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Women's Mobilization in Latin America: A Case Study of Venezuela

Brianna Russell
berussell@usfca.edu

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Women's Mobilization in Latin America

A Case Study of Venezuela

By Brianna Russell

University of San Francisco

Women's Mobilization in Latin America

A Case Study of Venezuela

A Thesis Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree

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By

Brianna Russell

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Women's Mobilization in Latin America
A Case Study of Venezuela

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree.

Approved:

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Tiffany Linton-Page

Academic Director: Dr. Anne Bartlett

Dean of Arts and Sciences

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Abstract

I examine the following elements in regards to women's mobilization in Latin America and Venezuela from the late 1950s to the present: (a) the influence of the state and economy on times when women mobilized (b) class division within the movement (c) women's demands during different time periods (d) the ways in which women were successful in working towards gender equality. This thesis reviews the literature on women's mobilization in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. I find that women mobilized across class lines with the masses to end dictatorships. Women demobilized during transitions to democracy due to partisan rivalry. During the neoliberal era women in Latin America mobilized across middle and lower classes for social services, economic stability, and employment opportunities. They were successful in receiving social welfare programs funded by the state. In some cases in Latin America, women across middle and lower classes mobilized with men for a socialist state that would include gender equality initiatives in its transformation. Countries that underwent the transition to socialism contributed to women's mobilization efforts by including women in leadership roles and the armed forces. At this time, women were successful in receiving a broader range of social services funded by the state, political inclusion, and economic opportunity.

I then examine in-depth women's mobilization in Venezuela with an emphasis on the past fifteen years under the government of Hugo Chávez. Women's mobilization from the 1950s to the 1990s took similar forms in relation to the rest of the region. However, Venezuela is a unique case because of what women were able to accomplish with support from the state from 1999 to

today. Venezuela was the first to create a gender inclusive constitution with social security benefits for homemakers. Additionally, Venezuela was able to maintain a state of democracy over the last fifty-four years since the removal of dictatorship in 1958. Venezuela has also invested one of the largest amounts of revenue in its social welfare missions that have predominantly assisted poor women. The Chávez government has included feminist ideology in its socialist rhetoric that has opened up the opportunity for further accomplishments in the struggle for gender equality.

The analysis of the Venezuelan case nuances our understanding of how politics and economics shape women's mobilization in Latin America because of its success in maintaining an environment conducive towards gender equality.

Section 1: Introduction

“We are amidst a profound social transformation in which discrimination, prejudices, and the injustices against women are coming to the forefront. This revolution has recognized women as human beings. Discrimination is a phenomenon that has existed for centuries and it is impossible to eradicate within five years. However, Venezuelan women now know that this revolution is for them too and they are beginning to wake up” -Nora Casteneda, the President of the Woman’s Bank in Venezuela (Wagner, 2005c).

As I walk out of the newly built metro station, and down the escalator into downtown Caracas, I somehow enter a crossfire. I fall down the rabbit hole into a full force campaign rally between Chávez supporters and Capriles¹ supporters yelling inaudible “boos” and chants at each other; each side trying to out shout the other. Ironically enough, both groups are lined up symbolically according to political spectrum on opposite sides with Chávez supporters on the left (west side) and Capriles supporters on the right (east side). There is a sense of tension between the two groups and I start to feel nervous about being in the middle. At that moment I begin to approach people in the crowd and initiate conversation. Women on both sides of the political spectrum voiced their opinions on why they were or were not voting for Chávez. The first woman I spoke to was a Chávez supporter and retired high school history teacher, Neris Antequera.² She spoke about Chávez and her undying support for him, as well as media manipulation, especially United States media, and how Chávez is demonized. People migrate around her as onlookers join our circle in order to hear her voice. “Chávez has made possible for

¹ Capriles was the oppositional candidate for the Presidential elections in 2012. He represented the center-right and the Justice First party.

² All names of people interviewed during this study are pseudonyms.

us women to be here in this square expressing our political opinions in a way we were never allowed to do before. He is a feminist and so am I.”

I experienced the story above on August 12, 2012. Hugo Chávez won the Presidential election two months later with 54% of the votes (Grainger, 2012). Chávez supporters pointed to the gains for women as a result of the 1999 Constitution and the government’s social welfare programs. In an interview with Al Jazeera, Venezuelan Maria Zambrano, aged 66 stated, “In the past, a woman of my age would be expected to be baking cookies at home, because of the revolution, I was able to finish high school. Now I am studying law. Imagine, at my age!” (as cited in Arsenault, 2012). During my fieldwork in Venezuela, I even encountered women who were not Chávez supporters who felt the social welfare programs had positively impacted women.

Chávez was first democratically elected in 1998 by the people and a year later created a new constitution that was gender inclusive. This constitution is said to be “one of the most progressive constitutions in the world” (Berman, 2006, p.18). The constitution took on new levels of gender inclusiveness by changing the value of women’s house work. The constitution includes articles that make homemakers eligible for social security, promise maternal health care throughout the gestation period, and equality amongst the division of domestic responsibilities between the husband and wife (Berman, 2006, p.22). It is “the only Constitution in Latin America that recognizes housework as an economically productive activity” (Berman, 2006, p. 18). Venezuela was seen by the region as a leader in the struggle for women’s equality. The 1999 Constitution made feminist history when these articles were adopted for the first time in Latin America.

In 2003, by taking greater control over Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. PDVSA (the state-owned oil company) Chávez was able to secure funding to establish social welfare programs targeted at poor populations (known as missions). These programs included adult literacy, higher education scholarships/cash transfers, the creation of subsidized grocery stores in poor neighborhoods, business training, micro-finance options, and women's housework allowance. The majority of participants in these programs were women, as were a majority of the workers and volunteers that facilitate these programs in the communities (Rakowski, 2008). By using oil revenues to fund these projects, Chávez appealed to lower classes and provided basic state services in addition to original forms of state support. Rakowski (2008) also observed that "Regardless of whether or not the *misiones* are clientelist projects, they represent an extraordinary array of services and programs that reach many people in mainly low income neighborhoods and that are embraced and nurtured by local volunteers and community groups" (p.10). The popularity of these social missions can be seen by the fact that both Presidential candidates during the October 2012 elections were advocating to keep the welfare programs running on into the future.

Venezuela is an interesting case to examine because women have successfully created state changes in policy, as well as in sustaining a democratic state that remained supportive of gender equality. Venezuela's 1999 Constitution is both gender inclusive and ground breaking in regards to equality in the labor force. Moreover, the use of state funded welfare programs have been successful in alleviating poverty and empowering women. Today women in Venezuela are literate, heads of households, community leaders, political activists and candidates, loud and in the streets advocating for gender equality and for leadership that supports their demands. In this

thesis, I seek to understand what the conditions were that produced this outcome. Venezuela, like many states in Latin America, has elected leftist leaders to veer away from neoliberal policies.

Today, women are shaping this post-neoliberal project in Venezuela.

In this research, I analyze the tri-directional relationship between the state, the economy, and women in Latin America. I examine women's mobilization in Latin America over time, and in particular under what conditions women were able to mobilize successfully for gender equality. I find that women's mobilization in Latin America was largely shaped by political and economic conditions. This research specifically looks at women's mobilization in Venezuela over the last fifty years as a case study in relationship to women's mobilization patterns in Latin America as a whole. This research is divided into five sections: (1) Introduction and Methodology, (2) Literature Review on women's mobilization in Latin America, (3) Case Study of Venezuela, (4) Analysis of results, (5) Conclusion.

In the next section, I review the literature on women's movements in Latin America from the 1970s to the present. In Latin America, women have historically mobilized across class lines during periods of dictatorship to demand the state uphold their basic rights as citizens and not necessarily around gender interests³. They have succeeded at mobilizing with the rest of the population in removing dictators from power. However, they have failed at making gender interests a priority during these struggles for democracy. Nevertheless, during the 1970s, new opportunities for women to participate in the labor force and in higher education opened up.⁴

³ Gender Interests: Molyneux identifies the difference between strategic and practical gender interests, in which it is important to evaluate the impact of one on the other. Strategic interests involve concerns over changing gender inequality and female inferiority, such as political equality. (Molyneux, 1986:284) Practical interests are more of an immediate need that must be met in a survival mode. Such interests include housing, food, finances. (Molyneux, 1986:284) As mentioned previously women's interests are not homogenous but rather differ based on other socio-economic factors.

⁴ According to Rakowski (2003) "In 1970, women constituted 40 percent of those enrolled in universities" (p.388).

These opportunities gave women from the upper and middle classes the empowerment⁵ to mobilize for democracy within the home (domestic violence laws). Here we see how the economic context shaped women's individual opportunities and subsequently their demands as a demographic group for gender equality. During the economic crisis of the 1980s and the imposition of neoliberal policies, women mobilized across class lines again for state services and economic independence (non-gender specific interests).⁶ Here women were successful in mobilizing with men for the removal of neoliberalism and replacing it with social welfare programs. The last part of the literature review examines women's mobilization in Nicaragua under the Sandinista project to transition to socialism. The socialist project focused on eliminating inequality and hence opened up opportunities for advances for women, as well as organization of women across lower and middle class divides. Women mobilized both around gender specific interests and non-gender specific interests during the socialist period. During this time, women were successful in pressuring the state to include them in political leadership as well as targeting them in the implementation of the social programs.

This section is followed by an examination of women's movements in Venezuela from the late 1950s to the present. Venezuela went from a dictatorship to a democracy in the late 1950s. Since then, Venezuela has not had a dictatorship in contrast to many other countries in Latin America. Women mobilized around different types of demands under each type of state rule. For example, in the 1950s women mobilized with the rest of the population to end the dictatorship by advocating for human rights. As democracy emerged women demobilized and

⁵ Using Kabeer's (1999) definition of empowerment, "the ability to make strategic life choices, in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (p. 437).

⁶ Using Jaquette's understanding of what it means to have control over monetary sources, "To be full citizens, individuals must have sufficient economic resources to be able to make their own decisions" (2009, p.211), we can interpret the importance of individual economics and autonomy.

became divided by political party affiliation and economic status. Yet, in the 1970s women from the upper and middle classes came together under a booming economy for equality in the work force and at home.

In the 1980s, in Venezuela as in other parts of Latin America, women demobilized, experiencing the negative effects of neoliberal policies. The economic crisis of the 1980s contributed to the demobilization of women around gender issues. This economic context shaped how and for what women in Venezuela, and in Latin America, mobilized. By the 1990s, women from the middle and lower classes mobilized to demand redistributive policies and economic assistance. Under Hugo Chávez, women from all classes were politically active and involved in the creation of the 1999 Constitution. Espina (2007, p.23) specifically cited a number of women that have been active in women's mobilization efforts since the 1930s that assisted in the additions to the 1999 Constitution. In addition, Chávez's social missions empowered women economically and gave them opportunities to improve their way of life.

