very egalitarian but has to be seen in the context of customary wage strategies at the time whereby women's salaries amounted to about 40% of those of their male counterparts.

dignity as enjoyed by those born in marriage. One of the most important changes for women, however, was the right to vote and to be elected into public office.

On November 11, 1951 women were able to vote for the first time. The majority, throughout the country, voted for Perón; the percentage of female votes going to Perón ranged from 83 to 53 (Hollander, 1974:47). The most widely held opinion, particularly amongst anti-Peronists, as to why such large numbers of women had voted for Peronism was that Perón had given them suffrage. However, this reflects a very superficial view of women's political behaviour. While it is generally the case that women's voting patterns have been more conservative than men's in respect to parties advocating social change, in the Argentine case the progressive populist movement had more support in the national election from women than from men.

Alicia Moreau de Justo, socialist and anti-Peronist, made a study of the voting patterns of women in the capital in order to determine their motivation for casting their votes. She reported that in the working-class districts which she investigated, a very large percentage of women voted in favour of Perón, while in the upper middle-class districts, the majority of both men and women voted for the liberal-Radical ticket. Moreau concluded from her findings that "women voted more from a sense of class than in gratitude for the suffrage law" (1969, cited in Hollander, p. 47).

This is not surprising - it must be remembered that the laws in favour of the working class improved the living standards of a great number of women and their families; but they also had a positive psychological effect since they increased women's self esteem and social status. Peronist ideology emphasized the dignity of working-class women who, through their hard work and love for home and country contributed to Argentina's economic development.

Daniel James points out that the issue of citizenship and the access to full political rights was a potent part of Peronist discourse. Perón's appeal to the working classes was due to a large extent to his ability to redefine the notion of citizenship within a broader, ultimately social context (1988:280). Reading through James' brilliant analysis of Peronism's popularity, however, it becomes clear that it appealed to women for different reasons than to men. It was true for male workers, for example, that Peronism's attraction cannot be explained simply in terms of its capacity to articulate claims to political participation and the full recognition of citizenship because universal suffrage, and equality before the law had existed in Argentina since 1912 (Saenz Peña Law). But this did not apply to women since they were not included in the Saenz Peña Law. Now, Peronism offered to recast the whole issue of citizenship within a new social context that would end exclusionary liberal politics and give women political equality with men. It cannot be denied that Peronist feminist ideology was full of contradictions and pragmatisms that make us suspect that the accusations that the main objective of Perón's policies related to women was to tap into a so far dormant pool of potential votes are not without a grain of truth. Peronist feminism was not radical enough to totally challenge the established role of women, that is to say that it did not entirely threaten men (and women for that matter) who were socialised within the traditional value structure of Argentine society because even while women were urged to take on a more active role in public life, their spiritual role within the family was often defined as their major sphere of influence (Hollander, 1974:55). Thus women were mainly positioned as loyal supporters of Peronist men; they were not given the vote to further their interests as women but in order to render their support for the Peronist Party (Molyneux, 2000:58). And yet, it seems that precisely these contradictions provided Peronism with an even wider range of female

followers. Those women who did not wish to challenge established gender roles, be it within the family environment or in the larger social relations of society, found a space of expression in Peronism. On the other hand, those who wanted to open new possibilities for themselves could do so because of the new, radical ideas that the movement had legitimised (Hollander, 1974:55).

Within the family-politics, the Peronist government also redefined the role of fathers and their relationship to their children. Unlike earlier visions, the new father's part in issues of governance was diminished compared with the mother's (Guy, 2000:188). While fathers were encouraged to spend more time with their children and support them with regards to homework and so forth, mothers were defined as *almas tutelares de la casa* (spiritual guardians of the home). As Guy further points out, the term tutelary implies that married women had custody over a minor, thereby replacing an absent or non-functioning father (Guy, 2000:189).

Eva

Instrumental in the implementation of Peronist social reform was Perón's wife Eva. The active involvement of a woman in politics was, to say the least, very unusual in 1940s Argentina and much criticized by anti-Peronists. The traditional role of the President's wife was limited to appearances at official functions and honorary positions of charity organizations. And yet, Eva's popularity with the lower class and her public support of her President husband was not unprecedented.

As touched upon above, studies about the nature of Peronist political thought often point to the influences of the Rosas era on Perón's own ideology. In the context of this project, however, it is also interesting to point out that there exist quite a few striking

personal similarities between Juan Manuel de Rosas and Juan Perón, not only regarding their style of politics but also the masculine image they both represented and the type of woman they both married (Navarro, 2002, in Poderti, 2005:206).

According to Sáenz Quesada, Rosas' main interest lay in the pursuit of power and dominance to the point of seeking 'omnipotence'. He is said to have been a dashing, handsome man yet he was no womanizer although he enjoyed female company. During his married life to Encarnación Ezcurra he had 'only' one mistress, Eugenia Castro, a relationship that remained unknown to the public until his death (*La Nación*, 20/02/2005). Although Encarnación and Rosas lived separately - he on his *estancia* and she in Buenos Aires, they were very close and she is said to have been a devoted wife, gentle and true. Encarnación became increasingly politically involved and, together with their daughter Manuelita, turned into Rosas' first and best collaborator. She converted her home into 'headquarters' where information amongst followers was exchanged and strategies plotted. She passed all this information to her husband who consequently was always up to date with say, the movement of officers or any possible conspiracies in the making (Calvera, 1994:171). Frequently asking him for 'orders' she became an 'extension' of him - a term later appropriated by Eva Perón. Paintings often show Ezcurra with a fanatical glint in her eyes, a characteristic often attributed to Eva. Encarnación became the '*heroína de la federación*' a title she gained during years of attending the poor, her copious correspondence with the Federalists in the interior and, above all, her fanatical adhesion to her husband's cause (Calvera, 1994:171).

Thanks to Andrew Lloyd Webber, most of us are familiar with Eva Duarte. However, the Hollywood production contains all the elements that have been proven to be

successful in a multitude of similar tales. It tells the story of a street-wise, self-made woman who beds her way up and gains the masses' affection by throwing banknotes at them. Once established at the very top, she indulges in yet another close relationship - that with Christian Dior and Van Cleef and Arpels. Ultimately, however, she must face the end of her good fortune as death closes in⁶⁷. While some aspects of Eva's life, her social background, the hardship during her earlier years, and so forth, are reproduced fairly accurately in the film, the portrayal of her relationship with Perón and the circumstances that led to her powerful position omits far more than it reveals; and so it turned out to be just another piece of mediocre entertainment. Were it not for the music, it would be entirely forgettable.

Eva's personality, as well as Perón's, has been the subject of persistent controversy in Argentina. It is difficult to find convincing disinterested judgements of them or of what they accomplished. Those who are for her see a hard-working woman, the benefactor of the poor; those who hate her, a scheming, power hungry fortune hunter. Writings about Eva often seem contradictory as if describing at least two different persons. In his memoirs, Perón recalls the impression he gained from her on the day they first met: a woman of fragile appearance, her hands reddened with tension, fingers tightly intertwined (Dujovne Ortiz 1997:51-4). And yet, two months later she is said to have hired a truck, packed it with her belongings, gone to Perón's apartment and, after throwing out his current lover, settled in herself (Dujovne Ortiz 1997:34) - an anecdote that is well remembered by those who have seen *Evita*.

It is important, therefore, to examine some evidence that sheds light on the circumstances that made Eva's access to politics possible and to steer away from the gossip that has surrounded her far beyond the period in question.

⁶⁷ See Savigliano, 1997, for an analysis of the 1996 film *Evita* in relation to the globalization of specifically regional personalities.

Like thousands of Argentines from the interior Eva went to Buenos Aires in search of a better life and if her aim was to find a wealthy and powerful husband, who could have blamed her? But to suggest that she purposefully pursued Perón in order to satisfy her own political ambitions is quite ludicrous - as fantastic as the soap operas she used to broadcast on Radio Belgrano. When Eva met Perón, she could not possibly have known the path his political career would take, let alone that he would become President of the country and that he would give her an active role to play.

Eva's rise from a provincial, small time radio actress to prominent government figurehead and icon of the working classes has to be understood as the result of circumstances and events caused by the political situation at the time.

Although Eva was very young and, as she herself states on numerous occasions, not interested in politics, she could not have remained untouched by the politicization and polarization that divided Argentina from 1943 onwards, the time when she and Perón started living together. Fraser and Navarro describe this period of her life in some detail which allows us to make some deductions about the way she became drawn into politics (1980). There were always people around Perón, assistants from the Labour Secretariat, officers from the Army, civilian politicians from the Radicals with whom the Colonel had contacts. In the evenings, Perón's apartment became a meeting place for his supporters. The visitors were taken into the living room and if Eva was back from her broadcasts, Perón would introduce her to them. She would stay throughout the meeting, making coffee, emptying the ashtrays or watching the guests in silence, listening (Fraser and Navarro, 1980:43-4). Quite ignorant of politics, Eva would not have questioned what was being discussed during these *tertulias*, let alone have stated an opinion of her own; but it is feasible that during these months she became

his most fervent supporter. She was probably grateful for the fact that Perón was not ashamed of her background and for his including her into what he did - few women at the time enjoyed such privilege. It must be remembered that Perón was heavily criticized for his liaison with Eva - the fact that he maintained the relationship, and maintained it publicly, despite this criticism points to the importance her presence had for him. This raises the question 'why did he allow her to listen to these presumably confidential conversations'? Again, a simple explanation is probably the most likely one to be true. Evidence suggests that they were very much in love. Perón was old enough to be Eva's father; it is likely that he felt very flattered by her attention. She never had had a father to speak of; she must have felt a certain degree of security in their relationship. A very tender and affectionate love letter Perón wrote to her later while being imprisoned on the island of Martín García in 1945 corroborates this assumption (see Luna, 1972:337). Eva could easily have left him during this uncertain and dangerous period; but she did not - in fact, she tried to arrange for both of them to leave the country. Neither of the two could have guessed even remotely that on 17 October 1945 thousands of workers would take to the streets of Buenos Aires demanding Perón's release and reinstatement⁶⁸. If Perón's style of politics in terms of contact and communication with the working classes could be described as charismatic before October 17, this open, unprecedented demonstration of admiration for him proved to him that it had been the right strategy to gain mass support - only, after that historic date, his relationship with the workers turned into

⁶⁸ The crisis started on the 9 October 1945 when Perón was forced to resign his three government posts as secretary of labour, minister of War, and vice-president under the Farrell presidency. His arrest and subsequent imprisonment prompted his labour and military supporters to close ranks and demand and organize his release. They succeeded and on the 17 October, after a day-long demonstration in Buenos Aires, they managed to bring him back to a triumphant welcome (see for example Luna, 1972). On interpretations by Peronists and anti-Peronist of Eva's role during the October Crisis see Navarro, 1980:127-138.

an affectionate, even mystical bond between the leader and the *descamisados*⁶⁹, as the working class became collectively known. Why this public display of mass support? Felix Luna finds that it was related to the process of Argentina's transition from a primary sector economy to an industrialized one which had already been initiated in Argentina. This industry which was growing all around Buenos Aires avidly absorbed all the available workers who arrived from the interior provinces or from the Pampas; men and women who only knew the hard life of the fields and cattle ranches and now, as neighbours of the big city, found high wages, full employment, better living conditions, and protection within the organisation of the syndicates; a hitherto unknown welfare which was automatically translated into the support of Perón, quite obviously the provider of such good fortune. A profound transformation was in the making here (1972:24).

The October crisis had established Perón's relationship with the *descamisados* as the fundamental base of his leadership and power. It was vital for him, therefore, to maintain and nurse this relationship which posited him in direct competition with the Partido Laborista (Labour Party) which was the main representative of the very same sector. The presidency, however, curtailed Perón's freedom of action in relation to the workers; he no longer could engage in social agitation in their favour or lend as much time to the solution of their grievances and complaints. If he was to prevent the deterioration of his liaison with the working class, he needed to employ an efficient minister of labour to replace him in this role. However, this was not without its own pitfalls: it had to be somebody who would not forge their own political power behind

⁶⁹ The term *descamisado* appeared for the first time during the demonstration on 17 October 1945 and was used pejoratively for Perón's supporters who were, to a large extent, former peasants and rural workers. By December of that year, the Peronists had adopted the name to identify themselves with the working classes (Navarro, 1977:229).

Perón's back (as he himself had done under the Farrell presidency).⁷⁰ Eva proved to be the perfect choice for the task, albeit without ever being officially appointed to any government position (Navarro, 1977:237).

Eva's role in the relationship between Peronism and the working classes became an immensely important one. Ironically, various aspects of her life and her person, so much criticized by the upper classes, became invaluable assets when she took up work in the ministry of labour; With respect to her humble background, she never failed to remind the workers and the union leaders that she was a *descamisada* too and that she could genuinely empathize with their problems and concerns. Furthermore, her lowly origins were an essential tool that allowed her to legitimize her actions. It was her condition as a woman "of the people" that authorized her to speak of the people and their needs in order to turn herself into their intermediary between them and the corridors of power (Savio, 2006:9); at a time when radio became an important and powerful medium of communication in Argentina, her talents as a broadcaster could be fully exploited for propaganda purposes. After various years of transmitting soap operas, she felt comfortable in front of a microphone; her condition as a woman and being married to Perón proved to be a huge advantage. Her position in the ministry was an unofficial one since women did not occupy public posts, hence she did not present a threat to Perón, precisely because she was a woman; and being his wife allowed her to reiterate the fact that she was his extension, his shadow, acting on his behalf and subject to his consent; being Perón's wife opened the possibility for her to become a one-woman propaganda machine for Peronism (Navarro, 1977:238). Close to him like nobody else, she could say things about him, he himself or anyone else would

⁷⁰ The person he appointed to the post at first was José María Freire, a little known labour leader who did not gain the workers' trust and affection like Perón had when he was secretary of labour (Navarro, 1977:236).

not have been able to say without appearing ridiculous;⁷¹ always the actress, Eva continued to dress glamorously and did not believe in moderation with respect to her jewellery.⁷² She knew instinctively that her flamboyant appearance would be seen by the masses as proof of her success, proof that under Peronism social mobility had become a reality, regardless of one's background.⁷³

In 1948 the Fundación Eva Perón was created which basically replaced the traditional charity organization *Sociedad de Beneficiencia*. The latter had been running since 1823, its members and organizers the *crème de la crème* of Argentine female aristocracy. Subsidised by the state but financed mainly by private donations and initiatives of the ladies, the *Sociedad* was responsible for the building of hospitals, orphanages and shelters for the poor as well as the administration of food and goods for the needy. Traditionally, the First Lady would be given honorary presidency of the *Sociedad*. Not so Eva Perón - she was ostracized by the ladies who did not make a secret of their disapproval of Eva's past as an actress, her unmarried relationship with Perón, or her mingling in politics. Eva was furious and according to María Flores "Eva was determined to destroy the Sociedad and the ladies, and out of this rage she conceived the plan to create her own charity organization... the Eva Perón Foundation (1952:102, in Guy, 2001:253). Furthermore, when the matrons of the Sociedad ignored

⁷¹ Addressing female members of the Confederación General del Trabajo, for example, she said: "Sometimes I think that Perón ceased to be an ordinary man and became an ideal incarnate... Perón is the Argentine ideal personified... He is the old ideal of all Argentine hopes come to life... Perón always will remain an ideal, the flag, a guide, like a star in the night leading the way to eternal victory" (Eva Perón, 16/12/1949 available at <http://www.pjmoreno.org.ar/documentos/discursoseva3.aspx>, (10/07/2009).

⁷² "Look", she said to an advisor, "they want to see me beautiful. Poor people don't want someone to protect them who is old and dowdy. They all have their dreams about me and I don't want to let them down." (cited in Fraser & Navarro, 1980:82)

⁷³ Later it seems to have become common practice to parade personal success stories as living proof of class equality. The football megastar Diego Maradona, for example, used to display his wealth in the most ostentatious fashion while his clubs and managers never tired to point to his extremely poor childhood in Villa Fiorito, a shantytown on the southern outskirts of Buenos Aires, son of rural migrants. About the role of football in social change see for example Tamir Bar-On, 1997:1-22; Eduardo Archetti, 1999.

her overtures, Eva's spite was so great that she decided to avenge herself by demanding that the *Sociedad* be taken over by the government and then set up her own charitable organization (Guy, 2001:254-5).⁷⁴ According to its statutes the Foundation had the following objectives:

- a) To provide with monetary assistance, or in kind, furnish with working tools, give scholarships to any person who lacks resources and requests them, and who, in the founder's judgment, deserves them;
- b) To build houses for indigent families;
- c) To create and/or build educational establishments, hospitals, homes and/or any other establishments that may best serve the goals of the Foundation;
- d) To construct welfare establishments of any kind which can then be given, with or without charge, to local, provincial or national authorities;
- e) To contribute or collaborate by any possible means to the creation of works tending to satisfy the basic needs for a better life of the less privileged classes.

