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Women's Political Mobilization in Argentina Stemming from the Last Military Dictatorship

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Buenos Aires, Argentina
Summer 2011

Research Context

I went to Buenos Aires in the summer of 2011 to research the effect of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo on women in modern day politics. I became interested in how Las Madres used their roles as mothers to garner international attention toward their cause. However, upon arriving in Argentina, my research began to shift. Argentina has some of the highest levels of female involvement in politics in the world, and currently has a female President. I interviewed women involved in academia, journalism, social organizations and partisan politics in regards to their history and experiences as women in politics. As a result of the full research process, in this paper, I propose to examine how women in modern day politics see their strength of purpose and/or their agenda, coming out of their reaction to the last military dictatorship (1976 - 1982.) By examining the groups of women formed under the dictatorship, including Las Madres, political prisoners and women in exile I hope to discern not only how they sustained their political involvement through today, but also what substantive elements run through that involvement in terms of perspectives and policy positions. Methodologically, I did research through University coursework on the history of Argentina and on feminist theory, independent research in Argentina (original language newspapers, books) and, most importantly, I carried out fifteen interviews with relevant people. Throughout the research and in the paper, I operate under the assumption that there is in fact, an underlying link between the involvement of women that are currently in politics and the last military dictatorship (1976 – 1982). An important aspect of my interviews was to pull out what the linkage was, and how or if it has affected the political discourse in Argentina. I personally define feminism in a loose manner, referring to people or policies that are motivated explicitly on advancing women's rights, regardless of the manner in

which they are pursued. I found the definition of feminism in Argentina to vary quite greatly both from each other and from my own assumption.

Introduction

In 1973, Juan D. Perón, Argentina's charismatic leader returned from exile in Spain, where he had been since 1955.[1] He arrived at Ezeiza airport with masses of crowds there to support him. Juan Perón was a former military general elected president in 1946. Together he and his wife, Evita became a political phenomenon. They supported unions and worker's reform, cultivating a cult-like following before their ousting in a military coup in 1955 when he fled to Spain. Upon his return, he was President for less than a year when he died and his third widow, Isabel Perón was left in the Presidential office.[2] The 1960's and 1970's, were on a global scale, a time of revolutions - sexual, racial and political - Argentina was no exception to this. During Isabel Peron's brief stint in office from 1974 until 1976, leftist organizations, (guerilla groups such the Montoneros, which had been Perón's left wing branch), and socially oriented organizations began to gain strength. This led to major generational clashes between the youth who sought societal changes and adulated Juan and Evita Perón, (these youth would later be persecuted by the military junta), and their more traditional parents, (some of whom would come to form Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo). In March of 1976, in a coup d'etat, a military junta comprised of Eduardo Massera, Jorge Videla and Orlando Agostí came to power.[3] They began what they would call, "a restructuring process" of the government meant to control the guerilla

[1] Simpson, 10.
[2] Ibid., 10.
[3] Guest, 12.

warfare. This “restructuring process” was in reality an oppressive military dictatorship in which an estimated 30,000 "subversives," primarily politically active youth went missing.[4]

The Legacy of the Dictatorship

One of the inevitable effects of the brutal dictatorship on current politics is the high collective conscious regarding human rights. This is affected by international political climates. Through the 1990's and early 2000's global politics switched from the United States and Soviet Union competing for global domination, to being unipolar with the United States as the major world power. This is now shifting to multipolar politics and other world powers are on the horizon. Despite this, The United States continues to often be seen as a beacon of imperialism. Argentina is no exception to this perception, and "the capitalism of the United States" is often seen as a world power that supported the military dictatorship and was in breach of basic human rights, a stigma that still lingers.[5] Prior to assuming public office, officials must go through a screening process during which their history pertaining to human rights is thoroughly investigated.[6] In Argentina, memory is an important concept. The mantra, "Nunca Mas," meaning, never again, (in reference to the dictatorship) is ubiquitous. Argentina's process of reconciliation has an interesting chronology. During the return to democratization, the newly elected President, Raul Alfonsin began the process of prosecuting high-level military officials responsible for the war atrocities. But fears of splintering an already divided nation, led Alfonsin

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[4] Ibid., 22.
[5] Feinmann, 57.
[6] *Feministas en el gobierno*

to pass *Ley de obedencia debida*[7] and *Punto Final*. Following Alfonsin, the conservative Carlos Menem was elected and the proseuction of the military dictatorship became a taboo subject**.** Only now under the Kirchners is the process of seeking truth, justice and reconciliation being pursued, and has the notion of political memory reemerged.

