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Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms

In November 1999, nearly 1,300 women from virtually every country in Latin America and the Caribbean journeyed to the coastal town of Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic, to take part in an event that many of the region's activists have come to regard as a key arena for collectively reimagining feminism and its relationship to a wide range of struggles for human dignity and social justice. Since the first such gathering was convened in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1981, the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentros* (encounters) have served as critical transnational sites in which local activists have refashioned and renegotiated identities, discourses, and practices distinctive of the region's feminisms.

The eighth in this series of biennial or triennial meetings, the Juan Dolio event—billed as “the last *Encuentro* of the millennium”—aimed to “take stock” of the past three decades of feminism in the region. Dominican organizers proclaimed the gathering's objectives to be threefold: (1) to produce a balance sheet of the past thirty years of *el quehacer feminista* (loosely, feminist action) in Latin America and the Caribbean; (2) to create spaces for dialogue that would further feminist analysis of and political positionings vis-à-vis “new” and “old” forms of oppression; and (3) to identify the *mínimos comunes* (lowest common denominators) that would

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foster the creation of links and alliances within the Latin American and Caribbean women's movement.¹

As participants in this *Encuentro* as well as past *Encuentros* and as analysts of Latin American feminisms with diverse and extensive links to activists and scholars throughout the region, we recognized that the Juan Dolio meeting's agenda also offered *us* a unique opportunity to reflect collectively on the past and present dynamics and future prospects of feminisms in the South of the Americas.² Our shared interest in bringing Latin American experiences more centrally to bear on recent debates concerning the "internationalization" or "globalization" of feminisms served as a further inspiration for this collaborative essay. While much of the recent literature on transnational feminist organizing has focused on how "official" international public arenas, such as the United Nations women's conferences, have fostered transborder links among feminists, scholars largely have overlooked the rich history of "extra-official" processes, such as the *Encuentros*, by which feminists have come together *within* world regions to build solidarity, devise innovative forms of political praxis, and elaborate discourses that challenge gender-based and sexual oppression.³ Moreover, the prevailing focus on UN-related conferences often misses how these alternative transnational linkages affect movement dynamics on the national and local levels. In analyzing the Latin American and Caribbean *Encuentros*, we wish to draw attention to movement-centered, intraregional feminist processes and their local effects, thereby under-

¹ This summary is from a July 1999 pamphlet by the Comité Organizador del VIII Encuentro titled "Convocación General."

² One of us has participated in all eight of the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentros*, another in five, one in three, two of us in two, and three in one of these regional meetings. Among us, we have conducted research and participated in innumerable local and national feminist and women's movement activities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Nicaragua, Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Mexico. Additionally, several of us have attended and conducted research on Latin American women's involvement in various UN conference processes, including Nairobi, Rio, Vienna, Cairo, and Beijing. We also bring our diverse range of feminist political and intellectual trajectories and cultural, racial-ethnic, sexual, geographic, and generational perspectives to the writing of this essay. Collectively, our research and teaching span a range of disciplines: history, literature, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and political science. The designation "South of the Americas" marks the shift from Cold War geopolitical demarcations of first/third world to emphasize the realignment of capital and power along a North/South axis in the current neoliberal context of globalization.

³ For a sampling of this literature on transnational feminist organizing, see Fraser 1987; Stienstra 1994; Friedman 1995; Stephenson 1995; Abzug 1996; Chen 1996; Kardam 1997; Clark, Friedman, and Hochstetler 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Meyer and Prügl 1999; Basu 2000.

scoring the dynamic and mutually constitutive interplay of national and transnational feminist identities, discourses, and practices.

In a 1992 article that was the product of a collaborative, interdisciplinary, multisited conversation similar to our own, Nancy Sternbach, Marysa Navarro-Aranguren, Patricia Chuchryk, and Sonia E. Alvarez suggested that the *Encuentros* serve as “historical markers, highlighting the key strategic, organizational, and theoretical debates that have characterized the political trajectory of contemporary Latin American feminisms” (1992, 395). While this essay will also explore how the *Encuentros* have “marked” feminist debates in the region, we will argue that they are, in themselves, productive transborder sites that not only reflect but also reshape local, national, and regional movement discourses and practices.

While feminisms in the region arose from a wide range of political struggles and social locations, the *Encuentros* have enabled activists to exchange differences in perspective and construct alternative political and cultural meanings. Although often politically marginalized in their own countries, participants in these periodic regional conversations have been able to engage with others whose feminisms emerge from analogous sociopolitical conditions and colonial and neocolonial legacies. In a region where the Left initially saw feminism as a “bourgeois, imperialist import” that divided the class struggle and where the Right and the church have denounced it as an affront to national cultural norms and Christian family values, we argue that the *Encuentros* have proven key transnational arenas where Latin America-specific feminist identities and strategies have been constituted and contested.

More than just a fertile meeting ground, these regional meetings have helped forge “imagined” Latin American feminist communities. They have been crucial in challenging masculinist, nationalist cultural norms and in creating a common (if always contested) feminist political grammar. As Peruvian feminist theorist Virginia Vargas has argued: “This transnational feminist action was oriented fundamentally toward recreating collective practices, deploying new analytical categories, new visibilities, and even new languages being invented by feminisms at the national level, naming that which heretofore had no name: sexuality, domestic violence, sexual harassment, marital rape, the feminization of poverty, and so on” (1999, 30). The *Encuentros* also have fostered new modalities of transborder activism. Indeed, a key product of these dialogues has been the formation of numerous intraregional issue- and identity-specific networks as well as advocacy coalitions on a range of issues such as women’s health and sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, and women’s political representation.

These periodic regional conversations also help reorient movement practices, cultural discourses, and even state policies, as participants learn from the experiences of their counterparts in other countries in the region and often return home inspired by new organizing strategies and new ways of framing their issues and demands. The discourses and strategies debated at these transnational movement sites, in turn, are translated and reworked to fit specific local and national contexts. We further suggest that local movements have benefited from the rotation of the *Encuentros* among different countries and subregions, as each meeting highlights issues or problems specific to the host context, allowing these to be aired, and sometimes worked out, in a supranational(ist) movement setting. We argue that the *Encuentros* thereby constitute a vital mediating space between national, regional, and global movement arenas.

Considering the *Encuentros* as productive spaces of transformation—facilitating a dynamic interaction between local/national struggles and regional processes—we analyze how they have proven critical sites of negotiation. Given class differences, rural-urban divisions, diverse racial and ethnic formations, age and generational divides, as well as differences in sexual identities and orientations, Latin American and Caribbean feminisms' heterogeneity has defied uniform understandings of key feminist concerns such as reproductive health, education, violence against women, labor rights, sexuality, and (neoliberal) globalization. Participants have been women engaged in feminist activism in a broad (and potentially antagonistic) range of public spaces—from lesbian-feminist collectives to trade unions, landless movements, research and service nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), university women's studies programs, revolutionary organizations, mainstream political parties, and state institutions. While grounded in political solidarity among women, then, the *Encuentros* and “*desencuentros*” (misencounters) within them have fostered productive debates and reconfigured alliances and coalitions among the region's feminists.

In what follows, we explore the key axes of debate that produced coalition and controversy, consensus and conflict, *encuentros* and *desencuentros*, among the diverse currents of the Latin American feminisms at the first seven of these regional events—Bogotá, Colombia (1981); Lima, Peru (1983); Bertioga, Brazil (1985); Taxco, Mexico (1987); San Bernardo, Argentina (1990); Costa del Sol, El Salvador (1993); and Cartagena, Chile (1996). The story we tell examines core movement debates as they have been enacted at each of the *Encuentros*, paying particular attention to those held in the 1990s. Coalitions, conflicts, and controversies emerging in specific national or subregional contexts, we argue, have been restaged, and sometimes rescripted, in these transnational arenas. Debates and tensions

unfolding through the *Encuentros*, in turn, have often been reenacted in local and national movement spheres—thus highlighting the mutual constitution of the national and the transnational. We explore three themes around which these debates have pivoted: (1) shifting conceptions of movement “autonomy” and feminisms’ relationship to the larger women’s movement and to other actors in civil and political society, the state, and international institutions; (2) controversies generated by the movements’ recurrent “crises of inclusion” and “crises of expansion”; and (3) debates centered on differences, inequalities, and power imbalances among women in general and among feminists in particular.

The latter part of our essay turns to a detailed analysis of the most recent *Encuentro*, the Eighth *Encuentro*, where old and new frictions were reproduced and longstanding debates among feminists reenvisioned—providing a unique window onto key challenges facing the movement today.⁴ As new generations and ever more diverse actors participate in the *Encuentros*, the definition of what feminism is and the modalities through which feminist struggles should be waged have increasingly come under question. In the context of the shifting political and economic coordinates of the 1990s—marked by neoliberal capitalism and partial, uneven democratization—the appropriate sites, targets, and goals of feminist politics, and, indeed, the very meaning of feminism itself, became subjects of intense conflict among activists. The Eighth *Encuentro* crystallized these new tendencies and highlighted unresolved tensions that had also surfaced at the previous two meetings. To better understand what transpired at Juan Dolio, however, we first must situate this most recent gathering in light of the history of two decades of Latin American and Caribbean “encounters.”

