Does State Feminism Contribute to State Retrenchment in the Field of Women’s Rights?

The Case of Chile since the Return of Democracy.

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State feminism has been a strategy adopted by the Chilean feminist NGOs since the return of democracy in 1990. With the support of international cooperation funds, part of women’s movement turn to NGOs in the mid ‘80s. This trend to the institutionalization of feminism was confirmed in 1991, with the creation of a women’s policy agency – the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer. Several feminists integrated the formal political sphere and a equal opportunities public policy were drafted. From the Chilean case, it seems that there is a trend among feminist NGOs to be committed in a partnership with the State. During the ‘90s, feminist NGOs shift from advocacy to “third sector servicing” or, more precisely, to a “non governmental public sector” in charge of women’s rights. Most of them face difficulties for their financial survival. Indeed, with the democratization of the Chilean State, the international funds were reduced and were not replaced by national public grants. Feminist NGOs are then supplying services to women and State, which allows equal opportunities institutions to disengage from their duty of guaranteeing the citizenship of women. At the same time, « social responsibility » funds of private companies seem to be the only solution for many NGOs.

Confronting State feminism as a theoretical concept framed from the democratic and advanced industrialized States to the political practice in the Chilean context forces us to ask whether it could “travel” from one context to another or whether we should rather adjust it to be operational. My starting intuition, confirmed by the analysis of ground in Chile, is that the (potential) feminist action of the State is not only the fact of women’s policy agency nor their interaction with feminist associations. The part played by “isolated” feminists present in the political parties, by non-feminist male or female allies within the executive and the CNGOress but also by some personalities from the equal opportunities agency, invites us to widen the horizon of State feminism beyond the women’s political agencies and the feminist movements.

My starting question is not to ask whether the Chilean women’s policy agency is helping for a better (substantive) political representation of women. I would rather map the (potential) distribution of political representation “responsabilities”, between several actors: the

1 My empirical data’s were gathered during my fieldwork in Chile: interviews with Chilean feminist militants, “femocrats” and political party’s members, realized in 2003 and 2005 for my PhD project on State feminism and the Political Representation of women in Chile, and active observation of the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer in 2006, as cooperant for the French Community of Belgium (with workshops, reunions and documents reading).
feminist/women’s movement and the NGOs, but also the political parties, the women’s policy agency, the State, the international organisms and the market. I could assess whether the institutionalization of feminism has indeed achieved a better substantive representation for women or if, on the contrary, it has been serving as a wave on which liberalization has surfed to carry out State reconfiguration towards less public interventions in the field of equal opportunities. I will demonstrate how Chilean feminist NGOs are caught into a trap, acting altogether towards a better substantive representation of women and towards a State reconfiguration that is helping the latter to disengage from its responsibility towards women. By doing so, part of the feminist NGOs turn to be a “non governmental public sector” financed by private companies.

The Political Representation of Women

In 1963 Hanna Pitkin proposed an accurate meaning of the concept of representation, stressing on four different approaches or dimensions: the formalistic approaches (which pay attention to authorization and accountability), the “standing for” approaches (that is the descriptive and the symbolic dimensions of representation) and the “acting for” approaches (which refer to the substance of the activity itself). Applying this frame to the political sphere, she defined the political representation in those terms:

[...] representing here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. The representative must act independently [...] The represented must also be (conceived as) capable of independent action and judgement, not merely being taken care of. [...] The representative must act in such a way that there is no conflict, or if it occurs an explanation is called for (Pitkin 1972: 209-210).

Nevertheless, in a certain way, Pitkin’s meaning of political representation does not help to consider it as a process of politization of stakes which goes beyond the polity. As the stake for citizenry is to bear on the political debate and the policy-making, it implies a broad definition of what does mean politics, what is political and who could be implicated in political practices. Consequently, political representation is a process which supposes individual and collective practices, carried out through politico-institutional space or civil society. Those practices allow to make questions, to formulate them in the public and political space, to register them in the political calendar and to transform them into issues for political decision. The four
dimensions of political representation underlined by Pitkin (formalistic, descriptive, symbolic and substantive) appear then to be useful to understand those practices (Lister 1998, Siim 2000, Young 2000, Marques-Pereira 2003).

Feminism helps to reinforce this approach and to define political representation as a process of intervention on the management of the “polis”. First, to affirm that “the personal/the private is also political” is to widen from the start the design of the political field and what can be represented there. Then, as Alexandra Dobrowolsky suggests,

[...] women’s representational interventions crisscross institutional/non-institutional or formal/informal political divides. They transcend public/private spaces and theorizations [...]. Standard distinctions fail to take into consideration that feminists have engaged in activities and advanced concerns previously excluded from the conventional, formal political sphere, the world of public institutions and officials, governments and parties, with their State-sanctioned powers, practices, and discourses. In seeking representation, women have bridged private and public, civil society and State, cultural and political, even when the lines between each have been in flux (Dobrowolsky 2000: 3).

In that sense, political representation could be defined as “the social and political construction of interests and identities” (Dobrowolsky 2000: 14). This dynamics is supported by the organization of the citizens and their political participation, which could be evaluated on a broad scale brewing the purely symbolic participation, information, consultation and “a true control from the bottom which supposes [...] the access to the decision-making process and know-how to influence this process” (Donzelot & Mével 2002: 86).

In addition, Pascale Dufour proposes to decompartmentalize the field of the political representation by integrating all the (institutional and individual) actors involved but also the places and logics which underlie it (Dufour 2007). Political parties, elected or appointed assemblies, social trade unions, citizens, social movements and civil society’s organizations are the main actors that interfere in the elections, the formal institutions and the social conflict. Furthermore, political representation articulates logics of aggregation of the interests and construction of collective identities, in the name of sectorial causes or citizenship, by collective or individual mobilizations, by delegation of power or direct participation, on the basis of a confrontation, a negotiation or a partnership. Political representation would be carried out around four poles.
Dufour defines then the “electoral democracy” as the representation in the electoral area, through the delegation of powers of the citizens to an elected representative and aggregation of their interests and identities. The “neo-corporatist democracy” is about the representation in the social conflict area, refering to the “aggregation of the interests, the construction of a collective identity and a public collective voice, the confrontation with the political power or participation in the decisions and public management by the means of the negotiations” between the State, the trade unions and the employers (Dufour 2007: 246). The “social democracy” is also defined by the collective mobilizations carried out in the area of the social conflicts. But the representation is not about the production relations, rather about “the promotion of collective interests whose benefit are not reducible with only one group or only one category of the population” (Dufour 2007: 247). At least, the “participative democracy” refers to the representation in the electoral and institutional area through a direct participation of the citizens to the political process. Here, the logic is the self-representation of the citizens and it “is not done in the name of common sectoral causes, but in the name of the citizenship, in order to modify the institutional forms of the liberal democracy or to propose a different use of it” (Dufour 2007: 249).

