

**Engendering Trade Unions and Social Movements:
New Proposals of
Social Inclusion in Argentina**

Women and Unions: Still the Most Difficult Revolution,
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Introduction

One of the most important characteristics of the new process of globalization has been the remarkable change in the global division of labour (GDL). Within the new GDL we can observe the spread of new technologies and labour processes throughout the world. New multinational corporations (MNCs) as well as new national competitive standards have been established, drastically affecting the social and historical relationships that prevailed under the previous system of production. These factors are dissolving the existent divisions of labour in the international system, undermining the sovereignty of states, and seriously affecting and influencing the new and diverse reactions arising from different sectors of civil society.

The December 2001 economic and political crisis in Argentina has unveiled the negative consequences of the process of globalization for different sectors of the population. In the international arena, Argentina's *de facto* default cut the country out of the international financial market leaving it further exposed to the "exigencies of transnational finance" (Soederberg, 2003:120). At the same time, the International Monetary Fund demanded that major changes be made to internal economic policies in order to regain international trust for future lending. On the national scene, according to the national Institute of Statistics (INDEC), the 10% richest households received 17,8 times more income than the poorest 10% in 1994, while in 2001 the richest 10% of households got 27.3 times more than the poorest 10%. Over the last two years nearly 2000 people became poor each day (living with less than 4 dollars a day). By May 2002, about 54.3% of the population lived under the poverty line and unemployment reached a historical peak of 21.5% (Esptein, 2003:16). According to the same source, 46,5% of households under the poverty line are headed by women, and 39,7% by men. Women are specially affected by this phenomenon given their traditional role as household's administrators¹.

As inequality, poverty, and unemployment grow so does social and political exclusion. The unemployed, underemployed, self-employed, women, old people are among the sectors of society that bear most of the social costs of neoliberalism. However, those excluded sectors of the population can contribute, if united and represented, to the creation of a more inclusive way of doing politics. Women have already started developing new forms of citizenship through the massive wave of social protest and self-organized local government groups. This situation shows how "a multiplicity of social actors establish their presence and spheres of autonomy in a fragmented social and political space" (Escobar, 1992:3) and with their presence, comes the possibility of developing or recognizing new political perspectives within society.

In this paper, I will explore the new political spaces created by new trade unions, social movements and grassroots groups. I will investigate how women have increased their political participation and, in some cases, achieved a leading role within these movements. My argument is that, economic and political transformations in Argentina (derived from changes in both international and national spheres) are driving the (re) construction of women's identities and strategies within the political arena, and are

¹ A study of 400 Argentine homes by the International Labour Organization in 1984 showed that the average housewife worked ten hours a day, seven days a week while other members of the family contributed a daily average of 15 minutes...The study also found that women's responsibility for housework and childcare did not diminish when they entered paid employment, but rather they combined work inside and outside the home in what has been called the "double day" (Fisher, 1993:153)

creating the basis for the emergence of a more inclusive and democratic citizenship given that women's movements are, "compatible with the idea of collective, democratic citizenship on a wider scale" (Dietz, 1998: 393).

In order to illustrate this point, I will examine how women have become or may become active and effective participants in two specific processes oriented towards social inclusion and democratization. The first case is the creation of the Central of Argentinean Workers (*CTA – Central de Trabajadores Argentinos*), a new labour confederation that emerged as a source of representation to project the voices those workers suffering the consequences of the economic reforms. Elsewhere, I have looked at the formation of new community organizations that aim at developing more inclusive representational processes of the unemployed workers (the *piqueteros*). However for reason of space these will only be mentioned here. Still, In both cases women have participated massively in these activities of political resistance to neoliberalism.

Theories on Globalization, Social Movements, and Gender

Linking economic and political action

Within the existing feminist literature, scholars like Maria del Carmen Feijoó and Jane Jaquette are skeptical to the continuity of women's activism. Despite the historical importance of many of these new experiences of political representation, the penetration and instauration of these changes in the long-term political arena, they argue, remains to be seen. Feijoó and Jaquette have described three main types of women activism in these new political alternatives: a) human rights groups; b) feminist groups; and c) urban poor associations (Jaquette, 1994; Feijoó, 1994). During the transition period, in the case of Argentina, we can find the "Mothers of Plaza de Mayo" in the first category, some feminist associations in the second, and the "Association of housewives" in the third one. One problem with this kind of analysis is that it tends to look at women's movements as separate responses to specific cases of hunger (economic sphere) and repression (political sphere) in a context where hunger and repression are isolated from each other. Women's responses are separated ignoring the possibility of positioning diverse groups within a common field of action: when political issues are solved, there is no motivation for further action and when economic issues are resolved there is no further motivation either. This approach leaves out the possibility of re-interpretation and re-configuration of women's positions when expanding their issues to the political, economic, social, or cultural arenas. There is no model for developing a complete vision of women's relational position in society.

