
mujer y desarrollo

The collective memory and
challenges of feminism

Amelia Valcárcel



NACIONES UNIDAS



Women and Development Unit

Santiago, Chile, June 2002

This document was prepared by Amelia Valcárcel for the ECLAC Women and Development Unit, for presentation at the Eighth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Lima, Peru, on 8-10 February 2000.

The views expressed in this document, which has been reproduced without formal editing, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Organization.

United Nations Publication

LC/L.1507-P

ISBN: 92-1-121361-4

ISSN printed version: 1564-4170

ISSN online version: 1680-8967

Copyright © United Nations, June 2002. All rights reserved

Sales No.:E.01.II.G.46

Printed in United Nations, Santiago, Chile

Applications for the right to reproduce this work are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary of the Publications Board, United Nations Headquarters, New York, N.Y. 10017, U.S.A. Member States and their governmental institutions may reproduce this work without prior authorization, but are requested to mention the source and inform the United Nations of such reproduction.

Contents

Summary	5
I. The first wave	7
II. The feminine mystique	21
III. The present and the challenges for the future	27
Serie Mujer y Desarrollo: Issues published	33

Summary

The work that appears in this publication was written by the philosopher Amelia Valcárcel and presented at the panel on Equity and Human Rights held in conjunction with the VIII Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Lima, Peru, 8-10 February 2000).

The collective memory and the challenges of feminism are reflected in the author's review of feminist political philosophy from the Enlightenment to the present day. She addresses the classic themes of equality and examines the sources that have given rise to much of the current contention between men and women.

This brief and disciplined text examines the process by which the feminism of the Enlightenment was able to formulate its demands at the political level; the relationship of feminism to the building of democracy and the conditions under which it was possible to bring about legislative and educational changes; the second wave, represented by suffragism, at the time of World War I; the third wave, in the 1970s, and the challenges for the new millennium.

I. The first wave

By emphasizing the role of the Enlightenment in the origins of feminism, I intend to make a distinction between political feminist literature, on the one hand, and another train of thought, also polemic, that has cropped up recurrently in European history since the thirteenth century. At the dawn of the early Middle Ages, at the time of the birth and spread of Gothic city life and early medieval forms of civilization, an entirely new set of ways and ideas was born which may be summed up by the term *gallantry*. In that context a particular form of literature emerged – I will refer to it as “discourse on the excellence of noble women” – which was cultivated by both men and women and unquestionably had its social uses. It served to provide models of female conduct and reinforce the self-esteem of women in the noble castes. By referring to queens, heroines, female saints, and other great women of the past, it offered models of femininity that contributed to the creation of gallantry among the group in power. However, this discourse on the excellence of women did not go unchallenged: it was paralleled by a misogynous literature of remote origins, usually promoted by the clergy but sometimes also by lay authors. The discourse on the excellence of women and the misogynous discourse competed with one another in an almost ritualised performance up until the Baroque period. The one exalted the feminine virtues and qualities and cited women as examples, while the other, with origins that went back to the Fathers of the Church and even to Aristotle, harped relentlessly on the supposed shortcomings and inherent stupidity of the female sex. Philogynists and misogynists kept repeating the same examples and arguments without ever coming to agreement, or perhaps never intending to, in an endless debate. However, they both shared, and neither of them ever challenged, the premise that women had to be under the authority of men; they differed only on the respect that should be accorded to them.

Feminism and the Enlightenment. The first wave

Feminism is radically different from the “discourse on the excellence of women.” It is a line of political thought that is typical of the Enlightenment: in the context of the development of modern political philosophy, feminism has emerged as the most important and profound correction to primitive democratism. It is not a discourse on the excellence of women, but rather one based on the notion of equality that informs the discussions which surround this school of political thought. The founding work of feminism is *A vindication of the rights of woman*, by Mary Wollstonecraft – a detailed bill of particulars contesting the exclusion of women from the regime of rights and property outlined in the political theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Wollstonecraft’s work epitomized the feminist debate of the Enlightenment and summed up its arguments. Thanks to its detailed programmatic presentation, it became literally the classic primer of feminism.

Enlightened thought is profoundly practical. Given the existing state of affairs, it chooses to imagine the world as it should be and seeks ways of turning this ideal into a reality. This does not mean, however, that the Enlightenment itself is feminist. It is more as if feminism is the unwanted child of the Enlightenment. Rousseau, one of its principal theorists, considered that many of the differences that distinguish the sexes and which are assumed to be natural were merely the result of habits and lifestyles adopted by society. Thus, a robust or delicate temperament, or the strength or weakness derived therefrom, was deemed to be the result of the harsh or effeminate way in which the person was reared rather than a reflection of his or her primitive constitution. The same was true of the forces of the spirit.

Without going into details, Rousseau said, it should be evident to all that in relationships of servitude, which were formed mainly because of the mutual dependency of human beings and the reciprocal needs that bound them together, it was impossible to be dominated by a man without first being in the position of not being able to do without him – a situation which, since it did not exist in nature, left each of them free, and therefore the law of survival of the fittest did not apply.¹ This radical philosopher, who did not even admit that force might be a factor contributing to inequality in the pre-social state, and who looked upon all subsequent privileges as unjust, went on to say that it was difficult to demonstrate the validity of a contract that obliged one of its parties to set everything aside but required nothing of the other. While on the one hand he regarded freedom as a benefit that no one had the authority to take away, on the other hand subjugation and exclusion of women were totally acceptable to him.

Rousseauian democratism was exclusionist. Equality among males was based on their advantage over women. The ideal State was a republic in which every man was both a citizen and the head of a family. Women, regardless of their social station or their particular endowments, had no right to citizenship or freedom. With this line of thinking Rousseau set the stage for the feminist debate of the eighteenth century. Although he was a great intellectual, he was an outsider to the philosophical currents that prevailed in the salons of the time and felt no obligation to maintain even a feeble semblance of “gallant feminism.” For him, women were a second sex; their education should merely ensure that they fulfil their obligation to please, serve as helpmates and raise children. Neither books nor platforms were for them. The idea of freedom for women was odious and lowered the moral calibre of society as a whole.

It may have been that once upon a time, in remote pre-civilian days, the two sexes were approximately equal. But the custom of cohabitation had given rise to the sweetest sentiments known to humankind – namely, conjugal and paternal love. Each family was a small society which was most united when its members were bound only by mutual commitment and freedom. It was at

¹ "Discours sur l'inégalité", *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol II, L'Intégrale, Seuil, 1971, pp. 226-7.

that point that the first differences appeared in the lifestyle of the two sexes, which up until then had been the same. Women grew more sedentary and became accustomed to guarding the home and children, while men sallied forth and sought subsistence for the entire family.² To guarantee this idyllic state, Rousseau the pedagogue explained in book V of *Émile* that in terms of sex, women were equal to men: they had the same organs, the same needs and the same faculties; the machine was built the same way, the parts were the same and they functioned in the same manner. As far as sex was concerned, there would always be relationships between men and women, and there would always be differences. It was these relationships and differences that governed the moral realm. As a clear result of this, experience had shown the uselessness of debates over the pre-eminence or equality of the sexes. Simply put, in that which was common between them, they were equal, but in that which was different they were not comparable. Men and women no more needed to be alike in their understanding than they were in their physical appearance. The former should be active and strong; the latter, passive and weak. It was indispensable for the one to have desires and power and sufficient for the other to not present much resistance. This principle being established, it could therefore be concluded that the particular destiny of women was to please men. Men's power was their worth, and the fact alone that they were strong was pleasing. The man was the husband, and he was by nature pre-eminent over the woman.

When I say that feminism can trace its birth to the Enlightenment and was its unwanted child, I am merely pointing out that it was the Enlightenment's debate over the equality and differences between the sexes that gave rise to a new critical discourse based on the universal categories of the political philosophy of the time – a discourse that no longer compared men and women or their respective differences or advantages but instead compared the situation of women being deprived of rights and property against the universal declarations themselves. These declarations were drafted using the actual text and terminology of Rousseau, hence the importance of his views for understanding feminism as a political theory.³ Feminism was the first strong and significant correction to the democratism of the Enlightenment. Although it arose out of the previous phase of the debate, it was forged and solidified through contrast with political developments of the time – the American and French declarations of rights – and the political theories on which they were based. Precisely because Mary Wollstonecraft was a Rousseauian democrat, because she believed that his *Du Contrat social* [Social Contract] and *Émile* [Emilius] offered the ideal formula for setting up a legitimate State and providing the appropriate education for its new citizenry, she was not about to let women be excluded from that new territory. Only after the new socio-political paradigm had been fully accepted could there be any argument about its shortcomings. She understood perfectly well that all individuals must be free and have full command over their person and their rights, that they could not be guided solely by their own personal interest. They had to fulfil a social contract which was based on the general will of the people, but this general will did not coincide with the will of all, since it had normative elements of its own; if common objectives were to be allowed to prevail, each individual had to exercise self-control, and ultimately, it was the State that had to assume responsibility for these common objectives and common benefits. Wollstonecraft could not accept that half of humanity should be excluded from this rational ideal on the basis of sex. For all these reasons, she was moved to draw up and publish her bill of particulars in 1792. Although *Du Contrat social* had been the model for the French Revolution, it was actually only a model in the making. Nevertheless, the exclusions that it called for were being respected point by point.

The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, dedicated to “the newly born generation,” was replete with expressions straight from Rousseau, whose ashes were being laid to rest with full pomp at the National Cemetery. Meanwhile, the Assembly was turning a deaf ear to

² Ibid. p. 229.