If one applies this framework to the political representation of women (in Chile in particular), it seems that one can draw aside two poles. On one side, the pole of neo-corporatism loses its raison d'être since the requests “of women” are not sectorial interests but transversal issues, relative to the whole society. On the other side, as women organize themselves in a social movement or in collective organizations and as they are present in the public sphere in the name of gender equality but also of their rights to be full citizens and free individuals, the representation is related to the social democracy and not the participative democracy. My approach of the political representation of women in Chile will be then defined around the electoral/institutional and the social spheres.

Dufour put in evidence that certain groups obtain a representation within the public institutions thanks to their social expertise. Being with crossing protest, regulation and, sometimes, management, these actors are at the same time “outwards” and “inside”, in their

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3 Whenever certain demands “of women” relate specifically to their participation in the production area, they can be integrated into the claims of the trade unions, acting in the name of the whole of the workers. In addition, in Chile, there is no social negotiation between the State, trade unions and employers as the neo-corporatist negotiation which exists in differing degrees in Europe.

4 Even if Latin-Americanist and Latin-American researchers use to write about the “social participation” or the “citizen participation” of women.
relation of privileged partner with the public institutions. They consequently occupy a “pivot position” which enables them to be “mediators” or a “door of entry” for the other groups in their relation with the State, while being sometimes very advanced on the road of institutionalization. Without going into more details, let us note that the advantage of this tool is to conceptualize the fact that no actor has the exclusiveness in a side of the political representation, nor does have to remain exclusively within the same place of representation. Moreover, this theoretical framework has the merit of not opposing institutional political space to extra-institutional political space.

Pascale Dufour dilutes to some extent Pitkin’s approach. Indeed, the Pitkin’s procedural dimension is approached by the means of the electoral and participative democracy, and via the electoral arena and the formal procedures that sustain it. The descriptive dimension can be found in the reflexion on the actors and the elected representatives. The substantive dimension is that which is best detailed by Dufour, since she examines the interests and identities concerned in the representation but also the logics that underlie this representation. Let us note that dimension symbolic system does not seem to find its place within the framework of Dufour. Without using Dufour’s approach in a systematic way to study the Chilean case, we will mobilize nevertheless the idea of the diversity of the places, actors and logics which underlie the political representation of women in Chile, in the idea to locate the role of State feminism in this process.

State Feminism: from Individuals to Structures and Agency

State feminism is a concept built to study the strategy impelled by part of the feminist social movement, to integrate requests or militants into the formal political sphere. If this strategic option could have been carried out, it is thanks to the answer of certain male or female politicians, either in direct bond with the feminist movement, or sensitive to the gender issue. The political result was imbedded in the creation of women’s policies agencies and was concretized by the entry of “femocrats” within the political-institutional sphere, and by the development of a public policy aiming at improving the equality and the living conditions of women (Révillard 2006). If the feminist movement managed to influence political management, in return, the response of the State encourages with the reconfiguration of the social movement. And so on. Interaction and a mutual influence lead to the reconfiguration of both of them (Banazsak, Beckwith & Rucht 2003).
Various feminist researches were devoted to this process and invite us to make a choice between a theoretical framework centered on the isolated feminists (who can be integrated into women’s agencies) and another centered on the agencies (which can eventually take a feminist action) (Randall in Randall & Waylen 1998: 201). I would rather advocate for a model which integrates individuals and institutions, in an intersectorial and pragmatic alliance in order to promote gender equality and the women’s emancipation.

From Individuals...

The book Playing the State (edited by Sophie Watson in 1990) presents the first tendency. “Femocracy”, “institutionalized feminism” or “official feminism” are defined as the fact that a “number of feminists have held positions of (relative) power within federal and State governments and bureaucracies, influencing policy and funding for women” (Watson 1990: 3). Hester Eisenstein goes further by proposing a typology for the feminist interventions into the bureaucratic, political, trade-union and legal arenas5 (Eisenstein 1990 : 87-88): the individual bureaucratic intervention (when a self-identified feminist enters the State policy-making); the structural bureaucratic intervention (when new structures for women’s interests or gender equality are created); the legal reform intervention (when new legislations are created or existing legislations are revisited to benefit women); the political participation in a leadership role (when a self-proclaimed feminist runs for a political office); and the alternative structures (when feminist structures are created “outside the mainstream of existing political and administrative structures”) (Eisenstein 1990: 88). This first approach of the institutionalized feminism draws the attention to the fact that the State is not only one whole of institutions, but also (or especially) a network of people, carrying interests, discourses and practices (Waylen 1998: 9).

In the same way, Virginia Vargas and Saskia Wieringa’s “triangle of empowerment” (as the interplay between the women’s movement, feminist politicians and femocrats) (Vargas & Wieringa 1998) or Alisson Woodward’s « velvet triangle » (between the feminists from the political sphere, the universities and the civil society) (Woodward 2000) dispose the non feminist allies (male or female) of the action towards a better citizenship for women. The pitfall of this approach is that it does not make it possible to consider the action of an institution in favour of the equality and the emancipation of women and that, in addition, it

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5 The reason why the notion of “institutionalized” or “official” feminism is prefered than “State” feminism.
can give the impression that only women (furthermore, feminists) carry this political objective.

However, in Chile, the feminist mobilization (in all its diversity) is only one of the sectors fighting for the emancipation of women, whether during the 80’s (beside the the popular districts women and the female human rights activists) or today (beside women of NGOs, political parties or trade unions who refuse the feminist label, deputies, student's representatives, altermondialists, queer activists, etc.). A reading of the networks and alliances, between individuals of the two sexes and institutions, would make it possible to refine the vision.

... To Structures

The book *Comparative State Feminism* (edited by Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy Mazur in 1995) shift the focus from individuals to structures and agencies. State feminism “refers to activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women’s status and rights” (McBride Stetson & Mazur 1995: 1-2). Although, women’s agencies are not State feminist per se: they will be considered as so in the only case that they concretely achieve feminist goals in the policy-making. Then, State feminism is about « the potential of turning the State into an activist on behalf of feminist goals, embedding gender issues in national policy agendas and giving advocates for the advancement of women permanent access to arenas of power » (McBride Stetson & Mazur 1995: 1).

Built on the findings of McBride Stetson & Mazur’s study, the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) goes on with comparative studies (XXX). Ten years after, in *State Feminism and the Political Representation*, Joni Lovenduski et al. asked whether women’s policies agencies (WPAs) were actually State feminist in the field of the political representation of women, by defining State feminism as “the advocacy of women’s movement demands inside the State” (Lovenduski 2005: 4). Thinking in terms of women’s political representation, they considers that “WPAs could increase women’s access to the State by furthering women’s participation in political decision-making, and by inserting feminist goals intro public policy” (Lovenduski 2005: 4). This comparative study leads to the conclusion that

[...] activist WPAs proved effective linkages between movement and State, particularly where the left was in or sharing power, the policy environment was not closed, discourse frame fit was matching or compatible with women’s movement actor goals,
and women’s movement actors were cohesive on and gave high priority to the issue. Under these conditions WPAs provided a boost to movement chances of policy success in debates about political representation. Activist WPAs were apparently unable to compensate when women’s movement actors did not give the issue high priority and/or were not cohesive, and issue frame fit was incompatible (Lovenduski 2005 : 285-6).