Another problem with this approach is that Feijoó and Jaquette observe women's responses in isolation from the rest of society. I suggest that it is important to identify the links with society as a whole and to look at the crisis as part of a global process that affects the whole Argentine society. This perspective also helps uncover how aspects considered specific to women's politics are shared with society and how improvements in those areas will be beneficial for the general population. In other words, feminist scholars could improve their assessment by looking at the articulation of women's issues with the society as a whole without neglecting the issues that differentiate women's positions according to gendered structures.

It is precisely this quest for articulation of women's and societal interests that inspired this study of the relationship between women's political participation and the

deepening of democracy in the context of emerging resistance towards globalization. As Lourdes Benería has proposed, women's movements can provide a vision with "emphasis on gender equality but linked also to wider social issues" (Benería, 1999: 76). However, the literature on women's movement in Argentina tends to focus on isolated issues such as human rights or economic protests within the national arena rather than working to connect the two issues and situate them within the context of global political and economic changes. I think that the exploration of theoretical perspectives on globalization and social movements complement the vision of previous feminist accounts on women's political participation. Many studies on Argentina show how women's organizations have been pioneers in denouncing human rights violations and the struggle for democracy. However, the economic role of women's organizations in the redistribution of social goods and services has not been sufficiently studied within the context of neoliberal globalization.

Linking social unionism and gender in Argentina through a new theoretical understanding of globalization.

During the last 20 years women in Argentina have faced the decomposition of a model of social inclusion² (corporatism). They have been casualties and protagonist in the process of the restructuring that the Argentinean government has put into place. While the corporatist model included them through their role as wives and mothers mostly outside the productive sphere, the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s have changed significantly this structure. Women were forced to enter the labour market in order to provide alternative sources of income given the rise in unemployment and the precarization of labour conditions of their partners (Cerutti, 2000). In September 2002 28.8 % of all households in the country were headed by women. This percentage was 26% in 1995 and 22.4% in 1991. In the most affected provinces like Buenos Aires and Córdoba the percentage is over 34% (Clarín On line, 4/09/02). However, women usually get the unstable jobs in the market and generally in the area of services. Half of them perform unskilled labour while only one fourth of the masculine labour force performs this type of labour. In 2002, 30% of working women earned less than \$300, and in 2003 36.2% earn less than \$300 (Clarín On Line, 18/08/03). Feminist literature in Argentina has studied some of the effects of these changes (Feijoo, 1994; Jaquette, 1994; Auyero, 2003b; Brooksbank, 1997), however for the most part, it has not pointed out the direct connections among women's actions and its global causes³.

Regarding the economic and political aspects of globalization, Robert Cox (Cox 1986:204-254) reveals links between new social forces and the international production system, "it is through these forces that [globalization's] major political consequences vis-

² Even though incomplete and highly unequal in terms of gender, corporatism had established a certain way in which women could express their demands through the position they occupied within the family. For this reason, the first responses to the political and economic changes brought by neoliberalism were based on those traditional roles: mothers (Madres de Plaza de Mayo) during the 1970's and housewives (Amas de Casa) during the economic struggles of the 1980's. However, 20 years of women's activism and the transformations within the labour movement made possible the construction of a different social roles: female-workers.

³ It is extremely difficult to find literature that reflects the international aspects of the transformations of women's political participation. However, the work of Marcela Cerutti (2000) on "Economic Reforms, Structural Adjustment and Female Labor Force Participation in Buenos Aires, Argentina" establishes some of the gendered links between the transformations taking place in the global economy and the effects on the Argentinean Labour Market.