The organization of the Foundation was to be a very simple but unequivocal process: it should be and should remain in the sole hands of its founder who would exercise this responsibility for life and possess the widest powers afforded by the state and the constitution (see *Fundación Eva Perón* at <http://www.fundacionevaperon.com/historia/fep-hdlf.htm>, 12/07/2009).

Eva worked tirelessly in her office in the ministry, receiving the poor, listening to their problems and doling out gifts ranging from money to working tools and summer holidays for children. She saw herself as the 'bridge' between Perón and the people,

⁷⁴ Eva's role in the take-over of the *Sociedad* by the government is often exaggerated. Guy maintains that the organization had been under investigation since 1939 when complaints about poor working conditions and low salaries of its employees as well as rumours of misappropriations of funds were presented in Congress. As a state financed institution it had already undergone some degree of reorganization in 1943, before Eva met Perón. The request for the government investigation of the *Sociedad* that began in July 1946 was presented at a time when Eva did not have the influence or the power to instigate such a move (2001:254-5).

concentrating her attention on the countless day-to-day problems of the poor that the President, occupied with the greater destinies of the nation, could not be expected to take care of himself.

One of the women who later became a Peronist militant in the early 1970s, one of the few with a working-class background, describes her personal experience of Peronism and of Eva's charity work:

...Tuve mi infancia en la época de Perón...Viví en un barrio Peronista en una casa que nos dio Evita. Fuimos con mamá... ella le entregó una carta y nos dio una casa hermosa, sin ser, ni mi madre ni mi padre, militantes Peronistas. Ella era obrera en Pirelli y hacía guantes, y para fabricar esos guantes se utilizaba talco. El talco se pegaba en la nariz y en la boca, y nadie, nadie más que Perón les dio la posibilidad de hacer una media hora de pausa para sentarse y tomar un vaso de leche. ("Tina", in Diana, 2006:45)

It can be said, therefore, that with the creation of the Eva Perón Foundation and Eva as its president her role as a "bridge" between the workers and Perón became extended to intermediary for all those in need of social support which then also included women, children, the elderly, and so forth. In this sense, Eva monopolized social assistance and effectively banned the bourgeoisie from their traditional position as benefactors of the needy.

Eva's role as the spokesperson for women in general had been established after she had become president of the female branch of the Peronist Party and campaigned for women's right to vote linking a moral dimension to the political one. Talking about

female suffrage she said in a speech: “...Tienes el deber de preocuparte por la estructura moral y política de tu Patria. Tienes el derecho de exigirlo.” (Discursos Completos, I, 64, in Savio, 2006:6)... podríamos agregar que toda mujer debe votar conforme su sentido religioso, vale decir, ajustándose a una clara y alta medida de su deber de madre, de esposa, o de hija,...dentro de un cuadro de cristiana equidad,... de limpia aspiración de mejoramiento espiritual...” (I, 57, in Savio, 2006:6).⁷⁵

In this sense, she tacitly proclaimed the continuing influence of Catholic doctrine in the Peronist state (although this can be seen as purely strategic since Peronism, in time, would severely curtail the power of the Church).

Perón’s, but particularly Eva’s, mobilizing of the women’s movement⁷⁶ which brought together middle-class and elite women as well as the mobilization of the working classes in general was an undertaking that neither the women’s movement or the traditional worker’s parties had achieved in the previous fifty years (Carlson:186-7).

Followers of the Peronist movement emphatically proclaimed Eva’s loyalty to the Peronist cause (and to Perón himself) in an atmosphere where the two branches of the Peronist Party, Congress, labour unions, the Labour Federation and the most eclectic mix of organizations took every opportunity to display their devotion to her. Streets, towns, subway stations, ships, and even a province were named after her (Navarro, 1980:136). In the months previous to her death, this 'homage' increased at a frantic

⁷⁵ You have the duty to care about the moral and political structure of your fatherland. You have the right to demand it...we could add that every woman should vote according to her religious belief, that is, seeking in clear and high standard in her duty as a mother, a wife, or a daughter,...within a framework of Christian equality,...of clean aspiration to spiritual improvement.”

⁷⁶ The Peronist women’s movement presented a sharp break with previous movements which had worked in opposition to the state, pressuring the government for change. Under Perón, with Eva as the spokesperson for women, the movement became a vehicle for the state to mobilize women for the Peronist cause (Fisher, 2000:323-4).

pace and reached its highest point in July 1952, when Congress voted a law declaring her 'Spiritual Leader of the Nation' (Navarro, 1980:136).

As is often the case, when a public figure dies in the prime of their life, the subsequent mourning becomes an exaggerated spectacle. In Eva's case, the collective grief took on unprecedented dimensions and the mystery surrounding her body not only kept the public's interest and grief alive, it also inflated her achievements out of all proportions. For fear of public riots and in their attempts to erase Peronism from history the authorities, instead of opting for a swift burial, practically kidnapped Eva's body in the belief that the people would forget her.⁷⁷

Not everybody grieved - the oligarchy and cultured Argentines celebrated the disappearance of Eva's body. "Long live cancer" they had written on the walls of buildings while she lay dying. Silvina Ocampo, staunchly anti-Peronist, wrote in the magazine *Sur*: "Que no renazca el sol, que no brille la luna si tiranos como éstos siembran nueva infortuna engañando a la patria. Es tiempo ya que muera esa raza maldita, esa estirpe rastrera"⁷⁸ (in Eloy Martínez, 1995:70, in Méndez:68).

According to Tomás Eloy Martínez: "La súbita entrada en escena de Eva Duarte arruinaba el pastel de la Argentina culta. Esa mina barata, esa mierdita - como se llamaba en los remantes de hacienda - era el último pedo de la barbarie. Mientras pasaba había que taparse la nariz."⁷⁹ (in Eloy Martínez, 1995:70, in Méndez:68).

The popular classes, however, were determined to achieve sainthood for their idol *Evita*. Between May 1952 and July 1954 the Vatican received forty thousand letters

⁷⁷ For details relating Eva Perón's body see, for example (Revista siete días, No. 916, enero 1985, Editorial Abril, Buenos Aires; Pablo A. Vázquez EVA DUARTE DE PERÓN: "EVITA"; EVA DUARTE DE PERÓN. HISTORIA DEL SECUESTRO DE SU CADÁVER EMBALSAMADO Planeta Sedna; cementerio La Recoleta: El cadáver de Evita; Soría, 2005:35-78; Kohen, 1996).

⁷⁸ "The sun shall not rise, the moon shall not shine if tyrants like these sow misfortune again, cheating the fatherland. It is time that that wretched breed died out, that despicable species."

⁷⁹ "The sudden appearance of Eva Duarte on the scene spoiled the cake for the cultured Argentina. That cheap broad that little shit - as she was called by the string-pullers in the treasury - she was the last fart of barbarism. While she passed by one had to cover one's nose."

from Argentines who attributed various miracles to Eva and demanded her canonization - Pius XII, however ignored the petitions.⁸⁰

Depending upon political standpoint, most of the bibliography about Eva Perón addresses either her saint or her sinner image but few suggest that she was, in reality, the power behind the throne, a woman who defied the limitations that had traditionally been imposed on women. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that this was actually the case. Furthermore, it would also explain the exaggerated, almost irrational admiration or hatred towards her. After all, if a woman could exercise this kind of power, then nothing could stand in the way of a more egalitarian system. To the same extent, for the upper classes this meant the complete deterioration of life as they had known it. Seen in this light, Perón's third marriage to María Estela Martínez Cartas ("Isabelita") seems an obvious strategy to recreate the Evita-phenomenon - this is not a new thought; but it could also have been an attempt to disguise his own weakness or his fear of facing the Argentine public on his own when he returned from exile.

Eloy Martínez portrays Perón as somebody whose image and legacy in Argentine politics has been inflated beyond all proportions thanks to the tremendous impact Eva's death had in this process. One of the most salient themes in his *La novela de Perón*,⁸¹ is the contrast he paints between Eva who became even "more beautiful" in death and Perón whose body - "fatter and increasingly disconcerted, became empty of history" (2003). Contrary to Eva's perception of herself as Perón's shadow and extension, a mere tool for him to carry out his political vocation, she was, according to Méndez, much more than that. Without her, Perón might have become president

⁸⁰ For the cult of Eva's body, alleged miracles performed by her, and super-natural events in relation to her death see Susti Gonzáles, 2002:117-158.

⁸¹ Eloy Martínez based this novel on an extensive interview with the exiled Perón in Madrid (*Las memorias del General*). The above is not an actual quote but reproduces the meaning of Perón's statements to Martínez.

and achieved a place in history as one more *caudillo*; but Peronism as a unique phenomenon and different from all other Latin American populisms would never have existed (63). Perón seems to have resented the fact that Eva's popularity surpassed his own. In his novel, Martínez has him say:

El destino es injusto. Eva estuvo apenas días en Madrid y la recibieron de honores. Yo me quedé a vivir trece años y sólo he podido dejar la huella de mi nombre en una calle...Fui yo quien la hice pero es ella la que se ha quedado con lo mejor de mi gloria. Infortunios de quien no muere joven.

Despite her constant claims of being Perón's shadow, his assistant, the "heart" to his "head", Eva increasingly forgot to play her traditional role as the submissive female as she began to outshine her husband in the male-dominated arena of politics. The subordination that she expressed in *La razón de mi vida* had virtually disappeared by the time she dictated *Mi mensaje*. Eva's last image as "*Evita montonera*", the radical militant, assumes a hard masculine edge that somehow erased her previous, typically female softness and femininity (Hughes Davies, 2007:274). Ezequiel Martínez Estrada once commented on Eva's active masculine role:

Todo lo que le faltaba a Perón o lo que poseía en grado rudimentario para llevar a cabo la conquista del país de arriba abajo, lo consumó ella o se lo hizo consumir a él ...En realidad, él era la mujer y ella el hombre.

(Eloy Martínez, 2002:184, in Hughes Davies, 2007:274.)

Marysa Navarro seconds these thoughts:

A pesar de su apariencia femenina, Evita es en verdad un hombre...Los rasgos de su personalidad son mucho más masculinos que los de Perón (1981:336).

After 1952, Argentina gradually suffered economic decline and Perón's policy of income distribution became increasingly hard to follow. With Eva gone, his "bridge" to the *descamisados* had crumbled and to the working classes it might have looked as if the financial difficulties were directly related to Eva's death. Now, the full extent of the value of her work seemed to be even more apparent - even though, for a time, Perón tried to carry out Eva's previous tasks by himself, he soon found that he did neither have the time, the patience or the popular rapport required (Navarro, 1977:240). The power that had been transferred to her could not be transferred to anyone else after she had gone, least of all to Perón himself (Navarro, 1977:240).

The political crisis that followed Perón's overthrow gave rise to several guerrilla organizations that gained widespread popular approval because they combined the social objectives of the Left with the strong nationalistic consciousness Peronism had propagated. While male participation in these groups is well documented, the involvement of women has only recently been recognized. The following chapter will explore female revolutionary activities, the positions they occupied within these organizations, and the impact of that experience on their lives.

Chapter 4

*Muchachas de mirada clara*⁸²

Women and the militant revolutionary movements in the 1970s

The shifts and trends that emerged in a particular country can not be analysed in an isolated way but have to be seen in a global context. Equally, the changes experienced by a particular social group depend on those that take place within the political, economic, social and cultural spheres on a national level. It is therefore important to remember the global situation in the 1960s and its effects on Argentina before we can look at its women's movements during that period.

The 1960s presented a 'landmark' decade in the history of the world. The students' and workers' May Protest in Paris with its repercussions in the whole of Western Europe, the Vietnam War and the opposition movement against it, The Prague Spring, the non-conformist Hippy Movement, the experience of the Cuban Revolution, the transformation of the Catholic Church laid down by the Second Vatican Council and its adaptation in Latin America at the Second Bishops Conference in Medellin, Colombia (1968), and later, the Chilean experience of socialism under Salvador Allende (1970 - 73) amongst others, are salient points of a global trend which sought a radical transformation of society.

At the beginning of the 1960s, improvements in the standard of living not only seemed to be limitless but also had become a vital objective for the quest for

⁸² Bright eyed girls - taken from the song *Muchacha* by Daniel Viglietti which circulated widely within the revolutionaries capturing the image of the female militant. This is its first verse: La muchacha de mirada clara/cabello corto/la que salió en los diarios/no sé su nombre, no sé su nombre/pero la nombro: primavera/pero la veo: compañera/pero yo digo: mujer entera/pero yo grito: guerrillera.

individual happiness, a trend that was reflected in the spectacular increase of consumption that had started in the previous decade. It was within this background that so-called 'youth culture' emerged (Avila, 2000:27-45, in Gil Lozano).

An uninvolved observer would have perceived conformity amongst the young generation in the 1950s and would only have gradually noticed that something was stirring underneath the calm surface. Society was characterised by consumerism that lived side by side with the threat of nuclear annihilation and a new spirit of rebelliousness started to gestate. By the end of the decade, the young ones began attempts to assert their own space in traditional and conservative societies (Gil Lozano).⁸³

The economy directed towards consumerism needed new markets and the young generation presented a privileged group because they had their own money to spend and also displayed patterns of group behaviour reflected in fashion, music, literature, 'in'-places to meet, a new way of travelling and a new jargon; all these elements together presented the typical 'young' model which related to and identified a whole generation (Gil Lozano).

The sixties were also a period when workers and students demanded the recognition of their rights by the prevailing system. Protest movements emerged on a global scale as a response to military interventions in a number of countries, amongst others the Dominican Republic, Algeria, the Congo. But most of all it was the United States' invasion of Vietnam that unleashed a vast social and political movement which exposed, at home and abroad, the truly horrific nature of this intervention. The napalm, the massive bombardments, the torture and killings, and not to forget, the never ceasing arrivals of body bags containing US soldiers, in short, the horror inflicted

⁸³ Paper presented at: I Jornadas de Reflexión Historia, Género y Política en los 70 Instituto Interdisciplinario de estudios de Género. (UBA). Available at <http://www.agendadelasmujeres.com.ar/index2.php?id=3¬a=771> (05/09/2008)

finally turned on those responsible in the form of incensed citizens in the States as well as elsewhere (Castro, 2005).

Insurgencies in Latin America, strangled and resuscitated many times, challenged US hegemony in the region and reinforced anti-imperialistic currents. Thus, in 1961, John F. Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress Policy, meant to assuage the conflicts⁸⁴ and ensure stable, independent governments in Latin America, and, most of all, to prevent a 'second Cuba'.

Parallel to anti-war-campaigns, the rise of civil right movements demanding the recognition of diverse identities within society, new discourses of gender, race, sexuality, and so forth, presented a serious threat to the establishment which, in turn, often responded with the forces of governments.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore women's participation in left-wing militant movements, the particular characteristics of their activism, their role within the organizations, and their relationships with their male colleagues. However, in order to provide a context in which these women pursued their political activism, the environment in which the militant movements emerged will be explained first. The

⁸⁴ United States foreign policy towards Latin America was one of the main contributors to social unrest across the region. It is important to remember that Kennedy's approach, instead of quelling unrest, resulted in increased revolutionary activities in Latin America, not least because it was implemented under the assumption that economic prosperity could be achieved without effecting major political and social changes and continued to support the mostly oppressive governments of the ruling elites and their army henchmen (see Pearce, 1981:41). A decade later, under Nixon (who described Latin Americans collectively as "a bunch of kooks" [in LaFeber, 1984:197]) foreign policy continued along the same lines - this time under the title 'Mature Partnership'. For Nixon, Latin America's ailing economies were a direct result of not enough private investment in the region (Rockefeller-Report, in Baily, 1976:119); this, in turn, was due to the political instability in the South causing the reluctance of foreign investors to stake their cash. However, the US government blamed Latin American societies as a whole for the lack of democracy; they were incapable of getting along in an 'orderly' way, therefore, they traditionally tended towards authoritarian rule and their inherent economic and social backwardness made it difficult for them to consistently support democracy; these conditions were a breeding ground for covert communist forces and it was the United States' duty to support those in a position to guarantee stability (Rockefeller-Report, in Baily, 1976:120). It was therefore recommended to Nixon (by Rockefeller) to increase spending on military assistance and enhanced training and equipment for police forces in Latin America since the essential force for constructive social and economic changes was the military (LaFeber, 1984:202). The Latin American governments would henceforth be "permitted" to purchase the necessary equipment from the US (Baily, 1976:120).

following section will focus on *Montoneros* in particular and will then move on the most important female and feminist movements active at the time.