The fourth section is a discussion and analysis of what the examination of the case of Venezuela adds to our understanding of how the dynamics of politics and economics shape women's mobilization in Latin America. Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, Latin American women have successfully worked with men to end dictatorships, as well as worked together across class lines to change legislation regarding domestic violence, political participation, and labor laws. However, as the saying goes, timing is everything. Venezuela is unique in its progression towards gender equality under a socialist state partly because of its occurrence in the twenty-first century in which gender equality has seen grand successes on a global level. In other parts of Latin America, such as Nicaragua, women's equality under

socialism occurred before the twenty-first century. Additionally, Venezuela has been able to maintain a state of democracy over the past fifty years, has been successful in its transition to socialism while incorporating feminist ideology inside its state apparatus, and has redefined the breadth of state support services through its social missions. The degree to which Venezuela has done these three things is what sets it apart from the rest of Latin American women's mobilizations.

Finally, in the last section is a conclusion in which I discuss the implications of my findings, as well as avenues for further research. This research adds to the limited analysis of women in contemporary Venezuelan politics, and the implications of state policy reforms and social welfare missions on women. The analysis of gender politics is crucial to the development of women's roles politically, economically, and domestically in Latin America.

Methods

In order to answer my research question about the conditions under which women mobilized in Latin America and specifically in Venezuela, I analyzed published primary data, and drew on information from secondary sources. The information from these published sources helped me to understand the historical sequence of events in Venezuela and Latin America as well as identify patterns in terms of when and how women mobilized for their demands and the degrees of success they had in working towards gender equality. The review of this literature provides the theoretical framework I use to analyze the case of Venezuela. Particular attention is paid to the cases of Nicaragua, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil since these countries provide

comparative analysis to the historical trends that occurred during women's mobilization in Venezuela.

This research aims to provide an analysis of the past in order to understand how politics and economics shapes women's mobilization. Berman (2006) stated "It would be naive to look at the political atmosphere in the status quo and measure the progress of political organizations without looking to the past" (p. 22). Historical backgrounds are an essential component to analyzing the present. In this research, I examine the historical foundation of Latin American women's movements, as well as looking more in-depth into the history of women's organizing in Venezuela. Linking past research with my analysis of the present creates a well-rounded, comprehensive study of the factors that shape women's mobilization and the outcomes.

In addition, I conducted interviews and participatory observation in Venezuela. During my fieldwork in Venezuela, I was able to observe and conduct informal interviews with women that worked in Venezuela's welfare programs, participants of the programs, government employees, pro-Chávez voters, anti-Chávez voters, teachers, *barrio* residents, and members of women's cooperatives. I spent time in Caracas, Barquisimeto, and Sanare for a total of one month in August 2012. I was able to visit with a total of four government agencies, four missions, three radio stations, two women's cooperatives, two public political rallies, and one youth center.

My fieldwork helped me understand the political dynamics in contemporary Venezuela. By attending campaign rallies and talking to female voters for Chávez and for the opposition, it became clear to me the level of political division was high. However, what was more important was the fact that so many women were involved in these public political rallies expressing their

opinions openly and fearlessly. Discussing gender issues with people in person gave me the opportunity to hear perspectives from a range of people of different socio-economic backgrounds. Seeing the political polarization gave me a better understanding of how divided the people were and how much different the case was in 2012 versus 1998. However, due to my limited resources and short time span in the country, I was not able to reach all the organizations I had hoped to that worked in relation to women's equality. I was also unable to get a large sample size of women to interview or to conduct a survey. My observational research will be used in this study to contribute to my overall understanding of the atmosphere in Venezuela in 2012 and how it lines up with or does not line up with the primary and secondary sources used in this paper.

There are limitations to this methodology that need to be expressed. First, there was limited statistical data available regarding the social welfare program recipients and funding. This made it difficult for me to find out the breadth of the mission's success and empowerment of women. Second, my trip to Venezuela was short due to limited resources and time. The minimal amount of time I was able to spend in Venezuela was not sufficient to conduct proper systematic interviews from a range of women from different demographic backgrounds. This research could be improved by expanding fieldwork in order to get more qualitative and quantitative data on women's perceptions, demographics of mission participants, and class distinctions.

I am one-fourth Venezuelan, and this project reached me on a personal level. My Venezuelan is largely made up of the upper and middle class socio-economic backgrounds. They have expressed their dislike for Chávez and socialism and agree with the Western mainstream

media's biased coverage of the political atmosphere in contemporary Venezuela. I embarked on this research journey with the hopes of finding out whether women are empowered or not, and how the state has impacted their struggle for gender equality.

The main reason for studying this topic is that there is little data available about these new social programs and the affects of Chávez's leadership on the women's movement. By understanding the history of Venezuela, as well as the trends of the region, this research intends to link the past to the present in relation to women's mobilization. By adding to the current discourse on this topic, sociologists and political scientists will better understand the positive and negative affects Chávez's changes have had on the Venezuelan people, specifically on women.

Section 2: Literature Review

“The resurgence of feminism and women’s activism in the region since the seventies has been hard to ignore: women have been active on a broad spectrum of political and cultural fronts, working for social justice and for a more inclusive citizenship with attention to gender power differentials” -(Lebon, 2010, p.3).

In this section, I examine how the nature of the state and the economy have historically shaped women’s mobilization in Latin America. I find that women’s mobilization in countries that transitioned from a dictatorship to democracy were not successful at maintaining high numbers of female participants in politics or at making gender interests a priority during the transition period. Women under dictatorship tended to mobilize with the other populations of the country around the same goal of creating a democratic state. Venezuela transitioned from dictatorship to democracy in the late 1950s while most of the region struggled under authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s. Women’s involvement in the ending of the dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile assisted in women’s inclusion in politics during that time. However, in the 1980s, countries throughout the region implemented neoliberal policies that affected women’s ability to mobilize. Due to a devastated economy and the world economic crisis that exacerbated the country’s debt, the neoliberal policies worsened the situation of the marginalized poor populations and there was social discontent. Since the majority of the poor are women, the economy impacted women’s ability to survive on the most basic levels causing them to mobilize to demand financial support and services from the state.

In countries like Nicaragua in the 1980s and Cuba after 1959, governments sought to construct socialism which held the potential for gender inequality to be addressed. Many women, and other poor populations, were empowered through welfare and redistribution programs. Yet,

during the transitions to socialism in most countries, gender interests took a back seat to what the leadership deemed the greater good of the revolution.

Women's movements in Latin America experienced times of mobilization across class-lines under political turmoil or dictatorship, yet under democracy and neoliberalism women were divided by socio-economic status and demobilized due to partisan rivalry. I argue that women's mobilization has historically been shaped by politics and economics altering women's demands and whether they organize across class. First, I analyze women's movements in Latin America that underwent a political shift from dictatorship to democracy. Second, I outline the limitations of women's organizing under the neoliberal era that swept the region. Lastly, I investigate the outcomes of countries that moved toward a socialist state and the affect this political change had on women's movements.

Women's Mobilization from Dictatorship to Democracy

In Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s women organized against authoritarian state regimes that were violating their basic human rights. Women's movements in the 1970s in Latin America started as resistance movements, or as Jean Franco categorized them as "survival movements" in which women joined the struggle against authoritarian regimes (Nichols, 2011, p. 301). The initial cause for women came from a situation of oppression in which their basic needs for water, food, and housing were at stake as well as their basic civil rights of freedom of speech, and political affiliation.

During Brazil's transition to a democratic government in the 1970s and 1980s, neighborhood associations began to advocate for basic rights in regards to access to housing,

access to education, and labor protections (Perry, 2008, p.200). This mobilization came about because the dictatorship had implemented an ethnic cleansing program targeted at poor neighborhoods. In the 1960s urban land rights became an issue in which the authoritarian regime began a plan to modernize, clean up, demolish and divide neighborhoods in some Brazilian cities (Perry, 2008, p.199). In violation of many human rights and the threat of displacement, many men and women went to the streets to protest the cleansing plan. Shortly thereafter as a response to state and local power struggles, the Women's Association in Gamboa de Baixo emerged in the 1980s. Their goals were to mobilize local residents, especially black women around the need for social programs funded by the state for the city's impoverished neighborhoods (Perry, 2008, p. 200). Unkempt neighborhoods and minimal government services were part of the state's plan to keep these housing projects underdeveloped for the future goal of completely demolishing them and expelling the residents. The state's use of brute force encouraged women to mobilize for the right of their homes and property. With the help of the United Nations Habitat conference in 1996, international support and awareness was raised to help the Brazilian women's neighborhood associations fight for their land and housing rights (Perry, 2008, p. 202). Aligned with the MST, (the Movement of Landless Rural Workers), these two groups conducted many land takeovers, encampments, and marches to demand their rights. The use of women's neighborhood associations is an example of how women from the lower classes were able to mobilize as a gender group. The issue of housing is an example of what women were mobilizing around since it is a practical issue in which women of the same class could find a commonality behind.

This movement, and the inclusion of women, ultimately helped to change Brazilian state leadership, electing Lula as the new President in 2002 (Vanden, 2008 pp.50-54). Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected by the people to help bring state protection and services to the marginalized populations. Since the regime change, Lula executed social programs targeted at education, cash transfers for families, hunger eradication, and job creation while developing the country's infrastructure. All of which empowered women and increased their abilities to participate in multiple facets of the national economy.

During the end of the authoritarian rule in Brazil (and in other countries) women largely from the middle class, began to include feminist rhetoric in their organizing efforts for an equal democracy. This feminist identity movement took on a force and an ideology. Feminists were arguing that "the personal is political" in which domestic life was politicized and public life impacts individuals personal lives (Maier, 2010, p.28). Women were demanding both democracy in the home and for the state to protect their human rights. The violation of human rights were so rampant during dictatorships that women were mobilizing during and after these regimes for the state to uphold justice. Argentina is an example of another form of rights being violated that goes one step beyond the housing situation in Brazil and into the realm of life and death.

During the Dirty War in Argentina from 1976 until 1983, women were mobilizing against the military dictatorship. Under the reign of the military, thousands of suspected subversives were kidnapped and murdered. A group of women began to organize in their neighborhoods searching for answers about their missing children. They came to be known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Stahler-Sholk, 2008, p.214). These women came together to fight for their human rights and the right of the family. Four hundred children went missing and most remained

missing (“History of Abuelas”, n.d.). The disappeared came from all classes of society. The mothers established a commonality across class in the name of their missing children. Together these women rallied in the public square demanding the government provide information and justice for their kidnapped children. In the last thirty years, these women’s groups, including the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, were able to recover more than 80 of the missing children (“History of Abuelas”, n.d.). Here women were constructing a new form of political participation, by going beyond the lines of traditional political process and by working with other women for answers and state justice.

In Chile, dictator President Augusto Pinochet changed the dynamics of the political and personal spheres of women. In the 1980s, Chilean women also mobilized with the rest of the population across class lines to end the authoritarian regime of Pinochet. Under his dictatorship basic human rights were violated on a daily basis creating fear and dissent among the people. Chile is an interesting case because women were divided largely based on class prior to the dictatorship of Pinochet. In 1988, “a coalition was built across party lines united for one purpose: the removal of Pinochet” (Berman, 2006, p.14). Through massive protests and mobilization, Chile was able to return to a democratic state in 1990. Under the new democracy, women were participating more in politics and were benefiting from newly created social welfare programs.