à-vis the nature of states and future world orders may be anticipated" (1986:234). Taking into account this relationship between the national and international spheres it is also possible to explain the capitalist nature of globalization and its effects on the working class and women. Complementing this explanation, Leo Panitch (1996:87-113) discusses the Marxist theory of the state, which provided a counterpoint to conventional liberal pluralist and social democratic understanding of the state. Those older theories were founded on the notion that the liberal democratic polity had freed itself from the determining power of capital (Panitch 1996:83). Panitch concludes that states are an ever more integral element in the development and reproduction of capital, and that the certain degree of autonomy of states was a functional condition (due to the competitiveness of the economy and the capitalists) for the defence and reproduction of the system.

However, these two approaches have been criticized for not making specific reference to the gendered aspects of social and productive relations (Whitworth, 1989:265-72). Some Latin American feminists therefore, have begun to deny the existence of a hierarchy between class and gender oppression, instead they favour an approach in which class struggle and gender issues intersect (Stoltz, 1992:46). Other scholars have criticized the fact that neo-Marxist approaches remain centred in the economic sphere. For example, Eschle notes that Marxist analysis of globalization by locating the centre of power in the state and in the capitalist economy ignore the sources of power that derive from multiple sites of oppression including cultural and social spheres (Eschle, 2001:178-9). This idea derives from a post-modern interpretation of how power is created and reproduced in multiple sites. This is important for gender differences are historically and socially created and reproduced making visible the meaning of difference. In other words, gender difference is taken within the context of globalization.

How can this theoretical understanding of globalization help explain social unionism and gender in Argentina? As new struggles arise, new spaces of contestation and new socially constructed actors arise too. The growing number of unemployed and informal workers that has emerged from the neoliberal mode of production⁴ has created a crisis of representation for the people that used to define themselves as workers including the transformation of male and female roles as "breadwinners" and "home caretakers" respectively. Under such conditions, alternative meaning systems and practices exist and are (re)created in the universe of political discourse, a space within which actors struggle over representation and identities are socially constructed" (Jenson 1990:3). The process of re-definition of the identity of the Argentinean workers under the new model of labour and social relations (Catalano and Novik 1995:91) has revealed increasing fragmentation within the working class, but at the same time it has also motivated a search for social and political solidarity among emerging identities like women, retired, disable, indigenous peoples to protest and counter the negative effects of Neoliberalism.

Cultural aspects of identity formation regain value and influence the reconstruction of the social network (Eschle, 2001:58). These cultural characteristics are the main feature of the New Social Movements (NSM). Some scholars have also linked the emergence of NSMs to a progressive crisis of democratic functioning. For example Manuel Castells (1997: 342-349) identifies a crisis of the liberal nation-state, no longer

⁴ This mode responds to the flexibilization of labour and post-fordism.

able to fulfill its welfare obligations under the current economic conditions of globalization causing the citizens distrust and development of multiple identities. Castells also sees a crisis in of the party system “that has lost its appeal and trustworthiness, and, for all practical purposes, is a bureaucratic reminder deprived of public confidence” (Castells, 1997: 343).

As labour markets become fragmented and workers strive for the reconstruction of a new identity that brings their demand to the political arena, the old labour movement undergoes a substantial transformation. New social movements are seen as spaces of resistance to the pervasive economic and political effects of globalization but they also represent spaces for the creation of political alternatives. Civil society is revitalized as a political actor who can contest and generate power.

The CTA: Women, Workers, Citizens

Workers and Women under Corporatism: Peronism and the Conservative Welfare State

The decision to incorporate new social actors such as the unemployed, women, and indigenous federations to make the CTA work along the lines of social movement unionism, does not only have its roots in the structural transformations of the Argentine labour market. It is necessary to highlight the transformation in the political and institutional bases that supported labour unions until the 1990's. The 1940s corporatist model of Peronism was able to accommodate the interaction of only three actors: the state, capital and labour⁵. The political identities of the actors were socially constructed to fit into this trilateral relation. Changes in the international economic structure introduced by neoliberalism narrowed the space that corporatism had given to the working class. Cox has suggested the alliance between government and business that directs the economic transformations of neoliberalism creates a number of disadvantaged and excluded groups (Cox 1987:288). And he notes:

Those groups have frequently passive relationship to the welfare services and lack influence in the making of policy. They are disproportionately the young, women, immigrant or minority groups, and the unemployed. The restructuring of production tends to increase their numbers. Since these groups are fragmented and relatively powerless, their exclusion has generally passed unchallenged. It does however contain a latent threat to the corporatist processes ... The narrowing basis of corporatism (particularly as regards its labour component) on which state-capitalist

⁵ Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports (Schmitter quoted in Patroni 1999).