Nevertheless, the Chilean field rather invites to think State feminism in the terms of a political practice which materializes in a network of actors (women – and feminists – primarily) implementing various strategies within varied spaces. At the origin of the creation of the equal opportunities agency, some representatives of the formal political space are present: the political parties or of their coalition, members of the elected assemblies, members of the government and the president of the Republic. With the origin thus of the State feminism and the institution which incarnates it, on the level of formal political space, as well the executive power as the legislative one play a role of first order, involving at the same time the action of political parties.

Once the women’s agency is created and that this process is theorized, it seems that the other political institutions as well as their representatives are ousted from the State feminism approach. For the one who wants to consider State feminism as a process of interaction between actors of the civil society (in its “broad” acceptance) and the public institutions, it seems relevant not to reduce it to “the State” at its equal opportunities agency, but also to integrate deputies, ministers, political parties leaders and the president.

State Feminism as Agency: a Pragmatic Interface, an Intersectorial Alliance

In her article synthesizing various constructions of the object “State feminism”, Anne Révillard remembers that the approach based on the institutions of equal opportunities is generally considered starting from two angles (Révillard 2006). On the one hand, via the examination of the impact of the official institution on the feminist movement, which can take place studying the phenomenon of co-optation, bureaucratization or depoliticization of the feminist movements, or the question of the public financing of the feminist militancy. In addition, via the interaction between the women’s policies agency (WPA) and the feminist movement. The WPA is then considered as a relay, a “driving belt”, a continuity or even a representative of feminists. But, in a way or the other, says Révillard, the analysis does not look at the WPA “for itself” with its logic, its constraints and its own resources.
Although WPAs are or could be in interaction with the feminist movements, those are not constitute the only interlocutors to be taken into account. Consequently “it is important to take into account the situation of interface in which are these authorities between the women’s movement, the State and the female population as a whole” (Révillard 2006: 13). This position of interface makes it possible to seize the situation of an institution born in the State because of the requests of feminist militants: for the remainder of the State institutions, it is about an “militant” claiming institution, even a spokesman of the feminist movement; while for the feminist movement, it is about an arm of the State, evolving within constraints and resources related to its governmental statute and not to feminist militancy. From where the tensions or contradictions lived by the feminists who have several “hats” (institutional, feminist, political supporter) and whose career made them pass from a sectorial space to another. Consequently “the complexity of these interactions makes so that these governmental authorities charged with the women can be considered neither as simple the ‘agents’ of a monolithic State which would be equipped with a clear intention (whatever it is) in direction of women, nor like a pure relay of the feminist claims within the State” (Révillard 2006: 14).

Alexandra Dobrowolsky had had the same approach of interface, in her study on the constitutional activism of canadian feminist and the political representation of women, but she “looks” from the feminist movement’s side and not from the WPA’s side (Dobrowolsky 2000). Although she does not use the concept of interface, she proposes a similar notion, the feminist “politics of pragmatism” in reference to the fact “[...] that strategies are not fixed in time, and grassroots versus mainstream ephases are not always easy to distinguish. [...] when circumstances changed, the movement diversified” (Dobrowolsky 2000: 31). The idea of confounding the boundaries between formal and informal is also present:

[…] the women’s movement opens political space and discourses through mobilizing its social and political networks, making room for other movements, forming coalitions, meeting with party and State officials, and confounding representational boundaries in its efforts to achieve some form of constitutional responsiveness. [...] women’s movement actors have organized from within, engaging with or working from inside traditional political forms such as the State and political parties, as well as from without, that is, outside the conventional political domain in the realm of informal politics (Dobrowolsky 2000: 7-8).

Yet in the same year, 2000 Birte Siim had proposed the concept of “agency” to draw a better attention on the individual and collective capacity of women (and the whole of the individuals) to act personally and politically on the management of the “polis”: « […] the notion of
agency is a key to women’s active citizenship and refers both to individual actors and to the political influence of women’s collective agency. On the analytical level it is a way of connecting the different arenas of State, market and civil society and the different forms of participation, ‘from below’ and ‘from above’” (Siim 2000 : 4).

The case of Chile will confirm my proposal to consider State feminism as a strategical and pragmatic interface existing between the feminist movement, the equal opportunities agency and their allies (who can be individual or collective, institutional, feminist, male or female). First, it is worth thinking about the “transferability” of this concept, born and used to study Western contexts.

### Transferability of the “State Feminism” Concept to Chile

Indeed, the comparative State feminism studies that we reviewed focused on post-industrial democracies (Europe, North America and Australia) and women’s policy agencies created even at the end of the ‘60s in order to have the exclusive load of the improvement of the status of women. What about Chile? Let’s examine briefly some arguments: its situation in regional trends, its policy and socio-economic environment and its conservative culture. We should then understand better the Chilean specificities that might be taken into account in order to examine the reality of a State feminism in this country.

**Regional Trends**

Latin-American and Caribbean countries, and the feminist movements that emerged in the region, have known a collective « destiny » that links the citizens together around similar processes. The area was configured by its colonial past and by the post-colonial social and political relations: the economical crisis of the ‘80s, the structural adjustment policies and the challenge of development, the denial or the travesty of democracy, the patriarchal relations conforted by Churches each day more conservative (Catholic and others) and, last but not least, the *criolla* culture based on the figures of the mother and the protecting macho. Furthermore, the feminist mobilization regionalized and transnationalized since the organization of the first Latin-American and Caribean Feminist Meeting in 1981 (in Colombia). During the ‘90s, the regionalization of women’s/feminist NGOs continued during the preparation of the Fourth World Conference on Women (United Nations, Beijing, 1995) and through the (regional) feminist autonomous critics of it.
Policy Environment

With the beginning of the Pinochet’s dictatorship in 1973, the traditional medias for political representation are dismantled. The Congress is closed, political parties are forbidden, and the fierce repression compels the leftist party’s staff to go into exile or to go underground (nevertheless, their opposition to Pinochet remains active, inside or abroad). The human rights abuses, the economical crisis and the re-emergence of feminism provoke massive social protests during the years 1983-86 (from women, trade unions and students’s movements). The Chilean State corresponds then to a bloody militarian dictatorship, a lab for the neoliberal model tested by the Chicago Boys and a conservative patriarchal model which promotes in the extreme the macho’s and the mother’s figures. The social protests forced Pinochet to liberalize his “controlled democratization” project. The perspective to return to a civil government transforms the deal between social movements and (still forbidden) political parties. As soon as Pinochet announces the organization of a referendum (in favor of or against his presence in the government, in 1988) and promises elections in case of victory of the “NO” (in 1989), social movements loose their quality as prior opposants to the dictatorship. Progressively legally authorized, political parties recover their status of leaders in the political game. The Christian Democracy (DC) takes then the leadership of the democratic transition. The Concertation for Democracy establishes itself as the progressist alternative to the dictator’s (political and economical) supporters. This centre-left coalition will appear to number of feminist activists as the best option “to make things go further”. On the 10th of March 1990, the State becomes again synonym of democracy (Yocelevzky 2002).