The section dealing with the *montoneras* is mostly based on interviews with women who participated in that organization and will include aspects of their position within the organizational hierarchy, the changes they experienced as the boundary between their private and public lives became increasingly blurred, and how they made their roles as mothers compatible with their militancy.

Gestation of urban guerrilla organizations

In Argentina, at the beginning of the 1950s the peronist regime, despite its strong electoral support, went through a severe crisis, partly caused by its attempts to redefine the social-economic structure, a policy implemented since the inauguration of the regime, and the political-economic alliances that maintained it. An inherent characteristic of Peronist populism was its representation of a coalition of classes whose antagonistic contradictions uneasily coexisted for a short period but ultimately resulted in Perón's overthrow (Hollander, 1977:190). It has been argued that this redefinition required the introduction of notable transformations within the power system, and that these transformations, should they be successful, demanded increased authoritarianism by the political classes, which had already emerged at the time in relation to other problems, and the development of policies that would capture vast layers of the civil society, including the practice of intensified coercion by the state (Villarruel, 1988:436-7).

This reinforcement of coercive methods clearly became visible in the official attitude with respect to the cultural space and its institutions. It was then - just to

mention some symptomatic examples - that the government imposed the creation of a likeminded student organization (CGU) in order to present an opposition to the reformist *Federación Universitaria*, exerted a tight control over the *Academias Nacionales* by modifying their statutes, allocated increased space in the confiscated daily *La Prensa* to sympathizing authors, warmly supported a split within the Association of Argentine Writers (*Sociedad Argentina de Escritores*), and even temporarily incarcerated a group of anti-peronist intellectuals⁸⁵ in 1953 (Cernada, estudio preliminary de Contorno:2, edición digital). Erro even goes as far as to say that Perón's government surpassed all precedents regarding political repression of dissidents and adversaries; workers who did not offer allegiance to the government were frequently 'roughed up' and fired; oppositional newspapers fell under censorship and were forced to publish rosy political propaganda instead of critical articles (1992:15).

To the same extent as Perón's popularity declined, his methods to mobilize support became increasingly radical. He also greatly antagonised the Church⁸⁶. Furthermore, after Eva's death in 1952, a vital source of sympathy and support was eliminated. From 1954 onwards Perón's lavish spending - even surpassing other populist experiences elsewhere - effected a heavy strain on the economy. With all the profits from the lucrative war-time agricultural sales now gone, Perón implemented austerity measures that were sponsored by the IMF. According to Erro, this was the first time the government knowingly implemented bad economic policy in order to maintain

⁸⁵ Amongst them, Victoria Ocampo, editor of the Magazine Sur, who ever after referred to this episode as a clear symbol of the depreciation of intelligence by the regime.

⁸⁶ The alliance between Juan Perón and the Roman Catholic Church was primarily political. During the initial stages of his regime, Perón gained considerable popular support by having the Church as an ally. Later, he miscalculated the strength of the Church and his aggressive anti-Catholic campaign since it aroused much more widespread opposition than he had expected. Towards the end of Perón's second term, religious intolerance by the government took violent forms against the Roman Catholic Church. In 1954, the Catholic Church, incensed over Perón's legalization of divorce, allied with conservative military factions to bomb Buenos Aires in a failed *coup d'état* (see D'Amico, 1977:490-503).

support (Erro, 1992:15). Like successive governments, the attempt to mobilize widespread support while the government's legitimacy seemed to wane, only precipitated and exacerbated the crisis.

The growing oppression by the state undoubtedly contributed profoundly to the unification of the opposition which had been in existence ever since the start of the regime and which most intellectual circles subscribed to, reinforcing the notion that Peronism was but a *criollo* version of fascism which had been defeated on a worldwide scale in 1945. This interpretation had achieved more weight during the critical years of the emergence and rise of Peronism; it nurtured itself in key political ideologies elaborated since the mid 1930s and persisted clandestinely until Perón's overthrow. Afterwards it flourished with renewed vigour (Cernada, in Contorno).

The overthrow of Perón in 1955 was the start of a period of almost 20 years of political crisis in which Peronism, the political convictions of the majority of Argentineans, was banned from the political stage; this, in turn, opened the path for violent political action. Perón left a radically altered country behind: the working masses were almost unanimously organized into the union structure while the national bourgeoisie's position in the economy and as a political agent had been solidified. However, this structure was not stable; by the time of the austerity measures, the old middle classes had grown disenchanted with the recessionary economic policy and the associated increase in foreign penetration of the national economy. This also alienated the working classes who responded with frequent unauthorized strikes (Erro, 1992:16). Amongst intellectuals within the liberal camp a split started to become visible which Oscar Terán describes as a generational fracture and from this situation a clear conscience emerged which expressed itself in the fact that the younger ones perceived

themselves as a generation without role models (1993:97); they adopted this belief not out of sheer negativity but because of the fact that “in our country the dominant classes have lost, a long time ago, the ability to culturally attract young people while the working class and its organized consciousness has not yet achieved a hegemony which might translate into a coherent intellectual and moral direction” (José Aricó, *pasado y presente*, cited in Terán, 1993:97). This was, without a doubt, an ideologically orientated way to describe a situation which also was recognized by other observers from different cultural spaces. A note published in *Sur* in 1960 stated that “los ‘angry young men’, los ‘tricheurs’, los ‘rebels without a cause’, los inconformes ‘teenagers’, inundan el teatro y el cine” (Coldaroli, 1960, in Terán, 1997:97) while the sociologist and historian Juan José Sebreli confirmed that the porteño youth was turning youth itself into a value in its own right (1964, in Terán, 1997:97) and became a relatively autonomous segment within society. In this sense, the younger generation gained ‘importance’ in as much as it became recognized as a social actor (Freytes, 2007:3).

At the same time and despite modernisation of the labour market, surveys revealed a surprisingly high number of young people losing their confidence not only in the possibility to achieve professional employment but also to reach a consensus between generations; these juvenile sectors searched for satisfaction in their non-conformity and a new enthusiasm for politics (*El Grillo de Papel*, in Terán, 1993:98).

On the other hand, within an opinion that outgrew intellectual circles and which was penetrated by anti-colonialist sentiments, ‘Europeanism’ turned into a disqualifying category for those who were partial to this influence which had blurred the perception of their own national uniqueness. The new leftists favoured an articulation of

Argentina with Latin America and displayed mistrust in the prevailing European cultural elements. “Nos habíamos empeñado reiteradamente en creernos europeos, en sentirnos fuera de América, sin advertir que estábamos enclavados tercamente en el destino común de los pueblos de América”, wrote Agosti in 1955. (in Terán, 1997:98).

But it was not only the negative colonial penetration that was meant to be criticized with such statements; it was also a way of responding to the mounting incomprehension by the left parties of the peronist movement in which, after all, the entire working class collected; precisely that stratum of society of which the Left was supposed to be the natural spokes media (Terán, 1997:98).

It could be argued then, that if the re-composition of the working class was not noticed by the traditional left - used to taking the European labour aristocracy as a model - this was due to their mistaking the ‘*cabecita negra*’ (the ‘shirtless’) for the *Lumpenproletariat* and consequently Peronism for fascism. From this characterization the entire history of the working-class movement was to be put into question, with particular mistrust towards its origins which showed a working class that was predominantly composed of and clearly politically marked by European elements (Terán, 1997:99).⁸⁷

Towards the end of Perón’s second term, the political landscape was in complete disarray. The Peronist coalition was splitting apart and the alliances of political groupings became fluid and even contradictory. Opposing ideologies - those belonging to the Left as well as those on the Right - united in opposition to the government. Divisions among traditional parties occurred who realigned their ideological

⁸⁷ The origins of the immigrant working class of the time also contributed to the incomprehension of the specific Argentine reality and of the mechanical transplantation of class schemes from countries with advanced capitalism from where they came, totally inadequate for a pre-capitalist country where the struggle for social demands cannot be separated from the national anti-imperialist struggle (J. J. Sebrelli, 163).

convictions to the point where they no longer represented those values and interests they had originally subscribed to (Katra, 1988:23).

The fact that Perón was ousted in a military coup rather than through democratic election and the subsequent proscription of Peronism, the country's principal political force, left the successively weak military and civilian governments⁸⁸ lacking the legitimacy they would have needed to withstand the opposition of other political actors and stay in power. Moreover, none of these governments was capable of dealing with ever recurring cycles of economic crises which affected the working classes more than any other social sector (Gillespie, 1982:28-29). Furthermore, all those belonging to the Peronist Party, predominantly the working class - a key political actor under Perón - now occupied an outlaw position and were forced to take their activities underground. It was during this period that a Peronist Left emerged within Peronism as a response to the growing acceptance by other sectors of the movement of the consensus within the new system that excluded Peronism from the political scene and which continually attacked the gains of the working class. This 'Left' emerged as an anti-capitalist strain of Peronism that perceived itself as defenders of the working class; but rather than developing an alternative ideology, politically it remained firmly within the Peronist/anti-Peronist dichotomy and was based mainly on total opposition to the military government (James, 1976:273-5). Society was increasingly divided in its outlook and political practices between *peronista-antiperonista*, a polarization that undermined political dialogue and compromise through normal constitutional means. This not only increasingly radicalized the Peronist working class, it also justified direct action and labour militancy.

⁸⁸ During the eighteen year proscription of Peronism, Argentina knew eight different presidents, of whom three were civilians (Frondizi, Guido, Illia) and five were generals (Lonardi, Aramburu, Onganía, Levingston, and Lanusse) (Gillespie, 1982:29).

If Argentina's political history could hardly be described as democratic, the military coup in 1966 initiated the hitherto most authoritarian regime. Baptized 'The Argentine Revolution' by General Juan Carlos Onganía, the dictatorship proclaimed its intentions to rid the political scene of corrupt and inefficient civilian politicians, a fate they shared with a great number of their counterparts across Latin America. To this end, nearly all political participation was suppressed (Brennan&Gordillo, 1994:478).

A 'Law against Communism' was implemented, affecting all people and institutions that protested or engaged in any action to protect their rights. This law empowered the Argentine Information Service to determine which people, for 'ideological communist motivations', might be a danger to the government. A punishment of up to nine years in prison was added for those who qualified as enemies of the state (Tosco, 2002:367, *The Argentina Reader*).

From 1960 onwards - throughout Latin America - the effects of the Cuban Revolution could be felt, which was perceived as a typical uprising in favour of democracy against a corrupt and repressive dictatorship, but which in these years declared its intention to constitute a socialist republic, 90 miles from the coast of the United States. The Cuban Revolution seemed to be an alternative to the ailing traditional left-wing governments which did not attract the younger generation; this favoured the emergence of a new Latin American Left.

Particularly in Argentina, this movement kept growing under the surface until 1969 when a workers and students uprising in the country's second city Córdoba⁸⁹, openly

⁸⁹ The *cordobazo* is widely believed to have initiated the political violence that would mark the decade of the 70s. It can be seen as a catalyst for a hitherto latent urban militancy which would erupt and establish itself as a fixture of Argentine politics for many years to come. Popular discontent with the government's repressive measures came to a head in May 1969 during a workers' protest. The spontaneous revolt, initially led by car, power, and transport workers, was joined by student organizations, liberal clerics, and the population at large. The independent nature and democratic structure of the workers unions in the province of Cordoba made this city a more likely stage for organized protest than Buenos Aires. Although most of the participating workers belonged to the Peronist Party, in its aftermath, the complexity of the *Cordobazo* and the confusion that surrounded it provided a number of left-wing groups with the

and furiously criticised the conservative and retrograde dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía (see Stival & Iturburu, 2005, Brennan & Gordillo, 1994). The 'onganiato' particularly incensed young people and leading artists who suffered discrimination and harassment for wearing long hair or eccentric dress. The atmosphere of cultural repression reached unprecedented levels - even operas were banned for their 'indecent' content, so for example the opera 'Bomarzo'⁹⁰ by the Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera was taken off the programme in the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (Costa, *El Clarín*, 27/04/2002).

With Perón deceased and under the presidency of his third wife Isabel, all the political and economic alliances he had managed to forge suffered a total break down. The government initiated a dirty war against revolutionary forces waged by the Triple A under the command of José López Rega⁹¹ against the urban terrorism by the *Montoneros*.

Montoneros⁹² *et al.*

Several guerrilla organizations came into existence during the 1960s who considered the increased oppression by the state as the failure of democracy - not only in

opportunity to interpret the event according to the specific ideologies they supported. Whether they were Marxists, Maoists, or Trotskyists - *ad hoc* mobilization on such a vast scale confirmed for them the need to establish a revolutionary strategy and army that would promote popular insurrection as the only way to socialism. For the Peronist working class, the riots were proof of the Party's inherent militancy and revolutionary essence (see Brennan & Gordillo, 1994: 477-498, Stival & Iturburu, 2005). To an extent, it filled the ideological void of the Peronist Left who, apart from loyalty to its exiled and vilified leader, had not been able to define its political strategy (James, 1976:276).

⁹⁰ For a brief description of the opera's content see appendix a.

⁹¹ Both, the Triple A and López Rega will be addressed in a later chapter; suffice it to say at this point that Rega's reign of state-terror together with a deteriorating economy can be seen as directly leading to the coup of 1976 and the ensuing military dictatorship.

⁹² The founders of this organization decided to adopt the name 'Montoneros' in order to underline the historical continuity between the nineteenth century caudillos of the Argentine interior and the original 'montoneras' (Spanish: peasant militias), establishing a nationalist, anti-imperialist, and federal political line that ideologically links San Martín, Rosas, and Perón (on the original montoneras see Ariel de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo*, 2000).

Argentina but across Latin America. In the late sixties and early seventies the main discrepancies within Argentine society were analyzed exclusively as pertaining to class, dependency, and imperialism, in which all political actors defined themselves around the polarization between capitalism or socialist revolution; the latter being understood and delineated in a variety of different ways according to either the Marxist or Peronist origins of the different organizations (even though there also existed revolutionary leftist groups with Maoist or Trotskyite inclination).⁹³

Democracy was seen as inadequate to combat the ever recurring cycles of economic stagnation, the power of entrenched, privileged elites, or to challenge the dominance of economic imperialism from the outside. Revolutionary left groups in the 1960s found little space for democratic alternatives that could solve the region's problems (Barros, 1986:53, in Chinchilla, 1991:298). It is no surprise that these revolutionaries should have felt that way; while in Europe and North America capitalism and democracy were associated with a high standard of living and an open society, in the South it was linked with a brutal oligarchy-military complex, underdevelopment, and widespread poverty (LaFeber, 1984:14). Democratic reformist movements were therefore perceived as non applicable to Latin America and the only path to socialism was through revolution (the enormous influence of the Cuban case on the Latin American Left in general has to be taken into account here).⁹⁴

⁹³ Oscar Terán maintains that it would be correct in this sense to characterize this New Left in Argentina as left nationalist or, maybe more precisely, as nationalist Marxist. However, within this cultural-political horizon, the space occupied by orthodox Marxism was markedly reduced, not least because Marxism was embodied mainly by the thinning communist and Trotskyite contingents who experienced a turbulent period of their development because of the ups and downs of their international development based on the decisions made by the Communist Party in the Soviet Union (1993:100).

⁹⁴ It is important to note here that many Latin American and Caribbean revolutions derived their programmes for social change from native, nationalist revolutionaries such as José Martí (Cuba), José Carlos Mariátegui (Peru), and Augusto Cesar Sandino (Nicaragua) amongst others, and not from Karl Marx. These revolutions were initially of a nationalist, reformist character and not an explicitly communist one. The fact that Marxist theory could be applied to their theory and methods is linked to the negative perceptions of capitalism mentioned above.

Arguably the most documented of the urban militant groups went under the name of Montoneros who drew on an eclectic mix of ideologies pertaining to a variety of movements - radical Catholicism, Peronism, nationalism - and amalgamated it into a populist expression of socialism that appealed to civilians of various political denominations (Gillespie in Nouzeilles and Montaldo, 2002:377). Many had entered the ambit of Peronism through the student struggles around the CGT (*Confederación General del Trabajo*) against the repression and crudity of the Onganía government (James, 1976:283).