³ For this analysis, see Rosa Cobo, *Fundamentos del Patriarcado Moderno: J.J. Rousseau*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1995.

the “Annals of Complaints” sent by some women pleading for education, modest voting rights, reform of the family and protection.⁴ *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was not a lone voice. Widespread egalitarian sentiment, fostered by the Enlightenment, had already begun to stir before the French Revolution. The *Vindication* reflected the attitudes of many women who, usually by virtue of their birth and social station, had managed to have some cultural opportunities. It found a rapt audience in the political elite, who agreed with the author’s arguments and in some cases had also come out in favour of these ideas. In 1790 the Marquis de Condorcet repeated what had already been said in 1787: just as men have rights in their condition as sentient beings capable of reason and as possessors of moral ideas, women should have absolutely the same rights. Never, he pointed out, under any “free” constitution have women exercised the right of citizenship.⁵

Despite the many editions that quickly followed the first appearance of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, and despite the defiant language reflecting its politics of origin, it failed to make an impact beyond a few small intellectual circles.⁶ The same was also true of the much briefer *Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizens*, published by Olympia de Gouges in 1791. This latter author, as a reward for her sharp pen and her fame, was beheaded at the guillotine two years later. Mary Wollstonecraft, for her part, was the object of ridicule and vilification. One can imagine the chilly reception she must have received, even in kindred political circles, judging from a pamphlet produced by one of the most radical groups on the revolutionary scene, which called for a law forbidding women to learn how to read.⁷ Of all the inventions and innovative proposals that were introduced in that political environment, feminism was among the ones that received the least support. The closest acknowledgment of women’s rights was contained in article XI of the French Revolution’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which entitled some men and women to defend and express their beliefs and opinions freely, recognizing that this was one of the most precious rights of man. However, there was little more than that. Feminist ideas came up against a solid wall of prejudices, firmly instated in social and political practices. Rousseau helped to perpetuate this inertia and give it new respectability when, in addition to arguing for the entire exclusion of women from his genial vision of a new public realm, he also offered successful fecund models of femininity.

Rousseau’s denial of citizenship for women, coupled with the adoption of this position as revolutionary policy, generated several forces simultaneously which led to secularization of the unequal treatment of women – precisely at the time when they were being delivered from outdated mythical and religious thinking. The political line of argumentation was derived from the moral line, and underlying them both was an unexpressed self-interest. Some of Rousseau’s arguments regarding the natural origin and basis for the exclusion of women have been cited above: all men were husbands and all women were wives; the family was the original society, and it was hierarchical; from this hierarchy flowed a number of effects.

⁴ This unusual literature, which mixes accusations and complaints, is relatively unknown, as is almost the entire feminist debate of the Enlightenment. An excellent selection of introductory texts has been assembled in A. Puleo, *La Ilustración olvidada: la polémica de los sexos en el siglo XVIII*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 1993.

⁵ Condorcet, *Lettres d’ un bourgeois de Newhaven à un citoyen de Virginie*, Puleo, op.cit. p. 95. With regard to a woman’s right to citizenship, Condorcet made it clear that either no member of the human species had true rights, or they all did.

⁶ For a better understanding of the text and context, see I. Burdiel, in his excellent introduction to the Spanish-language edition of *A vindication of the rights of woman*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1994.

⁷ The author was probably Sylvain Maréchal, of the group “Les Egaux” [The Equal Ones], one of whose most famous members was Babeur. If it comes as a surprise that pure egalitarianism was compatible with the complete exclusion of women, this could be because of a lack of sufficient clues with which to interpret it. According to Celia Amorós, the notion of equality of citizens was totally eclipsed by the conspiratorial equality of the male fraternity (“Espacio de Los Iguales y Espacio de las Idénticas”, Arbor, Madrid, November – December 1987); the author revisited and expanded on this work in “Igualdad e Identidad” in *El Concepto de Igualdad*, A. Valcárcel, Ed. Madrid, Pablo Iglesias, 1994. For a detailed commentary on Maréchal’s satiric pamphlet, see G. Fraisse, *Musa de la razón*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1991.

The Rousseauian mould gave rise to a new model of femininity, which was sanctified, in the division of political roles. If women were not part of the public and political order, it was because they belonged to the domestic and private order. This separation and this concept of a second sphere were to remain the foundation and the condition of possibility for everything in the political realm. Women did not have the qualities of spirit – that is, the moral strength, which implies intelligence, honourability, impartiality – or the physical qualities, given their obvious corporal weakness, with which to pay the price of citizenship. Ruled by sentiment rather than by reason, they would not be able to maintain the necessary equanimity in the assemblies, and because they were weak physically, they would be incapable of defending their right to citizenship against others. Neither assemblies nor arms were appropriate for them. It was impossible to be both a woman and a citizen; the one excluded the other. This exclusion, however, did not constitute a withholding of rights. Rights could not be granted to those who did not need them. They were being denied by nature itself. Women were the pre-civic mass whose function was to reproduce the natural order within the State. They were not citizens because they were mothers and wives.

The State was composed of males, who had responsibilities and rights and who contributed to edification of the general will and to the attainment of objectives of common interest. Women, bound as they were to a prior order, could not even think along these lines. Their inability to execute the contract that each individual makes with the general will arose from their situation within the family sphere, which was natural, rather than family-based or political. As a collectivity, they had to be kept under the real and symbolic authority of men: in the real order, they owed abnegation and obeisance to a specific man; on the symbolic level, they all owed reverence to the sex that was capable of maintaining the public order. While this might be interpreted as an unjust exclusion, it actually was not; quite the contrary, a clear-cut separation of spheres was important for the very good of those who were excluded. The familiar sex should not be burdened with the weight of public affairs. Given the nature of women, they could not endure the demands of public life, and they would inject their incapacity into serious matters and thus undermine the attainment of society's objectives. In this separation there were no exceptions, nor should there be any. Although the "Geneva Manuscript" in Rousseau's *Du contrat social* mentioned that in a free State men, often in groups, lived "gently" with women, he was later to retract this statement, which showed something about his desire not to unnecessarily provoke the salon culture. And in *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* [A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality], the division of labour between the sexes appeared already in the dedication, where he asked: "Could I forget this precious half of the republic which gives happiness to the other, which keeps the peace with their sweetness and wisdom and preserves its good customs? Amiable and virtuous citizens, the destiny of your sex shall always be to govern ours . . . therefore, always be what you are – vestal guardians of the sweet connection to peace; continue to seize every opportunity to give value to the rights of the heart and Nature in the name of duty and virtue".⁸

In the first of these works, the separate existence of the sexes was claimed to be a necessary accompaniment of freedom, and in the second, a guarantee of peace. However, the fact that there were two spheres did not mean that two sources of authority were recognized. In the State, only males were entitled to equality and freedom. Legitimate hierarchies were allowed within the State, and males also retained the authority within the family – this from the same philosopher who refused to accept that any individual could barter or renounce his own freedom. It must be understood, however, that "the individual" for all intents and purposes was male. Elsewhere Rousseau wrote that the difference between men and women was infinitesimal yet significant. There were many reasons, he said, based on the nature of things, why the father should rule the family. First, the father and mother should not have equal authority; one of them should govern,

⁸ Ed. cit. p. 208. From *Manuscrit*, ibidem ,422

and when there were differences of opinion, there should be a dominant voice that made the final decision. Second, however mild the particular inconveniences of womanhood might be, they always entailed a period of inaction, and that in itself was reason enough for her not to have primacy, because in a balance that was perfectly equal, a single straw could tip the scales. Moreover, the husband should have the right to inspect his wife because it was important for him to know that the children he was forced to recognize and feed were not fathered by anyone but him. The wife, who had no similar concern, did not have the same right as the husband in this regard.⁹ This line of thinking pushed Wollstonecraft to the brink of rage. At times her prose was withering, especially when she lamented the bitter fate of those women who had no protector or resources with which to take care of themselves. Women who were denied the use of their abilities, she claimed, became dependants or victims – they were forced into a dependency that subjected them to the whims of an individual who had almost total right over them. While that situation in itself was already deeply saddening, what enraged her even more was that those who were denouncing all forms of servitude were nevertheless willing to maintain the oppression of women. While the likes of Rousseau were dreaming of higher goals for humanity on the one hand, on the other hand they were still trying to prevent women from breaking free of the destiny that had been imposed on them.

Wollstonecraft refined the Enlightenment's discussion of the sexes by using of universal political categories drawn from rational Natural Law. At the same time, she took a critical look at the feminine condition, from which she concluded that many of the behavioural and temperamental traits considered to be characteristic of women were in reality a product of their lack of resources and freedom. From her Enlightenment perspective, she refused to accept that male superiority was anything but an unearned privilege reinforced by prejudices passed down since time immemorial. "I do not mean to allude to all the writers who have written on the subject of female manners – it would, in fact, be only beating over the old ground, for they have in general written in the same strain; but attacking the boasted prerogative of man – the prerogative that may emphatically be called the iron sceptre of tyranny, the original sin of tyrants, I declare against all power built on prejudices, however hoary."¹⁰ The situation of women had no origin other than abuse of the power on which the order of inherited nobility was based, and that, she vowed, must be overturned. Both denominations, class and sex, were political, and it was impossible to be against one of them and leave the other intact. What men exercised over women was not a natural authority – there was no such thing – but rather an unjust privilege: "if it proved that this throne of prerogative only rests on a chaotic mass of prejudices, that have no inherent principles of order to keep them together, . . . they may escape, who dare to brave the consequence, without any breach of duty, without sinning against the order of things."¹¹ Giving the modern name of privilege to the ancestral hierarchy between the sexes was a radical theoretical innovation, which the early feminism of the Enlightenment sought to oppose. This could be done, thanks to the conceptual and discursive categories of Modernity, but only by going beyond the uses for which these categories were originally intended. Feminism had emerged as an unwanted child of the Enlightenment. It called for subverting the established order, and very few people wanted to see that happen. The movement seemed to threaten the very pillars of the new bourgeois respectability. It appeared that refusal to accept the notion of pedigree, on which the privilege of inherited nobility was based, meant that it was necessary to establish a new form of family in which the sexual hierarchy was basic. It meant redefining the roles of man and woman.

⁹ From the article "Economía política," ed. cit., p. 277. In this regard, I cannot resist mentioning that Rousseau, as certain as he was that he was the father of the children he had with Thérèse, did not feel obligated to recognize or support them; he himself admits in his *Confessions* that he sent them all, one after the other, to the hospital for foundlings.