As Marcela Ríos explains, the particularity of the Chilean case does not just rest on the experience of a dictatorship, but also on the influence of some political structural factors built at the beginning of the XXth century and reinforced by the democratic transition « guided » by Pinochet himself (Ríos 2003). The tendency for statism and vertical dependency for political parties, the pre-eminence of institutionalized political actors, the organization of the political field around the electoral binominal system, the permanent search for consensus, the

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6 With the condition of not referring to the class struggle, which will give rise to the Party for Democracy (PPD) gathering part of the Socialists, and leave fractions of the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PC) in the illegality.

7 It gathers seventeen progressist political parties and groups (www.concertation.cl). It is only after the legalization and the reunification of the PS that the Concertation will gradually take its current composition: PS, PPD, DC and Social Democrat Radical Party. The parties and the coalitions which arise at the elections of 1989, copied on the “yes” and “no” to the political and economic model of Pinochet, are always today those which dominate the Chilean political space.
fear of conflicts and a certain self-censorship (at least, until Pinochet was arrested in London in 1998), all those elements contribute to exclude the minoritarian voices from the political management. The main political actors are, since the return of democracy: the president, the government and the political parties organized in coalitions – all institutionalized political actors. Consequently, in terms of political representation of women and State feminism, one could not quit from the debate the potentially important role of the president and his/her ministers, (few) feminist deputies, women’s sections within the political parties, male allies, and political and academic feminist lobbyists. Without establishing a direct causality, those factors interfere with the internal and external transformations of the feminist movement since the ‘80s, and then with the development of State feminism.

Socio-Economic Environment

The neoliberal economic model founded by Pinochet was not basically put into question during the democratic transition. On the one hand, the macro-economic indicators presented by the country were higher than the remainder of the area (while hiding one of the most unequal redistributions of the economic resources of the sub-continent). In addition, social peace and the *modus operandi* of consensus between the new democratic government and the opposition heiress of Pinochet were essential to the success of the “controlled” transition. The political transformations were thus done within a maintained and deepened neoliberal framework. The disengagement of the State from social area was maintained, and the responsibilities for wellbeing were more “shared” between the market, civil society’s organizations and families. The governments of Socialists Lagos (2000-2006) and Bachelet (since 2006) were committed putting “more social” in the model, without claiming to return to the before-Pinochet period. The end of the dictatorship and the good macro-economic indicators in addition induced a progressive reduction in funding from the development cooperation. This does not mean however that the democratic State decided to ensure a structural support for the civil society’s organizations (REF XXX).

Conservative Cultural Environment

The progressist sectors – and within them, the non-religious ones – which lead the democratic transition failed in transform the conservative cultural environment. The hegemonic political and cultural discourse, relative to women and “values”, remains centred around family, marriage and maternity. Elements of explanation consist in: the duty to the Catholic Church
which protected number of human rights and popular neighbours activists from the repression; the alliance with the Christian Democracy \(^8\); a kind of self-censorship regarding the conservative sectors; the governance requirements of the country which has to confront the institutional enclaves left by the dictatorship; and the fear to return to a militarian government (Pinochet remains senator until the end of the ‘90s). The “double discourse”, which illustrates the gap between the proclaimed moral standard and the social reality, is even presented as a Chilean specificity by the Chilean themselves...

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### Doing Feminism in Chile

In such a context, how did the feminist militancy re-emerge? How did the equal opportunities policy develop? And, what are the relations between the feminist movement and the political institutions? Those elements will put in evidence the reality of a State feminism in Chile.

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### The “Double Militancy” : Feminism, New Left and Dictatorship

As in the majority of the countries which knew the wind of the emancipation during the ’60s, Chilean feminism re-emerged in the context of the development of a “new left” and of the political activity around future President Salvador Allende. Although one regards the ‘50s-’80s period as being that of “feminist silence” (Kirkwood 1986, Ríos, Godoy & Guerrero 2003), consciousness raising groups appear during the ‘60s. Politically situated in the left parties (socialist and communist), part of female militants can not stand to be integrated into the traditional political organizations, according to methods defined by men. They feel the need for registering their position “as women” in their political practice, and for putting forward their alienation and their requests within their organization, without having to condition them with another priority fight (Kirkwood 1986 : 196). Frustrated by the difficulty in combining the party ideology and the fight against sexism, they form or join these feminist collectives. These spaces of “another power”, with a transformer and emancipative aiming, offer to them the alternative to exceed political cleavages and traditional practices of invisibilisation and discrimination of women in the political game (Saporta Sternbach & al. 1992, Fischer 2005). Furthermore, in the ‘70s and ‘80s, the contingencies related to the State terror push a number of “double militants” (political and feminist) to make the bet of feminist autonomy, in the form of collectives and then of a protest movement.

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\(^8\) Which is the main political force from the transition to the election of Socialist President Lagos in 2000.
Feminists will take part in a women’s movement which invests public space at the beginning of the ‘80s, at the sides of the human rights activists and the popular districts representatives (essentially women) although those do not claim a feminist identity. These women in movement, transcending partisanship, claim the democracy and the truth about prisoners-disappeared, while denouncing the economic crisis and the patriarchal domination. The weak margin of freedom – and protection – from which they profit as (potential) mothers, allows them to organize protests without facing a too violent repression (contrary to that which falls down on the female activists regarded as “political”) (Fitzsimmons 2000, Valdés 2000, Baldéz 2001, González & Kampwirth 2001, Marques-Pereira & Stoffel 2004).

*The Institutionalization of Feminism : NGOs, Equal Opportunities and Democracy*

During the ‘80s while taking part in the women’s movement, some feminist groups “institutionalized” themselves by setting up in non governmental organizations (NGOs). This “NGO-zation” corresponds to the configuration of the former feminist collectives in more formal or structured organizations. It reveals a logics of financial and political stabilization for the feminist activism. Indeed, the funding coming from the international cooperation agencies, which support the development and the democratization of the Chilean society, and the United Nations concern for the « women » issue, offer to feminist groups the perspective to become their beneficiaries or the relays of inter-gouvernmentnal organisms in charge to impulse the equal opportunities policies. But this implies more formalism, professionalization and specialization from the candidates groups. At the same time, feminists doing research on women get also institutionalized by setting up in research centers or foundations (thanks to the same funding donors) or by entering in the universities (Waylen 1995, Molina 1998, Baldéz 1999, Rios, Godoy & Guerrero 2003, Franceschet 2003, 2005, Dandavati 2005, Macaulay 2006).