The spectrum of politics present in Argentina is extremely broad, with parties ranging from socialism to radicalism and everything in between. The general Argentine population is also notably informed of political on goings. This may seem an unfair generalization to make, but throughout the course of my research anecdotal evidence was strong. I found no Argentines without an opinion, and a vehement one at that. However, this political involvement amongst the general populous has been decreasing since the dictatorship, a figure that hit a new low in 2010, with approximately 20% of the population involved with a political party.[8] Catalina Smulovitz, Professor at Universidad Torcuato di Tella points out, that the more legitimate and stable governments become, the more peripheral politics becomes, and people have the luxury of being apathetic about politics. Immediately following the dictatorship, involvement in political parties was extremely high, whereas within the past twenty years, political involvement has been on the decline.[9] A common political term is, "pueblo," meaning the will of the general populous. The connotations of the words "populist" and "militant" offer interesting insight into the politics of modern day Argentina. The word populist often carries a negative connotation, one associated with feeble-mindedness and false promises, whereas the word militant, rather than being seen as abrasive, is more often interpreted as having strong convictions and a willingness to fight for goals and values. The word *Patria* holds special significance in many South American nations,

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[7] A law which pardoned military officers who took part in the crimes if they were acting under orders from higher up officers
[8] lapop.org
[9] Catalina Smulovitz. Personal. 7/11/11.

not solely as "nation" but also meaning "motherland," which is often evoked in the name of sacrifice for the country. These terms are often used in regards to the campaign for women's rights and their status in politics. All this terminology is inherently subjective and it must be kept in mind that the vast majority of my interview subjects were involved in left-wing politics, and hence provided narrow definitions of these political terms. Despite this, it is important to note how political involvement is defined and perceived, and how the dictatorship has shaped the constantly evolving politics of Argentina.

The Status of Women in Argentina

One of the most prominent figures for women in Argentina continues to be Eva Perón (1919 – 1952). Evita, as she is endearingly termed, was Juan Peron's second wife was intrinsic to Perón's widespread popularity. She was the Minister of Labor and created her own foundation to tackle poverty and social issues affecting families, and was pivotal in gaining women the right to vote in 1949. She died from uterine cancer in 1952.[10] In modern day Argentina, the figure of Evita is appropriated as both a saint-like figure and an idol for left-wing militant groups. In embracing her role as a politician's wife Evita was able to successfully gain women rights, and in time she has gained a political identity of her own, a common occurrence in Argentine politics.

In Argentina in the mid 1970's, there were very few women in politics. Although Isabel Perón was the first non-royal female head of state in the Western hemisphere, her government was seen as politically incapable by the public, and a cover for the military coup that was to come. Prior to her term in office, Isabel had no political background. She met Perón as a dancer

[10] Lavrin, 12.

in Panama. The reality was that women in politics were simply not taken seriously. A women's legislative agenda was virtually non-existent. The challenges to gender equality were real: the "Patria Potestad" gave men legal control of their family, and over children within the confines of the family, it upheld unequal inheritance laws, as well as the criminalization of abortion. Beyond the legal aspects of Patria Potestad, the military rulers were, on the whole, unfriendly towards social agendas.[11]

The church in Argentina, and the conservatism with which it is associated has been a continuous obstacle to achieving concrete elements of a feminist agenda in the country. Argentina is a majority Catholic country, and although the influence of the church may be decreasing, it continues to be a political force. For instance, in the revised 1994 constitution the clause linking the state to the Catholic Church was not removed. The church has been the driving force behind the opposition to divorce and abortion.[12] Despite the influence of the church, much progress has been made in regards to women's rights legislatively since the military dictatorship. However, abortion is still criminalized under Argentine Law. Many conservative sects oppose abortion on religious grounds, The Lower Camera of Congress recently held The First National Discussion on Abortion. At the discussion, lines were extremely drawn, protestors mobbed the building, and tensions, as to be expected, ran high. Pro-choice organizations have adopted green napkins, mimicking the famous white napkins that Las Madres used while parading around the Plaza. This exemplifies, even among women struggling for women's rights, the reverence for women and mothers and the sway they hold in political