The first decade of *Encuentros*: Negotiating politics, producing feminist identities

The debates staged during the first decade of *Encuentros*, held between 1981 and 1990, reflected the shifting meanings of feminism in the region. As Sternbach et al. (1992) have argued, discussions at the first five meetings revolved around two main axes: first, the relationship between feminist movements and the male revolutionary Left, and later, as movements expanded, the relationship between feminist movements and the broad-based *movimientos de mujeres* (women’s movements) that emerged in the

⁴ For other recent overviews of Latin America’s feminist movements, see Alvarez 1998; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998; Navarro and Bourque 1998; Craske 2000; DAWN 2000; Molyneux 2000; Vargas 2000; Barrig 2001a; Franco 2001.

context of widespread economic crises and human rights abuses throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵

Key to understanding the first decade of *Encuentro* debates is the widely embraced—but hotly contested—ideal of feminist autonomy, considered by many to be the cornerstone of feminist identity in Latin America and the Caribbean. If feminist movements in the region have been characterized by a desire to forge alliances with diverse sectors of society (especially other women) with the goal of eradicating gender-based oppression, at the same time the ideal of autonomy has been invoked to avoid co-optation by actors such as political parties, the state, funding agencies, and even other social movements. Thus feminists have been deeply concerned with expanding the constituency, scope, and influence of feminism while they have refused to sacrifice the ideological, political, organizational, and financial autonomy of their movements. While autonomy, very broadly defined here as the capacity to act independently, has been called the “magic word” of Latin American and Caribbean feminisms, it has also been (and continues to be) a thorny issue: from what and from whom exactly should feminists maintain autonomy?⁶

In the 1970s and early 1980s, autonomy was invoked almost exclusively in relation to political parties or revolutionary organizations of the Left. As has been well documented, most early second-wave feminists shared a common background of experience in leftist political parties or revolutionary movements. Questioning the putative gender neutrality of the socialist project and recognizing that gender oppression transcended capitalist exploitation, many feminists increasingly opted to eschew party activism in favor of creating their own independent organizations, such as collectives, study centers, and consciousness-raising groups.⁷

Not surprisingly, then, the first major philosophical and strategic tension to confront second-wave feminists was between those who proclaimed themselves to be *feministas* and those whom they referred to as the *políticas* or *militantes*, women who continued to work within leftist party organ-

⁵ On the *movimientos de mujeres*, see Jelin 1990; Lind 1992, 1995; and Stephen 1997, 1998.

⁶ In the 1970s “the magic word incorporated was autonomy, understood by each group in a different manner. Autonomy in relation to men (many), autonomy from political parties (some), and autonomy in relation to the state (everyone)” (Shumaker and Vargas 1997, 129).

⁷ Peruvian feminist Ana María Portugal (1986) notes that leftist women originally viewed “bra-burning” U.S. feminists as “bored gringas”; however, as “the comrades continued to wear their feudal armor at home, the domestic world in which the revolution will not occur,” more and more women began to take feminism seriously (10).

izations. Most clearly present at the first two *Encuentros*, held in Bogotá, Colombia (1981) and Lima, Peru (1983), this conflict established “autonomy” as a practice that defined who was (and who was not) a feminist. For *feministas*, the Left’s dismissal of feminism as a bourgeois import from imperialist nations made it impossible to create a space for feminist politics within party structures. Moreover, feminists came to view the hierarchical structures then typical of the Left as inherently patriarchal and therefore antithetical to the radical cultural-ethical transformations their struggle implied. Autonomy, for the *feministas*, thus came to be defined as “independence from any organization that considers the battle for women’s liberation a secondary goal.”⁸ *Políticas* or *militantes*, by contrast, defended a strategy of *doble militancia* (double militancy) or concurrent participation in feminist and party/revolutionary organizations. For *feministas* at the first two *Encuentros*, *políticas* were “programmed” by the Left and attended feminist meetings only to “spread their message.” *Militantes*, on the other hand, viewed the *Encuentros* (and, to some extent, “autonomous feminism”) as a “petite bourgeois” project, arguing that feminists could only reach “the masses” of women through leftist party organizing and revolutionary mobilization.

The heated debates reenacted at the *Encuentros* of the early 1980s inspired many activists to try to overcome such polarized positions and helped produce new understandings of how feminists might continue to be “autonomous” while retaining their links to other struggles for social justice. As one participant observed at Bogotá: “The great majority of women supported the autonomy of their organizations and practices, which does not mean that we reject the participation of women in political parties. . . . We do argue that they should not bring their political slogans, agendas, and objectives that do not address women’s concerns. Nor does this mean that feminism should isolate and separate itself or ignore other social movements” (Manrique 1981). Indeed, after the mid-1980s, it appeared as though “autonomous feminism” had become a redundant term. The *feminista/política* debate faded into the background as many feminists adopted a revised understanding of what we might call “engaged autonomy”—negotiating with or participating in leftist and revolutionary movements and parties, as well as dominant social and political institutions, while maintaining a critical and *feminist* stance. As transitions from authoritarian to civilian rule unfolded in Brazil, the Southern Cone, and the Andean region, still others enlisted in legal parties of the opposition—but

⁸ Maruja Barrig (2001a, 159) cites a 1980 document signed by a group of Peruvian feminists.

did so while proudly and loudly proclaiming their feminist identities and insisting that the opposition embrace feminist issues and concerns.

Even as the debate over feminist participation in parties waned, the ideal of “autonomy” continued to inform feminist discourse and practice across the region, especially vis-à-vis the *Encuentros*. The organizing principles laid out for the First *Encuentro* in 1981, to be followed at each subsequent meeting, were designed to safeguard both the “autonomy” and “inclusiveness” of the event—and, implicitly, of feminism itself. Women were to attend “‘a título individual,’ and not as representatives or delegates of parties, trade unions, or other organizations” (Fisher 1995, 29). The meeting would be a true *encuentro*, not a rigidly structured political congress or more formal scholarly conference, reflecting a desire to create new, nonhierarchical, more participatory ways of “*hacer política*” (doing politics). Considering early on that accepting outside funds would politically compromise the event, the first three *Encuentros* were totally self-financed.

Furthermore, the meetings were to be “*amplios*,” or broad-based, anticipating the second major debate of the 1980s, surrounding the inclusionary and exclusionary practices of feminism. Like the ideal of autonomy, the proposed inclusiveness of the *Encuentros* has always been a contentious issue as it begs the questions: Who is considered “feminist” enough to attend, and, more broadly, whom is feminism supposed to convene in the first place? While participants at the Second *Encuentro* (Lima, 1983) widely rejected the creation of a *feministómetro* (feminist yardstick) to decide who was more or less feminist, later meetings would question feminism’s commitment to inclusion, especially along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

The dilemma of inclusion became particularly salient in part because second-wave feminist movements in Latin America and the Caribbean had always viewed poor and working-class women as a key constituency. The 1980s, marked by brutal state oppression and rampant poverty, presented fresh opportunities and challenges for the creation of a more broad-based feminist movement, as thousands of women began to mobilize politically—though not necessarily as feminists—in response to economic crises, political repression, and human rights abuses. In contrast to the middle-class, white/mestiza face of feminism in the early years of the movement, the burgeoning *movimiento de mujeres* of the 1980s was mainly composed of poor, working-class, and/or indigenous and Black women.⁹ The dif-

⁹ On women in human rights movements, see Navarro 1989; Taylor 1997; and Arditti

difficulties in bridging such structurally unequal and politically disparate women's movement constituencies came vividly to the fore at the Third *Encuentro* in Bertioga, Brazil (1985), when a group of women from a Rio de Janeiro *favela* (shantytown) arrived on a bus, asking to be allowed to participate despite their inability to pay the registration fee. Although a significant number of Black and poor women were already in attendance, feminisms' enduring crisis of inclusion/exclusion literally parked itself at the door of this *Encuentro*. The Brazilian organizers had in fact secured numerous scholarships to enable working-class women to attend, and many participants suspected political parties had orchestrated the bus incident in an effort to discredit feminism. Nonetheless, many among the participants, especially activists from Brazil's emergent Black women's movement, insisted that issues of race and class had not been centrally contemplated by the *Encuentro's* agenda and that poor and Black women had not participated fully in setting that agenda. Of course, race and class inequalities are hardly resolved with the mere "inclusion" of nonwhite, working-class women among the ranks of feminism. As our ensuing discussion will show, the movement continues to struggle with the ways in which class, racial, and heterosexual privileges have structured power relations among women in society and within feminism itself.

If Bertioga foregrounded the dilemma of inclusion, the new challenges posed by the expansion of the movement among poor, working-class, and nonwhite women became dramatically evident at the Fourth *Encuentro* in Taxco, Mexico (1987), which was attended by more than 1,500 women. The unprecedented participation of hundreds of women from the *movimiento de mujeres*, especially from the Central American region, seemed to signal that the feminist movement had achieved its goal of convening a truly broad-based *Encuentro*. This broadening can be attributed to the concerted efforts of activists to bring feminist perspectives to grassroots women's organizations. The massive attendance of politically active women new to feminism, however, was perceived by some to be a mixed blessing. Many *históricas* ("historical" or longstanding feminists) felt that the massive presence of the *movimiento de mujeres* impeded strategizing about "the" feminist agenda and was counterproductive to the advancement of feminist knowledge production. Frustrated by what they perceived as an elementary level of discourse of participants from the popular classes, many expressed impatience at rehearsing the "basics," when they wished to further feminist debate.

1999. On women's participation in grassroots survival struggles, see Caldeira 1990; Jelin 1990; Bennett 1992; Lind 1992; Massolo 1992; Stephen 1997.

At Taxco, a number of longtime activists maintained that the *Encuentros* should not be a “feminist school” for “the masses” but a space for regeneration of feminist ideas and practices. Others viewed this attitude as a reappearance of the *feministómetro* and rejected the assumption that Central American, indigenous, or poor women were not quite “feminist” enough to participate. The proposal that two *Encuentros* be held in the future, one for feminists and the other for the *movimiento de mujeres*, was met with hundreds of women chanting “*Todas somos feministas*” (We’re all feminists), producing greater recognition that feminism does not “belong” to anyone.