In this way, the switch from feminist activists to “gender issue” experts corresponds to an indispensable step in the funding quest and sustain some competition in the feminist field between « specialists » and « activists ». With the return of democracy, social movement faded and feminist activists moved progressively to different spaces (non profit sector, universities, political institutions, administrations, etc.). However, that does not mean that the Chilean feminism falls into a “new silence” (Rios, Godoy & Guerrero 2003) : it rather reconfigures itself into an heterogen and polycenter field of action built on a diversity of individualities, groups, institutions, thematical or geographical networks, which carry the
issue of the feminine emancipation (Álvarez 1998: 93).

The creation by law of the National Service for Women (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, SERNAM) in 1991, is seen as the second step in the process of the feminism institutionalization. The intense lobbying of the « double militants » and the feminists who rally the political parties leadership for the democratization is at the origine of what would be considered as a victory for the majority of feminists, as a compromise with the patriarchal enemy for some others, and as a concession to the left by conservative sectors. As the Concertation for Democracy is created to run the elections in 1989, political and feminist activists organize themselves in the Concertation of Women for Democracy (CWD), in order to integrate the « Women’s Demands to Democracy » into the future government programme – that is: the creation of an equal opportunities agency, a public policy against violence and the institution of gender quotas in the parties and the electoral lists (Montecino & Rossetti 1990, Rossetti 1991). By taking the way of the feminism institutionalization, beside the centre-left government that takes place in 1990⁹, the CWD renounces to carry demands which would make the Catholic Church « upset » (divorce and abortion essentially) or would imply important changes in the political way of doing (gender quotas). Self-censorship or strategic choice? At that time, the institutionalization of feminism mixed up with the democratization of the society.

*From Autonomy to the New Radicalities*

Since 1981, the Latin-American and Caribbean feminists regularly organize regional meetings in the idea to structure a feminist movement speaking from a common voice¹⁰. If these meetings contributed to consolidate transnational networks, they are far from to have helped to consolidate the unit of feminism in the area. Indeed, the need and the euphoria to be “between oneself” and to exchange thoughts and practices in a festive environment, was quickly followed by tended debates, around the alternatives female or feminist, feminism or gender, historical activists or neophytes, and autonomy or institutionalization. Years 1994-96 dig the differences until the rupture, around the process of Beijing and of VIIth Regional Feminist Meeting (in Chile, 1996)¹¹. The Chilean feminist movement weakened more especially as it was already extremely shaken by the disappearance of the common enemy

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⁹ Composed by four parties of Socialist, Christian Democrat and Radical Social Democrat allegiances.
(dictatorship), by the practice of the political consensus (which sees of “wary eye” any social mobilization) and by the action of the State in the field of equality between men and women.

Whereas feminists described as “institutional” seek to be integrated into the system by recognizing the State and its institutions as valid interlocutors in the fight against discriminations, and enter a logic of lobbying, expertise and search for financing, self-proclaimed “autonomous” feminists denounce the illusion of the taking into account of the interests “of women” by institutions considered as patriarchal, and the co-optation - even treason – of several feminists.

Differences and tensions accumulated within the feminist movement are revealed, resulting in “a dichotomisation between generations, a crystallization of the patriarchal logic of supervising and punishing, mutual charges and the practice of the friendly/enemy traditional policy male” (Fischer 2005 : 82). On its side, the autonomous current does not escape either the dogmatic and personal conflicts but, in spite of the dissolution of some autonomous groups, its members continue to denounce the noncritical institutionalization of number of militants. At the time of VIIth Regional Feminist Meeting, the question of the representativeness and the legitimacy of feminists who take the leadership of the “movement”, but also the denigration and the invisibilisation of contrary voices, make the feminist movement explode.

Seen from the outside, autonomous feminism can be defined as the refusal of any form of “intervention or participation of feminists in the formal political system, the international organizations and even in the [nongovernmental organizations] related to these spheres” (Ríos, Godoy & Guerrero 2003 : 80) 12. If “autonomous” feminists are opposed to the “takeover” and the “instrumentalisation” of feminist discourse by the SERNAM and international sponsors, and denounce the “collusion” of some militants with the patriarchal State, they are not however the only ones to denounce the legitimacy of the equal opportunities agency. Indeed, militants (self-)excluded from the Concertation (Communists and Radical ones, for example) do not regard the creation of this agency as one of their claims, since they do not consider the bipolar system of representation (worked by Pinochet) as legitimate. The refusal of the SERNAM by the “autonomous ones” also lies within the

12 Ríos, Godoy and Guerrero underline in addition that “autonomous” feminists constitute only a small fraction of the current Chilean mobilization, as opposed to what lets predict their great visibility in the regional feminist meetings and in the radical international circles (see Bisilliat 2003). Analyze that Margarita Pisano, one of the autonomous leader, disputes vigorously on her site (www.mpisano.cl).
denunciation of the androcentric system of thought.

The heterogeneity and the complexity of the Latin-American and Caribbean societies are superimposed on those discussion over the relation with institutions. These societies are marked by colonization, evangelization, interbreeding, slave system, cultural domination and misogyny - even sexophobia. Diversity has evil to find a platform. Difficulties of the feminist movement of recognizing the inequalities which exist in its centre push the Afro-descendants, the Indians and the lesbians to organize themselves in order to criticize the wrongfully homogeneous character which underlies the events, the claims and the practices of the movement. Asserting equality, respect and tolerance within the society, and thus within women’s movement, they raise the question of the exclusion of women by women, of feminists by feminists. Their respective mobilizations meet in a will to articulate the fights and the reflexions concerning the whole of exclusions, without isolating gender relations from multiple identity memberships.

In that sense, feminist radicality that one would have tendency to define “in terms of autonomy and utopia, i.e., like a fight of women independent of men, parties, States, international institutions and Churches, whom purpose is the eradication of the patriarchal racist and capitalist system” is confronted with the complexity of the identities and the contexts of action of the militants (Curiel, Masson & Falquet 2005: 6). Autonomy does not mean any more necessarily absolute rejection of institutions. The idea of “dissenting feminisms” should be preferred to the one of “radical” or “autonomous” feminisms, which would leave space, between the “institutional ones” and the “autonomous ones”, to the other feminist voices: lesbians, Afro-descendants, Indians, ecofeminists, altermondialists, etc. (Curiel, Masson & Falquet 2005: 8). This “autonomous” or “dissenting” position is considered then in the terms of a radical alternative to the liberal and capitalist economy, the heterosexual standard and the post-colonial domination.