The Montoneros engaged in armed combat between 1970 and 1979, although their activities started to decline after 1976. Their main objectives were the destabilization of the de-facto government of Onganía, Levingston, and Lanusse (1966-73), the return of Juan Perón, and the instauration of a political system in Argentina which they defined as 'Socialismo Nacional' and which they considered the natural historical evolution of Peronism.⁹⁵

While the Montoneros were supported by Perón and the Peronist Movement by and large during their first few years, their existence as a group gradually became isolated and was forced into clandestinity after their strategies had failed and provoked rejection by Perón himself⁹⁶ as well as by the unions and political sectors in general.

⁹⁵ Less radical than, for example, ERP (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*) or the MRP (*Movimiento Revolucionario Peronista*), the Montoneros came to lead the most numerous Peronist Left; their faith in Perón's revolutionism was absolutely sincere, rooted in his sanction of armed struggle, their own youthful lack of political experience and, sometimes, their guilty reaction against their own anti-Peronist backgrounds. Their majority was middle-class and more inclined to class alliances than to class struggle (Gillespie, 1982:45-6, James, 1976:282).

⁹⁶ After Perón's return to Argentina after an eighteen-year exile, he gained 61.9 percent of the vote in the elections of 1973, his third wife, Isabel, occupying the post of vice-president. Most Argentines still believed that he had the answers to the country's problem - class antagonism, high inflation, unemployment, and guerrilla activity amongst many more. Displaying his old pragmatism, Perón's reformist policies steered clear of radical solutions to these issues in order to avoid alienation of different social sectors. Perón's failure to resolve the growing economic crisis, however, earned him the criticism of the most radical political organizations, amongst them the Montoneros. In response, Perón began to

Classed as a terrorist group, the Montoneros were annihilated by the military dictatorship that took power in 1976.

After 1973, not only montonero militants but also members of other revolutionary organizations as well as any citizen suspected of supporting a leftist ideology became subject to violent reprisals by the AAA (*'Triple A' - Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*), who frequently received the collaboration of the military intelligence service to carry out their operations (Gillespie, 1982:153-5).

'Political women' and feminism

During Onganía's presidency, a government that propagated traditional cultural norms, women were relegated once more to either their homes or to activities in institutions approved by the reactionary consensus. Against this background the first feminist organisations appeared.

Influences and theories that reached these organisations from Europe and the USA merged with their own necessities and interests. The participants were looking for common links in their experiences as women, whether they were housewives or professionals, artists or political activists, or a combination of all. The idea was to create a new consciousness, that is to say, to find unifying elements beyond ideological differences, class, age, and so on (Gil Lozano). They organised self-awareness groups that raised a number of issues: women's economic dependency, insecurity, motherhood, and sexuality. To start with, the women compared individual experiences and at the same time read, translated, and analysed related works that came from the core countries and circulated copies. Various groups with these

attack the revolutionary Left and sought to define Peronism more within traditional conservative parameters (see James, 1976:286).

characteristics were formed and became relatively widespread amongst the middle classes. During the 1960s the women's meetings took place within the framework of the Movimiento de Liberación de Mujeres (MLM). Many participants of MLM later went on to form other women's organisations. During the 1970s, an important number of organizations and groups emerged (Movimiento de Liberación Feminina, Nueva Mujer, Organización Feminista Argentina, Frente de Lucha por la Mujer, to name just a few), that often regrouped or split, within or outside political organizations. After the dissolution of the MLM, the Unión Feminista Argentina (UFA⁹⁷) was founded by a group of women who later would be the protagonists in the formation of yet other movements: Nelly Bugallo, Leonor Calvera, Gabrielle Christeller, and the film maker María Luisa Bemberg, amongst others (see Vasallo, 2005:61-88).

All these groups, influenced by second-wave feminism in Western Europe and the US, signalled a revival of Argentine feminism after it had been in a state of suspension from the late 1940s - with the right to vote - until the end of the 1960s (Nari, 2002:529).

This new kind of feminist struggle found a space within the new social movements and was characterized, unlike the feminism at the beginning of the century, by the rejection of power which was identified with the masculine, historically monopolized by men and associated with domination and violence (Archetti, 1994:19). The new feminism continued to struggle for civil and political rights but at the same time started to question women's position in every-day-life allowing for the first time public discussion of 'private' matters like love, marital relationships, sexuality, and so forth. Feminism in Argentina finally became more firmly established on political agendas and strove to articulate its own struggle with that of anti-imperialism in dependent

⁹⁷ Both, MLM and UFA were short-lived due to the military coup in 1976 and the subsequent dictatorship.

countries (DiTella et al., 2001:179, in Guzzetti and Fraschini, 2005). The use of feminist language, clearly radical and subversive was a common characteristic of most groups active during this turbulent period. Nevertheless, it was still not an organized and articulated movement with concrete objectives; rather, the vast number of women's movements had as a central characteristic their heterogeneity and a tentative recognition as feminists.

Despite the constant social and cultural turmoil in which participation in politics seemed to be unavoidable, second-wave feminism did not have the explosive impact it had elsewhere in the developed world. According to Nari, the changes experienced by women in the 1940s, the amplification of citizenship, greater access to higher education, and paid work, the impact this had on gender relations, did not lead women to feminism. Even more, they denied its existence, rejected it, or simply were not aware of it. The political radicalization and social dispute either concealed or offered alternative ways (1996:15). The process of social and political conflict between 1966 and 1976 encouraged the development of social networks which, in the case of many women, facilitated their entry into militant circles (1996:15).

The peak of political militancy that took place in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s motivated the emergence of women's groups who tried to construct their own space within their respective political organizations (Guzzetti & Fraschini, 2005).

The emergence of feminist organizations in Argentina took place within the context of intense political activity and social mobilization that characterized the country as well as most of the rest of the world in that era. The Argentinean women's groups came into existence at a time when the Women's Liberation Movement - predominantly in the USA and Western Europe - engaged in fierce struggles for women's rights. This context is important since Argentine historiography has been

reluctant to include the political experience of women amongst the different anti-establishment manifestations of the period (Grammático, 2005:20).⁹⁸

Investigation of female militancy during the 1960s and 1970s requires an analysis of the relationship between women in social or revolutionary movements and the re-emerging feminist movements at the time. It is important to clarify this aspect, not only in order to assess women's participation in the revolutionary struggle, but also in order to reconstruct and understand their uneasy coexistence with feminism in Argentina (Grammático, 2005:20).

One of the characteristics that defined the feminist movement at the beginning of the 1970s was the exercise of 'double militancy' practised by many of its followers. Even though this fact could be assessed by some feminists as a way of 'entry' into political organizations of the Left, many of the 'double' militants finally opted for feminism (Grammático, 2005:20).

Amongst those who practised it, this parallel activism not only generated tensions on a personal level, creating a conflict of loyalties to their respective parties and the feminist group they subscribed to; it also caused controversy with the 'pure' feminists within their feminist organizations (Vassallo, 2005:76).⁹⁹ For feminists, the leftist

⁹⁸ As is well remembered, the Women's Liberation Movement experienced a particularly dynamic development in Great Britain, France, and the United States where it reached significant achievements; legalization of abortion (1967 in Great Britain, 1974 in France), Equal Pay Act (1975 in Great Britain [unfortunately still to be implemented in parts]), constitutional amendment for the equality of rights (1972 in the USA).

⁹⁹ Nari remembers that 1973 was a crucial year for feminism because it posited the double militants at a crossroads marked by the end of the dictatorship and the resulting election campaign. For many of the women, the new political situation forced them to choose between persisting in their feminist activism or putting it on hold and dedicating themselves to the demands and needs of their political parties (2002:529)

parties were only interested in ‘women’s rights’ just before elections; and looking at the timing of the creation of *Agrupación Evita*, this suspicion seems reasonable.¹⁰⁰

The most dramatic early examples of women’s contribution to a redefinition of what constitutes political activity in Latin America emerged from the resistance and protest movements against military dictatorships, not only because of the human rights abuses they committed but also because of the increased poverty that derived from their policies.¹⁰¹ Women’s participation in these protests and movements for change, more often than not, were motivated by the wish to fulfil rather than subvert traditional gender roles. Literature on women’s activism has shown that women are mobilised not only as women but also as mothers, workers, peasants, and citizens. At first, scholars focused on interests, specifically whether such a thing as “women’s interests” could be identified. More recently, the focus has been on identities, specifically how identities mobilise women (Ray & Kortweg, 1999:48 - 9). Molyneux, as one of the most influential writers on the question of interests, dismissed the concept of “women’s interests” claiming that women as a group have many interests (1985:230

¹⁰⁰ In 1973, both the PRT-ERP and Montoneros decided to create female branches of their organizations - the *Frente de Mujeres* and *Agrupación Evita* respectively (Grammático, 2005:26). The former was supposed to be present in all the regional cadres and was promised the support of the main party in all its activities; nevertheless, none of these promises materialized and by 1975 the ‘women-project’ was abandoned (Pozzi, 2001:239, in Grammático, 2005:27). The latter provided an organized opportunity for leftist female activists to reach women in the factories, slums, and poor neighbourhoods of Argentina in order to politicize them regarding the oppression they suffered based on their class and their sex (Hollander, 1974:56). However, Vassallo points out that AE cannot be seen as a reflection on gender by Montoneros and even less as encouraged by feminist influences (2002, in Grammático, p. 26). Rather, it was created as a response to the conservative politics of the traditional women’s branch of the Peronist Movement in order to emphasize Montonero interpretation of Peronism and to gain control of the movement. Although the political clout of AE was negligible and the group never engaged in any important decision making, Montoneros were well aware of the importance the Peronist Female Party and its founder Eva Perón held in popular imagery (Grammático, 2005:28). It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that AE was but a façade.

¹⁰¹ In Nicaragua, approximately 30% of the combatants in the Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) were women; in El Salvador, women made up 40% of the membership of the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN), 30% of the combatants and 20% of the military leaders; in Chiapas (Mexico), women were about one third of the combatants of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) (Kampwirth, 2002, Introduction). In Peru in the early 1980s, women were at the vanguard of grass roots survival struggles that increasingly challenged the social and economic policies of the conservative Belaúnde Terry administration. Similarly, in the 1970s in the military ruled Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay women enlisted massively in the opposition’s struggle for democracy and became internationally known for their human rights struggles (Sternbach, Navarro-Aranguren, Chuchryk, and Alvarez, 1992:399).

- 1). Nevertheless, she did specify that women have “gender interests” which can be strategic or practical. The central knot of feminist practice, particularly for those who aspire to create a feminist current within popular movements, is how to link practical (female) women’s interests derived from the existing gender division of labour and strategic (feminist)¹⁰² gender interests derived from a critique of the existing gender hierarchy. Chilean feminists attempted to when they linked authoritarianism in the family to authoritarianism in society and Nicaraguan feminists did when they linked women’s demands to the success of the revolution (Chinchilla, 1991:302).¹⁰³

Guerilleras

It is difficult to find an official ‘female’ history of the *guerilleras*, whatever organization they may have associated with. Despite the significant implications a female history could bear on historiography and on the relationship it should have with history in general where men and women have a space, most of the studies about *guerilla* activity deal with its male participants, revealing only part of the picture. In this sense, Joan Scott’s contribution is crucial; gender, she states, is a necessary category for historical analysis since by opening new perspectives it makes women visible and allows a revision of the constructed conceptions of gender; not only is it a constitutive element of those social relations which are based on gender differences, gender is also a primary form of power relations (1986:1073).

¹⁰² Sonia Alvarez preferred the adjectives ‘female’ and ‘feminist’ to ‘practical’ and ‘strategic’ in her analysis of Brazil’s transition to democracy (cited in Ray & Kortweg, 2002:49).

¹⁰³ Whereas male analysts stressed the cultural or economic determinants of the militarization of civilian rule and the entrenchment of modern military dictatorships in the 1970s, feminists argued that such politics are also rooted in the authoritarian foundations of patriarchal relations in the private sphere: the family, the male-female relations, and the sexual oppression of women. Authoritarianism, they proclaimed, represented “the highest” form of patriarchal oppression. The dictatorship which institutionalises social inequality, Chilean women argued, is founded on inequality in the family (Sternbach, Navarro-Aranguren, Chuchryk, and Alvarez, 1992:398).

Investigation of women's armed struggle in 1970s Argentina presents an interesting challenge since those who actively participated did so in a clandestine manner. From the very beginning, this imposes certain limits - lack of documentation, the inexistence of, say, lists of associates, and the extreme repression of the militants by the state. Furthermore, women did not participate in equal numbers as men within the leadership of the various organizations; therefore, if the conditions in which the armed struggle took place indicate the difficulty in reconstructing male militants' lives, those of female combatants are even more elusive.

In order to gain insight, to establish the new perspectives Scott talks about, one relies heavily on the personal experiences, memories, and emotions lived by women who were involved and who are willing to tell their stories. Stanley points out the importance of including 'the personal' of female militants since its omission not only would be inimical to the future of women as political agents but would also distort history (in Pasquali, 2005:123).¹⁰⁴ Until recently, however, 'the personal' was considered as exclusively belonging to the private sphere and not until the history of private life stopped being theoretically opposed to the history of the public sphere was it possible to identify a series of elements previously relegated to factual historiography, chronicles, journalism, biography or other types of historiography regarded as being 'lesser' (García, 1999:463). Analyzing the personal accounts of female militants not only allows a reconstruction of their lives but also a re-consideration of the public/private relationships, thereby giving a greater complexity to political historiography, including that centred on the analysis of revolutionary processes and organizations.

¹⁰⁴ Stanley also states that the absence of personal experiences of lesbians and gays encourages future generations to believe that the Left in its entirety was exclusively heterosexual (in Pasquali, 2005:123).

The Left and the 'Woman-Question'

The political Left supposedly supported women's struggle for equality but clearly was male-dominated. In an interview by Pasquali, the attitude of men in the organization towards the female participants demonstrates the views on gender relations within the group and the perceptions of differences in relation to achieving decision-making positions. Active within Frente de Mujeres (see footnote 20), one woman, Mónica, states:

El tema de mujeres era tomado muy a la ligera yo creo. Primero porque no se hacía un análisis de la mujer dentro de la organización o dentro de la clase. Era una cuestión de hombres y mujeres...las mujeres tenemos algunos problemas para poder ocupar cargos, somos discriminadas en algunos aspectos, tenemos muchos problemas para poder avanzar en ciertas carreras, incluso dentro de las organizaciones teníamos problemas para avanzar. Siempre las compañeras éramos relevadas de algunas tareas...los varones tenían un discurso: "Si, las compañeras mujeres, que se integran a la lucha, todo bien, pero la mía no, que me acompañe ma non troppo. (in Pasquali, 2005:131)

Although some women did occupy higher positions in the organizations, their number was by no means proportionate to the number of women participants. It is difficult to establish how many female militants were active within the revolutionary Left given the mostly clandestine nature of their operations. Interviewed by Marta Diana, Roberto Perdiá attempts an approximate calculation: "The political force the

Montoneros represented, that is to say, those who were mobilized around the organized members of the group, can be measured by the participation in public actions. Given the fact that actions took place across the country, the total number of participants can be estimated at around one hundred and twenty thousand,¹⁰⁵ counting sympathizers as well as organized and non-organized members". Perdía estimates the number of active militants belonging to the various groups at ten thousand; however, the militant core, organized into revolutionary cells, counted around five thousand members of all the groupings. Estimating the number of women participating in militant actions within all the revolutionary organizations, one can probably talk of about three thousand (in Diana, 2006:380). However, while during the 1960s female participation in revolutionary movements only represented a small percentage and was linked predominantly to the activism within the student movement, during the following decade, and particularly from 1973 onwards, a noticeable increase of female militants can be observed (Pasquali, 2005:126). In the case of PRT-ERP, Pozzi points out that the number of female members increased markedly from 1970 onwards and reached around 40% in 1975. It is all the more astonishing therefore, that only two women came to hold a position in the Comité Central.¹⁰⁶ For Jutta Marx, the fact that women do not occupy decision-making positions is not related to the number of female participants nor to the efforts they have made, but is a consequence of the prevailing hegemonic conception according to which women and their different ways of participation, different from those of men, are de-valued (1994:123-35).

¹⁰⁵ This number includes militants of all the revolutionary groups who associated publicly with the Montoneros; amongst them *Juventud Peronista*, *Agrupación Evita*, *Juventud Trabajadora Peronista*, *Unión Estudiantes Secundarios*, *Juventud Universitaria Peronista* as well as members of political party structures like *Partido Justicialista* and *Partido Peronista Auténtico*.