The view that any woman who considered herself a feminist *was* a feminist—in what turned out to be a contingent solution to feminism’s enduring tensions over inclusion and expansion—was echoed at the next *Encuentro*, held in San Bernardo, Argentina, in 1990.¹⁰ With 3,200 participants, it was the largest *Encuentro* held to date. Indeed, the San Bernardo meeting seemed to suggest that Latin American and Caribbean feminism had grown to massive proportions. The presence of women from a vast arena of *el quehacer feminista*, including independent collectives, trade unions, NGOs, universities, newly created state-run women’s ministries, and even elected representatives, signaled that by 1990 feminist practice was acquiring significant new dimensions. The simultaneous presence of women from “autonomous” collectives and study centers and “institutionalized” arenas such as political parties and the state suggested that “old” debates regarding autonomy had apparently been superseded.

Another development at San Bernardo was the marked presence of formalized, regionwide movement *redes* (networks). Some of these—like the Latin American and Caribbean Black Women’s Network, founded at San Bernardo, and the lesbian feminist network formed in 1987 at a regional meeting that preceded Taxco—had aimed to build solidarity; elaborate strategies to address racism, heterosexism, and other issues often marginalized from regional and national feminist agendas; and combat the invisibility of “Other” women in the movement. These networks were joined at the Fifth *Encuentro* by new regional *redes* and coalitions—such as the Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Health and Reproductive Rights Network—centered on national and international policy advocacy.

¹⁰ At the final plenary session, it was declared, “All women who fight to improve the objective situation of the female gender will be considered feminists.” The *históricas* were criticized as “those founders of feminism who have intellectually appropriated it for themselves, and who employ categories that are not only obsolete but also discriminatory against women who are approaching the movement” (Gargallo 1991, 15–16).

While throughout the 1980s the latter form of networking was relatively rare, policy-focused networks gained significantly in visibility and influence during the 1990s—largely due to Latin American and Caribbean feminists' growing involvement with the UN conference process.

The significant number of feminists now involved in gender policy advocacy and the increased visibility at San Bernardo of feminists active in legal as opposed to clandestine parties of the Left and center, involved in electoral politics, or employed in state women's agencies reflected the changed political context in which feminism was embedded by the beginning of the 1990s. How feminists grappled with Latin America's "twin transitions"—to political democracy and economic neoliberalism—is explored below.

Autonomy revisited: Reframing feminist strategies and identities at the *Encuentros* of the 1990s

The expanded involvement of feminists in professionalized and highly specialized national and international advocacy efforts would rekindle and reframe long-standing debates among feminists throughout the region. If historic movement conflicts over autonomy, inclusion, and expansion appeared to have subsided at the San Bernardo meeting, they resurfaced with renewed vigor at the three subsequent *Encuentros* of the 1990s—Costa del Sol, El Salvador (1993); Cartagena, Chile (1996); and Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic (1999).

The always contentious question of autonomy would now increasingly pivot on a new axis: the heightened engagement of some feminists with national and international political institutions—viewed by some as a "necessary step" in advancing the feminist transformational agenda but regarded by others as a dangerous slippage into or even collusion with "global neoliberal patriarchy." Tensions surrounding who was to be included in the "true" (if always "imagined") feminist community also were recast at the regional gatherings in Costa del Sol and Cartagena around this same axis: Should the activists now principally engaged in "masculinist" policy arenas be viewed simply as the "advocacy wing" of the movement, or were they "sellouts" or, worse, "traitors" to the feminist cause?

To understand the rearticulation of tensions over autonomy, inclusion, and expansion among feminists, one must consider the national and international contexts in which two distinctive "logics" that informed Latin American feminist movements in the 1990s took shape. On the one hand, a "policy-advocacy" logic drove the efforts of growing numbers of activists seeking to promote feminist-influenced gender policy through formal gov-

ernmental and nongovernmental institutions. On the other hand, an “identity-solidarity” logic remained evident in the movement-centered development of feminist identities, communities, politics, and ideas, and was often geared explicitly away from, or at least not concerned centrally with, formal institutions (Alvarez 2000).

Long before Cartagena and already presaged in San Bernardo, the policy-advocacy logic had begun to influence much local and regional feminist activism. The domestic factors behind this move were rooted in the twin transitions to democratic politics and neoliberal economic reform. On the political front, governments and parties responded to the important role women’s movements had played in the overturning of authoritarian regimes throughout the region, as well as to a concern with attracting women voters by embracing, at least rhetorically, several feminist issues such as electoral quotas and domestic violence legislation.¹¹ This effort provided symbolic and material opportunities for the articulation of a feminist politics from within formal institutions, especially with the founding of national women’s agencies in almost all countries in the region. Feminists not only increasingly entered the state apparatus and mainstream parties but also began providing the civil society–based component of feminist policy advocacy and research by founding NGOs. This in turn led to an increase in issue specialization, “expertization,” and professionalization among movement activists and organizations (Lebon 1993, 1998; Alvarez 1999; Murdock forthcoming).

These transformations were further fueled by economic developments, as neoliberal reform policies, including “rolling back the state,” resulted in “subcontracting out” formerly state-provided social welfare programs to NGOs, including many of those focused on women. Feminist NGOs seeking such work were pushed to formalize their organizational practices and moderate their discourses to be able to interact with state agencies and international institutions (Craske 1998; Schild 1998).

International factors, most notably the UN conferences of the 1990s, reinforced the growing policy orientation of many national groups.¹² Effective participation in the UN system required further specialized skills,

¹¹ On recent gender policy gains of the 1990s, see Nelson 1996; Htun 1998; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998; dos Santos 2000; Tamayo 2000.

¹² These conferences included the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro; the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna; the 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo; the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW), held in Beijing; the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen; and the 1996 Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul.

greater material resources, and alliances with both government and international organization officials. Moreover, participation was in large part underwritten by multilateral, bilateral, and nongovernmental international funding agencies. Already predisposed to funding organizations with a more professional (and often governmental) orientation and structure, funding agencies privileged those groups willing to turn most of their energies toward the international arena during the 1990s (Alvarez 1998).

The interplay of these domestic and international influences inspired growing numbers of activists to forge intra- and interregional linkages to participate in UN processes. They hoped international pressure could be “boomeranged” onto national and local governments to implement the women’s rights legislation and programs begun during democratization processes (Keck and Sikkink 1998). As explained by one of the most prominent leaders of the preparatory process for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, “one of the significant changes [in the 1990s] has been the modification of an anti-statist posture to a critical-negotiating posture in relation to the State and to formal international spaces” (Vargas 1998a, 15).

By the 1990s the policy-advocacy logic operated as both a complement and competitor to the identity-solidarity logic of more grassroots-oriented, less professionalized movement activists. On the one hand, the logics complemented one another as NGO coordinations for UN conferences such as Beijing drew on contacts and discourses forged through preexisting, mostly informal, identity and solidarity networks, while local feminist advocacy efforts benefited from the legitimation of some historical feminist issues, now officially embraced by the UN and nominally endorsed by many of the region’s governments.

However, conflict arose when the privileging of leaders and discourses more amenable to traditional policy was viewed as compromising feminist solidarity. Membership having its privileges, the disproportionate access to resources and governmental “ears” (and “wallets”) on the part of activists following the policy-advocacy logic became a deep source of contention among feminists throughout the region. In particular, the obvious moderation of feminisms’ more radical social critiques and prescriptions triggered the visceral condemnation of all things “institutionally oriented” by a new segment of the movement, which revived the ideal of autonomy, now recast in relation to the changed conditions of the 1990s.

Costa del Sol, El Salvador, 1993

Few expected that renewed tensions concerning autonomy would overwhelm the agenda at the Sixth *Encuentro* held in Costa del Sol, El Salvador,

in late 1993. After all, the very fact that Central America—where most feminists had continued to engage in “double militancy” in revolutionary parties and radical popular movements throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s—had been chosen as the site for the sixth regional feminist gathering seemed to suggest that many had set aside their earlier conviction that party activism and feminist practice were ontologically incompatible. It also signaled a recognition that Central American feminism—with its unique history in Costa Rica; its birth in the fires of revolution and civil war in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala; and its links to struggles against military occupation and for land in Honduras—had something important to offer feminists from other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The road to attend previous *Encuentros* had been long and arduous, especially for Guatemalan and Salvadoran women emerging from bloody civil wars. The decision to hold this *Encuentro* in war-torn El Salvador had been made the year before at a subregional *Encuentro* of Central American activists. Held in Montelimar, Nicaragua, the meeting was intended to bolster the movements’ strength and visibility locally and foster autonomy, leadership, and democracy among Central American feminisms. Interventions by Nicaraguan revolutionary activists, urging their counterparts in Guatemala and El Salvador not to put their feminist demands on the back burner—even when the social movements in which they participated called for unity—proved to be crucial in this respect, especially for the Guatemalan women who later succeeded in getting women’s demands into the 1994 Peace Accords.

At the same time, tensions around class and sexuality surfaced at Montelimar when peasant and poor women expressed their discomfort at the relatively posh accommodations in a context where their children and communities lacked so much, even though Nicaraguan organizers had intended to provide participants with a relaxing setting in which to engage in debate. The visible presence of lesbians also disconcerted some, while others, including several of the revolutionary women, took advantage of the opportunity to learn about something only whispered about during the wars: sexuality.

In the process of preparing the Sixth *Encuentro*, sharp divisions arose among the organizers—a politically diverse group of women, including exiles and refugees in Mexico—around the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the *Encuentros* and, even more important in this case, about leadership, debate, and decision-making styles carried over from the revolutionary movements. Some of the organizers felt that others had simply transferred their revolutionary dogmatism and intolerance into feminism. While rec-

ognizing the efficiency and logistical capacity of some of these leaders, many called for more democracy, tolerance for difference, and a more nurturing environment in which to carry out their activism.