During the ‘90s, a privileged relation between institutions and feminist associations is gradually reinforced. Years 2000 thus seem to testify of a broad consensus, justified or resigned, within feminist associations in favour of a partnership with the equal opportunities public institution. However, national and international political-administrative structures extremely changed since the first moments of the “NGO-zation” and sponsors are fewer and/or less generous. Feminist NGOs being more and more precarious, they are tempted to have recourse to the financing of private companies under cover of their “social responsibility
for the society”. I will discuss this issue in the last section. Before that, I would like to come back to the State feminism concept and its reality in Chile.

Is there a « Real » State Feminism in Chile?

By taking again with large features the approach worked out by Amy Mazur, Dorothy McBride Stetson, Joni Lovenduski and their teams, State feminism can be evaluated by regarding the capacity of a women’s policy agency to influence the debate and the political action in the direction of the claims carried by feminist activists, and to its capacity to involve those in the development of public policies. What does happen thus with the integration of the feminist discourse to the political action, the entry of some feminists in the equal opportunities agency and the interaction of this one with the feminist organizations in Chile?

The (Feminist) Issues carried by the SERNAM

The SERNAM is a “decentralized organization, equipped with an own budget, charged with coordinating, planning and proposing policies, plans and programs which lead to the full equality and the incorporation of women to all the spheres of national activity and with taking care of the elimination of every discriminatory practices against women” (SERNAM 1994a : 13). In concrete terms, it is about a governmental agency under supervision of the ministry for planning. The establishment of its lines of action does not depend only on the social reality, the demands of the associative world, the direction given by the presidency or the international agenda. The Service is also implied in the forces relations existing within the Concertation and within the party which the minister director comes from, what puts limits at its margin of autonomy.

The two first ministers for the SERNAM were Christian Democrats (Soledad Alvear 1991-1994, and Josefina Bilbao 1994-2000), the third minister, a Socialist from the Party for the Democracy (Adriana del Piano, 2000-2003, named in another ministry three years after its entry in function), the fourth minister, independent, i.e. representing the Concertation as a whole (Cecilia Pérez, 2003-2006). The fifth and current Minister Laura Albornóz comes from the progressist sector of the Christian Democracy. Those who directed the SERNAM consider however that their difficulties did not come as well from the political dependences as of the lack of financial independence. Indeed, the relatively limited budget of the agency can be devoted only to the setting-up of pilot programs supposed being transferred thereafter to
suitable ministries. The SERNAM is also charged with gender mainstreaming in the rest of the government but without real possibility to oblige to follow its recommendations.

Beyond the political color of the ministers, one should not neglect their personality, their curriculum and their philosophical or (non-)confessional orientation in the establishment of priorities of the institution - what explains in particular the changes of orientation of the action from one minister to another\textsuperscript{13}. Certain questions thus were automatically excluded from the agenda, in spite of the feminist mobilization in their favour. If family and responsible paternity, fight against “intra-familiar” violence and professional insertion are the core of the action of the SERNAM since its creation, in agreement with the claims carried by women’s organizations since the ‘80s (SERNAM 1994b)\textsuperscript{14}, on the other hand, the distance is large regarding the issues with “moral” connotation or those which could upset the political modus operandi of consensus. The request for the legal recognition of divorce was not really assumed by the Service until the arrival of Socialist Ricardo Lagos to the presidency (2000), although it was carried by Concertation’s deputies and civil society’s (and women’s) associations\textsuperscript{15}. In the same way, sexual and reproductive rights always constitute the main taboo of the SERNAM, even if the Christian Democrat Minister Bilbao had had the audacity to launch a pilot experiment of the “Days of conversation on the emotional and sexual life” gathering pupils, parents and professors. Only issues related to the “good” course of pregnancy (pre- and post-natal attention, support for pregnant teenagers, etc.) receive the downstream of the SERNAM. Abortion and sexual freedom remain resolutely excluded from the debate, in spite of requests and initiatives coming from the civil society\textsuperscript{16}. Sex education and contraception are still to date minorized in the action of the Service, in spite of the realization by preceding teams of some pilot programs for community work, projects of international co-operation and the will of President Bachelet (elected in 2006) to reduce the number of teenagers pregnancies and clandestine abortions.

\textsuperscript{13} Interviews carried out with personalities having taken part in the direction of the SERNAM (Santiago, November-December 2003): P. Veloso (Vice-Director of the SERNAM, 1994-97), J. Bilbao (Minister Director, 1994-2000), N. Molina (Member of the council assessor, 1994-97, Vice-Director, 1997-2000), E. Rubio (Responsible for the Promotion of the Rights and Participation of Women, 2001-2006) and M. Sauterel (Promotion of the Rights and Participation of Women, 2001-2006).

\textsuperscript{14} But also with the ideological orientations of the parties and the orientations of the United Nations.

\textsuperscript{15} The law on the divorce was finally voted on May 17, 2004 (Marques-Pereira 2005).

\textsuperscript{16} As the organization of a network of specialists in various sectors (Foro Red de Salud) which were at the origin of the law proposition on sexual and reproductive rights, deposited in 2000 by the feminist and PPD deputy Maria Antonieta Sáa.
Despising pressures of conservative sectors of her party, current Minister Albornóz however publicly ensured her unconditional support to the ministers for Health and Education on the issues of the distribution of the “following day pill”, the access of minors to it without the assent of their parents and the education to emotional, sexual and reproductive life, by arguing that they were not for her moral questions but orientations given by President Bachelet.

The SERNAM is registered as a good pupil in the recommendations of the United Nations, with regard to gender equality, but it is obliged to satisfy members of the governing center-left coalition (Socialists, Christian Democrats and Radicals) while sparing conservative and progressist sectors within these parties, as well as the susceptibility of (conservative and liberal) right opposition and, especially, the episcopate. For as much, hot lines traced by the UN are not applied to the letter and equality is far from being carried out. The legislations taken aim at consolidating family, by stopping the violence which takes place within this space, or by making it possible to mothers to “also” develop themselves as workers or political leaders. In that sense, the issue of sexuality and reproduction were generally approached only under this prism (violence and teenagers pregnancy). In addition, the SERNAM is engaged in international agreements with European and North-American women’s policies and cooperation agencies, which induces also the circulation of ideas relative to State feminism.

Lastly, another stake carried by several feminist associations, the political representation of women and quotas, was not one of the priorities of action of the SERNAM, at the time of the first Plan for equal opportunities (1994-1999). Registered in the second Plan (2000-2010), this request found a real support with Minister del Piano (PPD) who in addition reinforced the team of the SERNAM in charge of this issue (SERNAM 1994b, 2000). But its shortened mandate did not make it possible to launch a sufficient political dynamics to obtain a modification of the law (Stoffel 2005). Although the question remained on the agenda with Minister Pérez (who succeeds to her), it seems to be re-dynamized by the election of President Bachelet who made “parity in policy” her motto. Nevertheless, in spite of the goodwill of Minister Albornóz, the issue of gender quotas and parity is conditioned with a reform of the electoral system binominal, which carries to believe that many debates in the various political sectors are still to come, before any reform to be taken.