¹⁰⁶ Emilia Susana Gaggero de Pujals - active within PRT-ERP for fifteen years before being made a member of the Central Committee and killed during a raid while attending her first Committee meeting in 1976 (*Página12*, Lunes, 15 de Mayo de 2006); and Liliana Delfino de Santucho - arrested during a raid and subsequently was disappeared (1976) as was almost the entire Santucho family (Diana, 2006:310 ff.)

In their struggle for social change, the revolutionary organizations became both agents and conveyors of the relation of power and ended up reproducing hierarchical gender relations. MacKinnon points out that everything that includes power is political; thus, relations between men and women - historically marked by the asymmetric exercise of power, are political. Therefore, gender is a political issue, because from historical processes it can be observed that women - purely because they are women - are more exploited, oppressed, and discriminated against, economically, as well as socially and politically; and men have traditionally been the ones who have occupied spaces of power, have written and executed laws, as well as being the beneficiaries of economic production.¹⁰⁷ The hegemonic masculine subject establishes relationships of subordination; this imbalance demonstrates that the inequality between the sexes becomes a political issue (1989:3-12).

Furthermore, historically, political action by women has been limited to tasks linked to social care and assistance, to help out where need be, determining that women themselves reinforce the stereotype of their 'female qualities' and excluding themselves from the reputedly masculine spaces where decisions are made. This situation has historically impeded the development of women as political subjects and made them invisible in the public arena (Garrido & Schwartz, 2005:69-70).

Given our condition, we weren't heard; generally, the person who spoke was the husband. I would say that I was the wife of so-and-so. ("H", militant of the Revolutionary Peronist Movement, interviewed by Feijóo et al, 1996:22)

¹⁰⁷ Except those who 'suffer' from certain conditions that qualify them as objects of discrimination like women; this is the case for black men and homosexuals.

As a current within radical thought and as a social movement, feminism had a close association with socialism; but it was one that was often antagonistic and became more so with time, mostly because a clear analytical and political distinction divided them. This was evident as much in their analysis of inequality and exploitation as in the measures needed to overcome them (Molyneux, 2001:106). Neither the traditional Left nor the New Left was opposed to feminism but perceived it as inadequate because it posited gender inequality above inequalities of class; this subverted the basis for class struggle which was perceived as the prime force for social transformation (Melhuus & Stølen, 1996:10). In other words, socialist or Marxist feminist theory was not connected to the daily life of the revolutionary groups or to the couple relationship between their militants (Feijoó, Nari & Fierro, 1996:20). In both cases there was a sexual division of labour that relegated women to second-class positions at the same time that it encumbered them with all the chores of domestic organization and maternity (Feijoó, Nari & Fierro, 1996:20).

De todos modos, y esto lo sabe muy bien cualquier mujer que trabaja, a nosotras siempre nos toca desempeñar un doble o triple rol. Todo implica un mayor esfuerzo. Las organizaciones no fueron una excepción (a pesar de estar luchando por una sociedad distinta). Había un ritmo abrumador de reuniones y actividades que no dejaban espacio para la vida personal...cuando uno se tiene que levantar a las cinco de la mañana, estar reunidos hasta las dos era un sacrificio desmedido e inútil. Desgraciadamente, no se consideraban esas cosas... de seguir así, la revolución nos iba a pasar por encima. (Alejandra, in Diana, 2006:33)

The private and the public

The militancy of the 1970s was much more than a political practice; in the majority of cases it meant a life-style choice. Considering that the movement, the party or organization filtered through every personal aspect of each of their members, it is not surprising that they became friends, couples, family or, at least very close and the organization as a central axis in all these lives blurred the boundaries between the private and the public sphere or, even more significantly, between a personal and a collective project. In this sense, this vague demarcation constitutes one of the central aspects in tackling female militancy during this period (Freytes, 2007:7). The world of militancy has been likened to a microcosm subject to specific rules and codes which may suggest the idea that the party is a 'countersociety'. This allusion is particularly fitting for revolutionary organizations which made armed struggle the centre of their activity, having to survive most of the time in clandestinity. The need to hide and the need to trust accentuated the closed nature of groups and therefore brought closer and linked the public and the private spheres, providing a privileged view of this complex relationship (García, 1999:463). It is also important to point out that most activists, male and female, had ceased contact with their 'real' families which were replaced by the *compañeros*.

Nuestra casa era también nuestra base. Eso imponía inevitablemente, un estado de movilización permanente para todos que vivían con nosotros. Cada casa era un miniejército, con normas de seguridad e instrucciones precisas a cumplir cotidianamente, y más aún cuando se sospechaba que la casa había sido identificada, o podía sufrir un allanamiento (Roberto Perdía recuerda a las mujeres montoneras, in Diana, 2006:379).

Despite the arduous daily schedule and constant need for alertness, an idealized, romantic image of the militant couple prevailed within the organizations - lovers struggling side by side for a better future (Sapriza, 2005:42)¹⁰⁸. The love poem¹⁰⁹ by the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti pays homage to the female militants and was well known amongst the revolutionaries; and it is possible that for some of the women it reflected their relationship with their *compañeros*; but it is more likely that statements like the following, on the one hand, present the desperate attempt to carve out a space for romantic love in an environment marked by danger and uncertainty and, on the other hand, an insistence to re-establish at least some sort of boundary between the private/personal and the public/political in a setting where the two had merged into one.

¿Recordás el poema de Benedetti?...Eso era entre nosotros el amor, la pareja. La entrega a la militancia hacía que la entrega del uno al otro fuera sublime, que la identificación fuera máxima. Esa especie de sacerdocio, de sacrificio permanente al que estábamos entregados, se intensificó en las épocas de mayor represión, en las que el hoy era lo único que existía. (Mariana, en Diana, p. 155)

Yo creo que la mujer debe estar al lado del hombre, como las que lucharon al lado de nuestros patriotas en el siglo pasado. Esto se dio plenamente con mi “cumpa”, que era un tipo adorable... Como él conocí muchos otros que no eran machistas. (Tina, en Diana, 2006:54)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ See also: “Alicia Eguren de Cooke: la voz contestaria del peronismo” (Bellucci, M., http://www.elortiba.org/cooke.html#Alicia_Eguren_de_Cooke (12/11/2008)

¹⁰⁹ This is the poem’s last verse: Si te quiero es por que sos/ mi amor, mi cómplice y todo/en la calle codo a codo/somos mucho más que dos.

¹¹⁰ It seems important to point out that both women’s relationships with their partners were cut short by arrest and imprisonment at the moment when they were happiest.

For many others, however, reality deviated considerably from the disseminated discourse of equality and liberation that the militant couple-companionship should facilitate. This is not meant to be a criticism of the male group members but the recognition of the cultural barriers that inhibited the translation of theory into practice. After all, as García rightly states, militancy is not the action of robots, of isolated individuals who act mechanically according to their ‘class conscience’ or of the political guidelines which emanate from their party, all within a given national and international context. Militants are specific people, men and women, bearers of ethical values, political convictions and religious influences who reflect, in their daily life, their cultural education, their family background and a set of ‘orders’ which affect the way in which they will ‘apply’ the party ‘line’ in society, (1999:462) or in their personal lives, one might add. If the Left held that “everything was political”, for the women within the movements, feminists or not, “everything” included the personal. The discrepancy between these two recognitions caused considerable tension within the organizations - while women questioned issues of daily life as a source of their subordination, the men saw this questioning as a dangerous deviation from the correct course of the struggle.

...gradualmente, es que, inevitablemente, la militancia incidió en nuestra pareja. Llegó el momento en que dejamos de hablar de nosotros. Todo estaba relacionado con lo que teníamos que hacer, o los temas que teníamos que estudiar...Cuando reflexiono ahora sobre nosotros, siento que éramos una especie de pareja “platónica”, donde la unión no estaba sellada por nuestro mutuo amor, sino por el amor a la revolución. (Alejandra, in Diana, p. 29)

Every time we fought amongst ourselves, we would have to read Erich Fromm". ("L", Member in Montoneros, interviewed by Feijoó et al, 1996:20)

Así como la recuerdo, la pelea ahora me parece cómica. Los términos en discusión no eran el amor ni el odio. Como si se hubiera tratado de una situación política, él recurrió a los clásico del marxismo para justificar su actitud y criticar la mía. (Alejandra, in Diana, p. 41)

These women clearly resented the encroachment of the political/public on their personal lives. Later, in his *Genealogy of Ethics*, Foucault would express a similar disillusionment with the public realm which he understood as composed of a network of controlling, disciplinary discourses. Instead of conceiving of the private realm as that which contains the affective and emotional aspects of existence and of that which is necessarily excluded from the public, Foucault defined the private as those aspects of individual's lives and activities that they have a right to exclude others from (1984:362, in McNay, 1992:177). In the case of the women in question it was always going to be difficult to exclude the public from their affective relationships given the commune-style living arrangements and the fact that their collective political project was the reason for these measures in the first place - this does not seem to have been the root of the problem. Rather, the women clearly conceived of the couple as one unit (the self) and of the collective project (the revolution) the 'other' which they felt they had a right to exclude. In other words, the women did not resent the lack of privacy or the collective struggle but the institutional regulation of 'the private'. To stay with Foucault's 'where there is power there is resistance', women in the revolutionary movement clearly had to act upon a twofold oppression - that by the

state and that by the male-dominated structures within the groups. However, unlike the feminist organizations at the time that had started to study feminist theory emerging in Europe and the United States, the 'political' women had virtually no theoretical foundation for the processes they were involved in.

Mi práctica era muy profunda, pero no meditada...yo vivía de esa manera, sin reflexionar. Ahora pienso que eso no era positivo porque si bien mi dedicación y mi entrega eran totales, mi aporte a la construcción teórica era prácticamente nulo. No hacía críticas y consideraba que todo lo que se decía y todo lo que se escribía era correcto. Y lo asumía plenamente. (Tina, in Diana, 2006:48)

With women's acceptance of everything that was said and written as correct and the expectance by the party ideologues of collective consent, the common error of confusing equality with sameness was committed. Conflicts within the groups and couples drifting apart, therefore, were inevitable in the long term. As Benhabib points out, community and commonality arise and develop between us not, as Marx would have it, because we are thrust into objectively similar life conditions. A common, shared perspective is one that we create insofar as in acting with others we discover our own difference and identity, our distinctiveness from, and unity with others (1986:348).

One particular aspect of female presence in the political struggle is the unintentional temptation which many female militants posed to the rank and file which ended up creating situations of conflict with their wives (García, 1999:466), or with their

compañeras even when they also belonged to the organization. ‘Alejandra’ remembers:

*Se daban casos que para los celos tradicionales serían insoportables.
El típico era pasar la noche con un compañero que no era “tu”
compañero, en un albergue transitorio, para salir de madrugada a
‘volantear’ en las fábricas. A mí me tocaron las dos posibilidades. En
una, yo con otro compañero...Dormimos vestidos...otra vez tuve que ir...a
encontrarme con el que era mi pareja que salía de pasar la noche con otra
compañera, porque ella no podía salir tan temprano de su casa....
(in Diana, 2006:32)*

In relation to conventional emotions like jealousy it has to be remembered that the generation in question - born between 1940/50 could not effect a total and sudden break from the established stereotypes of its society. The impact of the ‘sexual revolution’ which took place in the 1960s and 70s, therefore presented another source for tensions within the organizations. Constituting a significant social change it should have been positively received by the Left since it contributed considerably to women’s liberation and equality;¹¹¹ and for some activists, a socio-political revolution clearly demanded sexual liberation (Rapisardi, 2001). However, the responses of vast sectors of the Left to these changes were as reactionary as those of the ultra-right - a discourse of monogamy, orthodox politics and customs, and a ‘new’ sexual morality¹¹²

¹¹¹ It has to be noted here, that the impact of the ‘sexual revolution’ on women was highly ambiguous. On the one hand, changing popular attitudes to sex along with improvements in contraceptive technology definitely gave women more sexual freedom. On the other, breaking the links between marriage and legitimate sex brought an equally dramatic loss of security, especially for older women and those with children. Furthermore, it did not defy the patriarchal order (see for example Bouchier, 1983:115).

¹¹² According to Alicia Stolkiner, the various organizations had different guidelines about couples and sexual relationships. The PRT produced a manual for revolutionary morals, marked by severe asceticism and monogamy, which indicated what was ‘correct’ even in relation to child-raising. In contrast to this,

- more critical of the 'bourgeois hypocrisy' of the old morality, as Feijóo et al point out, than of its forms (1996:21-22).¹¹³

En cuanto a la pareja, había normas que eran sagradas, como las relacionadas con la infidelidad que, no en nuestra organización, pero sí en otras, se sancionaba, y podía implicar la pérdida de una categoría alcanzada. (Alejandra, in Diana, 2006:29)

Female militants and motherhood

From maternalist feminism, which converted motherhood into political feminist action, particularly notable in some expressions of the anarchist-feminism of the nineteenth century, to motherhood in the 70s within the temporary framework of the revolutionary project, leading to the motherhood of women who were arrested and disappeared, to motherhood as a legitimization of the demand for human rights during the transition to democracy in the 1980s; there is a historical process that marks, selects, and excludes signifiers in the construction of motherhood in the collective and subjective imaginary (Ferro, 2005:200-1).

The historical period in question displays sufficient elements to back up the idea of the existence of a complex paternalist/maternalist alliance represented by the complementary Perón/Evita formula. Eva Perón frequently spoke of female complicity

some independent groups that emerged from the student movement proclaimed 'free love'. Those of Peronist origins were, perhaps, the most 'conservative' ones, even maintaining the tradition of getting married in religious ceremonies (2005, Revista Los '70, No. 5).

¹¹³ What clearly demonstrates the macho-attitude and petty morals of the revolutionary leaders is their homophobia. Héctor Anabitarte, activist of the Argentine Communist Party, was demoted for 'confessing' his homosexuality. Rapisardi claims that the demands by women or minorities presented no more than an afterthought in the programmes of the 'Popular Forces', if they were not excluded altogether from their 'new moral codes'; after all, infidelity, *putos* (male prostitutes), or *faloperos* (drug addicts) threatened one's condition as a soldier of FAR or Montoneros, as they proclaimed more than once on the *Plaza de Mayo* (2001, *Página12*).

in the maintenance of the patriarchal system which undeniably held some rewards for women but ultimately they remained excluded. Eva's speeches to women about their political function are one of the best examples of maternalist ideology: a mere modernization of women's role - the kind of change that ensures continuity (Luna, *Mujeres en red*).

Eva Perón had been proclaimed the patron of the revolutionary movements, first and foremost because of her tireless efforts for the poor. In terms of her maternalist ideology, it is not surprising that the revolutionary organizations, particularly Montoneros with the creation of *Agrupación Evita*, adopted it in order to uphold claims of reform for equality; but also to ensure new generations of dedicated revolutionaries. Indeed, the Left, by and large, insisted on heterosexuality and motherhood even in situations with the looming threat of imprisonment and an overall air of an uncertain future. The 'girl with the bright look in her eyes', the one that marched 'side by side' was transformed into the symbol of 'new woman' who was also expected to have 'children for a new beginning' (to stay with another song by Viglietti [Sapriza, 2005:42]).¹¹⁴ Motherhood and revolutionary activism were therefore not contradictory. For the women in the movements there was no 'option' or delimitation between private and public spheres, between a personal and collective project - everything was part of the same decision (Ferro, 2005:200). In this sense, their *leitmotif* 'everything for the political project' led to the concept of motherhood being moulded by the predominant political discourse.

The Chilean writer Diamela Eltit defined the context of the insertion of women in the revolutionary process as the scenario "where the perception of the female body

¹¹⁴ This is the last verse from the song *Gurisito*: Y aunque nazcas pobre/te traigo también/se precisan niños/para amanecer (Gurisito is the diminutive (hispanicized) of the Guaraní word 'guri' meaning 'child')

experienced a break with the prolonged cultural norms of physical inferiority in order to become identical to men, all in the name of the construction of a collective, egalitarian future”, where the “parodistic exhibition of masculinity postponed ‘the intimate/private’ in favour of the paramount ‘collective/public’” (in Sapriza, 2005:42).