¹⁰ *Vindication*, p. 249, Spanish ed., Cátedra, 1994.

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 249-50.

I have said that the new model of femininity can be traced to Rousseau. In *La Nouvelle Héloïse* [The New Héloïse] and *Émile* he created a model of womanhood that was sensitive and maternal. E. Badinter examined the creation of this woman-mother model and the consequent abrogation of such prior practices as mercenary child-rearing, wet nurses, and leaving children at hospitals for foundlings.¹² According to the model, every man was conceived, as a virtual *pater familias* whose higher purpose, on a par with others, was to configure the general will in the form of the State. Every woman, in turn, should exist and be prepared for the purpose of being a wife. The public realm corresponded to men; the private, to women. As Hegel pointed out in his *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [Philosophy of Right], each generation, apart from the talents and abilities of individuals, had a destiny that was determined at birth. “Complementarity” became the watchword, and it excluded symmetrical justice. It was neither convenient nor desirable for the sexes to neutralize their defining characteristics; rather, they should be emphasized. That was the way to guarantee order. The sexes were not equal; they were complementary. That was the way of Nature, and the new socio-political order should not go against its will. Feminism claimed that male domination was a political construct. The response to that claim was to neutralize it by giving each sex its own principles of action and excellence.¹³ But underneath the pretence of complementarity was a deep division: one part of humanity was culture – ideas, habits, concepts, institutions, rites, rationality, in short, everything that differentiated humans from the other species – and the other part was Nature – absolute identity which reproduced itself and maintained itself. In that fundamental division, the men were culture and the women were Nature. The destiny of women was, and should continue to be, to perpetuate the species. To paraphrase Rousseau: women should continue to be what they already were. It had always been thus, and there was no reason to alter that destiny. It was not the will of any one individual that women should be as they were, but rather an immemorial decree of the world. With all the changes that were taking place or might be desirable in the human realm, including a new politics that was the highest expression of spirit and reason, still there appeared to be no reason to amend the statute that governed the entire collectivity of women. As Hegel was to insist later on, they had to be kept in their own order, the undifferentiated bosom of Nature, regardless of their particular abilities and talents. If in the deep nucleus of humanity there was a division between Nature and Spirit, women were Nature, and therefore what took place in their lives was neither political nor the consequences of unjust privilege. That world should never be regarded as part of the political realm, nor should any attempt be made to enlighten it, much less change it.

To recapitulate: the early feminism that emerged from the debates of the Enlightenment managed to formulate its demands in a political key, with two pillars, the virile concept of citizenship and the new definition of femininity, and herein was the beginning of an exclusionist democracy. Once the revolutionary moment was over, its two main concerns were to implement the new Napoleonic Code of civil and penal law and to institutionalize the bourgeois educational model.

We use the term “Napoleonic Code” generically to refer to the new forms of positive law that replaced the old piecemeal order of law based on such notions as caste, trade and estate. Universality was adopted as a standard principle and Roman law as the model. The haphazard mosaic of ancient laws was replaced by a homogeneous civil code and a penal code made less

¹² Badinter, E. *¿Existe el amor maternal?*, (1980) Span. trans. in Paidós, Barcelona and Buenos Aires, 1984 edition cited here.

¹³ Badinter notes that it was not mere chance that the first women to hear men discourse on the subject of maternity were from the bourgeoisie. Neither poor nor especially rich or brilliant, the women of the middle classes saw in their new role an opportunity for advancement and emancipation that aristocratic women were not looking for. The mother became the central basis of the family and was hailed as a “domestic sovereign,” while maternity became a gratifying function because it was now elevated as an ideal. In a vocabulary borrowed from religion, the “noble function” of motherhood became associated with a new mystique. The mother was compared to a saint, and her natural patron was the Virgin Mary, whose life was a testament of devotion to her son. Badinter, op. cit., pp. 183-84.

harsh by the enlightened principles advanced by Cesare Beccaria. Using Roman law as the basic model, the new civil codes consecrated women's status as perpetual underage minors: they were regarded as daughters or mothers in the charge of their parents, husbands – even their sons. They had no right to manage their own property, decide upon or abandon their domicile, exercise parental authority, practice a profession or be gainfully employed without permission, nor could they reject a violent father or husband. Obedience, respect, abnegation and sacrifice were their obligatory virtues. The new penal code, with its provisions against such crimes as adultery and abortion, enshrined the belief that their bodies did not belong to them. In the end, no woman was her own person because they were all denied what citizenship ensured – namely, freedom.

Moreover, the institutionalized educational curriculum in the new society also excluded women. The new liberal State assumed responsibility for education and established the levels that we now refer to as primary, intermediate and higher education. The educational curriculum became the key that opened the door to the professions. Changes were made to the university system; the degrees granted by the institutions had to be certified by the State. The State also regulated the intermediate level and had its own system of centres and school officials. Even primary schooling was formalized and ceased to depend on the family or unregulated teaching. The State became the judge and guarantor of what a person knew or did not know and of their competency in terms of the curriculum. Women were formally excluded from the intermediate and higher levels, while primary schooling for them was merely “allowed.”

Without citizenship and excluded from the regular educational system, women were entirely outside the realm of liberal rights and goods. Securing these, obtaining the vote and gaining access to institutions of higher learning became the objectives of suffragism.

Feminism as liberal suffragism. The second wave

The nineteenth century brought consolidation of the liberal socio-political model, though not without some setbacks and opposition. Despite attempts to restore the old order, Napoleonism and the budding industrial society had so significantly changed the picture that not even the most nostalgic were able to maintain their intent to return to the former system. When the powers met at the Congress of Vienna and assumed the commitment to reinstate the earlier moulds and mutually support the restored monarchs against revolutionary uprisings, they knew that it would be virtually impossible to stand by their agreement.¹⁴ Liberal principles gradually became accepted, as did the models of political alternation. The political theory that underpinned this early liberalism was an amalgam of abstract Rousseauian principles and the solid elaborations of theory of State advanced by Benjamin Constant. The separation of the public and private spheres, of family and State, which had been the basis of the Rousseauian concept of the State, was completely accepted in the liberal political philosophy. Early liberalism regarded the citizen as a *pater familias* and drew on the notions of social contract and general will. The latter notions were rejected and attacked by the conservative ultramontane tradition, but the former was upheld by all the authors.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and subsequent *Philosophy of Right* reflect the accepted sentiment of the time: the abolition of pedigrees was good because the nobility could become masters of the State. On the other hand, he preferred not to look upon the State as a contract, and even less did he think that matrimony should be regarded in those terms. The family was the guarantee of order, and within the family, the separation of the sexes and their functions was the ultimate and immutable foundation of ethics.

¹⁴ There was actually only one intervention. “Los Cien Mil Hijos de San Luis” [The Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis]” were called up in Spain by the ultramontane Ferdinand VII to fight the Spanish liberals. They withdrew, disgusted by the type of violence he expected them to take part in. The outcome of this intervention ruled out any possibility of engaging in another one elsewhere.

Romantic misogyny

Understanding Rousseau's ideas about what men and women had the right to expect from the body politic was essential to understanding the developments that took place in the nineteenth century. Rousseau, author of the *Du Contrat social*, was attacked, but he stood alongside the Rousseau who was not attacked – the one who had decreed that there were two immiscible realms: the political and spiritual, which corresponded to men, and the natural, which corresponded to women. This division of the world had been dictated by philosophy, and an explanation is in order.

Today feminism tends to look to philosophy as an ally, but this is no different from associating philosophy with misogyny. By this I mean to say that philosophy in and of itself may not necessarily be liberating – a fact that was amply demonstrated throughout the nineteenth century. When the Enlightenment overturned the religious discourse that validated female inferiority as a prelude to justice, it also overturned the religious arguments that women had inherited the expulsion of Eve from the Garden of Eden and that their inferiority was retribution by Divine Justice for the original sin committed by the first woman. However, the determination that sustained these arguments had not lost its force, and hence new arguments were sought to justify the exclusion of women. Old Mother Eve was not sufficiently convincing in a world of technical progress, telegraph, railroads, anaesthesia and free trade. She had served her purpose, and new explanations of greater substance were needed; philosophy was to provide them.

Obviously it was possible to continue excluding women, but not without awareness that the discordant voices of early feminism – Wollstonecraft, Gouges, Condorcet – had spoken. In opposition to these, and to the hopes that they had raised, albeit in very small circles of opinion, the monumental edifice of romantic misogyny was erected. The only referent for this whole new way of seeing the world was Rousseauian thought, and its purpose was to re-argue the reasons for the exclusion of women. Thus philosophy took over the role once played by religion in validating the world, as it already existed, endowing it with even harsher aspects than it had had before.

The philosophers that I refer to in the chapters I devote to romantic misogyny in *La política de las mujeres* [The politics of women] are no second- or third-string players lurking in the recesses of the history of philosophy. Those who advanced theories on why women should be excluded were among the great minds of the nineteenth century: Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche – figures whose names evoke immediate recognition even among those who are not experts in the field. The sound of these names is associated with well-deserved respect, for these eminent thinkers held undisputed influence over everything that had to do with the development of new discourse in the scientific, technical, and humanistic areas: medicine, biology, all the sciences that emerged during nineteenth century, psychology, history, literature, the plastic arts – they all drew upon the ideas of one or another of these philosophers.

The first to address the reconceptualization of the sexes was Hegel, but he was not the most influential: he was an obscure philosopher, his terminology was complicated and what he did say, he said with too much gentility. In his *Phenomenology of Mind* he declared that the sexes were a reality of life and the natural world, but that in the human species they were dictated by norms. Each had its own destiny. The destiny of women was the family; that of men, the State. That destiny could not be contradicted. What we understand as the history and dynamics of human communities is really how the two sexes relate to one another. Although each of them had a destiny, it was not a biological one. For Hegel there was a political/ethical dimorphism, which was what made for the two separate spheres. That distinction went beyond the contingent qualities of the individual. In other words, if an individual conformed to what is preached about the entire sex, that was all to the good; otherwise, the normative standard would have to be imposed on that individual as the truth. The truth was that which applied to the entire sex to which he or she

belonged, not the qualities or character traits that the particular individual brought to the world. In any case, sex was a public destiny for men and a private one for women, and any attempt on the part of the latter to subvert this order was to invite ruin upon their communities.