[11] CEDAW
[12] Lebon, 14.

decisions, and the "social maternity" present in politics.[13] The debate over the right to abortion has been central to women's agendas, as it remains one of the biggest legislative hurdles facing women, and one with some of the most vehement opposition and stigma surrounding it. In 2008 stricter sanctions were actually placed against women who seek abortions and doctors who perform them. Following the dictatorship, President Alfonsín passed several laws benefiting women, including the overturning of Patria Potestad, creating a Women's Department under the office of the President and legalizing divorce. Other important legislative advances in regards to women's rights include the passing of the Ley de Matrimonio Igual.[14] The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) was ratified but it was not incorporated to the constitution until 1994.[15] The National Council of Women was established to promote equal social, political, and economic opportunities for women. The council works with the special representative for international women's issues, the Ministry of Labor, and union and business organizations to form the Tripartite Committee on Equal Opportunity for Men and Women in the Workplace, which aims to support the equal treatment of men and women in the workplace.[16] Argentina also ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in 1996, but this has not been enacted or enforced in many of the provinces. According to the United Nations, Argentina ranks sixty, out of one hundred and thirty-eight countries on the Gender Inequality Index.[17] On the United Nations Gender Equity Index,[18] they rank thirty-first out of one hundred and fifty-seven nations.

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[13] Social maternity defined as the implementation of social policies in politics because of a deep-rooted regard for the role of women.
[14] U.S. Department of State
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Measures the loss in achievement due to gender inequality
[18] Measures inequity in education, empowerment, and economic activity.

Legislatively, and internationally Argentina is ranked amongst some of the most progressive nations in regards to women's rights.[19] According to Clori Yelicic,

> "The subject of gender has made crucial advances in terms of laws. That's not to say that they are all completed, but there is an important norm that no one is opposing this subject… There was a tightening of relations because there were concrete issues... Today we have legislators bringing forward a project that over 200 people have worked on; this synthesis is a result of the confluence of groups. Political women have worked very hard for this and to take this space for participation in political participation."[20]

Women have entered into politics, and advances have been made, however, a feminist agenda is still in the process of being formed and just as important, implemented. In subsequent sections, I would like to address how the military dictatorship served to influence, motivate and or lead women to organize themselves to work towards the successes that have been achieved on the women's agenda, and how, or if, it will help in the further implementation of that agenda.

Mobilization Under the Dictatorship

Women have taken two divergent paths in mobilizing themselves towards the end of dictatorship and the achievement of democracy: involvement in human rights organizations or in party politics. Women throughout history have mobilized during times of crisis that directly affect them, but when crisis is over and infrastructure is laid down, women are repeatedly left out

[19] Inter Parliamentary Union
[20] Clori Yelicic. Personal. 7/12/11.

of the planning process and, in many cases, left out of politics all together.[21] In Argentina's case, women have managed to sustain political mobilization, many of the causes behind this mobilization stem from the last Argentine military dictatorship.

Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo are a prominent example of women in human rights. The majority of Las Madres were housewives, who stayed at home until their children were disappeared during the dictatorship. When the military began kidnapping youth and taking them to clandestine detention centers, it fell upon their mother's shoulders, first to search for them, then to fight for justice to those who were responsible, and even until now to continue to take up the fight for social justice that their children began. Las Madres, although by no means a feminist group, made "the personal political."[22] They used difference feminism, or the respect afforded to them as women and mothers as leverage for their cause. Part of the reason why they were able to protest the junta in public was because of the reverence for the nuclear family that the junta propagated. Las Madres were formed in 1977 by a group of women searching desperately for their children, unable to find records of their disappearances, or find any help from the government who denied their disappearance; they took their frustrations directly to the Plaza de Mayo, the main square, in front of the President's house to protest to the dictatorship. Every Thursday, they gathered their wearing their white handkerchiefs and often carrying pictures of their missing children. In December of 1977 one of their founders and leaders, Acuzena Villaflor along with other Madres were kidnapped and disappeared. Since the end of the disappearance their bodies have been identified. Following these disappearances Las Madres continued to march every Thursday and continued the search for their children. Las Madres became internationally renowned for their activism and following the return to democracy they

