

# Leadership from the Margins



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# Leadership from the Margins

Women and Civil Society  
Organizations in Argentina,  
Chile, and El Salvador

SERENA COSGROVE

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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY, AND LONDON

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Cosgrove, Serena, 1963–

Leadership from the margins : women and civil society organizations in  
Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador / Serena Cosgrove.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8135-4799-2 (hbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8135-4800-5  
(pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Women—Political activity—Latin America. 2. Leadership in women—  
Latin America. 3. Women in development—Latin America. 4. Civil society—  
Latin America. 5. Social movements—Latin America. I. Title.

HQ1236.5.L37C67 2010

305.42098—dc22

2009048293

A British Cataloging-in-Publication record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

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This book is dedicated to the women of Latin America who are transforming their communities, countries, and continent—sometimes under great risk and often at immense sacrifice. Thank you for inspiring with your example. Your contributions are creating a more equitable and sustainable Latin America.



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## Women and Civil Society Leadership in Latin America

I argue with my *compañeros*, thank God, as one equal to another. If I have to swear, I swear. If I have to act feminine, I do it. And if I have to fight, I fight, never forgetting that I am a woman.

—Magdalena Jamargo, Argentine Printers' Union

I didn't want to accept the position [of community president] because I am a woman and men are screwed up, they are macho . . . But I was always talking to them about the land, that we had to take our land back. Whatever happens, will happen, but we Mapuche have got to make ourselves heard so at least we won't be called sheep.

—Petronila Catrileo, President Lonko Juan Segundo Marileo, Pocuno, Chile

We women see ourselves . . . without political or ideological differences, rather women who come together for a problem that we share: struggling for space for women in politics.

—Virginia Magaña, President National Association of Salvadoran Councilwomen and Women Mayors, Santa Tecla, El Salvador

Traditionally men have benefited from gender hierarchies, occupying leadership positions across Latin American society, but a number of factors—political, economic, and historical—have aligned to expand leadership opportunities throughout the region in civil society organizations (CSOs) for women, especially women who have been marginalized by poverty, be it urban or rural, or by ethnicity. Many of these organizations—a number of which are led by women—are successfully achieving their goals and creating new hope for the disenfranchised and marginalized in Latin America. These women leaders are setting up child care centers,

addressing domestic violence in their communities, organizing campaigns for safe neighborhoods, securing access to basic services for their families and communities, working to get children who have dropped out of school back into classes, improving public education in their countries, and calling on the state to implement much-needed environmental laws. Given the challenges the planet Earth and all its peoples face at this present historical juncture—war, terrorism, global warming, and increased exclusion of people for reasons of difference—this focus on women civil society leaders provides concrete examples of social change from margins created by gender discrimination, racism, poverty, and other forms of social exclusion. Women in Latin America are uniquely positioned to contribute solutions to the major problems threatening their societies because their culturally ascribed roles as caretakers in the home and in the community, as well as their activism and volunteerism during periods of economic and political crisis, mean they have often developed skills like networking, cooperation, and listening across difference.

This book brings attention to the power, courage, and commitment of women civil society leaders at the grassroots and national levels in Latin America through a close examination of their leadership experiences, achievements, and challenges in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador—three countries that share a history of state violence and authoritarianism as well as vibrant civil societies in which women leaders have contributed significantly to democratization. This book shows how the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a small group of primarily working- and middle-class Argentine mothers, became contributors to ending a dictatorship and achieving a return to democracy for Argentina by demanding that the government return their illegally detained, *disappeared* children alive. For Chile, I describe the successful efforts of a group of rural Mapuche women to create Rayen Voygue,<sup>1</sup> an independent, financially sustainable organization committed to preserving Mapuche crafts and weaving techniques in addition to empowering poor, rural women—Mapuche and Chilean alike—through income-generating strategies and consciousness raising. In the case of El Salvador—a country polarized, almost frozen, by political differences—I illustrate the achievements of one of the only pluralistic civil society organizations in the country, the National Association of

Salvadoran Councilwomen and Women Mayors (ANDRYASAS). ANDRYASAS brings women mayors and municipal council members together across the spectrum of political parties by providing them with technical training and gender empowerment workshops, in addition to promoting the development and implementation of gender policies at the municipal level throughout the country.

Due to gender inequalities throughout Latin America, women experience higher levels of poverty and discrimination than men (Craske 2003, 58). Yet, because of their roles in the family and their communities as mothers and caretakers, empowerment for women translates into improved economic conditions and well-being for them as well as their children and communities (UNICEF 2006).<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the United Nations, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, international foundations, state agencies, and civil society organizations often focus on women, especially in the areas of education, health, and income generation. As regards these three areas, indicators demonstrate some improvement throughout Latin America for women, but “there is a gap between the expected goal and achievements related to broadening women’s rights” (Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005, 16).

In the area of education, more girls than boys are attending school—primary through secondary—as well as graduating from college in Latin America (World Bank 2007). But these advances are threatened by the fact that in the face of economic crisis, families often encourage girls to drop out of school before boys due to the internalization of gender hierarchies that favor boys’ education over girls’.

Regarding women’s employment, all three countries experienced economic crises during the democratization processes of the eighties and nineties that had gendered consequences, putting the burden of family survival on the shoulders of women. “The crisis—and the structural adjustment policies that governments adopted to deal with it—hit the urban poor, especially women, very hard” (Jaquette 1994, 3). In Argentina, women remain underemployed due to the continued effects of the economic crisis and the subsequent devaluation of the peso in 2001; in Chile and El Salvador, however, women are entering the workforce in greater numbers (Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005, 33). Regardless of the country, Latin

American women tend to cluster in the informal and lowest paid sectors of the economy, such as the service sector and assembly work at home or in *maquilas* (assembly plants).

In terms of women's reproductive health, updated figures are not available for Argentina, but both Chile and El Salvador have shown advancement in indicators such as increases in women's access to birth control and live births to mothers over the age of twenty (43 percent and 46 percent, respectively), but this progress lies in stark contrast to the fact that each of these two countries has severe anti-abortion laws that punish women who seek abortions rather than address the conditions that compel women to seek abortions in the first place (Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005). Though Argentina's abortion laws are also conservative—only permitting abortions when pregnancies threaten the physical life of the mother—women who arrive at hospitals because of botched abortions are not arrested, as has happened in Chile and El Salvador (Hitt 2006).

Women still lag behind men in areas such as income, management opportunities, and political representation even though many Latin American governments have made efforts to tackle inequalities (Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005). In Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, women's average income in formal-sector, urban employment is only 59 percent of that earned by men: for every dollar a man earns, a woman earns fifty-nine cents. In Chile and El Salvador, the levels are higher in urban formal sector jobs: 77 percent and 87 percent respectively (Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005, 32). None of these figures, however, apply to the informal sector—where primarily women generate income as street sellers, market stall vendors, and door-to-door saleswomen—nor to the agricultural sector, where women often perform significant yet underpaid or unpaid work in planting and harvesting. Access to political representation is an absorbing topic given the three countries under study. The president of Chile from 2006 to 2010, Michelle Bachelet, is a woman representing the multiparty coalition the Concertación. In 2007 Cristina Kirchner won the presidential elections in Argentina under the Peronist party. These gains aside, women's participation in elected positions remains woefully lower than men's. Argentina has achieved 32 percent parity, Chile 27 percent, and El Salvador 18 percent. Chile shows declining levels of parity between the genders at the national level, but all three countries have slowly increasing

levels of parity in executive positions at the local level (Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005, 21, 25; Departamento de Sociología y Ciencias Políticas, Universidad Centroamericano José Simeon Cañas 2009, 2).

Gender inequality manifests itself in tangible and intangible ways. Some manifestations are easier to measure, as in the case of wages. Governments can tackle this by addressing inequalities directly through job creation for women at equal wages or more broadly through legislation and vocational training, for example. Advancement in these areas can be tracked by social watch groups using agreed-upon indicators such as the Latin American Index of Fulfilled Commitment (see Valdés, Muñoz, and Donoso 2005). Nonetheless, there are hidden aspects of the discrimination that women face, such as having to work a double day—income generation and family responsibilities—or a triple day—income generation, family responsibilities, and community activism. This *triple burden* (Craske 2003, 67) means that women from poor communities are often working around the clock to guarantee their families' survival.

Women still suffer discrimination in the areas of reproductive health and their vulnerability to gender-based violence, especially domestic violence. In the past decades, health ministries and women's movements throughout Latin America have achieved advances in opening access to birth control and preventative information about women's health, but estimates indicate that over 3.8 million Latin American women seek unsafe abortions every year, over 4,000 of whom die (World Health Organization 2007). Poor women suffer disproportionately in comparison to middle-class or elite women because they cannot afford private clinics or trips to countries that offer legalized abortion. Because abortion is a divisive political issue, few Latin American governments confront the issue due to the potential backlash from conservatives. Mala Htun, a political scientist, summarizes the situation in the region: "Since middle-class women generally have access to safe abortions in private clinics, many see little reason to press for liberalization of abortion laws. It is primarily poor women who suffer the consequences of clandestine abortions" (Htun 2003, 6). Many women face violence at home at the hands of their partners. An estimated 20–50 percent of Latin American women cope with domestic violence (Morrison, Ellsberg, and Bott 2004, 3), a cross-cutting phenomenon that affects women irrespective of their social class, race,

ethnicity, or religion. Economic and political crises often create additional stress and can exacerbate levels of violence at home. Many countries do not track incidences of domestic violence, making it difficult to quantify the phenomenon in individual countries. In Argentina, more safe houses are needed, as existing houses for battered women and children are always at full capacity (Ynoub 1998).