In 2006, Chile elected its first female President, Michelle Bachelet (Berman, 2006, p.16). While she displays an increase in women’s abilities to climb the political ladder, her position raises the question of descriptive representation versus substantive representation through female leadership. Friedman (2009) explained, “...descriptive representation is not equivalent to substantive representation; female leadership doesn’t automatically translate into the promotion

of a feminist agenda, let alone into women-friendly policies” (424). Friedman argued that real change comes in decision making power and through empowering *feminist* leadership. During her Presidency, Bachelet increased the budget of the national women’s ministry to increase the number of gender inclusive initiatives, such as job training for female heads of households, the restructuring of her cabinet to include half female representatives, and campaigns against domestic violence (Balch, 2009). While her achievements are noteworthy, there is still criticism in regards to policies encouraging female representation in political seats. More important than descriptive representation is active citizenship in which women of all classes are participating regularly in public affairs and discussions about national and local issues (Valdes, 2009, p.166). However, by including women in the political decision making process, there will be more opportunities for feminist policies than if no women were involved at all.

Alba Carosio, co-founder and director of the Center for Women’s Studies in Venezuela, argues that, there is a logical theory behind gender parity in politics in which half the population is composed of women thus half the decision making power should be controlled by women (Martinez, 2010, p.74). This was the logic supporting women’s demands for political inclusion. In response to this theory and women’s demands for representation, quota laws were created. In the 1990s, quota laws were made in Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil among other countries in Latin America. In 1991, Argentina was the first to adopt a quota law in the lower legislative chamber (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009, Table 1). These quotas expanded into the upper levels of the legislative chambers and were implemented in a domino effect all over Latin America and the world.⁷

⁷ See appendix 2 chart on quota laws in Latin America

Women's movements were however, demanding more than public policy initiatives. Changing the way people think and behave towards women was an equally important factor in efforts to create gender equality. Lebon (2010) argued that "Influencing changes in discourse and cultural norms is thus essential to gender equity" (p.19). The state contributes largely to the dialogue on the value of women and thus is a key element in the re-shaping of gender norms and stereotypes. The law is written by men thus creating laws from a male perspective (Bryson, 1999, p.98). Women need to become involved in law creation and writing. This theory behind legislation was a motivating factor for women to mobilize against a male dominated state body. Women felt they had something to contribute to the state apparatus instead of continuing to be a recipient of state initiatives.

Feminists argued that working within the state organization for change towards gender equality was not the only route to be pursued. By also working outside the current power structures and creating new ones, they argued women would be able to more effectively push for their demands. Herrera (2010) believed "As long as we continue working from the margins, unable to form a critical mass, we will remain a minority, used either to fulfill the diversity quotas or to serve as decorative objects" (p.303). Here Herrera is stating the need for mass mobilization by women in addition to advocating for substantive policy changes. While quota laws are an example of women being 'decorative objects', the presence of gender inclusive language in the law is an example of women working within the state apparatus to make legitimate changes in women's lives. Quota laws are seen by some as an ineffective way to address gender inequality in politics. Others argue that quota laws are a way to increase the

presence of women in political decision making and potentially increase the influence of feminists in politics.

Feminists have argued that there needs to be a paradigm shift in the way women are perceived in their intellectual and political capabilities. Through the creation of opportunities for continued education, economic independence, and increased labor opportunities women will be able to influence state policies and win positions of power based on merit and expertise. Dietz (1991) made the point that participation is more than “casting a ballot every four years or engaging in interest group activities” (p.243). Gaining the right to vote was a huge accomplishment for women, but was a mere stepping stone towards their full participation in politics. Bryson argued that “Feminist politics therefore involves using the political rights for which earlier generations fought, and working to increase the number of women in positions of public power” (1999, p.90). From a feminist stand point, using state policy to encourage feminist leadership in the government is a step towards increasing gender interests in the state’s agenda.

Women in Brazil and Argentina were able to increase women’s leadership roles both through community participation and local politics. Bryson (1999) said “Women’s involvement in neighborhood and community politics is not usually overtly feminist; it can, however, lead to an increased consciousness of the collective interests of women and to links with the wider women’s movement” (p.93). In Brazil as in Argentina, neighborhood organization created a space for common dissent to be expressed leading to an increase in women’s mobilization. Going from dictatorship to democracy opened up the channel for women’s organization and voice. Neighborhood associations proved to be a valuable mechanism for women to mobilize collectively.

During the transition to from dictatorship to democracy, women often demobilized once the dictator was removed because of party rivalry and socio-economic background. Instead, they mobilized with men around basic citizen rights and political inclusion. At this time, women were successful in working within their respective classes in seeking justice from past citizen rights violation. They were also successful in participating in the transition towards democracy and having female representation in the new governments. Overtime, these replacement regimes faced new forms of economic setbacks and international intervention that undermined initiatives to promote greater gender equality.

Women's Mobilization in Latin America During the Neoliberal Period

There were four significant changes on a global level that impacted Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. The first were the successful transitions from dictatorship to democracy that were discussed in the previous section. The second was the rise of neoliberalism as dominant economic ideology, and its diffusion throughout Latin America in the wake of the debt crises. The third significant event was the collapse of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe, which further solidified neoliberal capitalism's dominance and destroyed any idea that there could be a socialist alternative. And, finally, technological advances in communication globally increased the positive and negative effects of globalization (Maier, 2010, p.38). Women's movements were impacted by these changes in ways that increased mobilization. Women mobilized against the dictatorships because they wanted freedom of speech, basic survival services, and the law to uphold their human rights. Women mobilized in response to failed neoliberal policies because

they exacerbated gender inequalities. Improvements in communication technology allowed women's movements to organize more efficiently and to reach international support groups.

The late twentieth century was important because most countries in this region were dealing with the economic crisis and the negative impact of neoliberal policies. Latin America underwent a severe economic crisis in the 1980s that impacted the state's ability to function and caused significant increases in unemployment and poverty. The whole world felt the negative effects of a global society so intertwined economically that every country suffered. Latin America was hard hit because of its:

unfavorable structural position in the world economy; their economic vulnerability to the changes in the world market and flows of capital; their internal inequalities in income, employment, land tenure, and control of resources; and their populations' destitution and lack of basic necessities, such as food, housing, and health care (Acosta-Belen 1995, p.16).

This instability in the region caused the vast majority of people to be at the mercy of economic conditions controllable and uncontrollable by the state. Men and women across classes were facing hardship and thus looking to the state for an economic policy focused on rebuilding. The state of the economy shaped social movements and altered the demands that women were mobilizing around. In some countries, the explosion of social movement activity in response to the negative impacts of neoliberalism helped elect progressive left leaders, who subsequently took into account the demands of the popular movements who elected them (Vanden, 2008, p. 338). For example, Hugo Chávez was elected in Venezuela in 1998 after more than a decade of social, political and economic instability. Similarly, indigenous leader Evo Morales, was elected in 2005 in Bolivia after the neoliberal policies expanded privatization and U.S. corporate interests in the country and caused mass protests. Rafael Correa, the President of Ecuador, was

elected in 2006 after an odious state debt was created by past corrupt regimes that took loans from international bodies.

Unfortunately, many countries in Latin America experienced what Sachs and Warner (2001) call the resource curse in which countries with resources in high global demand have experienced the opposite of economic growth and development. Such countries as Venezuela (oil), Brazil (timber), and Bolivia (natural gas) have experienced this phenomenon. These resources caused the state to invest heavily into one commodity and to invest in technological advances to help extract their resources quickly and efficiently. By focusing on one source for revenue and not diversifying these countries had high import costs and accumulated foreign debt in order to finance technology to extract their main resource more efficiently. The workers in these industries were treated unfairly and were paid minimally. Corruption at the highest levels of management became rampant as global demand increased for the country's primary resource. Social movements emerged in response to labor exploitation, lack of state services, corruption, and high costs for basic goods. The growth of the local economy of these states was at the mercy of the global economy.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailed out many of these countries with foreign loans while requiring them to implement neoliberal policies. These policies included free trade, privatization, deregulation, and fiscal austerity. Neoliberal policies negatively affected the working class and poor populations in regards to their livelihood and economic independence. Neoliberal policies awakened civil society to create new ways of engaging in political change after realizing the ineffectiveness of these policies in creating socio-economic equality for all. People from both the lower and middle classes mobilized against these policies (Vanden, 2008,

p.43). Through new avenues of mobilization and emphasis on nonviolence social movements used grassroots organizing strategies to influence the state. During this time period the size of the informal sector of the labor force grew dramatically as a result of the neoliberal policies. At a time when women across the globe were participating more in the labor force, these reforms caused many of them to seek work outside the formal economy. In Latin America, women make up 58 percent of the informal workforce as of 2000 (International Labour Office, 2002, p.19). Women were seeking additional work during the neoliberal period in order to survive the economic downturn because of cutbacks in state services.

This economic situation impacted women's demands, focusing them on issues regarding equality in the labor force and income distribution. Women were mobilizing around changes in state legislation in regards to the pressing need of finding work. Feminists were arguing for the state's cooperation with informal workers and including legislative policy to protect these workers with social security and other labor benefits. Bose (1995) argued "Feminist research since the mid-1980s has emphasized the need to re-conceptualize work itself, to measure it on a continuum from formal paid work, to informal paid labor, to household work" (p.2). Women were advocating for state support within the informal workforce to assist women's development towards economic independence.

Due to increasing inequalities during the neoliberal period, women mobilized with men for political change in addition to their gendered demands. In response to social, political, and economic fluctuations caused by the neoliberal policies, women organized with men for these policies to be replaced with programs that would benefit the masses. While most of Latin America was pursuing a capitalist model of development in the twentieth century, some countries

pursued, to varying degrees, a socialist model. In the next section, I consider how this distinct political and economic context shaped women's mobilization, their demands, and the outcome of their struggles.

Women's Movements in Transition to Socialism

During transitions to socialism women have mobilized in large masses across middle and lower class lines, they demanded policy changes regarding unemployment, poverty, housing, political inclusion, and basic government services. All of these elements have been key policy goals of the revolutionary governments. Upper class women worked with men of their economic group to bring down the revolutionary government. Through socialist ideology women have been able to incorporate feminist rhetoric to include women's emancipation as a priority for an equal society. Bryson (1999) argued "Socialism covers a huge range of political theories and practices from reformist social democracy to revolutionary Marxist communism. Despite their profound differences, these share a general belief that unrestricted capitalism is oppressive for most men and women" (p.16). Historically, women have sought out and found opportunities to varying degrees for equality during the transition to socialism.

Most states begin this transitional process with the inheritance of an extremely underdeveloped nation, one exacerbated by historical colonial ties and imperialistic influence from global governance (Fagen, 1986, p.249). Starting at a disadvantage the revolutionary regimes have utilized their socialist rhetoric to keep momentum towards creating a new states run by the masses. Women's issues have been pushed to the outsides of national struggles for the "cause of national liberation" (Acosta-Belen, 1995, p.31). Gender interests were put behind other

goals of the revolution. In the case of Nicaragua in the 1980s, the revolutionary government made significant reforms to include women in the revolution, however these changes decreased as internal and external pressures forced the state to focus on sustaining the revolution and fighting the opposition.

