

**mujer y desarrollo**



**G**ender relations in  
a global world

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## Contents

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<b>Summary</b> .....	5
<b>I. Overview</b> .....	7
<b>II. Globality as compression of the world and global consciousness</b> .....	9
<b>III. Socio-historical conditions behind the emergence of women's movements as modernizing and globalizing forces</b> .....	13
<b>IV. The women's movement as a driver of institutional change</b> .....	17
A. Processes of individualization and personal biographies ....	18
B. New social practices within the family sphere .....	20
C. Economic practices: of production and exchange .....	21
D. Practices of authoritarian power and signification: the State, government administration, parties and policies .....	23
E. The contribution of the women's movement to the formulation of new rights.....	26
<b>V. Conclusion</b> .....	29
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	31
<b>Serie Mujer y desarrollo: issues published</b> .....	35



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## Summary

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This report takes a look at globalization from a politico-institutional standpoint, and emphasizes the role assumed by the whole range of agents involved in the different global dynamics (including the economic ones) driving changes in gender relations. The paper seeks to describe the influence of institutional changes on gender relations, as well as the role played by the women's movement in the loosening of conventions and the formulation of new institutional frameworks.

This paper looks at some of the major issues that the women's movement has placed on the global public agenda, and which have the potential to effect social change insofar as they broaden and enrich the ways of making policy, the concept of citizenship and rights, and the relationship between States and supranational organs and civil society.

This approach confirms the multidimensional nature of globalization and the importance of human agency in the process of social transformation currently under way. The paper also seeks to reveal the consequences and risks of the globalization process in its current guise, which is leading to new forms of social stratification and a polarization of life experiences and prospects between those who can access the benefits of globalization and those who are excluded from it.

The viewpoint adopted differs from those positions which reduce globalization to its economic dimension and fail to distinguish between the process of globalization and the form it is currently taking with the implementation of neoliberal policies.



## I. Overview <sup>1</sup>

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In a context such as the contemporary one, characterized by major discontinuities that impact on the different aspects of society –subjective, social, economic, political and cultural–, the study of the interrelationships between the processes of globalization and gender relations gives rise to a variety of approaches.

The first of these approaches, and perhaps the earliest and most common to date, examines the adverse effects of globalization, especially in its economic dimension, on the status and quality of life of women, and in particular the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Such studies tend to deny the contradictions inherent in the globalization process such as it is unfolding today, namely that it presents opportunities at the same time as it potentially gives rise to limitations and huge inequalities; furthermore, these studies tend to identify the globalization process with the implementation of a specific economic model.

More recent studies shift the focus from the consequences of globalization towards understanding the processes implicit in globalization and concentrate on revealing how these processes –especially in their economic dimension– are established while at the same time transforming a particular ordering of gender relations.

This analytical framework (Sassen, 1988; Todaro, Yáñez, 1997) enables light to be shed on the less visible dynamics of globalization and the various agents involved in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the comments and suggestions of Claudia Bonan and Sonia Montañó, the support of Claudia Moreno in identifying texts to be read on the topic and Lucia Stecher for her assistance with the final version.

These studies attempt to describe the ways in which gender relations sustain today's economy, at the same time as they are modified in line with economic changes. In this way, they highlight the role of women as participants in the economic and daily dynamics that make up globalization processes.

This report examines the topic from a political/institutional viewpoint and stresses the role of the various agents who, occupying non-economic positions, participate in the different global dynamics (including economic dynamics) spurring changes in gender relations. Attention is paid to the role played by women's emancipation movements in globalization.

The study views these movements as modernizing forces with a growing influence, chiefly in the final four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, on the transition from one stage of modernity to that of today defined by globalization.

The 'modernizing' influence of these movements ranges from the dynamics that structure daily living –the living and symbolic space where people develop and order their movement between private life and public spheres– to public agendas, the arenas where political negotiation take place and the public and state institutional fabric.

The report ponders the validity of the institutional norms and conventions that organize and regulate social practices, including those of gender, in the globalization process. It is the contention of this paper that the fact that social practices have gone beyond the limits established by convention erodes the boundaries of national States, social class and the nuclear family, which characterized the phase of organized modernity.<sup>2</sup> The paper seeks to clarify the influence of institutional changes on gender relations, as well as the contribution of women's movements to the loosening of conventions and the establishment of new institutional frameworks.

Lastly, the study refers to some major themes that the women's movement has placed on the international public agenda, which offer huge potential for social change in that they broaden and enhance ways of making policy, the concept of citizenship and rights and the relationship between States and supranational governments and civil societies.

Our approach affirms the multidimensional nature of the globalization process, and the importance of human agency in the process of social transformation taking place at present. Our approach also looks to explore the consequences and risks of this process such as it is developing at present, and which is resulting in new forms of social stratification and a polarization of life experiences and prospects between those agents who are reaping the benefits of globalization and those who are excluded from it (Bauman, 1999).

Our perspective marks itself out from those positions that reduce globalization to its economic dimension (which is not to deny the importance of this dimension nor that of technological innovation) and that fail to distinguish between the process of globalization and the shape it is currently assuming with the implementation of neoliberal policies (Montaño, 2001; Benería, 1999).

In our efforts to come to grips with the interrelationship between globalization and gender, we needed on several occasions to cast our attention back in time and analyse this association as part of a larger temporal process under way in modern societies.

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<sup>2</sup> Using a socio-historical perspective, Wagner (1997) identifies the major milestones and splits in society in line with the penetration of modern ideas in the social fabric and the manner in which modern institutions combine. From this perspective, globalization constitutes a moment of significant transformation in the evolution of these societies.



## **II. Globality as compression of the world and global consciousness**

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The potential and future course of globalization is understood and evaluated in political/institutional terms in differing and sometimes opposing ways by different analysts, a fact which highlights not only the complex nature and unpredictable consequences of the process, but also the influence that various interpretations have on the future direction of the phenomenon.

The compression of the world and the increasing interaction of different lifestyles that characterizes globalization is interpreted by Roland Robertson (1992) as an historical circumstance which deepens and extends awareness that we live in a global heterogeneous world. This situation promotes the proliferation of different and concurrent societal definitions and cultural interpretations about what it is and what it should be to live in a 'world as a whole'. With that in mind, the author stresses the myriad interpretations, decisions and political intentions of the various agents who drive historical processes.

The range of interpretations evident in society today may be understood in light of the concept of reflexivity as put forward by Anthony Giddens (1993).