This seemed all the more imperative since organizers of the Sixth *Encuentro* had to confront serious opposition from right-wing politicians in El Salvador who denounced all feminists as lesbians, communists, and members of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), even issuing death threats. Furthermore, Salvadoran officials prohibited Cuban women from entering the country, and when participants from other countries began to arrive, some one hundred were detained at the airport. Indeed, the *Encuentro* ultimately took place under the protection of the United Nations peacekeeping forces, at the time overseeing the Salvadoran peace process. Unbeknownst to most participants, women who had acquired security experience during the wars also protected the *Encuentro* day and night.

Despite this conflictual local political backdrop, the major bone of contention at Costa del Sol turned out to be whether the Latin American feminist movement should participate in the regionwide preparatory process for the Beijing Conference to be held in 1995 and, if so, in what capacity. Shortly before the *Encuentro*, it was disclosed that a very conservative Chilean businesswoman with no connections to the feminist movement had been designated as NGO forum coordinator for Latin America.¹³ A group of feminists—mostly from Chile—resolved to replace the officially selected representative with a candidate from “the movement.” After gathering endorsements from various feminist groups throughout Latin America, they persuaded the conference secretariat to substitute the official nominee with Virginia Vargas, a founder of the well-known Peruvian NGO, *Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán*. At Costa del Sol, the group announced that the conference secretariat had accepted their alternative nominee, explained how the substitution had been made, and also revealed that there would now be a process of organizing feminist NGOs toward Beijing and that this would be funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The news fell like a bombshell. Most participants had no prior experience with UN conferences and had not yet heard of Beijing. Moreover, the vast majority of Latin American feminists had little contact with the new international networks involved in the world summits. Even though the UN Decade for Women began in Mexico City in 1975, UN confer-

¹³ Official governmental UN conferences usually are accompanied by a parallel meeting or “forum” for nongovernmental organizations.

ences had limited impact on mobilizing efforts among most Latin American feminists, with the partial exceptions of Mexico and Brazil. More concerned with national developments during the 1980s, very few of the women at the Costa del Sol *Encuentro* had participated in the “Decade Closing” UN Women’s Conference in Nairobi in 1985, which coincided with the Third *Encuentro* in Bertioga (Navarro 1998). As we noted above, the situation began to change somewhat in the early 1990s, as preparations for various UN conferences stepped up. At the time of the Sixth *Encuentro*, however, most Latin American activists did not know what an NGO forum was or what was supposed to happen there.

Funding by USAID was also a problem for many. Beyond general suspicions fueled by the long history of U.S. political intervention in the region, the memory of USAID’s closeness to the CIA and its actions in Central and South America, especially during the Reagan era, made acceptance of funding from the agency highly problematic to say the least (Mello 1994). Most *Encuentro* participants supported the rejection of the Chilean businesswoman and even agreed with the nomination of Virginia Vargas as a *fait accompli*. But many nevertheless protested the seemingly undemocratic process pursued in selecting Vargas and wondered why other “movement candidates” had not been considered. The ensuing debates at Costa del Sol were heated and fraught with confusing information and rumors of all kinds, including the high cost of the *Encuentro*—information revealed the following year suggested that the organizers had received close to half a million dollars from foundations.

At Costa del Sol, those feminists who were already involved in NGOs and accustomed to dealing with foreign funders favored participating in the preparatory work that would lead to Beijing. Others, who were determined to maintain the independence of the feminist movement from international funders and the state, opposed all involvement in Beijing. That is, they were intent on defending the “autonomy” of the movement—now redefined by many as pivoting on feminism’s relationship to formal or “mainstream” institutional arenas and the movement’s capacity to set its own agendas independently of those institutions. The debates at Costa del Sol also reopened the discussion over what many saw as the perverse role of foreign funding in the movement, especially in view of the proliferation of northern-sponsored NGOs, and the concern that such funding might politically compromise, or worse, come to control, the feminist agenda.

Those who refused to participate and decided to voice their opposition to Beijing were in the minority. Others prepared their participation in the NGO forum for the following two years under the direction and guidelines

of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which sought to promote Beijing initiative groups in every country—though many questioned the transparency and inclusiveness of their organizing methods. The initiative groups sponsored numerous national meetings, provincial and subregional gatherings, and a final regionwide meeting held in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in conjunction with the official Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) regional preparatory conference in September 1994.

Although a detailed discussion of the Beijing process is beyond the scope of the present essay, it would be difficult to overstate its impact on feminist movement politics and gender policy throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁴ For nearly two years prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women itself, many of the movement's ongoing organizing and lobbying efforts were absorbed by local, national, and regional preparations for Beijing. Sizable material resources and political rewards accrued to those sectors of the movement—largely the expanding number of professionalized NGOs specializing in policy advocacy—who devoted the bulk of their energies to influencing national government reports on the status of women and worked to integrate feminist perspectives into the regional and global platforms for action.

Given its origins in earlier exchanges facilitated by the *Encuentros*, “it is not surprising that the Latin American and Caribbean NGO Coordination for the FWCW—headquartered in Lima and charged with articulating six subregional ‘focal points’ in the region—declared in its core organizing slogan that Beijing would serve as both *‘Texto y Pretexto’* (Text and Pretext) for feminist movements in the region” (Alvarez 2000, 43).¹⁵ That is, while feminists involved hoped to influence the actual “texts” of government reports and UN documents, many also saw Beijing as an exceptional opportunity, a “pretext,” for remobilizing and revitalizing feminist movements and fostering public debate about women's subordination.¹⁶ A dynamic interplay of text and pretext, then, guided much of feminist NGOs' involvement in the UN process and had a number of

¹⁴ On the local, national, and regional impact of preparations for and participation in the Beijing preparatory process by Latin American and Caribbean feminists, see Amado 1995; Asturias 1995; Faccio 1995; Rodríguez 1995; Vargas 1996; Alvarez 1998; Franco 1998; Lebon 1998; Mauleón 1998; Friedman 1999; and Friedman, Hochstetler, and Clark 2000.

¹⁵ The focal points were coalitions of women's NGOs and individual activists established in the following UN-designated subregions: Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, the Andean Region, the Southern Cone, and Brazil.

¹⁶ Formal interview with Gina Vargas and Cecilia Olea, Centro Flora Tristán and Regional NGO Coordination for Beijing, Lima, Peru, August 19, 1997, conducted by Sonia E. Alvarez.

positive consequences for local movement discourses and practices (Alvarez 1998, 2000; Vargas and Mauleón 1998).

Still, participation in the Beijing process provided “relatively few actors in local movement arenas with greater access to political, cultural, and ‘actual’ capital” (Alvarez 2000, 56). The growing involvement of many activists in intergovernmental advocacy therefore sometimes “‘translate[d]’ locally in ways that exacerbate[d] existing power imbalances among activists and organizations” (2000, 56), unsettling intramovement solidarities while accentuating class, racial-ethnic, and other inequalities among activists (Vargas and Mauleón 1998; Friedman 1999).

With respect to political capital, for instance, local leaders of the initiative groups gained greater access to national policy microphones and became the privileged interlocutors of domestic policy makers and international donors alike. When funding “civil society” involvement in the national and regional Beijing processes, donors clearly favored “larger, already well-resourced, more professionalized feminist NGOs whose work has measurable ‘policy relevance’ over smaller, less formalized, typically more grassroots- or identity-solidarity-oriented movement organizations” (Alvarez 2000, 57; see also Alvarez 1999). Finally, as Vargas (1998b) herself has argued in an insightful retrospective essay, “the equilibrium between ‘text’ and ‘pretext’ did not resist the confrontation of the global with the local. [Locally,] the emphasis on the text . . . prevailed, while strategies aimed at cultural, symbolic and political transformations [were] relegated to a secondary plane” (14). Beyond aggravating tensions between policy-focused and more movement-centered activists and groups, then, the Beijing process brought growing political divergences among local feminists into the full light of day. Those conflicts were played out with unprecedented virulence on the transnational stage provided by the Seventh *Encuentro* in Cartagena, Chile.

Cartagena, Chile, 1996

The absorption of much of the movement’s energies by the Beijing process had compelled Chilean organizers of the Seventh *Encuentro* to postpone it until November 1996. From May 1995 onward, Chilean activists held several national meetings to plan the regional event, only to find that the differences and the ill will between those engaged with formal institutions and those defending the absolute autonomy of the movement were increasing. Indeed, Chileans identified with the local *Movimiento Feminista Autónomo* (MFA), who ultimately dominated the local organizing committee for this *Encuentro*, deliberately provoked the confrontation between these two tendencies or “logics” in the movement. In appropriating

the term *autonomous*, which, as we argued above, historically was almost synonymous with feminism, they tried to unequivocally mark their fundamental difference with those they pejoratively dubbed the *institucionalizadas*, that is, those who worked “inside” governmental and nongovernmental institutions.¹⁷

In Chile, the *autónomas* had emerged as an explicit political current in 1993, proclaiming that their erstwhile feminist “sisters”—who had chosen to occupy the new “women’s spaces” in parties and the state or had founded professionalized NGOs—had “institutionalized” the movement and “sold out” to the forces of “patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism,” using “the movement as a springboard to attain spaces of power” instead of working to “strengthen the movement.” In explaining the origins of their autonomous current, the Chilean MFA maintained:

The constitution of the autonomous feminist movement coincides with the process in which feminism finds itself in general with regard to defining its relationship to the system. In a period in which the ideology of neoliberalism is taking root . . . feminism could not remain at the margins of this historic predicament, and therefore two political currents have assumed a clear profile. One, led from within institutions, is represented fundamentally by women who work for NGOs, whose ideology responds to the neoliberal ideology of pragmatism from the standpoint of gender . . . and which attempts to make invisible and supplant the *movimiento social de mujeres* and the feminist movement. The other current, the autonomous one, is the one that “stands on the other corner” (*se “para en la otra esquina”*), from the standpoint of the movement and the protagonism of women, questioning the values of the system and its institutions. (Lidid and Maldonado 1996, 2)

Divisions among Chilean feminists were sharp, spurred largely by differences in how activists responded to the state in the post-Pinochet era.¹⁸ While many readily enlisted in women’s agencies and formal politics under the new Christian Democratic and Socialist Party ruling coalition, others vehemently criticized what they perceived as the unwarranted moderation

¹⁷ It is important to note, as explained below, that those it was intended to describe did not adopt this term. However, feminists in Latin America who routinely engage with formal institutions are known as *institucionalizadas* or the less pejorative *institucionales*.