It follows that their condition as women not only limited their activities within the organizations as militant activists but also the domestic aspects of their lives. As Valero puts it, apart from hardly ever advancing to positions of leadership, they had to relegate love and motherhood in favour of the political project. By and large, this was accepted by the women themselves as indicative of the system they were immersed in (2005:146). One woman (‘urban, clandestine militant’) interviewed by Sapriza states:

Es cierto que en las condiciones en que vivíamos no era conveniente tener un hijo, pero teníamos muchísimo deseo de tenerlo. Y en esa lucha loca entre la vida y la muerte, sabíamos el peligro que corríamos, pero a su vez queríamos que viviera y fuera feliz con nosotros. (43)

Western feminists at the time engaged in lively debates about what it was that made women want to be mothers; but while they had realized that the personal is political, they also displayed a readiness to consider women’s desire for children without attributing it exclusively to external pressures. It was innovatory then, as Duchon points out, for a political movement to embark on exploration of experiences and feelings in an area that defies political analysis (1986:61, in Rowbotham, 1989:85). However, to explain the desire to become mothers in the case of the female revolutionaries, Breen’s study of pregnancy, presenting an interaction between growth and development of the mother and maternity, seems to fit; particularly in relation to

Sapriza's interviewee above: "Pregnancy", Breen contends, "stimulates in the woman ideas of life and death, mortality and immortality, purposefulness and futility, ideas connected with her own infancy, mothering and fathering, about the ability to nurture, to be relied upon, about dependency, about her own capacity to be intimately and bodily involved with a newborn baby and later a child while at the same time able to retain a sense of individuality" (1978:18, in Rowbotham, 1989:89).

Motherhood in relation to involuntary separation from their children is a recurring theme in the statements of the women interviewed. Their often fragmented historical accounts are frequently interspersed with attempts to justify their participation in armed struggle, looking for their children's understanding, trying to ease their guilt.

Es increíble lo que éramos capaces de hacer con la vida de los hijos. Nos íbamos a un operativo y los dejábamos en manos de la mujer de cualquier compañero. Podíamos regresar o no, ¿y los niños? A veces nos acompañaban mientras íbamos armados, estaban presentes en las reuniones. ('Vásquez', in Salazar, 2002, in Valero¹¹⁵, 2005:147)

Éramos una gran familia...ese sentimiento de pertenencia me decía que cualquiera de mis compañeros podía ser buen padre para ellos, si yo faltaba. Éramos una familia, y no iban a quedar huérfanos. (Celeste Zerpa in Sapriza, 2005:43)

¹¹⁵ Silvia Valero investigates female militants in the Colombian revolutionary movement M-19, Graciela Sapriza those in Uruguayan guerrilla organization during the last dictatorship. In both cases, women's experiences seem to be virtually identical to those in Argentina and do therefore have a place here.

...no es buena madre solamente la que se queda en casa con los hijos. También es buena madre la que sale a luchar por algo que va a ser para ellos y para todos. Transformar una sociedad tan cruel, donde muchos de esos hijos no tienen ninguna posibilidad de subsistencia, es el mejor regalo que una madre podría tratar de brindarles. ('Gringa', in Diana, p. 189)

Women's militancy in revolutionary organizations during the 1960s and 1970s is regarded generally as a dual transgression. This is firstly because enlistment in these organizations, most of which were devoted to carrying out armed actions against the government, meant placing oneself 'outside the law'. The high price paid by female militants - death, torture, prison, exile - and the effects on their private life - family, emotional, and professional - clearly demonstrate this. The second transgression was that 'the conduct of female militants also challenged the gender code of their time', in other words, the participation of women in politics was not socially acceptable (García, 1999:464), let alone, one might add, in violent political action.

Gillespie maintains that Montoneros, by and large, engaged in psychological warfare rather than in armed confrontations with police or military units. They cultivated sympathetic popular response by minimal use of offensive violence and extreme discrimination in the selection of targets, as opposed to random terrorism. Property,¹¹⁶ not people were the prime targets of Montonero violence, however, shoot-outs,

¹¹⁶ Luxurious country clubs, Jockey Clubs, golf course buildings, business buildings and factories owned by foreign corporations (Gillespie, 2002:381).

explosive devices, and kidnappings occasionally claimed deaths on both sides (2002:380-2).¹¹⁷

The growing state violence therefore, at least before the military *coup* in 1976, was not so much a response to Montonero terrorism, as it was a preventative measure to dissuade the working classes from joining the ranks of opposition movements (Gillespie, 2002:383). From 1976 onwards, however, state repression took on an unprecedented magnitude; by the end of July 1976, one hundred 'subversive delinquents' had been killed in the previous six weeks - the same number as in the seven years from 1966-73 (Marini, 1977:114-5). Of the former, about a third was women who, in general, were specifically targeted by the state as the embodiment of moral subversion. Both government and Church upheld their portrayal of the traditional family as the basic cell of society and the foundation of its stability - a long established responsibility of women. According to Marini, media coverage at the time, of speeches by government and Church officials, had one common theme: the praise of the family as the most important vehicle for the transmission and control of the observance of Christian and patriotic values (1977:116). This sort of propaganda was not only directed against the young women militants but also against the mothers of 'subversive' sons and daughters, as well as against 'working' women since they all had evidently failed (or were failing) in their task to convey these values to their offspring. Tacitly, this rhetoric blamed women for the dismal situation the whole country was enveloped in.

This intensified ideological campaign by government and Church to redefine once more the role of women in Argentine society clearly is yet another confirmation of the fluid meaning of motherhood.

¹¹⁷ Please note that I categorically reject all forms of violence, regardless on which side it is committed. I also firmly believe that no number of deaths, however small it might be, resulting from violent action, can be categorized as collateral damage in a struggle for political change.

So far, in part one of this thesis, it has been shown that all aspects of women's position in society have been manipulated by the patriarchal system; as workers, citizens, and particularly as mothers and reproducers of the nation. Female political activism, it has been demonstrated, primarily took place because women felt that cultural and political institutions obstructed rather than furthered the adequate accomplishment of any of their pursuits.

Part two will demonstrate that the work of female writers mirrored and corroborated the same dissatisfaction felt by those women active in political protest. The following chapter will look at some of the first Argentine women writers during the Liberal State.

Chapter 5

Women Writers in Nineteenth Century Argentina

Women's entry into the public sphere was not always the result of active struggle. It also happened that the very persons who lived comfortably within the stereotype ended up breaking the rules of the game through activities which they themselves considered 'normal'. The appearance of women in the public sphere took centuries to come and was due to the work, the struggle, and often to the sacrifices of many women. But these were not the only reasons. According to the literary critic Lea Fletcher (2005), it has been clearly demonstrated that a number of women writers in the nineteenth century set the antecedents of 'the thinking woman', dedicated to literature or journalism not as a mere pastime but professionally. In an era when the image of a 'contributing' woman did not exist - at least not among the middle and upper classes - it is still possible to rescue the names and works of some women who did write (and think) and who did not feel distressed about it. As if for a few years the prevailing national machismo had fallen into hibernation, these women moved freely and carved out their own spaces where it was possible to associate with likeminded women who pursued the same goal. The emergence of wider available public education opened the path to literature for them, although it is also true that they wrote predominantly for women and mostly language appropriate for the time and circumstances. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a great number of economic and cultural changes took place all over Latin America which initiated a series of reforms and laws that provided access for women to education. Primary education had been available for women since the mid eighteenth century but now

colleges and other forms of secondary education for 'señoritas' were added. The curriculum though, was basic since apart from instructions to become accomplished in traditional female activities like embroidery, sewing, and so forth, the education system hardly reached beyond teaching girls to read and write and this lack of academic emphasis practically placed women at the same educational level as their male children. Nevertheless, it was because of these new opportunities that these pioneers of female literature first appeared on the literary scene. Teaching positions, increasingly occupied by women at the time, were often the key for many women to become aware of their writing ambitions. A good example of this is the development of the career of the first female medical doctor in Argentina, Cecilia Grierson, which had started in a traditional way: in 1878, at nineteen years of age, she graduated from the *Escuela Normal de Maestras de Buenos Aires* and immediately was offered a position in a boys' school by no other than Sarmiento himself. Grierson however, had other plans and viewed this post as a springboard to greater things. She enrolled at the medical faculty at the University of Buenos Aires and those who tried to stop her had to realize that it was too late. The question arises 'how was this possible in a time when women had to ask permission for virtually everything they wanted to do?' What was it that they had in common and what differentiated them? In order to answer these questions, we have to look at female writers across Spanish America rather than solely in Argentina in order to get a fuller picture and maybe a pattern that shows similarities within cultural diversity. The following selection of nineteenth-century Spanish American writers only presents an overview of female writing during this period; but it is supposed to illustrate how these writers complemented and deviated from the male literary tradition. Frederick (1998) argues that Argentine women writers in the nineteenth century engaged in political writing and social criticism, citing

themes of domesticity, gender relations, motherhood, and national progress. She also suggests that these writers contradict the stereotype of women intellectuals as being sentimental, humourless, and prudish. Rather, their works illustrate that they were rational, jocular, passionate, and contentious. I would like to contend, however, that this was the case across the region rather than country-specific.

The following chapter analyzes the works of Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818-1892) and Juana Manso (1819-1875). Both these women achieved fame for their writing, albeit for different reasons - while Gorriti moved within the acceptable, Manso was often attacked for her transgressions. Both authors' works, however, clearly display social criticism either in relation to women's submissive role in society, their exclusion from the public sphere, or racial and religious prejudices. The last section of this chapter looks at an example of how women used a traditionally female literary genre in order to break with tradition and make their voices heard: a recipe book.

Early Latin American Women Writers

The extraordinary boom of fictional literature written by women from the second half of the twentieth century onwards constitutes a phenomenon in Spanish American literature, surprising in its diversity, its richness, and its success with the public. Even more surprising, however, is the fact that when trying to trace the origins of this phenomenon or to insert it into a literary history of the region through canonical texts dedicated to its study, it seems that it emerges suddenly, without a tradition to support it (Mataix, 2003; Batticuore, 2005). The majority of textbooks on the literature in question, including some recent studies of female literature, spring from

the extraordinary Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz¹¹⁸ (1651-1695) who, for several years held the position of Poet Laureate at the Mexican vice regal court. By and large, however, information about early female writers is limited to a superficial treatment of the women who, nevertheless, inaugurated the tradition of Spanish American fiction in their respective countries. Nevertheless, in recent years, some more profound investigation of women's writings in nineteenth-century Spanish America has been undertaken. Their work represents nineteenth-century Spanish American female culture through the lens of women writers, pointing to women's needs and grievances, and clearly differentiating it from male culture at the time.

The following is merely a short selection of women writers and, while by no means exhaustive, is supposed to give an idea about the widespread emergence of female writers across the region.

Examples include Juana Manuela Gorriti and Juana Manso, whose works will be analyzed in some detail below; their compatriot Eduarda Mansilla (1834-1892); the Chilean, Rosario Orrego (1834-1879); the Bolivian Adela Zamudio (1854-1928); the Honduran Lucila Gamero (1873-1964); the Uruguayan Lola Larrosa de Ansaldo (1859-1895); and last but not least, the Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner (1852-1909).¹¹⁹

It is important to remember that these women, perhaps with the exception of Juana Manso, were not feminists. It never occurred to them that women could abandon their role as housewives and mothers. On the contrary, they struggled and worked to educate other women through articles in magazines and newspapers, which they themselves created and directed, because they wanted to contribute precisely in their

¹¹⁸ Sor Juana found opportunity for education only as a nun. However, she abandoned intellectual pursuits after years of harassment by the Inquisition for criticizing colonial social inequalities, the low moral standards of the upper classes, and the insensitivity of the Church to the spiritual and material needs of the poor (Carlson, 1988:197)

¹¹⁹ See appendix b for more details on these writers.

role as mothers. Their intention was not to get other women out of their houses but to teach them how to better educate their own children. Furthermore, they did not perceive any contradiction in the fact that they were writers and housewives. They all had primary education, almost all of them were teachers, they recognized their writing skills and that was what they wanted to do. They did break rules because they became professional women who supported their household with the fruits of their labour; none of them had a husband to 'keep' them none of them had a husband to 'keep' them but regardless of their individual economic imperatives they all related writing to financial gain.

According to Lea Fletcher, these women, who wrote stories and newspaper articles, were not perceived as scandalous by society at the time, because their kind of writing (poems, romantic novels, articles on fashion and music, and so forth) was seen as an activity on a par with cooking, embroidery or playing the piano. They were not engaging in anything inappropriate for women (2005). However, Fletcher's assertion seems to be somewhat flawed since most of the early women writers, at least the ones mentioned in this work, wrote under a pseudonym which suggests that they were reluctant to disclose their real identity, the most obvious reason for this being fear of possible repercussions. Neither is it quite true that they had no additional sources of income. Apart from Lola Larrosa, perhaps, of whom we know few details, these women all came from a relatively privileged background; and although many of them were divorced, they, more often than not, were well connected and moved within the kind of social environment where they were able to meet another affluent husband (literary circles, upper-class family connections, and so on). Furthermore, Clorinda Matto de Turner (see footnote 7) and Juana Manso, as we will see later, became the targets of public protest and violent verbal, and to an extent physical abuse. The

prevailing machismo Fletcher speaks about might have been temporarily hibernating with regards to women's writing *per se* but it quickly surfaced again when some of these writings' contents became known.

Women's access to public education took place around seven or eight years after that of men. There are no great differences in this sense and at the time in question between the sexes. The women who had access to a public school settled in a profession which was then appropriate for *señoritas*, namely teaching; but it was a badly paid job and the transition from teacher to writer was a common strategy to increase their income.

The cultural panorama of the era undoubtedly provided a fertile background for the emergence of women writers. The Buenos Aires of the nineteenth century provided unprecedented opportunities for them considering the efforts by the government to educate the population. Female writers were not an isolated phenomenon; this was the century of anarchists, socialists and the first female university graduates; more so than the female writers, these latter normally enjoyed favourable connections. Alicia Moreau de Justo, for example, was a physician and her husband had founded the Socialist Party. The more educated women became, the more they also became visible in public life.

It is no coincidence, for example, that Eduarda Mansilla was the most prominent of the female writers of that generation. Her surname was fundamental in the dissemination of her writings, regardless of her talent. Prejudices against women who work for women have always existed. A good example is Ricardo Rojas' comments talking about Juana Manso: he stated that she was as mannish as Sarmiento himself (1925, cited in Pierini, 2002:458). The traditional perception of women, then as well

as now, is well known; if she is pretty she is not clever; and if she is unattractive she can be clever but then she is ‘not a real a woman’.

The first pages in the novel *Amalia* by José Mármol (1851), today a classic of Argentine literature, draws a picture of a young woman, alone at home and hoping for love to arrive in her life soon. She is reading a book of poems by the famous French writer Alphonse de Lamartine. The scene in question defines the figure of the female Romantic reader that emerged at the time who, far from representing a purely sentimental woman, points to the appearance of a female reader who is educated and committed to the national project. Most of the intellectuals during this era dreamt of this ‘ideal female reader’: Sarmiento, Frías, Cané, Gutiérrez, Mármol himself, and even Alberdi (Batticuore, *El Clarín*, 02/09/2006).

The ideologues who sought to define Argentine nationality according to non-transferable patterns of European civilization imported an exotic institutional model, a cultural product which was meant to adjust itself to the New World but simultaneously retained its original meaning in some areas; consequently, the nascent nation tried to mould itself to the ideological and cultural background of the Old Continent (Poderti, 1999:108). This historical process also contained women’s visions of the nation. It is in this sense that the works of Juana Manuela Gorriti¹²⁰ and Juana Manso¹²¹ will be

¹²⁰ Gorriti came from a privileged background. Her father was a hero of the Independence War and an officer in the Unitarian Army. Most of the family, including Juana Manuela was forced into exile to Bolivia after the defeat of the Unitarians in 1831. At fifteen, she married Isidoro Belzú who later became president of Bolivia. They had two daughters, but the marriage was not a happy one and Gorriti left her husband to live in Lima with her children. Separated from Belzú but not divorced she started a new life with the businessman Julián Sandoval who was a relative of General Orbegoso who would become president of Peru; with Sandoval she had a son and a daughter. She did not return to Argentina permanently until 1875. Even then she travelled back and forth to Bolivia and Peru settling in Buenos Aires only in the final years of her life.

¹²¹ Manso’s father also participated actively in the Independence struggles. The Mansos were Unitarians and went into exile, first to Montevideo in 1840 and a year later to Rio de Janeiro where Juana married the violinist Fransisco de Saá Noronha whom she accompanied to the United States on an artistic tour. They had two daughters but Juana regularly wrote to her parents of the maltreatment she suffered by her husband. In 1852 Noronha abandoned her and the children and left them in a state of financial hardship.

analyzed. Gorriti, although her stories and style of writing were clearly critical of the female condition and that of other marginalized groups, was not a feminist and she moved within the parameters of what was considered acceptable. Juana Manso on the other hand, unlike Gorriti, transgressed these boundaries. She has recently been named a pioneer of Argentine feminism. Because of her brusque style and hitherto taboo themes she and her work were rejected by the public during all her life. Both writers, together with a number of other female authors, constitute a generation of key importance in the development of Argentine literature which at that point was still at its infant stages (Poderti, 1999:109).