As Patroni suggests (1999), corporatism in Argentina has served the interests of the three interested parties. Corporatism has given labour organizations a political coherence and a level of organization that allowed them to become very powerful political actors. At same time it has given diverse governments (democratic as well as military) the power to promote their economic strategies for development which included the benefits of protection and subsidization to the local capitalist elites.

development must rest does contain a latent contradiction to democratic legitimacy... the excluded groups available for mobilization into a counterhegemony would be considerable... (Cox 1987:297-8)

However, while Cox makes reference to the possibility of excluded groups as agents of change in the development and consolidation of hegemonic ideas, he does not contemplate the possibility that those groups may become incorporated into the scheme of trade unionism. The emergence of the CTA demonstrates that, in the historical and material conditions of Argentina, the integration of the demands of workers and non-workers can be articulated into a model of trade unionism that works towards the transformation of its own structure.

It can be argued that the historical evolution of Argentinean women's political participation (inclusion/exclusion system) starts with Peron's corporatist regime (1946-55) and the establishment of a conservative welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1987, 1994) that relied on the unification of social citizenship, full employment, mass education, and well-functioning industrial relations systems (Borelli, 2001). The traditional model represented by the Peronist General Confederation of Workers (*CGT – Confederación General de Trabajadores*) was exclusively intended to represent the interests of the workers. According to Palomino, this is due to the early incorporation of urban wage earners to the labour market. "The labour market became a social institution in the sense that several services of protection and guaranties for the workers and their families were articulated through the salary" (Palomino 2000:2, my translation). In this way the incorporation of society in participatory political spaces occurred solely through the salary, excluding the political interests of those who did not earn one. This also meant the subordination of non-workers' (women, peasants, students, retired people) interests to the interests of the breadwinner/head of the family (usually male). The participatory model of the CGT was based in the compulsory membership of formal workers only.

Still, this arrangement was able to absorb masses of de-ruralized workers and raise real earnings and living conditions for the vast majority of the population. However, this system was organized around the political economy of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), which accommodated social policy regimes and power relationships depending on the way resources were allocated among state, market and households. This regime puts family at the centre, while the role of the market remains marginal and the role of the state is subsidiary to the family. Employment becomes a key element in this model for the breadwinner and his family enjoys an acceptable living standard and social benefits only as long as his employment status is favourable.

We can detect inequalities that are related in this model, first from the employment/unemployment situation of the worker, and second from the bargaining power of the worker's union to negotiate salary levels. But equally important, there are inequalities between the independent status of the male breadwinner as natural recipient of social rights, and the rest of the family who lack the autonomy to claim those rights directly. Under this conservative regime, the family was also a fundamental services provider, especially taking care of children and old people. Women were responsible for the unpaid care economy, becoming heavily dependent on the "breadwinner". On the other hand, the state relied on the "safety net" provided by the family and did not establish social policies to provide for services already provided in the private sphere. As Zabaleta points out:

The crucial role of women in the economy was revalued by Peronism, but unequally, with women's contribution to production being minimized in contrast to the exaltation of their domestic roles in the traditional sense. In short, here were the new fathers and heads of family and the new housewives required by the new model of capital accumulation. (Zabaleta, 77, 1997)

As the failure of ISI policies became evident, economic restructuring towards neoliberalism started to be implemented, disrupting the social arrangements that underlined the inclusion/exclusion of women as part of the family. In contrast to the previous conservative regime, the breadwinner in a neoliberal model is responsible for the quality of life of his household, not the state, and *he/she* should be able to prevent social risks alone. Women in this changing structure also became breadwinners by entering the formal or informal market. Their responsibility in the public sphere becomes visible and the previous barriers begin to break. Feminist scholar Nikki Craske and Magdalena León have pointed out the influence of economic and political transformations on women's political participation in Latin America (Craske, 1999; León, 1994). As Fisher argues:

As male breadwinners fell victim to a wave of unemployment, women were forced to find paid work; as savage cuts in government spending put medical care out of the reach of the working class families, women started their own health campaigns; when hunger and despair struck their communities, they combined their efforts, setting up communal self-help projects to feed their families; and when members of their families fell victim of political persecution and 'disappearance', they organized public protests that brought attention to the international community. In the name of motherhood and the family, women extended their domestic role into the public arena, and in the process they transformed not only politics, but also the challenged traditional ideas about women (Fisher, 1993:2).