Until now, results obtained by the feminists relate to requests which are integrated into the global project of democracy (political participation) and development (participation
economic), with that of reinforcement of family (“intrafamily” violence). Even if equality is more often proclaimed that effective, Chilean women acquired the political recognition of this principle. To want to reconsider these rights would consequently be seen like an attack with democracy, development or family… rather than with women. The women’s movement seems more to have been based on an assertion or an instrumentalisation of the female roles prescribed that on their dispute (except a part of feminist sector). The echo of women’s mobilization at the time of the democratic transition and the recognition that obtained women with the creation of an agency for equal opportunities, rest certainly on their role in the fight against dictatorship but also, indirectly, on their respect of the sexual hierarchy into force in Chile. Without devaluing the importance of women’s movement, force is to note that it did not succeed in modifying the dominating model of reference for women: being mothers first of all.

The Integration of Feminists in the SERNAM

A second criterion to be examined relates to the integration of feminists within the equal opportunities agency. What is denounced or feared by some militants, it is the practice of co-optation which would make it possible for the SERNAM to associate the services of the most experienced of them, what would cut down the feminist movement from its more experimented representatives. That would lead moreover to a certain “takeover” of feminist movement’s networks by the public agency. The fact that the militants become “femocrats” continues to mobilize their networks, in a pragmatic or strategic manner, which leads inevitably to an overlap of the institutional, political and militant networks.

Whereas the SERNAM results from the claims of a broad part of the feminist movement, can one accuse the agency to have carried out a reflective action in order to appropriate the work made by militants or to dismember the feminist movement? It is to note that the bonds that were woven during the ‘80s and the re-establishment of the democracy, the solidarity between feminists, the need to make face vis-a-vis the “patriarchal enemy”, the self-censorship vis-a-vis those who question the existence of the SERNAM and, more concretely, the mixture of “labels” or the identities confusion by political and feminist “experts” which passes from a space to the other, with the presidential and ministerial changes, make that the separation

17 The SERNAM being an agency as much political than administrative, all the personnel changes when the minister is replaced. This tendency to replace the administrative staff at the same time as the political one is a practice characteristic of the Chilean democracy.
between the networks is not always extremely clear (without a true intersector partnership). Let us notice however that only one of the five ministers of the SERNAM (Minister del Piano) had personal bonds with the feminist movement of the ‘80s and that only a handle of people in charge of departments came directly from the civil company. It is more on the level of the professional teams in charge to implement the programs decided (thanks to their authority) that women who had experiments passed within feminist associations are more or less numerous. Since the very great majority of the most “mediatized” representatives of women’s mobilization since the ‘80s, remained anchored in the civil society, one can suggest that the SERNAM did not decapitate the social movement.

*The Interaction between the SERNAM and the Feminist Organizations*

However - and it is here the third criterion to be observed - in its will to rest “the public policies (...) on a process of communication between the State and the society on a set of reciprocal influences” (SERNAM 1996: 13), the SERNAM wants to interact with women’s representatives in order to know their requests and to hold of it account during the policy-making process. The objective being to consolidate “a process of articulation and dialogue between the organized women and local and regional authorities” (SERNAM 1999: 29).

For the Beijing Conference, the Group Initiative Women coordinates twelve NGOs, institutions and gender studies programmes (Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres, 1993). Very quickly it imposes itself as the relay between the “institutional” feminists and the SERNAM. Its objective was “to join together and revitalize the organizations of women starting from the elaboration of a national document on their requests” and to carry these requests to the national, regional and international institutions taking part in the process of Beijing, and in the network of Latin-American associations that prepare the Forum of NGOs (in Huairou, parallel to the United Nations Conference). Thereafter, the Group Initiative Women would take care that Chilean women’s organizations integrate the final documents in their action and would evaluate the degree of concretization of the Chilean engagements by the “citizen control index”. The interaction between the associative world and the governmental authorities result moreover in the signature of the Act of Engagement (Acta de Compromiso, September

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18 See the website of Grupo Iniciativa Mujeres, [http://www.flacso.cl](http://www.flacso.cl).
19 Índice de Compromiso Cumplido (ICC), that constitutes, for the organizations of women, a tool of pressure and negotiation vis-a-vis politicy-makers (Valdés 2001).
23, 1997) 20, which formalizes the national Forum of Follow-up of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. This experience is probably the more formal one in terms of an interaction between civil society and public institutions in the field of women’s rights.

With the entry of part of the claims and some feminist activists in public institutions and with the configuration of a State supposed/felt like more “women friendly”, feminism as a political project incarnated until then in a social movement was seen driven back with the change. On the one hand, the Chilean feminist movement of the ‘80s, presumably united or homogeneous, and having risen to the institutionalization of feminism, was left weakened and diversified. On the other hand, the installation of a labelled “women” public administration led to compare the public policy of equal opportunities to “State feminism” - reducing a process to an institution and lose its political dimension to, by the way, feminism. We could go on discussing the existence of a real interaction between the feminists and the Chilean State. However, the reinforcement of one (broad) feminist mobilization turned towards the State and animated by the idea of an effective co-operation with the SERNAM, is a reality – independently of the success obtained within the official institutions. It deserves, then, our attention. Specially today, the number of “institutional” feminists seem to be caught in a “bad marriage” with the SERNAM, perhaps even with the “cord at the neck”.

### State Feminism in Chile and the Political Representation of Women

The defensive autonomy of the mobilization of the ‘70-‘80s was gradually converted into a radical or rebel autonomy for a minority of militants, but also into an autonomy of dialogue and proposal vis-a-vis the political institutions, or for the remainder of them. Indeed, feminist NGOs that do not assert an autonomous current, without being (because of that) institutionalized branches of the State, consider themselves autonomous in their actions. Although the representation of women and militants by “experts” brings the top on social mobilization and, that the critic of the system is done less radical, the research of institutional partnership raises, according to them, to a wanted strategy; therefore… autonomous and independent. Today, many feminist organizations are found nevertheless, and sometimes in spite of them, wedged in priorities decided by their backers (State, intergovernmental institutions, private organizations, etc).

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20 With, inter alia, J. Bilbao, minister director of the SERNAM at this time.
The disengagement of international co-operation agencies is, according to Amalia Fischer, “all the more irresponsible as they never made so that women’s organizations generate economic resources which in the long term enable them to take their autonomy, and they acted as if they believe that the Latin-American companies will replace them to support the initiatives of women - what constitutes a disaster joke or a total lack of knowledge of the Latin-American entrepreneurs, often extremely conservative” (Fischer 2005: 75). In fact, in Chile, economic resources are concentrated in the hands of some entrepreneurs and families generally related on the ultra-liberal party and the conservative party.