[21] Feminismo, Ciudadania y política democratica radical.
[22] Fisher, 33.

continued their struggle to bring those responsible for the atrocities to justice. What started as a non-aligned political movement diverged into two factions in 1986, forming one highly politicized line and one line that adheres to their founding principles, La Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Madres de Plaza de Mayo - linea fundadora. Right now in Argentina, The Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo is under much scrutiny. There have been embezzlement charges against Pablo Schoklender, their treasurer who their controversial leader, Hebe de Bonafini has taken on as a son.[23] Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo has many social initiatives. Two of their primary projects are Sueños Compartidos, an affordable housing organization, and The Universidad Popular de Las Madres, a humanities centered university.[24]

The Linea Fundadora on the other hand define themselves as having the few mothers who were politically active before their children went missing and the rest who became involved after the dictatorship. Maria Adela Antokoletz, a member of the Linea Fundadora describes the split between the two groups as, "a bad divorce."[25] The split is one over irreconcilable differences over the desired methods to pursue, with la fundación ending up with most of the assets and the name.

It is hard to categorize Las Madres as anything other than mothers, first and foremost. Both lines of Las Madres took their children's struggle, one that they weren't always in agreement with and kept their never-ending fight for social equality alive. Although Las Madres are ostensibly a group of mothers, they have been pioneers in fighting the state and women upholding social agendas. The two lines have polarized approaches to politics, which is indicative of the paths women often choose between in politics. Las Madres are a group, despite

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[23] Rosemberg.
[24] Representative of Universidad de las Madres. Personal. 6/17/11.
[25] María Adela Antokoletz. Personal. 6/23/11.

the present scandals, that is greatly revered. Their activities have inspired future figures and organizations, however, there is a distinct line drawn between the politics of Las Madres and partisan politics, and it is important to distinguish between groups that work within and outside the system. The women of the Union de Mujeres de Argentina (UMA)[26] elaborate, "During a crisis, the parties sometimes are able to achieve results, and sometimes they are not, but you do not see them interested in the problems of the people."[27] Argentina is on the cusp of changing women's expectations and this has been achieved because women leaders have effectively used the respect they garner in the home to do push their boundaries. Nora Cortiñas, of the Linea fundadora says, "I think governments should respect the role of human rights organs and not want to invade their space and compromise their independence." Human rights organizations play a very specific role within Argentine politics, one that is not necessarily in the center of partisan politics, but intrinsically involved in the forming and lobbying of agendas. As Catalina Smulovitz explains, "Feminine agendas have gone through social movements to politics - it is their presence that forces politics to take part in some issues of a feminist agenda."[28] They have spearheaded campaigns and been in the forefront of creating legislative proposals for politicians.

The effect of women who were in political prisons and in exile abroad under the dictatorship is an unexamined factor on current women's political involvement. One example of ways women sustained their political mobilization while it was dangerous to do so was in prisons. In the few legal prisons that existed, women were often able to stay together, unlike the

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[26] A social organization that provides aid to the impoverished provinces in Argentina.

[27] UMA Interview. Personal. 7/8/11.

[28] Nora Cortiñas. Audio file.

men who were kept in isolation.[29] This was the case in Villa Devoto, a prison solely for women political prisoners. While imprisoned these women were able to create a tight-knit community and intricate forms of organization and communications, which allowed them to communicate with the outside and kept them sane within their confines. Irma Antognazzi, a former political prisoner elaborates, "because we were all specifically political prisoners, we had to organize ourselves to survive, and that carried over after we left the prison."[30]

Women who were in exile on the other hand, were exposed to new organizations, thoughts and political practices that had not been seen in an Argentina that had been having successive military coups since 1930.[31] Argentina looked more to European feminists, such as Simone DeBeauvoir, rather than American feminists for inspiration. The first quota law for women in legislature was established in Germany in 1988. During the dictatorship many women were exiled to Germany, Maria Rigat, of FES Genero[32] recalls, "I was in Germany during the dictatorship, and they had the first quota system and we brought ideas from there back with us."[33] The majority of women I interviewed belonged to a generation that was characterized by their political activism and the backlash. The state responded to that activism with state-led terrorism. In summation, the dictatorship was indisputably a time of fear. Clori Yelicic, a member of the socialist party, describes living in Argentina under the dictatorship as, "very difficult to live clandestinely. We continued to be active in secret, even though we weren't an extremist group, no kind of participation was allowed. We had to take care of ourselves, keep to