As I have said, however, Hegel was too complicated. The philosopher whose undisguised misogyny set the tone for the nineteenth century was Schopenhauer. Unlike Hegel, he expressed himself with great fluidity and in terms that anyone could understand, and he was therefore a major influence. Anyone in the mid-nineteenth century who was reasonably “cultured” kept Schopenhauer’s works at his bedside. *Parerga und Paralipomena* [Essays from the Parerga and Paralipomena] went beyond philosophy to offer ideas on literature, politics, medicine, and other areas as well. Indeed, it could be said that Schopenhauer’s thought informed all that was thinkable. And of course, his misogyny was an essential aspect of his thought. He made no attempt to hide it. Moreover, he added something significant to Rousseauian and Hegelian theory: not only was the male sex the incarnation of spirit and the female sex the embodiment of Nature, but the fundamental characteristic of nature was the *perpetuation* of Nature. And this was worth a lot.

The feminine, broadly speaking, was Nature’s stratagem for reproducing itself. Actually, thanks to a spiritualist distortion, the term *feminine* has been used to refer to what should properly be called *female*. Nature herself was female. She ought to perpetuate herself because this was her only purpose; she did not and could not have any ulterior teleology. Nature was unconscious and therefore had no awareness of herself. This unconsciousness – this absence of intelligence, deprivation of purpose, inability to express ideas or look to the future or reflect on the past – was indeed a pure existence devoid of any self-awareness. And since the female was a continuity throughout Nature, it followed that a cow, a bitch, a hen and a woman actually shared much more than man and woman, who were of the same species in appearance only. What separated women from the human species was precisely the fact that they were females. Although their speech, comportment and adherence to norms might sometimes suggest that they were human beings that was pure appearance. True wisdom lay in being able to look more deeply and see that this apparent human being was really no more than the manifestation of Nature’s stratagem for self-perpetuation. The exquisiteness of this being was false and utilitarian: the sole purpose of its beauty, grace and glimmerings of intelligence was reproduction – witness the fact that those features disappeared as soon as reproduction was taking place. While men acquired maturity, women bloomed and faded. Nature used and abused them. This philosophy became the topic of discussions in coffeehouses, and indeed there was nothing in its basic texts to prevent it from being well received in those places. Schopenhauer vaunted the popular misogyny and its various subtopics, giving it an imposing and respectable appearance. All women were *woman* – ultimately, *female* – and none of them were entitled to the treatment that would be given to a second sex. What disgraced European cultures, compared with wiser ones such as those of the Orient and Islam, was the pretence of individuality accorded to women out of stupid gallantry. The European woman was futile and ridiculous, and by all logic she should be made to disappear, because women belonged in the harem. Women, the anaesthetic sex, should be shielded from self-will and all knowledge. Yet another of Schopenhauer’s many absurdities, by way of conclusion, was his claim that it was a stratagem of Nature that women should constantly seek a man who would assume legal responsibility for them. In other words, it would appear that Nature had assumed a juridical role. Be this nonsense or not, Schopenhauer was one of the strongest pillars in the formidable edifice of romantic misogyny.

One may wonder why such formidable armaments were mobilized against the vindication of equality, which had only been proposed in elitist circles. Romantic misogyny was able to gain the foothold that it did precisely because its proponents feared that feminism could become a force that could render all of society uncontrollable. We all know what fear is, and societies know it as well.

Our worlds feel threatened by change and react by defending themselves against it. Romantic misogyny was mobilized to stave off the second great wave of feminism – namely, suffragism.

The Seneca Falls declaration

There were few protests against this new order, and the few that there were came from lone and strident voices. Without education and without any power, few women could afford to take up the political or moral defence of their sex. The same was true of men, who were already committed in the political realm and could not afford to turn their attention to any woman other than the one invented by early romanticism. There were a few voices like George Sand and Stendhal, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the romantic feminine figures of perfect innocence. In the political arena, there was the systematic confrontation of liberals and ultramontane conservatives – and, emerging under their feet with no one even noticing it, a nascent workers' movement.

In 1848 Europe was severely shaken by a new revolutionary process that was getting under way in several countries simultaneously. It should be noted that some of the European nations had almost totally escaped the Enlightenment; romanticism was the first cultural movement to blanket the entire European map. Society in the first half of the nineteenth century was more homogeneous, more synergistic, than it had been in earlier times.

The year 1848 was one of ferment and public declarations. While the Communist Manifesto is often remembered, far less attention has been given to the declaration signed at Seneca Falls, New York. Although the latter was produced on the other side of the Atlantic, its repercussions were ultimately felt in all industrial societies. In 1848, seventy women and thirty men from various liberal movements and political associations came together at Seneca Falls and adopted a "Declaration of Sentiments."

The Seneca Falls declaration was modelled after the American Declaration of Independence. Its twelve resolutions were organized around two central themes: first, women's attainment of full citizenship in civil society, and second, a set of principles oriented towards the transformation of customs and the moral realm.¹⁵ The group that met at Seneca Falls came mostly from abolitionist circles. These men and women, who had devoted their lives to the abolition of slavery, came to the conclusion that there was more than just parallelism between slavery and the situation of presumably "free" women. Inspired by the postulates of Natural Law and John Locke, along with the belief that human beings were born free and equal, they declared that "all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature and therefore of no force or authority." The "great precept of nature" they were referring to may be summarized as the right to equality, liberty and the pursuit of personal happiness. This was the same precept that had been invoked against the trafficking, sale and ownership of slaves. While sentiment in favour of abolition grew stronger in England, to be soon followed by the open condemnation of slave traffic and ultimately its prosecution, the abolitionist movement was also gaining momentum in the United States. The most conscious groups, even though their victories were meagre, decided to include feminine servitude on their list of wrongs to be righted. This happened because the majority of their members were women activists. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the de facto movers behind the Seneca Falls Declaration, together formed the vanguard of what came to be known as the suffragist movement. These two women, who were later to compile and edit the classic text on suffragism, *Woman's Bible*, made their struggle public with this declaration.¹⁶

¹⁵ A. Miyares, "1848 El manifiesto de Seneca Falls" in *Leviatán*, spring 1999.

¹⁶ The youngest of the participants lived to see women win the right to vote, but by then she was an old woman.

Suffragism was an international movement and its presence was ultimately felt in all industrial societies. It focused on two specific objectives – namely, the right to vote, and the right to an education – and it achieved both within a period of eighty years. In other words, at least three generations of militants engaged in this struggle, and at least two of those generations never lived to see the fruit of their labours.

The two campaigns, the one for the vote and the other for education, advanced in parallel and mutually supported each another. As the requirements for male suffrage changed, even the most familiar misogynous arguments could no longer conceal their shocking nature. At first, men who had a certain amount of revenue could vote, but women in the same circumstances could not. Then the vote was given to men who earned their livelihood, but not to women, even if they were employed. And finally, all men won the right to vote, yet all women, regardless of their status, were still excluded. The right to education would play a major role in the changes that were to come.

As the first step, some females were given the right to primary education based on the rationale that such schooling was consistent with the domestic canon: a knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic was necessary in order for a woman to adequately fulfil her role as wife and mother. Such a petition, so consonant with domestic submission, could not be turned down, and primary schools for young girls were created under the guise of preparing them for their feminine duties. Not long afterwards, women's groups began to demand admission to the intermediate levels of instruction, invoking an argument that was also consistent with the prevailing model: it might happen that some women, while fully aware that marriage and maternity were their destiny, could be faced with adverse circumstances that prevented them from fulfilling it: orphanhood, lack of an adequate dowry or some other unforeseen misfortune might preclude a matrimonial life for a number of women with the best intentions. Would it not be a good idea if such a woman could subsist by practising some worthy profession, rather than having to depend on her family, or, even worse, falling into disgrace? Cast in terms of ensuring their virtue and proper discipline, the new proposal of schooling, first for teachers and then for nurses, was presented and, again, it had to be accepted. Nursing was nothing but a social extension of a private feminine virtue – namely caring for those in need. The same was true of teachers. Was it not more reasonable for young girls to be educated by women than by male teachers, who, with higher expectations, could undoubtedly be imparting greater knowledge to young boys? And from the standpoint of decency, was it not more seemly for women to instruct young girls and extend their maternal capacity to the education of prepubescent boys? Indeed, up to the present day these two professions continue to be dominated by women. It was these early teachers and nurses who prepared the way and made it possible for middle-class women to enjoy a relatively free existence. However, there was still one more hurdle to surmount, and that was the most difficult of all: the institutions of higher learning.