In 1979 Nicaragua had been successful in overthrowing the Somoza regime and replacing it with a new revolutionary leadership known as the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional or the Sandinista National Liberation Front), under which the FSLN ruled until 1990. The socialist state was a response to the “failures of dependent capitalism...imperialism and underdevelopment” (Fagen, 1986, p. 9). The FSLN implemented a program of mass literacy, improved health care, and advocated for gender equality. Through increased educational opportunities, worker training courses, and childcare support women were empowered by the state to participate politically. The Sandinista government also placed women in leadership roles in government.

During Nicaragua’s transition, the new revolutionary regime was able to include women in areas of the government previously dominated by men. The FSLN had been able to appeal to vast populations of women, while also including women in the ranks of the armed forces. It was clear by their guidelines that combating inequality, including among women, was a high priority of their revolution (Molyneux, 1986, pp.287-290). These goals increased women’s participation in politics and in state development. Molyneux (1986) argued that women received the most change in their lives during the Sandinista regime in the form of the welfare programs, legal reforms, and through their invited and appreciated political participation (pp.290-291). Since, the state was a revolutionary regime it worked hard to keep in line with ideals that it started the

revolution around which were largely about equality for all. By giving citizens these freedoms the state empowered women to express their demands and encouraged them to mobilize in conjunction with the state and the revolution.

The FSLN socialist regime understood the value and importance of having half the population involved in state growth and in the national economy. Molyneux (1986) identified three main reasons for revolutionary regimes motives behind advocating for women's equality: to increase the governments support base, to bring women into the work force thus increasing overall production of the country, and to transfer socialist theory into family life (p.295). Women in this context were able to achieve perception change, and new values in the home. In addition, the "program of the FSLN also made special mention of eliminating prostitution and other 'social vices', helping the abandoned working mother, and protecting the illegitimate child" (Molyneux, 1986, p.290). These substantial changes in legislation enhanced women's lives and confidence in the state's desire to emancipate women from sexist structures of oppression.

The FSLN's implementation of social welfare programs reached women directly in response to an economic and systematic imbalance. Women as a group tend to be marginalized when it comes to income and equality. It is worth noting the link between "poverty and violence" since both "are disproportionately experienced by women" creating a need for these issues to have a gender basis (Marshall, 1994, p.143). Women experience the effects of poverty more harshly because of exclusion from the labor force and their traditional roles of domestic work and family rearing.

More often than not women were viewed by the state as victims needing the help of the state. Blumberg (1995) argued, “Instead of focusing on ‘women needing help’, the stress is now on how and why the ‘world needs women’” (p.10). While the state has played the role of savior for women, there was a discursive shift created by feminists in which instead of women needing the state, the state needs women. Women are vital to increasing the workforce and overall production in the country. Women are also essential components of shaping the next generations’ belief system. Blumberg (1995) concluded that women were finding ways to make their roles in society needed instead of being portrayed as victims by the state. This frame of thinking has enabled women to go beyond their traditional roles and critique the state for lack of female empowerment on the part of the state.

In the transition to socialism, the goals of the socialist state will inevitably find class conflict as a response to the ending of privilege, to redistribution policies, to welfare programs, and to increased participation from the marginalized populations (Fagen, 1986, pp.10-11). While class divide emerged within the women’s movement in Nicaragua, bonds formed between the middle and lower classes. The social welfare programs allowed women the space and confidence to mobilize for equality changes and legislative support. Such legislative changes were seen in relation to domestic violence reforms, social security for housewives, and child support laws in Nicaragua.

Here we see how the political context opened up opportunities for women especially in regards to cross class mobilization. Women took advantage of these social programs that empowered them to also demand the state to put into practice its discourse on equality. Women were able to mobilize in masses during the transition to socialism even with class division. They

were successful in their demands for political inclusion and economic opportunities across lower and middle class lines. Women benefited largely from the social welfare programs implemented by the government labeled as part of the socialist shift. Here, women took on a role of power when the conflict with the opposition increased and the government started to back away from its feminist agenda. This is an example of the tri-directional relationship in which women can also impact the state and the economy.

Conclusion

In this review of the literature on women's mobilization in Latin America we see that women mobilized under a dictatorship to work towards the creation of a democratic state. Once the authoritarian regime was replaced women tended to divide along class lines as political parties were formed. This occurred in the cases of Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. Along with this transformation, there were new economic opportunities for women that emerged in the 1970s as well as feminist ideology.

The economic crisis produced questions over the political legitimacy of the dominant political parties and political stability. This ruptured class division among women and led to mobilization by women across class lines to demand economic support and state services.

Under the socialist state, women saw an increase in social welfare programs and political inclusion. Through women's demands for services and economic independence, the socialist state created welfare programs that directly benefited and included women. There have been more significant improvements in women's lives during the state's transition to socialism than during the neoliberal era. Women were mobilizing during the transition to socialism to remind

the state they have the right to organize for their gender demands. They did this in response to their gender interests being put second to the revolutionary interests as conflict with the opposition grew stronger.

Women's movements in Latin America were strongly impacted by the political and economical contexts of the era. During certain periods of state rule, women were able to mobilize in masses around gender interests. As highlighted, these time periods usually came at revolutionary moments, grave violation of human rights on a mass scale, and economic decay. In addition, women from the middle and lower classes were able to mobilize across class lines during most of these stretches. Women's demands altered with the shaping of the economy and state. During authoritarian rule women were demanding justice and basic citizen rights. In times of economic crisis women demanded equality and opportunity in the labor force. Throughout these time periods women have demanded political inclusion, state support against domestic violence. Women have been successful in impacting state initiatives that have adhered to their demands through state laws and social welfare programs.

Section 3: Women's Mobilization in Venezuela

“Someone can put on a red shirt but still be sexist. The revolution can continue being patriarchal and if there is not feminism there cannot be socialism” -Marija Morales from *Mujeres Por La Vida* (Fischer-Hoffman, 2011).

Women in Venezuela have successfully organized for gender equality by putting pressure on the state in order to have their demands for a democratic home, domestic violence legislation, child support, political inclusion, and equality in the labor force met. In the beginning of the twenty-first century women were mobilizing around issues related to improvements in economic status, increased women representatives in leadership positions, reproductive and sexual rights, and domestic violence legislation (Friedman, 2009). In the late 1950s, 1970s, early 1990s and today women were able to mobilize in large masses and put pressure on the state causing legislative changes that responded to their demands. In each period, the state's actions shaped the way women mobilized.⁸

The majority of women were organizing around non-gender specific issues in the beginning of the 1950s. These women made up the middle and upper classes. The majority of lower class women were not mobilizing. However, this changed when women from all classes went to the streets to end the reign of dictator Jimenez. In the 1960s, women began to divide after the fall of the dictatorship due to partisan rivalry. However, in the 1970s women began to mobilize across class lines again in large part due to the oil and economic boom of that time.

In 1973, 59 percent of the population in Venezuela identified themselves as middle class, 35 percent identified as working class, and 7 percent were unsure (Heath, 2009, p.191). More than half the population at this time considered themselves middle class citizens. The thriving

⁸ See appendix 1

economy of the 1970s, opened up opportunities for women from the middle classes in higher education and the labor force (Rakowski, 2003, p.388). Class plays an influential role in the ability of women to create a strong coalition based on gender interests. If basic survival needs are not being met, women along with men, will have difficulty in pursuing issues beyond those basic needs and along political inclusion, legislative creation, chances at higher education, and labor protection.

Once the boom busted in the early 1980s, women began to mobilize with a focus on economic demands and in conjunction with men from their socio-economic group leaving women's issues on the back burner. Middle class and lower class women organized against the neoliberal policies, while the upper class was gaining exponentially from these policies. In the mid-1990s, Chávez came into the public sphere and promoted a discourse that added to the polarization of the poor against the rich. The polarization between Chávez supporters and opposition supporters has proved to be a hindrance in the progress of women's organizing across classes in the present, since mobilization at this time was largely through party affiliation.

During the 1998 elections, there was a disparity between the number of middle class and lower class voters in favor of Chávez. In his first election, Chávez had the support of mainly lower class voters (Lupu, 2010). However, the next election held in 2006 had a different demographic turnout from voters. Lupu (2010) argued that class divisions subsided in which there was an increase in middle class Chávez voters. While women from the middle class and lower class were mobilizing together to win gains under the Chávez administration there was still little collaboration of women from the upper class with the other two classes around gender issues. While class is an important factor in the success of women's mobilization, state policies

and economic conditions have contributed to women's ability to mobilize, the way they organize and what they demand.

1950s Dictatorship

In the 1950s, there was significant cross-party and cross-class organizing among women since they had a common interest in ending the repressive dictatorship of Jimenez (Friedman, 1998, p.100). Here, women were demanding basic rights like freedom of speech that were oppressed under Jimenez. During his presidency, he unjustly imprisoned anyone opposed to his regime and oppressed any political opposition within the country. (Friedman, 2000, p.106). Women were also organizing together as part of a larger movement, not independently from the people's mobilization to oust Jimenez.

After the fall of the dictatorship there were new political opportunities for women's organizing around issues of gender (Friedman, 1998, p.114). Much like in the removal of Pinochet in Chile, Venezuelan women were seen as valuable participants in the struggle to end the dictatorship. In the late 1950s, "The Comite Feminino de la Junta Patriotica (Feminine Committee of the Patriotic) served as the catalyst for expanding women's cross-class opposition, manifested most visibly in the huge rally of women following the downfall of Perez Jimenez on International Women's Day in 1958" (Friedman, 1998, p.107). With the fall of Jimenez, new political parties and leadership emerged in Venezuela.

During the transition to democracy, women made many attempts to unite and organize but with partisan rivalry each attempt was unsuccessful. "Despite the ideal of more inclusive politics under democratization, women's mobilization was fragmented by the new political

opportunity structure of the transition period” (Friedman, 1998, p.114). This political structure took on the shape of multiple party affiliations. Inside these parties women were included by playing traditional gender roles in the political parties, or inclusion by male association only. In other words, women were included in politics only if they had male counterparts bringing them into the discussion or if they played the role of hostess for political meetings.

At this time two dominant parties emerged, AD (Democratic Action) and COPEI (Committee of Independent Electoral Political Organization-Social Christian party) solidified their control of the political system representing the left and the right sides of the political spectrum. Friedman (1998) argued that, “women mobilize politically under even the most repressive forms of authoritarian rule, but in the transition to democracy they demobilize” (p.87). Women were advised by men to organize around their political affiliation instead of gender interests. Women’s separate organizations were deemed a threat to the political parties. Immediately after the fall of the dictatorship, political opportunities for women’s organizing were created around the new configuration of political elites and institutions (Friedman, 1998, p.114). This caused a lull in the momentum of women’s ability to mobilize since they were coerced into keeping with the political party that would best assist their class group or their neighborhood.

While women mobilized initially against the dictatorship, the new democratic state encouraged them to demobilize and made little change in regards to legislation in favor of women’s equality. Even though the Constitution of 1961 banned sex discrimination, women could not own property or participate much outside of the home in politics or the labor force (Rakowski, 2010, p.256). Women at this time were still very much influenced by their male

counterparts and the gender role structure. They participated in politics minimally and at the discretion of men's approval.