Broad-based women's movements and regional meetings throughout Latin America as well as international campaigns—such as the UN-sponsored Women's Decade (1975–1985), the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), and international pressure to fulfill commitments to improving indicators of women's equality—have attained great advances in bringing attention to the importance of addressing women's inequality, but long-term change depends on legislation, its implementation, and the transformation of commonly held stereotypes about women's roles in society. From society to society, members are socialized to expect certain kinds of behavior from men and women. Though these *gendered* expectations differ from group to group, equality between men and women, as well as a celebration of gender differences, remain elusive in many Latin American contexts. Transforming how women are treated, perceived, and included requires an ongoing commitment—by governments, civil society groups, and individual citizens—in order to amend unfair laws, guaranteeing their implementation, and demanding programs and services to address the gender-based discrimination and violence that women face. However, this kind of transformation also requires the deeper work of cultural change—shifting societal perceptions, stereotypes, habits, and customs—which occurs when ample sectors of society see women as proactive citizens gaining equal treatment.

Women's participation in the leadership of civil society organizations is crucial for changing society's views about gender roles: example after example of proactive women making a difference in their communities and countries facilitates the emergence of new social constructions for what it means to be Latin American women. Today Latin American women are challenging gender stereotypes as they cope with more and more responsibility at home and in their communities by taking on leadership roles in civil society organizations, from self-help groups to nationwide nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Civil society—the wide spectrum

of organizations, associations, networks, and social movements outside of direct state control—has been expanding in Latin America in response to economic crisis, authoritarian or undemocratic conditions, discrimination, neoliberal structural adjustments slashing state spending, corruption, environmental degradation, and other issues.<sup>3</sup> Civil society organizations, ranging from informal community associations to formal NGOs, are making significant contributions in determining the direction of development priorities in Latin America.

Civil society is an arena where women's participation equals or surpasses that of men throughout Latin America (see Craske 2003; Jaquette 1994; Jelin 1990; Stephen 1995, 1997; and Waylen 1994). Anthropologist Lynn Stephen summarizes the research on this issue: "Women are the backbone of a wide range of social movements in Latin America, including rural and urban movements for improved living conditions, student movements, feminist movements, and movements for human rights, land reclamations, relatives of the disappeared, labor unions, abortion and reproductive rights, democratization of political systems, and more" (1995, 807). Even at the leadership level, women are achieving greater representation in civil society organizations, taking advantage of leadership opportunities, and making progress toward parity with men.<sup>4</sup> Many of these organizations comprise vital women's movements that also provide women with significant civil society and transnational leadership experiences through participation in Latin American women's and feminist conferences and meetings. A number of factors contribute to this phenomenon. Because caretaking is a culturally ascribed characteristic of women in many Latin American contexts, women able to get an education often choose such professions as social work, nursing, and education, and they choose to work in CSOs providing health services, welfare programming, and technical assistance. Elite women have historically played leadership roles in charitable activities and organizations because these activities were seen as a socially acceptable extension of their caretaking roles in the home. As I describe in depth in the following chapter, documentation of the activism of working-class and poor women in unions, community and ethnic associations, and church-related volunteerism dates back to the 1800s in Chile and Argentina and to the early 1900s in El Salvador. A number of historians, including José Bengoa, Inga Clendinnen,

Donna Guy, Margaret Power, Aldo Lauria-Santiago, Maxine Molyneux, and Gabriel Salazar, depict how women and other disenfranchised groups have formed organizations advocating for social rights and women's equality: access to health and housing, parental rights for mothers, civil rights within the marriage contract, the right to vote, equality in education, and ending domestic violence.

Beyond historical and cultural factors, political and economic crises over the past decades have also propelled women—especially from working-class and marginalized sectors—into leadership positions. The survival of their families and communities depended on their organizing skills when confronted with widespread unemployment and cuts to state spending for housing, health, basic food subsidies, and other services. Authoritarian regimes—characterized by human rights abuses and disregard for basic democratic rights—forced many women to take action by joining organizations demanding the release of illegally detained relatives, respect for human rights, and a return to democracy.

This book focuses on women's leadership experiences in civil society organizations in the two Southern Cone countries of Argentina and Chile and the Central American country of El Salvador. Country selection depended on a number of different yet interrelated factors. First, I wanted to include countries from both Central and South America. I was not able to include the Caribbean in my selection due to lack of resources, but I do include insights about women's leadership from Dame Nita Barrow, a pre-eminent woman leader from the West Indies, in the discussion about what it means to be a leader. Second, funding for research as well as my professional obligations facilitated frequent travel and even extended stays to the three selected countries. For this kind of research, it is essential to build relationships of trust with civil society networks, experts, and women leaders themselves, and this requires commitment over time. Furthermore, these three countries have similarities and differences that generate compelling comparisons, evoking reflection on the factors that inform women's civil society leadership. They share histories of authoritarian regimes that harshly repressed civil society organizations: the Argentine "dirty war" from 1976 to 1983, the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile from 1973 to 1990, and the Salvadoran civil war from 1980 to 1992. And, in all three countries, civil society leaders,

especially women, were major contributors in either returning their countries to more democratic conditions or in democracy building after the conflict. Interviews with these women, as well as with those who have become activists in recent years, facilitate an understanding of just how much women's organizing and participation has contributed to democratization and the ongoing struggle for the expansion of social, cultural, economic, and political rights in Latin America. In all three countries, women have gained increased access to the state, which I examine in greater detail in the Chilean and Salvadoran chapters. Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador have much in common concerning women and civil society organizing, but they also have differences such as a long history of civil society leadership by women in Argentina, the active involvement of indigenous women leaders in Chilean civil society, and the cross-class pollination that informed civil society development in El Salvador.

Of the three countries under study, Chile has the highest standard of living followed by Argentina; El Salvador has the greatest poverty. Argentina is the largest in terms of territory, with over one million square miles; Chile is about a third the size of Argentina; and El Salvador is a small country of roughly 8,000 square miles, making it the smallest yet most densely populated country in continental Latin America. El Salvador has 825 inhabitants per square mile, while Argentina has thirty-seven and Chile fifty-five. Size and population density are important issues for El Salvador, as these factors have aggravated tensions about land tenure, ownership, and use past to present.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This book builds on a vibrant scholarship within Latin American studies, women's studies, and the social sciences that analyzes specific realities from the perspective of those who have been marginalized, those whose voices are often not heard in official discourses. Since the seventies, many feminist anthropologists and sociologists from throughout the Americas have dedicated their research to understanding how women experience particular events differently from men. For instance, if communities expect women will provide drinking water for their families, then a project for building a well close to the community will lessen women's work, but if

the opposite occurs, women may find themselves walking additional distances to carry water home. It is essential to analyze women's and men's activities, responsibilities, and roles before implementing development projects. Gender influences how women and men are socialized to perform certain roles in the family and society; these roles generate different points from which they interact with the social forces around them. Women's particular experiences, as well as how politics, economic policies, and civil strife have different repercussions for them than for men, have been the topics of extensive research (see, e.g., Babb 1993; Bose and Acosta-Belen 1995; Jelin 1990; Rodríguez 1996; Safa 1995; Silber 2004; Stephen 1995, 1997). The work of these social scientists has shown that women often play unrecognized but central roles in relation to community development; the health, safety, and welfare of their families; and the generation of income for their families; as well as documenting women's more visible roles in the struggle for more responsive, democratic governments or attention to gender-related issues. Different explanatory models have been developed to describe women's civil society participation and leadership in Latin America, including strategic gender interests versus practical gender interests (Molyneux 1985, 232–233), the triple workload of women (Craske 2003, 67), the feminist/feminine dichotomy between feminist organizations and women's organizing, and the public/private dichotomy in which women's protagonist role at home is highlighted against the backdrop of discrimination in the public sphere (Stephen 1995, 1997). Throughout the ethnographic chapters and conclusion of this book, I build on these models, showing how women's civil society leadership in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador requires a continual reworking of how we understand women's leadership and activism. The explanatory scope of theoretical frameworks or models is always limited by the gray areas and contradictions they generate when applied to specific groups, communities, or individuals.

Each of the four models mentioned has contributed significantly to understanding the roles of women in Latin America, yet each one has raised new questions that could not be answered by the model itself, requiring new research, analysis, and explanations. Molyneux's (1985) use of the analytical categories of strategic and practical gender interests facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the range of women's activism. Nonetheless, this view comes up short in its analytical power because what

may begin as a practical gender need, such as participating in a communal kitchen, can often lead to the emergence of strategic gender issues when women working together on a common practical issue start reflecting together on gender roles, discrimination, domestic violence, or the gendered division of labor. Even the most practical of gender issues can become strategic: “the simplest act of organizing, regardless of its content or intent, often has the result of disrupting domestic routines and divisions of labor” (Stephen 1997, 271). In addition, basic needs are not just informed by survival but also by the social constructions of identity and power relations (Lind 1992, 137), thereby situating them as simultaneously practical and strategic issues. In this book, many of the women leaders interviewed have either integrated strategic and practical interests in their work or started out focusing on a practical interest that ultimately led them to question strategic interests. A prime example of this is how the vision of the Salvadoran organization of mothers of the disappeared, CO-MADRES, “has expanded to embrace a much wider definition of human rights, one that incorporates the rights of women” (Stephen 1995, 817).