Once they had gained entry to primary education and some of the intermediate vocations, a select group of women emerged who were able to meet the requirements for admission to the universities. Would the doors of these institutions remain closed to them? Let us take the pioneering case of Concepción Arenal and the university system in Spain. This woman, without doubt one of our greatest jurists, applied for admission to law school, encouraged by a family of academic leaders who had confidence in her exceptional brilliance. After sufficient pressure was exerted, it was decided to admit her. However, the characteristics of this admission said a lot about the obstacles that existed for women who attempted to pursue a university education. She was allowed to audit classes in the law school as long as her presence in the hallowed university halls was not “indecent.” What this meant was that she was obliged to attend classes dressed as a man. It can only be assumed that that proper and God-fearing society considered transvestism less threatening than the idea of a woman hearing teachings, which in principle were forbidden to her! The routine was as follows: accompanied by a member of the family, Doña Concepción would present herself at the door of the law school, where she was received by a warden, who would

escort her to a room where she had to wait alone until the professor in the subject to be presented would come to get her and take her to the class. Seated apart from her other classmates, she would follow the lecture until it concluded, at which point the professor would take her back to the room until the next class. With consummate patience, Concepción Arenal put up with these rituals and completed her studies in law. However, for women, completion of the course of study signified nothing more than that they had attended the classes; they were not entitled to a degree, much less allowed to practice the profession that their studies had prepared them for. Thus many women who pursued university studies during the second half of the nineteenth century, and even up into the 1920s, were listed at graduation time as having completed the course of professional study but were never granted a degree. In fact, sometimes they were required to explicitly renounce that right.¹⁷

Starting in 1880, a few of the European universities began to admit women to their classrooms. The rationale was that it was being done on an exceptional basis. This was apparently a case of the familiar expression “the exception proves the rule.” It is well known, however, that if there are exceptions to a rule or a regularly observed phenomenon, then it is not really a rule. If all of ‘x’ is ‘y’, then the fact that there is an ‘x’ which is not ‘y’ invalidates the former proposition. But that is another kind of rule. The rule here was that higher education was unacceptable for women but that exceptions could be made. The fact that there were exceptions confirmed that the rule was well formed. A woman with a higher education was not, and could not be, an ordinary woman, and therefore her abilities and her work spoke for her alone and in no way altered the opinion held about the rest. She was an exception and the others were as their nature made them. Under this “dynamic of exceptions,” some women succeeded, for the first time, in creating a space for themselves within the formal culture. Lou Andreas Salomé, Marie Curie and others of a similar calibre came from this generation of exceptions.

It should be kept in mind, however, that even though the granting of degrees began to be more common thanks to these “exceptions,” it did not mean that women had the option to practise the regular professions. The first women to obtain degrees were denied entrance to the professional colleges of physicians, jurists and professors, which was why the early generations of women with higher education went into research. Excluded by law and custom from the professional careers, they found their niche in scholarly investigation. Thus, the exclusion of women from the professions, at a time when research could still be carried out almost alone or in small teams, made for some of the first women Nobel laureates.

The difficult road to education intersected with the one leading to political rights. As select groups of women expanded and grew in number, it became increasingly difficult to deny them the right to vote. The suffragist movement took advantage of this tension in other parts of the world as well. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the suffragists consistently stepped up their program of meetings, conventions, public statements and demonstrations. Political democracy owes the suffragist movement a debt of gratitude both for the word “solidarity” and for the modern-day methods of civic activism. The word “solidarity” was chosen to replace “fraternity” because the latter’s root *frater* had clearly masculine connotations. Today we never use the phrase “liberty, equality and fraternity” except to refer to the historic triptych of the French Revolution. “Solidarity,” the term coined by the suffragist movement, has become commonplace. The movement’s methods of civic activism have been even more far-reaching. Suffragism introduced intervention strategies into politics starting from the perspective of women’s exclusion. The strategies had to be appropriate for persons who were not inclined to be violent and had relatively little physical strength, and so they devised methods such as peaceful demonstrations, the heckling of speakers, hunger strikes, human chains

¹⁷ Three years ago the British press ran a feature about an Englishwoman celebrating her 100th birthday who received two presents: first, like every centenarian in England, a congratulatory telegram from the Queen, and second, a diploma from Oxford University, where she had studied history and had not been allowed to hold a degree when she was young.

and inflammatory pamphlets, all which are now in widespread use. Today this is seen as the normal way to carry out the fight for citizenship – no assaults, fires or barricades. Suffragism pioneered these methods of non-violent demonstration.¹⁸ Suffragist parades became processions of women dressed in academic gowns with diplomas in hand, marching behind banners which demanded the right to vote.

The theoretical political foundation of suffragism had been laid down by Harriet Taylor and her husband John Stuart Mill. The latter's exhaustive reform of early liberalism provided the theoretical framework that made it possible to consider non-exclusive citizenship for the first time. His contribution was primarily the redrafting of Natural Law and a deeply individualistic ontology that found its social articulation in the notion of common interest rather than the general will. Equipped with the solid doctrine of the second wave of liberalism, suffragists were able to demand and obtain the basic liberal rights of voting and education. Feminism has yet to lose any of the battles in which it has engaged. Although it may have been relatively slow in achieving its results, it has never wavered in its objectives. Fulfilling the twin demands of suffragism took at least eighty years, but the struggle was ultimately successful. In some countries and states, women won the right to vote around the time of World War I; by the end of World War II, all countries that were not dictatorships recognized that its female population had this right.

This victory was not unrelated to the two great wars that broke out during the first half of the twentieth century. Men were called up and sent to the front, and the belligerent countries then had to turn to women to keep manufacturing and the war industry going, not to mention government and its subsystems. The economy did not collapse, production levels were maintained and public administration managed to deal smoothly with numerous critical situations. It became clear that women were capable of keeping the country going. There was no reason to deny them full citizenship. Not even the most misogynist voices could oppose their demand for the vote. Instead, these misogynists limited themselves to predicting the catastrophic effects that women's new freedom would have on family relationships. The suffragists had been wrong, they said, or had misled themselves with their frequent assurances that this new freedom would not affect the family. It was possible that many of the militants sincerely believed it would not, but the picture that developed as a result of their activism ensured that indeed it did.

The long suffragist struggle – a struggle to win public favour and improve the position of women in education and the labour force – had lasted for almost a century, and now it had finally come to an end. The benefits of freedom had been achieved, and both suffragism and romantic misogyny had run their course. Things were different now. Or were they?

¹⁸ I do not know why this fact is often ignored and the origin of peaceful resistance is attributed to the purportedly peaceful ancestral roots of the Hinduism of Mahatma Gandhi. The truth is that Gandhi borrowed it from suffragism.

II. The feminine mystique

In democracies that came into being after World War II, for the first time there was universal suffrage and guaranteed education for the entire population. That meant the beginning of a new era for women – an era made possible thanks to the rights won by the suffragists. An enormous contingent of female citizens had opportunities available to them that had been unheard of in the past.

What happened then was the emergence of a coordinated campaign based on what came to be referred to as “the feminine mystique.” The governments and the mass media, with a newly expanded role nearly as impressive as what they have today, embarked on the conscious mission to both remove women from the jobs they had held during the war and send them home, and at the same time, to diversify production in the plants that had been devoted to the war effort. Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, which was to become the launching platform for the feminism of the seventies, offered a masterful analysis of the various trends of the time. In the 1950s, women with the hard-won right to vote and finally with educational opportunities were being forced to return to the hearth and resign themselves to a domestic life. This literally meant renouncing their newly acquired rights. The men returning from the front demanded to have their old jobs back, thereby displacing the women and obliging them to return their traditional role. It was argued that the jobs belonged to the men, who had been obliged to give up their jobs temporarily because of *force majeure*.

In order for this to happen, the home itself had to be reinvented and the traditional role of women had to be updated to take the new state of affairs into account. Large numbers of women, with their recently won citizenship and elementary or high school education, had to be satisfied with being housewives.

Women were being summarily expelled from the jobs they had taken on when they replaced the men who went to the front. They were being asked to give up their jobs through a campaign of optimistic dissuasion in which the women's magazines played an active role.

Women's magazines had made their debut in the Roaring Twenties, and by the 1950s they had gained their present broad-based readership and circulation. They proposed a new female model in which modern women were distinguished from their ignorant and worn out grandmothers. "Then" and "now" became the catchwords. "Then" their grandmothers did many things thoughtlessly and no doubt incorrectly because of their lack of education and opportunities: they didn't know how to raise their children, observe proper hygiene, and so forth – in other words, they didn't know that running a household required a degree in home economics. "Now" modern women were citizens and had an education; they were free and capable – free to choose to stay at home and not compete in the tight labour market; capable of running the home with business-like planning. The contemporary home, in which electrical appliances freed women from some of the more onerous and humiliating chores, required a domestic engineer to run it – a woman who knew that success depended on proper management of the family enterprise. Every homemaker was a managing director and the success of the nuclear family depended entirely on her. It didn't make sense to go out and compete on the labour market for a job that required low or average qualifications when she could be her own boss. And the "modern woman" not only had to keep her technologically up-to-date home in perfect order; she also had to establish relations that could promote her husband's career: meetings, clubs, dinner parties and other special occasions fuelled the engine of family progress.

The models of womanhood changed not only in ads and magazines but also in the movies. The independent unmarried woman of the 1950s was countered by the likes of Doris Day. On television, which was having a steadily growing influence, the ideal woman, even when she could choose to do anything, decided to be a homemaker, as seen in such notable examples as the highly successful series "Bewitched" – a perfect composite of them all. The protagonist is not a gnarled old witch like her mother but rather a doting wife who willingly renounces her powers and lives vicariously through the professional life of a pleasant but mediocre husband.

Simone de Beauvoir's seminal feminist work, *Le deuxième sexe* [The Second Sex], had appeared just before this propaganda campaign got under way. This philosopher, daughter of "the dynamic of exceptions," had applied her considerable talent to going about feminism in a new way. It was no longer a question of vindication, as it had been for the women writers during the Enlightenment and for the suffragists, but rather a matter of explanations. It is difficult to categorize the work of de Beauvoir: one always wonders whether to consider her the last word for suffragism or the beginning of the third wave of feminism. In any event, she appeared during a vacuum between the two, just at the time the feminine mystique was being concocted. Moreover, she belonged to cultural elite, whereas the model of womanhood proposed by the mystique was for the average woman. So the feminine mystique continued to operate within the "dynamic of exceptions." The new domestic model foreshadowed women's return *en masse* to the old dichotomy of public vs. private, this time not based on Nature but conceived as complementary. Undoubtedly some women might object to such a destiny, but they should give it a try. If it turned out to be untenable, they would be regarded as exceptions. Beauvoir herself writes that she believed in good faith that she was an exception. It was like believing in good faith that only in the Capitalist world were women treated unfairly and that equality had already been achieved in the

Soviet State. The feminine mystique coincided with the Cold War and was one of its defining features; just as there were two socio-political models, there was also two models of womanhood. The reality, however, was quite different. In the West, the feminine mystique had triggered a major reaction in the female population it was attempting to convert, while Soviet “equality,” for its part, functioned only with extraordinary effort, which was required exclusively of women, while domestic work remained unchanged and public freedoms were still suppressed.