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[29] These should be distinguished from the clandestine detention centers where the "desaparecidos" were kept under the dictatorship.
[30] Irma Antognazzi. Personal. 6/21/11.
[31] Guest, 14.
[32] An organization that fights for women's political representation, legislation, and rights.
[33] Maria Rigat. Personal. 6/20/11.

ourselves, there was a lot of fear."[34] Graciela DiMarco lived in what was called, "inxilation," living in exile and isolation within her own country. She recalls burning books, and running to the bathroom to meet people in secret to hug over good news. The atrocities witnessed during the dictatorship served to cement a commitment to fighting social injustices. Some groups of women found strength from their children, some found strength within their confines, and some found inspiration from going abroad, all stemming from the dictatorship and carrying on until today. Women used the dictatorship as a catalyst, it was an immediate opponent and hegemonic force to overcome, however, the visceral experiences which came out of it not only mobilized but cemented many women's political involvement.

The Trajectory of Feminism

Feminism in the 1960's, known as first wave feminism, is often associated with middle-class women fighting for women's rights. Second Wave feminism is perceived to be more encompassing of feminists of different race and socio-economic status. The United Nations Women's Decade was kicked off in 1975 at the conference in Mexico City. The decade consisted of three major conferences, the second two in Copenhagen and Nairobi.[35] As the conferences proceeded, the demographics of women who were able to attend broadened. In this vain, Latin America has begun to have annual "*encuentros de mujeres*."[36] These *encuentros* are a meeting of different organizations, led by men and women and involved in a variety of activities pertaining to women. The *encuentros* have made feminism a more accessible idea to

[34] Clori Yelicic, Personal. 7/12/11.
[35] Jacquette.
[36] DiMarco, *Pueblo Feminista*

the average working woman, and related feminism directly to women's daily struggles. The 1990's saw a confluence of women's social networks, and what Graciela DiMarco, a professor at Universidad de San Martin explained as a, "pueblo feminista."[37] These groups represent a wider population of women, who like the women from UMA, may at some point have found feminism to be "exclusive" and instead took up social causes which inadvertently led them to feminism.[38] Mabel Burin is a psychoanalyst and one of the founders of the Center for Gender Studies, which came into existence under the dictatorship and served to help many families of disappeared and women who wished to remain within academic circles in secret for fear of persecution. She worked with the *madres* on occasion throughout the dictatorship but at the end of the dictatorship Las Madres shut themselves off from outside groups. [39] This is similar to how feminists are perceived, as shut off because of the exclusivity of their struggle. Social organizations span the gamut; they can work vertically or horizontally, meaning they can protest the state and legislation or they can protest situations and take direct action. They take on different feminine agendas, and work through a slew of different avenues. A women's agenda, according to DiMarco, has always been a form of counter hegemony.[40] Part of the success of these women's organizations is due to their nature as minority groups. Because they have continually found immediate adversaries, beginning with the male military junta and evolving to social issues such as access to food and education for children, women have stayed mobilized and been inspired by annual *encuentros* with other women from similar backgrounds with different projects. The *encuentros* have essentially become a way to institutionalize and increase the exchange of thoughts and ideas between different but overlapping organizations, which can then make their

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[37] Ibid., 3.
[38] Interview with the women from UMA
[39] Mabel Burin. Personal. 6/8/11.
[40] Graciela DiMarco. Personal. 7/7/11.