In reality, the women (and men) who were literate¹²² at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Argentina and the rest of Latin America represented only a limited part of the population which portrayed the 'state of barbarism' which these regions had to face. Therefore, when women found entrance into journalism as editors and publishers (the first female newspaper was *La Aljaba* in 1830, but a more pronounced surge of weeklies for women started around 1870), they systematically hid behind the much repeated slogan "The degree of civilization of a people can be measured by the extent of education afforded to women" (Batticuore, 2006).

In 1853 she settled permanently in Buenos Aires. Unlike Gorriti, Manso was forced to work for a living. Far ahead of her time, Manso wrote the first course book on Argentine History and historical novels in which she criticized the neglect by the state of the most vulnerable members of society - women and children; she was an accomplished public speaker condemning oppression and racial discrimination. Manso was extremely knowledgeable in Argentine law; she published didactic works as well as theatrical plays and poetry. Apart from organizing conferences, she edited newspaper articles and campaigned for the provision of libraries and cultural centres. Juana dedicated her entire life to public education; as a teacher, she was a precursor of scientific and social pedagogy. Representing the principles of Pestalozzi and Froebel, she believed in child activities in accordance with individual interests and spontaneity. Manso was a fervent opponent of corporal punishment and initiated a reward system for good behaviour; she also introduced English Language classes. During Sarmiento's presidency, Manso became the first spokeswoman of the Department for Education and implemented her teaching methods in thirty four institutions. In 1871 she became the first female member of the *Comisión Nacional de Escuelas* for which she suffered brutal verbal abuse in order to force her resignation.

¹²²The first school for boys was opened in 1817, the first girls school in 1823. In mid century, 1855, the literate population in Buenos Aires had reached 48% (51% men, 44% women), (Fletcher, 2007:12).

Sarmiento defended this belief more fervently than any of his contemporaries. Even before writing *Facundo* (1845) he published in *El Progreso de Chile* a supplement dedicated 'exclusively' to female readers. In a jocular, often provocative, but always conspiratorial tone, he tried to enlighten them and mould their republican sensitivities. But Sarmiento was less preoccupied with educated women than with those of the lower classes who hardly could read and who were especially predisposed to sentimentalism (Batticuore, 2006).

As the century wore on, this ever increasing number of women readers motivated the efforts of other writers who sought fame and popularity, and inspired commercial strategies amongst publishers. "When I write I always think of a woman", Lucio Mansilla confessed in 1890, pinpointing the key to his success with the public. Then and now, women readers have moulded the prose of male writers who employ a language and themes which they presumed to suit female tastes. Almost as Sarmiento would have wished for, from the time of their first appearance until now, the romantic novel has succeeded in establishing the habit of reading.



Juana Manuela Gorriti¹²³

Juana Manuela almost saw the arrival of the 20th century. She died in 1892. Immediately, the government declared that it would carry the cost of 2000 Pesos of her funeral. Her burial became an important social event - 'everybody' attended. More than twenty articles about her life, her suffering, and her death as well as many biographies appeared during the following months, remembering her life and work. (Zucotti, 2005:96)

During her lifetime, Gorriti was the most widely read woman writer in Latin America, although her work subsequently slipped into oblivion. Only in the last ten years or so has it been rediscovered by feminist critics. Francine Masiello's study of women, nation, and literary culture in Argentina (1997) navigates the area between the binary oppositions that have traditionally divided Argentine culture and society to find the spaces occupied by women that do not fit into the dichotomies of civilization and barbarism, public and private, federalist and Unitarian, city and interior.

The presence of an ever growing number of educated women also led to the entry of more women into the field of literature, with respect to fictional writing, only a few years later than their male counterparts.¹²⁴

¹²³ Pictures of both women have been inserted here because one of the reasons for Juana Manso's life long rejection was her physical appearance which was deemed to be 'manly', unattractive, and sometimes even ugly. The pictures are meant to give an idea of what a woman at the time should or should not look like. While Manso's beauty, or the lack of it is, of course, of no importance, I notice that on all her published photographs she is at least twenty years older than all the other famous female writers whose photos were taken when they were at their prime. This surely is no coincidence.

¹²⁴ Esteban Echeverría wrote *El matadero* in 1838 (published in Argentina in 1871) and is considered the first Argentine fictional narrative. Seven years later, in 1845, *La quena* by Juana Manuela Gorriti appeared serialized in a newspaper in Lima (Fletcher, 2007:13).

Juana Manuela Gorriti is one of the few women writers of the period to have earned a significant place in Argentine literary history among the many writers participating in the attempt to define a national self which shaped national politics at the time (Urraca, 1999:152).

Although they could never forget their lack of opportunities, legal rights, or social status, the women of the Generation of 1880 nonetheless were convinced that they were witnessing the birth of a marvellous new era: the age of progress. The impact of the idea of progress on Argentine women's thinking can hardly be overstated; in fact, it is difficult to find a contemporary article about women's issues that does *not* mention progress or evolution. Rarely has a society had such a clear awareness of living between the end of one era and the beginning of a new one, but a survey of Argentine writing from 1870-1914 reveals that the belief in a new age of progress was accepted across boundaries of class, gender, and ideology (Frederick, 1997:1).¹²⁵ Martínez and other women viewed their century as revolutionary as well as evolutionary. Progress, they believed, would cure the ills of the past: tyranny, ignorance, poverty, and, significantly, the oppression of women.

In her short story, "*La quena*",¹²⁶ Gorriti clearly expresses this belief. Set in Lima, shortly after the conquest, Hernán, a mestizo, speaks to his Spanish lover, Rosa, about hidden Inca treasures and says:

¹²⁵ In 1897, Elia Martínez summed up the exuberance of the times by describing the 1800s as "el siglo de la libertad, del progreso, de la gloria, de la electricidad." (1897:217, in Frederick 1997). Electric lighting thus became more than a technological feat: it was a metaphor for the arrival of spiritual light.

¹²⁶ All of Gorriti's stories analyzed in this section have only been available to me in their English translation and are from the collection "*Dreams and Realities*"; their translation from the Spanish is by Sergio Waisman.

Hernán, son of an Inca princess and a Spanish aristocrat, and Rosa, also the daughter of a Spanish nobleman, are lovers; but their love is doomed since she has been promised in marriage to the wealthy and powerful Judge Ramírez. Unbeknown to the lovers, they are betrayed by a black servant and Rosa is married off to the judge thinking that Hernán is dead. Hernán becomes a priest and takes his mission abroad. After his return to Lima, the two see each other by coincidence in church and realize the betrayal. Rosa is finally killed by Ramírez and her body taken by Hernán to a paradise-like Inca valley

A day shall come in which man's science will discover those treasures; but by then men will be free and equal, and they shall use the wealth to serve humanity! The reign of worries and despotism will have ended, and only man's genius will rule the world, whether it reside upon the head of a European, or upon that of an Indian. (2003:7)

Relating the story of his childhood to Rosa, Hernán tells about a conversation between him and his mother, María, who is guilt ridden for appropriating a piece of Inca gold from the treasure in order to finance her journey to Spain where her son had been taken by his father against her wishes. She says to him:

Hernán, my beloved son, promise me that my crime will not have been fruitless.... Our prophecies speak of a liberator who will live a long time among our enemies, learn the conqueror's science, and return to break the chains enslaving our homeland, leading it to a greater glory and happiness. Promise me that you shall be that liberator, but that to liberate our brothers you will not use the hatred that demands the blood of our masters, but rather the enlightenment that shall make us their equals - enlightenment, the most sublime and certain means of liberation. (19)

One of the most effective female definers of Argentine national identity, she was concerned with finding ways of expressing and resolving the fraught relationship between the country's past and its turbulent present¹²⁷ as it affected their gender (Urraca, 1999:152) and other marginalized groups. It is not that relevant that *La quena*

where he guards and mourns her ever after, playing *the quena*, a reed flute played by indigenous groups in Andean tradition.

¹²⁷ The national turmoil and political instability of the Rosas dictatorship and its aftermath.

is set in Peru during early colonial rule while Gorriti wrote this story during the Rosas dictatorship - hostility toward the 'other' and violent struggle were present in both settings. She laments and criticizes these attitudes and events across time and space. For Gorriti and her protagonists, the basis of identity can ultimately not be found in present space and time, nor in a projected future but in the recognition and articulation of memories of foundational events in the past (Berg, 1994:70). Travels and exile provided Gorriti with clear perceptions of the junctures where past and present met - "mirajes encantados", as she called them, that lent an exceptional optimism to her stories.

In "*La quena*", the story moves within a triangle of displaced people: an Inca prince who belongs to a kingdom now officially annihilated; his Spanish lover, alienated from her homeland and everything she knows well; and a black female slave who betrays the couple in exchange for the promise of being sent back to Africa in order to be reunited with her children. The convergence of these three exiles, with all their corresponding anxieties and insecurities, is explosive; the resolution of their situation seems impossible. Because of their non-belonging to any nationality or core identity, the three of them are incapable of resolving their personal relationships. They do not have a national space.

Gorriti particularly highlights the suffering of women and, even more so mothers, caused by such conflicts. Because of insufficient legislation for women's protection, men can destroy home life, take away the children, and leave women with nothing but their grief (particularly if they were not legally married, as is the case in this story). Demanding an explanation of Hernán's father for not keeping his promises, he says to her:

“María,” the Count answered, “the promises a man makes to a woman, especially to the mother of his son, are not like those that bind him to other men. They are rather like those we make to ourselves: subject to change with unexpected circumstances. If you love me, and if you love your son, you must understand that neither he nor I can confine our future to the small circle of a country lost among deserts just because I made a stupid promise to you one day. In any case, he added in a resolved tone, “my son - and you, if you wish - is leaving with me tomorrow. Good-bye!” (8)

Here, the Count clearly represents the patriarchal state and the ruling class if one superimposes the story on the civil war during the Rosas era. Independence was meant to bring new beginnings marked by enlightened thought, peace, and equality - changes that the new republican states had promised. And yet, none of it had become true.

Gorriti often uses elements of this conflict between Civilization and Barbarism that was central to the nineteenth-century in order to display other traits of the same dichotomy. In her work she frequently uses the conventional image of the family as a model for political stability. “*La quena*” initiated a Romantic discourse that seemed to reject those intellectual trends which sought to consolidate an ideology that elevated the city, the white ‘race’, and Euro-centrism as the ideal model for republican civilization (Mataix, 2003:36).

This is not to say, however, that Gorriti was free of racial prejudices. As already mentioned, Francisca, the black slave in *La quena*, is portrayed as a traitor; and later on, a mysterious man providing a potion to poison the beautiful Rosa is described as “...old and had a repugnant appearance; his vulturelike eyes, curved nose, and thin lips revealed that he belonged to the degenerate race of Jacob”. (27)

In *El ángel caído* the black slaves end up as evil criminals motivated by a violent desire for vengeance that ultimately triumphed over any noble characteristics they might have had (in Mataix, p. 110). It can be said, therefore, that although Gorriti suggested an alternative, more integrated vision of “the nation” by introducing the cultural and social vindication of the “Indian” into her stories, she moved clearly within the established canon when it came to black people, mulattoes, and the Jewish “race”. According to Luis Miguel Glavé (1996), “black characters in these narratives occupied a threatening and corrupt role; they were carriers of those values which the ideology of the modernizers sought to eradicate. The narrative’s protagonists - the *criollo* elite, including women, seemed to feel threatened by members of a different, ‘other’, subordinated, and popular culture... Blacks seemed to be possessed by destructive sexual desires; the *low* sexual becomes yet another *low* with the racial fixation of the repression”. The ‘others’, those from below, were socially peripheral but symbolically central in the romantic fiction written by women.

Apart from “*La quena*”, Gorriti’s stories “*If You Do Wrong, Expect No Good*” and “*Treasure Of The Incas*” were also part of this contradictory structure of race, class and gender relations which reveal different criteria within the indigenous and female discourse of the time that can be discovered in her work. Rape as a form of direct oppression of the indigenous by whites, of women by men; disrupted childhood and displaced persons appear in this discourse - a discourse corroborated by the most cruel reality of the time (Denegri in Glavé, 1996).

In Buenos Aires, as well as in Lima and Mexico, the publication of women's magazines became very frequent during the first decades of the new republics.¹²⁸ Male writers, producers of new ideologies in the lively discourse of nationhood which dominated the era, were preoccupied with the role of women in this 'imagined community'. Articles by women were a daily feature in these magazines and the common message was to afford women the role of 'the angel of the home'. Female writers demanded respect for this role within the home which they made into a sanctuary against tyranny but also stressed the need for female education, which they did not perceive as in conflict with their domestic duties.

The prevailing discourse of republican motherhood was used by female writers to defend their female rights, carve out a space for women in the formation of the nation, reflect upon their rights and develop female education. This middle-class discourse of motherhood in which these women engaged has to be viewed as a step towards confrontation, consciousness-raising, and female struggle at the birth of the nation (Masiello, 1989a, in Glavé). This was not only the case in Buenos Aires but also in Lima, where Juana Manuela Gorriti edited *La Alborada* and also held *tertulias* on a regular basis.

Gorriti's commitment to women's issues sparked the interest of both men and women. Abel Delgado, for example, author of an essay entitled 'La educación social de la mujer', not only addressed the perspective of separate male and female spheres but also lamented the resulting fragmentation of society. While maintaining the view that

¹²⁸ The first female edited paper, *La Aljaba*, appeared as early as 1830, after Rosas came to power. *La Aljaba* focused mainly on domestic issues. In their opening prospectus, the editors stated since *La Aljaba* belonged to its female readers, it would present a female discourse, and say "nothing that will offend your delicate nature." The paper would be in favour of topics "fitting to the orbit of female duty, showing you the pillars of religion, the August temple of morality, and all of the paths that will lead you therein" (Shumway, 2005:129).

the domestic sphere was an exclusively female domain, he also justified the participation of women in law and politics: “La política interesa a las mujeres lo mismo que nos interesa a los hombres, y sería un grave error asegurar lo contrario..., y conviene a la sociedad entera que la mujer ponga en ello sus muy delicadas manos y su agudo entendimiento” (1892).¹²⁹ The use of expressions like “sus muy delicadas manos” suggests that even progressive thinkers like Delgado were trapped in the prevailing perceptions of what constitutes the masculine and the feminine (although the expression could also be understood in the sense that Delgado perceived women as particularly sensitive). He did recognize, however, that women’s separate sphere was affected by what men did and that activities defined by women in their own sphere influenced and even set constraints and limitations on what men might choose to do because he also wrote: “El hombre puede estar siempre donde la mujer está, prestarla un inmenso apoyo, dispensarla sus consejos; mientras que la mujer no puede estar siempre donde está el hombre ni ayudarlo, siquiera en su opinión ilustrada, en las diversas tareas y cuestiones de la vida.”¹³⁰ This statement clearly demonstrates that men like Delgado experienced the exclusion of women from issues like politics and culture as an aspect in gender relations that afforded a certain isolation, indeed, even a certain loneliness to men as well as to women which defeated the very object of having a wife (husband, partner) in the first place.

National consolidation, until that time, had mainly been debated in literary gatherings hosted by women for male and female participants (Carlson, 1988:49). The already mentioned *tertulias* hosted by Mariquita Sánchez had been a particularly

¹²⁹ Politics are interesting to women just as they are to men and it would be a grave mistake to claim the opposite... and it benefits the whole of society that woman should put her delicate hands and her astute understanding to these matters.

¹³⁰ “A man can always be where his wife is and lend her immense support, give her his advice; but a woman cannot always be where her husband is, nor help him, even with her enlightened opinion, in the diverse tasks and questions of life.”

notorious meeting venue for heated discussions of literature, culture, and patriotism during the independence struggles and were as significant a space for the exchange of ideas as they became again later in the 1940s (Urraca, 1999:153) when Victoria Ocampo became the most celebrated hostess of such gatherings.

Although Gorriti's female protagonists belong to either the Federal or the Unitarian camp, they do so only through their background and male family ties. Their loyalty is not directed towards either one or the other political ideology but to individuals to whom they are linked emotionally. They criticize and, at the same time, sympathize with both factions' causes - not because they were politically inept but because they perceived the magnitude of the bloodshed and personal loss as far greater evils than political victory or defeat.