If the model was difficult for the exceptions, since it usually entailed spinsterhood, strict sexual morality and almost unbearable emotional moderation, for those who attempted to adapt to it, it was equally repugnant. The nuclear family was no longer a production centre; it had become a consumption centre. At first the emphasis on natality – not unexpected after a war, when there is always an upsurge in births – took up the available time of the new homemakers, but not without any letup on the demands for perfectionism, placing excessive pressure on family relations. “Modern women” was required both to work and to please, and she was often torn between the two.¹⁹ Homemaker clubs were the only political niche that was available to them, and they had little chance of playing a role in the community. The way to keep the average educated woman with a high school education and certain professional aspirations at home, even though it was a technologically up-to-date home, was to occupy her mind with compulsive personal and domestic tasks, and the way to satisfy her desire for participation was for her to attend meetings about the best ways to can food, or get involved in buying and selling cosmetics at home – and all this was to have personally disastrous consequences. With no economic independence and no relevant domestic tasks or prospects for relationships or a cultural life outside the suggestions advanced in the magazines, women lapsed into a domestic vacuousness – fostered all the more by technology and even, in the upper income brackets, by paid domestic help. At first they frittered away their idle time on handiwork, romance novels and television, but eventually they fell into loneliness, depression and those syndromes dismissed as “typically female” ailments.

By the mid-1960s it became abundantly clear to the daughters of this generation that the conquests of the suffragists had only succeeded in bringing about changes in the male hierarchy. Their restlessness began to increase, and individual channels for venting it could not be found. A new movement was about to come into being.

The feminism of 1968. The third wave

The feminine mystique of Betty Friedan

The phrase capsulized the model of womanhood that was being promoted by post-war politics, and it opened the eyes of the new generation of women. It gave a name to the “nameless malaise” – the term used by the feminists of the 1970s to refer to the mental and emotional state of deprivation and discontent, the stale air and lack of horizons, that appeared to infuse the world they had inherited. The earliest feminists of the 1970s were quick to come up with a diagnosis: the patriarchal order had remained intact. “Patriarchy” was the term chosen to refer to the social, moral and political order maintained and perpetuated by the male hierarchy. It was a social, economic and ideological order that sustained itself by self-supporting practices, with no regard whatsoever for the rights those women had recently won.

¹⁹ For example, the popular glamour books of the day went so far as to say that the perfect wife should get up an hour earlier than her husband to put on her makeup so that he would never see her without it. Elsewhere it was recommended that women do exercises to slim the waistline while peeling potatoes. In the Spanish high schools girls were required to take a course in “home economics” in which the textbook offered interesting lessons on topics such as the cuts of meat and the perfectly arranged closet.

The political niche in which the third wave of feminism was born was the 1968 counterculture of the Left. Just as the feminism of the Enlightenment had seized upon contemporary political categories and suffragism had enlisted (and updated) the terminology of liberal politics, the third wave of feminism adopted conceptualisations from contemporary politics. It remains to fully explore the change in political conceptions that informed the uprising of May 1968, or even to understand what the movement actually represented. What it did do was form a new elite, replacing the one that had emerged after the Allied Victory; propose a new design for the Welfare State; launch a revolution in the communication of knowledge; bring about profound changes in lifestyle, and chart a new Utopian horizon based on a different set of values. Since we continue to live in the midst of these changes, it is still difficult to understand them fully.

The feminism of the 1970s brought the end of the feminine mystique and set the stage for a series of changes in values and lifestyle that are still taking place. Its first major accomplishment was the recognition that, even though political rights had been won in the form of the vote, access to education had been gained and women were taking their place in the professions (albeit with explicit prohibitions in some areas),²⁰ they had not yet attained a position of parity with men. There continued to be a hierarchical distance and a difference in the degree to which they were valued, which in some way was accepted as legitimate. This recognition prompted an analysis of the situation and the identification of new objectives to be achieved.

It was determined with certainty that winning the vote had failed to bring about any legislative changes as far as much of civil and family law was concerned. The non-legal, normative realm – i.e., morals, modes and customs – had scarcely undergone any change. It was therefore urgent to examine existing legislation with a view to making it egalitarian and equitable. Equal rights would be in appearance only unless they were codified in the form of new legislation. This third wave of feminism was not content with the right to vote; it embarked on a systematic review of each and every existing law with a view to detecting and eliminating the legal roots of enduring discrimination.

In all the advanced countries, in the 1970s, when the feminist protests were at their height, revisions and legal reforms were introduced that enabled women to truly exercise their freedom, which until then had only been granted to them in the abstract. But the feminism of the 1970s was not prepared to stop there. From the outset it had sought to undo the inherited normative order in its entirety, not just the strictly legal aspects. This was accomplished by incorporating into the juridical realm areas, which up until then had been regarded as private.²¹ Feminism was erasing the traditional boundaries between private and public.

The bulk of the legislative work was completed within a decade – the 1970s through the early 1980s. But the third wave of feminism was also determined to effect changes in the non-legal and non-explicit normative spheres as well. The revolution in morals, modes and customs – the triad that we usually refer to as *mores* – was taking place at the same time as the legislative reform. What was most notorious and created the greatest scandal were the new judgments about female sexuality and the new sexual freedom of “liberated” women. Whether or not premarital relations were more common than they had been before, what was important was that the women who engaged in them refused to feel guilty or be censured. The availability of contraceptives, intrauterine devices, spermicides and “the pill” (widely marketed and used semi-legally) gave women in the student advanced guard unprecedented power over their lives.

²⁰ For example, judgeships, the army and the clergy remained legally closed to women, and of course, there was only de facto access to the prestigious professions – politics, engineering, architecture, medicine, economics, etc. -- to which women were admitted on an exceptional basis.

²¹ For example, the idea that rape could occur within the marriage was unthinkable when it was first proposed.

The change in *mores* was taking place partly through momentum, independently of the militant nucleus. For the militants, “abolition of the patriarchy” and “what is personal is political” were their two principal themes. The first was the overall objective, and the second was a new way of looking at politics, not as management but rather in contractual terms. A much broader interpretation of politics, albeit somewhat more elusive to deal with, came to prevail: namely, that politics includes everything that involves a relationship to power. This interpretation, drawn directly from the philosophy of the Frankfurt School, particularly via Herbert Marcuse, and later to be supplemented with elements from Michel Foucault, made it possible to return to the deepest and most classic theme of feminism since its very beginnings: unjust privilege. But now the analysis, despite the broader scope of the term *politics*, was becoming more explicit. The new data and contributions of psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, sociology – in sum, the current panoply of contractual political culture – permitted diagnoses that once would have been unforeseeable. The new feminist philosophy was being shaped, as Kant would have it, by elevating the particular to the level of a category.

Kate Millett, Sulamith Firestone, J. Mitchell, C. Lonzi, each in their own way, undertook to memorialize the painstaking work of the women everywhere who had come forward in response to the idea that “what is personal is political.” Those primitive groups literally pooled their personal experiences so that they could be carefully examined and discussed.²² Laboriously, even painfully, their members began reweaving, with the threads of their individual lives, the entire tapestry of their shared oppression. From these early labours, reworked in the prevailing political language of the countercultural of the Left, arose the leading works of the period: Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, and Firestone’s *Dialectic of Sex*.

As the analyses went deeper into detail and broader in scope to include a wide range of situations – the law, the workplace, the mass media, education, health, sexuality, intimate relationships– de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* [The Second Sex], buried under 20 years of neglect, also began to take on importance. While it certainly had not been articulated in an immediately political language, in its own way it gave convincing explanations for some of the phenomena that existed worldwide. It became the first step of feminism into the “philosophy of suspicion,” and soon this latter philosophy was added to the previous ones, though not without certain reservations. The reservations were greater among the more radicalised groups, which embraced Valerie Solanas’ *S.C.U.M. Manifesto: Society for Cutting Up Men*.

In any case, the movement as a whole was seen from the outside as a radical, and sometimes incomprehensible, protest, both because of the kinds of demands that were being made and because of the way in which they were presented. And this was not just in conservative circles; tensions began to mount among the travelling companions themselves. The “unwanted child of the Enlightenment,” which with suffragism had become the uncomfortable kin of liberalism, was now being regarded as the unexpected and undesirable ally of the 1968 movement. But now, just when the protesters were on the verge of reaching the Utopian paradise and overturning the “system,” what was the point of women still revolting? Didn’t they realize that they were fragmenting the movement just as it was entering the final struggle?

Already accustomed to working within the dynamic of exceptions, even the most extreme politicians attempted to divert the momentum of this headless force. As far as the theorists were concerned, with the prior issue of “the principal contradiction” for practice, they turned to deceptive tactics in an effort to win the women over. “Why do you need to be a feminist?” was a

²² For a more detailed analysis of these organizational norms, see my *Sexo y filosofía, sobre mujer y poder* [Sex and Philosophy: About Women and Power], Anthropos, 1991. There I take the same approach in addressing the fundamental debate about “the principal contradiction,” which space does not allow me to reproduce in detail.

question they often heard by women. The implication was that feminism was for the incompetents; “real” women could gain access to the radical elite without such baggage.

As the direct descendant of egalitarianism, feminism has always had an inner tension between the rank and file and the leadership. This has often caused the movement to fall into what has come to be referred to as “the tyranny of lack of structure.” Indeed, feminism itself is such a basic form of egalitarianism that the movement’s collective action sometimes gets in its own way. The feminism of the 1970s, which had attracted impressively large numbers of women, had confidence in the novelty of its demands and in its ability to stir up unrest, but it had almost no leadership and often did not even want it. The groups came together either through affinity to the cause or through friendship, and they operated on the basis of this ethically and politically directed amity, which may best be characterized by the Greek word *philia*. This way of forming their ranks was entirely appropriate, given the nature of the discourse and the experiences that had to be addressed in the initial phase. To elevate the anecdotal to the level of category sometimes meant revealing personal and even intimate things, and this was facilitated by the support of the *philia*. However, both the diagnosis and the formulation of objectives were political. Yet they were attempting to make an impact in the public realm from a space that was being constructed as semiprivate. At the same time, feminism also sought to transform each militant into a unique liberated woman. In the jockeying for a position in the hierarchy, which did not take long to appear, a small elite group of women emerged who had not been endorsed by their male counterparts and did not come from the established male network, and these women believed in direct political dialogue. By themselves, they hoped to bring about the desired changes on all matters regarding which the politics in power was prepared to yield.