During the 1990's the government of President Menem accentuated the process of internationalization of the state (Cox 1986:230-232) through the reform of the state and regional economic integration. The policies comprised in these programs have negatively affected the Argentinean working class and caused many different responses at the national level (Panitch 1996:110). Workers negatively affected by those processes lost their spaces of representation within the traditional trade union system. Workers in sectors related to the government services (mostly health and education with an overwhelming female proportion), privatized enterprises and the productive sectors exposed to international competitiveness have been displaced from their jobs or subject to deteriorating labour conditions. I will examine how international and national changes in production are reflected in the creation of the CTA and to what extent this federation of workers presents an alternative vision and praxis of corporatist unionism conducive to the development of a more participatory way of doing politics including gender concerns.

I argue that changes in the international economic structure of production and their national and regional implications via implementation of neoliberal policies have caused the segmentation and precarization of the labour market. The state has altered the traditional “contract of work law” (Palomino 2000:15) to favour capital accumulation, leaving the workers as well as the unemployed, both women and men, in need of finding new modalities of inclusion in working class struggles as well as contentious politics in general.

External Factors in the Formation of the CTA: International and National Setting

The international context during which the CTA was created can be identified as the consolidation and expansion of globalization. At the beginning of the 1980's the international debt crisis put an end to the projects of developing countries regarding the new international economic order. The *Pax Americana*⁶ seemed to have overcome its difficulties, and ideas associated with globalization of capital and production became hegemonic. Developing countries adopted the logic of internationalization of the state, which led to the abandonment of ISI policies in favor of export oriented strategies (Cox 1996:21-30). The payment of the external debt required states to reduce public expenditure, devalue currencies⁷ and facilitate the free movement of capital, which exposed the vulnerability of national and local enterprises (Cox 1996:22).

Argentina started to take the road towards neoliberalism during the military government of the late 1970's. The process of internationalization of the state and internationalisation of production caused the reversion of ISI policies, which resulted in growing de-industrialization. It also entailed the progressive liberalization and deregulation of trade and finance. Different administrations followed the path of structural adjustment programs within the framework of national political and economic restrictions such as the power of trade unions and political opposition to block the advancement of economic reforms. However, the Menem administration attempted to eliminate completely those restrictions and was capable of implementing policies that had been previously resisted and blocked by organized labour. The most clear examples of the successful implementation of the reform of the state are the a) privatization of state owned enterprises, b) decentralization of social services (transfer of national administrations to provincial and municipal jurisdictions), and c) politization of the federal administration (promoting the participation – and cooptation - of trade union leaders in the restructuring process of the national administration⁸). These measures deeply affected the quality and conditions of the private and public sector labour force in

⁶ Pax Americana has been defined by Robert Cox as a new hegemonic world order that formed under the leadership of the United States of America, which marked the “victory of the liberal internationalists over the proponents of state capitalism”(Cox 1987:214). The new hegemonic order implied the adaptation of national states and economies to the dynamics of the world economy. Third World countries such as Argentina are defined as neo-mercantilist developmentalist states that seek to increase their bargaining power in the economic system without breaking their relationships with the center, “transforming classic dependency into dependent development”(Cox 1987:232).

⁷ In the case of Argentina we observe devaluations during the Alfonsín administration that brought about a hyperinflation spiral in 1989. The Menem administration also continued with these policies during the first months of its mandate which also ended up causing a second hyperinflation in 1991.

⁸ The UPCN (the Union of Civil Personnel of the Nation) was incorporated in the negotiation table and co-opted (via increments in salaries and threaten to be fire) into the selection of the personnel to be eliminated of the public function.

Argentina (Orlansky 1996:79-81). Through privatization, decentralization and restructuring, more than 200,000 state jobs were eliminated and with them also the money to implement better social services such as education and health care among others. Moreover, the budget constraints in the state sector and the competitive standards in the private sector paved the way for the flexibilization and precarization of labour, which went against the working standards achieved by the traditional General Confederation of Workers (CGT) under the corporatist modality of Peronism.