1970s Economic Boom

In the 1970s women began to organize across class for equality in the home. During this time period, the economy was booming. With over half the population thriving in the middle class (Heath, 2009), division based on class subsided. Women began to demand legislative reform. They called for legal reforms such as domestic violence laws, the need for women's state agencies that focused on gender interests and services targeted at the female population, as well as the democratization of the home (Rakowski, 2003b, p.392). It was during this time period that women were successful in mobilizing for the first national women's agency, the Presidential Women's Advisory Commission (COFEAPRE) (Friedman, 2000, p.?). This agency was given oil revenues to fund social services targeted at women. Women's groups emerged in the *barrios* (or slums) and formed associations within their respective neighborhoods. The state recognized these organizations as Civil Associations under the law, granting them the right to be a non-governmental organization or non-profit with legal rights (Dejong, 2007, 89). At this point, the state was in favor of women's organizational efforts, and did not see their associations as a threat.

In the late 1970s the driving force behind women's mobilization as a group regardless of class and political affiliation was the reform of the Civil Code. The Civil Code was important because prior to the reform children were labeled as illegitimate if their parents were not married and were thus granted fewer rights than legitimate children. Moreover, fathers had no legal obligation to pay child support (Martinez, 2010, 69). This demand appealed to women across

class lines and brought high participation by women of all backgrounds. The Civil Code reform was a response to women's demand for equality in regards to child rearing and raising.

The Civil Code was needed to establish a legal foundation for women's rights and for a democratic family. A democratic family is one in which women are not the sole caregivers and child-raisers. Instead women share domestic responsibilities with their husbands and can engage in activities outside the home (Rakowski, 2010, p.257). Women across class lines felt this was a necessary demand at a time when economic and work opportunities were rampant given the booming economy. Rakowski (2003) identified a popular saying, "How can you raise children to defend democracy, when they live under dictatorship at home?" (p.392). Women wanted purchasing power and new opportunities for involvement outside the home. At the same time, women were able to reform the nation's Labor Law to get rid of discriminatory language (Friedman, 2000, p.147). This reform is another example of how women in this time period were mobilizing around work opportunities.

Yet once the reform was passed, women's organizing decreased rapidly (Rakowski, 2010, p.257). In the 1980s there was little mobilization among women's groups while the few attempts that were made garnered little success. The 1980s was the 'lost decade' in Latin America in which as a region development slowed dramatically.

1990s Economic Crisis

With the end of the oil boom and world economic crisis in the 1980s, the devaluation of the Venezuelan currency began to increase extreme poverty in the country. Buxton (2003) noted that "From 1988 to 1989 general poverty spiked from 43.9 to 66.5 percent, while extreme

poverty jumped from 13.9 to 29.6 percent in the same period” (p.118). In 1989 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed a Structural Readjustment Program that caused chaos in the country. Venezuela experienced the neoliberal reforms later than many other countries in the region because as an oil exporter the spikes in the price of oil in the 1970s increased revenues for the country. The IMF’s neoliberal policies encouraged privatization and pressured the state to cut expenditures. As part of the neoliberal reforms, the government cut fuel subsidies, which led to increases in the cost of public transportation.

Due to large increases in basic food, gasoline, and transportation costs, the people of Venezuela began looting and rioting in the streets. This was simply because they could not afford to survive and they were protesting the policies. The state activated the military to control and suppress the riots. They killed many citizens for breaking the law (DeJong, 2007, p.33). Men and women were desperate for economic support. By 1989, economic hardship forced women to fight for issues on employment, income, food, and subsidies that men were also rallying around (Rakowski, 2003b, p.394). By 1990, women were organizing next to men for reform of the political system to include the voice of the poor. This time period was important because it brought women back together regardless of class.

The driving force in women’s organizing in the 1990s was the degradation of the economy and Perez’s implementation of the Structural Readjustment Programs imposed by the IMF. In 1992, through massive protests by the people, women were able to create the first National Council for Women (CONAMU). This was created because women were rallying against Perez’s decision to eliminate the Women’s Ministry (Rakowski, 2010, p.259). The state was acting in response to the economic crisis. It was implementing neoliberal policies that

affected middle and working class citizens who lost jobs in the privatizations. The state was cutting federal budgets in areas of social welfare and state institutions. During this time women were mobilizing against these state reforms alongside their male counterparts.

The neoliberal era continued through the nineties. Many women were advocating for a permanent women's agency devoted to protecting women's rights (Rakowski, 2010, p.259). During this period women saw little change in the area of gender equality. Women from all educational backgrounds, classes, and parties put criticisms aside and worked together to reach a common goal for gender equality (Rakowski, 2010, p.260). In 1997 Venezuela adopted quota laws in which 30% of lower and upper legislative chambers had to be women representatives. (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009, p.8). As women reunited, research on gender issues also increased, and in 1992 the Center for Women's Studies (CEM) was created. Based at the Central University of Venezuela in Caracas, it was the first institution in Venezuela that was a research facility for women. The center became a vital advisory committee for the government (Martinez, 2010, p. 66). The CEM put pressure on the state to include gender related issues and concerns on the national agenda. It was not until 1999 that their requests were heard and a new gender sensitive constitution was written.

1998 Enter Hugo Chávez

The class polarization born out of the social tensions of the 1980s and 1990s worked to Chávez's advantage as the majority of the lower class was in economic desperation seeking change (Ellner, 2007, p.78). Not only were they seeking a change to the neoliberal policies that isolated them from society but for the chance to be included both economically and politically.

Heath (2009, p.199) cited “The politically disinterested lower class represents the largest pool of available voters, and when mobilized constitutes Chávez’s greatest source of support.” Many of the lower class voters idealized Chávez for what he represented: a rags to riches story in which he could relate to their economic conditions (Heath, 2009, p.199). In my fieldwork, a pro-Chavista woman claimed it was the first time in history that people could relate to the President and feel more connected to him.⁹ Hawkins (2003) stated “these confessions of support emphasize not the particulars of Chávez’s program of change, but the leader who embodies the program” (p. 1149). While Chávez has taken on a heroic rhetoric around his leadership, the revolution is largely dependent on the masses.

Political polarization is a common phrase used when describing the Chávez government. While there is a strong oppositional force against Chávez, there is a demographic mix of middle class and lower class supporters voting for or against Chávez. The exception to this is the upper class voters in which the majority voted for the opposition consistently in all the elections. Lupu (2010) found there to be little class relationship between voters for Chávez in the 2006 election. Lupu’s survey of household income and its effect on voter choice during the 1993, 1998, 2000, and 2006 elections has found that in 1993 there was no clear class division among voters. Lupu used the 1993 elections, even though Chávez was not running at that time, as a base to explain the jump class voting that occurred in 1998. Only in 1998 was Chávez’s voter base largely formed by the poor. In the following two elections Chávez’s voter base increased among the middle class especially in the 2006 elections in which Chávez’s voters were largely middle class

⁹ The term “Chavista” means someone that is a supporter of President Hugo Chávez.

citizens with fewer lower class votes. Additionally, the very wealthy or top rich percent did not vote for Chávez consistently in all three elections (Lupu, 2010, pp.13-23).

By the time Chávez was elected President in 1998 women had succeeded in getting the state to create a women's national agency to work on gender specific issues. They had been advocating for more women's institutions, women in government, full political participation, equality in the home through gender inclusive language and laws protecting women from domestic violence. When Chávez was elected president he had no women named to his government and showed little interest in women's issues while ordering an 80 percent budget cut on CONAMU (Rakowski, 2010, p.261). In the beginning of his Presidency Chávez had less than five percent of women in the constituent assembly (Rakowski, 2010, p.261). After protests by masses of women from all classes, he named Maria Leon director of CONAMU. Maria Leon is a long time "women's rights activist and former guerrilla fighter" (Berman, 2006, p.19). Chávez made an important move to include women in more leadership roles after the naming of Maria to director. Women were capable of putting pressure on Chávez from the beginning to change their own status. Rakowski (2010) observed "Initially his speeches had emphasized race and class justice. He now added gender justice" (p.262). This change in Chávez occurred in 1999, showing the affect the rapid mobilization of women had on the state, as well as Chávez's ability to adapt to societal demands quickly.

Women were united and ready for change after coming out of the 1989 disaster and replacement neoliberal presidency of Rafael Caldera Rodriguez. In 1999, through feminist intervention and pressure, Chávez's new constitutional convention created prohibitions against gender discrimination through the use of gender-inclusive language. In 2000, INAMUJER

(National Women's Institute) was created with the help of women participating the communal councils.¹⁰ Ellner (2007, p.151) argued that the 1999 Constitution opened new possibilities for social organizations to interact with the state and thus provided the foundation for a participatory democracy in Venezuela. Women mobilized successfully to include gender interests in the government's agenda and later in the socialist ideology of the government that emerged in 2005. Rakowski (2008) stated that the core group of feminists succeeded in working together in ratifying the whole Constitution to be gender inclusive. They also contributed to the addition of the Social Security Act and Article 88 of the Constitution.

Article 88 of the Constitution: The State guarantees the equality and equitable treatment of men and women in the exercise of the right to work. The state recognizes work at home as an economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth. Housewives are entitled to Social Security in accordance with law. Here the state is redefining work and including gender interests in their legislative policies while also improving women's lives and economic power (Venezuela Constitution, 1999).

In 2003, Chávez created the social welfare missions that were targeted at helping the poor out of poverty. Chávez's first program focused on health care for people living in *barrios* outside the largest cities. Quickly thereafter more programs were created to include adult literacy, higher education scholarships/cash transfers, identification card access, the building of cheap grocery stores in poor neighborhoods, women's business training, and women's housework payments. A majority of participants in these programs are women as are a majority of the workers and volunteers that facilitate these programs in the communities. Low-income women took advantage of the opportunities provided by the state (Rakowski, 2008, p.12).

¹⁰ Communal Councils are a form of community governing in which communities work together in the management of local policies and projects towards development. These councils were created as part of the 2006 Law of Communal Councils and are given development funds from the state.

Shortly after the new constitution and the beginning of the social welfare missions, another agency emerged to provide financial support for women; Banmujer (Women's Development Bank) was created in 2001. This bank provides low-interest micro-credit loans to women and women's groups in an effort to assist them in creating a business. They also provide trainings and advisory support once their projects commence (Martinez, 2010, p.66). The goals of Banmujer are centered around bringing women out of poverty, and assisting women in creating jobs for themselves. Martinez (2010) noted that "As of 2009, Banmujer reports that it has provided over 100,000 loans creating 440,619 jobs in the country" (p.66). Women from lower and middle classes took advantage of Banmujer and the welfare programs. Having a successful track record and large support base of women, Banmujer has been essential in women's mobilization for economic freedom. Once empowered through social welfare programs women sought opportunities in economic independence and societal changes toward gender.