way into the political realm. According to Catalina Smulovitz, "in terms of the history of Argentina, it's clear that involvement has changed from parties to social movements." Agendas have truly been formed at these *encuentros*, from which they have been taken to the political parties. There are two primary schools of thought regarding women in international development, that is, Women in development versus Gender and development.[41] The argument essentialized is a debate over whether or not women should create separate agencies that specifically address women's issues or whether they should strive to include a gender initiative into all agencies. This dilemma has manifested itself in Argentine politics in that issues have created a space where these issues can be cultivated and then expanded to legislation. The situation in Argentina has been reflective of global trends regarding women and development and gender in development. The primary woman's initiative following the dictatorship was to create the quota law and to create a feminine space. Following this wave, women's agendas have tried to incorporate and mainstream women's issues into all aspects of politics. This has certainly been the case with the *encuentros*, where issues have been debated in a delegated space for women, but will now begin to mainstream themselves.[42]

Women in Partisan Politics

During the period of my research, Buenos Aires was preparing for presidential, municipal and legislative elections, leaving most politicians on the campaign trail and many unavailable for interviews; however, it also made media and literature about them easily accessible. Cristina Kirchner is the first legitimately elected woman president in the country. She ascended into

[41] Jacquette, xx.
[42] Vasallo, 12.

office in 2007 after her husband; Nestor completed his four-year term as president. Nestor Kirchner was elected president in 2003 with only 22% of the vote and died in October 2010 from a heart attack. He became president during the nation's largest economic crisis in recent memory. Nestor and Cristina's legacy, however, are their efforts improve human rights in the country. The first steps taken were to declare the *ley de punto final* and *obedencia debida* unconstitutional, leading to the trials of military members responsible for the kidnapping and murder of "disappeared persons" during the dictatorship.[43] The military trials are the only ones of the like in the world. The military members are being tried not only for crimes against humanity, but for genocide, claiming it was a systematic attack against political enemies. The United Nations classifies genocide as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.[44] Were the military members to be convicted, it would be an unprecedented occurrence. Las Madres have been crucial in pursuing the "justice to those guilty," and military trials.[45] Cristina has come to be a strong supporter of a human rights agenda and has been a staunch supporter of Las Madres and of social agendas, such as support of gay marriage. However, Cristina has been hesitant to broach women's issues such as abortion, and none of my interviewees identified Cristina with a feminine agenda, which may still be seen as too controversial.[46] Although having a woman elected to executive office bears unequivocal symbolic significance, and Kirchner remains a competent woman in office, she was elected immediately following her husband's popular term in office. The Kirchners are often compared to a modern day Evita and Juan Perón. Although there is significance to both Evita and Cristina's positions, they have arguably gotten there through their association with a man in

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[43] Sarlo, 49.

[44] Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II

[45] Sarlo, 161.

[46] All Interviews

politics. This is often the case in the Peronist party, whether referring to Evita, Isabel, Cristina or Congress members. Kirchner's politics have not challenged the expectations of women in politics.

All the women who I spoke to became involved in politics for three different reasons: university activism, familial politics, or pressing needs.[47] They in turn entered in politics primarily through four different vehicles: university, relation to a man or family, grassroots organizations or the quota law.[48] Many women who entered social organizations felt disillusioned with party politics. They claimed politicians would say one thing and do another.[49] Congresswoman Maria Luisa Storani elaborates, "These social movements have closed themselves up and then made themselves accessible."[50] Throughout the years social organizations have moved towards and away from partisan politics, in order to tackle specific issues. Political entrances are just as classifiable as legislation. Women who entered politics through grassroots organizations or university were more likely to take up feminine agendas, whereas women who entered through the quota law or relation to a man were more likely to enter partisan politics, often without a feminine agenda. Las Madres mobilized because of a pressing need to find their children and they have maintained their mobilization. The majority of exiles and prisoners were university activists who, upon return took up legislative initiatives.

Within partisan politics it is still hard to find an overarching feminist agenda. The stigma that "feminists" are masculine, contrary figures continues to exist, and the term has only recently gained much following. Graciela DiMarco proclaims, "I am a feminist, but that still carries a

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[47]All Interviews
[48] Maria Rigat. Personal. 6/20/11.
[49] UMA interview. Personal. 7/8/11.
[50] Maria Luisa Storani

stigma, maybe it's not as strong as it once was, but if you try to define feminism it awakens negative reactions, even in circles that consider themselves progressive."[51] However, according to most women involved in politics, this is changing. Women in politics on the whole tend to be more associated with "soft" politics, social issues which directly pertain to the private life of women, rather than with partisan party politics and traditionally "hard" politics such as security and economics. When asked in interviews, women repeatedly seemed to see a difference in the manner in which women did politics.[52] Women are seen as seeking concurrence, they traverse vertical political structures and are imagined to be caring politicians who seek to address (the real social issues facing the people) around them.[53] Though political methods may diverge, many perceptions regarding women in politics prevail.