¹⁸ On Chilean feminist movement dynamics in the 1990s, see Frohmann and Valdés 1995; Valdés and Weinstein 1997; Guerrero and Ríos 1998; Schild 1998; Valenzuela 1998; Fitzsimmons 2000; Ríos Tobar 2000.

of the former opposition's transformational agenda. For several months preceding the *Encuentro*, the polarization rending Chilean feminisms, which had been further accentuated by the national Beijing preparations, rapidly became "transnationalized" through electronic communication and movement journals with significant regional circulation, such as *mujer/fempres* and *Cotidiano mujer*, which published several articles on the debates surrounding autonomy then raging among Chilean feminists. In May 1996, Montevideo-based *Cotidiano mujer* published a letter signed by 124 Chilean feminists denouncing the manipulation of the *Encuentro* by the MFA: "We declare that neither the conditions nor the guarantees necessary for an open and democratic *Encuentro*, as the previous *Encuentros* have been, exist in Chile. The organizers have set up a model in which each participant will be defined according to their unilateral conception of what a feminist is" (*Cotidiano mujer* 1996, 3). The letter urged another country to take over the organizing as soon as possible. Another letter, authored by Virginia Vargas, urged the organizers of the six previous *Encuentros* to mediate the conflict among the Chileans and to help create a space open to democratic dialogue. In the same issue, Margarita Pisano, a leading MFA figure, responded in an interview by lashing out at formalized feminist NGOs and networks, their wealth, their power to dictate the agenda, their corruption, and their lack of democratic commitment. She saw irony in their willingness to spend large sums of money preparing their trip to the Beijing conference and their lack of support for the Chilean *Encuentro*.

The acrimonious debates preceding this *Encuentro* clearly did not augur well for things to come. When the seven hundred participants began to arrive in Cartagena, a working-class resort near Santiago de Chile, tensions were high. The organizers planned the meeting around three themes: "(1) Political and philosophical frameworks of the various currents of Latin American feminism: Autonomy, movement, feminist ethics, relations with the women's movement, and strategies in the context of the globalization of neoliberalism. (2) The hidden and discriminated dimensions of feminism: the indigenous women, Black women, lesbians, poor women . . . in us. (3) Unraveling our strategies. How do we change the world?" (Comisión Organizadora del VII Encuentro, 1996).

The first two axes were presented in two rigidly organized plenary sessions in which presenters read position papers, a format that many saw as violating the nonhierarchical, participatory organizing principles that, as noted above, had guided all previous *Encuentros*. Furthermore, speakers engaged in an angry display of insults, accusations, recriminations, and vicious attacks, a behavior never seen before in an *Encuentro* and painful

for all to watch. The highly theatrical Bolivian *autónoma* group, “*Mujeres Creando*” (women creating) used particularly violent language, making personal attacks, and, after Vargas addressed the assembly, displayed a banner stating “Watch out! Patriarchy now dresses up as a power-hungry woman.” In the afternoon, participants were scheduled to divide into the two “camps” demarcated by the organizers—*autónomas* and *institucionalizadas*—to discuss the position papers. However, a third grouping, refusing to identify with either of these two camps, met under the denomination of *ni las unas, ni las otras* (neither the ones nor the others). In a statement drafted during this “third position’s” workshop, attended by between three and four hundred women, participants criticized the excessively policy-centered focus of some sectors of the movement and stressed that “we need to evaluate our own practices . . . and discuss how to revitalize the feminist movement in our countries, recognizing its current fragility” (“Desde ‘ni las unas ni las otras’ hacia las ‘unas’ y las ‘otras’” 1998, 226). At the same time, they interrogated the essentialism and intransigence of the *autónomas*, arguing that “autonomy is not necessarily about whether one does or does not have funding, it doesn’t mean not having an ideological project, nor is it about the demonization of institutions” (226). Instead, autonomy was defined as an individual and collective commitment to claiming arenas from which to transform women’s lives and society as a whole.

On several occasions, as insults were hurled right and left, it seemed that Cartagena, the supposed “*Encuentro del Diálogo*,” might well be the last *Encuentro*. However, the majority on the “two sides,” including those who declared themselves to be on “neither side,” were resolved to avoid a full-scale breakup. But the lack of dialogue meant, among other things, that Cartagena was largely a missed opportunity for an analysis of the positive and negative consequences of the Beijing process for national and regional feminist politics. Instead, the Beijing legacy contributed to the polarization of participants and hovered like a ghost over Cartagena.

The “Last *Encuentro* of the Millennium”: Enduring frictions, renewed debates, and emergent possibilities at Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic, 1999

Many activists had feared that the polarized and acrimonious “showdown” that was Cartagena would be reenacted at the Juan Dolio gathering in November 1999. Indeed, a number of feminists, particularly those labeled *institucionalizadas* (even if they did not self-identify as such), shied away from attending the meeting. However, as will become clear in what follows,

the Eighth *Encuentro* did not simply reproduce long-standing tensions surrounding movement autonomy, inclusion, and exclusion. Instead, it again proved to be a critical transnational site in which “old” frictions were renegotiated if not “resolved” and where feminist identities were refashioned and where movement debates, some new and some long-standing, were recast.

Despite the absence of some policy-oriented activists who feared a repeat of Cartagena, the Eighth *Encuentro* brought together nearly 1,300 women. According to the program distributed at the meeting, the organizing committee deliberately chose to focus not on specific topics but on three political axes of discussion (*ejes políticos*), which they intended to be broad enough to allow for an analysis of “patriarchy in its complexity and as a system”: (1) “old and new forms of domination” facing feminists; (2) the dynamics of feminism as a social movement, especially in relation to power relationships among women within it; and (3) prospects for forging alliances across regional feminist movements based on minimum common values and goals.

A fourth component—no less essential to the organizers—was what they referred to as the *eje transversal* (transversal axis), intended to recapture the “cultural-symbolic-relational” elements of feminist practice.¹⁹ This methodological approach, identified as a “political choice,” was intended to foster creative, dynamic, and innovative forms of interaction among participants. Each participant was to select one of ten groups, organized around “dynamics” such as theater/role-playing, poetry, dance/corporal expression, collage, body painting, and so on. The results of each group’s interaction were to be presented at the two plenary sessions.

The equal importance given to form and content—as well as to art and “culture” as privileged venues in the quest for new modes of communication and sociability—was also evident in the plethora of cultural events including video, theater, dance, and musical performances offered every evening. This transversal axis was designed to serve as an equalizer between those with differing capacities and patience for the privileged verbal and analytic modes of movement work by offering a variety of options for communication, expression, and participation. Those who did not wish to take part in one of the ten preestablished groups were able to create their own (not necessarily following the proposed methodology). At the same time, a “parallel” program offered more than thirty participant-initiated workshops, discussion groups, and other activities.

¹⁹ This is from a flier titled “Información sobre la metodología en el trabajo con los ejes políticos” distributed by the Organizing Committee at the *Encuentro*.

Corporal and expressive feminisms

The call for a “new feminist ethic” was embedded in a form of cultural feminism, which, though always part of *Encuentros*, permeated the organizational structure of Juan Dolio. This tendency was expressed in an emphasis on the body, on corporal and artistic expression, on knowledge of the self, and on inner strength, as well as an emphasis on “women’s values,” on common experiences as women, and a shared sense of strength from women’s “herstories” (*el ser mujer*).

The strong presence of cultural feminists among the Dominican organizers, a number of whom self-identified as *autónomas*, and the relative absence of more policy-focused Dominican feminists certainly reinforced this trend. However, the organizing committee’s methodological choices were also part of a strategy that seemed aimed at displacing the acerbic political debates of Cartagena and healing the wounds of that highly divisive meeting.

Indeed, the methodology generally chosen was successful in diffusing tensions. The small groups certainly facilitated inclusiveness and possibly aided in the search for common strategies. Still, while this emphasis on the corporal over the verbal or analytical delighted some *Encuentro* participants, it disconcerted others. On one hand, many first-time attendees seemed to appreciate the chance to get to know other participants and engage in self-expression in an atmosphere that minimized differences in age, previous feminist experience, and political tendencies. On the other hand, a number of women found the approach frustrating because it offered little guidance for strategizing about changing political conditions and yielded little more than a shopping list of problems or issues presented at the final plenary. Jokingly referring to the morning workshop approach as “feminism lite,” women who proclaimed they wanted to “discuss” rather than “touch” their feminism formed their own formal or informal discussion groups. The largest of these groups, known as the *discoteca* group because of its meeting venue, drew dozens of activists of all ages and levels of experience to discuss concrete movement strategies.

Bridging the divide between autónomas and institucionalizadas?

Beyond the tensions between “corporal” and more “cerebral” approaches to feminism, the Eighth *Encuentro* marked a significant turning point in the conflict between *autónomas* and *institucionalizadas*. The Juan Dolio *Encuentro* revealed the gradual diffusion of that conflict—a process initiated in the aftermath of the Seventh *Encuentro* in Cartagena and accentuated by the “autonomous *Encuentro*” held in Sorata, Bolivia, in 1998.