Lastly, the criteria of financing by the international organizations increasingly complex are copied on the agenda of United Nations. However, the professionalisation of feminist associations turns this access essential to institutional financing for their survival and their action. Indeed, it is relatively difficult for a group of women to be confined with an informal and non-professional status, laying purely on the voluntary help of activists, since they hope to be heard in the public space (this one being occupied already with difficulty by the activists who have funds and structured organizations). Feminist NGOs thus do the splits between two realities: on one side, they require recognition and legitimacy on behalf of the backers to continue to exist. But, on the other side, they do not have to give up their creative freedom. They do not want to have to hope for militants that they compensate the lacks of financial resources by their own means, but they would also wish not to have to condition their engagement with the international institutional agenda.

Theoretically, institutionalized feminism is supposed to improve the substantive representation of women, through an effective interaction between feminist organizations, on one side, and the equal opportunities agency and other political actors, on the other. In Chile however, the relations between the SERNAM and feminist associations consist primarily of selective and not very formal collaborations, by the means of co-organized research or activities financed by public institutions. When the intersectoriality is of setting, it is more often under the terms of the existence of informal and private networks that of a political good-will to formalize collaborations between the sectors.

The current Minister for the SERNAM, in coherence with the discourse of citizen participation of President Bachelet, however shows the will to create bonds of confidence

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21 For more details on the locking of the public and political discussion by the conservative alliance of the right, the Catholic Church (and, in particular, Opus Dei), private companies and media, see Stoffel 2006.
with civil society, so that this one inspires, supports and evaluates the public action, to be regarded as equal opportunities. The doubt is allowed for the reception of this interaction: a true partnership based on a mutual recognition and co-operation, or a configuration of feminist associations as unconditional grassroots support for the SERNAM, or even a neutralization of their critical and claiming capacity? On another side, the SERNAM does not have the funds necessary to the organization of an efficient partnership with feminist associations, in spite of the energy and the engagement of the agency’s workers, who often see themselves forced to give up innovating projects due to the lack of financial (and political) support. Let us remember that the funds of this ministerial department are only devoted to the setting-up of pilot programs intended in the long term for other ministries. Other elements slow down or block the development of a solid partnership between the State and feminist associative world: the structural weakness of the autonomous civil society; its lack of visibility and recognition by the State, the media and the whole society; reciprocal mistrust and suspiciousness of State’s instrumentalization of women’s mobilization; the personalization of associations through some figures and the discussed statute of certain “historical” militants, etc.

One can thus wonder whether State feminism carried out a better substantive representation of women or if, on the contrary, it rather contributed to feed the liberal model of the Chilean State, reducing the public intervention in terms of equal opportunities between men and women. Indeed, feminist NGOs, specialized initially in the practices of lobbying and advocacy, are reoriented more and more towards the expertise and the creation of a “third sector of services” or a “non governmental public sector” in the field of women's rights (Bresser et Cunill 1998). Feminist associations provide services at the same time to women and to the State, since they deal with services raising in theory from the public sector, for example in issues of violence prevention or the support for women victims of violence, but also in terms of education and formation.

The State, “guarantor” and “promoter” of the citizenship of women, created the SERNAM in order to set up a public policy of equal opportunities, while not releasing the resources necessary – what complicates from the start the good achievement of the objectives of the ministerial agency. The SERNAM, on its side, involves feminist NGOs (letting themselves involved…) in an interaction that conditions the agenda of these, without achieving a real partnership, nor ensuring their structural financing. By doing this, the SERNAM relieves them
partly from its obligations to ensure a really effective citizenship for women. NGOs in search of financing are thus found to ensure a public service, without being official agencies. Finally, these feminist associations are prevented (by lack of resources and time) from carrying out their true role of civil company: to control, criticize and impel the public action, in an autonomous and independent way.

The logic of political negotiation which prevails and the ambiguous attitude of the democratic State towards civil society’s associations are not in fact extraneous to this situation. The State indeed sends contradictory signals to them. On one side, “NGOs are regarded as the privileged partners in the new model of development [with the end of the dictatorship, and] they are encouraged to take an active part like executors of policies and public programs” (Ríos 2003: 271). But, on the other side, the State does not particularly support the reinforcement of the civil society (by structural subsidiarity or the opening of real channels of political participation, for example), while reinforcing the elitist practice of consensus, which disqualifies from the start the social movements\textsuperscript{22}. This absence of a clear project on the society and the relation to establish between the State and the civil society’s organizations inspires Marcela Ríos the idea that

\[\ldots\] the State, and the SERNAM in particular, are in a hurry to be in relation to these organizations as technical experts being able to support the initiatives of the State, but not like “representing” citizens of the civil society. Remainder, the State institutions privilege the bonds with the organizations which can respect the strict standards and the requirements suitable for the development of public policies. By legitimating NGOs only as professional experts, the State saps their political importance and their hybrid historical identity coming from their membership of a social movement (Ríos 2003: 271).

Consequently, the funds of the private companies aimed at their “social responsibility” with respect to the society, appear to many NGOs as being today the only solution of alternative financing to the international co-operation and subsidies of the State. But a partnership with the world of private companies does not always appear contradictory to some associations, which do not carry out an ethical and critical reflexion on their sources of financing. Admittedly, to organize a meeting of women’s organizations with the candidates for the presidential election in 2005, in a place placarded of affiches praising the merits of a company of telecommunications or beauty products, seems a priori inoffensive. However, how to claim

\textsuperscript{22} President Bachelet seems decided to make play civil company sound true role. In this direction, the social demonstrations and movements which occupied the streets of the capital on several occasions in 2006 and 2007 should not be seen like signs of political instability, but rather as the mark of a democratic democracy more…
to take a critical action in favour of the professional insertion of women, obtaining better working conditions and wage equality, or to fight against the sexual harassment in the workplace, when the “partner” is a large multinational corporation, denounced with the International Labour Organization for nonrespect of the international legislations and the right to the trade-union representation? How to denounce the dictatorship of appearance and the daily difficulties that women in their professional, militant or political career meet, their family life and their intimate life, when the “partner” adds to the stress generated by their various lives that “to have to remain” young and beautiful people and, in that way, feed “cultural” resistance to an equitable division of the domestic tasks and the reduction of the individuals (female, especially) to their physical appearances?

The metaphor of the “bad marriage” between feminist NGOs and the SERNAM was chosen because one of the partners is caught into a trap. On the grounds of the funding issue, of the international discourse on gender specialization and NGOs responsibilities in terms of achieving a full citizenship for women, and of the political discourse of the political representation through the social participation, Chilean feminist organizations are trying to act altogether towards a better substantive representation of women. But the lack of sufficient material and time resources makes that they can not make this political representation efficient or pro-active. To respond to the impulses that come from the international donors, from the SERNAM or from the private companies, part of the feminist NGOs just act towards a State reconfiguration that is helping the latter to disengage from its responsibility towards women. A State reconfiguration that is also preventing feminist NGOs from playing their critical role of civil society.

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