In Giddens' view, one of the features of contemporary society is the rise of personal, social and institutional reflexivity, namely the ability of different entities to think about the course and the outcomes of actions and to redirect them in accordance with such thinking.<sup>3</sup>

This heightened reflexivity of individuals, organizations, movements and institutions is a source of increased personal individuation; it enriches the cultural production of new symbols and meanings about social and personal reality; it encourages the proliferation of lifestyles and stimulates the production and interaction of alternative goals for society and the future. Even local resistance and anti-globalization movements opposed to the process actually deepen it to insofar as they contribute to the expansion of the network of global interactions.

The phenomenon of globality refers then to the cultural diversity in two ways that can be distinguished in analytical terms: first, because it strengthens relationships between distinct cultural traditions and lifestyles; and second, because it favours plurality of interpretations about the world order.

For Robertson, the new lifestyle practices, the diversity of interpretations of the global social reality today, the presence of concurrent images of 'the world as a whole' and processes that unfold at different levels –individual, family, local, national, etc.– have a significant impact on the trends in and overall course of globalization. From his perspective, it is important to study the range of protagonists and movements present on the world scene, along with their assorted interpretations symbolic of the emerging sociocultural world. The universe of interpretations includes not just those generated by more traditional and monumental collective subjectivities (civilizations, nations, religions) but also interpretations of more recent communities such as various types of social movements, local communities, ethnic groups, and finally individuals.

Of course, the application of these interpretations of today's world is not without conflict and is also conditioned by differing access to resources and opportunities for power on the part of those who sustain them.

However, the incorporation of different agents who speak from their civilizational, societal, ethnic, regional, gender and individual consciousness, stands in the way of attempts at homogenization and compression of the history of humanity as simply the emergence and triumph of the western world. This fact makes possible the "thematization" of diversity, that is recognition of the ways by which a diverse and increasing number of entities in the contemporary world construct and reconstruct their histories, and their positions in the context of the global future.

Furthermore, rapid and growing global interdependence, together with awareness of this phenomenon, is fuelling concerns about the evolution of the world as a whole and is instrumental in the thematization of common problems and their inclusion on global agendas. The environment, human rights, gender equity and problems of governability are just some of the issues of international scope discussed in official or societal spheres.

The author thus distances himself from those positions that emphasize solely the theme of domination and imposition of one culture and specific interests over others. The expansion of the global system in economic and political terms does not involve a symmetrical process in the context of the development of a global culture to a point where all players on the world scene share the same assumptions. A viable world order does not require a real generalization of interpretations nor the legitimation or dominance of some interpretations over others. Strict cultural and political homogenization is improbable and also entails the risk of fundamentalism.

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<sup>3</sup> The reflexivity of modern social life relates to the fact that social practices are constantly being examined and modified in light of new information and understanding about these same practices, and in that way their elemental nature is changed (Giddens, 1993, p.46).

For Zygmunt Bauman (1999), in contrast, the technological annulment of temporal/spatial differences has negative consequences for the ways societies are structured, giving rise to new foci of social stratification and a growing and more complex polarization that threatens social cohesion.

In this author's view, globalization emancipates only a select number of human beings, those who have the ability to free themselves from the territorial restrictions that characterize industrial societies, while tying the others to geographical areas that are increasingly stripped of their capacity to generate public discourses. Public spheres continue to be the preserve of the elites who free themselves of local shackles, and continue to be out of the reach of the communicational capacity of the people who remain in the region. In this way, the discourses and interpretations of social reality, as well as the new standards governing behaviour, bear little relation to local life and the experiences of people who remain tied to their own geographical space.

The bonds between owners of capital and their district, community or country weaken on account of the mobility of their resources. Power is to a very large degree disconnected from obligations in terms of the self-reproduction of mankind's living conditions and is untied from the need to contribute to daily life and the continuation of the community.

Against this background, mobility in space becomes a powerful stratifying factor, from which new social, political, economic and cultural hierarchies of global reach are built and rebuilt on a daily basis. For this author, a new asymmetry thus emerges between the extraterritorial nature of power and the territoriality of life as a whole. This situation leads to a major polarization of human experiences and the cultural symbols fashioned in global spheres give rise to distinctly different interpretations.

Bauman to some extent comes close to those positions for which only the actions of a deliberately rational core, operating in line with specific interests within a hierarchical structure (finance companies, IMF, World Bank, etc.) have efficient causality in the historic process of globalization. In terms of this particular position, the components of the 'system', especially those on the periphery, are perceived as mere cogs in a machine of domination implanted by the core of the system from its dominant material interests.

This author, in contrast to Robertson, stresses the dimension of domination and power, the action of anonymous forces which are beyond the reach of planning; in short, Bauman calls attention more to undesired and unforeseen global impacts than the role of the various initiatives and undertakings of social individuals and agents.

Robertson, on the other hand, underlines the agency of individuals in the development of the processes and the possibilities that globalization offers through the creation of a scenario that stimulates the cultural production of new symbols and meanings about social reality and the interaction of alternative visions for society and the future, and in so doing fosters recognition of diversity and understanding of history as the history of humanity.

Each of these approaches emphasizes one of two aspects in evidence in globalization, namely the opportunities and the risks of the process as it is unfolding at present.

Our paper will endeavour, firstly, to highlight the role played by women in globalization together with the opportunities it offers for the building of new gender relations, but it will also seek to stress the risks and limitations that this entails.

On the other hand, this study accepts the tenets of historical-comparative sociology of Barrington, Moore, Bendix, Reis and others, who maintain that historical processes and their outcomes are not normally the product of a single original and dominant plan, but rather the product of interactions between political and sociocultural communities, the unintentional consequences of their actions and factors, known or otherwise, that delimit the prospects for change at a given moment in history.



### **III. Socio-historical conditions behind the emergence of women's movements as modernizing and globalizing forces**

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Modernity ushered in a radical change in the discourses on individuals and societies by affirming the autonomy of human beings and their ability (and obligation) to set for themselves rules organizing their existence. Modernity introduces an historical paradigm based on the rational and interlocking organization of myriad aspects of social life and the idea of a social contract. The ideas embodied by modernity represented a liberating factor in comparison with the feudal and absolutist regimes with their fixed hierarchies, rules governing communal life and service relationships; this feeds aspirations for equity and social justice, whose efficacy has still not been exhausted, and continues to promote the legitimate demands of various discriminated social groups.