Hugo Chávez declared, "Socialists must be feminists or they won't be complete human beings. With the support of our women we must strengthen unity in Venezuela... We have to take firm steps towards...the total emancipation of gender and be more just with our women...there is no socialism without feminism" (as quoted in Pearson, 2012). Chávez is the first President in Venezuelan history to say publicly that he is a feminist and that feminism is part of socialism.¹¹ Motivated by the revolution and their new gender conscious President, these women are not simply manipulated masses led blindly by Chávez's discourse and rhetoric advocating for

¹¹ Historically the term 'feminism' has been received with negative connotations and apprehension. Even in the 1970s and 1980s women did not want to be known as 'feminists' because it meant either they were lesbians, degrading the role of housewives, or dividing women against each other (Martinez, 2010, p.69). However, I use this term to mean the empowerment of women in all facets of life, the belief of gender equality in society.

women to lead the Bolivarian Revolution (DeJong, 2007, p.73).¹² Instead, the women were a large force in the Revolution working for free, using their private homes as community spaces to help uplift the women of Venezuela and the people into a classless society. Rakowski (2010) said “A new phenomenon emerged: the widespread mobilization of working-class and poor women as part of the Bolivarian Revolution” (p.263). These two classes of women were previously left out of the process but then became the main drivers of change. The 1999 Constitution also created a citizen branch of government that included many women in its community leadership roles (Rakowski, 2008,).

In 2003, women organized again across political lines in an effort to protest against the removal of Articles 3 and 39 from the 1998 Law against Violence against Women and the Family. However, the Supreme Court denied their measures (Rakowski, 2010, p.265). These articles ensured that the state could defend women against domestic violence by being able to institute immediate restraining measures on those accused of violence against women. Initially defeated by the state, women continued on in their legislative fight against the Law against Violence against Women and the Family.

In 2004, the case of Linda Loaiza, an 18 year old young girl raped repeatedly by her husband, ignited a coalition across class and political lines to fight for justice against domestic violence and rape. Women protested, organized, conducted strikes, made Linda a national icon, and advocated for justice against the perpetrator. They did not settle for the first verdict finding the attacker innocent. Instead they demanded a second trial. And in the second trial they achieved

¹² According to Chávez in Wilson’s (2008) critique of the Bolivarian Revolution it is: a three-pronged approach that is fashioned by political theory, advanced by populist leadership, and legitimized by public policy. Such a revolution, therefore, has both theoretical and practical dimensions. Like Bolívar, his idol, Chávez claims that at the heart of this revolution is the struggle against foreign imperialism (p.526).

justice: the perpetrator was found guilty (Rakowski, 2010, p.266). Here women took the initiative when the state remained silent. They put pressure on the state to react and rectify this gender discrimination. Women mobilized around the case of Linda Loaiza to remind the state that protection of people's rights is their priority. While the state claimed that personal issues in the home were not a state concern, women argued that domestic violence was no longer a personal battle but largely a political one. Through this dialogue women were able to influence the state into legal reform. Shortly thereafter, in 2006, the anti-violence law was passed in which rape became a crime and domestic violence courts were created (Rakowski, 2010, p.266).

Through increased political pressure and women's leadership within the state, these legislative changes were made possible.

As of 2007, the National Assembly had approved a reform of the Penal Code (2001), the Organic Law of Social Security establishing pensions for housewives (2002), the Law of Social Services affirming a stipend for impoverished housewives (2004), and the Organic Law for Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence (2006) (DeJong, 2007, p.54).

The state used feminist ideology in its explanation for these reforms thereby validating feminist theory and further empowering women's mobilization efforts. DeJong (2007) said in reference to the Organic Law for Women's Right to a Life Free from Violence, "This law places violence against women as a direct assault on the principles of the Bolivarian Revolution, drastically expands the definition of violence, and increases penalties for aggressors" (p.54). The state listened and used women's agencies to continue making changes in their planning and projects. In 2005, the National Electoral Council (CNE) required all public budgets to incorporate gender in the process and planning of their programs and projects (Rakowski and Espina, 2007, pp.

37-38). The socialist state has been able to increase economic opportunities for women and the economy as a whole while also making legislative reforms to empower women.

In 2007, the state created a new Domestic Violence law. According to Amnesty International (2008, p.9) the following issues still remained problematic for women in Venezuela: “lack of awareness and education about domestic violence; limited access to information about protection and redress for victims; inadequate data collection; insufficient shelters for victims; and a poorly resourced police and judicial infrastructure.” While the state has made substantial improvements, women are still rallying around complete gender equality. Through increased empowerment, increased voting power, increased purchasing power, women are able to mobilize more effectively and routinely.

Today, women have duties and opportunities in the Venezuelan Armed Forces. The complete inclusion of Venezuelan women in Venezuela’s National Armed Forces (FANB) has been a successful accomplishment for women in the last five years. This change in women’s role is in part due to the state taking on new forms of speech when engaging the debate around socialism to include women as a key element. Chávez’s rhetoric around feminism and its place inside socialism is creating many outcomes. First, that women and their empowerment is crucial to the success of the socialist state. Second, that women can, and are, allowed to move outside the traditional role and into the political sector. Women from the middle and lower classes are highlighting the importance of feminist discourse being used within the state structure.

Importantly, Susana (a long time feminist activist interviewed by Dejong) recognizes that, when she and other women call on the Revolution to openly fight patriarchy, a major shift in the revolution’s discourse or agenda ultimately comes from Chávez. As she said

in an interview, 'If Chávez says something about patriarchy, feminism, machismo everything will move forward.' (DeJong, 2007, p.95).

Regardless if this statement by Susana is true or not, this is what she believes.

Of course, this discourse is met with oppositional views and rebuttals in which "Susana emphasizes many men's opposition to women's new involvement outside of their home... As women go to classes, committee meetings, workshops, jobs and events, either run by the state or associated with the Bolivarian Revolution, they no longer comply with their strict gender role that men often want to uphold (DeJong, 2007, p.96). Additionally a male centered perception that "Chávez is destroying the family" pervades both state structures and the daily lives of women in the barrio communities" (DeJong, 2007, p.96). There is a tension that exists within state structures in which on the one hand, feminism is being seen as an integral part of socialism. On the other hand, there is a perception that women's increased involvement is destroying the family. Rakowski (2008) argued that, "Chávez has added a third discourse for women: 'the country needs revolutionary mothers to advance social change.' This discourse both honors and reinforces women's traditional roles as self-sacrificing mothers and wives and their unpaid work as volunteers" (p.18). While women have been pushing for inclusion and change, they have also been dealing with the decrease in time and ability to complete their duties in the home, community, politics, and work sectors.

Women are using feminist socialist ideology to demand their way into positions of power. There have been pushes for equality in the government elections. Parity ordinances by the National Electoral Council occurred in 2008, advocating for equality in male and female candidates for regional elections. So far the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), Chávez's party, is the only party currently in Venezuela that has pushed for parity and done so by

example (Martinez, 2010, p.75). The theory around gender parity remains relevant in establishing the order and distribution of power amongst a society's citizens. While Chávez's effort leads us to believe his motivations are in fact to help women become equal citizens on all levels, there are legitimate questions as to whether women's political participation at the leadership level is descriptive or substantive.

The world economic crisis that hit in 2008 did not leave Venezuela unaffected. The decline in oil income caused the state to make massive budget cuts particularly in social welfare programs causing people from the middle and lower classes to object (Rakowski, 2010, p.267). The socialist state has been dependent on oil revenues to fund the welfare programs that have empowered women and won over women's votes. Decline in these programs has caused concern about this dependency model. However, in response to women's programs dependency on the government and women's demands for autonomy, Rakowski (2010) argued that some women have been advocating for INAMUJER to become a ministry in which it would be entitled to control its own budget and increase its decision making (pp.268-269). The missions targeted specifically at women would then be run by this ministry and controlled by the women in charge.

But what is flawed in this solution and in the social welfare programs as well, is the dependency model these institutions have created using government revenue to be able to run effectively. All the missions are funded by oil revenues, these revenues are subject to fluctuations based on the world market. Oil is also not an everlasting resource, eventually the oil will dry up and at that time what will the state's solution be to poverty? Critics also make the argument that Chávez's 21st century socialism is not less state centered like he claims but more state centered through his social programs (Wilpert, 2006).

Chávez has created twenty-one new social welfare programs since 2003, one of the many social programs launched was the *Madres Del Barrio* or “Mothers of the Slums” program. This is a temporary program, with conditional cash assistance for women. Single mothers receive a monthly allowance which can be withdrawn if they do not comply with program requirements. The mission requires that women send their children to school, get involved with community work, and design their own economic project (Daguerre, 2011, p.849). Launched in 2006, this mission provides a monthly stipend to poor women with children and who lack full time employment. Six months after the start of the program, the program was providing some 200,000 women with stipends averaging around \$176 USD per month. The money is distributed based on need, and rotates between recipients (Venezuelan Information Office, 2008).

The questions of sustainability and dependency arise also out of Anne Daguerre’s research on anti-poverty programs in which she noted, “The main contention is that the Missions exhibit a strong pattern of path dependency, despite the ideological and discursive ruptures that have attended the presidency of Hugo Chávez” (2011, p.835). Daguerre identifies another form of dependency than Wilpert, in which the missions are not only dependent on the oil market but also on the state. Therefore, women have become dependent on the Chávez government in order to receive the benefits of these missions. This can be problematic for women as a gendered group because in this case the state controls where and when they are working together towards economic independence.

Daguerre (2011) also asked the question, “Are the missions rooted in a sustainable model that seeks to increase the state’s institutional capacities? Or do they represent a short-term response to pressing social needs?” (p.837). Does a cash transfer program like, *Madres Del*

Barrio, alleviate women from poverty temporarily or permanently? According to Banmujer President, Nora Castaneda, “The women are constantly paying back their loans...We have managed some 467 million bolivars (10.7 million dollars at the official exchange rate) in 11 years...We have granted 150,000 loans” (Gutierrez, 2012). If women are successfully paying back their business loans and continuing to run an efficient business then we can say the program is effective in alleviating women from poverty long term. However, while these programs address one social need (economic independence) they also add on another (increased responsibility and less time).

Lind argued that, “Directed mobilization from above and the institutionalization of *barrio* women’s struggles may lead to increased work responsibilities without changes in women’s conditions of life” (Lind, 2005, p.90). Her analysis is important because it raises the question of how effective this social program is in making substantial, sustainable changes in these women’s lives. Fernandes (2007) claimed “The extra responsibilities being put on women to become active participants in their communities has been referred to by Caroline Moser (1986) as a ‘triple burden’ which includes productive work, reproductive work, and community managing work” (p.113). Article 88 of the Constitution and the “Mothers of the Slums” program prove successful in their goal of increasing women’s economic status, gender collaboration, and political involvement.

“Mothers of the Slums” is the only mission that targets women exclusively. Initially based on retired ‘housewives’ legal right to a pension at age 55, it now enrolls young mothers with several children. The first 100,000 enrolled were given stipends of 60-80 percent of the Venezuelan minimum wage. Recipients are required to participate in community programs as

volunteers simultaneously receiving skill trainings (Rakowski, 2008, p.12). During my fieldwork I was able to visit with the Madres Del Barrio (Mothers of the Slums) office in the town of Sanare. Here, I was informed that during this one to two year mission program the participants have to attend job training, be part of a community committee, and start a cooperative with other women. They are not allowed to have their own business and by the end of the program they need to present their cooperative project to an approval committee in order to get approved for a loan from Banmujer to start the project. By creating the condition that women have to start a business together, this program is a uniting force for women. This business plan allows more labor and management support that is needed in order to pay back the loan. Thus, creating a successful mission for women to be apart of and gain economic independence. Still, there are criticisms in the structure of the missions and how they are operated.