Women’s triple workday is a useful analytical tool for bringing attention to how hard women are working, although it divides women’s activities into separate categories. Many Latin American women carry out their responsibilities simultaneously or in an interspersed manner, such as taking care of children while selling at the market or participating in income-generating activities as part of a community development project. Many of the women interviewed for this book refer to the multilayered, simultaneous, and dense set of activities they carry out on a daily basis.

The debate on whether or not Latin American women activists are feminist (self-identifying as feminists and consciously challenging gender inequalities) or simply working on issues that affect women raised the issue of who gets to apply the definition. Do northern or elite feminists get to determine whether Latin American women are feminists? Or do Latin American women get to make this decision? The supposition that the scholar is able to determine what is a feminist action and what is a women-related action in other women’s activism is culturally insensitive if not racist. This reflection did, however, contribute to raising awareness among northern feminists about the importance of not imposing the mind-sets or concepts of U.S., white, middle-class feminism on women from different

cultures and places, because ultimately it is up to Latin American women to determine whether or not they want to call themselves feminists and to consider their work as feminist in nature. Furthermore, this whole debate begs the question of whether it is ultimately useful or not to use the feminist category as determinant of whether or not a woman's activism challenges oppressive gender roles. Sometimes a simple action such as attending a workshop may challenge a gender stereotype. The lines are often blurry between resistance and accommodation to gender roles (Stephen 1995, 807); and the outcomes of civil society participation can lead to consciousness-raising around gender issues whether or not the action was feminist from the outset. Some of the women interviewed for this book self-identify as feminists and some do not. Some identify with grassroots forms of women's organizing and eschew the feminist label. Others have long trajectories as feminists in the feminist movement within their countries. Others see themselves as working with men and women on particular issues, not solely with women. This research attempts to allow the voices and commitments of women leaders from a spectrum of civil society organizations to describe their actions, their understandings of the contribution of their work, and how they self-identify themselves—not how the researcher identifies them.

And finally, the private-public dichotomy was initially a useful rubric for recognizing women's contributions in societies where gender hierarchies restrict women's actions outside of the home; it brought attention to the important contribution and power of women as caretakers and leaders within the family and household as compared to the public leadership of men in the community and beyond. At a time when women's contributions were invisible, this model facilitated seeing women. However, as with most dichotomies, the limitations of the public/private model become apparent, especially in the Latin American context where women's activism, contributions, and even domestic roles have appeared in the public sphere from the 1800s to the present day. From the organizing of feminist anarchists in late nineteenth-century Buenos Aires to the mothers and relatives of the disappeared in all three countries under study in the late twentieth century, women's private and public roles and responsibilities have always been present in public settings. Lynn Stephen articulates how women's mothering is not just a private or domestic

action: “Women’s presence within a political movement or confrontation in what is culturally labeled a public space makes visible the fact that mothering has always been both public and private” (1997, 273).

The work of feminist social scientists in Latin America has generated descriptive ethnographies, broad-based studies, and explanatory models to help describe what they have observed. I frequently refer to these works as I unpack the interviews and research for this project. Nonetheless, the study of women and leadership in civil society organizations in Latin America requires constantly problematizing and updating explanatory models and research categories under investigation because “concepts are crucial . . . they determine the questions one asks and the answers one is likely to get” (Schamis 1991, 207). It is important to orient theoretical frameworks around the realities emerging from the analysis of research participants’ stories. Theorizing about how women become leaders in Latin American civil society organizations “ha[s] to grow out of historically and specifically grounded instances of mobilization and must be mediated by the voices and interpretations of those who are doing the acting” (Stephen 1997, 22). For instance, *women*, *leader*, and *civil society* have to be sufficiently defined and located in particular circumstances so as to avoid such pitfalls as conflating very different kinds of people into overly simplified categories (what Stephen calls “homogenizing difference” [21]), obfuscating arguments with poorly defined terms, and using terms whose usage contributes to the maintenance of oppressive stereotypes.

### ***Gender***

As the interviews for this research demonstrate, women are challenging gender stereotypes as they cope with increased responsibility at home, in their communities, and in the other spheres where they are active, such as local associations, formal organizations, and social movements. Gender—akin to other social constructs of difference—is defined as the culturally ascribed roles for what it means to be a woman and a man in particular contexts. In many cultures, difference—such as gender, race, or ethnicity—is used to marginalize certain groups, excluding them from opportunities and spaces to exercise power and decision making. Caroline Moser, international development gender expert, defines gender as “the social relationship between men and women, in which women have been systematically

subordinated” (1993, 3). Lorber argues that gender “establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself” (1994, 1). As an analytical tool, a *gender perspective* encourages comprehension of a given social reality by allowing us to look at the situation from different points of view. Since gender defines appropriate masculine and feminine behavior, using a gender perspective facilitates understanding how women and men experience particular realities in different ways, be it at an individual, family, community, or institutional level. In patriarchal cultures, where women are subordinated to men, examining social reality from the female perspective allows the observer to trace how women are affected by this difference, how they accommodate it, and how they resist it. In the case of leadership, men and women are socialized differently regarding how they should use power. Gender hierarchies—defined as “situation[s] where social power and control over labor, resources, and products are associated with masculinity” (Gailey 1988, 32)—and structures of subordination translate into men having more access to formal positions of power than women. Gender hierarchies in patriarchal societies tend to inhibit women’s access to public leadership roles and inform the kinds of leaders women will be if they do manage to become leaders (Freeman, Bourque, and Shelton 2001, 8–11).

Obviously, gender is not the sole factor that explains differences between the experiences of certain women and men because their lives—especially their leadership styles, experiences, and opportunities—are not determined just by gender roles. Rather, actions and choices are informed by gender and other factors such as life events and circumstances, race, ethnicity, education, sexual orientation, social class, and political activism. Because the category of “women” refers to so many different kinds of human beings from an immense diversity of cultural, ethnic, religious, and social class backgrounds even within Latin America, researchers need to be cognizant of these differences and not make claims that all women face the same challenges. Attention must be paid to the differences among women. Nonetheless, because discrimination against women remains so pervasive and women’s organizing happens across national, cultural, and geographical borders, the conceptual rubric of

“women” can still be used as long as the differences between women are identified. This view is corroborated by Chilean feminist Patricia Chuchryk in her discussion of the use of the term: “Despite the fact that women of different social classes experience oppression in different ways, they are all subject to the same structures of patriarchal domination . . . suffer(ing) from domestic violence, economic dependence, sexual aggression, discrimination in the work place, lack of reproductive control, and clandestine abortion” (1994, 82).

Throughout this book women leaders share their challenges, goals, and work, facilitating insight into the complexities of how they negotiate the intersection between their cultural understandings of gender with the world they are trying to transform. Lynn Stephen describes the intersection in the following way: “In many cases women who inhabit these positions have found ways of coping, of redefining marginality, of struggling and resisting, of encountering joy and happiness in human relations” (Stephen 1997, 6). For some women activists, the negotiation translates as “their daily battle to persuade their husbands to allow them to participate in public activities” (Arizpe 1990, xix); it also means simultaneously juggling multiple roles as mothers, income earners, and volunteers/activists in civil society organizations.

### ***Civil Society***

Civil society is a multifaceted, historically charged concept referring to a broad range of citizen activities outside of direct state control. The concept has become popular in international development circles, having reemerged after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and Russia and the return to democracy in many countries in Latin America (McIlwaine 1998a, 415). Civil society, like other concepts mentioned in this introduction, has to be linked to concrete realities so as not to become a blurry concept with shifting definitions and multiple usages. Civil society “is not separated and ideal; it must exist in the real world. It must be located in time and space” (Alexander 2006, 3); otherwise, it is just a popular term appropriated by different, ideological agendas for contradictory ends. Even though the term “civil society” is used by a variety of interests to justify different actions—from structural adjustment policies to empowerment and democratization discourses—I argue that as long as

the concept is defined and located in particular places and times, it remains a useful conceptual rubric because it describes the contributions of an influential sector of society, especially throughout Latin America. As Edwards posits, “recognizing that civil society is contested territory—in both theory and reality—is the first step in rescuing a potentially powerful set of ideas from the conceptual confusion that threatens to submerge them” (2004, vii).

Theorists agree that civil society refers to organizations and social movements outside of direct state control, such as unions, community associations, voluntary associations, NGOs, and self-help groups (Alexander 2006; Edwards 2004; Foley and Edwards 1996; McIlwaine 1998a, 1998b; Mitlin 2000; Salamon 1994; and Salamon et al. 2004). According to most theorists, the sphere of civil action represented by the term has great importance to democratization throughout the world because it creates an associational space in which citizens can build coalitions, collaborate on projects or causes, and organize to achieve change on issues of importance to them. Foley and Edwards (1996, 38) write, “Civil society . . . has come to be seen as an essential ingredient in both democratization and the health of established democracies.” It is the purpose, potential, and role of this civil sphere, as Alexander (2006) calls it, that causes so much discussion among politicians, theorists, activists, and development practitioners who frequently use the concept to promote radically different programs, policies, and agendas, from the support of social movements critical of their governments to the withdrawal of support for government spending on social programming. To understand how the term has come to be used to justify a plethora of different agendas, its emergence as a concept must be traced.

The roots of civil society can be found in Aristotle’s writings. His “interpretation of the ancient Greek *polis* as the ‘association of associations,’ founded on bonds of friendship and religious loyalty to the homeland” was a precursor to Enlightenment and Industrial Age philosophers who began to use the term to theorize the role of the citizen and citizen groups in the emergence of different forms of government and economic systems (Hodgkinson and Foley 2003, ix). Enlightenment philosophers took this current of thought in the direction of perceiving civil society as protection against state incursion into the realm of individual rights and

freedoms (Edwards 2004, 7). During the industrial revolution, the emerging division of labor, the growing complexity of production processes, and a modern interpretation of justice led Adam Ferguson, Scottish political philosopher, and Thomas Paine, American revolutionary thinker, to write about the responsibility of citizens to keep their governments democratic. Yet there remained a contingent of theorists who worried that civil associations or factions could manipulate politics to their own ends. James Madison described the important role of government to keep factions and interest groups from determining what was best for the whole polity when he wrote to the people of New York State in 1787: “Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserve to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction” (Madison 2003, 70).

Karl Marx, on the other hand, proffered a different interpretation of civil society in which civil associations perpetuate unjust capitalist relations; he persuasively argued that the capitalist system depends on the support of the citizenry: “Where the political state has attained to its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life*, a double existence—celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the *political community*, where he regards himself as a *communal being*, and in *civil society* where he acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers” (Marx 2003, 103). In this critique of capitalism, Marx described civil society as the social organizations that sustain the status quo. Antonio Gramsci, Italian revolutionary and political thinker, recognized civil society’s role in perpetuating the status quo, but his work served to bring attention to the civil society’s revolutionary potential: “The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as state organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the ‘trenches’ and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position” (Gramsci 2000, 233). Thus civil society can be interpreted as a site for challenging and maintaining the status quo or, to use Gramscian terms, counterhegemonic and hegemonic action respectively (Hodgkinson and Foley 2003, xix).

The present-day interpretation of civil society as a sector of society that nurtures democratic conditions owes much of its inspiration to Alexis

de Tocqueville, who visited the United States in the early part of the nineteenth century and was impressed with its strong culture of voluntary associations and active citizenry (Hodgkinson and Foley 2003, xxi). De Tocqueville's enthusiastic endorsement of associational life described its contributions to a strong and enduring democracy. He wrote, "If men are to remain civilized or become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of condition is increased" (Salamon et al. 2004, 122).

The work of these philosophers and political theorists formed the basis for the two primary interpretations of civil society in usage today. From the writings of de Tocqueville a definition of civil society emerged that focused on the important contribution of citizen groups to democracy. This approach is often referred to as the *liberal approach* to understanding civil society and argues that democratic culture and habits emerge from participation and belonging to associations. "This approach puts special emphasis on the ability of associational life in general and the habits of association in particular to foster patterns of civility in the actions of citizens in a democratic polity" (Edwards and Foley 1996, 39). Often this approach is used to justify citizen groups and organizations assuming increased responsibilities to address inequalities or problems in society as seen in the United States in the wake of cuts to state spending and throughout the developing world in response to structural adjustment policies.

The second approach to civil society has its roots in the work of early American revolutionaries and in Gramscian thought as well. This *revolutionary approach* envisions civil society as separate from the state and able to challenge authoritarian regimes (Foley and Edwards 1996, 39). The purpose of civil society is to resist undemocratic authoritarian regimes, demand fulfillment of state promises, and hold the government accountable to its promises. This interpretation represents much of the action of leftist activists and the organizations and movements in which they participate. "Civil society in this sense means 'people power' writ large," argues Edwards, because "the role of NGOs and social movements in mobilizing opposition to authoritarian rule and supporting progress towards multi-party elections has been well documented in Africa, eastern Europe and Latin America" (2004, 15).

Consideration of both the liberal and the revolutionary approaches are necessary to understanding the roles assigned to civil society organizations, especially in Latin America, by governments, other development stakeholders, and social movements. Both approaches can lead to changes being made in government by civil society through the use of their power or civil forces, though in the case of the liberal approach change means strengthening democratic elements in the government, whereas within the revolutionary approach change can mean complete social transformation and the overthrow of the unjust, authoritarian state. Both approaches can use uncivil forces, leading to the use of power in negative and antidemocratic ways. When death squads and paramilitary groups formed in El Salvador during the 1980s to protect the interests of large landowners or state interests, they violated principles of justice and democracy. Even de Tocqueville warned against the impact that uncivil civil society groups could achieve under certain circumstances. He “worry[ed] [that] dissidents can league together to ‘form something like a separate nation within the nation and a government within the government’” (Foley and Edwards 1996, 45). In the case of the revolutionary potential of the civil society, when a radical political organization from the left takes up arms, it chooses an uncivil path, using violence to promote its agenda. This raises a difficult question about situations when these forces are used for ends that are not democratic. “If civil society is a beachhead secure enough to be of use in thwarting tyrannical regimes, what prevents it from being used to undermine democratic governments” (or values) (Foley and Edwards 1996, 46)? This final issue is crucial to recovering the use of the term. Interpretations of civil society that fail to acknowledge its more unsavory, violent, or “uncivil” elements or that ignore authoritarian leadership styles within civil society groups oversimplify the relations and complexity of civil society (McIlwaine 1998a, 417). This sphere is made up of different kinds of organizations and associations; it can move in uncivil directions, and this risk means that civil society organizations must continually reflect on their accountability, transparency, and political and ideological agendas.

Both the liberal and revolutionary approaches to understanding the role of civil society stress how civil society is distinct from the state (and the business sector and family), thereby missing a key aspect of the

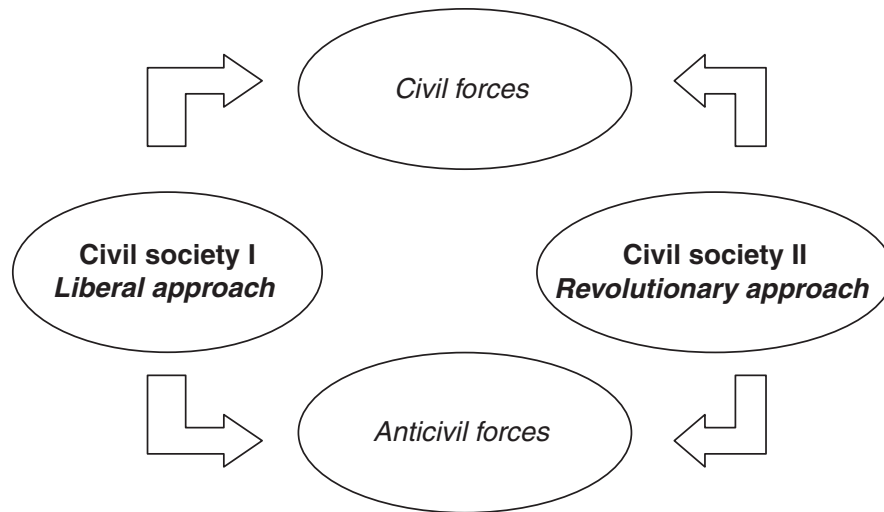


FIGURE 1 Civil Society Approaches

interconnections between the sectors that comprise society because ultimately the lines are not clear between any of the spheres. As McIlwaine (1998b, 655) explains, “the separation of the state and civil society is untenable,” in grand part because many states throughout Latin America provide the majority of the funding for local organizations, raising the question, How independent are these organizations from the state if their budgets depend on state funding? There is also the issue of political parties. Are they considered part of civil society or part of the state, especially considering the pervasiveness of clientelistic relationships between political parties and the electorate in Latin America? Though many civil society organizations are perceived as social watch organizations monitoring the state and even the business sector, they are also often involved in supporting, promoting, and creating micro and small enterprises through micro-credit funds, technical assistance, and consulting for small businesses. Hence, the boundary between civil society activities and the business sector also hides overlapping areas of action. And finally, the assertion that civil society starts when the individual leaves the home has been challenged for over a hundred years by women’s movements around the globe. Yes, they demand equal pay for equal work; yes, they demand equal treatment in front of the law; but they also demand an end to domestic violence and a transformation of cultural norms that perpetuate a triple workday for women. These struggles of civil society movements have led to great changes within the family making their way into the domestic sphere.

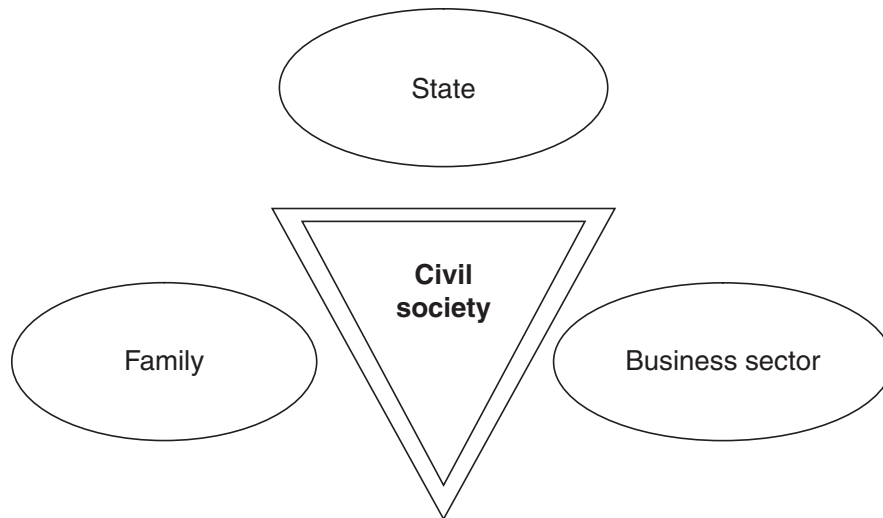


FIGURE 2 Civil Society and Other Sectors of Society

Because it is known for its civil commitment and volunteerism, many practitioners and policy makers idealize civil society organizations and movements as organizations comprised of altruistic citizens incapable of deception, corruption, or authoritarian practices. “With roots very often in religious and moral teachings, [civil society] has acquired a saintly self-perception and persona, and a certain romanticism now surrounds its presumed ability to change people’s lives” (Salamon et al. 2004, 119). Just because civil society organizations are committed to civil ends, these organizations should not be reified as the solution to all ills or as paragons of organizational virtue. McIlwaine also cautions against romanticizing these human organizations, because they are not democratic or participatory simply because they are aligned with a noble cause (1998b, 656). The usefulness of the concept of civil society, as well as the recognition of the role of civil society, depends on the inclusion, transparency, and accountability of civil society organizations. The credibility of civil society depends on “emerg[ing] from below, and involv[ing] negotiations among conflicting groups, both within themselves, and with the state and elites . . . Furthermore, discussions and interpretations of civil society should also recognize internal divisions along lines of gender, race, and ethnicity” (McIlwaine 1998a, 419).

For the purpose of this book, I define “civil society” as the organizations outside of direct state control that attempt—locally, nationally, or globally—to make their communities more responsive to the needs

of their members. “It is the we-ness of a national, regional, or international community, the feeling of connectedness to ‘every member’ of that community, that transcends particular commitments, narrow loyalties and sectional interests. Only this kind of solidarity can provide a thread . . . that unites individuals dispersed by class, religion, ethnicity, or race,” and gender, I would add (Alexander 2006, 43). This definition includes a wide range of organizations, some of which are described by the women leaders I interviewed, many of whom direct NGOs, formal organizations legally recognized by their governments as not-for-profit organizations. Some women mentioned CSOs, such as community associations and neighborhood committees. Others spoke of social movements. A few of the women considered civil society a preserver of democratic values of the liberal approach, while others identified with the revolutionary approach. Often there is overlap between the two approaches, as pro-democratic actions can be interpreted as revolutionary depending on the historical, political, and economic context and juncture of events.

Discussing the growth of NGOs around the globe, Salamon writes, “the upshot is a global third sector: a massive array of self-governing private organizations, not dedicated to distributing profits to shareholders or directors, pursuing public purposes outside the formal apparatus of the state” (Salamon et al. 2004, 109). However, as much as these organizations are not for-profit businesses or state-run institutions, this sphere obviously does not stand alone; there are areas of overlap between it and other spheres. Given the interconnections, civil society is one of many actors in a complex, globalized world. Civil society organizations, as pure as their intentions may be, can choose to align themselves with uncivil forces and carry out actions that do not forward a democratic set of values or actions. Civil society organizations can demand, act, and work for a strong democratic state, but it is not coterminous with democracy. Edwards (2004, 110) articulates why civil society remains so useful even with its contradictions: “whatever its shortcomings in theory, civil society does offer both a touchstone for social movements and a practical framework for organizing resistance and alternative solutions to social, economic and political problems.”

### *Leadership*

A leader is someone who has “the ability to get things done,” using status and influence to play a catalytic role motivating others to action (Freeman, Bourque, and Shelton 2001, 10). Sumru Erkut, in her analysis of sixty interviews with women leaders from different sectors of U.S. society—civil society, arts and culture, business, and government—offered a similar definition: “Leadership can be defined as persuading other people to set aside, if only for a period of time, their individual concerns and to pursue a common goal that is important for the responsibilities and welfare of a group” (2001, 2). The concept of followers is decisive to the definition of what it means to be a leader. Gary Wills, in his biographical descriptions of different types of leaders, reminds us that “the leader does not just vaguely affect others. He or she takes others toward the object of their joint quest” (1994, 19). Many theorists agree about how important it is that the leader belong to the group he or she is leading. In the case of many of the women interviewed for this book, they emerge as community leaders or occupy leadership positions within NGOs because they represent their communities, have spent years participating in social movements, or are part of “a ‘critical mass’” fighting for a particular goal (Brasileiro 1996, 11).

Many of the women interviewed agree that gender affects leadership because they see different types of leadership styles, specifically feminine and masculine ones; but often women are able to draw upon all styles, whereas men are often sanctioned for using more feminine approaches. There are many ways for a leader to achieve her ends: she can be domineering, authoritative, empowering, and/or consensus-oriented. In civil society movements and organizations, leaders use a variety of approaches, but more democratic models are often pursued due to the social-movement orientation of many civil society organizations. Even though women use a wide range of leadership styles, life experience and gender roles affect how and when women lead. “The exercise of leadership involves power, a concept where research has suggested gender variation” (Freeman and Bourque 2001, 4), which is to say that how a person will use their power is informed by the gender of the user.

As mentioned, in most societies gender hierarchies and structures of subordination translate into men having more access to formal positions

of power than women. “Visible leadership still remains a primarily male domain” (Erkut and Winds 2001, 15). These structures inform conceptions about what it means to be a leader. Gender hierarchies in patriarchal societies inhibit women’s access to leadership and also inform the kinds of leaders they become if they are able to overcome the barriers to leadership. Often, commonly held understandings of what it means to be a leader are derived from stereotypes. Given the importance of avoiding the reproduction of sexist stereotypes about women and leadership, even by well intentioned researchers, it is of paramount importance to use participant observation and interviews to show the diversity and vibrancy of women’s leadership experiences (Martins Costa and Heisler Neves 1996, 57).

The topic of leadership has been troublesome for feminists because they have been wary of leadership either as a research topic or as a goal in and of itself because the concepts of leader and leadership (with notable exceptions) have historically been synonymous with the masculine (Vianello et al. 2000, 6). Freeman, Bourque, and Shelton (2001, 7) describing the intersection of leadership, power, and gender describe a similar phenomenon: “a leader . . . is assumed to be rational, decisive, objective, and strongly motivated to achieve, with a worldview that projects concern well beyond the confines of the domestic sphere . . . [which] still closely corresponds to our stereotyped images of men and the masculine.” The women interviewed for this book show that in some cases they do use what poet Audre Lorde refers to as “the Master’s tools”—attributes associated with masculine leadership styles—but they also draw on approaches to leadership gained from years of marginalization and struggle on behalf of themselves and their communities.

Another related and knotty issue for many feminists and women activists is their role vis-à-vis the state. If the concept of leadership—especially masculine approaches—generates ambivalence among feminists, then the same can be said about choosing to work from the state, either as elected officials or for state agencies. Since the state is often critiqued by feminists as a patriarchal and sexist set of institutions, working for the state is synonymous with cooptation and selling out. Many of the facets of this debate are revealed in the ethnographic chapters on Chile and El Salvador. In Chile autonomous feminists and other activists are critical of the

National Service for Women (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer—SERNAM), the state agency for women, calling the staff *femocrats* and *institucionalizadas* (Alvarez et al. 2003, 555; Richards 2004), yet many feminists have chosen to work there out of a desire to effect change from within and channel resources to areas of need. In El Salvador, a similar polemic has surfaced over the years regarding the many civil society women activists who have chosen to participate in local and national politics. I argue that the debate about whether or not to participate in politics and state agencies is useful as long as it encourages a critical examination of the motivations, agendas, and real possibilities of change from within. Eloquently reminding us that the litmus test should be addressing the very real inequalities and high levels of violence women face daily, Sharon Capeling-Alakija (1994) of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) said, “We cannot escape the conclusion that in many parts of the world, even as we speak, women are being ‘disappeared’ simply because they are women. And those who survive cannot participate fully in development efforts, or benefit from those efforts, as long as they are forced to live with the reality or the threat of violence. . . . But we cannot turn away from these realities. We cannot allow ourselves to be paralyzed by their magnitude. As the poet Audre Lorde said: ‘We must never close our eyes to the terror.’” If the debate about participation stymies new approaches, action, or opportunities for women to serve women and address inequalities, then the debate—and its proponents—has become limiting in my view. As the Salvadoran women I interviewed who have chosen to participate in politics indicate, they face institutionalized sexism when working from within the state, but they also describe the results they achieved from their elected posts and the knowledge they have gained from the experience.

The late Dame Nita Barrow, preeminent woman leader from the Caribbean, had a clear understanding of male leadership, its pitfalls, and the potential for social change by women leaders. Because women are socialized differently than men and seldom offered traditional access to leadership, they often develop different styles of leadership. Dame Barrow compared male and female power, calling on women to imagine more inclusive approaches rather than the power-by-domination approach: “The power women generate is different from the popular concepts of what constitutes power from the masculine point of view . . . Do not let us

hide behind supposed powerlessness—power by domination is not the only power” (Drayton 2001, 22). Even though gender ideologies and hierarchies often contribute to women’s subordination, women receive culturally encoded messages about the importance of caretaking, network building, and relational work that are all extremely useful skills in leadership. Sumru Erkut, in her pioneering research with women leaders in the United States, addressed the relational qualities of women leaders: “women have a much stronger sense of connectedness to others and of being part of the whole. [They] are more gratified by leadership that involves creating a shared purpose, with the leader being part of the whole” (2001, 34). Many women bring certain characteristics to leadership such as inclusiveness, compassion, and sensitivity to others (Wilson 2004, 6). This kind of research corroborates the hypothesis that women can develop horizontal and interconnected forms of leadership through their experience of marginality as members of societies raised to care for others.

Gender is not the only vector that differentiates people, affects how they will lead, and informs their access to positions of leadership; race, ethnicity, class, political identity and militancy, and cultural background also affect access to positions of power. “It seems that hierarchies based on age, class, and education, and *not* simply gender, are just as important in determining the nature of leadership” (Datta and McIlwaine 2000, 42). Obviously a number of factors contribute to help a woman develop and deploy leadership qualities for a particular cause. This is why the study of civil society women leaders in Latin America reveals new insights about the different factors (gender roles, ethnicity, personal histories, social class, kin networks, access to education, and political networks) that facilitate or inhibit women’s access to leadership experiences and how they will lead. Experiences of injustice and marginalization affect how people lead; so, for those who experience multiple kinds of discrimination, such as women of color, low-income women, and women with disabilities, they may have an advantage in developing innovative or transformational leadership approaches. Women leaders face a challenging terrain: not only do they face structural barriers to their leadership because of gender, but in some cases they may choose a leadership style that promotes empowerment, includes the voiceless, and uses consensus-building models. This kind of a leadership model brings its own challenges, such as how to use a

leadership model that challenges many of the presuppositions and stereotypes reaffirmed by Western patriarchal, capitalist societies, especially ones that have experienced periods of authoritarian rule.

### *Civic Culture in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador*

Before applying concepts of gender and civil society leadership to the concrete experiences of women in the three countries under study, it is important to analyze the civic culture in each country by critically evaluating the impact of authoritarian rule and the roles such institutions as the military and the Catholic Church have played during these times. In order to understand the evolution of civil society organizations in Latin America, it is necessary to analyze the context in which they emerged, which is to say, “the historical heritages, the ‘rules of the game’ and the structure of opportunities” (Panfichi 1999, 1). All three countries share a set of political practices known as clientelism, a system in which political parties or state institutions provide citizens with goods or services with the understanding that they will vote along the lines of those providing the services. Much has been written on the topic of clientelism in Latin America (Auyero 2000; García-Guadilla and Pérez 2002; Sobrado-Chaves and Stoller 2002), and the definitions coincide describing how clientelistic relations are based on the idea of buying future votes and political support. “By *political clientelism* I mean the relations that are established between a *patron* who offers certain services and a *client* who in exchange for those services (or goods) permits the patron to govern and resolve collective issues without the client’s participation” (Sobrado-Chaves and Stoller 2002, 8). Though clientelistic practices are observable in each country, the political systems of each country developed along different lines. Each of these three countries began as a Spanish and Roman Catholic colony gaining its independence in the early 1800s, but Chile consolidated a series of stable yet contested democratic governments by 1925, enjoying “one of the most solid democracies in Latin America” until the military coup in 1973 (Schamis 1991, 201). Argentina and El Salvador, on the other hand, were subject to frequent periods of authoritarian rule, especially by the military, as well as *caudillos*, leadership by local strongmen.

In the 1970s Argentina and Chile experienced military coups leading to periods of brutal authoritarian rule by the military in which civil society

organizations were harshly repressed. These coups and their subsequent authoritarian regimes had “significant gendered components” exemplified by the emphasis placed on traditional feminine roles (read: traditional family values) and the harsh sanctions administered to women who violated them (Htun 2003, 19). In Argentina the military coup of March 24, 1976, started a period now referred to as the “dirty war,” or *dictadura* (dictatorship), which lasted until 1983 with the restoration of democracy. During this time, the Argentine army and other state security forces carried out a campaign of terror on the civilian population leading to the disappearance of 30,000 Argentines, including those illegally detained, tortured, and killed, as well as the exile of many more (Feitlowitz 1998, ix). In Chile the military coup of September 11, 1973, overthrew the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende and installed General Augusto Pinochet in power. This dictatorship lasted until 1990 with the democratic election of President Patricio Aylwin. Though the repression was the harshest in the first couple of months just after the coup, 28,000 people in total were illegally detained, 94 percent of whom were tortured while detained, and roughly 2,700 people were murdered by security forces (Ministerio del Interior 1991, 2004).<sup>5</sup> In El Salvador, the lack of democratic spaces through the sixties, combined with unmet expectations for land reform and respect for basic rights, contributed to increasing tensions between the government and civilian organizing. In response to state repression and widespread citizen protest, an armed revolutionary movement comprised of different groups under the umbrella organization Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) was formed and became active across the country. From the escalation of the conflict in 1980 to the signing of the Peace Accords between the government and the FMLN in 1992, 70,000 Salvadorans were killed—an estimated 1 out of every 100—most of them by government security forces (Stephen 1997, 30).

In each of the three countries, the Catholic Church has played a significant yet often contradictory role. From the early 1960s, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) encouraged the Church to reach out to impoverished and marginalized sectors of the population; this new framing of the role of the poor led to the dissolution of some of the historical ties between the Church and elites as bishops, priests, nuns, and lay people sought a new relationship with the poor and marginalized of

society. No longer the objects of pity or charity, the poor were the privileged children of God and *solidarity* with them—going to live in marginalized communities, sharing their day-to-day situations, and working shoulder to shoulder with them to address the problems they faced—was the path to a deeper relationship with God and humanity. These progressive currents within the Catholic Church led to the emergence of a movement of Church officials and lay people throughout Latin America who worked closely with the marginalized sectors of parishes, organized as Christian Base Communities or Ecclesiastical Base Communities. Because lay women have been so active in their parishes historically, this movement promoted the organization and empowerment of women as citizens (Waylen 1994, 338), providing them with leadership and organizing skills and experience. This revolutionary interpretation of the teachings of Jesus became known as liberation theology based on a new reading of the Bible: “Since liberation theologians argued that the Bible should be read as a living text that spoke to the need to work for social justice in this world, the Church actively organized social activists in general and women in particular” (Kampwirth 2004, xi). Throughout South America and Central America, “the role of the Catholic Church has been essential in the formation and consolidation of civil society organizations” (Panfichi 1999, 8), yet fossilized positions on women’s roles and their reproductive and sexual rights has made the Church “an inconsistent ally” (Friedman, forthcoming) for women’s movements.

Nonetheless, many people—lay men and women, nuns, priests, and even bishops—were targeted by security forces because of their commitment to the empowerment of the poor. These progressive theological currents greatly influenced the Catholic Church hierarchy in El Salvador and Chile but less so in Argentina. In fact, in Argentina the Church hierarchy actively supported the dirty war, but in the case of El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero and numerous priests, nuns, and laypeople were assassinated by government forces for their solidarity with the poor and marginalized (Feitlowitz 1998, 217–223). In Chile the Catholic Church protected civil society leaders and their organizations. “Under the Pinochet regime, the Church . . . sheltered dissidents, provided services to the poor, and then served as a powerbroker in the democratic transition” (Htun 2003, 102).

There were common elements in the authoritarian regimes of Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador, such as state terrorism against nonmilitary groups seen as subversives, extensive use of the illegal tools of torture and disappearance by state security forces (army, police, national guard, and navy), nationwide publicity campaigns against government critics, and the implementation of conservative economic plans in accordance with U.S. and U.K. policies at the time.<sup>6</sup> Jaquette describes the authoritarian regimes of Latin America as noteworthy in how the military governments “took to [their] self-assigned task of restructuring society and for the terrorist tactics used in pursuing . . . opponents, *real and imagined*, on the Left” (1994, 1; emphasis mine). In analyzing these histories, it cannot be forgotten that these tactics were indeed used to eradicate the actual or perceived threat of armed guerrilla groups, but also to install fear throughout society about the price to be paid for civil society organizing: disappearance and torture.

There were important differences between the three countries that deserve to be highlighted. The Salvadoran military apparatus was never able to eradicate the FMLN even with \$1 million a day in military aid from the United States during the 1980s. In Argentina incipient armed revolutionary groups were eliminated soon after the coup; this occurrence did not deter the armed forces from continuing their campaign of terror against civilians they perceived as subversive. Though the emergence of armed revolutionary groups was small in Argentina and minimal in Chile, the conflict became so widespread in El Salvador that the Salvadoran security forces were never able to contain the FMLN and ultimately were forced to meet them at the negotiating table.

In the case of Argentina, the Argentine Peronist party—a populist movement under the leadership of General Juan Perón and María Eva “Evita” Duarte de Perón, his charismatic wife—came to power in the 1940s, installing a government whose practices were fraught with clientelism and repressive tactics against critics that led to the military coup of 1955, which forced Perón into exile. However, upon his short-lived—both figuratively and literally—return in 1974, neither he nor his supporters were able to respond effectively to political and economic crisis. The military took advantage of a lack of leadership within the governing Peronist party after Perón’s death, staging a coup in 1976 and then instituting economic,

social, and political changes while systematically denying rights and actively repressing any dissent.

Chile, on the other hand, did not have such a harsh history of authoritarian regimes. A commitment to democratic practices and governments—testament to effective civil society organizing—marked its history since 1925. From the early decades of the twentieth century, Chile had a vital range of political parties and gradually incorporated basic social and economic rights into state actions, including education, health care, and workers' compensation. This culminated in the 1970 elections in which socialist Salvador Allende, representing a coalition of political parties, won the elections and became president. “[Chile’s] open system had even allowed something that would have been routine in western Europe but was unique to Latin America: a socialist coalition intent on implementing structural transformations by means of democratic procedures came to power in 1970” (Schamis 1991, 201).

In each of these countries, women in civil society organizations played a key role in ending authoritarian rule and achieving a return to democratization. In Argentina women “played a central role in bringing about the transition to a democracy” (Feijoó 1994, 109). This was particularly evident in the human rights organizing of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and other organizations of the relatives of the disappeared demanding the return of their children and other relatives who had been disappeared by government forces. In Chile women across the class spectrum were active in supporting *and* protesting the Allende government; their mobilization both for and against the regime speaks to the extent of Chilean women’s activism.<sup>7</sup> During the dictatorship, the women’s movement, *pobladores* activists from marginalized urban communities, and the indigenous movement played major roles in achieving the return to democracy (Richards 2004). And in El Salvador, the women’s movement and other women leaders from civil society organizations were staunch supporters of the peace process. Women even played a significant role in the FMLN guerrilla forces, making up 30 percent of combatants and support units. “Women were present in both the popular and armed struggle. Within the context of the popular movement . . . women organizing in their feminine capacity as teachers, mothers, and refugees had the potential to achieve certain fundamental alliances with the population that men were not as likely to foster” (Shayne 2004, 43).

There is a current within the social sciences that argues authoritarian regimes create an authoritarian citizenry; this claim has been refuted by two different strands of research in Latin America. One strand of research, led by social scientists such as anthropologist James Scott (1985) and others (Binford 1998, 1999; Molyneux 1986; Roseberry 1994), has depicted how communities manifest a *culture of resistance* in which they continue to struggle for democratic spaces in microways even in very repressive times. The other strand of research carried out by sociologists and political scientists (Booth and Seligson 1984; Tiano 1986) reexamined and adjusted some of the quantitative indicators used to measure authoritarian culture and showed how citizens remain committed, maybe even more so, to democratic values, beliefs, practices, and institutions during periods of authoritarian rule. I find it relevant, nonetheless, to distinguish between the existence of a democratic culture even under authoritarian regimes and the impact of authoritarian regimes on the population. All the women interviewed for this book spoke to how their lives were affected, transformed, or altered irrevocably by living under periods of authoritarian repression. Repressive regimes leave scars on their citizenries that can take years—even generations—to overcome. While most citizens remain committed to democratic practices and institutions—even under or after authoritarian regimes, they know why democracy is important. Many continue to have nightmares or flashbacks about traumatic or frightening experiences that occurred during the repression, and they still catch themselves looking over their shoulders to see if they are being followed.

In the case of these three countries, the women interviewed continue to feel a certain distrust of government in general and state institutions, policies, and political parties in particular. Many Argentineans question the motives of their political parties and institutions, as seen by the growth of civil society organizations and frequent protests against the government in the face of scandal, corruption, and economic crisis. Describing Chile after the return to democracy, Patricia Chuchryk cogently observed that “it would be difficult to overestimate the social, economic, cultural, and psychological destruction wrought by more than sixteen years of military rule” (1994, 67). In Chile, the major decisions about political and economic development still remain in the hands of a few and are seldom negotiable. Gonzalo de la Maza summarizes this situation: “The

democratization reached so far . . . since 1990 has not modified the socio-economic framework inherited from the dictatorship; it has not recovered the regulatory role of the state in key areas; it has not achieved citizen participation; nor has it diminished the existing power inequalities” (2003, 2). In El Salvador, it is still to be seen if the newly elected, FMLN president Mauricio Funes will be able to transform the widely held perception that impunity continues to reign. For the time being, levels of violence supersede violence during the civil war period. El Salvador remains one of the most violent countries in Latin America; it has the highest per capita homicide rate in Latin America (CDHES 2005b) and police and the justice system are seldom able to bring perpetrators to justice.

Since the periods of authoritarian rule, all three countries have experienced unprecedented growth for civil society organizations. In Argentina, the human rights organizations that emerged before and during the dirty war—the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo and the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS)—continue their human rights monitoring and lobbying, but they have been joined by a new generation of human rights organizations—Citizen Power (Poder Ciudadano), Citizen Participation (Participación Ciudadana), Conscience (Conciencia), the National Coordinator against Police and Institutional Repression (CORREPI), and Citizens in Action (Ciudadanos en Accion)—working to address government corruption, promote citizen participation, and expand the notion of social, economic, and political citizenship (Peruzzotti 2002). These new actors in the human rights arena are the result of “both human rights and women’s rights organizations expand[ing] the new Latin American discourse of rights and citizenship” (Jaquette 1994, 4).

In Chile certain sectors of civil society have grown stronger while others find themselves struggling for limited resources. The professional associations of teachers and physicians and the environmental movement are “the politically most important actors” (Panfichi 1999, 19). But it is the Mapuche movement—composed of indigenous activists representing about 10 percent of the population of Chile—that continues to challenge the Chilean state on issues of sovereignty, land rights, and indigenous rights. De la Maza argues that the Mapuche movement today is more internally organized and responsive to its members, rather than responding to outside political interests or pressures, as has happened in the past

(2003, 20). The women's movement is looking for a new direction since their pivotal role in achieving a return to democracy. Marcela Rios Tobar corroborates this: "there is consensus in recognizing that the public presence of the women's movement—including feminist organizations—has gradually dwindled as a political force" since the return to democracy (n.d., 3).

In El Salvador a vital civil society continued to grow after the signing of the Peace Accords in January 1992. During the years directly following the signing of the Peace Accords—a period called the Reconstruction—international aid dollars flowed into the country for reconstruction projects, channeled through state agencies, municipalities, and NGOs. However, by the end of the twentieth century these funds diminished and were eventually redirected to other war-torn and needy parts of the world, and many local organizations were forced to close for lack of funding. Organizations that were able to diversify funding sources, generate some of their own income, and implement transparency and accountability practices are the ones that have survived, including a diverse range of women's organizations, human rights organizations, local development organizations, and research think tanks.

### **Research Methods and Considerations**

Stereotypes and commonly held definitions of what it means to be a leader are informed by structural inequalities that do not preference women, people of color, or those from marginalized backgrounds. The first challenge that confronts the social scientist interested in observing and analyzing leaders and their styles of leadership is the fact that often they themselves suffer from stereotypes about leadership that hinder recognizing different kinds of leadership in action. If Dame Barrow is correct that women do not have to act like men to be leaders, what kinds of leaders are they? Freeman and Bourque note that "a tradition of power as a male preserve has obscured our understanding of women and power" (2001, 11). This is further complicated by the impact of Western, masculinist models of leadership that entail one person heading a group as the spokesperson or leader.

Anthropologist Karen Brodtkin Sacks corroborates how easily even feminist researchers get caught using stereotypical definitions of leadership that affect observing women's leadership, let alone analyzing it or theorizing about it or promoting it. Reflecting on her fieldwork with women hospital workers and their attempt to organize a union at Duke University, Sacks could not understand why the women did not take more proactive leadership roles. Ultimately she saw that she had missed seeing women's activism and leadership because of her own stereotypes about leadership. She writes, "As I reexamined the data from my research to try to answer that question, I came to believe that the notion of leadership I had inadvertently promoted was a class-, gender-, and perhaps race-biased one" (1988b, 79). Field notes, interview transcripts, and double-checking conclusions with research participants become very important sources for reexamining what one has been observing, as the researcher must unlearn her own stereotypes of what it means to be a leader. Vigilant attention must remain constant during fieldwork, but also while writing up field notes, transcribing interviews, and analyzing data.

However, the challenge of recognizing women's leadership should not deter research. No matter the leadership model, women are leading. Especially in Chile, Argentina, and El Salvador, women are among the primary catalysts for social change and proponents of gender equity and social justice given their roles in civil society organizations. They are developing new tools, strategies, and visions of transformation. I concur with Dame Barrow: "We need to understand and theorize the processes women use to alter conventional practices, subvert barriers to women's participation, and force societal changes that produce benefits for women as well as a more just society" (Barriteau and Copley 2001, 7).

### ***Feminist Social Science Methodologies and Dilemmas***

Many articulations of feminist methodologies and feminist dilemmas in research proceed from the commitment of the researcher to accompany and support processes of transformations of relations of inequality and of consciousness-raising for the researched (see Bowles and Duelli Klein 1983; Fonow and Cook 1991; Enslin 1990; Geiger 1990; Harding 1987; Reinhartz 1992; Wolf 1992, 1996). The danger here, of course, is the assumption that

the researcher is already empowered herself (which is often not the case) or that the researcher knows the best path to consciousness-raising for the researched (which is often not the case either). Diane Wolf distinguishes between “consciousness raising that is instigated exogenously by a well meaning outsider” and “when local women initiate the process and learn from each other’s experiences” (1996, 26).<sup>8</sup> Though this premise forces the researcher to clarify the power differential between herself and the researched along with her own positionality vis-à-vis the women she is researching, I argue that the question of the power differential between the researcher and research participants—often portrayed as the dichotomy of researcher empowered, researched unempowered—is seldom clear-cut. Furthermore, this dichotomy only serves to perpetuate stereotypes of women from developing countries as unempowered research *objects* as opposed to *subjects or actors or participants*. I propose a more nuanced interpretation in which the power relations between the researched and researcher are complex, many layered, and charged with historical and political tensions. Though many feminist social scientists address the issues of positionality (see Fine 1994; Geiger 1990; John 1989; Williams 1996; Wolf 1992, 1996), the challenge is to deepen the reflection of the complexity and interrelation of positionalities and accountability. Along this vein, Kirin Narayan convincingly recommends that “we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” (1993, 671).

In my case, I was born in the United States to a couple of Irish and English descent. My parents divorced when I was ten, and I was raised by a single, working mother. I attended a Jesuit liberal arts college, Seattle University, where I first studied Latin America through a theology course on liberation theology. I have been living and working in Latin America or working on Latin American-related issues from the United States for over twenty years; this has involved two and a half years working as a human rights observer in Nicaragua in 1986–1988, four years monitoring human rights in El Salvador and working with women’s organizations there in 1989–1993, graduate school with frequent periods in Central America for fieldwork in 1993–1999, and twelve years with AVINA, a Latin American NGO with offices throughout the region supporting civil society and business sector leadership for sustainable development. My role at AVINA was

not programmatic in the traditional sense; rather I led the foundation's knowledge management area promoting knowledge transfer between AVINA staff and partners as well as among partners.

Obviously, my gender, race, nationality, educational background, and work with a Latin American foundation inform how the women I interviewed for this book perceive me when we meet and vice versa. Yes, the risk exists that the women interviewed might be prejudiced or intimidated by me in some way because of these factors, and, yes, these factors also combine to inform how I look at the world. Yet, I believe that people can connect and share their stories honestly with openness, trust, and compassion from each side. I never ask a question I am not willing to answer myself, and I frequently tell parts of my own story to put women at ease in the interview setting. I witnessed extensive domestic violence as a child, and as an adult I have witnessed the disastrous and long-term effects of war and authoritarianism on civilian populations and my own family members. Nonetheless, there are always multiple interpretations of a given reality, and there is always the risk that I have not fully grasped the lives and actions I have been observing. This is why developing long-term relationships with research participants over extended stays is so vital to the research endeavor. As a feminist researcher, I approach the interview setting and the opportunity for participant observation with as much transparency and honesty as possible in an attempt to create a mutually beneficial atmosphere in which participants share from their experiences. The stories these women leaders shared with me come from connections that extend beyond our individual experiences and speak to the challenges and lessons these women have learned in their struggles. In the research endeavor, sometimes the researcher and researched are able to find a place of mutual trust and a conversation emerges whose text can serve to elucidate complex fields of action. "In particular, oral testimony enables us to approach the issue of agency and subjectivity in history" (James 2000, 124).

### ***Research Methodology***

In all three countries I carried out numerous interviews with civil society actors, experts, and researchers. I formally interviewed and tape-recorded fifteen to twenty women leaders from each country, choosing in-depth interviews with a smaller sample rather than a more ample but superficial

survey. I agree with anthropologist Lynn Stephen's assertion that "by concentrating on a smaller number of in depth exchanges, I am better able to translate the meaning and depth of women's varied experiences onto the page" (1997, 5). I used a snowball sampling technique to identify women leaders to interview, meaning that I gathered recommendations from contacts in each country and from initial interviews with civil society leaders and experts. This participant-driven sampling technique was necessary given the lack of information about the population under study, what is called a "hidden population" (Heckathorn 1997). Few quantitative studies exist about civil society in general for the countries under study, much less quantitative information about women leaders in the sector. The risk of snowball samples is that the sample is biased or limited to the network of the researcher; for this reason, I attempted to get my recommendations from a variety of sources and networks.

Interviews often lasted over two hours and were tape-recorded in the women's homes and offices and then transcribed in their entirety. (See the appendix for a list of the organizations of the women interviewed.) Common elements explored in the interviews with women leaders included the following:

1. Opinion, interpretation, and usage of the term "leader"
2. Evolution and description of leadership experiences together with current work, organizational form of work (NGO, association, social movement), and achievements
3. Views on teamwork, collaborators, and followers
4. Views on the difference between being a manager and being a leader
5. Factors that have facilitated the development of leadership skills
6. Views on differences between women (emphasis on class, political activism, and ethnicity)
7. Challenges or difficulties of being a woman and a leader

Interviewees revised their transcribed interviews and edited them as they saw fit. Letting them decide what parts of their story to share and whether or not to appear with their own names was particularly important given the history of repression in the three countries. Additionally, I facilitated focus groups in each country with the interviewees to get their input on the conclusions from my analysis of their interview texts.

Though I always asked the women leaders the same basic set of questions, I used the semistructured interview format so that I could include additional questions depending on the context and particular experience of the interviewee. For this reason, each of the ethnographic chapters focuses on diverse features of women's leadership experiences. In Chile multiple yet unrelated initial interviews with civil society experts urged me to focus on Mapuche leaders given their exceptional contributions; so a major feature of the Chilean chapter is about gender and ethnicity. In El Salvador the contacts I have developed over the past twenty years insisted I unpack the phenomenon of women civil society leaders and their participation in local and national elected positions. Argentine interviews pointed me in the direction of investigating the intersection of gender and class, and so the research and analysis focused on these issues.

I carried out fieldwork and bibliographic research in each country, assuring that local research and publications about women and civil society organizing informed the analysis of the women's stories. During 2006 and 2007 I lived in southern Argentina, near the Chilean border, for fourteen months, which greatly facilitated the research process in each of these two countries. The Salvadoran part of the research was originally carried out during research and fieldwork stints during 1990–1993, 1994, 1996–1997, as well as visits every year during 2006–2009.

## Overview

From the emergence of the first charity organizations in Chile and Argentina in the 1800s to the indigenous and workers unions in El Salvador in the early 1900s, chapter 2 traces how women have led civil society organizations into the late twentieth century. Extensive excerpts from women leaders describe the impact of these events on their lives and their civil society commitments.

Chapter 3 weaves together women leaders' stories of how CSOs and leadership opportunities for women have flourished since Argentina's return to democracy in 1983. Many CSOs reopened their doors after the repression and many new organizations were founded. In the mid-1980s organizations based in the capital city of Buenos Aires began to reach out

to marginalized communities, avoiding paternalistic approaches in an attempt to learn from and work more effectively with communities. Women leaders in working-class and marginalized communities were galvanized into action during the economic crises of the late 1990s and the early part of the twenty-first century, building partnerships with other organizations, demanding a response from state agencies, and working together for the survival of their families.

Chapter 4 describes how Mapuche women leaders in Chile are building effective and financially viable NGOs that challenge the class and ethnic barriers that keep rural, poor, or indigenous women relegated to the margins of Chilean society. Their leadership styles draw on indigenous leadership qualities and their cultural authority as respected women in their communities, generating new leadership models for all Chilean women. Though conservative gender stereotypes are particularly entrenched in Chile, the Mapuche women are pressuring state agencies to focus on women's interests and indigenous people's demands. The achievements of these leaders is an invigorating contribution to the women's movement in particular and civil society in general.

In chapter 5 I discuss how the Salvadoran civil war of the 1980s was a class leveler for women that facilitated leadership experiences for working-class and farming women and provided women from more privileged backgrounds the chance to understand the plight of marginalized sectors of society. When the peace accords were signed in January 1992, the country was flooded with international funding for CSOs, creating additional opportunities for women's leadership growth. Women also took the challenge to run for elected offices, increasing their participation in local and national government. These funds eventually evaporated, and financially strapped CSOs were left to cope with a series of monumental societal problems such as increased violence, inflation, unemployment, and environmental degradation in the wake of the war and state spending cuts for social issues. These conditions have led to a number of successful (and sustainable) CSO-community partnerships in which women's empowerment and local development needs are attended to in an integrated fashion.

Chapter 6 looks for common threads facilitating a regionwide analysis by exploring the trends in women's civil society leadership experiences in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador and comparing these experiences with

those of women in other Latin American countries. Lessons learned from initial collaborations and cross-class projects between women leaders indicate a growing tendency toward cooperation, which may advance these leaders' long-term goals. This chapter proposes policy suggestions for international organizations and national CSOs to recognize and support the important role women play in these organizations' leadership and activities.