The process whereby these ideals have been realized and have materialized in new social practices has been complex and contradictory. Up until the present, modern societies have been riven by ambiguities and tensions between a pole of liberation and one of "submission" (the pole of submission is also known as the pole of discipline or regulation). There is major tension between individual freedom and harmonious social relationships, between the capacity for human action and structural limitations, and between human existence tied to a specific place and the existence of social norms held by broad sectors of society.

The concept of modernizing offensives (Wagner, 1997) highlights the tension between both poles and facilitates analysis of the inevitable dialectic between the possibilities and the limitations associated with modern institutions. In this regard, it reveals the role of individuals and social beings in the introduction of new discourses and social rules. Wagner makes a distinction between modernizing offensives from above and from below. In the former, the agents of modernization use the imbalance of power in their favour to create institutions that provide them with opportunities, which others will participate in over time, even where this runs counter to the interests of the original architects.<sup>4</sup>

Modernizing offensives from below are the opposition movements that seek to defend groups from the effects of exclusion that modernizing offensives from above bring with them. They typically include forms of collective action and mobilize people who aspire to be recognized as equals, and to be bound by the rules that govern the set of groups considered as equals.

In the case of women, as with other marginalized groups, the inability of modern ideas to permeate the way gender relations are organized led from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards to their demands for equality, integration in public spheres and respect for their differences.

The radical separation of the female and the male in the hegemonic discourses of the imaginary institutions of modernity openly contradicted the ideals of equality and independence. Women were excluded from involvement in public affairs and from avenues of political representation, and their experiences and problems were not deemed matters about which collective decisions could be taken. In addition, women were not perceived as rational and were subjected to control in the private sphere. Rousseau's *Emile* is paradigmatic of the modern idea of a radical difference between men and women. Sexual difference is perceived as derived from sexual biology, and each sex is accorded a different space in the physical, moral and social order of things. In other words, because the sexual anatomy of men and women is different, it can be assumed that their values differ as well. Physical and moral differences mean that each sex is accorded a particular station in society, different from the other (for a discussion of this topic, see Bonan, 2001).

Unlike other social practices and modern institutions based on free association, the public contract and political action (as the practice of negotiation, definition and distribution of power), the *practices* of social reproduction, of particular significance in the modern construction of gender inequalities (such as the organization of private life, family, sexuality and rearing of children) remained largely outside the logic that regulates modernity. The absence of a truly modern orientation (Wagner, 1997) meant that women were restricted to private spheres structured by *family power* (Zincone, 1992),<sup>5</sup> and the question of intimate sociality was confined to this sphere. This state of affairs prevented men and women from establishing *for themselves their own rules through their practices*, as in other social domains, with all the attendant insecurities.

For their part, typically modern political authorities, especially those embodied by the politicians and ideologues of the national State and people invested with biomedical power, in different ways and in different phases of modern history, played an important role in the structuring of modern gender asymmetries (see Bonan, 2001).

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<sup>4</sup> There is a trend towards widespread dissemination of the new institutional arrangements. The new forms may unleash broader social change as soon as they become widespread, regardless of the intentions of their proponents or subsequent beneficiaries.

<sup>5</sup> For Zincone, the modern version of the dichotomies of the public/private and production/reproduction bears a close relationship with the constitution of two forms of power that have distinct rationales and rules, namely political power –which involves negotiation and consensus–, and family power –based on the argument of efficiency and natural order of decision-making power. Family power does not only structure social relationships within the family nor does it apply exclusively to social relationships between the sexes; it pervades other relationship structures in the public sphere (workplace relations, confessional relationships, social relationships pertaining to public services) and is used to deny moral autonomy and independence to many subordinate individuals and groups (Bonan, 2000).

In the phase of modernity labelled organized capitalism,<sup>6</sup> State intervention, the organization of social practices and the influence of an expert discourse were more prominent and widespread, and this contributed to an intensification of a particular gender order, which excluded women from the ideals, resources and benefits of modernity.

The society of work which promised all adults full employment and sufficient income to attend to their needs on the symbolic and institutional level shut women out to a great extent. Only male workers had access to a family wage to ensure the survival of the family. The contribution of women's reproductive and productive labours was neither foregrounded nor valued as work or a generator of wealth. Nor was there any acknowledgement of women's contribution to reproduction of the workforce, which to a large degree sustained the family wage.

The sociology that has accompanied the rise of organized capitalism also reflects the hegemonic ideology of that phase. Sociological studies suggest that mass consumption, i.e. large-scale demand for standardized products, made possible a new lifestyle based on money and the market, more homogeneous and individualistic. These studies ignored the role played by women in setting up social networks, generating different forms of mutual assistance, carrying out household maintenance tasks and in activities related to construction of the human habitat.

A range of studies show that in the society of work and well-being as well, access to citizenship varied according to whether one was a man or a woman (see, for example, Marques-Pereira, 1997). In many of the more developed countries of industrial society, particularly in Europe, men gained access to rights primarily as workers, while women gained rights through their relationships with men as wives, housewives, daughters and mothers. For men, civil rights came before political rights, which in turn preceded economic and social rights, whilst in many cases women gained access first to social and economic rights before civil and political rights. There is a need in Latin America and the Caribbean to carry out more detailed studies on the question of access to citizenship. Men and women have had unequal access to citizenship, and gender bias has been compounded by other forms of bias, on grounds of class, race and ethnicity, which has exacerbated the social exclusion of many groups of women. All this notwithstanding, the national State in our region, as in the countries of the developed world, has considered the head of the household as the main interlocutor of its policies, thereby fostering awareness of men's rights and providing a fillip to their individuation processes (Beck, 2001); in the case of women, it promoted dependence and lack of autonomy, placing them at greater risk of poverty, exploitation and violence.

During the different phases of modernity, the women's movement has proved to be an important force for modernization that questions women's exclusion from public life, and from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century onwards the movement has taken on a globalizing nature. Thus, the feminist movement<sup>7</sup> constitutes one of the most important modernizing offensives from below which are instrumental in disseminating the ideas of modernity, as regards questions of freedom, recognition of individual autonomy and social justice for women and other excluded groups.

The feminist movement focuses its efforts on redefining women's identity, at times affirming equality between men and women, at times affirming difference. At all times, however, it has rejected the alienated identity of women as defined by the culture of male domination. Similarly, feminism is interested in explaining and clarifying the processes whereby this system of domination and inequality between men and women is constructed, as well as links with other systems of domination.

In this way, the political action undertaken by the movement has helped propel us towards a fresh more reflective phase of modernity which has seen an erosion of the restrictions that excluded women from public life and confined them to the family sphere.