Thus there arose the question of whether it was a single or dual militancy,²³ complicated by the fact that the leadership just mentioned was emerging in groups with a similar dual commitment as well as in others that were focused on a single cause. In this way, feminism was forced to address the subject of power. These tensions, however, should not distract us from the main issue: even in the midst of the confusion, the identification of symptoms, the diagnosis and the formulation of objectives continued advance apace. By the 1980s, feminism, albeit very timidly, had begun to take its place in formal politics. Agencies specifically devoted to the situation of women were being created in all the Western countries, and for the most part they made it possible to complete the work under way on legal reforms and to evaluate the laws already in place.

In the 1980s it became clear that in the world’s social image the masculine side continued to connote power, authority and prestige, and that the reforms achieved to date had not made a significant impact on this inertia. Thus the objective became *visibility*. In other words, the profoundly anti-hierarchical and egalitarian movement of feminism had to face the problem that it, too, was becoming a theory of the elite, and it had to try not to lose its identity while dealing with it. This was an important factor in the development of tension between equality and difference.

²³ In order not to digress from the principal train of thought, I again refer to my book, *Sexo y filosofía*, already cited above.

III. The present and the challenges for the future

Just as the suffragist victories were followed by the feminine mystique, the 1980s saw the development of a conservative backlash which attempted to put things back the way they had been and close off the avenues opened up by the new legal spaces. This happened during the conservative administrations of Reagan and Thatcher, so ably described by Susan Faludi in her *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*.²⁴ Again the strategy consisted of a synergistic orchestration by the public powers, the media industry, the trend-setters and the conservative network of civil society. However, it had much less impact than its predecessor. On the one hand, the international panorama was not as homogeneous; on the other, feminism in the 1980s was being reduced to a mass of unfocussed individual actions.

While in some countries an effort was made to suppress the agencies responsible for equality, or else restructure them so that they would be supportive of a conservative model of womanhood, in other countries, with a different political orientation, the small representation of women in their public agencies gained increased visibility through quota and parity systems based on positive discrimination. Internationally, feminism, which had always been an international movement, was making its mark in places where it had previously been unthinkable – the developing societies – and it was embodied in “gender” practices, which had never existed before, thus claiming for the first time a role in the building of democracies.

²⁴ 1991. Anchor, 1992. Sp. ed. Anagrama, 1993.

The feminism of the 1980s and the 1990s found in the quota system a tool that enabled women to become more prominent at the heart of the public sector, where studies showed that previously the social visibility of women had been interrupted because there was no place for their new skills and positions in the explicit or legally established authority. This spelled the end of the dynamic of exceptions.

It became urgent to conduct quantitative reviews. Exercises were undertaken to find out how many women were employed in each of the major sectors and why there were so few of them. The conclusion was that there was a “glass ceiling” in all the hierarchical and organizational scales: at the upper levels of the ladder, the presence of women with equivalent preparation got smaller. The conviction grew that selection mechanisms were impartial in appearance only.²⁵ It was therefore considered important to promote measures that would ensure the presence and visibility of women at all levels – in other words, to implement positive discrimination and quotas.

In this area the best results have been obtained so far in the public sector. It remains a challenge to implement this type of action in private industry, which would entail rather broad political and trade union agreements. Both mechanisms, positive discrimination and quotas, are natural tools that democracies use when they decide to improve their egalitarian balance sheet,²⁶ and for this very reason they tend to fall outside liberal or ultraliberal contexts. Quotas are instruments for ensuring that members of systematically preferred groups are placed in selected positions; in other words, they impose a meritocracy when the normal recruitment procedures are not sufficient. Positive discrimination, on the other hand, attempts to impose impartiality from the outset rather than at the end; similar individuals may be treated differently so that some of them can have a slight advantage from the beginning of the competition.

The feminism of the 1990s found itself turning to the study of organizational dynamics. This does not mean that the themes of general political philosophy had been abandoned, but rather that there was a need to shed light, using increasingly refined instruments, on the micro-politics of sex. The analyses looked at the real nodes and points of power, the economic and relational forms, the image one projects, the ability to handle authority, etc., and gave rise to highly detailed and informative studies.²⁷ Thus feminism became all the more complex by continuing to be, in essence, an egalitarianism which was at the same time a theory of the elite – in other words, global activism turned into clever political theory.

The challenges for the new millennium

In order to accede to feminism’s demands for parity, it seems clear that the current theoretical framework, which is still naturalist in its broad outlines, will have to change. The naturalism that existed on the ideological map at the end of the last century undoubtedly came from the Enlightenment, as a reaction to the spiritualism that that went before. It has been around long enough to have changed its face several times, assuming such forms as Positivism, Eugenism, socio-biologism, etc. However, it is not part of the current landscape of global ideas and concepts in the modern world simply because it offers better explanations for certain phenomena than the earlier spiritual explanations; the naturalism of today is above all the foundation and outgrowth of current social practices, as amply demonstrated by Mary Douglas.²⁸ If there is sufficient dissent

²⁵ For a more detailed review, see Valcárcel, *La política de las mujeres*, Cátedra, 1997.

²⁶ They are derived from the self-conscious application of the principle of impartiality, one of whose most outstanding theorists is John Rawls, in his *Theory of Justice*.

²⁷ See numerous examples of this type of work in the bibliography compiled by Pierre Bourdieu in *La domination masculine*, Seuil, París, 1998.

²⁸ *How Institutions Think* (1986), Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986. (Sp. ed. Alianza, 1996), which concludes the work undertaken in *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970), Routledge, 1996. (Sp. ed. Alianza 1978). All institutions need some

over such practices – for example, in the case of those that ensure sexual hierarchy – we at least have a good reason to expect the ultimate decadence of naturalist reductionism. At present, however, it is still an important component of modern cosmogony, and a great conceptual effort will be required in order to change it radically, much less leave it behind.²⁹ If the global framework continues on its drift toward dialogism and hermeneutics, the possibilities that have already opened up will be expanded.

With regard to the political societies within the framework of globalization, it is clear that opportunities and freedoms for women tend to be greater wherever overall liberties are guaranteed and the State takes responsibility for ensuring adequate minimums. Feminism, which since its origin has been a form of democratism, relies on the guarantees of democracies to achieve its objectives. Although in extreme situations the active participation of at least some women in civil conflicts would seem to advance their cause, in reality gains there from are only consolidated in free and stable situations. Many women have learned the hard way, with their own flesh, that risking life and limb to overthrow a tyranny does not prevent them from suffering the consequences of their victory if the new regime that follows is yet another tyranny. Any totalitarianism and any fundamentalism will tighten social control and, unfortunately, this means above all else more stringent normative control of the female collective as well. Thus the outward signs of a victorious insurrection – changes in clothing and customs, defence of family values, moral “housecleaning,” etc. – are always significant and should never be dismissed as mere accidental details. Montesquieu once wrote that the measure of freedom that a society enjoys depends on the freedom enjoyed by the women in that society. Only democracy – the more so to the extent that it is deep-rooted and participative – ensures the exercise of freedoms and the enjoyment of acquired rights. However imperfect it may be, it is always better than any kind of dictatorship, whether it is social, religious or charismatic. In a democracy the channels for the resolution of demands have to be kept open and therefore they are presented in public – although this may not necessarily bring immediate agreement. This is a prerequisite for viability and consensus. Rights acquired in a situation of tyranny are easily lost – an indication of the limited consensus that had been reached. Precisely because no necessary historical law governs social events, involutions are always possible and nothing is certain forever. Democracy is a political form that must be constantly defended and refined, and this may be done from any number of sources, individual or associative. Increasing the flow of participation – which involves the encouragement of questioning, debate and the elaboration of final arguments – always favours public presentation of the cause of those who have been excluded. Feminism, democracy and economic industrial development work synergistically, so that even the appearance of explicit feminism in societies that had not had it before is an indication that they are on the road to development. Feminism is committed to the strengthening of democracies and it also tends to strengthen them.

Admission to the circles of explicit power continues to be the task at hand. Quota systems – formal in some political contexts and informal in others – have helped to ensure that all rosters include more women than would have been admitted in a process of normal, biased recruitment.

stabilizing principle, which usually involves the naturalization of social classifications. This is achieved by the systematic application of an analogy. When the analogy is applied from time to time, going from one set of social relations to others and from these again to nature, its formal structure becomes more easily recognizable and ends up becoming a self-validating truth. Or looking at it more deeply, the shared analogy is a mechanism for legitimizing a set of fragile institutions. Mary Douglas, 1986, pp. 78 ff. of the Spanish edition.

²⁹ This does not take into account its capacity to resist, which was amply demonstrated throughout the century just now coming to an end. For example, the socio-biological arguments, which have been roundly discredited by scientific experts, have been taken to the media, -- the press, magazines, television, monographs -- without their promoters appearing to attach any importance to the fact that they no longer have any credibility in serious scientific circles.

Despite their defects, and they clearly have them,³⁰ they should continue to be applied precisely because so far it has not been possible to ensure impartiality through the usual mechanisms.

The purpose of quotas is not to put women in places where there are none – that would be positive discrimination – but rather to prevent the regular recruitment process from exercising any bias with regard to sex. The explicit and legitimate power, whose primary analogy is political power within democracies, is important for achieving the aim of visibility. It exposes the true quality of the progress made toward the attainment of educational objectives. Suffragism, in its struggle to gain educational rights, managed to cover the most important and decisive stretch of the road toward parity. Visibility only attempts to ensure that this hitherto unthinkable event – namely equal education and women’s accomplishments measured in terms of their merit – is not systematically obliterated and swept under the rug as if nothing had changed. Quotas put an end to two recurring patterns that perpetuate male privilege: discrimination in recognizing achievement (making women’s achievements invisible) and discrimination by the elite.