Despite the presence of a significant number of *autónomas* who had

attended the Sorata meeting and the fact that a number of them actively participated in the Dominican organizing committee, the Eighth *Encuentro* did not turn out to be yet another standoff between two polarized sectors of the movement. This *Encuentro* was instead characterized by the diversity and heterogeneity of issues aired rather than by the predominance of single-issue discussions and by the apparent unwillingness of the majority of participants to engage in confrontations such as those staged in Cartagena. Moreover, it seems that the very level of animosity displayed in Chile had an unexpected effect on the collective Latin American feminist imaginary: it imposed the necessity of healing the wounds and exorcising the trauma that many felt the Seventh *Encuentro* had provoked.

Moreover, Cartagena arguably produced a tension at the regional level between *autónomas* and *institucionalizadas* that did not find a direct counterpart in most individual countries other than Chile—with the partial exceptions of Bolivia, Argentina, and perhaps Mexico. Still, the “new” debate about autonomy staged in Chile was reenacted in many countries during the latter half of the 1990s—foregrounding already present, though sometimes not yet fully articulated, local concerns about the excessive “institutionalization” of the movement. In this sense, the *Encuentros* again had served as a vital space of mediation between the local/national and transnational movement arenas.

In retrospect, it is difficult to speak of genuine confrontation in a conflict that developed as a unilateral criticism on the part of the *autónomas* but never had an organized interlocutor to defend the (imputed) opposite position, the so-called *institucionalizadas*. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the latter group was increasingly absent from more movement-based spheres where the *autónomas* concentrated their action. Instead, they tended to avoid or ignore the criticisms and issues posed by the *autónomas* and focused on strengthening policy advocacy strategies. The feminists who did acknowledge the *autónomas* as legitimate interlocutors were precisely those who did not identify with the dichotomized scenario the *autónomas* tried to construct. They were, in general, active in “movement spheres” while at the same time contributing to other processes promoted through more “institutional” venues, such as NGOs. As it turned out, very few feminists took it upon themselves to defend a purely institutional strategy to advance a feminist agenda.

As new issues and actors emerged in the movement, and as the context in which the *autónomas/institucionalizadas* conflict arose changed, the confrontational logic constructed around that axis seemed to reach a stage of inevitable exhaustion. For instance, whereas, as we suggested above, Beijing haunted the discussion at Cartagena, at Juan Dolio it had been transformed

into a “white elephant”—an issue everyone now “saw” clearly but about which enough had been said. Internal conflicts among the *autónomas* themselves also contributed to their loss of visibility and power within the movement and to the consequent diffusion of conflict. The experience in Sorata, Bolivia, during the first (and, thus far, only) self-proclaimed Autonomous Feminist *Encuentro* had a devastating effect on the *autónomas*’ capacity to organize and act as a unified political current. The event, ironically, was rife with confrontations regarding who could be considered a “genuine” autonomous feminist. The participation of younger women and the airing of different interpretations of what autonomy meant for feminism were among the most conflictive issues. This experience, together with fragmentation among groups of *autónomas* in different countries, translated into a clear weakening of their position even before the Eighth *Encuentro*. This became apparent in the working group the *autónomas* organized at Juan Dolio independently of the official program, which never gathered more than thirty women at a time.

Although the “autonomous” current was never internally homogeneous, it was further rent by internal conflicts. Hence, it is no longer possible to speak of a sole, coherent *autónomas* discourse or current.²⁰ This fragmentation explains in part why, despite the *autónomas*’ influence in the local organizing committee, they were not able to play a predominant role in Juan Dolio. As discussed above, the Eighth *Encuentro*’s organizers made an explicit political decision to avoid confrontation. The meeting’s methodology was harshly criticized by the *autónomas* who attended the *Encuentro*, who denounced it as a strategy to erase the *Encuentro* in Cartagena from feminist historical memory in an attempt to ignore real and important differences among feminists.

Finally, the processes of critical introspection embarked on by many feminists who have focused primarily on policy advocacy during the past few years also seem to have contributed to the diffusion of this conflict.

²⁰ On the contrary, there are many voices and proposals. Margarita Pisano explains that the current is composed of at least three main trends: one closely linked to a type of “cultural feminism” to which a number of the Juan Dolio organizers adhered; another identified with a stronger class-based discourse where many ex-“ultra Left”-wing militants find themselves today—a group that has demonstrated significant ties to popular women’s groups; and finally, a third group that identifies itself as the “pure” *autónomas*, who rally around some of the most prominent historic figures within this trend of thought and who are far from both cultural feminism or a purely class discourse (Ríos Tobar, Godoy, and Guerrero 2002). Members of this latter group have functioned as ideologues for the *autónomas* and, by and large, have been the ones unable to engage in any kind of meaningful political dialogue with other feminists with different political or ideological positions.

Even though this is not necessarily a widespread phenomenon, a small but significant number of *históricas* who have formed part of the “advocacy wing” of the movement attended the Eighth *Encuentro*, showing a disposition to reflect critically on their activism during the 1990s. Some have acknowledged the need to assess the dangers of a political strategy that rests solely on policy advocacy and negotiations with governments and international organizations and is primarily aimed at influencing the construction of institutional or policy agendas. Many acknowledged, in turn, the legitimacy of some of the *autónomas*’ criticisms. The fragmentation and weakening of the *autónomas*’ position, together with increased self-criticism on the part of many so-called *institucionalizadas*, thus facilitated a diffusion of the conflict between these sectors.

At Juan Dolio it nonetheless became evident that much of the *autónomas*’ discourse and critiques had found resonance among many Latin American and Caribbean feminists. They were able to place key issues on the agenda and forced an important debate about the costs and benefits of “institutionally centered” national and international feminist strategies that otherwise might have gone untouched. In this respect, the Eighth *Encuentro* sat at a crossroads between the conflicts manifested at previous *Encuentros* and what can be expected of the movement in the future. While in Chile the *Encuentro* had revolved around the confrontation between two putatively polarized political strategies, the Dominican gathering lacked a central single issue around which feminists positioned themselves and, on the contrary, provided fertile soil for a multitude of issues to flourish.

Crossing generational divides: The emergence of a young feminist movement and the renegotiation of identity and power

While there have always been distinct political cohorts in Latin American feminisms, the articulated presence of a new generation of feminists at this *Encuentro* marked a shift in the region’s second wave. The growing number of young feminists in several countries has fueled the proliferation of organizations made up mostly of this newer generation, such as the *Colectivo Feminista Bajo Sospecha* (“under suspicion” feminist collective) in Chile, which formed in response to the institutionalization/autonomy divide in the Chilean feminist movement. The collective has tried to organize across this political divide, even though some of its members work in NGOs. In Mexico, a nascent movement has been operating since the late 1990s, leading to the first National *Encuentro* of Young Feminists in 1998.²¹ The

²¹ Interview with Alexandra Ancheita, organizer of the feminist youth conference and

formation of this generation of feminists, largely urban youth, has been influenced by the 1994 Zapatista uprising, the student movement, and university women's studies programs, as documented by such publications as *Lunatika* (*feminismo, política, sexualidad, cultura*), "a publication by young women, for women."²²

With the increased presence of young feminists at the Eighth *Encuentro*, an important development at this meeting was the articulation of this newer generation's perspective in the declaration ("Declaración de las jóvenes feministas") they presented at the final plenary. Emerging from the workshop, "Young Women of the End of the Century," convened by *Bajo Sospecha* and attended by more than fifty women, the statement called for a greater recognition of those who entered the feminist movement in the 1990s. Drawing attention to their increased participation in the workshops and plenaries, they viewed the Eighth *Encuentro* as a milestone in the visibility of young women within the movement. While acknowledging that they were beneficiaries of the gains secured by earlier generations, they critiqued the lack of openness in other movement spaces and the absence of strategies to involve new activists.

A decisive intervention of young feminists was their claim that "feminism is defined by its practice of power," challenging feminists to examine power relationships internal to movement organizations. Critical of the ways in which more established feminists have failed to share power, they denounced a division of labor in which "some feminists write, think and speak, while others make photocopies, hand out pamphlets, and format texts. . . . This seems to us to correspond to patriarchal practices of doing politics that result in the establishment of hierarchies, the invisibilization of some and the exclusion of others."²³ The statement was a call to dialogue and a demand for recognition by a younger generation of feminists emerging from very different historical, economic, and political circumstances. As daughters of the "lost decade" of the 1980s who had grown up under authoritarian regimes, armed conflicts, and economic crises, they had witnessed the collapse of utopian visions of social change and a crisis in the political party system as well as the revalorization of democracy. While acknowledging that earlier feminist struggles had gained more spaces for women, young activists noted that their generation of feminists have come of age in a world marked by globalization, technological development, and

member of the editorial group of *Lunatika*, conducted by Maylei Blackwell, March 15, 1999, tape recording, offices of K'inál Antsetik, Mexico City.

²² Coordinated by Norma de la Cruz, *Lunatika* can be reached at Vicente Suárez 146-12 Col. Romz, México D.F., C.P. 06140 or by e-mail at lunatikamex@yahoo.com.

²³ "Declaración de las jóvenes feministas" 1999.

neoliberalism, in which the forms of oppression they confront are often economically more brutal while socially more subtle, factors that distinguish their experiences from those of past generations.

To a large extent, this new generation of activists has emerged out of the institutional spaces won by feminism—such as NGOs and university women’s studies programs—rather than out of the radical mass movements, political parties, or the Left of the past; in fact, some expressed a sense of loss for not having witnessed the feminist militancy and mass mobilizations of “yesteryear.” Furthermore, this generational difference in political trajectories may also inform young women’s expressed desire not to repeat errors of the past, such as “internal conflicts that arose from the root of the relationship with the State and other political actors.” As a distinct new sector of the movement whose concerns are often neglected by the “larger” feminist agenda, young feminists also articulated a critique of discourses of diversity and pluralism, arguing that “often the idea of diversity implies more precisely difference and inequality . . . and does not permit the recognition or legitimation of others and their experience.”²⁴

Discourses of diversity

The greater visibility of young women at Juan Dolio suggested that, by the turn of the new century, Latin American and Caribbean feminisms’ enduring tensions around issues of inclusion had dovetailed with the movement’s recurrent conflict over expansion. Inclusion was no longer a matter of how best to deal with feminism’s “Others”—that is, Black women from the *favelas* or activists in popular women’s groups. “Feminisms’ Others,” the Juan Dolio meeting made crystal clear, were now actively reinventing “other feminisms”—forcing a reimagining of the region’s “feminist community” that would account for its expansion among and resignification by “popular feminists,” Afro-Latin American feminists, young feminists, lesbian feminists, and so on. Indeed, the history of the *Encuentros* can be read as one of conflict and debate around the ways that race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation are organizing axes in gender oppression and shaping how gender is experienced in daily life.

Given second-wave feminism’s historical relationship to the Left, a clear class critique of women’s oppression as well as a strident anti-imperialist stance has been evident in the regional meetings ever since Bogotá. During the first decade of *Encuentros*, however, far less attention was paid to how gender identities and social stratification are determined not only by class

²⁴ “Declaración de las jóvenes feministas” 1999.

and gender but also by race and ethnicity, sexuality, and other vectors of power that shape women's subordination.

As Peruvian feminist Maruja Barrig suggests, early second-wave feminists' origins in the Left made them "tributaries of a [Marxian] tradition of interpretation of the nation that subsumed the ethnic-cultural under rigid categories of proletarians, peasants, and students" that "blinded" most white/mestiza activists to racial-ethnic inequalities among women (Barrig 2001b, 20). Despite the absence of discussion of race early on, Sergia Galván observes that Black women participants have been attending the *Encuentros* and caucusing since 1983: "The ethnic/racial question has headed the list of absences and knots in the agenda of Latin American feminism, in spite of the fact that, from 1983, Black women present at the *Encuentros* have tried to open spaces in said agendas, however, it is clear, that [we do this] from the periphery and from a minority position where only we have felt called to do so. Indigenous women have done the same in the last two *Encuentros* [in 1990 and 1993]" (Galván 1995, 34).

Black women who attended the Fifth *Encuentro* in Argentina decided to hold a regional meeting of their own to reflect on their organizational experiences within the feminist movement and national Black movements in Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. In July 1992, they convened the First *Encuentro* of Black Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in the Dominican Republic, where 350 Black women from thirty-two countries came together for six days of intense dialogue, strategizing, and celebration.

Since then, the diversity of feminist actors and struggles has been increasingly recognized within the *Encuentros*, but not without substantial debate and negotiation. For example, though lesbian feminists always have been key actors in feminist and women's movements throughout the region, they have had to struggle to put the issue of sexual orientation on the feminist agenda, this despite the fact that *Encuentro* workshops focused on lesbian issues are often among the most well attended, where participants overflow into the hallways. To confront invisibility within the movement, they organized a Network of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian Feminists. Lesbian feminists convened an independent regionwide meeting in 1987 immediately preceding the Fourth *Encuentro* in Taxco, and they since have met on several other occasions (Mogrovejo 1998, 2000).

While conversations at Juan Dolio revealed that diversity was now invoked as an affirmative ideal by most in the movement, the social, eco-

nomic, historical, and cultural differences and inequalities among women were not frontally addressed at the Eighth *Encuentro*. This was most evident in participants' conflation of ideological diversity with socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and sexual differences and inequalities. As is still often the case among feminisms in the United States, the reduction of differences to a form of feminist pluralism makes it seem as though all feminisms and feminists operate equally on the same social terrain and fails to grapple with how that terrain is fractured by profound social and economic inequities and forms of prejudice.

This relative neglect of inequalities among women—even as feminist “diversity” was celebrated—was compounded by the continued search for a “minimum common denominator” at Juan Dolio. A faction at the meeting called for the feminist movement to create a common strategy—to which others replied, “We’re a movement, not a party.” While some expressed anxiety that too much difference would de-center historic feminist concerns or fragment the movement, several of the sessions, mostly in the parallel program, focused on new strategies, such as the panel on *Estrategias para incidir desde el feminismo para combatir el racismo y el sexismo* (strategies for combating racism and sexism from within feminism). Lesbians also organized several sessions and held their own ad hoc caucus meeting where ideas, strategies, and reports were shared.

Despite this increased recognition of “diversity,” however, indigenous women were numerically invisible at the Eighth *Encuentro*, even though they have emerged as a significant transnational force in women’s organizing in the region over the past decade. A single workshop, fittingly titled *La identidad india ‘invisible’: Un racismo feminista?* (the invisible Indian identity: a feminist racism?), highlighted their absence from the strategies and agendas formulated at the *Encuentro*. Geography may have been one factor contributing to the relative absence of indigenous women, since their participation in past *Encuentros* has been most visible in subregions or countries with mobilized indigenous struggles. A second factor was the expansion of indigenous women’s independent organizing on a continental level.

Although indigenous women participated in earlier *Encuentros*, the Fifth *Encuentro* in Argentina had marked a visible shift, as indigenous women organized their own workshop to discuss opposition to the 500-Year Celebration of Columbus’s so-called discovery of the Americas and proposed that October 11 be proclaimed Indigenous Women’s Day. If the *Encuentros* facilitated networks such as the Lesbian Feminist Network or that of Black women, it can be argued that indigenous women’s regional networks were formed in part as a consequence of *desencuentros*, or mis-

encounters. Yet, as distinct from other regional networks, indigenous women's organizing occurred at a juncture when a transnational indigenous movement was growing; thus, while having zones of contact with both the feminist and larger women's movement, it developed its own independent structure.

In fact, the preparatory process for Beijing, rather than the Latin American feminist *Encuentros*, provided the catalyst for sustained regionwide meetings of indigenous women.²⁵ At the Mar de Plata preparatory meeting for Beijing, indigenous women were unsettled by their lack of representation and by the fact that an "advisor" had been assigned to deal with their concerns but had not been selected by indigenous women themselves. As a consequence, they decided they needed their own space to deliberate how they would participate in the Beijing process, convening the First Continental *Encuentro* of Indigenous Women of the First Nations of Abya Yala (continent of life) in August 1995 in Quito, Ecuador. At that historic meeting the *Coordinadora Continental de Mujeres Indígenas* formed as the first network of indigenous women's organizations spanning all of North, Central, and South America. The Second Continental *Encuentro* of Indigenous Women met in Mexico City in 1997, the Third *Encuentro* was held in Panama in March 2000, and a Fourth *Encuentro* is scheduled to be held in Peru in 2003.

Reframing exclusion: "Cultural racism" and linguistic diversity at Juan Dolio

Although the Eighth *Encuentro* was marked by an almost total absence of women who identified as indigenous, the presence of hundreds of Afro-Latin women from the United States and Black women from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and several South American countries far exceeded their participation in previous *Encuentros*. As the first *Encuentro* to be held in the Caribbean, the Juan Dolio gathering also shed new light on ongoing feminist debates about diversity, given the historical, cultural, linguistic, and demographic specificity of that region.

Political tensions and linguistic difficulties surfaced at the Juan Dolio meeting. They were fueled by the Dominican Republic's proximity to and historically racialized antagonism toward Haiti, the first (and only) predominantly Black republic in the Americas, created upon gaining independence from France two hundred years ago. In fact, several Caribbean activists drew attention to the fact that a manifestation of the human

²⁵ For more information on indigenous women's organizing in the region, see especially chaps. 3–5 in Blackwell 2000.

rights abuses routinely suffered by migrant Haitian workers was taking place precisely at the time of the meeting: the forcible expulsion of “unnecessary” workers from the Dominican Republic regardless of immigration status. A veteran Dominican feminist argued that, given the longstanding tensions between the nations, Haitian women who attended “should have been treated with *guantes de seda* (kid gloves).” Instead, forms of exclusion that inextricably wove together race issues and linguistic differences underscored the hegemony of Spanish-speaking women, who largely identified as being of European or mixed descent, despite the complaints of their English- and French-speaking “sisters,” who identified as of African descent.

The Eighth *Encuentro* seems to have exacerbated, or at least not helped to overcome, some of the divisions between Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean and Dominican feminists. In an interview, veteran Dominican feminist Sergia Galván confirmed that the number of Caribbean women in attendance at the *Encuentro* was disappointingly low and attributed it to a historic tendency of Dominican feminism to look to the rest of Latin America rather than to the Caribbean: “Ever since the first Feminist *Encuentro*, we have emphasized the need to construct spaces where Caribbean feminists can develop links and now that the *Encuentro* takes place in the Dominican Republic, in the Caribbean, [Caribbean feminists] are in the total minority, which reflects not only communication problems among us, but a lack of understanding of who we are as Caribbeans” (1995).

These tensions culminated during the plenary sessions where originally only makeshift translation by volunteers with no amplification was provided in the corners of the room. This led, during the first plenary, to the explosive exit of the frustrated Haitian delegation—which could not help but view this occurrence as an incident of cultural racism—and the no less impassioned calls for the delegation’s return on the part of the rest of the crowd. From then on, volunteers provided consecutive translation in French, English, and Portuguese, with amplification. But translation was muted by the disrespectful chatter of those who did not need it and was later cut down to French only due to time constraints.