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<sup>6</sup> The hallmark of organized modernity is the growing conventionalization of social practices. It was underpinned by organized capitalism, the strengthening and expansion of the national State, the emergence of national culture, and a society structured on class lines (Wagner, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Feminism is a critical theory and practice that has emerged in modernity in response to women's subjugation.





## IV. The women's movement as a driver of institutional change

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*When conventions remain in place over a long period of time, members of a society tend to lose sight of their socially constructed nature. Classification acquires the status of representation of a kind of natural order of reality. Social phenomena become like objects and it is then possible to assume that they have causal active repercussions on people. When we lose sight of the fact that existing institutions have been created by human action, we can no longer conceive of alternatives nor is any consideration given to possibilities of change (Wagner, 1997; 143).*

Most studies of contemporary society point to a breakdown of established rules and conventions in industrial societies, or organized modernity.

Ulrich Beck (2001) states that industrial society understood as a model of life in which the roles of the sexes, the family unit and classes form part of a same chain is disappearing. The global organization of production, consumption, and movement, together with their components (capital, labour, raw materials, management, information, technology and markets) –made possible chiefly due to the progress of the technology revolution–, have been eroding the conventions that regulated social practices in industrial society.

The political system and the dynamic of modernization introduce a vital new dimension to society: new networks, new centres of decision-making, new forms of conflict and political contract. People are free from the securities and lifestyles of traditional industrial life. For past generations, one's class, income, profession, status and political beliefs formed a whole, but today these elements of an individual's life appear to be independent of one another. The author declares that we face an institutional gap in the sense that the immobilism of institutions stands in contrast to a society undergoing change.

As this stripping away of conventions –the weakening and erosion of old rules– is occurring in all major fields of praxis, it is possible to speak of a crisis of the formation of contemporary society. Institutions have been losing the bases of consensus that underpinned them, in the face of new problems and global challenges. There is a need for new conventions that reduce uncertainty by limiting possible variations of events, actions and interpretations, thereby preventing existing power differentials from impacting directly on the individual without the mediation of collective agreements. There then arises the fundamental issue of which conventions should be maintained and even accentuated, which others should be abandoned and which new ones should be created. In this regard, conflicts are occurring within institutions as regards the principles and alternatives of institutional policy.

This context foregrounds the socially constructed nature of institutions and their relations with social practices. Giddens and Wagner state that large modern social institutions are the result of lengthy conflict-ridden processes of conventionalization of social practices, which are structured in daily life and give rise to lifestyles.<sup>8</sup>

Daily life does not exist independently of social institutions, as these bodies guide the way in which individuals formulate the rules governing their lives. Daily living is experienced through and with these forms of knowledge and praxis already converted into customs. In this sense, all members of a modern society participate through their daily activities in the reproduction and transformation of modern institutions, although their ability to use the rules and resources and to change them in their entirety varies.

This way of understanding institutions emphasizes the role of human agency and focuses interest on the conditions under which social practices emerge as the result of the interactions of individuals and communities. At the same time, this approach sheds light on the restricting effects of institutional formalization that gives rise to practices of inclusion and/or exclusion of people to different rights, resources and social environments.

It is our contention that the changes referred to –in economic organization, in construction of the individual, in culture and in the new adaptations of the ideas of freedom, autonomy, rights and political participation– have had a bearing on gender relations. Changes in the daily interactions of men and women and the pressure exercised by women's organizations on public agendas and public authorities have served to weaken the norms that regulated the family, private life and sexuality and the other major social institutions of today.

## **A. Processes of individualization and personal biographies**

In the absence of blueprints and models for living due to a weakening of social conventions in industrial society (class, sex roles, family), people face an irreversibly connected world that is beyond their control. People are forced to separate their social relations from their local environments and to think about their lives and find meaning for them. They thus become actors in

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<sup>8</sup> Order in modern societies is guaranteed by institutions based on free association, which shore up a new self-determined political order, the market economy and the rise of science characterized by the boundless quest for the truth.

their own biographies and identities, of their own social ties and networks in undefined intervals of time and space.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas in the past, the opportunities, dangers and ambiguities of personal lives could be dealt with within the family group, the community and the village in a context of well-established rules and social classes, today individuals must define them for themselves. It is the individual who must shape and give meaning to his own life. Life is transient, both literally and metaphorically, and this weakens the links between place, community and society (Beck, 2001).

One way of making sense of the distinct, and at times incompatible, logics of action which people find themselves involved in lies in our ability to construct and reflect on our own lives. Accordingly, in today's world, living becomes a reflexive experience. Even traditional lifestyle options must be consciously chosen, defended and justified vis-à-vis other options. Social reflexivity, information processing, conversations, negotiations, contradictory obligations, are all becoming synonymous with living one's own life.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the daily struggle to lead one's own life has become a pervasive experience in the western world and that individuality and recognition of diversity are quite widely-held values. We are beginning to see a situation where culture is no longer understood exclusively in terms of traditions but also as a sphere of freedom that protects the individual's ability to create and defend his own individuation and the communities to which he belongs (Beck, 2001).

In view of this, it is possible to understand why a new debate is emerging about rights to privacy, which enrich the notion of democracy, these being rights that guarantee individuals the ability to make their own decisions, the inviolability of their person and a sense of control over their own identity needs in the private sphere (Cohen, 2001).

However, due to the complexity of social relationships, it is difficult to be in a position to take all the necessary public and private decisions in a responsible and informed manner, or in such a way that most of the consequences can be foreseen and managed. This introduces a high degree of risk in people's lives and increases the chances of failure.

In such a situation where the individualization process is strong, failure tends to take on the characteristics of a personal experience, and social crises (e.g., redundancy, unemployment) begin to be perceived as personal crises, and to lose their social dimension.

Furthermore, not everyone has the same freedom to move around and take action because the means of effective choice and action are unevenly distributed. Globalization allows some groups of people to lead lives that are not tied to any particular territory ("deterritorialization"), and to enjoy broad cultural insights through their interactions with a range of cultures; at the same time, the process ties many others to areas impoverished due to the relocation and mobility of social groups with economic and cultural power. In contrast to the most disadvantaged social groups, who face deprivation and obstacles in the way of migration to centres of development, capital and the intellectual, artistic and political classes enjoy a high degree of mobility to move around the world.

Bauman (1999) contends that contemporary society is stratified, with a new yardstick of stratification: viz., the degree of mobility and freedom to choose that separates those at the top from those at the bottom. Those at the top have the satisfaction of moving through life as they so wish, of choosing their destinies in accordance with the pleasures that they are offered. In contrast, the fate of those at the bottom is to be thrown out time and again from the place that they wished to occupy. For those on top, space has lost its restrictive qualities and it is easy to move through both real and virtual space. Those on the bottom are prevented from shifting and must endure the changes

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this, see the concepts of anchoring and de-anchoring in Giddens (1993).

undergone by the areas to which they are tied. The current panorama, one of cancelled entry visas and stepped-up immigration controls, has a deep symbolic significance: it may be considered the metaphor of a new emerging stratification (Bauman, 1999; 115).

The growing presence of women in the labour market, education, public life and politics in recent decades has enabled them to gain access to new resources and areas of power, and to construct new interpretative frameworks of reality. The need for women to get involved in spheres underpinned by different logics fostered their self-perception as individuals responsible for giving order and meaning to their lives.

Indeed, such fundamental changes in daily life coupled with the loosening of old institutional conventions has the potential to translate into enhanced freedom for and less oppression of women, thereby bringing to fruition one of the most cherished goals of feminism, as a theory, historical process and political demand, namely progress towards self-realization and increased autonomy in immediate relationships.

However, as has been demonstrated, the scope for freedom and individual creativity is unevenly distributed and can only be accessed if one has available the institutional resources (i.e., human rights, international courts, social policies) that mitigate the effects of power differentials and unequal access to resources between men and women, and indeed among women themselves. In point of fact, the women's movement in Latin America and the Caribbean has set itself the priority of eliminating discriminatory conventions, regulations and laws, and has made headway in devising new norms aimed at bolstering recognition of different groups of women as autonomous individuals with rights.

At this stage, it is appropriate to review a few examples of the contradictions inherent in similar experiences. The phenomenon of solo mothers may be interpreted as a sign of the independence of women who have greater resources to pursue their personal goals in life. They happen to live in a world where people are freer to experiment with personal and family arrangements. On the other hand, the rise in the number of households headed by women, an indication of the decline of the traditional family, may leave most women in this situation extremely vulnerable due to loss of resources and added responsibility for maintaining the household. If growth in this type of household is accompanied by a drop in social spending and the need to devote more time to housework and care spurred by cutbacks in social services, the time available for personal development and labour force participation is restricted.<sup>10</sup> Against this backdrop, it is understandable that these women face more restraints and are more likely to suffer from poverty, mistreatment and abuse (Anderson, 1998).

Moreover, different studies have shown that globalization in its current guise has not only exacerbated social inequality between people and societies but has also in some places contributed to a resurgence in cultural traditions that oppress women, resulting in an increase in exploitation, violence and poverty for many of them.

## **B. New social practices within the family sphere**

The institution of the nuclear family organized around the father's authority and endorsed by the ensemble of social institutions is coming into question as a result of interrelated processes: a revolution in the way work is organized in a global information economy; greater levels of education and integration of women in the labour market; growing control over the timing and frequency of pregnancy; the circulation of people and ideas between different societies and of

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<sup>10</sup> The differences in the way men and women use their time is an important indicator of the uneven distribution of opportunities between men and women.

different lifestyles; and heightened awareness among women themselves that they are a part of a social experiment with sexuality.

A series of indicators show up major trends towards change in the family structure (Castells, 1999). The nuclear family is losing ground as new types of families appear. More marriages are ending in annulment, people are marrying at a later age, de facto relationships are more common, fertility rates are on the decline, and the proportion of children born out of wedlock is rising. As a result of separation and solo motherhood, the proportion of households with a solo parent with dependent children is on the increase. With more marriages being annulled and more couples living together, a distinction is arising between family and partner, and the number of types of parental relationship is increasing –children may have more than one mother or father– as biological and social paternity and maternity are becoming separate.

The migration of women to developed countries in search of survival opportunities for their families, which generally remain behind, is bringing strong pressure for change to norms governing relationships between men and women in the family sphere. The phenomenon is also generating the conditions for the emergence of new collectives of reference and organization of subjectivity (Sassen, 2000).

Changes in the way work is organized, with a trend to increased flexibility, are giving rise to a greater variety of career paths for men, as well as greater instability in their labour biographies, characterized by successive shifts between different situations and positions in the labour market. If both partners work under such conditions, it is no longer possible for one of them to assume permanent responsibility for providing for the family and the conditions are right for a renegotiation of the way work and opportunities are divided up within the relationship (Godoy and Mauro, 2001).

However, the advent of the worldwide women's movement has been fundamental in the search for new norms that take into account the diversity of family circumstances and recognize the individuality of the members of those families. Moreover, women have lobbied for a shift in the line dividing the private and public spheres, putting practices previously deemed as private on the agenda and making them the object of new rights: respect for, and acknowledgement of, privacy, violence, and sexual and reproductive rights.

Growing labour-market participation has led to increased public discussion of the relationship between the productive and reproductive spheres. In this way, women have contributed to the erosion of boundaries that societies organized internally and to the highlighting of experiences that before remained integrated within the family structure: the individual, privacy, intimacy and affection.

### **C. Economic practices: of production and exchange**

The globalization process involves the breaking of the “agreement” to regulate industrial relations within national borders as well as the erosion of the Keynesian consensus to develop a domestic economy based on consumption and economic growth with full employment; at the same time, the organizational rules that defined and guaranteed the position and role of each individual are modified, and there is a stream of technical innovations whose application endangers existing agreements (Wagner, 1997).

The limits set out by earlier agreements turned into obstacles to the development of the potential offered by economic practices, and that caused these agreements to gradually crumble without any new alternative proposals for regulation.

During globalization, domestic economies have unravelled, to be replaced by a system of transactions and processes that operate directly on the international level. Countries' ability to create wealth depends on firms that are increasingly integrated in global networks of corporations operating according to a logic that does not necessarily coincide with countries' interests. Modernization of the economy is no longer dependent solely on domestic industry and national capitalism is no longer the only method by which capital is organized. Furthermore, what today we can call the national stock is increasingly integrated into that global logic (Guzmán and Todaro, 2001).

The growth in inter-linkages between countries' productive and financial structures, in the form of an increasing number of international transactions, causes complex interdependence among economic agents, markets and nations. Wealth creation and distribution within a country's borders comes to depend closely on the expectations and activities of economic agents in other regions of the planet.

Implementation of global processes and markets in the large cities leads the internationalized sector of the economy to impose a new set of criteria for valuing or pricing a range of economic activities and their outputs, with devastating effects on major sectors of the domestic economy. Firms with the ability to generate substantial profits raise commercial prices, thereby imperilling the survival of firms that are unable to generate such profits, though they are key to the urban economy and the daily needs of its residents.

The economic makeover has been supported by a radical change in the organization of work. Innovations in productive activity point increasingly towards an increase in flexibility and specialization.<sup>11</sup>

Such deregulation creates new growth opportunities for firms, and the breakdown of existing conventions has been of particular benefit to multinationals, small and medium-sized enterprises, which found it difficult to comply with general arrangements, and consumers. Having said that, the loosening of the agreements means that differences of power are being felt directly by people, communities and domestic firms.

These changes translate into a loss of control of those economic agents who had organized themselves in view of the requirements of national capitalism (States and unions).

In its most theoretical and practical forms, the women's movement has revealed the inter-linkages between the norms and conventions that regulate the gender and economic arenas. The women's movement has become a major force working to roll back conventions that ignore the value of housework, hinder the reconciliation of domestic and productive work and impede women's access to and mobility in the labour market.

In the first instance, studies have shown how the growth in paid work and the constitution of the private sphere are two concurrent processes that contribute to the autonomization of the individual, and social reproduction in the broad sense. However, because of the sexual division of labour, the means by which men and women integrate each of these spheres are different and determine specific individuation processes. The advent of the private sphere gives rise to household work assigned to women, and this is not limited to the nuclear family but rather takes in relationships as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Flexibility refers to changes in the organization of work and production, the labour market and working time (half-time work, part-time work, annualization of working time). A distinction is drawn between two types of flexibility: internal flexibility (multi-tasking, rotation, task integration, teamwork) and external flexibility, which relates to the emergence of a large number of atypical forms of employment.

<sup>12</sup> In order to bring work goals to fruition, women need to have available a network of reliable alternatives. Organization of the family rests on outside assistance, more than on the partner.

Along with other feminists, Daniele Kergoat (1997) deconstructs the concept of work and broadens it to include housework and other tasks performed in the reproductive sphere. It is such approaches that have prompted some economists to measure the contribution of housework and to reconsider the definitions of consumption, including the couple as a producer of services.

As women have increasingly swelled the ranks of the labour market, the dividing line between the productive and reproductive arenas has blurred, to the extent that women's participation in a paid activity has not called into question to any significant extent their participation in housework.<sup>13</sup>

At present, the sexual division of labour largely supports the flexible organization of work: Daniele Kergoat shows how, on the one hand, there exists a juxtaposition between Taylorism (sector employing women) and flexibility (male-dominated sectors) and on the other, how arrangements concerning internal flexibility concern the male workforce more, while external flexibility is achieved primarily by recourse to female labour (unstable jobs, part-time employment, flexible hours). In any event, paid work on a part-time basis finds greater acceptance among women due to their domestic responsibilities. These differences in the way the labour force is treated serve to exacerbate inequalities between the sexes in the areas of work, employment and health, and are justified using the argument of reconciliation of family and professional life.

Globalization has been a key driver behind women's inclusion in the global labour force, the electronics industry, the inbond assembly industry, and services, and has also been instrumental in the movement of female workers to the big cities. A sizeable number of female immigrants move to these cities –strategic sites for services, and the specialized financing and handling of global economic processes–, where they take up a variety of activities in the formal and informal economy serving these strategic sectors (Sassen, 1998).

Women's migration is changing the patterns and conventions of gender owing to the advent of transnational households that may give women more power. Access to day work and wages (low though they may be), feminization of the labour supply and greater opportunities for women to generate income due to informalization of the economy all enable women to increase their bargaining power with their partner as regards making decisions, budgeting and redistribution of some household chores.

Similarly, the links that develop between female migrants and public and private aid agencies in dealing with the vulnerability of their families gives them visibility as partners of these agencies, and their role in the job market receives greater acknowledgement than in the past.

To sum up, the upheavals currently facing modern society are focusing attention on the mutual interactions between the economic and gender spheres. This greater visibility is associated with the weakening of the norms and conventions that used to regulate human behaviour in different institutional settings, a situation that has caused greater fluidity and interpenetration between the boundaries that separate subjectivity, daily living, politics, economics and culture (Guzmán and Todaro, 2001).

#### **D. Practices of authoritarian power and signification: the State, government administration, parties and policies**

In industrial society, the political frontiers were supposed to coincide with those of national territory. It was expected that the State, a solid and coherent entity, could gain access to all information in order to intervene in society in a regulatory and reconciliatory capacity. In addition

<sup>13</sup> The idea that paid work is the exclusive preserve of men and housework that of women is increasingly at odds with new social and economic practices.

to guaranteeing public order and upholding the laws, the State had a legitimate role in ensuring a normal life for each of its members. Citizenship was defined as membership of national political communities, and was assumed to be a feature of the Nation-State. Political representation was exercised through competing parties, and political dialogue was supposed to be conducted by way of agreements and talks between the leaders of political and social organizations (Wagner, 1997).

In the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, reality differed markedly from the model described, though that at least served as an ideal to aim for. The evolution of this model in the central countries and, with all its weaknesses and shortcomings, in the countries of the region highlighted the fact that exercising centralized control and adequately defining problems was an impossible task for the State administration alone. Acquisition of knowledge and techniques by public servants was not sufficient to define problems in a way that matched the interpretations of those problems by the social sectors concerned. Increasingly complex relations between the State and society require public servants to interface with a range of groups in defining and interpreting problems.

In this context of change, and in view of the standardization of behaviour and the collectivization of actions promoted by policies, a series of demands burgeoned –particularly among the higher socio-economic groups–, which called for a reactivation of the liberal idea of limiting State interference and a renewed insistence on self-regulation of society.

For their part, the demands of social groups for more personal autonomy, increased political participation, recognition of particular political and cultural communities, and the social movements that have appeared in the last 40 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (women, blacks, indigenous peoples, homosexuals, environmentalists, and others) constitute a genuine revolt of the subjectivities of individuals and communities against a statist, protective, homogenizing type of citizenship.

The extension of social, economic and political practices beyond national borders in the course of globalization helps weaken the central position of national States, forms of political organization and representation and relations between the State and society.

In such a context, politics is no longer limited to the formal political spheres, nor is legitimacy conferred solely by voting. Deliberative democracy assumes importance and social mobilization transcends formal spheres.