Rakowski (2008), stated the top-down structure of the social programs to be a challenge for the growth of women's political roles, "The Chávez government and programs like the missions are 'very top down, heavily dependent on funding and decisions made by national leaders' and there is a tendency to increasing centralization" (p.4). Yet, Chávez continuously argues that his new socialism is less state centered. Fernandes (2007) made the opposing argument that, "barrio women in Chávez's Venezuela...have sought to take the initiative at the local level to make decisions regarding their community and the implementation of local programs...these women are agents who are building new spaces of democratic community participation" (p.122). There seems to be contradictory perceptions about the empowerment of women through these social missions and the sustainability of these missions. I argue that neither perception is wrong, but rather both hold truths to varying degrees. To some degree women have

taken control of the missions by becoming the facilitators and providing the physical space for them to be carried out. On the other hand, salaries, supply inventory, and curriculum development are all decided by the leadership of the Chávez government. In essence, the missions would not be successful without the participation of the state or the involvement of women. Additionally Rakowski (2008) claimed that:

The missions have been important not only as redistributive programs to reduce extreme poverty and social inequality, but also in this process of identity construction. They are intended to improve self esteem and foster a new self image based on capability, solidarity, and entitlement” (p.7).

I agree that the missions have been able to increase women’s self-esteem as well as assisted in uniting women to demand more in the name of gender equality. There does seem to be a contradictory undertone of encouraging women to participate politically, but only after they have tended to their domestic chores. This creates speculation as well to the effectiveness and viability of such a time consuming program that expects these mothers to attend to their domestic duties, contribute to their community, be politically active, and attend trainings on how to start a business. Since the inception of these missions, women have adapted their demands to keep the missions running and expanding but also for new progressive initiatives. I suggest there needs to be modifications in the way the missions are carried out to alleviate some of the responsibility from women’s shoulders and to include men in the sharing of domestic chores and child raising so women can have enough time to participate in the missions, to be politically active, and to organize as a gender group. In my fieldwork, women expressed the downfall of the missions. They said now they have less time and more commitments to fulfill.

In 2012, after Chávez was re-elected women collaborated to submit gender sensitive proposals for the President to include in his state strategy for the next six years. These women

came from various women's groups such as the Ezequiel Zamora Peasant Front, and included the following demands:

the free distribution of contraceptives for men and women, education in state schools to increase awareness surrounding gender equality, the creation of communal council based refuges for women who are victims of domestic violence, an increase in communal projects to care for children and the "socialization" of domestic labour to allow women to participate fully in political activities. The women also demanded more state regulation over the usage of women's bodies as "merchandise" in the media (Boothroyd, 2012).

These demands express women's concerns that have been an issue since the past (support for domestic violence victims, political participation, and reproductive rights) while also including progressive demands that are relevant to the twenty-first century (images of women in media, new school curriculums to include gender sensitivity awareness).

Conclusion

Women's organizing in Venezuela in the mid-twentieth century was about mobilizing to end a dictatorship and holding the state accountable to providing basic citizen rights. After the removal of the dictator, women demobilized due to party conflicts that fell along socio-economic lines. Once the neoliberal policies and the economic crisis hit the country, women from the lower and middle classes came back together to demand that the state provide social services, economic opportunities, and stability. After, women mobilized for a transformation of the political system and a new leadership that would address their demands. Once Chávez, came to power and adhered to women's demands for political inclusion, state welfare, education, and domestic violence laws, women built a coalition primarily made up of women from the lower

and middle classes. Historically, we can see how the state and the economy shaped women's mobilization in Venezuela much like that of women's movements in the region.

Feminists in Venezuela argue there is still much to be done in the name of women's equality especially in regards to poverty and its relationship to gender, sexual and reproductive rights, legalizing abortion, the introduction of gender equality into the curriculum of public education, and the need to end patriarchy in Venezuela (Martinez, 2010, p.77). Some women believe the increased relationship between the state and women's mobilizing is indeed problematic because the state has incorporated a sense of politicization in its program objectives.

Institutional strengthening (the building and maintaining of large organizations funded by the state) is not the route most helpful to women in creating change. Rather, grassroots organizations and community building keep the power within the hands of the people (Martinez, 2010, p.89). Instead of linking a women's agency with the state, some women are suggesting the state give funds to local women's organizations to implement programs they deem most important for their community. By removing the over-arching umbrella structure common in top-down governments, women's social programs will be more effective in reaching the needs of women based on their community situation. Also, by giving ownership to local women's groups, there will be less politicization. Women have demanded autonomy from the state in order to keep their goals and objectives focused on gender interests that appeal to women from all socio-economic backgrounds.

Section 4: Analysis

“If we are to change the historical legacy that puts women at a disadvantage in most societies, we must implement what we have learnt on a larger scale” - UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (Wagner, 2005a).

In this study, through the review of the literature on women’s mobilization in Latin America and the in-depth analysis of women’s mobilization in Venezuela emphasizing the last fifty years, I consider how the political and economic conditions shaped how and when women mobilized, whether they mobilized across class lines or not, what they demanded, and how successful they were in reaching gender equality. By looking at Latin America as a region we can better understand the regional ties that link these countries together due to past migration, colonization, language, religion, and environment. While Latin America is not homogenous there are regional similarities that are distinct from other parts of the world. In my analysis of women’s mobilization in Venezuela, and Latin America more generally, we see some common patterns.

The parallels between Latin America as a region and the case of Venezuela suggest that certain conditions with regards to the state and the economy have positively and negatively impacted the women’s struggle for gender equality. Identifying these patterns is crucial in seeking progressive alternatives to state intervention when it comes to women’s empowerment. During periods of economic stability and lower levels of inequality women are able to mobilize across class lines and seek opportunities in higher education and the labor force thus strengthening their underlying goal for gender equality in society. In past times of democracy, divisions emerged and little movement across gender interests due to partisan rivalry occurred. At times of severe political and economic crises women mobilized across class lines around non-

gender specific interests. When an economic crisis occurs it takes dominance over politics in shaping women's mobilization. In these cases, women mobilize in large numbers for economic stability and initiatives for the state to implement welfare programs and basic services to its citizens. Under a socialist state women in the lower and middle classes of Latin America have mobilized together and have been successful in reaching their demands for political inclusion (leadership positions) and democratization of the home (domestic violence laws).

Venezuela has been similar in all the above mentioned patterns found in this research. Yet, I argue that Venezuela is a unique case because once Venezuela established a democracy in 1958 it remained democratic unlike Chile and Argentina. The 1999 Constitution was the first of its kind in the region, and Venezuela was successful in sustaining and increasing its scale of social welfare programs (missions) to become one of the largest social initiatives created in Latin America (Hawkins, 2011, p.190). Before it made the transition from a dictatorship to democracy, it was clear that politics played a huge role in shaping women's demands since women were mobilizing to end the dictatorship above any other gender interests as we saw elsewhere in the region.

In the 1970s we see how the economy in Venezuela shaped the women's movement by diminishing class lines within it due to an economic boom. In this case, much like in the 1980s when the boom busted, the economy played a more important role than politics did in shaping women's mobilization. During both the boom and the bust the women's movement was affected by class in a positive and negative way. Class wise, women from middle and lower classes worked together during economic busts, yet when the economy was booming women from all classes, including the upper class, organized together demanding gender specific issues. The

economy forced women to either mobilize around gender interests such as domestic violence and the Civil Code Reform (the boom) or around non-gender interests such as labor laws and economic support (the bust). However, in response to the economic crisis, the state took control by implementing neoliberal policies that then drove women in Latin America and Venezuela towards an even bigger gender gap and towards increased poverty. In this time period the economy shaped women's mobilization and the state's response. Then the state's response impacted the economy and influenced the women's movement. This decade clearly reveals the tri-directional relationship that is constantly flowing between the state, the economy, and women's mobilization.

All over Latin America neoliberal policies took effect creating poverty, unemployment, inflation, and civil unrest. Women in Venezuela and Latin America were rallying in the streets alongside their male counterparts advocating for economic stability and in Venezuela women were demanding the restructuring of the labor force to include informal work in social security laws. At this time, Venezuela underwent a similar situation as the rest of the region in which the women's movement was largely affected and halted by the state's response to the economy. Women mobilized on a grand scale and across class lines with the exception of the upper class. Women demanded economic stability and political inclusion as a means to address poverty as women made up the majority of the poor. Women in Venezuela were able to transform the state into providing funding, support, and new opportunities for women.

It is important to understand how similar triggers create different outcomes at different time periods. For example, the historical moment of the late 1950s was a very different historical moment than the early 1980s in terms of the development and acceptance of feminist ideology

on a global level. Nicaragua's transitional period towards socialism included gender equality issues in its rhetoric and programming as did Venezuela. However, Venezuela was more successful partly due to its timing towards socialism.

In the 1950s there was not much emphasis on gender equality within social movements that took place across the globe. However, with the 1960s second-wave feminism that took place in the United States, with the first female Prime Minister elected in Sri Lanka, and the establishment of 1975 as the International Women's Year, the emphasis on gender equality shifted to be more important. By the 1990s, women had seen significant advances in the establishment of labor laws and education opportunities that emphasized the need for women to participate in the growth of society all over the globe. By the twenty-first century female leaders were no longer few and far between. It is no surprise then that women's movements today are finding more success than those of the past. However, the successes of women's movements of the past in the world have shaped women's demands of the present. Looking back on the history in Latin America of women's mobilization we see how that past has brought us to an unique present in which gender equality is continuing to take significant strides.

In Latin America, through pressure and massive mobilization efforts, women were able to protest alongside men to help bring new democratic governments to power that sought to radically transform social relations in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Venezuela is unique in its transition to socialism because women were able to influence the outcome of the new regime to include them in the process of creating a socialist state that is also feminist. Venezuela's implementation of the gender inclusive 1999 Constitution made significant achievements for women's equality through state initiatives in Latin America that have not been done elsewhere in

the region. Through the social welfare missions administered in Venezuela in 2003, women became active participants in the implementation of economic programs designed to alleviate women out of poverty.

The case of Venezuela can expand our theoretical thinking of women's mobilization in Latin America because of its progressive form of socialism that has created new opportunities for women. This was able to occur in Venezuela and not in other countries for two distinct reasons. First, Venezuela has been able to sustain its massive social missions because it is an oil rich country with the revenues to do so. Second, Venezuela's leadership is unique in its ability to motivate the poor masses and include feminist rhetoric in its dialogue and initiatives. The first reason identifies the impact of the economy in shaping a society as well as women's mobilization. In Nicaragua, their economy was unable to maintain the social welfare programs implemented under the Sandinista government, the state also experienced a much stronger oppositional force than in Venezuela. The second reason Venezuela has been a more successful case in the region is because of the political leadership of Chávez that has been able to motivate and sustain loyalty from the poor masses. By appealing to these marginalized populations, the state has been able to battle the opposition through the voices of the poor. Women in Venezuela made up a large portion of the poor population and thus supported Chávez's plans for a feminist-socialist state.