In 1991, Argentina implemented the first mandatory Quota Laws, mandating that 1 of every 3 women on the candidate list for congress must be a woman. Much of this stemmed, not only from perceived machismo in Argentina but because of seemingly universal complaints on behalf of women.[54] In her book, "Justice, Gender and the Family," Susan Moller Okin delves into issues surrounding women and their dual obligations to family and to careers and the often incompatibility of the two. A common complaint amongst all the women I interviewed, but a problem that is not unique to Argentina is the balance of juggling home and work life. Many women who do enter into politics either do not have children or have grown children.[55] Another common observation was the lack of women in the highest managerial position, also common outside of Argentina. Women continue to face a glass ceiling and though they are now entering

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[51] Graciela DiMarco. Personal. 7/7/11.
[52] All interviews.
[53] Jacquette.
[54] Okin., 17.
[55] Ibid., 18.

into congress more than ever, heads of political parties are rarely women. The Quota law has been extremely successful at promoting women into political office, with a 38.5% female congress.[56] Although the quota law has been amazingly successful, and comparably more effective than other ones implemented, such as in Brazil, simply stated by Mabel Burin, Psychoanalyst and the founder of the Center for Women's studies, "being a woman does not make you conscious of gender."[57] One inevitable consequence repeated by everyone I interviewed is that because of the quota law, the majority of women in politics are not feminist. The Quota Law has necessarily and effectively brought women into partisan politics, but a gender agenda has been slower to form. The Quota Law campaign promoted the idea that, "one woman in politics changes the woman, many women in politics change politics."[58] One, woman politician whose name repeatedly cropped up when it came to feminist topics is Nilda Garre, the Minister of Security. Garre has not only assumed a post normally reserved for men, but also incorporated issues of gender into her male dominated sphere, including mandatory classes on sexual assault for members of the military.[59] Nilda Garre serves as a prime example of advances women have made in politics since the dictatorship. She has no relation to a man in politics and she functions outside of the expected feminine sphere, bringing aspects of gender to new areas of politics. There will eventually be a point when the quota becomes excessive and no longer advances a feminine agenda. This point may be when a popular feminism develops, and common will pursues gender equality rather than law enforces it from the top-down. That point has yet to be reached and for now Argentina has provided an extremely effective example of

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[56] ipu.org
[57] Mabel Burin. Personal. 6/8/11.
[58] Jelin, 4.
[59] Ibid., 4.

women not only creating a space for themselves within politics but also truly inculcating themselves in politics and changing the manner in which things work.

Conclusions

Women have sustained their political involvement from the dictatorship in varied ways. Women have managed to continue their activism because they have created spaces for themselves and been able to translate these spaces from the social to political spheres. The dictatorship spurred mobilization, but the farther-reaching consequences of the dictatorship were the opportunities for organization that it continued to offer and the various paths it offered women in social and political spheres. Following the dictatorship women have had to face a slew of different, immediate obstacles in order to gain their rights. Feminism has been a form of counter hegemony that is now gaining a popular backing. With this popular backing may also come a vehicle, through which women's involvement can not only be implemented, but also widely supported and eventually, assumed in office. Argentina is often cited as a traditionally *machista* country, however, it also has deep regard for the value of women. This has two main consequences, one is that feminism may be slow to gain popularity in Argentina, the second however, is that it may in the long run be more effective. Women have entered into politics as relatives, prisoners, exiles, inxiles, and been involved in social and political spheres. Many women who have entered into politics as candidates have descriptively represented women, but many women who have pursued social agendas have reflected the political needs of women. There are many factors that lead to mobilization, that decide political route, and that determine efficacy, however, much of it is traceable to the mobilization that occurred during and

immediately followed the dictatorship. Mobilization of a variety of social and political movements led to the current confluence of social and political. In conjunction these social and political strategies have shifted political norms in Argentina and promulgated a feminine agenda, and created a lasting sphere for women in all aspects of politics.

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