Social and political practices are increasingly characterized by internationalization and transnationalization. The circulation of information and the broadening of the scope of communications bring pressure to bear for a denationalization of culture and a strengthening of local identities.

People are remaining in their country of origin less than in the past. We are witnessing greater movement of people who for a variety of reasons are migrating to the developed countries. Wars and civil and ethnic conflicts are also the reason behind major population shifts, which are putting pressure on the concepts of rights and citizenship restricted to a national community.

The women's movement and the feminist movement have made a decisive contribution to the questioning of the political order and practices characteristic of industrial society and to the generation of conditions for the emergence of a sort of global civil society and citizenry (Vargas, 2001). In the past three decades, women's movements in Latin America and the Caribbean have faced a variety of social and political environments, typified by a strong dynamic of change, and have interacted intensely with the political scene during each of those decades (Bonan, 1999).

The methods of organization adopted by the movement are essentially distinct from those of the parties and other traditional political institutions. Feminism takes on different forms of



association, many of which address specific problems, and this enables women to participate in different organizations at the same time.

Unlike traditional political institutions, the policy promoted by women's organizations is not based exclusively or primarily on the delegation of representation. Acknowledgement of the diversity of cultures and experiences among women themselves brings with it a critical attitude towards any claim to talk on behalf of all women. That notwithstanding, there exists a kind of "common thread" in the women's movement across all societies which emphasizes the interests of women, their rights and values.

Women's organizations contribute to the reformulation and realization of their social identities, and in being able to speak with their own voice and express their own cultural identity, they are beginning to be acknowledged as political individuals. Furthermore, the discussions initiated by women's movements generate new unofficial public arenas that enrich civil societies and are conducive to gender studies programmes being set up in academic and theoretical institutions (Fraser, 1994).

The formulation of national and regional networks and participation in worldwide networks allows different groups of women across the globe to link up, and facilitates the circulation of ideas, resources and altruistic forms of behaviour. Women's presence in transnational spheres has the double advantage of foregrounding their activism and their projects, while at the same time informing their respective societies of the recognition gained in these global arenas, thereby putting pressure on the cultural and political restrictions imposed by national societies on the development of the movement.

In the 1990s in particular, women's movements increased their geographical range, diversified and took on a range of forms. The way in which they organized and took action became more sophisticated and their membership more diverse. Movements are actively involved in World Conferences convened by the United Nations, taking part in preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1994) and, to a lesser extent, given the specialist theme, other conferences convened (Environment (1992), Human Rights (1994), Population and Development (1994) and Adult Education (1997)). The conferences and meetings are attended by record numbers of women from different parts of the globe and give legitimacy to the problems raised in the networks. Such face-to-face gatherings increase confidence, facilitate the exchange of information and make it possible to identify new issues which, in turn, galvanize and strengthen pre-existing networks and organizations.

Women's involvement in transnational spheres prompts them to become visible players in international relations and active participants, along with other movements, such as the human rights and environmental movements, in the drafting of international laws (Sassen, 1998).

Women's experience on the world stage –feminist gatherings, world conferences– was conducive not only to the drafting of Platforms of Action, both global and regional, but also to the cultivation of a strong sense of belonging to a liberating experience of global import. Each section of the women's movement feels to some extent represented and in solidarity with the rest of the movement. This process has enabled the movement to tap into growing awareness about the diversity of women's struggles, multiculturalism, and the different interpretations attributed to gender inequalities. This heightened awareness has contributed significantly to recognition of diversity in the global discourse on modernity.

The gender discourse has made a clear impact on other movements, groups and communities, chipping away at previously constructed bases of identity. Numerous groups of women are making their presence felt: indigenous women, blacks, lesbians, older women, the handicapped,

professionals, etc. Also within the ranks of various religious movements –Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Afro-Americans, etc.– feminist women’s groups are springing forth (Bonan, 1999).

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that these new global spheres are criss-crossed by conflict and power relations. The hegemonic nations still have greater room to manoeuvre and a higher profile in global spheres when it comes to defining relationships and actions; moreover, within these spheres themselves, one finds highly contradictory positions as regards basic aspects of human life, such as issues related to sexual and reproductive rights. In addition, inequalities persist within the spheres of construction of democratic civil societies concerning the distribution of power and different subjectivities.

Lastly, it is worth pointing out that as a result of interaction between the women’s movement and the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, a raft of new institutions have appeared and gender issues have been included on the institutional agenda. The make-up of the new institutions and the nature of gender issues have often constituted a factor promoting modernization and democratization of the State and the establishment of new forms of relationship between the State and society. New structures for intermediation between the State and women have appeared (round tables, commissions, councils), together with new bodies inside States (ministries, secretariats, inter-ministerial committees), and they have exerted pressure for coordination of the various State sectors in the preparation and execution of policies with a gender focus (Guzmán, 2000).

## **E. The contribution of the women’s movement to the formulation of new rights**

The feminist movement has ensured that new interpretations of the way society is structured are publicly discussed and has provided a fresh perspective to the study and handling of most of the issues that make up public agendas at the national and global levels: poverty, human rights and citizenship.

This section examines one issue, the relationship between the public and private spheres, whose treatment by feminist theory has contributed to a broader, more elaborate understanding of rights, politics and democracy.<sup>14</sup>

In the first instance, this theory has demonstrated how the concepts of the public and the private spheres are not only open to a variety of interpretations and can fulfil different roles in different discourses, but that reconceptualization of their relationship extends the concept of the public sphere and breaks down the boundaries that rigidly separated the public and private arenas.

A number of feminist theorists have given thought to the significance and repercussions of this rigid separation in the reproduction of the gender order in industrial societies (Pateman, 1996; Moller Okin, 1991). Cultural gender stereotypes are associated with conceptions of the public and private arenas; cultural representations and legal regulations have been used both to exclude women from the official public arena and to deny public discussion of issues that result from asymmetrical power relations and other aspects of intimate relationships within the home.

Using this discussion as a starting point, it has been possible to redefine the concepts of citizenship and attendant rights. On the one hand, the tension has been highlighted that exists between universality and specificity of rights and differentiated access to them depending on an individual’s position in different social relationships. On the other, this discussion has contributed to the reassessment of existing rights and the definition of new specific rights.

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this see, “Introducción” in “Perspectivas feministas”; various authors, 1996, Paidós, Barcelona, Spain.

Feminist theory reconsiders the discourse on rights within a more inclusive referential universe with the aim of transforming the traditional liberal model of rights. Theorists emphasize the *social* nature, and not just the individual nature, of rights, and in so doing seek to shift the bulk of correlative obligations from individuals to public agencies; they recognize *community contexts* (i.e., relational contexts) in which individuals take action to exercise or attain their rights; they consider human needs and the redistribution of resources as the *substantive* basis of rights and they acknowledge the holders of rights in their multiple identities as defined by themselves, including their gender, class, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity (Correa and Petchesky, 1994).

However, Cohen contends that the problem of reconciling universality with specificity and autonomy cannot be resolved solely in the public sphere (Cohen, 2001). Genuine participation in public citizenship and the construction and defence of individual identities depend on legal safeguards and policies that also protect personal privacy. Any democratization project whose aim is to prevent exclusion, levelling and homogenization must embrace both defence of the individual voice and a multiplicity of voices in the public sphere, as well as respect for the rights to privacy. In this regard, such privacy rights are a suitable complement to the new conceptualizations of the public space.

Personal privacy rights guarantee socialized, community-minded individuals autonomy when it comes to decision-making, the inviolability of their person and a sense of control over their own needs for identity in the private sphere.

These rights must be upheld on different grounds than those used to justify private property, freedom to enter into contracts and privacy of the family institution. There is no reason why property should constitute the symbolic core of individual rights. Furthermore, as regards privacy rights, a distinction needs to be drawn between rights to personal privacy and rights to privacy of intimate and family relationships. Both types of privacy rights presuppose breaking the links that bind privacy with property and the patriarchal family. Up till now, the private sphere has been identified with the domestic sphere, which has been perceived as the sphere of dependence, natural hierarchical relationships, and private bonds. In this instance, privacy is associated with an entity, the family, which protects intimate and “natural” internal relationships against public intervention and scrutiny. Unlike the rights sought by the patriarchal family, the privacy of intimate relationships peculiar to associations and different family arrangements defends communicative interaction between intimate persons against unjustified control or intervention on the part of the State or third parties. However, due to the fact that relationships may entail power and exploitation, people also need protection within the relationship and not only for that reason, but also to ensure the personal and physical safety of the family members in the event that those relationships become distorted or fall apart.

The right to decision-making autonomy (personal privacy) signifies guaranteeing control with regard to *deeply personal concerns and interests*. People cannot be obliged to reveal personal reasons that led them to take certain ethical decisions nor to accept as their own the reasons or judgement of the group. They are free to keep certain matters, reasons and aspects of themselves out of the view of public scrutiny or control. In this way, personal privacy rights offer protection against State paternalism, whether in the form of community standards or the will of the majority.

At this point, it should be made clear that recognition of these rights only prescribes the formal conditions that enable individuals to pursue their own conception of good.

*It is not tantamount to affirming the absolute rationality and transparency of individuals, nor an extreme kind of individualism.* Whatever the meaning of “free” or “voluntary”, that is not synonymous with isolation or individualism. For, as we know, each individual is radically situated; his or her identity and understanding of self and values take shape through communicative

socialization processes mediated by the community. In order to have moral intuition, we must see ourselves as individuals situated in the family, community, nation or people. Accordingly, people are defined by loyalties and purposes that spring from our attachment to a context and specific responsibilities exist within a community. Therefore, though people may be individual beings, capable of interpreting and pondering their past and examining their identities to some degree, they are also in the final analysis situated beings.

In short, in Cohen's view, there is a need to recognize the decision-making autonomy, in respect of certain choices, of socialized, attached and interdependent people who perceive their identity needs as elements that constitute their selves. If there is respect for each person, irrespective of where they are situated, their decision-making autonomy, their capacity for deliberation and moral justification, their capacity for existential ethical introspection and self-interpretation, that individual will act as a *moral agent*.

As we have seen in the section related to individuation processes and personal biographies, there are myriad, heterogeneous sources and inputs of personal identity in modern civil societies, which are plural, differentiated and globalized. Individuals belong to many different groups, they assume different roles and have community identities at different levels of the social structure. The changing dynamic of participation in distinct spheres, roles and responsibilities generates in each person the need and potential to develop a strong sense of oneself, along with the ability to form, affirm introspectively and express one's identity in a changing multiplicity of contexts. For that reason, human beings require acknowledgement of their individual personalities, opportunities to develop a sense of control over definitions of themselves and over synthesis, which only they can construct from their various situations, backgrounds and communicative interaction with others.

From this standpoint, privacy rights ensure the minimum constituent conditions necessary to have one's own identity, and they protect identity, self-determination and self-realization without prescribing a particular concept of personality at any of those levels. Privacy rights ensure respect for, and protection of, individual difference, that is individual identities that may deviate from the norm adopted by society or a particular subgroup.

That notwithstanding, acknowledgement of these rights should not come into contradiction with moral values or human rights, both important issues on the global agenda. For this reason, in the final instance, the areas that should be subject to privacy rights must be discussed extensively in public. The scope and interpretations of privacy depend on the understanding that society has of itself, as well as the outcome of political debate, standards, cultural codes and social relationships that shape practices.

Enjoyment of individualized privacy rights enables people, in this case women in particular, to gain full legal status and start demanding simultaneously protection and independence. In this way, women are empowered to demand State intervention in the family in order to protect their rights as individuals while at the same time maintaining control over their intimate decisions which are protected by individual privacy rights.

However, privacy rights understood as freedoms or choices are meaningless if nothing is done to guarantee the *conditions of possibility* that enable such rights to be enforced. Those conditions constitute *social rights* and include social well-being, personal safety and political freedom.

## V. Conclusion

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Over the course of this paper, we have examined the role of the women's movement in modern societies and we have endeavoured to show how women have constituted a modernizing, globalizing force bringing major pressure for change to bear on institutions.

Globalization manifests itself in, among other ways, the loosening of conventions prevailing in industrial societies, and raises as an issue of some urgency the formation of new institutional frameworks that can handle the complexity of society and are able to facilitate progress towards the two ideals that are the hallmarks of modern societies: freedom and equality. The presence of transnational social movements such as the women's movement and the emergence of conditions for the formulation of a democratic global agenda offer fresh opportunities for changing existing gender relations marked by inequality and a lesser degree of recognition of women as social individuals. Nonetheless, the existence of powers-that-be such as multinational corporations, coupled with the absence of standards governing the new practices, poses huge risks of exclusion and of the exercise of power over the weakest sectors of society.



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