The high degree of success in the implementation of these policies has its origins in both the international and national environments. The expansion of globalization was presented as inevitable and states presented as mere instruments for the advancement of neoliberal hegemony, incapable of posing any resistance. There is a transnational process of consensus formation among the official caretakers of the global economy. This process generates consensual guidelines, underpinned by the ideology of globalization, that are transmitted into the policy-making channels of national governments and big corporations (Cox 1992:30-31). Within national politics in order to implement the Reform of the State, president Menem took advantage of a weak political opposition⁹ and also resorted to the utilization of presidential decrees¹⁰.

The consequences of neoliberal policies for the Argentinean labour force have been significant. The labour market has undergone considerable transformations regarding its structure and composition. Unemployment has grown rapidly compared to the employment rates during the ISI periods¹¹. The recent decade has been characterized by the "segmentation of the labour market based on the growth of open unemployment, the unfolding of underemployment, and the migration of wage earners to the self-employed and informal sector" (Catalano and Novick 1995:87, my translation). Furthermore, the quality and conditions of work have declined regarding real wages¹², employment stability, and social protection. While in 1980 68% of the Economic Active Population (EAP) had access the totality of labour benefits, in 1991 only 60% of the EAP could access them. This situation has worsened and in 1997 only 28.4% of the Economic Active Population could be considered as formal wage earners and therefore eligible for labour benefits¹³.

The most important features of the new model of labour relations in Argentina can be summarized within the logic of labour flexibility and national and international competitiveness: a) Restructuring of the time of work: intensification of work according to the preferences of the employer; b) Short term duration contracts to stimulate job

⁹ This refers mainly to the policies regarding the process of privatisation of State owned enterprises and flexibilization of labour.

¹⁰ The measures implanted by the government included the restriction of the right to strike (Decree 2184), reductions in public sector salaries (Decrees 485 and 612), legalization of precarious forms of employment (Laws 24,013 and 14,467), the negotiation of increases in salaries according to increment in productivity (Decree 470), and the restriction of the liabilities for work related accidents (Law 24,028) (Patroni, 1999:26-7).

¹¹ During the years of ISI unemployment never was higher than 3% of the Active Economic Population. (Catalano and Novick, 1995: 87)

¹² According to Palomino (2000:15), industrial real wages have declined 10% between 1980 and 1990 and the have continue to deteriorate during the 1990's.

¹³ The rest of the working force is divided as follows: Unemployed 17%, Self-employed 17.3%, Non-paid workers 1.3%, informal workers 23%, Workers with limited time contracts 3.3%, Probation Workers 5.0%, others 5%. Source: Data extracted from the Encuesta permanente de Hogares elaborated by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses 1997.

creation, and c) Reduction of social and labour benefits regarding health. It is evident that the new model of the 1990's has replaced the corporatist modality of the Fordist mode of production compatible with ISI. Labour precarization – mainly through subcontracting, outsourcing - has become legal and, the traditional Law of Contract of Work (Palomino 2000:15-16), which determined the conditions of stable work, health and retirement benefits provided by the employer in the previous labour relations framework, is less and less applicable to the remaining working population.

Palomino notes that: "The work done within the new context [flexibilization] is subject to new modalities of hiring and even though the contents and nature of the tasks remain the same, they vary considerably in their social organization and symbolic representations" (Palomino 2000:18, my translation). This is reflected in the workers radical changes in the sense of 'belonging' to the working class. This situation has caused trade unions to lose the capacity to recruit their members among traditional labour structures. Thus, it becomes necessary for the unions to re-define the parameters of their function, their membership and the very definition of the concept of workers. Catalano and Novick state:

New labour relations have emerged where the union system seems to have strong difficulties in determining – from the worker's perspective – the nature of the new institutions that must direct the wage relation within an accumulation model that promote strong exclusions, segmentation of labour forces and the formation of a new worker's profile (Catalano and Novick 1995:91, my translation).

There is a lack of representation and this vacuum calls for the creation of a system that through the adoption of a wider idea of worker's identity can represent those who have been excluded by the new labour relations of this economic model. The CTA emerges as an alternative source of representation for those who are enmeshed in the new labour relations. At the same time, the CTA, while widening its representative base, opens a political space for those social sectors that were never included in the social construction of the worker's identities such as the poor, peasants, indigenous peoples, and more importantly, women.