In this sense Gorriti's female characters are frequently torn between love and loyalty and ultimately mourn the dead on both sides. In "The Dead Man's Fiancée" (*La novia del muerto*), Vital, daughter of a Federalist learns of the time and date of an attack on Unitarian troops by the Federalists. In love with a Unitarian officer, Horacio Ravelo, she finds her conscience in turmoil: "If I do not speak, I lose him; if I speak, I betray my father...." (77). 'Lover becomes soldier' (80) and follows the bugle call into battle. Unbeknown to Vital, Horacio is executed by a Federalist firing squad. The battle in full swing, the narrator states:

The unfortunate women whose dear ones were in the defeated army did not know of their fate; those mothers, sisters, and wives had to spend the entire night in their houses tormented by the unbearable uncertainty of not knowing whether they lived or not. (82)

The battlefield teeming with Unitarian bodies, Vital's chaperone informs her of a gruesome task which unites women from both sides across political differences:

Vital! Vital!" the good lady shouted as she came in. "Come with me, my daughter; your father has given permission for you to carry out an act of charity. Do you know what it is? It is to bury the unfortunate Unitarians who were executed by firing squad yesterday afternoon in the plaza. Quiroga has said that they may be buried, but under the condition that it be their mothers and their wives who escort them to their graves. Mother of God! Poor children! All of my hatred has turned to pity. Let us go, my daughter, let us go help carry out this painful duty. (83)

In "*The Mazorquero's Daughter*" (*La hija del mazorquero*),¹³¹ the theme is similar. Night after night, Roque Black-Soul carries out his duty of finding and killing opponents of the regime. His daughter, Clemencia, is very distressed about her father's violent pursuits. Unbeknown to him, she seeks out his victims' families and tries to ease their pain and hardship by taking money, food, and clothes; because "...if it was not possible for her to take him away from it, at least to offer God a life of suffering and atonement on his behalf." (87)¹³² Torn between the love to her father and her conscience, she informs a victim to be when she learns of the time and place of a planned assassination. In the end, Clemencia carries out her moral duties when she is

¹³¹ The Mazorca referred to Rosas' secret police force created to secure his power in Argentina by seeking out his opponents whom they persecuted with extreme violence and atrocity. The Mazorca took its name from the corn husk that appeared on the emblem of this organisation.

¹³² The idea of women's suffering for the redemption of men's sins clearly points to the marianismo ideal that even progressive women like Gorriti frequently used in the characterisations of her heroines. Gorriti's choice of name - Clemencia - is no coincidence; Roque always utters her name when he returns home from his killing sprees. Gorriti clearly underlines the double burden this young woman is carrying: to compensate for his sins in this life in order to be treated with clemency in the next.

mistakenly killed by her father who is subsequently reformed by his daughter's sacrifice.

As we can see, Gorriti was particularly concerned about the female victims of the Rosas regime. However, she sometimes also points to the fact that men too become entangled in divided loyalties. In "The Black Glove" (*El guante negro*), it is the male protagonist, Wenceslao, who, given an ultimatum by his Unitarian lover, Isabel, betrays his father, Ramirez, by switching to the enemy's side. Enraged by his son's treason, his father plans to kill him but is found out by the boy's mother, Margarita, who, in turn, stabs her husband to death.

In Gorriti's stories, mothers are never plagued by divided loyalties; their only concern is their children's welfare, the securing of which justifies any means and sacrifices. Fiercely arguing, Ramirez reminds Margarita that it had always been her conviction that it was better to die than break your word and lose your honour. "But" she answers crying, "I was a wife then; now I am a mother!"... I want my son to live", says Wenceslao's mother, "even if it is in a world of ruins" (121), and plunges the knife into her husband's chest.

Similarly, in "*La quena*", Francisca, the slave says as she counts her reward money:

In exchange for a mother's being returned to her children, two lovers have been thrown into immense despair, a father, a wife, and a husband will be dishonored... and who knows what else may happen?.. I am saving myself, and taking my vengeance! To save myself and take my vengeance at once! What fortune! Freedom! Vengeance! I salute you. My land! My children! I shall see you soon! (24)

The crimes committed by mothers - María's stealing the Inca gold to see her son again, Margarita's murdering her husband to save her son, and Francisca's treason in order to be reunited with her children - all become justified because these women answer to a 'higher law', so to speak, than that created by man: that of the bond between a mother and her children. Even Gorriti's racial prejudices seem to wane in the case of Francisca as she passionately describes the woman's burning desire to see her children again (and her land, which follows closely in importance).

Another recurring theme is that of ghosts or 'unreal beings'. Vital, in "The Dead Man's Fiancée", after discovering Horacio's body on the battlefield, for ever after roams the scene of death; a never changing figure shrouded in white veils who finds happiness only in madness. Isabel, in "The Black Glove", guilty of Wenceslao's death by making him change his allegiance, regularly appears on the scene of executions by Rosas, also covered in shrouds and singing in a doleful voice. María, in *El lucero del manantial* also becomes a ghost roaming the *pampas* after losing her father, her husband, and her son.

These women, unable to recover from the death of loved ones, remind the reader of individual tragedies and are a metaphor for national tragedy. Their ghostly existence represents an unresolved past that lives on in the present, particularly for women because these tragedies influence their lives even though the location for solving national issues has moved from the battlefield into parliament. Here, Gorriti criticizes the non-acknowledgement of women's contributions and sufferings during the attempts to consolidate the nation.

The ghosts of the past, particularly in her later stories, after she returned to Argentina, also symbolize the persistence of memory of her childhood when the

country's spirit was still drenched with the euphoria of the victory in the independence struggles (Urraca, 1999:166).

According to Masiello, Gorriti's women blurred the boundaries of the Unitarian and Federal discourses as well as the urban and regional conflicts; they identified invariably with the indigenous question, acted as mediators in the confrontation between the dominant and oppressed groups, and undermined the traditional authority of print culture in order to insert a female alternative in the field of knowledge and national history (1997:67).

Coming to terms with the past was essential for Gorriti if the country was to have a viable prospect for the future. She associated herself with the generation of 1837 - Sarmiento, Alberdi, Echeverría, Mármol, and others - but unlike these intellectuals, she understood the past to be an integral part of Argentina's identity and not - as the 'generation' did - as a failure.



Juana Manso

Juana Manso died in 1875. Her body had been without burial for two days. She had been denied a tomb in Chacarita and Recoleta (see footnote 13). '*La Manso*', Doña Juanita, Juana *la loca* had been denied the administration of the Last Rites by a Catholic priest. A convert to Protestantism since many years before, she refused to be converted back to Catholicism on her deathbed. Not until 1915, when public education became perceived as an adequate tool to assimilate European immigrants, were her remains moved to the mausoleum for (female) teachers in Chacarita (Zucotti, 2005:96)

As a follower of the Romantic Movement and rational thought that marked her era, Manso understood that humanity never regressed but that progress was its inevitable destiny. In accordance with the ideas of the Enlightenment and Rousseau's reflections on the importance of education, she sought to eradicate slavery and racism and fought

against prejudice and intolerance which, like we have seen in Gorriti, included tensions related to the extermination of the indigenous peoples. She also pointed out the necessity to overcome social conventions in order to achieve happiness. Manso disputed a number of cultural traditions including traditional family life and religious doctrine. She frequently expressed her disagreement with the dominance of the Catholic Church. In her article “Libertad de conciencia”, Manso calls for an end of hostile attitudes among the different religious communities in Buenos Aires:

Jew and Catholic, Christian and Muslim, are all children of God
and those who forgive here on earth will be forgiven in Heaven.”
(Manso, 1854c:55, in Southwell, 2005:119).

Manso clearly expressed her disagreement with Catholic domination:

With regard to the Roman Catholic clergy, they have had mankind
in their hands for eighteen centuries, only to try to annihilate it.
This city [Buenos Aires] has fallen into the hands of the Jesuits, and
for the last seven years all the women have been dragooned into secret
religious associations so that for a heretic like myself there is
only unremitting hatred and war. (Manso, 1868, p. 398 in Southwell, 2005:118-9)

Manso’s anti-clerical views were only one side of her ideology that earned her rejection and isolation. Of the two novels she wrote, *Los misterios del Plata* is known for its criticism of the Rosas dictatorship - it did not create a stir amongst its readers since it merely suggested a change within the established order. Her second novel,

however, *La familia del Comendador*¹³³, proposed a revolutionary overthrow of precisely that order.

The principal themes of this story are racism and slavery, social injustices that most certainly touched Manso during her time in Brazil before the abolition of slavery; and I would like to speculate that in that country the novel might have enjoyed much greater popularity than in Argentina. The story was first published in instalments by Manso herself in her own journal *Álbum de señoritas* whose publication had to cease after only eight issues since it was not as successful as Manso had hoped for. In 1854, she decided to publish *La familia* in book form. Lea Fletcher compares *La familia* with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - both stories were "appreciated by the intelligent and unknown by the majority of readers" (1994:110).

In *La familia*, the relationship between Gabriela, daughter of a white family, and Alina, her young slave, is one of friendship. When Gabriela has to leave, the narrator says:

...llegadas a la puerta se arrojaron una en los brazos de la
otra, allí no había esclava ni ama, ni blanca ni negra,
había dos mujeres afligidas, cuyos corazones nivelaba el
dolor y la amistad. (83)

¹³³ The protagonist of *El comendador*, Gabriel das Neves, is the rich owner of an enormous sugar plantation in Brazil and of a great number of slaves whom he and his wife and cousin, the devious and greedy Carolina, treat abominably. They have two daughters, Gabriela and Mariquita, and a son, Pedro and the whole family obeys the wishes of Gabriel's mother, Doña María who is very wealthy in her own rights. Her older son, Gabriel's brother, Juan, is mentally fragile since in his youth his mother refused to let him marry an English protestant girl; ever since, he has been living with a mulatto woman, Camila, who had born him two children, Emilia and Mauricio who returns from Paris where he has successfully finished a medical degree. Neither these two grandchildren, nor their mother are recognized as family by Doña María. In order to keep all the wealth in the family, Doña María suggests Gabriela should be married to her uncle Juan. However, the girl is in love with a medical student, Ernesto, of a respectable but far less affluent family. To avoid the marriage, she escapes to a convent with the help of her slave, Alina, who dies from the physical punishment she receives for her refusal to disclose Gabriela's whereabouts. Ernesto rescues Gabriela from the convent at the same time as Doña María falls terminally ill. On her deathbed she repents her cruelties and experiences a complete reformation of character. Finally, everybody is allowed to marry their chosen partners, Mauricio is included in the will, and the slaves are given their freedom.

Later on, Doña María's mulatto grandson, Mauricio, returns from France where he had studied medicine. Now a qualified doctor he declares:

*Le importaba poco lo que la familia le pudiera hacer, había
llegado el día en que les hablaría de igual, no como esclavo,
sino como hombre, cuyos derechos no son ilusorios, sino
verdades, que aunque desconocidas o atropelladas, son siempre
argumentos irresistibles del lenguaje de la razón y de la
conciencia. (104)*

As the story progresses, firmly entrenched power relations not only experience a radical change but become practically reversed. At the beginning, Doña María, the tyrannical matriarch of the family, and the devious Carolina, her daughter-in-law, both represent those traditionally in power in terms of class and 'race'. Manso intentionally portrays these two characters as the "villains" of the story. Alina, the slave girl as well as the two younger daughters, Gabriela and Mariquita represent a new generation of women - one without racial or social prejudices.

Here, the readers who occupied the same ideological and social spaces as Doña María and, therefore, identified with her, would have started to feel somewhat uncomfortable; then, Alina dies saving Gabriela's life as a consequence. Now, this would not have bothered anybody since this sort of loyalty would have been expected of a slave and her death would merely have caused an inconvenience; but at the same time Carolina's ignorant and uncouth actions produce precisely the opposite outcome to what she had intended - disclosure of Gabriela's hiding place. Alina stays true to her word and keeps her friend's secret while Carolina not only becomes the author of

her own defeat but also inadvertently reinforces the new, progressive attitude of the younger women.

The slight discomfort felt by the readers so far turn into alarm bells when Doña María, on her death bed, experiences total reformation. She not only allows her two remaining grandchildren, Juan and Mariquita, to marry a black woman and the mulatto grandson respectively, but also leaves her entire fortune to the eventual offspring of these unions.

The profound dislike and mistrust of black people and those of mixed race has to be explained briefly at this point in order to demonstrate the extent of Manso's transgressions committed by publishing *La familia del comendador*.

Juana Manso strongly believed in conceptions identified with 'the Spirit of May' - a movement which, in the Río de la Plata territory, referred to the first steps towards independence from Spain and the creation of the first autonomous government. Many intellectuals shared this 'spirit' and the ideas it gestated - emancipation, republicanism, enlightenment, sovereign nation, abolition of slavery, and progress, amongst others. These ideas did not remain confined to the symbolic sphere as the governing juntas enacted progressive reforms dealing with socio-racial relations. The slave trade was officially abolished in 1812¹³⁴ and in 1813, The Law of Free Birth assured that children of slaves would be born free, thus placing the end of slavery within the not so distant future (Shumway, 2001:206).

In the military, black officers were recognized as equal to white officers, and in general the military provided a mechanism for social mobility for Afro-Argentines who

¹³⁴ This ban was subverted and the slave trade continued under different guises until much later, at least until 1840 (Rosal, 1994, cited in Shumway, 2001:206, footnote 14).

flocked to the army as a way to achieve freedom from slavery or to boost their social position. In 1838, the 15,000 Afro-Argentines (these included all persons of more or less pure African descent, known as *negros* or *morenos*, and those of mixed racial ancestry, known as *pardos*. *Pardos* and *morenos* were collectively termed as ‘people of color’) accounted for almost a quarter of the city’s 63,000 inhabitants. By 1887, the year of the next census recording information on race, the community had declined to 8,000, a mere two percent in a rapidly growing city of 433,000 (Goldberg, cited in Andrews, 1979:21). It can be said, therefore, that Afro-Argentines did not constitute a ‘problem’ given their small, rapidly declining numbers. Furthermore, they were concentrated in Buenos Aires, the place of civilization and progress as opposed to the backward and barbaric countryside which was the *pampas*. The 1827 census revealed that of all the Afro-Argentines who listed a profession, 94 percent worked as manual labourers, divided fairly evenly between skilled, semi-skilled, and un-skilled professions. Only 52 percent of the white population listed such trades (Andrews, 1979:22) and it can be assumed that black men and women worked in jobs that white people were either too few, too proud, or too lazy to take on. Even tough manual and domestic labour became associated with black people, a small proportion of Afro-Argentines worked in trades higher than that of artisans, several were professionals (military officers, pharmacists, school teachers), others owned small businesses. Obviously, the black community did not present a threat, perceived or real, to the white population and Buenos Aires might well have provided a setting in which black people could be painlessly absorbed into wider society, at least in the first decades of the nineteenth century (Andrews, 1979:22).

Nonetheless, constructors of the Argentine nation always sought to create a ‘white’ country and they left no stone unturned to achieve this goal. Andrews lists a few

reasons for why the Afro-Argentines virtually disappeared from official statistics: many died in the national and international wars that took place during and after the Independence struggles until the mid nineteenth century; mestizaje; low birth and high death rates; the decline of the slave trade after the Law of Free Birth. Furthermore, the use of the term *trigueño* (wheat-coloured) in the census records, which allowed black people to be reclassified as white. This new terminology presented an escape for many from being labelled black but in a wider sense it also contributed to the 'erasure' of blacks from the national identity in an effort to fulfil the dream of a 'white' Argentina (Shumway, 2001:212).

According to Fletcher, however, all of these reasons observed by Andrews, lack sufficient evidence (1994:211). In reality, she maintains, the 'disappearance' of the black and mulatto population coincided with the fall of Rosas who was supported by the majority of Afro-Argentines (1994:212). Rosas had made a special point of courting the black community. He regularly attended their social functions, invited community leaders to his residence for consultation and social events, and so forth. His wife, Encarnación Ezcurra, maintained contact with different Afro-Argentine groups, and his daughter Manuelita was even known to participate in Afro-Argentine dances. In return, a large number of blacks and mulattoes fought with the Federals as soldiers, domestic spies, and mercenaries in the *mazorca* (Shumway, 2001:206). These activities caused no small stir among the Unitarians - whether in exile or at home. Their racism, combined with their hatred for Rosas and the Federal cause now transformed the black population into a symbol for the savagery and barbarism of the Rosas years.

Coming back to Juana Manso and *La familia del comendador*, the novel was published in 1854 - two years after Rosas' defeat when enthusiasm for the Unitarian victory was