The restraining effect of the hegemonic use of Spanish on the participation of non-Spanish-speaking women was nothing new (especially for Portuguese speakers). However, it was greatly heightened in Juan Dolio as a result of the geopolitical relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the unavoidable conflation of race and language issues in this situation, as well as the continuing lack of sustained discussion of racism at Juan Dolio. The need to examine race and other issues of diversity more profoundly at future *Encuentros* was argued in a manifesto read by

a group of women of African descent in the four languages spoken at the meeting. Finally, the presence and discourse of women of the Latin American and Caribbean diaspora, with heightened sensitivity to issues of racism and migration and therefore to the plight of Haitian women migrants in the Dominican Republic, certainly added kindling to the fire.

Women of the Latin American and Caribbean diaspora in the United States and Europe

As living testimony to an increasingly interdependent and historically transnational “Latin/a American” community, an unprecedented number of women of Caribbean and Latin American origin living as immigrants or exiles in the United States (particularly Dominican and Puerto Rican women from the East Coast) attended the *Encuentro*. As a consequence, the geographical boundaries of the imagined Latin American feminist community were dramatically remapped at the Juan Dolio meeting. Whereas a handful of Latinas from the United States and Europe had participated since the First *Encuentro* and were still counted as “foreign participants” by the organizers of the Fourth *Encuentro* in Mexico in 1987, they attended the Juan Dolio meeting by the hundreds (Alvarez 2000, 34). In addition, the Eighth *Encuentro*’s program included, for the first time, numerous sessions devoted to issues—such as immigrant rights and racism—confronting women in the Latin American and Caribbean diaspora. Afro-Caribbean women from that diaspora, along with many “white” and mestiza Chicana/Latinas, who in U.S. and European racial formations are, of course, politically situated as nonwhite or “brown,” often coalesced with women of African descent residing in Latin America and the Caribbean in calling attention to the ways in which racism deeply shapes women’s experience and life chances, challenging Euro-Latin American and mestiza feminists to not only “embrace diversity” but also confront inequality among women.

U.S. Latinas conducted a number of workshops at Juan Dolio, including one on the myths and realities of immigrant women’s lives in the United States titled *Transgresión de Fronteras* (Transgressing borders). The workshop, organized by Dominican and Puerto Rican activists from the New York City area, included a psychotherapist, a social worker, an activist against domestic violence, and the head of an organization of grandmothers raising their grandchildren (often due to problems such as domestic violence, incest, or the imprisonment or substance abuse of their parents). One of their main goals was to dispel the myth of a life on “easy street” for immigrant women in the United States, particularly in light of deteriorating conditions in cities such as New York, cuts in social services, and immigration restrictions. They also wanted women elsewhere to know

that they were organizing to address immigrant community problems and to establish alliances across borders.

Heightened awareness of the local effects of globalization and neoliberalism

While the issue of class has always been central to the region's feminisms, the rapid accentuation of inequalities stemming from the spread of neoliberal capitalism and the complex outcomes of globalization brought economic exploitation and its intersection with gender and race to the fore of many debates at the Eighth *Encuentro*. Many participants bore witness to the complexity of economic oppression in the lives of women in the region, especially for urban and rural poor women who are hardest hit by economic restructuring, and repeatedly emphasized the need for a feminist response. Although the format and methodology of the gathering did not allow for systematic analysis of economic change or the elaboration of collective responses to it, substantial agreement seemed to exist on its importance and implications.

On one hand, neoliberal policies, many participants argued, have accelerated women's poverty and increased the burden of their "double or triple day" through the simultaneous devolution of public services to the household and the increase in women's need to perform paid work outside the home. Cuts in public funding and reliance on the vagaries of the market have accentuated a culture of individualism, competition, and conflict over scarce resources, making it difficult to pursue collective solutions to social problems and to effectively enforce rights gained as the result of struggles in the previous decade. Development projects have become focused on teaching women how to manage poverty individually rather than on collectively mobilizing them to reduce it at a societal level. Even projects with common goals compete with each other for funds from international sources, and local agendas are often compromised to adapt to external priorities. In the neoliberal world of "projects" for social change, long-term visions of change often have been substituted for practical short-term "results."

Many insisted, on the other hand, that globalization also presents new opportunities for feminist organizing. Throughout Latin America and across the globe, the technological revolution in communications makes it possible for some feminists to exchange information, write and sign manifestos, plan conferences, strategize about political action, and share dreams of new utopias unhampered by geographical constraints. At the same time, however, connection to the global may result in inattention

to or a distorted interpretation of local conditions. Furthermore, uneven access to technological resources such as electronic mail and the Internet can exacerbate preexisting inequalities and exclusionary practices.

Undoubtedly, the effects of neoliberalism and globalization pose a multitude of strategic questions. "How," wondered one participant, "are we supposed to navigate in a world in which so much has changed?" Others underscored the need to move beyond criticisms of what exists in order to formulate concrete proposals for change (*de la queja a la propuesta* [from complaint to proposal]). Still others emphasized the need to advance alternative models of globalization and learn to manage "degrees of negotiation" vis-à-vis the rest of civil society and other social movements that allow them to negotiate an ethical stance *entre la política de lo posible y la transgresión* (between the politics of the possible and transgression). Reflecting this heightened feminist engagement with global political-economic inequality, the organizers of the Ninth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentro*, to be held in Playa Tambor, Costa Rica, in December 2002, have designated "Active Resistance to Globalization" as the meeting's overarching theme.

Concluding reflections

The *Encuentros*, like feminisms themselves, are arenas of solidarity and expansion but also of conflict and exclusion, negotiations, and renegotiations. These dynamics do not take shape in a vacuum but are always informed by the changing political and economic contexts in which feminisms unfold. Since the *Encuentros* began, the political landscape of Latin America has shifted dramatically, from a period in which dictatorships and open political repression flourished to a time when almost all of the countries in the region claim to be at least de jure if not de facto democracies. While economic crisis seems to typify the entire period, economic development models have also been transformed, moving from state-led to market-driven or neoliberal capitalism within an increasingly globalized arena. These contextual shifts in turn have reshaped the choices different feminists have made to interact with actors and institutions outside of the feminist movement, whether these are leftist movements, parties, state agencies, international funders, or the larger women's movements in all their diversity.

These interactions have been informed by changing and continually contested meanings of autonomy, which, in turn, have generated shifting criteria of inclusion and exclusion in the imagined regional feminist com-

munity. From *what* should feminists be independent? Parties? The state? Other women's movements? Foundations? And *who* can be accepted as "feminist": *faveladas*? Latina gringas? *Institucionalizadas*?

But perhaps most important to both sets of criteria is *quien decide*?—who decides? The answer has become less and less clear, as feminism's "Others" articulate "other feminisms"—ones, moreover, that insist that recognizing diversity, while necessary, is not a sufficient answer to taking inequality seriously. Instead, the difficult work of bringing to the fore the real inequities in power and privilege, whether generated by class, race/culture, sexual identity, location, or age, must be part and parcel of feminist analysis and prescription.

These will not be new issues to those engaged in feminist theorizing and practice beyond the Latin American region. However, analyzing their negotiation over the past twenty years in the richly textured experiences of the *Encuentros* and similar transnational movement sites may well provide new insights into debates over the postmodern fragmentation so celebrated by some and bemoaned by others within the international feminist community.

As participant-analysts of the *Encuentros*, moreover, we too have negotiated interpretive, political, disciplinary, and generational differences in the process of writing this essay. And we too have learned much from the tensions that inevitably surface in such collaborative endeavors. But we feel our experience reflects a crucial lesson from the *Encuentros*: while time-consuming and often frustrating, attempts at communication across various divides are always productive in some sense—whether such production "sees the light of day" or whether it informs participants' lives and work in some less tangible way.

Tracking the *Encuentros* from our different locations, moreover, has enabled us to assess a number of shifts in movement dynamics, discourses, and practices that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to apprehend through locally focused ethnographic methods alone. We believe that "transnational ethnographies" of events such as the *Encuentros* can enable analysts to better situate local and national movement actors and actions within a broader comparative framework. The kind of supralocal ethnographic research we undertook in this project permitted us to assess the dynamic interactions among diverse actors who identify with feminism and to observe the enactment and reformulations of alliances, collusions, conflicts, and outright confrontations among them. Transnational movement sites also offer unique insights into the uneven flows of power within movements, particularly if we pay close attention to who speaks, which voices become hegemonic, whose issues or interests predominate, and

who is absent or silenced. In short, tracking regional and global movement gatherings enables scholars to extend ethnography beyond the confines of the local, offering unique opportunities to craft ethnographies of transnational activism.

Reading movements through or at transnational sites only makes methodological sense, however, if one can ground those interpretations in local and national ethnographies and histories. If one cannot situate diverse *Encuentro* participants in their local contexts, there is, of course, a strong likelihood of misreading what transpires in transnational movement spaces. Collaborative research among scholars with extensive knowledge of diverse localities therefore serves as a crucial corrective, making it possible to check individual interpretations against those of colleagues familiar with local/national contexts other than those in which one has conducted in-depth research. In light of accelerated globalization and the concomitant intensification of transnational activism, the kind of collaborative, multisited ethnographic research strategies we have undertaken in analyzing feminisms through the lens of the regional *Encuentros* will be increasingly essential to more fully apprehend movement dynamics at the local and national levels.

Finally, beyond this academic site of knowledge production, the experience of the *Encuentros* demonstrates how imperative it is that feminists in the so-called global women's movement nourish, sustain, reinvent, and recreate these sorts of productive transnational movement sites (both virtual and "real"), parallel to, but always in interaction and creative tension with, official intergovernmental venues—such as the UN—which also have been crucial to the forging of feminist identities, discourses, and practices.

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