Internal Factors within the CTA: Politics, Ideology and Relations with other Groups.

Initially, the CTA emerged as a source of representation that could project the voices of those workers suffering the consequences of the economic reforms. As the CTA looked for an autonomous way of representation in the public scene, their members realized the importance of incorporating other sectors that were equally hit by neoliberalism, and were also looking for new spaces for political action. Ex-workers, students, retired people, and diverse social movements who had become socially and economically excluded from the system could be incorporated in order to form a new common front opposed the neoliberal paradigm.

In contrast with the traditional Peronist unions, the ideological profile of the CTA includes the defence of citizens and human universal rights rather than the sole

promotion of particular labour interests. It is for this reason that several social sectors¹⁴ participate in most of the protests, including general strikes and road blockages, organized or supported by the CTA. It is important to note that even though the protests are initially based on work related issues they include more general goals concerning different sectors of the population. According to Iñigo and Catarelo, this integrative characteristic of social protests can point to a possible relation between wider participation and the “emergence of organizational forms that go beyond the already constituted institutions such as popular assemblies or direct democracy” (Iñigo and Catarelo 2000:83, my translation).

Since it was based on the compulsory membership of formal workers, the model of the CGT did not require any strong association with other social fractions; its only association – and that not completely institutionalized – being with the Peronist party. In contrast, since the CTA has adopted a model that allows the membership of individuals regardless of their employment status, it “defines the membership as an ideological/political option rather than a mere instrument of collective negotiation” (Catalano and Novick 1995:95). In other words, people join the CTA because they share the ideological and political causes for which the CTA is fighting: “to continue the fight against the neoliberal model and against those who apply or attempt to apply the model in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres” (Anuario de la CTA 1999:6, my translation). As a result, the CTA has associated itself with more than 240 social organizations from which almost half of them are not based on workers’ rights. Among these associations we can find several associations of retired people¹⁵, disabled people, the unemployed¹⁶, informal workers¹⁷, peasants and indigenous groups¹⁸, and other associations such as the movement of illegal occupants and the federation of slums and marginal neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires.

Women in the CTA have organized the *Gender Equity and Equal Opportunity Secretariat* and participate actively in all general assemblies as a block. The main axes of work are defined as:

- Feminization of Poverty: Women are more likely to be poor than men
- Leading role of women in popular protest: more than 60% in 2001-2002
- Decriminalization of abortion and promotion of Reproductive Rights

The Secretariat has stated the necessity of constructing a social and political movement that recognizes the particular importance of gendered political spaces in the construction of democracy, sovereignty, and distribution. Women of the CTA participated in the XVII National Encounter of Women and lead the workshops on

- Women, Contraception, and Abortion
- Women, Power, and Politics

¹⁴ Usually picket lines are formed by community associations, indigenous confederations, and women's organizations, students and other social sectors accompanied by members of the CTA.

¹⁵ Mesa Coordinadora de Jubilados y Pensionados Plenario Permanente de Organizaciones de Jubilados; Centro de Jubilados de La Matanza, Jubilados del Banco Provincia, Centro de Jubilados Señaleros.

¹⁶ UTD (Unión de Trabajadores Desocupados), SOD (Sociedad Obrera de Desocupados),

¹⁷ Trabajadores Transitorios Ingenio Las Palmas

¹⁸ MICH (Movimiento Indigenista del Chaco), Asociación de Comunidades y Pueblos Guaraníes, Unión de Trabajadores Rurales de Río Negro, Comunidad Toba Saenz Peña (Chaco), Unión de Campesinos Poriahjú.

- Women and the Construction of Political Power
- Women and Prostitution

At the end of the Congress more than 9000 women marched together with the following slogans: "Nation yes, Colony no", "Popular Unity", and "Contraceptives not to have abortions, Legal abortion to not die". We could argue that the construction of women's identity has to do with several levels of concern such as colonialism and domination, unity, and reproductive rights. All of these aspects are women's issues, or the issues that women consider most important. Some feminist scholars would argue that the first two interests are not necessarily women's issues, but the fact that these women construct their political identity around those issues and naming themselves women denotes the importance of understanding feminism within changing cultural, economic and social contexts.

Besides the Secretariat, women's organizations are present within the CTA in the association of sex workers¹⁹. The Association of Sex Workers with the support of the CTA has recently organized a federal march that lasted 4 days and culminated on November 25, 2002 in the City of Mar del Plata to commemorate the "International Day of Violence against Women". The CTA is also associated to women's community groups such as the Home of the Admirable Mother among others. This is an especially important fact for some students of social movements have suggested that organizing women within the matrix of traditional labour unions "fails to address the intersections of the public and private spheres, of production and reproduction, which lead to women's subordination" (Gabriel and Macdonald 1996:182). They note that "women do not compartmentalize the world", rather they integrate their working issues with their community issues. The CTA has opened a window of opportunity for women to address the question regarding "what kind of new unionism women want" (Gabriel and Macdonald 1996:181). The incorporation community groups gives women the opportunity of raising their voices as political actors within the new social movement unionism scheme of the CTA

This particular form of women's participation implies an important change in the perception and construction of women's identities as workers, women, mothers, sexual workers, politicians, etc... Their participation and search for unity and collaboration starts by recognizing all the differences that separate them, such as class, religion, politics, and culture. However the ultimate goal is to understand those differences and act with awareness of diversity to find common goals and set priorities of action. The on-going economic and political transformation that was initiated by Neoliberal globalization reached its climax with the national political and economic crisis that developed in December 2001. At that point traditional political institutions (even though functioning under democratic mechanisms) were no longer able to provide citizens with a legitimate sentiment of political representation. As Jenson argues, in the moment of crisis new identities and new claims can develop (Jenson 1990:4). As institutional renewal was under way within the traditional trade union structure, the crisis gave the opportunity to women to re-construct their identity and make new claims in the way they consider applies to their experience. Because of their experiences and social location, the women of the CTA have a distinctive understanding of all aspects of society and therefore by bringing their unique perspective to the political debate they contribute

¹⁹ The CTA is the first trade union that recognize prostitutes as sex workers.

to develop a more inclusive and participatory approach to politics (Young, 1998: 402). They have proved to be aware of the general negative effects of the crisis, nonetheless they have also proved to be seriously concerned with the development of a gender perspective within their own institution and in society in general when in the last encounter they declared that "issues of class cannot be resolved if gender issues are not resolved too" (www.cta.org.ar/institucional/gener/xviiencuentro.html).

Conclusion: Globalization, Social Mobilization, and Gender: A possibility of Social Change?

The process of globalization has deeply affected the way in which productive and political forces were articulated in Argentina. Argentina has moved from an import substitution model of industrialization towards a neoliberal model of development based on export promotion. As the new model was installed, the corporatist bases for social inclusion could no longer be sustained, and consequently neither could the traditional mechanism for political and social cohesion. The ensuing fragmentation of the labour market resulted in the fragmentation and polarization of society.

The consequences of this process have been strongly felt by the most vulnerable sectors of the population and the evidence presented in this essay suggests that women workers as a marginalized group have organized different kinds of social resistance. They have modified trade union structures to address new problems introduced by globalization and opened up the political imaginary as well as the membership of their organization. Other experiences could not be studied here because of space but are worth mentioning, such as the *piqueteros* (unemployed workers), who have developed new forms of direct and horizontal participation through assemblies, opening spaces that are widening the universe of traditional political structures; as well as the marginalized poor who have organized themselves into cooperatives and community organizations to deal with poverty and protest.

It is imperative to note that even though organizations such as the CTA might have started as protest-driven, they also show capacity for self-organization to debate the current economic and political circumstances and, more importantly, to generate immediate solutions as well as organized rules and procedures and viable alternative political proposals for the long term. As we have seen, women have participated actively in this framework. They have even taken leading roles in the development and promotion of particular forms of doing politics. Even though more time is needed to follow up on the development of these organizations, women's activities in the Argentinean case suggest that economic and political transformations in Argentina are driving the (re) construction of women's identities and strategies within the political arena, and are creating the basis for the emergence of a more inclusive and democratic citizenship given that women's movements are, "compatible with the idea of collective, democratic citizenship on a wider scale" (Dietz, 1998: 393).

In conclusion, social movement unionism, neighborhood assemblies, and community organizations demonstrate a current turn (or claim) to a more comprehensive way of doing politics and women can and have shown that their participation increases as more inclusive alternative political conceptions and practices are introduced to the universe of political discourse and action.

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