While most cases in Latin America have made substantial improvements in gender equality, Venezuela has been a leading country in the implementation of policies to achieve gender equality. The state has encouraged change in gender stereotypes by implementing policies geared towards gender inclusion in politics and economics. Venezuela's 1999 Constitution is a

prime example of how this was done. Not only were women from CEM involved in the writing process of new articles but their demands for economic support were heard through the state missions and the creation of Banmujer. In addition, Article 88 not only increased the value of women's housework, it was a direct response to women's demands for state recognition of the informal labor force. The re-writing of the constitution was an important historical step for women. Women have historically been excluded in the law creation process in Latin America. Laws were mainly written by men and upheld by men thus creating a disconnect between genders (Bryson, 1999, p.98). If women are to create a society that is completely gender inclusive then re-writing the rules of that society is a necessary step. This is why women were advocating for political inclusion across the region. Venezuela was able to achieve a gender inclusive relationship between the state and women's mobilization because women mobilized across middle and lower classes for gender demands that were upheld by the new state leadership.

The case of Venezuela has helped nuance our understanding of how patterns in women's mobilization are impacted by the economic and political frames. Analyzing why women have been relatively successful in their struggle for gender equality in contemporary Venezuela allows us to determine at what economic state women are able to mobilize across class and for what demands. Additionally, the political framework at any given time period also contributes to our understanding of what state structures, policies, and leadership styles impacted women's mobilization efforts both positively and negatively. Through this understanding, women and governments can use Venezuela as an example to learn from in the struggle forward for gender equality.

Since Chávez was elected, women have mobilized along side the socialist revolution demanding women's institutions, political inclusion, and opportunities for economic independence. Women in middle and lower income brackets have been organizing together for the last fourteen years. While much has been accomplished in the name of feminism and gender equality there is still a long road ahead for the women's movement in Venezuela and Latin America. Women in Venezuela have expressed concerns regarding clientelism, the over-use of institutionalism, fear of an unsustainable state dependency model, and lack of change in men's beliefs about gender stereotypes.¹³ Women's demands today in Venezuela have taken on new breadths and have changed in response to the transformation of the state. Today, women in Venezuela are taking new strides towards gender equality in Latin America by dismantling the structures that have fed into their second class citizenship status over the years. Women's demands in 2012 have included the availability of contraceptives for men women, a battle long carried out between women, the state, and the church. Women are also battling the education system by demanding the inclusion of gender awareness in school curriculums. Additionally, women are requesting a change in the objectification of women's bodies in the media. By looking at what women are demanding, it is clear how far Venezuela has come in the name of gender equality. These three issues are concerns for all women in Venezuela and in Latin America. Looking at how Venezuelan women's mobilization changed throughout history we can see in what ways Venezuela was able to reach these new demands of the twenty-first century.

The welfare missions have both helped women out of poverty and towards economic independence but have also created a politicization of the women's agencies set out to assist

¹³ Through the use of oil revenues the social missions are dependent on one source of revenue that is unsustainable since the price of oil fluctuates with global markets and is diminishing in quantity over time.

them. By creating a politicized women's institution that survives on funding from the state, are women subject to the demands of the state and supporting the governing regime in order to maintain their benefits? The politicization of women's organizations contributes to the demobilization of women as a gendered group. This was the case in the transition to democracy in the 1960s, women became divided based on political association. The same happens when political views and alliances are intertwined with women's goals and objectives. This is one of the main the arguments circling Venezuela's women's movement today.

During my fieldwork, I encountered women from both sides of the political spectrum that were in favor of the social missions and did not want them to end regardless of any changes that occurred in the state apparatus. However, women on both sides expressed legitimate criticisms in the way the missions were carried out. First, they were demanding autonomy from the state in regards to applicant acceptance, program design and implementation. Second, women wanted more funding to pay full time employees and to open more programs in rural areas in order to increase grassroots initiatives. And third, they wanted no political affiliation or discourse used when implementing the programs so as not to deter women from participating simply because of different political views.

While gender equality is an ongoing struggle all over the globe, women in Venezuela have been able to make significant strides in addressing these concerns and have at the very least opened up the dialogue surrounding them. By using their past successes and current momentum, the women's movement will be able to manage these concerns in a way that will prevent an epic demobilization of women. When, how (across class lines or not), for what demands, and to what achievements women mobilized in Latin America and Venezuela are all impacted by the political

and the economic frameworks of a specific time period. Additionally, the changes that occurred globally and regionally in the name of gender equality also contributed to the degree to which women's mobilizations efforts were stunted or intensified.

Section 5: Conclusion

“In order to arrive at equilibrium between men and women we have to raise the status of the women, as well as their self esteem” -Banmujer Manager, Loryan Cazadilla (Wagner, 2005b).

This research has shown how and under what conditions women in Latin America and Venezuela mobilize, how the state and economy have impacted women's demands and mobilization, to what degree class has played a defining role in women's mobilization efforts, and what successes women have had towards gender equality. This research suggests that under certain political and economic conditions women's demands shifted between gender specific interests and non-gender specific interests. Additionally, in relation to global gender equality movements, the time period for which women's mobilization took force impacted the outcome of those mobilizations.

My research has shown the historical foundation of the women's movement in Venezuela and its relationship to Latin America's women's movements more broadly. I argue that Venezuela is unique because of its state policies that have empowered women, as well as its inclusion of women in the policy process (through the 1999 Constitution and facilitation of the missions). This study has found that Venezuela's successes are relative to the current atmosphere of the twenty-first century in which gender equality movements have intensified worldwide.

Venezuela's inclusion of feminist ideology in its state leadership has also contributed uniquely to its successes for women's equality. Twenty-first century socialism and feminism are at the root of Venezuela's state objectives. Changing the narrative and rhetoric around women's equality to include feminist ideology in economics and politics has been key in the states ability to mobilize women. Women all over Latin America are reaching new levels of education,

political seats, and entrepreneurship that have empowered the region and Venezuela to change the lives of all women.

This research implies the need for further research to be conducted regarding the outcomes and empowerment of the social welfare missions that have been implemented in Venezuela. These programs have shown economic success for women and inclusion in local and national politics that was previously not available. How then will these programs continue to empower women? What sort of transformation will these programs need to take in order to remain sustainable and effective? What role will women continue to play inside the state facilitation of these missions? What is the success rate of the missions and those requiring a loan to start a cooperative? What are the attitudes and perceptions of women involved and not involved in the missions about political affiliation? There is little data on these above questions available to the public that would be worth researching further in order to better understand how successful women are mobilizing today under Venezuela's socialism.

In many instances this research has shown the importance, the effectiveness, and the demand for grassroots and local level organizations to take on women's issues and replace the national agencies that exist today. As seen in Brazil with the creation of women's neighborhood associations, and in Venezuela with a large number of women participating in community councils, further research in this direction needs to be done to find the relationship between national, international bodies, and women's local organizations. Also, at what point does funding affect the objectives of an organization that is supposed to provide routes inside and outside the state apparatus for women to find assistance in their daily struggles? How many state sponsored missions are conducted in neighborhoods largely supported by the opposition? Political divisions

should not have the potential to disrupt the underlying goal of social welfare programs in Venezuela and in Latin America as a whole.

Regionally, this research has identified trends in women's mobilization and how the political and economic circumstances shape these struggles. The history laid out in this research has given us a historical perspective of women's mobilization in the region and benchmarks of how far women have come, as well where gender equality is still lacking in growth. Using this information, we can figure out the conditions in which women will find the most gains in gender equality.

In order for women's mobilization to continue moving forward effectively, women will have to continue to advocate for policy changes as well as redefining gender norms. Discourse on women's equality must continue to reach the masses in order for the society as a whole to realize the value in empowering women. State agencies, women's NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and community councils all have been able to operate effectively under the socialist state. Even though there are disagreements within the movement about politicization (political party ties) and institutionalization (top down agencies), much has been done for the struggle for gender equality. The socialist state remains an empowering mechanism for women's mobilization and economic stability in Venezuela. A booming economy has proven effective in decreasing divisions along class lines and has increased opportunities for women outside the home.

Highlighted in the Venezuela case is the need for women to be included in the law writing process in order to effectively tackle gender specific issues. Latin America can gain from the Venezuela case in regards to this matter. While quota laws have helped to increase women's

involvement in political decision-making, separate women's organizations can be utilized as well. Venezuela's women's research centers (CEM) and women's NGOs assisted in the 1999 constitution revisions. The constitution of Venezuela is a key component in women's struggle for equality. By creating a state standard upheld by the President himself, the objectives of gender equality will continue to reach lower levels of society. As noted in this study, public policy is not the only route for women's equality initiatives. In addition, and perhaps simultaneously, women in Venezuela have been working from the bottom up to meet the state in the middle. The masses of women have learned to read and write, to run a business, to organize and lobby against the state until their demands have been met. Without the push from below and the support from above, women's mobilization in Venezuela would not have been as successful as it has been.

The journey for women's equality has just begun and while there have been substantial improvements in the lives of women in Venezuela, there are still many battles to be won for women. Sexual and reproductive rights are one, the changing of gender stereotypes is also one, and the conversion of media images of women as beauty objects into women of intellectual substance is another. Where will the twenty-first century take women's mobilization in Venezuela and Latin America next?

Appendices

Appendix 1: Table of the History of Venezuela from the 1950s-2000s with regards to the political state, economy, and women's mobilization.

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Politics</u>	<u>Economy</u>	<u>Women's Mobilization</u>
1950s	Dictatorship	Increased oil revenues funded infrastructure projects. Limited government spending on social services.	Cross-class mobilization. Demands for democracy.
1960s	Democracy	Increased government spending on social services to poor populations. The creation of OPEC. Economic growth at 5.5 % annually.	De-mobilization, emergence of multiple political parties.
1970s	Democracy	Oil boom in world, SELA created, increase in employment percentage.	Cross-class mobilization. Demands for equality in home and domestic violence laws.
1980s	Neoliberalism	World Economic Crisis, oil bust. Unemployment at 20%.	De-mobilization.
1990s	Neoliberalism and beginning of transformation to Socialism.	Foreign debt at an all time high, increased poverty and decline in social services to people. IMF Structural Readjustment programs.	Cross-class mobilization. Demands for social services. Political quota laws implemented.
2000s	Transition to Socialism	Economy struggling, yet increase in state funded social services to people.	Cross-class mobilization. Demands for political inclusion and gender inclusiveness.
2010	Twenty-first Century Socialism	Economy still struggling. New social missions emerge.	Cross-class mobilization. Women are empowered by social missions, new demands for gender sensitivity in media and education.

Sources: (Timeline Venezuela, 2012), (Venezuela Country Studies, 1990), (World Economic Outlook Database, 2006), (The World Factbook, 2012), (Venezuela's National Statistics Institute, 2006).

Appendix 2: Table of Gender Quota Laws for the Legislative Branch in Latin America

Country	Chamber	Year Created
Argentina	Lower	1991
Bolivia	Lower & Upper	1997
Brazil	Lower	1997
Costa Rica	Unicameral	1996
Dominican Republic	Lower	1997
Ecuador	Unicameral	1997
Guyana	Unicameral	2000
Honduras	Unicameral	2000
Mexico	Lower & Upper	2002
Panama	Unicameral	1997
Paraguay	Lower & Upper	1996
Peru	Unicameral	1997
Venezuela	Lower & Upper	1997

Sources: (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009, p.8).

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