Feminism is also internationalism, and has been since the beginning, in that it has applied the universal principles of the Enlightenment in both senses: as a broad movement and as political/moral universalism. In the context of globalization, this means that feminism should enter into three fields of action. It should engage in the debate on multiculturalism. It should seek to have a presence in international organizations. And it should be open to the possibility of rapid and effective international action.

Multiculturalism, which basically accepts differences between cultures and the right to demand respect for this difference, when it allies itself with communitarianism, may attempt to rationalize and legitimize certain social forms of oppression and exclusion which feminism has had to struggle against in the past. To give its support to multiculturalist positions, feminism can and should make certain that these positions are in keeping with the list of minimum conditions set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, if possible, supplemented by the declarations currently being considered on the rights of women.

The presence and visibility of women should also be increased in the international organizations, as should the capacity of international women’s bodies, both partisan and general, to take action. Experience with international conferences, declarations and forums would indicate that there is willingness for women to have a presence in the complex process of globalization, as well as a voice in the formulation of general objectives in the areas of ethics, politics and population policy. The presence of feminism in international institutions also ensures that gender-based technical assistance programs are appropriate and effective. At a time when nations are no longer the appropriate framework within which to solve many problems that have worldwide ramifications and are beyond the scope of action by individual States, contributions to the endowment, improvement and empowerment of international institutions are, in effect, contributions to the overall cause of women’s liberation.

The matter of rapid and effective international action is also tied to the thorny question of violence. Women are not essentially committed to peace. Although a philosopher as perspicacious and enlightened as Simone de Beauvoir has referred to males as the sex that kills and females as the sex that gives life, this is really the kind of rhetoric that only a certain differentialist mystique could take as serious. However, although women may not be essentially pacific, or even functionally so in a patriarchal hierarchical system (because a woman uses her capacity for violence with those who are weak, even among the same sex, and because her atomized disposition obliges her, regardless of her wishes, to support the violence of her men), in an impartial society they have

³⁰ Since most of them do not have the internal modulation capable of preventing their perverted usage, systematic vigilance is essential.

nothing to gain from violence. In applying the ethical principle of majorities to decisions that sometimes can and should entail violence toward the outside, states must suppress internal violence as much as possible. Moreover, even if they do manage to avoid political and civil violence, their responsibility for action has not ended, for they are also obliged to protect their citizens against their own capacity for mutual violence. In other words, they have the duty to be safe, because the easy life can only hope to flourish when the external and internal violence of the State does not take up too much space in the collective imagination. The conservative Roman historians used to say that peace “feminizes” a population. That conclusion, which was meant as a criticism, is now a firm conviction in advanced democracies. The values that peace promotes – namely, shared community life, caring for others, enjoyment of pleasures – are not essentially feminine; they are aspirations common to all societies that can afford to allow for them. I will refrain from further exploration of this matter here because it is too important a subject to be dealt with in brief. But I will at least say that feminism can constitute a guarantee of peace because it is totally committed to the elimination of gender-based violence and individual violence. Women can freely take up arms in the military, while at the same time feminism can collectively demand to have a society that is pacific and internally disarmed. In those communities in which value is still given to the capacity for violence, little value is accorded to women, and they are its victims.

Most of the lines of present and future action that have been mentioned so far can be reduced to one of following three types: calls for change in the conceptual framework, development of increased capacity for action and reparation of quantitative deficits. In conclusion, I would like to propose some immediate objectives the fulfilment of which would help to clear the real hurdles that are blocking the road to parity. I will list at least three of them. The first would be to correct the qualitative, as well as the quantitative, deficit. While discrimination by the elite produces a quantitative deficit, in itself it is a qualitative deficit – and currently an especially serious one. Given the present level of schooling of the female population, their massive failure – and the early data from the previous decade leave no doubt about this – could not have occurred without an express will for it to happen and the operational will to ensure it. The glass ceiling remains firmly in place in all professional areas.

The second objective would be to expose gynophobia in the business world and deactivate it. As subjects, women are in the worst situation in the labour system – which would appear to be indifferent – with fewer opportunities, worse jobs and duties often beneath their individual capacity. The second part of this objective would be to introduce the merit system for women over 30 who are subjected to constant and not-so-subtle discrimination like no other women have experienced in the past. This generation, which has made the greatest achievements and attained the highest education rates in history, is currently experiencing a genuine disaster.

And third, there is still a critical need to develop common will. Feminism is more than a theory or a movement; neither is it clever politics. It is, and has always been, I would like to say, at the risk of repeating myself, a mass of actions, some of which may have seemed minor and of little significance. Every time a woman has individually opposed an inherited hierarchical guideline, or increased her prospects for freedom from prevailing practices, she is making another infinitesimal moral step forward. Feminism has been, and still is, a sum of rebellions, affirmations and actions against the prevailing tide, which many women have been and continue to be engaged in without having any idea that they are feminists. In other words, these actions are taking place without any awareness of common will.

I believe that at this moment, in this third wave of feminism setting the stage for the third millennium, women may already be capable of forging a common will that is relatively homogeneous in its overall aims: namely, to protect what has already been achieved and to continue progressing toward the attainment of their freedoms. Regardless of their place on the

political spectrum, today's women who are in the public eye have the duty and the capacity to develop an agenda of agreed-upon minimum objectives. If they press forward and create this common will, women will be able to reach their goals with much less effort – even if only on the emotional level – than their predecessors had to make in order to achieve what they have today.

I believe that every generation is responsible for its own phase, and those of us who are benefiting from what other men and women have already achieved for us will in turn be responsible for our own. Ahead of us lies the great challenge of parity, which will mean resolving several smaller challenges: the formation of a well-articulated common will that is aware of both its memory and the goals that it is pursuing; the exposure of sexist (if not gynophobic) practices in civil society, the marketplace and politics; joint development of an agenda of minimum conditions that would prevent any loss of what has already been achieved and strengthen new gains as they are made; and finally, redress of the qualitative deficit which is currently a shameless affront to reason.



Serie

mujer y desarrollo

Issues published

- 1 Rural women in Latin America and the Caribbean: results of projects and programmes (LC/L.513), September 1989
- 2 Latin America: the challenge of socializing the home environment (LC/L.514), October 1989
- 3 Women and politics in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.515), September 1989
- 4 Refugee and displaced women in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.591), December 1990
- 5 Women, Cultures and Development: views from Latin America (LC/L.596), May 1991
- 6 Women and new technologies (LC/L.597), November 1990
- 7 New participatory methodologies for working with women (LC/L.592), October 1990
- 8 The vulnerability of households headed by women: policy questions and options for Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/L.611), April 1991
- 9 Integration of the feminine into Latin American culture: in search of a new social paradigm (LC/L.674/Rev.1), June 1994
- 10 Domestic violence against women in Latin America and the Caribbean: proposals for discussion (LC/L.690), June 1992
- 11 Feminisation of the informal sector in Latin America and the Caribbean? (LC/L.731), May 1993
- 12 Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: potential leadership in the area of population (LC/L.738), May 1993
- 13 Development and gender equity: an uncompleted task (LC/L.767), June 1992
- 14 Changing power and autonomy of the Caribbean women (LC/L.881), October 1995
- 15 Female human resources development: growth and equity as priorities (LC/L.947), May 1997
- 16 Gender-based violence: a human rights problem (LC/L.957), June 1997 [www](#)
- 17 Health and women in Latin America and the Caribbean: old issues and new approaches (LC/L.990), September 1997
- 18 Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s: diagnostic elements and proposals (LC/L.836/Rev.1), March 1997
- 19 Reflections on the use of labour market indicators in designing policies with a gender-based approach (LC/L.1016), June 1998 [www](#)
- 20 A gender-based approach to the urban informal sector. The case of Mexico (LC/L.1017), July 1998
- 21 The urban female labour market in Latin America: The myth and the reality (LC/L.1034), July 1998 [www](#)
- 22 The education of women: from marginality to coeducation (LC/L.1120), August 1998 [www](#)
- 23 Violence within couples. Legal treatment. Review of progress and results (LC/L.1123), September 1998 [www](#)
- 24 Towards equality for women. Progress in legislation since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (LC/L.1126) [www](#)
- 25 Gender, the environment and the sustainability of development (LC/L.1144), October 1998 [www](#)
- 26 Part-time work in Chile (LC/L.1301-P), Sales No. E.00.II.G.9 (US\$ 10.00), January 2000
- 27 The challenge of gender equity and human rights on the threshold of the twenty-first century (LC/L.1295/Rev.1-P), Sales No. E.00.II.G.48 (US\$ 10.00), May 2000 [www](#)

- 28 Mujer y trabajo en las reformas estructurales latinoamericanas durante las décadas de 1980 y 1990 (LC/L.1378), N° de venta: S.00.II.G.94 (US\$ 10.00), mayo de 2000 [www](#)
- 29 The Gender Perspective in Economic and Labour Policies. State of the Art in Latin America and the Caribbean. (LC/L.1500-P), Sales N° E.00.II. G.44 (US\$ 10.00), July, 2001 [www](#)
- 30 Equidad de género y calidad en el empleo: Las trabajadoras y los trabajadores en salud en Argentina, (LC/L. 1506-P), N° de venta: S.01.II.G.45 (US\$ 10.00), marzo de 2001 [www](#)
- 31 The collective memory and challenges of feminism, (LC/L. 1507-P), Sales N° E.01.II.G.46 (US\$ 10.00), June 2002 [www](#)

-
- Readers wishing to obtain the above publications can do so by writing to the following address: ECLAC, Casilla 179-D, Santiago, Chile, Fax (562) 210 2069, publications@eclac.cl.

- [www](#): These publications are also available on the Internet: <http://www.eclac.cl>

Name:
Activity:
Address:
Postal code, city, country:
Tel.: Fax: E.mail address: