La Señora Presidenta.
Feminist policy-making by female Latin-American presidents?

“Imagine, when they named me Defence Minister: I was a woman, a socialist, separated, agnostic; all the sins together. There could have been a lot of mistrust from the commanders-in-chief” Michelle Bachelet quoted by Hannah Hennessy on TimesOnline (Dec 5, 2005)

"I bring a lot of passion to my life and my politics — I don't mind saying there is a very strong Latin component to it. I'm a daughter of the middle class with a strong sense of social mobility and individualism, like the waves of immigrants, like my Spanish grandparents, who made Argentina...My advantage is largely a product of President Kirchner's political project, which has produced strong economic growth without [...] unemployment and institutional ruptures...We're both lawyers, and it's considered rare that professional women like us are also wives of Presidents. And don't forget, one difference is that I was a Senator before my husband became President. But I think our style of argumentation is similar in the sense that women today bring a different face to politics. We're culturally formed to be citizens of two worlds, public and private. We're wrapped up as much in what our daughters' school principal says as we are in what the newspapers are saying — we see the big geopolitical picture but also the smaller daily details of our citizens' lives.” Cristina Kirchner quoted by Time (Sep 29, 2007)

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1 Available at: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article745181.ece (Accessed 2008-11-25)
2 Available at: http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1666879,00.html (Accessed 2008-11-25)
Abstract
The following thesis is dedicated to the investigation of the comparative gender discourse of two of the current South American female Presidents: Michelle Bachelet, the first woman elected President in Chile for a four year term, in 2006 and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the first woman elected President in Argentina also for a four year term, but in 2007. Using secondary sources and critical discourse analysis, the study attempts to characterize their agenda on gender both before and after their election campaigns. Recognizing that a candidate must balance between many actors, as one of the principles of social constructivism runs, the essay presents a short history of the feminist movement in both countries and the current state that the movement finds itself in, either institutionalized or absorbed and fragmented by party politics. The conclusions that the study arrives to are that, of the two subjects, the one who has presented a more concrete and convincing stand on gender thanks to her political views, the space created for feminism by her coalition and the climate of her country, is Michelle Bachelet.

Key-words: social-constructivism, feminism, gender equality, gender representation, Michelle Bachelet, Cristina de Kirchner, Chile, Argentina, women, South America

List of abbreviations
CDA Critical discourse analysis
FTTA Free Trade Agreement of the Americas
IPU Inter-Parliamentary Union
UNDP United Nations’ Development Programme
GEM Gender Empowerment Measurement
GDI Gender-related Development Index
HDI Human Development Index

Argentina
SACRA Sindicato de Amas de Casa de la República Argentina/ Housewives’ Union of the Argentine Republic
APC Buenos Aires Housewives Movement
LAC La Liga de las Amas de Casa/The League of Housewives
CGT Confederación General de Trabajadores/ General Confederation of Labourers
UCR Unión Civica Radical/ Radical Civic Union
PJ Partido Justicialista/ Justicialist Peronist Party
CESMA Centro de Estudios Sociales de la Mujer/ Argentina Centre for Social Studies of the Argentine Woman

Chile
CERC Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea/ Centre for the Study of the Contemporary Reality
SERNAM Servicio National de la Mujer/ The National Ministry of Women
RN Renovación Nacional/ National Renovation
PS Partido Socialista/ Socialist Party (member of Concertación)
PPD Partido por la Democracia/ Party for Democracy (member of Concertación)
PDC Partido Demócrata Cristiano/ Christian Democratic Party (member of Concertación)
CPD Concertación/Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia/ The Coalition for Democracy
PR Partido Radical/Radical Party
UDI Unión Democrática Independiente/ Independent Democratic Union
UMS Union de Mujeres Socialistas/ The Union of Socialist Women
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1. Introduction
   1.1. Background
Latin American politics is known around the world for three things: populist authoritarian leaders (some of which have successfully constructed full-blown personality cults like that of Evita and Juan Perón in Argentina), late democratic development and machistic hierarchical societies. The Southern cone is furthermore known for the debt crisis, its descending into Purgatory during the 70s and the 80s when state-sponsored political violence, perpetrated by military leaders known in Argentina as the Dirty War and, more generally, as the Violencia, became the rule; and more recently it has become infamous for the rejection of the neo-liberalist model by some left-inclined governments and the continent-wide rejection of a FTAA. Today it is also known for the gradual rise to power of the ‘gender in the shadows’: in the last two decades Latin America has had five elect female presidents: Violeta Chamorro (1990-1997) in Nicaragua, Janet Rosenberg Jagan (1997-1999) in Guyana (a country which is in fact culturally and politically part of the Commonwealth of Nations, but is geographically part of the mainland of South America), Mireya Moscoso (1999-2004) in Panama and, more recently, Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) in Chile and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2011) in Argentina; three interim women presidents in the persons of Maria Estela (Isabelita) Martinez Cartas de Perón (1974-1976) in Argentina, whose husband died while in office, Lydia Gueiler Tejada (1979-1980) in Bolivia, both removed from office by military coups, and Rosalia Arteaga Serrano (1997) in Ecuador, who served briefly as president during a constitutional crisis in February of that year, a couple of close calls with Ingrid Betancourt (Colombia), Graciela Fernandez Majide (Argentina), Mona Irene Lailin Sáez Conde (Venezuela), Blanca Margarita Ovelar de Duarte (Paraguay) and Lourdes Flores Nano (Perú), who were all in the lead in their respective campaigns for presidency for quite a while before they were outrun by their male counter-candidates.

Although post-1983 Argentina can be characterized as a ‘crisis-ridden’ democracy because of the consistent economical problems and abuse of power by the Menem administration, the country, unlike other crisis-plagued regimes in Latin America, remained fully democratic throughout the 1990s while dodging the most severe depression in its history. The democracy here survived without being tinted by neo-populism foremostly due to the societal consensus against military rule enforced by the relatively stable party system, the powerful media and civic watch-dog mechanisms which publicly denounced and questioned political abuses (Levitsky 2005:63-4; Waisman 1999:108). The previous breakdowns were related to the failure of the party system to integrate powerful organized interests (the dysfunctionality of the Conservative party and the deterioration of the labour movement who was unable to disperse into multi-class populist parties in order to formulate political positions) that pleaded to the military for a solution whenever it felt itself to be under threat (Levitsky 2005:67; Waisman 1999:97). However difficult, the 80s were a time of empowerment for the Argentines who collaborated fervently in defining democratic rules for the political game (constructing a civil society opposed to violence and military rule, engendering an independent press, transforming the misrepresented interests of the right and the labour movement into political parties) and opposed by means of public demonstrations any threat against the development of civil and democratic freedoms (Levitsky 2005:68-9). The two-party system (Peronist Party (PJ) which appeals to the working and lower classes and the centrist Radical Civic Union (UCR) which, together with smaller left-of-centre and conservative provincial parties, represent the upper and middle classes) took to integrative measures and cooperated in avoiding societal polarization and governability crises. To a certain extent it is fair to say that it was exactly the influence amassed by the civil society and the party system that created a part of the governmental irregularities during the following two decades because although it was agreed that democracy would be the name of the game, there was little agreement about what the rules within that game would be. Whereas mass demonstrations ended the presidencies of elect leaders Raul Alfonsin and Fernando de la Rua and interim presidents Adolfo Rodriguez Saa and Eduardo Duhalde, Carlos Menem used his power in his first term to challenge the executive-legislative relation to effectively halt the prosecution of the military
officials responsible for human rights abuses, to change the size of the Supreme Court so as to
give the executive an ‘automatic majority’ and to modify the Constitution to permit presidents
two terms in office (Levitsky 2005:71-3; Waisman 1999:100-3).

It is hard to comprehend and even underestimate the size of the social damage and democratic
deficit stirred by the Menem government: the Convertibility Law of 1991 had disarmed
governments of policy tools to respond with in case of widespread economical crisis, the stacked
unemployment effectively excluded population in the double digits from political participation,
the corruption scandals and threats on the judicial autonomy of federal courts and the Supreme
Court, structural adjustment programmes, all of the making of Carlos Menem, decimated
electorate trust well into the presidency of Fernando de la Rua who, together with the two
following interim presidents, was forced to resign. The extreme mood of hatred towards the
political class is visible in the formula que se vayan todos (“throw all of them out”) shouted by
looters and protesters who, starting in the first days of 2002, proceeded to physically attacking
politicians in the streets (Levitsky 2005:81-2). The state of despair subsided slowly and Argentine
politics stabilized somewhat only in the second part of 2002 when elections were held amidst
party disarray. PJ sported three candidates (Carlos Menem, for a third term, Santa Cruz governor
Néstor Kirchner supported by the current interim president, ex-interim president Adolfo
Rodríguez Saá), Elisa Carrió and Ricardo López Murphy (both antiestablishment politicians)
were the independent personalistic candidates and leftist Autodeterminación y Libertad presented
Luis Zamora as candidate. The run-off between Kirchner and Menem was short lived because the
two-time-president Menem withdrew when he began suspecting that his changes of winning were
low and left the former to set on a deep and wide reform program far removed from the neo-
liberal spirit of the de la Rua and Menem days (Levitsky 2005:85). If the amount of damage done
by the Menem administration is hard to underestimate, the positive effects of the Kirchner
government, supported by local Peronist machineries and activist networks, are hard to overstate:
although the re-equilibration of Argentine economy had started the year before his inauguration
as president of the Republic, Kirchner’s emergency social policies, restoration of pre-2000
economic growth, return of optimism and governability have all prevented a very sure full-scale
meltdown of the political process. Though similar circumstances had led in Peru and Venezuela
to the success of outsider populist candidates, in Argentina the vote gathered around Partido
Justicialista, which guaranteed the partial collapse of the competitors due to lack of elector base
(Levitsky 2005: 86).

Although Levitsky (2005:87) seems to think that leadership did not play a major part in the
post-2000 restoration because Kirchner’s main merit was that of being member of a powerful,
wide-based and grass-rooted political party, it is clear that his wife’s campaign was built upon his
success in exactly this way as she time and time again promised to consolidate the economic
recovery that her husband was responsible for (Caroll & Goni 2008). Besides, other studies
(O’Donnell 1994 and Nino 1996 ref in Waisman 1999:122) tend to highlight the monarchic
tendencies and mafia-like structure of Argentine politics. Since the establishment of an
independent Argentina, strong leaders have been central to the forming of all the major parties:
Julio A. Roca (Conservative Party), Hipólito Yrigoyen (Radical Party) and Juan Perón
(Justicialista Party), but their figures have in time become conventionalized within the ideology.
This only meant that the major figures of the party alliances and coalitions became emancipated
(or even down-right divorced) from the party’s doctrine in a sense and in time two statesmen
belonging to the same party, such as Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner, could take opposing

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3 The Convertibility Law implied that Argentina could employ a parallel currency system in which the peso and the
dollar both legally circulated in Argentina and traded at a peso-dollar rate of 1-to-1. It also gave a peso holder the
right to freely convert one peso into one U.S. dollar which was seen as credible as long as the Central Bank was
required by law to hold foreign reserves to fully cover its peso liabilities. Towards the end of the 1990s, however,
The Central Bank of Argentina began bleeding dollars towards private persons who exchanged pesos in fear of an
approaching inflation and to payments of imports and loans. Investor flight, parallel currencies, mass withdrawals
worsened the problem and the only option left was voluntary devaluation of the peso and the abolition of the Law.
measures so as to reverse and reorient the country (Waisman 1999: 119). Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is the first woman elected president in the history of Argentina. A former long-time senator of Santa Cruz, Cristina Kirchner, running for the Frente para la Victoria (a wing of the Peronist Justicialist Party), captured 45% of the vote, easily surpassing Elisa Carrió (a candidate for the left-of-centre Civic Coalition) by 23% and her husband’s former Economy Minister, Roberto Lavagna backed by the Radical Civic Union, by 17%. Her success is perhaps not so much related to her gender, but has much more to do with the popularity figures of her outgoing husband. During Néstor Kirchner’s presidency (2002-2007) unemployment was cut by almost a half and going down to 27%, consumption increased by almost 52% and the economy grew steadily with almost 9% every year (Levitsky & Murillo 2008:16-7).

After the fall from power of General Pinochet in 1989, Chile experienced nearly a decade of economical recession and democracy experiments at the hands of the multi-party coalition known as Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia, all of whom stand for the No vote in the plebiscite of 1988 concerning the former military leader’s right to continued presidency. Under the guidance of its strongest members, the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, the Radicals and the newly formed Partido por la Democracia (PPD), the coalition managed to put aside historic rivalries and formulate a coherent and disciplined transition plan for Chile which included amongst the top priorities the improvement of economic growth (which had already started to take root before Pinochet’s exit) and social conditions, confront issues of human rights abuses and seek further democratization through the re-establishment of the elected local governments while deepening free-market reforms (Valenzuela 1999:232-3). Despite the 1993 election of Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, a rightist Christian Democrat of the coalition, the parties of Concertación’s left have consistently gained ground in the years since as more of the electorate began identifying with left and left-centrist ideals. By 1998 the former balance was over-turned with as much as 25% of voters as self-placed leftists (Valenzuela 1999:234-5). Because of the circumstances in which Frei Ruiz-Tagle took power (the Asian financial crisis, high unemployment rates and the constant confrontation by the rightist coalition and general Pinochet who had stayed on as commander-in-chief, both favored by the Constitution and the electoral process) and his lack of charisma, Concertación, the president’s own party and the president himself began to exhibit classic symptoms of electorate distrust and political apathy: approval rates were going down rapidly and in the 1997 elections the numbers of absenteeism plus null votes were as high as 40,1% (Valenzuela 1999:236). True to facts, it was only fair to blame the president and his party for underwhelming the electorate with their performance because the 1980 Constitution granted him almost exclusive legislative powers on which he obviously failed to act. This indecisiveness and inertia on the part of Frei Ruiz-Tagle led to the weakening of the transitional government, which was the exact opposite of the intention behind allowing for strong presidential prerogatives (Valenzuela 1999:240). In the midst of heated debate and insecurity, Concertación allowed Ricardo Lagos, a member of the Socialist Party, to redefine the political agenda so as to spark the interest of non-voters and re-enchant those who had fallen between the chairs (Valenzuela 1999:238) and, despite his superhuman efforts, the previous damage done by Frei Ruiz-Tagle with respect to engendering electorate confidence seems to be beyond repair as both of the last presidential elections since needed two rounds to secure a majority. Despite hard moments between 2001 and 2002, by the time of the end of his term in office Ricardo Lagos was experiencing just over 20% rejection which is nearly 30% less than any other democratically elect president in Chile since the restoration of democracy in 1989 (Izquierdo & Nevia 2007:78).

Michelle Bachelet –a former Minister of Health and Defense– coming from the Socialist party (PS) as well and also a member of the Concertación coalition, competed in the 2005-2006 elections against two candidates from the right-wing Alianza coalition: Sebastian Piñera, of Renovación Nacional, and Joaquín Lavín, of the Union Democrática Independiente, and Tomás Hirsch of the left-wing alliance Juntos Podemos Más (Angell 2007:112). Although not running on her husband’s success image (she is separated) it is easy to say that Bachelet profited immensely from her party colleague Ricardo Lagos’ policies that have essentially breathed new
life into the moribund Chilean economy causing a raise in the GDP per capita of over a thousand dollars and reducing the unemployment with nearly one and a half percent while raising the minimum salary by 29% (Angell 2007:113; Morales Quiroga 2008:18).

1.2 Purpose and problem formulation
Although there are many (feminist) studies that approach the question of female legislative power and style, the better part of them are focused on ‘women amongst men’, that is on women who are part of predominately male legislative circles and how their behavior is more or less masculine. This issue is related to two rather concrete problems: on the one hand, there is a pervasive lack of female leadership on the highest level of authority even during our ‘post-modern’ history which directly impacts on the analytical poverty of sources and, on the other, when women do make it into the highest ranks of politics, the interaction woman-to-woman is in reality rather limited because of the lack of a common geographic and cultural denominators. Amongst the collection of feminist studies, there is a lack of comparative case studies of female leaders because of the diversity of cultural and economical variables that have impacted in, for instance, President Tarja Halonen or Chancellor Angela Merkel, acts of taking up power. The fact that Latin America and particularly the Southern Cone is a relatively homogenous region from a cultural and historical point of view eliminates a lot of these otherwise conflictive variables. Therefore, in this essay I intend to investigate whether the two newest South American women presidents, Michelle Bachelet and Cristina de Kirchner, represent a feminist ideology or have a feminist focus in the time that has lapsed since the beginning of their political campaigns for the highest political offices in 2005 and 2007 respectively.

In order to do this I plan to look in detail at three separate campaign questions: why did their parties run women, why did the public (constituencies) vote for women politicians and why did they, the candidates themselves, run. On this step of the analysis, I am interested in revealing whether the candidates ran as feminist women: that means to say if they had defined women as a specially bereft social group which they had the intention to protect or designed plans for promoting more women in the high ranks of high politics, private business related decision-making and on the work market and if that is how they were promoted during their campaigns. Another aspect is the bodies of constituents’ understanding and interpretation of the (feminist) policies that the candidates intended to put into place. It is perhaps so that the incumbents did not present any overtly feminist approach to the reconstruction of post-dictatorship politics, but that one is either expected of them or was induced by the electorate.

Furthermore, there is the question of whether they represent a feminist ideology in their post-election speeches and overall policy-making while in office and if so whether this comes in conflict with their party’s ideology or that of their Congress. In addition, I would like to include a discussion about the fashion in which gender is constructed in the speeches of the presidents and in the Latin American society at large referring in particular to how they (unwillingly and maybe even unconsciously) support and reproduce misogynist prejudices about women’s inability to lead.

1.3. Delimitations of the study
Since the study is concerned with the presidencies of Michelle Bachelet and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the time line under investigation cannot be another than that of their campaigns and of the subsequent time in office up to the present date. However, since both of the ladies have been close to power a number of years before through their official posts as Minister of Health and later of Defense (Bachelet) and as governor (de Kirchner), a number of references to these periods must be included as well as references regarding the historical development of their parties’ ideology which stand out of the above proposed time frame. During the research period dedicated to this study, the need for representing relevant part of the development of feminism in the two countries discussed became obvious as I did not want to give the impression that the two leaders of state evolved in an ideological void. In order to understand possible present
expressions of feminism in their respective presidencies, it is paramount that their brand be related its forerunners and contemporary, but different, forms of feminism that have also become institutionalized. Thus I have enhanced the timeline back to the dictatorship days so that I can introduce flashbacks, still pictures, which epitomize various forms of feminism. With respect to the geographical restrictions, as this is a comparative case study based on the formulation of domestic policy, this paper is restricted to the space of the Southern Cone of Latin America and more specifically to the two countries in question: Chile and Argentina.

1.4. Other studies
The studies done on women in Latin America usually encompass two dimensions of the gendered imagery in the region. On the one hand they refer to the structural factors (the economical perspective) that downplay women’s productive performance despite their double role as part of the normal work force and unpaid labourers, on which the welfare of most families depends, and the elements that strangle the positive effects of their increased (political) integration in civil society in the support of democracy. Other studies discuss the cultural transformations of which women are the symbols (and only in a limited amount of cases the engines of) and which continue to affect women’s subordination in society. More complex analyses which amalgamate both outlooks have looked into the interrelations between gender, class and ethnicity with regard to employment and political participation (Melhuus & Stølen 1996:12-13). The general tendency with all Latin American gender research is its economic and ethnical underpinnings appears to be lop-siding feminist influenced investigation away from any deep cultural analysis of how gender differences are perceived, discussed, categorized and symbolized (all of which could be labeled the social construction or attribution of gender inequalities) and how these attitudes influence in the construction of justification of female subordination (Melhuus & Stølen 1996:14).

1.5. Structure
The structure of the study is very basic: while the following theoretical fragment will elaborate, besides presenting the theoretical approach that we have to our data, upon the concept of feminism in the attempt to identify which areas of domestic policy may be of interest to a feminist politician, the methods and material segment will describe our sources and explain the reasons behind excluding certain types of literature. The body of analysis of the essay is threefold and contains, besides arguments to support our thesis derived from secondary material, our own analysis of crucial speeches given by each of the female leaders under investigation. While in the case of Michelle Bachelet, who has had both a longer term and generally has a higher presence at conferences dedicated to gender issues, the number of discourses that I have settled on is five, Cristina de Kirchner is represented in this investigation with four interventions. Since it is impossible to construct policies in void, preceding the results of these close readings, there are included defining moments of the development of feminism in both countries as backgrounds to the commitment exhibited by the two presidents. A conclusion will follow thereafter noting the progress done to answer the proposed questions and to suggest further possible studies into the matter.

2. Theoretical approach
The development of social constructivism into a fashionable challenger to the established security paradigms within International relations in just under fifteen years is quite an achievement. Initially inspired by sociological and critical theory, social constructivism intends to draw attention to the origins and possible interpretations of states’ interests and the changing character of the organization of world politics (Barnett 2006:252). Since neo-liberalism and neo-realism, both ideologies that dominated the scene of International relations during the 1990s and earlier, take the international structure, power maximizing strategies or the existence of certain supra-governmental organizations for given, constructivism sought to explain how social structures constitute or influence the perception of reality and the meanings actors the give to their activities.
(Barnett 2006:254). Like liberalism, social constructivism sees that, besides states, there are unlimited numbers of actors participating on the international arena. However, in contrast with both, it claims that both the actors’ interests and nature (or identity) are malleable and dependent upon context and the interactions with other actors. Rules or practices, such as apartheid for instance, or organizational forms, like colonialism, simply cease to exist or are subtly transformed when enough states stop following them or deem them morally unacceptable. The nature of the international system, although anarchical in the sense of it lacking a supervisor or enforcer of rules and guidelines, is societal and filled with meaning derived from shared rules and ideas (Ba & Hoffman 2003:20-21).

Already before the coining of the term by Nicholas Onuf in his influential The World of Our Making (1989), the groundwork had been laid by three theorists: John Ruggie who developed a critique of the three central elements of Kenneth Waltz’s conception of the international structure (namely, anarchy, functional non-differentiation between states and the distribution of power), Richard Ashley who argued that neo-realism was blind to the actions of non-state actors and Alexander Wendt who postulated that structure not only restricts actors, as neo-realism would have it, but it guides their interests in the same time as it is itself defined by the states’ actions (Barnett 2006:254-255; Fierke 2007:170-1). The constructivist sensibility gained ground against the background of the end of the Cold War, the outcome of which wasn’t predicted or explained neither by neo-realists nor by neo-liberal institutionalists, and the creation of the new world order. Further respectability was gained in the academic arena thanks to an unshakeable commitment to ‘science’ present in the modernizing work dedicated to the concept of social science and the logic of inquiry, and, moreover, in presenting the fundamental disagreement about the essence of the world as the source of their differences with the mainstream epistemic community (Barnett 2006:257). Today there are three main variants of constructivism available in the literature: critical/radical, conventional and interpretative. Conventional constructivism investigates the role of norms and identity in shaping international political outcomes using largely the qualitative, process-tracing case study as method. Interpretative constructivists are committed to inductive research strategies aimed at the clarification of the state/agent identity. Critical scholars take a normative standpoint and aim at containing and investigating the researcher’s implication in the reproduction of the identities and world studied. Both the critical/radical and interpretative approach use a variety of discourse-theoretic techniques, with a greater emphasis on power and domination structures inherent in language in the latter case (Checkel 2004:230-231).

Social constructivism is thus the generic title of an array of social theories concerned with conceptualizing the relationship between structures and agents. The differences amongst them arise from the fact that some give primacy to either states or agents, others concentrate on interstate politics or trans-nationalism, while a third group disagrees about the empirical approach to be used in data processing: post-modern, linguistic, naturalistic, narrative, neoclassical etc. They are united in that none of them makes value statements about the preferences, the means and the future patterns of the agents’ actions and in the fact that they present a firm commitment to collectively constructed idealism (Barnett 2006:258). This holistic approach brings about a view of the world as irreducibly social and impossible to boil down into properties of the existing identified actors. Whereas the focus on idealism does not imply the denial of material reality, the emphasis on holism does not diminish agency: the construction of material reality as such is dependent upon perception, interpretation and ideas. Actors have relative autonomy within the structure which imposes constraints and which is reproduced through their actions. Thus, actors are not born in an a-social universe and reality or knowledge does not exist outside of human interpretation. Social facts, as opposed to brute facts like hard objects, gravity and other natural phenomena, are a matter of temporary human agreement, of shared values which are taken for objective facts while this harmony in feeling exists. They guide what is acceptable action and practice, shape identity and construct actors’ interests through eliminating the ‘inappropriate’. Constructivism recognizes that concepts such as sovereignty, refugees, and human rights have origins and are therefore historically and culturally determined (Barnett 2006:259; Fierke 2007:
It is in this vein that feminist theory continues the criticism of international politics. While empiricist feminist theory (or first wave feminism) regarded the state as a potentially benevolent institution, the last court of appeal, second wave feminism recognizes that the state is an oppressive structure as it reflects a patriarchal power and therefore demands that the state, participation in the public sphere, and social relations such as sexuality should be reconstructed on a more egalitarian basis (Freeden 1996:495). Both radical feminism and critical social constructivism are part of a ‘linguistic move’ which question the existence of a natural connection between word (language) and thing (objective world) and the possibility of recognizing this world outside of our pre-established categories (Fierke 2007:173-4); feminism in particular questions the naturalization of certain associations: female – sensitive, irrational, in need of protection, weak, subjectivity while male is their opposite (True 1996:213).

Social constructivism distances itself from the methods of most positivist sciences because it deems its object, human behavior, to be unstable as it is both subject to self-reflection and to readjustments through social pressure. What characterizes social constructivism is the need to understand how individuals assign significance and meaning to their acts and, therefore, it requires that its methods capture these interpretations in the form of contingent generalizations. Although it admits the existence of causality, it insists that there are other legitimate forms of connection than long-lasting independent-dependent variable links. Human sciences are time-bound and essentially descriptive because they rely on the empathy of the scholar to describe how certain behaviors are made possible. Constructivists may use a variety of methods: ethnographic and interpretative procedures, quantitative studies aimed at explaining the emergence of a specific practice, genealogical methods to show the parentage and the evolution of certain categories later taken for granted or computer simulations to show the modulations of certain actors’ behaviors (Barnett 2006:261-262).

In a sense, constructivism is a transformational science because it regards practices as conditioned by the existence of certain pre-factors which, when fading or altering the form of their interaction, cause ‘alternative worlds’. The analysis of the diffusion or change of norms has brought about two explanatory patterns: institutional isomorphism –socializing actors or those subjected to the same environment tend to acquire identical forms in order to ease communication either through coercion, competition or simply for the sake of conformity: e.g. the rise of the nation-state– and life cycle of norms –understood as a collection of regulations that give identity to actors through their internalization, but can also come to change–. The internalization of norms can be based on an initial strategic judgment which tells actors that a specific behavior is internationally acceptable and politically beneficial. Therefore, despite institutional isomorphism with regard to the nominal adoption of concepts of democracy and stability, states act in very different ways towards the population because while some have a deep-felt commitment, others have been socialized into it and treat democracy itself simply as a door-opener towards the West (Barnett 2006:264-268).

Feminist theory is to a large extent social constructivist in that it considers gender relations both on an individual and societal level to be the result of socialization, conceptions about gender roles to be culturally constructed and, more importantly, in that it emphasizes ideational and linguistic rather than material aspects of human interaction. Feminist constructivists see gender “as an institution that codifies power at every level of global politics, from the home to the state to the international system” and they claim that “gender politics pervades world politics, creating a set of linguistically based rules about how states [or people] interact with each other and with their own citizens” (Tickner & Sjoberg 2007:190). Furthermore, like critical theory, it proposes the deconstruction of pre-conditioned assumptions about the essence and the defining elements of gender differences and specific qualities and to ‘reconstruct practices of feminist solidarity and resistance in the face of the increased fragmentation of labour and identities and the increased mobility of capital and people’ (True 1996:212). Feminists state that even theory which does not make reference to gender assumes and naturalizes the dichotomy and mutual exclusion of gender association, therefore implicitly crutching the status quo (True 1996:213). In approaching the
ontological and epistemological foundations of International relations or domestic politics with whole-sale critical appraisals, feminist theoreticians have, according to their own appreciation, ‘dismantled the last bastion of male-privileged citizenship’ as they made obvious the rich and varied history of women’s struggle (True 1996:211).

Because of the constant reformulation that feminism has been subjected to today there are endless strands of feminism which seem to comprise even the most contradictory and, in some cases, questionable positions and discourses: from conservative feminisms, liberal feminisms, Marxist feminisms and socialists feminisms to less compromising and more radicalized postmodern critical feminists, eco-feminists, Third World feminists, eco-feminists (Freeden 1996: 489). Some groups of theorists have purposely challenged the view that there is one woman whom they speak to or of in order to avoid the formation of a dogma similar to that engendered by any of the theories of the mainstream IR (True 1996:212). While the initial feminist movement (the so called feminist empiricists) intended to demonstrate the falsity of gender ascriptions by proving that women had the same capacities as men and therefore deserve the same treatment in society, it soon became recognized that this would only enforce the men-masculinity as the standard to be reached by women (True 1996:214; Hooks 2000:22). The second wave of theoretical feminisms valorizes femaleness by inverting the existent gender hierarchy to spell female-femaleness over male-masculine and claims that ‘knowledge which emerges from women’s experiences ‘on the margins’ of the world politics is actually more neutral and critical because it is not as complicit with, and blinded by, existing institutions and power relations’ (True 1996:215). The third postmodernist move has argued for the deconstruction of harmful dichotomies (sex/gender, male/female; cultural/political; heterosexual/homo-bisexual) and in the most extreme variants has gone as far as postulating that sex itself is a socially constructed gendered category and that gender is its apparatus of production (True 1996:216).

As we have seen, feminism challenges the patriarchic hierarchy by showing that if women aren’t discussed in our studies because these still stand for the dated view that men’s experiences can represent those of both sexes, they are all-present in the world where they seem to be the most disadvantaged of classes (women are the majority of the poor, of refugees, illiterate) and yet be those on which development relies the most as they are central to the social and material survival of the most basic unit of society, namely the family. Perhaps the most interesting field of investigation within gender studies with regard to this thesis is ‘women in development’ (WID) which ties two loose ends together: Third World development and the female experience. In theory it focuses foremostly on recognizing and supporting women’s already fundamental and indispensable role in economic-political development and criticizes aid projects which fail to bring women’s concerns into the mainstream, but rather reinforce a subordinate role for women while fulfilling some of their more practical needs. This happens because women’s interests in developing areas are analyzed most frequently on the micro-plane and associated with decreasing their ‘primary’ responsibilities for health, family planning, nutrition and caretaking for the elderly and children while the macroeconomic structural shifts, which in Latin America consisted of debt crises followed by structural adjustment policies, continue to impose growing gaps between income, working hours and access to resources and power which strike women the hardest (True 1996:217-9).

Feminist theory and ideology is in conclusion characterized by three core concepts: the centrality of women (or of gender politics) and the formulation of feminist theory as an ideology designed to promote the advancement of women, secondly, the fundamentality of the gender-based dimension of social relations and thirdly, the domination, exploitation and oppression of women by men and the masculine-influenced institutions (e.g. the Church or any religious institution that professes the primacy of Man and the subservience and forced companionship Woman, the State, capitalism for Marxist feminists) (Freeden 1996:491). Therefore is possible to say that on a practical level feminists seek special protection for women on the labour-market based on their special status as reproducers of the labour force, the elimination of unequal gender relations in the workforce and in the family (this implies the reduction of pay and working hours
inequalities), enforcement of non-discriminatory employment and educational practices, remodeling of societal institutions (by quota and quota reinforcement) to ensure women’s penetration into decision-making ranks, making women’s lives visible by reframing research so as to become more gender-sensitive in relation to gender exploitation (unpaid female labour and poverty distribution), the reformulation of society norms which encourage women in power to exhibit characteristics branded as masculine, the elimination of the dichotomy ‘just warrior-beautiful soul’ which prevents women (and homosexuals) from ever achieving full citizenship and positions them as civilian victims, reformulation of the human rights to include gender-persecution amongst grounds for asylum, ensuring women’s rights over their bodies (contraception, abortion, adoption and artificial insemination and adoption) and enforcement of measures which curtail domestic violence (True 1996: 219-224; Tickner & Sjoberg 2007:190-4). All of this can be compressed into the words of Michael Freeden (1996:492) who claims that “feminism aspires to revalorize practices and ideas that express the centrality of the first core [women as the heart of society] and solve the problematics of the second [the gendering of all human relations]...[while] the third core concept [domination of the second sex] reflects the tension between critique and recommendation” because while feminism represents a cultural critique of gender relations, much like Marxism is one of capitalist relations, it is in the same time a normative ideology.

3. Methods and material
The materials used in the first step of our analysis are articles extracted from various English and Spanish-speaking scientific journals such as América Latina Hoy, Latin American Research Review, Politics and Gender, the Project Muse and political anthologies like Hagopian and Mainwaring’s The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America and Diamond and Hartlyn’s Democracy in Developing Countries. Latin America. Some texts, emblematic to the research on gender and political power in Latin America, like Craske’s Women and Politics in Latin America and Chaney’s Supermadre, have also been thoroughly read in order to create a symbolic and cultural background to my own case studies. Since the presidency of Cristina Kirchner is so new and yet widely absent from peer reviewed journals, I will have to rely mostly on Latin American and otherwise newspaper articles available on the Internet from the period of her elections in order to establish the inclination of her campaign. The two governmental web sites available to anyone with a connection to the Internet have been the location from which their respective speeches have been downloaded for the following analyses.

The following thesis will be constructed as a comparative case study based on qualitative methods. Qualitative research contains everything from interpretive ethnographic studies or macrohistories spanning over millennia to microanalysis of certain events that have been explicated using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Therefore, a case study should not be automatically equated with qualitative methods. Indeed, a case study is for Barnett (2004:21) “an instance of a class of events of interest to the investigator, such as an instance of revolution, type of governmental regime, kind of economic system or personality type...[it] is thus the investigation of a well defined aspect of a historical happening that the investigator selects for analysis”. Nearly all case studies involve either implicit or explicit, across cases or within case comparisons, which has made this method become associated in particular with the analysis of small case studies (Levy 2002:132-3; Barnett 2004:21). In my case study, I propose to compare the factors that have lead to the presidency of two female candidates in Chile and Argentina in 2006 and 2007 respectively. The societies, their culture, feminism (or feminine leadership) and its development, political parties, the constituencies are all independent variables that lead, for the two candidates, to presidency. Based on social constructivism, we will be looking on how these values and candidacies have been articulated in order to lead to the victory in elections. I intend to test whether amongst them, feminism, or the intention to further gender equality, on the part of the political party or the candidate herself, has been a dominant feature of the campaign and the following term in office. I am well aware that any researcher’s theoretical orientation (which
turns into a form of theoretical prejudice) will color his choice of event or historical episode to be
selected and transformed into a sequence of ‘variables,’ but since this was not intended as a
theory generative study, as that would be far too much for this academic level, all that remains for
me to do is to accept that my case study, like all interpretive case study, has not been discovered,
but constructed (Levy 2002:134). In this an important part is played by my (involuntary) bias
which is related to the deliberate selection of these two non-random cases which presents the risk
of over-representation of key variables. This is particularly disruptive when the dependent
variable has extreme values (which can be anything between a war with international
consequences to at-the-time-perceived-to-be a minor revolution that was later assigned historical
significance). Therefore for a study of female presidency in Latin America to gain external
validity, an inclusion of cases in which similar conditions existed: similar developments and
elements present within the culture, society, political party and feminism and yet presidency

Although internal validity can be achieved through using most-similar/different systems
designs, inserting control variables, by propping the theory on most-likely/least-likely designs
and comparing it with the competing rival theory, the biggest issue remains with external validity.
Case studies cannot make probabilistic theories because the researcher will be hard pressed to
prove that his findings are valid for comparable instances outside his investigation, which is
nearly impossible because of the large number of variables and their high diversity relative to the
small number of cases. Case study methodology also faces the difficulty of assessing the relative
causal weights of the various factors influencing a particular outcome, unless those elements are
either necessary or sufficient for the end result. While they may be able to determine the presence
or absence of certain factors and even to establish empirically the direction and the category (in
terms of high or low) of a variable’s impact, case studies cannot determine the magnitude of

In the following primary sources investigation, critical discourse analysis or CDA will be
applied to five of the speeches delivered by Michelle Bachelet between 2006 and the present on
different occasions and Cristina Kirchner since her term in office began in the autumn of 2007.
Critical discourse analysis is the most fitting tool because of its fundamental agreement with
social constructivism on the assumption that reality (and even more so language) is socially
constructed and negotiated. CDA believes that meanings are created through the interaction
between readers and receivers (or listeners and speakers) and linguistic features are a blend of
social processes (which are never arbitrary), history and the users’ different dispositions toward
language caused by their social positioning. It studies the dialectal relation between discourse and
other elements of social practices particularly when sudden change is involved (Fairclough 2003:
206). Discourse is an essential part of social behavior as it dominates the way we interact with
peers and superiors in accordance to what is expected of us, what we think possible and who we
are. Discourse includes representations of how the world has been, elements that have been
internalized or reduced to one another (operationalized) and imagined activities that may or may
not lead to actual social practices in the future (Fairclough 2003:207). Furthermore, according to
Juan Romero (2005:213), discourse contributes to the “creation and/or transformation of the
society and culture through rearticulating three domains of social life: a) representations of the
world, b) the social relations between people and c) the individual and social identities of people”.

The method of CDA “consciously poses against discourse its own counter-discourse,
uncovering, resisting, or reversing the routine sense-making procedures that were expected by the
original producers of the discourse” (de Beaugrande 2006:46). CDA works as a form of language
critique which initially identifies a social problem and tackles the obstacles to it in any of the
following ways: it can analyze the practices within which it’s located, the relationship of the
discourse within the practices it regards or the discourse itself (either in a structural manner or in
a textual-linguistic way) (Fairclough 2003:209). This process is far from ‘objective’ firstly
because none of its components or concerns is an ‘object’, but rather the manner in which a
notion is constructed by the speaker as natural and convincing. Furthermore, “the analyst is
always already a participant irrevocably implicated in the production of the discourse being analyzed” (de Beaugrande 2006:43); but the simple fact of the analyst being a separate person from the speaker with, hopefully, little belief in the discourse’s underlying ideology tends to make investigations more socially relevant.

4. Analysis

4.1. Secondary sources

4.1.1. Preliminary considerations: Female (political) representation in Latin America

In this segment I propose that we look into the progress that women have made since the beginning of this century with regard to integration in and representation in high politics. The last segment I intend to dedicate to an argumentation about the underlying cultural structures that maintain women in subordinate positions even when they break into the public sphere.

In Latin America, like in most places in the world, women have been entering politics in increasing numbers over the span of the last two decades thanks to quotas. The fact that in the 1990s twelve Latin American countries had opened quotas for female representation shows an increasing, but imperfect commitment to gender equality. Although the numbers of women in power have all but doubled over a decade, poor enforcement of the quotas and the lack of resources for ensuring women’s upwards mobility and impact over decision-making once in power stops the governments from being able to guarantee efficient usage of this power by the ‘second sex’. The UN’s Human Development report for 2007/2008 shows that none of the countries of Latin America are rated in the low HDI column and that the highest rated is in fact Chile (rank 40 of 179) and the lowest is Guatemala (rank 121), a country that is emerging from a long civil war (UNDP 2008:229). The Gender Empowerment Measurement and the Gender-related Development Index, both available in the same report, commonly show that the first country of Latin America is Argentina (registers a 38 of 177) and the lowest again Guatemala with 118 (UNDP 2008:326-8). The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a measure of inequalities between men's and women's opportunities in the same country: it combines inequalities in three areas of political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) is an indication of the inequalities between the standards of living in a country of the genders in the following areas: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrollment into education.

A study presented by Mala N. Htun (2002:3-4) and conducted by Gallup on behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Inter-American Dialogue in 2000 shows that of the 2000 Latin-American urban interviewees, the majority were optimistic about women’s performance in politics and more than half (57%) believed that women’s presence in political office would lead to better government. The interviewed group trusted that women are more efficient leaders and that, given the chance, women would outperform men in several areas: 66% agreed that women are more honest than men, 62% of people expressed the belief that women would do better than men at reducing poverty, 72 % at improving education, 57 % at combating corruption, 64 % at protecting the environment, 59 % at managing the economy and 53 % at conducting diplomatic relations. However, in those fields traditionally regarded as the male’s domain, defending public security and running the army, only 44, and respectively 20 %, said that women would outperform men. Another interesting finding of this study is that the electorate pays attention to the candidates’ stand on women’s rights: of those interviewed 55% claimed that a candidate’s opinion on women’s rights would be “very important” to their decision about whom to vote for in the next presidential election and as much as 44% of those surveyed would be more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who promised to appoint equal numbers of men and women to the cabinet (which Michelle Bachelet did). These startling numbers show that the problem may well lie above the level of the electorate’s like or dislike of female candidates: the party system, the media, and the electoral system are the three wolves in this drama and, behind all this the biggest
meanest wolf, is the cultural differentiation of women which consistently assigns women the role of organizers of the support network of the homeland’s defenders.

Machismo is a system of gender relations which exaggerates the biological differences between men and women who are then expected to act according to what is ‘natural’ for their gender. Although the origin of the word is not ascertained, the set of rules itself seems to owe much to the colonial ideas of the kingdom of Castilla and the Catholic Church. Machismo, and its female corollary marianismo, guide all aspects of life: from public behavior, where men must be seen as controllers of the honour and dominators of the women’s life choices, and particularly their sexuality which can only be expressed behind closed doors in the conjugal bedroom, to the private sphere where the latter are expected to replicate the image of the Virgin Mary, i.e. comply with the self-abnegating motherhood, and on a more practical plane do nearly all the unpaid work and submit to decisions made by her male relatives (Craske 1999:12-3). “The stereotypical macho male is strong, aggressive and virile while women are dependent, self-sacrificing, submissive and emotional; men are unfaithful by nature and women are monogamous and devoted to the family” (Fisher 1993:3). It would seem that these differences aim at making men and women complementary, but more or less by accident women end up inferior to men. Despite the fact that the quote above is an overstatement because in working class environments women usually must take part in the labour market and social life, their duties at home remain the same and therefore women end up working double shifts. Furthermore, it dominates the decision of what kind of work is available to women: as housework and child-rearing is seen as a ‘natural’ choice for them, women are usually left illiterate and untrained which in turn limits the type of work they can get on the labour market leading them to working in odd domestic jobs or cash-in-hand jobs in small and mostly illegal enterprises which offer no job security or welfare benefits (Fisher 1993:6-7).

Womanhood is not a class, a caste or a social group. It is not a caste because women share the caste status with their male relatives and it is not a class because, on the one hand, women derive their position from a significant male they are attached to and, on the other, social class is a over-determinant as women from the higher echelons afford better medical care (including abortions or birth control which is widely inaccessible to working class women), education and working opportunities and they are even exempt from the housework, which then, however, becomes the responsibility of another woman who is probably young, of a lower social standing as she is a migrant worker who will work such jobs for the better part of her life, first as a lodger and after she is married as a part time cook for the family. Probably originating in the desire to establish with all certainty the fatherhood of children, women’s seclusion in the house, be it a shanty or a mansion, is perhaps still one of the defining features for all women. Creating the link between generations has been women’s prerogative and obligation: as women had little choice other than to passively carry children up to their biological limits in the hope that some of them will survive and become the couple’s insurance policy during the autumn of their lives, single (or barren) women have been regarded as a waste as their infertility signified a burden for the community. As societies modernized, the ‘childbearing vocation’ came in conflict with the model of women as workers and professionals sharing in the burdens of providing for the family. Work being defined as something that happens outside the household, many women took the ‘unqualified’ skills that they earned as housewives and converted them into ‘womanly’ professions: educating and caring for children, the disabled and the elderly (Chaney 1979:16-20).

According to the study done by Chaney (1979) in the early 1970s, when in political office, women are more often than not seen as carrying out the nurturing and affectionate tasks related to motherhood, rather than the more aggressive, authoritarian and performance-oriented model identified with the male leadership role. Women agree to a division of labour in polity that reflects that of the home: women who hold political office often refer to themselves as mothers who tend to the extended family that is the municipality or, in some special cases, the nation. This role that women lend themselves to called supermadre by Chaney (1979:21) is still in force today through the work of many women’s organizations and local politicians who busy
themselves with issues that can be best described as the application of the domestic in the larger society. Women orientate their policies towards socialization of the young and excluded, creating welfare and universal health care and guarding and improving the society’s morals, but rely on men to give orders to other men. The other thesis is that women’s progresses in relation to political participation never become fully consolidated because, as they appear in the public space during moments of extreme crisis (war, dictatorial take-over, economic crises) in large numbers, they slowly withdraw because of apathy in the face of male power seizures or inability to serve long years in office because of family obligations leaving behind just a few who, nevertheless, add to the percentage of those already there (Chaney 1979:23-5).

4.1.2. Female political representation in Chile

In the coming section I will try to make a revision of the classifications in existence and propose my own division of the Chilean feminist social movement. This recapitulation serves the purpose of creating a background for the (feminist) political action of the leaders under investigation so as to see if they are consistent with the prior developments. Feminism has been ridiculed in Chile by the military regime that extolled the virtues of motherhood and, because of the government imposed censorship, it was interpreted as a foreign-influenced bourgeois oriented struggle for political and civil rights irrelevant to the large group of lower class women who could not benefit from legislation covering for instance equality in the workplace as they had no stable or formal employments. As far as the political parties go, they have failed to recognize the need for specific policies directed at women outside of the universe of the family as they remained dominated by men even after the suffrage rights were established in the late 40s (Fisher 1993:178). Therefore there are not many organizations that would recognize themselves as overtly feminist even today, but many that gladly admit that they work with ‘women’s problems’.

Rosa M. Cañadell (2001:163-5) recognizes three categories of organizations for and by women during the period of the dictatorship and the years immediately following it: women for human rights, which refers exclusively to protesting on the account of their disappeared or imprisoned relatives, feminist women and popular women’s organizations. Since the popular women’s organizations in existence during the dictatorship years aimed at drawing attention to the state’s inability to fulfill its responsibility to provide for the citizens under the social contract and the neglect of their natural rights, the separation between popular organizations and human rights organizations does not really make sense. Her middle category, feminist women, is also somewhat questionable: although in this category she includes feminist women theoreticians who produce the ‘intellectual’ feminist discourse, it is clear that they have since slowly been integrated as supporting technicians, who give shape and direction, to either to the grassroots level or the ministry-party level and don’t constitute a category of their own any longer, if they ever did. The theoreticians have analyzed the movement to unveil the power relations that govern their relation to the state (and to men) and now their research has been absorbed by the same movements who are now in the second stage of their development and posit their theories as the grounds for demanding recognition of women as social actors.

I believe that the gender issues in Chile can be catalogued better if one refers to the two directions from which they have been formulated: top-down (ministerial feminism associated mainly with the middle and upper class) and bottom-up (grassroots feminism associated with lower and working class). Although both ministerial and grassroots feminism are articulated in similar terms, women as the protectors of the home and family values, the second type has since the 1980s begun to overstep and question the boundaries of what is seen as ‘decent’ action for a woman. Grassroots feminism in Chile is connected to the anti-dictatorship and resistance movement of the early 1980s when women, using their previously non-political status, opened up soup kitchen in the poblaciones (the slum quarters where most of the land has been illegally occupied starting in the fifties) as a way to publicly condemn the financial hardships of the military regime (Fisher 1993:30) and later on got rephrased as a human rights movement in demand of state aid and answers about their disappeared (more often than not) male relatives
The women did not consider their activities political because politics was a field previously reserved for men and authorities, but the fact that people met in their courtyards and discussed politics, falling living and education standards and what seemed to become general unemployment in the shantytowns around Santiago de Chile made the regime attempt to stop the projects (Fisher 1993:31-2). Independent of their initial intentions, women found themselves in the minefield of politics in two ways: they were challenging the regime through drawing international attention to the hunger and crimes in Chile and they were also questioning the basis of the roles of ‘male provider’ and ‘female housewife’ because the majority of the men, now unemployed, spend most of their days in isolation because of the stigma and shame of not being able to feed the children while the wives, mostly through Church related organizations, found increasingly creative ways to put food on the table (Fisher 1993:34-7; Dandavati 2005:64-6).

The main difference between Chile and Argentina with regard to the Church is that despite the original closeness and affinity of the Roman Catholic Church to the Pinochet regime, which was credited for removing the country from the way of the Marxist threat, it shortly turned into a virulent critic of the General and remained so until after Aylwin’s take-over. The Churches in the poblaciones in particular were inspired by the teachings of liberation theology and offered, besides humanitarian aid for the victims of extreme poverty, some logistic support and protection to new organizations at least until they became too political, that is openly and visibly regime critical (Fisher 1993:25). The Church in Argentina, on the other hand, advised women to pray instead of fussing about and drawing attention to themselves by public protests which could further damage their children’s chances of survival. Later uncovered evidence showed that several priests were regular visitors of the concentration camps and some even had assisted in the illegal adoption of the children of the disappeared (Fisher 1993:111-2).

Before the Chilean plebiscite, regular massive attacks and kidnappings were carried out by the military in the slums, but despite the slow improvement in living standards and civil freedoms since, many claim that they have been disadvantaged and disappointed with the democratization process which has created unrealistic expectation followed by apathy and, on a more practical level, meant slower and less fund availability (since they are now channeled through government agencies that have established application procedures) (Fisher 1993:40-1). Despite the fact that organization life placed another unpaid workload on the women’s shoulders, the positive effects were two-fold: women have become more involved, visible and responsible citizens aware of their civil rights and their standing in the world and through their continued involvement they have given themselves the chance of building new types of relationships, lives and skills (Fisher 1993:42). Even if a punch in the middle-class hurts as much as a punch in the low and working class, as a woman in Fisher’s book says (1993:191), popular feminism admits that women in the middle classes have a different outlook (besides being able to employ other –low class informal servants– women to do relieve them of house-related ‘duties’, they have a support network and societal respect needed to live as single mothers) and therefore it commits itself to changing the society as a hole: educate men and women alike so as to minimize conflicts within the family (Fisher 1993:195). Therefore, I believe that it can be said that while the middle-class ministerial feminism is stuck in a man-hating but equality-seeking feminism, first generation feminism as described by Hooks (2000:22-3), popular grassroots feminisms seek a reorganization of society so as to engender a fully conscious society and a sexism and racism free culture.

The other trend that I chose to dub ministerial feminism is represented by SERNAM (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer/Women’s National Ministry) whose main task is that of gender mainstreaming amidst tradeoffs and manoeuvres enforced by antagonisms in the political system and internal ideological conflicts within the Concertación and even the ministry itself. The politization of gender issues in Chile results from a combination of three factors: the lack of lea-way for political parties in other matters which blocks ideological differentiation based on politico-economical approaches⁴, the fact that attitudes to gender issues are registered in absolute

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⁴ neo-liberalism as the answer to economic development has become so engrained that not even the Socialist Party questions it
terms in some of the parties’ foundational documents (the deep secular-religious split) and the position of gratitude to the Roman Catholic Church, to whom *Concertación* finds itself particularly indebted, after that institutions’ decades of resistance to the attacks of the Pinochet dictatorship (Macaulay 2006:127-9; Dandavati 2005:102). SERNAM was officially created on the 3rd of January 1991 and was given a hybrid executive status: not quite a ministry, but not quite a service. It would co-ordinate and plan the policy together with the Congress, but not implement it. The Director would gain ministerial status and a guaranteed seat in the Cabinet, but on the other hand it would be controlled by the Ministry of Planning because of its inter-sectoral mandate (Dandavati 2005:100-1). Since its foundation, the ministry has been the battle ground of many party leaders who have refused to base the agency’s mandate on concepts such as women’s rights (including reproductive rights) and altered the initial foundational principles that defined gender relations as socially constructed and contingent to state that the department’s role would be to stimulate “equality of rights and opportunities in relation to men, in process of political, social, economic and cultural development of the country, respecting the nature and specificity of women that derive from the natural differences between sexes, including a proper profile for family relations” (Macaulay 2006:133).

Because of the relentless control from the Right, SERNAM has had more success on the international arena than the national one. From the beginning the Ministry has been well aware of the importance of boosting Chile’s democratic prestige internationally through ratification of the international conventions on human rights and creating a closer and more efficient alignment with international norms on gender equality. Its collaboration with the UN in the production of a series of reports about the situation of the Chilean woman, with the Foreign Ministry in order to prepare and issue government statements at conferences on gender issues and with diplomats before international summits have professionalized gender policy work and removed SERNAM’s from its past role as a charitable institution run by the wives of the leading officers (Macaulay 2006:136-9). Despite mild national success with regard to bills concerning married women’s property rights, the decriminalization of adultery, equal rights of inheritance and child support for both legitimate and illegitimate children, decriminalization of homosexuality and enforcing jail punishments for domestic violence, the laws that it manages to pass are always watered down because of party politics and ideological antagonisms. The bills that come out have to be reframed as pro-family and pro-life rather than secular no matter their content (Dandavati 2005:103). The law preventing young mothers from being expelled from schools was not explicated in terms of the girls’ right to education, but rather as protective measure for the embryos that risked abortion (Macaulay 2006:143). Due to this climate, SERNAM has opted for “meeting women’s practical gender needs rather than challenging existing gender traditions” so as to avoid the humiliation of being denied every bill it sponsors and also in order to appease its overwhelmingly Christian Democratic leaders (Macaulay 2006:144).

### 4.1.3. Michelle Bachelet: preliminary observations

Although the role of the women in Chilean politics has widened in the last decade due to the governments’ deeper commitment to their increased participation in the public sphere, their still low presence in Congress puts Chile as of yet on the thirteenth position in South America. The most progress has been done in the lower House where the number of women has tripled since 1989, reaching 15% in 2005 (Ríos cited in Morales Quiroga 2008:10). Despite some moves forwards, the continued under-representation of women in high politics is obvious to any on-looker and has to do mainly with the inner-workings of most parties and with those of the media representation of women candidates. As far as party structures are concerned, the majority of which still under the control of a male elite which renders the female quotas meaningless, they remain extremely rigid and play a double game which impacts negatively on the political self-esteem of women candidates: parties in Chile understand that women on the candidacy lists attract the electorate, but they also, reportedly, run and fund women candidates only when and where the polls show they have high chances of winning (Morales Quiroga 2008:11). Some
women refuse to get involved in party politics because they see it as counter-productive considering that running as an independent spares them the competition within the party necessary to appear on the electoral list. Not joining therefore means two things for women: they are not seen by the voters as políticas—a class which is generally associated with patronage, corruption and masculine politics—and they jump one step ahead of the game by avoiding being cut out of the list on the party level (Macaulay 2006:123-4). Therefore it is fair to say that women’s solid successes on the municipal level is not so much related to the party affiliation, but to their own personality and their own efforts which are often taken advantage of by the parties. Unión Democrática Independiente (UDI), one of the parties of the right, for instance, despite being as conservative as they come in Chile, is known for recruiting women activists from the shantytowns to include in its structures so as to capitalize on their image and their previous success in the area around their domicile (Macaulay 2006:125). National politics does not have the same clear feminized imprint as the lower political level because here party affiliation is a must and those who have lagged behind in joining one always find themselves on the lower echelons of the party hierarchy. Because they regarded the administration of the municipality not as a political matter, but a technical and professional one, and therefore failed to carve out a place for themselves in the informal and male-dominated circuits of political power, women are usually alienated from the party decision-making circles and seen as incapable to perceive politics itself as a profession removed from public administration. One of the women that Macaulay (2006:124) interviewed observes that the gender segregation in the party hierarchy is related to an attitudinal difference: while men are in office they keep their professional and political interests running while women, having to split their time between the office and the family, rarely do.

The press reflects a gendered standpoint on female candidates as well. The mass-media use oft-expressed doubts about women’s gender-related leadership deficit to justify a disproportionate focus on their private life and personality, in contrast to the treatment given to male candidates. The coverage of men concentrates almost exclusively on their political careers, their rise to leading positions in their parties, and ability to put into practice the political program they present (Morales Quiroga 2008:11). So, if the women manage to climb in the party and public administration ranks, their image is then packaged differently by the media so as to reflect more personal aspects of the life of the candidate creating suspicion and distrust about their capacities which do not appear. This could have been catastrophic for a candidate who hadn’t previously occupied the kind of high responsibility positions held by Bachelet, namely Minister of Health and subsequently Minister of Defense for two years, and hadn’t earned the minimum of trust and visibility prior to the gendered representation during the campaign so that the constituencies could at least in theory consider her as a competent president. The same goes for Cristina de Kirchner, who is considered by many outsiders to be simply the wife of the man who put Argentina back on track after the economic shocks of the late 1990s, but inside the country she was a well-known political figure before her husband ever made it to the presidency. A lawyer and a provincial deputy, Cristina de Kirchner had been a member of the local legislature of Santa Cruz as far back as 1989 and, a senator for the same province during the later half of the 1990s and between 2001 and 2005, and has been repeatedly put in charge of several investigative congressional committees.

4.1.3.1. Party level and the campaign

In this fragment I want to discuss the condition of women in the Socialist Party, of which Michelle Bachelet is a member, this party’s policies and stand on female political power and the possible reasons behind the election of Bachelet as a presidential candidate in 2005. Using secondary sources, it is my intention to uncover whether the party has a clear feminist line and, if on the account of such a line, it supported a female candidate. Thus I believe it to be beneficial to display the different segments within the party that work currently or have worked with the ‘women’s problem’ and try to explain their weight in the game behind the scenes. At the end the campaign for the presidency will take some space. There I will elaborate on the issues discussed
during the months prior to the election and the perception of the electorate derived from the candidates’ and the media’s depiction of their capabilities.

The Socialist party, of which Michelle Bachelet is a member, is not the strongest on gender issues in Chile. Although it finds itself reconciled with neo-liberalism and does not present a critique of the free market and free trade as ideology, the Socialist Party still speaks a language of poverty, class struggle, political exclusion and lack of civil liberties due to economical exclusion. Compared to, PPD, one of partners within the Concertación, the feminist wing of the SP produces little results past recommendations on gender relations (demanding social responsibility for childcare, recognition of common law or same sex de facto unions, divorce laws, affirmative action plans) because, on the one hand, they expected that the party once in government to automatically put into practice these features institutionalized in its platform and charter and, on the other, that SERNAM would carve out a larger role for itself in such matters (Macaulay 2006:130). Also it is regarded beneficial to mute or tone down some demands for gender equality during the campaigns so as to not scare off voters of more conservative morals. Such was the case of the first post-Pinochet democratically elect president from the Concertación who dared to promote a bill that promoted marriage reform (divorce with equal property and custody rights) only during his last years in office (Macaulay 2006:142-3). Further, there is also a risk for those who subscribe to a feminist ideology to be accused of having abandoned the cause of socialism to fall into sectionalism and therefore they hush their own demands beforehand.

However, there is a wing of the PS, The Union of Socialist Women, (UMS Union de Mujeres Socialistas) which uses militant feminism to transform the sexist system which characterizes women’s relations in the family, society and polity. It is mainly interested in enlarging women’s role in the party and enforcing the notion of women as a special and distinct social group. In accordance with these ideals it has required that women constitute a minimum of twenty percent of the party’s National Directorate, a requirement which is now a fact (Dandavati 2005:110). This activist wing is said to continue on the party level the work of the CNMD which was the militant feminist branch of Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia now dissolved. CNMD, Concertación National de Mujeres por la Democracia (National Coalition of Women for Democracy), was the breeding ground for SERNAM as it conducted the first unbiased studies about the situation of women in the fields of education, health and family (Franceschet 2003:21; Dandavati 2005:90). In the first years after the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship CNMD was essential to reworking the political mentality of those directly involved in politics and of the electorate regarding women’s rights, their perceived contingent conservatism and the need for equality between genders. Before its dissolution in January 1990, the CNMD promoted women in politics, public administration and public government and operated efficiently to bring women’s problems into focus through conferences and declarations (Dandavati 2005:91).

The growing popularity figures of Michelle Bachelet5 forced the party and the coalition elite to consider her as a candidate in accordance with the theory above that political parties elect women as candidates only when their victory is as good as guaranteed (Subercaseaux & Sierra 2006:147). Others might say that she had been groomed by Ricardo Lagos for the last four years to take his place and that is why she was named Minister of Defense, a post that increased her visibility as she would have to travel and her perceived competence since she would have to organize the ceremonies around the thirty years’ commemorative landmark since the coup on Salvador Allende and his socialism. Another name that had been discussed in the coalition was also that of a woman: Soledad Alvear, member of the PDC, minister of SERNAM during the Aylwin years and Minister of External Affairs during the Lagos government. Her popularity ratings were low from the beginning, but what really destroyed her chances were the internal conflicts about her nomination. Despite having defeated the party’s president in primaries in the beginning of 2005, Alvear was continuously undermined by the opposition inside the party. This gave her little time to focus on a campaign directed at the coalition and even less time to woo the electorate. In the

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5 in December 2004 more than 40% of those asked would have voted for her is she ran as president
face of meager results in popularity survey, she eventually yielded to the demands of the Socialist Party and pulled out of the race of candidacy (Izquierdo & Navia 2007:84). Also, there was little chance of the Socialist Party yielding its candidacy that year after the success that its previous president-elect, Ricardo Lagos, had had to the party that brought Chile on its knees one term prior through the presidency of Frei-Tagle. Besides, the popularity of the parties has been revered since the late 1990s when more than a quarter of those asked identified themselves as socialists (Valenzuela 1999:235).

The issues that were at the centre of the presidential election were no different than the problems discussed the years before or those of any campaign in the world: crime, unemployment, health, poverty, drugs, education etc. What made this election slightly different and more ‘Chilean’ was the overt focus on the candidates’ personal past and qualities. Alberto Bachelet, a long time Air Force general and Director of Supplies during the last year of Allende’s government, Michelle’s mother and even Michelle herself were detained and tortured during the first dictatorship years. As a result of the injuries Alberto Bachelet died in custody and the two women went into exile (Subercaseaux & Sierra 2006: 43-85). Running for Union Democrática Independiente, Lavín’s image was, despite having been part of Pinochet’s state apparatus, that of a young new reformer with strong right wring religious beliefs who had been a successful mayor of a wealthy Santiago municipality. His electoral strategy was to create anxiety about (fictive) rampant violence and crime and to consolidate votes amongst his already supporters. Piñera, running for National Renewel (RN) who, together with UDI, formed Alianza por Chile, was a well-known wealthy businessman who decided to invest in a professional campaign which would leave two things clear: he had opposed the 1988 Pinochet plebiscite and he is closer to Christian Democrat ideals than UDI. UDI had been the party that had pulled the rug from under his feet a decade before refusing to run him as a candidate after what became known as the Piñeragate scandal: in 1992 it became known that Piñera himself and another member of the party, Pedro Diaz, were attempting to outmanoeuvre his counter-candidate during the primaries, Evelyn Matthei, by putting her in an uncomfortable position during the televised debates. In 2005 his emphasis was on eliminating poverty and therefore political exclusion, a stance which likened him to the left and at times, like in the suggestion of pensions for housewives, even to pure populism. Hirsch’s image, the candidate of the Junto Podemos Más por Chile (PODEMOS)– an alliance between the Communist and the Humanist Parties of Chile–, was that of an articulate and engaging candidate who made a good impression with the audience because he condemned the neo-liberalist economic model and the effects of environmental degradation, but he never really stood a chance because his electoral base was too narrow from the start (Angell 2007:116-119).

Michelle Bachelet’s campaign was confused in the first steps because she didn’t know how to integrate the novel elements (womanhood, her membership in the Socialist Party and her past as a militant communist) and the dated elements (the relationship with the Lagos presidency and the Pinochet drama that struck her family) to create a concoction that would both differentiate her from the mass of the candidates and would show her as committed to the progress already made (Angell 2007:118). Besides, the moderate success that she had in the first round was also related to relative lack of resources, misguided belief held by her party that her charisma and personality would suffice for her to win and the exaggerate focus from the party on the Congress elections that took place in the same time (Angell 2007:120). When the time came for the televised debates, she faced numerous sexist remarks and failed to promote any assertive attitude until late in the second round when president Lagos had already become more involved in the campaign than common sense permitted (Angell 2007:121).

The media stereotyped her as a woman who was getting the lead because of her charisma, honesty and empathy with the electorate, not because of her education and political abilities like any other of her counter-candidates. This emphasis on the personal attributes of the female candidates may give the electorate the impression that they might be less capable of fulfilling a public contract (Morales Quiroga 2008:12), but I believe that in the case of Michelle Bachelet that was beyond doubt. In a study presented by Morales Quiroga (2008:14) on the electorate’s
perceptions of Bachelet’s ability to govern, she seems to have been surpassed by her counter-
candidates in only two areas: solving the problem of delinquency, by Lavin, and in the matter of
improving economical growth, by Piñera. Both these perceptions are understandable since Lavin
had made a point of the delinquency issue since his candidature of 1999 and Piñera’s being a
well-known businessman probably tipped the scales in that direction as well. Lavin had since the
end of the 90s adopted an anti-establishment discourse that focused on the ‘problems of the
people’ and the need for a pragmatic ‘change’ (Izquierdo & Navia 2007:86). On the contrary, I
believe that the representation by the media as a empathic person interested in the development of
the individual rather than the improvement of the country’s GDP might have given her the edge:
in the eyes of the electorate she was both capable (male) and a women. That goes to say that they
could have all that which the male candidates offered, a competent president, and an empathic,
caring president. There might have been some gender solidarity amongst the constituencies
because the results of another study developed by Morales Quiroga (2008:17) show that support
for Bachelet was predominant amongst women, independent of the party from which she was
clearly distinguished by the interviewees, and was slightly more prevalent amongst those with
lower education compared to Piñera whose followers were, for the most part, college educated
men.

4.1.3.2. The candidate

Having understood the importance of communicating with the military lest there be another coup,
Michelle Bachelet finished a series of studies that permitted her to become Minister of Defense at
the beginning of 2002. Amongst other important reforms which aimed at ascertaining civilian
control over the military, she promoted a programme of equality of opportunities between women
and men. Besides being allowed to join the strategy and defense courses at the Chilean War
Academy and voluntarily integrate into the regular military service, women could be promoted
according to merit in all the branches of the Armed Forces on the same principles and with the
same speed as men starting 2003. Beginning with her own presence at the Ministry and her role
as leader of thousands of men and ending with the actual integration of women in the military
programmes, Bachelet has perhaps forever altered the idea of what is the woman’s ‘natural’ place
amongst those who once had dubbed themselves as enforcers of the Chilean values. Michelle
Bachelet, through her public role and acts, created the awareness of the need of gender equality: a
woman could be a colleague, but also your superior (Subercaseaux & Sierra 2006:143-145).

In her biography, Michelle Bachelet leaves the impression that the campaign train was set in
motion without her having expressed a wish for it and that she assumed this new challenge
humbly with an air of self-abnegation like she did with other responsibilities that were previously
placed on her shoulders. She says: “the leitmotiv of all of my life has been how to relieve the pain
of the other, not only as a doctor, but also by supporting people, by giving them more
opportunities so that they can rise, have a better life, be happy, develop their talents […] The
opportunity of playing an important role in improving the situation of the Chileans has been
presented to me. This is the challenge that makes me want to be president, despite not having
looked for it myself” (Subercaseaux & Sierra 2006:148; my translation). What is astonishing is
that she refers to Chile as ‘our house’ and nearly all the answers she gives about her political
mission are formulated in the terms of the supermadre: socialization of the excluded (young,
women and lower classes), dialogue and discussion on gender, the construction of history,
nativity, collaborative or participative democracy where the citizens’ wishes can be used to pass
legislation, fighting together against mistrust and fear (Subercaseaux & Sierra 2006:149-150).
Despite presenting a political argument that perceived as womanly through its reference to
nurturing and softening politics itself, she never used the image of the perfect family to sell her
way to the hearts and mind of the electorate, but that of a regular separated woman whose son did
not want to appear on the posters because he preferred to have a political career of his own,
whose eldest daughter was picked up by the police and charged with DWI during her campaign
and whose youngest was conceived out of wedlock. Later she went on to do exactly what she
promised: half of the cabinet she named were women – the second female minister of Defense (Vivianne Blanlot), SERNAM (Laura Albornoz), chief-of-staff (Paulina Veloso), Economy minister (Ingrid Antonijevic) and Planning minister (Clarisa Hardy), Health minister (Maria Soledad Barria), Urbanization and Home minister (Patricia Poblete), Mining minister (Karen Poniachik). These appointments continued the line of socialization of the traditionally excluded from politics started by Ricardo Lagos once he entered office when he named the first female justice to the Chilean Supreme Court and five female ministers out of the sixteen members of his cabinet (Izquierdo & Navia 2007:82).

As it can be seen in the quote above, once in power Bachelet’s agenda was profiled in moral terms: the aim was new kind of citizen fit for a new kind of politics. She aimed at reformulating democracy so as to become more participative and more bottom-up – a ‘government of citizens’ in contrast with a government run by politicians in the name of the people (Valenzuela & Dammert 2006:66). In this spirit she promised that her ministers would not repeat or prolong their terms in office and that there will be a wide promotion of new faces in the coalition lines. Because nobody is willing to fix that which is not broken, Bachelet is not likely to attempt to challenge the economic model that has made Chile one of the most successful countries in the region. However, her views on same sex marriage, sex education in school, the right to abortion and greater press and media freedom are what might split the political arena and, although aimed at bringing non-voters into politics, they may end up losing her some of her otherwise stable supporters (Angell 2007: 126). The 2006 proposal for the revision of the public pension system was directly aimed at women who spend less time in the workforce because of child-rearing responsibilities, retire on average five years earlier than man and live longer on less money than men. Her cabinet proposed raising the pension age for women so that they manage making the same amount of pension savings as men over a longer amount of time, but Michelle Bachelet resisted this and proposed that women be reimbursed with one year’s pension fee for each child born alive and be allowed to save in private pension funds (El Mercurio 2006).

4.1.3.3. Societal level
The polls conducted by the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Contemporánea (CERC), a private independent company that has been executing public opinion surveys since 1986, in November 2005 show that the rejection numbers of Bachelet were as low as 15%, second to those of Lavín (50%), and that nearly 67% of the pollsters thought that she would be elected president if the election would be held the coming day (Morales Quiroga 2008:13). Fearful that the novelty of a female candidate might arouse suspicion in the electorate, the party began by positioning Bachelet as a factor of continuation of president Lagos’ policies. Since Ricardo Lagos (also of the PS) had, during his five year presidency, breathed new life into the halting Chilean economy by raising the GDP per capita with over a thousand dollars and reducing the unemployment with nearly one and a half percent while raising the minimum salary by 29%, Michelle would be there not only to reap the benefits, but share in the credits as she herself had been quite an active part of his administration for nearly four years (Izquierdo & Navia 2007:77). During the Concertación years overall poverty fell from 45,1% in 1987 to 18.8% in 2003 and extreme poverty was cut to a fourth of its previous value (Angell 2007:113); however, in comparison to the last phase of the Frei-Tagle government when economical growth was in the negative digits, Lagos brought inflation down to 2,8% and growth was registered at 6,2% in times when Latin America’s most significant countries were adopting structural adjustment programs and defaulting foreign debts to survive (Morales Quiroga 2008:18). He has also held the moral high ground internationally: firstly, in the UN’s Security Council where Chile occupied a non-permanent seat between 2003 and 2004 and firmly refused to recognize the US’ ‘right’ to invade Iraq and, secondly, in reopening the diplomatic channels with Bolivia to discuss the possibility of this country crafting an own exit to the Pacific (Izquierdo & Navia 2007:79). The ‘horizontal integration’ system is also something that has given people a lot of trust Concertación’s governments: if a minister is from party A, s/he is always followed by sub-secretaries from parties other than A. In this way
collaboration between the parties of the coalition is encouraged and the risk of creating cliques of power and sectionalism is avoided. This mechanism has been credited for allowing the alliance to work so well throughout the years in government and for being able to organize before elections in a manner that appears to be unknown to the opposition (Altman 2006:23-4). Concertación has been the alliance in power since the return of democracy and the connection with it might have benefited Bachelet in another way besides transference of the popularity capital accumulated by her precursor. It is logical that the association with the reigning coalition may have given the female candidate more visibility and more resources compared to either independents or small party leaders running for the same office (Morales Quiroga 2008:23) and, according to the conclusions of William Porath (2007:71), her being the ‘official’ candidate the current government, her campaign was helped on in the last months before the election by the president and the mouthpieces of the administration (the Minister of Internal Affairs, the General Secretary of the Government and Presidency) who inspired the choice of themes for speeches and shared with her the burdens of strategizing and image-building before the media. Porath concludes that because of her ties with Concertación Michelle Bachelet had, besides herself, two other actors who could represent her campaign and confront the opposition.

Like it says on the cover, Bachelet is a separated middle-aged woman (head of her household) and, according to Morales Quiroga’s (2008:26) analysis of the voting on the level of the communes, this image in combination with Concertación’s previous boost to the economy may have been two of the most important factors behind the fact that in the areas where single poor mothers were highly prevalent she had landslide victory. The candidate’s slogan said that she gave them her ‘woman’s word’ that she will improve their situation as well as promised that should she be elected half of the seats in her cabinet would be reserved for women. Her perceived ability to lead and administrate a home, supported by the casting of the female candidate as a victim, but also survivor, of the Pinochet regime, stimulated gender solidarity in the urban women electors who drew the conclusion that since he’s able to manage a home and two consecutive turns in office as minister she can’t make a bad president. Amongst the unemployed it was, however, Piñera who got the highest votes. This can be explained by his past as an entrepreneur and his knowledge of economy which impressed many of the under- or unemployed (Morales Quiroga 2008:28). With this in mind and the observations made earlier about women being the most disadvantaged group in case of cuts in the welfare state or negative economic growth, it is perhaps understandable that the pre-election polls showed that women would have voted for Bachelet to a higher extent than men and double as many women would have voted for her than for any other candidate (Morales Quiroga 2008:13).

Morales Quiroga’s (2008:17) analysis shows that the concentration of the female vote for Bachelet doesn’t seem to be related to her introduction by Concertación as this alliance is not traditionally known for amassing any significant quantity female votes, as they normally are directed towards the conservative right. It indicates furthermore that the women belonging to the economic-educational elite tended to vote not for her, but for Piñera who built his campaign on the importance of education for achieving economical success. Politically it was those to the left and centre-left who were predisposed to voting for Bachelet and were also most oppositional to Lavin’s campaign. In the second round what happened was that some of the voters were left without a candidate and could not directly migrate to Piñera because of the abyss of difference between his, Hirsch and Lavin’s ideologies and plus they disliked Piñera the most for being a neo-liberal. Therefore, those who had voted for Hirsch went ‘naturally’ towards Bachelet (Morales Quiroga 2008:24).

4.2.1. Female political representation in Argentina

Although I must say that they all refuse to be associated with the openly feminist organizations because they consider that these “are very European based …[and] they live in a different world”, in the following I would like to present my own observations of Argentinean gender politics and argument for my belief that there are three strands of feminism here directly related to three
models of women: feminists while in the home, feminists in the street or community, feminists in motherhood. Radical feminist associations are seen as far too normative (divorce before receiving full guarantees of alimony, abortion rights before guaranteeing universal health care, freeing women from the burden of the burdens of household responsibilities before guaranteeing full employment or day-care) as removed from “an Argentine feminism for the mass of Argentine women” and therefore not constructive enough (Fisher 1993:173).

Evita Perón is perhaps the most controversial woman in the (feminist) history of this continent: despite having campaigned, through a phalanx of the Peronist party which she built and administrated, for universal suffrage for women on the behalf of working class women who had been excluded from the mainly middle-and-upper-class women’s movement, she would remain convinced throughout her life that the women’s movement (and women themselves) could accomplish their goals only if they remained associated with a great male figure. Therefore when women were introduced into parties it was often as through a women’s branch as a space which, like the home, remains highly controlled and dependent on male political success (Craske 1999: 62). The Peronist party regulated domestic service, introduced equal pay in the textile industry, incorporated paid work carried out in the home, as this is the dominant source of income for women, minimum wage legislation and yet there was mutual rejection between Evita (and Juan) Perón and the feminists as, on the one hand, the early feminist organizations claimed that the Party was using women as support base for his presidential ambitions and, on the other, the First Lady considered feminists to be the purveyors of a foreign doctrine that was contrary to the nature of Argentine women. The nature of Argentine women was most often formulated in terms of service to country (and Perón), home and husbands. This ambiguous makeup of the Peronist movement was continued by Isabel Perón who gave state provisions for nursery services for working women (which remained unimplemented because of her short time in office) with one hand and took the public sale of contraceptives and mothers’ equal rights with fathers’ over the children in case of divorce with the other hand (Fisher 1993:151-2).

Nearly all the Unions that stand for women’s rights in some shape or form have to refer back to Evita, taking that which they can accommodate into their ideology and leaving out that which they are opposed to. The League of Housewives (LAC), a mainly upper-class organization established in 1956 by a female Minister of Education in the province of Buenos Aires, follows the submissive line and while it does not ask for equality in the home as the phrase feminists-while-in-the-home, and the election of Mrs. Thatcher as its figurehead, would seem to suggest, it engages in a dispute against the removal of women from their traditional roles by defending “the consumer, moral values and the family and home life.” The League’s belief is family values, the complementarity of men and women and women’s natural exclusion from politics kept them from coming into conflict with the military junta that allowed them to continue with their charitable activities, their (recreational) home-makers’ courses and their free-market orientated defense of the consumer (Fisher 1993:144).

The Buenos Aires Housewives Movement (ACP), a mainly middle and lower class organization established in 1982, can easily be classified as a in-the-street strand of feminism because although their main area of concern remains the family and its decreasing standard of living, they take to the streets to challenge the governments’ rights to sign bills which damage the working class. Besides ‘making politics’ by exiting to the streets, a space which was previously reserved to men, not by associating with political parties, the Movement also opposes free market economy which it sees as liable for the impoverishment of the middle classes and for the widening of the gap between the poor and the rich (Fisher 1993:145-8). The ACP has been instrumental in the demonstrations against the Galtieri regime post-Falklands’ war, but in the recent years have taken a more prominent radical feminist stand attempting to challenge the traditional concept of a housewife by advocating for housewife pensions, free health care and union participation, the legalization of divorce, free access to birth control and nursery schools (Fisher 1993:150-1). Another group that has more definite feminist leftist affiliation is Centre for Social Studies of the Argentine Woman (CESMA) or, as it became known from 1984, the
Housewives’ Union of the Argentine Republic (SACRA) that acts very much in the same way as the ACP, but with a twist: the SACRA attempts to offer housewives economic independence in the present (by state salary) and in the future (by pension funds) by demanding the recognition of the unpaid labour in the home and by alleviating some of the burden of ‘double workers’ (through meals in schools for children, launderettes and crèches) (Fisher 1993:155-6).

The denomination feminists-in-motherhood stands for the most internationally well-known strand of female political action in Argentina: las madres y las abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo. The movement itself started in April 1977 when 14 women gathered in the square before the Presidential palace to demand information about their missing sons and daughters. Within months they would be joined by dozens of other women, most of who were housewives between 40 and 60 and knew nothing of politics, but had become the first public open and visible challenger to the military dictatorship in Argentina. Their sons and daughters had disappeared as a part of the armed forces ‘dirty war’: the kidnapping, illegal detention, torture and murder of suspected dissidents and their families, a nation-wide project originally designed to eliminate a small Tucumán guerilla of the mid-1970s (Fisher 1993:104). The women initially took up the search because it could have been more dangerous for the male relatives to get involved (since men are more ‘political’) and formulated their demands in terms of deprived motherhood; the move from ‘mad old women’ to ‘mothers of terrorists’ was made in October 1977 as the questioning of the morality of a regime that took away the most important piece in what, based on Christian values, they considered to be women’s main duty, namely the rearing of the children, became so intense that the mothers and grandmothers began collaborating with human rights organizations inside the country and abroad to uncover the truth about how all the authorities (the Church, the military, the political parties and the trade unions, the judicial branch and some of the civilians in the executive) conspired to cover up tortures, murders and adoptions perpetrated on the ‘subversives’ (Fisher 1993:109-113). Although the military regime fell on its own because of the overall condemnable economical situation and the failure of the Falklands take-over, the Mothers continued to point out the injustices of the democratically elect Alfonsin administration which, despite its status, was still dubbed a protector of torturers and murderers because of the laws and executive orders designed to protect a majority of perpetrators, namely the Due Obedience and the Punto final (Fisher 1993: 133). “[T]he Mothers see themselves as transforming ‘politics’, by introducing new, ethical values based on non-violence, participation and solidarity into their struggle for social justice, a struggle inspired by the ideals of their children” (Fisher 1993:134) and now take an active role in the popular opposition to privatizations, redundancies and the increasing poverty caused by the Menem government’s austerity measures. Although they do not count themselves amongst the feminists, the Mothers have “made motherhood the basis of an ethical condemnation of society and its values” (Fisher 1993:135).

Despite the post-1983 richness of women’s grassroots movement, a problem that is perhaps endemic to Argentina remains: the opposition from the men ranges from overt hostility and sabotage to indifference. Those women who participate often have to receive the reluctant green light from their husbands because their involvement means that they will spend less time at home and there is the slight risk that their manhood might be questioned in the society if it looks like the woman is becoming the public face of the family (Fisher 1993:168). In the period of transition a feminist movement of sorts was resurrected and the ideologues began to collaborate again with various organizations for women’s and human rights, but the diversity of enemies in this epoch confused and ruptured it: some women became involved in malestream politics where they contented themselves with “a dynamics of adding [feminist] interests, rather than differentiating them” and running their candidates as vice-presidents under men (Catalina Guagnini, Irene Rodriguez and Elisa Colombo), others isolated themselves in the electorate from where they were pleased to hear President Alfonsin’s invectives against machismo and less pleased with the lack of action to prevent it and yet another group wanted to convert to traditional lobby from where they could affect politics without being a part of it (Feijoo 1994:330-334). As an example, in the same period SACRA led a battle against the masculine trade union world as it
has been, from its beginnings as a phalanx of the Peronist Party has been a member of the CGT, the national trade union, which continued to be male-led despite the fact that the SACRA plus other traditionally mainly female unions (teachers, health and textile workers) jointly make up more than a qualified majority of the members (Fisher 1993:157).

Although satisfied with the creation of several programmes for women under the Ministry for Social Action, the passing of laws against discrimination, the recognition of the equal rights of inheritance of both legitimate and illegitimate children, the passing of the divorce and access to contraceptives laws because any progress signifies the establishment of a space where gender equality, in the family and in the State, can be better approached, women complain over the relative lack of attention that such headway is given. The feminist groups regard the State with distrust because, although it passes laws to protect them, it doesn’t specify how it intends to enforce leaving the feminists to suspect that the laws are an ill disguised attempt at co-opting them (Feijoó 1994:339-340). In the political area a law was passed in 1991 that guarantees the presence of at least 30% women in relevant position in national elections which increased the number of women in Parliament (Feijoó 1994:346).

4.2.2. Cristina de Kirchner: preliminary observations

The 1994 Argentine Constitution limits the amount of terms a president may hold in succession to two, but it allows a former president to legally rerun after one term on the bench at least one time. This means that Néstor Kirchner could have stayed on for another term, but then he would be forced to withdraw for a period of at least four years (Levitsky & Murillo 2008:25). Although the fact that he would not run for a second term was well-known long before the end of his presidency in 2007, the possible candidacy of his wife, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, was entirely built upon rumours until the official announcement was made in the beginning of July 2007 (Rother 2007). If Néstor Kirchner had joked about his wife’s candidacy on several occasions throughout his years as president, in August 2007 he was using her candidacy as a guarantee for asking for investments along his visits around the globe (Verón 2007). In fact, some claim that Cristina de Kirchner enjoyed many of the privileges of incumbency even during her campaign: she, unlike any other candidate for the same post, was favored by most of the mass-media coverage and received most of the international attention (which was not always positive) as her husband commissioned her presence for a round of trips to Europe where she represented the interests of Argentina in her quality as acting First Lady. Although “Cristina’s presidential bid...was legal, it nevertheless smacked of institutional manipulation” (Levitsky & Murillo 2008:26) not only because of the conditions under which she was named candidate of the Frente para la Victoria, but also because of her avoidance of the press, public debates with her counter-candidates and the internalization of her campaign in oficialism.

4.2.2.1. The party

The question of why the Justicialist Party ran Cristina Kirchner may never get a full answer. What is clear is that Néstor Kirchner wanted to keep his word and not run for a second term, at least not immediately. Nevertheless, the party itself wanted to cash in on his immense popularity and success somehow and having a well schooled and well groomed candidate in the person of the First Lady readily available did not escape its eye. It is not clear who proposed it first: the party or the Kirchners, but it is clear that both benefited from the switch. Néstor Kirchner made good on his word, Cristina Kirchner got the presidential seat and the Justicialist Party remained in power. The magnitude of Cristina Kirchner’s national standing made it possible for her to ascend to candidacy without primary elections and it mitigated somewhat the nepotistic nature of the proposal. Having been active in the Youth Peronist Movement since the 1970s, Cristina Kirchner had served first as a provincial legislator in Santa Cruz, then as one of the province’s Congressional deputies to reach the Senate chair of the same province in 2001. In 2005 she was elected Senator for the province of Buenos Aires after several years of increasing popularity and notoriety (Svampa 2008:92).
The Peronist Justicialist Party is immensely fragmented and immensely powerful. In certain cases, particularly when it comes to elections for Parliament and Presidency, it can easily be said that its power derives directly from the segmentation of the electorate. The candidates for these two elections share the electoral list with candidates for the provincial city halls coming from the most diverse party phalanges and therefore amass more votes than they normally might. Support for Cristina Kirchner as candidate came not only from the ordinary Justicialist acolytes, but also from some of the former members of the opposition who had been ‘converted’ to Kirchnerism throughout Néstor Kirchner’s term in office. After the catastrophic failure of Unión Cívica Radical, the only clearly anti-Peronist party in Argentina, in the 2003 elections when the party, associated in people’s consciousness with Fernando de la Rúa’s disastrous presidency, got less than 2% of the vote, six UCR governors rejected the Radical leadership and joined forces with Néstor Kirchner. They, and other Radicals who joined their ranks later, became known as the K Radicals and one of them, Julio Cobos, became Cristina Kirchner’s running mate (Levitsky & Murillo 2008:18). In the catch-all Frente para la Victoria, a political alliance that had also brought Néstor Kirchner to power four years prior, all types of dissidents, socialists, communists, Radicals and Christian Democrats were co-opted because they declared themselves to be Kirchnerites at core. The lists varied from district to district comprising anything from former popular activists already known in the area who held the most varied political inclinations to centrally ‘ordained’ Kirchnerites (Svampa 2008:93). Therefore, what was once mainly a two party system has been slowly disintegrating since the beginning of the decade of 2000 because of defections amongst the UCR’s electorate and members. In fact, the unification of the PJ may be to the detriment of the Kirchner team as it might, not only require that they hold organized and through primaries in order to run as candidates, but also entice a very confused opposition to unite as well (The Economist 2008:46).

There were fourteen candidates on the ballot for the October 28 election, but only three of those were really known to and in different amounts liked by the public. What is interesting is that the one that finished second in the race with almost 23% of the vote was also a woman widely recognized for her crusade against corruption and her anti-establishment politics. She is a firm critic of the Kirchner administration and has served two terms as a congresswoman representing her poor, northern home province, Chaco. Her platform is focused on the need for transparency in government, and includes a promise to clean up Indec, the statistics agency accused of data manipulation particularly with regard to inflation digits, as well as to cut back the government's focus on ties with Venezuela. Instead she proposes that the relationships with close neighbours such as Uruguay and Chile be improved. Carrió is not blowing up smoke and is not accusing the Kirchner administration of wrong-doings simply to capitalize on the discontent of some of the electorate. If in 2006, Argentina was ranked number 93 of 163 countries in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of 2.9, in 2008 with the same score it is doing a bit worse: it was rated as 105 of 180. Venezuela, the priceless friend of the Kirchners, is scoring a 1,9 this year while, Chile and Uruguay, Carrió’s suggested new contacts in the area are both number 23 with a 6,9 rating (James 2007). While Elisa Carrió seemed to be centered on the domestic policies, Cristina Kirchner’s international tours alone, or in the company of her husband, give her an internationalist woman-of-the-world air that impresses some in the electorate who still remember the days when Argentina was one of the most influential countries in the region (Silkwood 2007).

Roberto Lavanga, the last of the top three, is in fact the economist behind the policies that have granted Néstor Kirchner such success who feels that he’s not been credited enough for the turn-around of the last four years. His campaign is focused on three fields: fighting crime, alleviating poverty, and creating jobs. While the last two are discussed also by Cristina Kirchner and the first also by Carrió who has made her fame precisely on issues related to increasing criminality, Lavanga takes another approach: he talks about increasing drug use, money-laundering, human and drug smuggling in the border area between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. Also a critic of the relationship with Hugo Chávez, who has been proven to illegally attempt to invest in the
campaign of Cristina de Kirchner, he asks that the government focus on the near neighbours who are more important in the fight of some of the more immediate problems that threaten the institutions of the state (James 2007).

4.2.2.2. The candidate

As a Senator for the province of Buenos Aires and a First Lady, Cristina Kirchner had popularity and had fame. She even had a foot in the Casa Rosada through her husband and had accompanied him in a series of trips abroad where he negotiated a number of investments and improved foreign relations with some Latin American countries that had begun to consider him too much of a leftist. What she lacked, however, was real power. Amidst rumors that they, like the Clintons, were attempting to start a dynasty, she did not confirm or deny the allegations. Politely she pointed out to *Time* that there is a flip-side of the coin: it is good that a woman might enter the White House, as Cristina herself would the Pink House, but then if she does “the country will have been ruled by two families, the Bushes and Clintons, for a quarter century” (Time 2007). In the same interview she promised that she would build on the historic achievements of her husband improving on education and health and that, as in the days when they were both working out of conjoined offices in their province in the South, they would “consult each other not as spouses but as people we considered to have the clearest opinions on politics” (Time 2007). If her politics would be a continuation of her husband’s, it is not clear why Cristina Kirchner wanted this power.

During her campaign she was portrayed as his ‘natural’ successor and, while that might be so, because she, as a longtime senator, has shared with him the burdens of rising inflation and the people’s disillusionment with politics, the motivation behind her own desire for more political power remains equivocal. The issues of the campaign were all inherited from the down-turn of the 90s and her husband’s term: the rampant inflation that is visible even to the most untrained on-looker despite the price controls and the ‘official index’ who shows remarkably steady digits, growing impunity amongst the police who turn a blind eye to increasing criminal activity which threatens public-security, expanding income inequalities and social marginalization and shrinking of political institutions (Levitsky & Murillo 2008:27-9). During the meetings along her tour Cristina de Kirchner made almost no clear reference to gender issues otherwise than asking gender-mates (*compañeras de género*) and the youngsters, the first time voters, to vote for her so that the dream begun in 2003 could continue (Adn.es 2007a). She made no promises to improve the quality of life for women based on this gender solidarity that she invoked in her speeches, but rather kept to sweeping remarks about eliminating poverty in general. She presented herself without a last name, simply as Cristina, which is explained as a need to avoid being perceived as ‘the wife of,’ but in the same time her campaign advisers packaged her as his successor (Adn.es 2007b). I believe that she used her first name as ‘slogan’ in memory of a former wife of a president who is fondly remembered by all Argentines despite having been the head of a number of measures that only touched upon a few. Eva Duarte de Perón, known as Evita, has been discussed above with regard to feminism and it seems that Cristina de Kirchner is mimicking her fixation on the poor and confused feminism. Superficially de Kirchner seems to adopt a stand of appreciation towards women in power, particularly in her interviews where she rejoices over the progress done by women to integrate politically, but in the same time she makes no promise of furthering this success once she becomes elected. In the same time, she throughout her candidacy she had no problem using her husband success (based mostly on populism) as collateral and made little attempts at actually creating a real political platform.

Her current cabinet has four female Ministers out of twenty Ministries and Secretariats: Graciela Ocaña (Minister of Health Salud), Débora Adriana Giorgi (Minister of Production), Alicia Margarita Kirchner (Minister of Social Development), who has also held this post during her brother’s presidency, and most importantly Nilda Garré for Minister of Defense. A study done by the IPU\(^6\) shows that in Argentina the number of women in Congress has risen thanks to

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\(^6\) the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organization established in 1889 whose purpose has evolved from the arbitration of conflicts to the promotion of democracy and inter-parliamentary dialogue
the 2007 elections: by 4.6% to an impressive 40% in the House of Representatives (130 seats which were up for the vote that year), second only to Finland who also has one of the highest Gender Empowerment Measures in the world. This number is nearly matched by that of the Senate where of the 72 seats women make up 38.9%, having as many as 29 seats after the partial reelection (IPU 2007:3-7). But perhaps it is not the number of women in government but the position that they occupy and the quality of their merits: for instance although the naming of Alicia Kirchner as Minister of Social Development might seem suspicious at first because of the family relation, she has earned a PhD in Social Work and had served as a provincial minister of social work for in the first half of the 1990s. Nilda Garré, who is also a ‘Néstor minister’ confirmed in her post, was the youngest woman ever serving in Congress during Perón’s 1973 term and has served as an ambassador to Venezuela since 2000. When she was named Minister of Defense she became the first woman ever serving in this high position in Argentina, a decision that confused many army men, not because of her gender, but because of the well-known combative style of this 70s guerilla adherent (Blanck 2005).

4.2.2.3. The societal level
In a country where non-voters can be legally fined, a 72% presence at the ballot box, the lowest since the reintroduction of democracy in 1983, is all but tragic even for the winner. The 45% vote Fernández de Kirchner obtained was arguably as much the product of party loyalty as of goodwill created by her husband’s record and very, narrowly allowed, her to avoid a runoff with Elisa Carrió (Svampa 2008:94). In the context of this essay, it is interesting that the runner up for this election was also a woman. Like in the case of the runner up for the primaries within the Concertación in Chile where Soledad Alvear competed against Michelle Bachelet, Cristina de Kirchner has to face another woman who was a socialist. The Peronist Party machine that relies heavily upon local support all around the country and her husband support and good reputation allowed her to come up on top.

After four years of export-led development and consistent dropping unemployment numbers, Néstor Kirchner left office as the most popular president in Argentine history. His public policies pushed wages up, foreign debt down, his social security reforms brought the unemployed and those working in the informal sector back into the system, and his legislative measures reduced the number of Supreme Court justices (Levitsky and Murillo 2008:17-8). The low turnout can be explained by a more general hard felt disillusionment with politics which passed over from the 1990s and the time of the anti-establishment politics, but the skepticism can also be related to the fact that Cristina was already portrayed as the victor of the elections half a year before they were even held. If the result was already ‘known’ and, since Fernandez de Kirchner was the only one that could afford to invest in a real planned campaign, the public might have felt the she could win even without their support (van der Kooy 2007). Nonetheless, there was a marked correlation between income levels and votes for the incumbent party, the Peronist candidate sweeping the board in the most deprived districts, but scoring less well in relatively prosperous areas, such as the cities of Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Santa Fe which might lead any researcher to conclude that, despite the consumer boom, the urban middle classes seems to be turning their backs on kirchnerismo (Svampa 2008:94).

4.2. Speech analysis
4.2.1. Michelle Bachelet
On the page of the government of Chile there are available an astounding 949 speeches given by the President of Chile during the span of her now almost three year long term. Speech selection is always a difficult process because even if the administrations present us with rich material there is always a risk that the researcher might leave behind data of capital importance that may well define the personality analyzed in a greater measure than any piece of information that has been collected when dealing with the speeches chosen. Public enunciations represent an already truncated part of the person who speaks and their intentions, firstly, because they are received by
and directed in the moment of their conception towards a ‘specialized’ audience who expects a
certain kind of intervention and, secondly, because speeches have to follow certain patterns of
articulation. In other words, the analysis of (transcribed) verbal material is confronted with the
problem of context that is treated by pragmatics both as function and content of language: (1) the
content may be abbreviated or make reference to a former understanding between the leader and
the public which the researcher doesn’t have access to and (2) the content may be manipulated or
exaggerated to fit either certain types of audiences or the leaders’ personality or emotional state at
the moment. What this says is that subjects do not speak the same in front of a trusted group of
friends as in the company of a respected, but on a personal basis unfamiliar, political leader and
that meetings tend to dictate not only the thematic of the discourse, but also the attitude put
forward during the intervention. Therefore if the subject attends a conference with the theme
“Women and domestic violence,” he is likely to be against violence perpetrated onto women
while if an individual attends a meeting dedicated to sadism, he may be either interested in the
psychological ramifications or causes of sadism or adhere to its practices. Either way, for both of
our subjects the interest in violence is present: while the first one values it negatively and
probably intends to discuss ways of containing or eliminating that violence, the second may have
an (obscure) interest in perpetuating or at least observing it. Which of the two concerns our
subject can only be ascertained through the discourse he puts forward about his interests in which
he either distances himself from the sub-culture (but shows ‘scientific’ interest in it) or full
commitment to its exercise. In both cases, there is a need for deconstruction and skeptical
resistance towards the discourse presented since any act of verbalization appears as mediated
thought and may therefore diverge from the true intentions of the person.

Having said this, we can now move on to the speeches that have been selected for this close
reading. They are five: the first speech held by Bachelet in her new quality of President of Chile,
three speeches held at women’s conferences (two in Chile and one in Guatemala in order to see if
her agenda changes once she is in contact with a foreign audience) and one discourse held in
relation to the extension of the anti-abuse hotline to encompass the whole of Chile. Already in the
selection phase, the material has intentionally been picked so as to represent those instances when
the President is most likely to utter statements relating to her views on gender equality and gender
roles in society. The fact that there are many such examples, as Michelle Bachelet attends a series
of functions where gender is at least one of the bi-topics of discussion, shows, like in the example
above, that she is intensely interested in these subjects and that she has a hard-felt commitment
for gender solidarity. Although at times, her interventions are short and even neutral, the ones that
I have selected range between two thousand and three and a half thousand words. They are also
fairly evenly distributed across time: besides the inaugural speech held in March 2006, there are
two other speeches of that year (from September and June) and two from 2007 (October and
March).

Michelle Bachelet has a straightforward and seemingly affectionate style of approach towards
the audience. She is engaging, frank and emotionally involved in the themes of her speeches.
Starting with the first of her speeches she asks for unity and for her audience not only to expect
top-down solutions for their problems, but work together with the government and with each
other to create a country where “nobody should feel that their destiny is at the mercy of the
elements” (Bachelet 2006a). She creates bubbles of inclusion by using verbs in the plural
pointing at an alliance between herself, her coalition and the people who she constantly
encourages to act independently and not wait for the government to impose its will from above.
At the height at the first speech she proclaims her will to create a government of citizens “from
the discarded to the enterprising, this infinite array of colours, of perceptions and perspectives
that give such richness to our society” (Bachelet 2006a) giving them her woman’s word (one of
the slogans of the recently concluded campaign) that she will create a more egalitarian, more
participative future for all the Chileans. The whole first page represents a clear constructivist
ideology: the citizens are not only urged to collaborate with the government in the spirit of
pragmatism, but also in the spirit of working together to recreate and rejuvenate the values that
have been pacted after the fall of the dictatorship: equality, dignity support of the talents of the country and so forth. The President reiterates that her candidacy did not surge out of a will for power, but rather of the wish to serve so that together the populace, her “friends”, as she calls them, and the government can reconstruct history. She adds that she is “the trustee of an entire history that has had grey and bitter moments [but] today, we, the Chileans live better, freer than before. We have had three successful governments and I feel proud to continue on this path that has given such fruits” (Bachelet 2006a). This line of reasoning is closed in the last row when the President concludes by saying that the new government, headed of a woman, is going to “work ceaselessly [so that] together we will have a much improved Chile” (Bachelet 2006a).

In the same speech she uses some of the associations that have been naturalized in language due to overuse: e.g. while children are the future and in order to create better opportunities for them we should tirelessly struggle in the present, the elderly should be kept from harm as a reward for their past efforts for the country. According to Fairclough (1995:44) this kind of ‘knowledge’, although it is not factual (there is for instance no proof that the elderly have made real efforts to better the country and we would probably not stop thanking them if we would discover that the welfare created was a simple coincidence), but rather highly symbolical and ideologized, is what best defines subjects because they reproduce it uncritically as if it was rational and natural. When this ‘knowledge’ is shared, the failure to subscribe to it leads the group to consider the subject as socially incompetent. Apart from making reference to something that the public expected, in the case of Michelle Bachelet the reference to children and the future serves the purpose of reminding the audience of the fact that she shares their fate: she has a young child herself and an elderly tortured mother who should really be thanked for her resistance against the dictatorship. This phrase aims also at establishing the period ahead as an altruistic struggle riddled with dangers and (possible) insufficiencies that are justified by the need to create welfare in another’s name. Like a true leftist, Michelle Bachelet envisions the State at the “service of those who suffer the bitterness of defenselessness, by the side of those who wish to arise” (Bachelet 2006a). Another possibility is that Michelle Bachelet intentionally formulates her hopes for the future in the terms of the supermadre so as to stimulate the expectations of those present and not shock them too much: since they know that she is a capable woman, she tries to show that she has no desire to emulate the aggressive style of the men that have gone before her.

The coming two speeches, also from 2006, are perhaps the clearest with regard to Michelle Bachelet feminist commitment despite her probably having slightly exaggerated her claims and her attitude so as to better fit the militant environment of the forums she attended. While the presence itself at the forums implies an attitude of consent with the feminist cause, her words are intended to clarify its depth as a conference specifically dedicated to gender gives the speaker more of an opportunity to articulate opinions regarding the theme. In front of the Forum “Women at the helm” (Mujeres al timón) she opens with the realization that women are a majority in Chile (little over 50%) and without their full inclusion in all the fields and the public spaces, which means equal dignity for both genders, there will be little chance for Chile to live a better life. This is followed by a diatribe against those in Chile who, having treated women as a significative minority, hurry to count themselves amongst the progressive and the generous (Bachelet 2006b). This statement can relate to either one of two things: either it makes reference to the Conservative Party and, its modern off-shoot and co-coalitionist, the Christian Democrats or to the UDI, the opposition, who uses women with an established political base as candidates discarding them soon after the victory is won in the name of the party. While the Conservative Party rooted for the female vote in the 1940s simply so that the expansion of the electorate could guarantee them victory in the elections for decades to come, the Christian Democrats, who have been in control of the SERNAM for nearly a decade since its reconfiguration in the early 1990s, advocate a snail pace improvement for the ‘women’s issue’ so as not to ‘shock’ society. Either one of these accusations is serious because they jointly lead to placing the conservative coalition brother in the reject pile in relation to gender equality (which they haven’t really promoted when they had the presidency due to the onslaught of other more pressing issues) together with the real opposition.
This clears the field for the PS who now, through Michelle Bachelet, who delivers on the gender promises she makes like when she, despite the resistance from “many men and some women,” created the first fifty-fifty cabinet, becomes the true champion of women. She says that before her many doubted that Chile even had enough women of talent and ability to fill these quotas, but now the feminine presence in politics is irreversible because “the world is living a process of cultural change…that will lead us to accept this new reality sooner or later” (Bachelet 2006b).

Although she sees that positive changes in society which start with a civil society that is more present, more knowledgeable about its rights and more skeptical to authority, she still believes that women are being discriminated against and advocates quotas until there will be full equality of opportunities between the genders. She says that although the female representation in Congress raises by 2% every election, leading to an estimated 40 or 50 year wait until parity can even become possible in practice, gender integration can be achieved faster by improving the quota system and putting forward policies that make work, family and reeducation possible for women. According to Bachelet “the full integration of women is a true must in order to achieve development” because it is not only unfair that women should be left out of the process, but it is economically harmful. She cites an article written by a (woman) economist who claimed that given the current economical situation of Chile a 10 points increase of female participation would gain 5 points of growth in the country (Bachelet 2006b). Women are therefore considered an opportunity in themselves, a hidden treasure that goes to waste because of a culture and a political structure that is inherently alien to women’s needs and in addition knows little about economy. Women and men have to attend to the family together, share in the household duties and institutions in the society (political parties, private and public companies) have to change in order to promote women because it is this common agreement between them that has sunken women into anonymity for so many decades when a new deal would profit not only women, but also men and therefore the whole society at large.

Michelle Bachelet believes that “this is not a feminist theme, nor a vindication of gender…it is mainly a theme of justice” and since her “objective is to create a more just Chile, a Chile without exclusions” (Bachelet 2006b) this is one of the cornerstones of her politics. A year later, in March 2007, she has developed and polished this rhetoric, and although she cannot be classified as a populist because of her participation in and sanctioning by the elite, there are some tendencies towards ‘gender populism’. By 2007, Bachelet knows enough about giving speeches that she is able to create and dot her interventions with formulas to be remembered by: “equality is not a dream”, “poverty has a woman’s face”, “discrimination has a woman’s face”, “we will win this battle”, “no woman left behind”, “we [the women] must change the world in order to enter it” (Bachelet 2007a). The data that she puts forward are the same: 40 to 50 years before women can begin to achieve parity with men in the Chilean Congress, growing numbers of women and children harmed by domestic violence, lower wages and lower presence of women on the work market and in decision-making circles and so forth. Nevertheless, the speech contains some novel elements like her reflections on her own political success because she probably wants to present herself as a model to follow for the women in the country she’s visiting. She believes that she was selected not only because she has immersed herself into women’s issues since the beginning of her campaign, but also because of the efforts of the outgoing president, Ricardo Lagos, who made sure that women would be given space and visibility in his cabinet. According to Bachelet herself her positioning in the Ministry of Defense was vital to her election as a president because although she had penetrated the male space already when she was Minister of Health, she is convinced that it was the former that made the electorate feel that she is truly capable of managing an occupation to which women hadn’t been assigned to traditionally. Therefore, following her own case in point, she trusts that quotas are the only way to give the constituencies the incentive they need in order to begin to rely on women in high posts (Bachelet 2007a). What is interesting is that she does not seem to take into account the fact that she was appointed by a man and how this affects her credibility as a feminist. If patriarchy passed the torch onto her,
some might question her true commitment to the cause because it appears that she is, if not wholly a part of the discriminative system, at least connected, sponsored and ‘authorized’ by it.

I left the conference on gender and social cohesion held in October 2007 and the speech following the inauguration of the anti-abuse hotline last because their thematic is so similar. At the conference Michelle Bachelet begins by condemning the indifference that allows women to become the victims of domestic violence. This she relates to the lack of value that society and men give to women and their work: if a woman is a housewife, the husband will answer that she does not work when asked about her profession, if a woman goes out to work, she will almost always have to pull double shifts (taking care of the chores at home and her official employment) and receive lower pay than men do (Bachelet 2007b). Formal equality, she continues means nothing to women if the underlying structural causes of this ‘disrespect’ remain unaddressed. The social cohesion, currently under threat because of women’s awareness of their still un-enforced rights and their demand for extended liberties, can only be appeased through wide policies that aim at the restructuring of society: the eradication of all forms of violence against women, increasing women’s presence in decision-making circles and the reconciliation of paid labour and family life. Although they may not look like deep or too controversial policies they aim at upsetting “deeper causes [of discrimination against women] that have to do with a patriarchal vision of gender relations…that assigns women a subordinate place and because of this converts them into permanent victims of the reduction of rights, including the most fundamental one, the right to life” (Bachelet 2007b; my translation). While this statement reveals relatively deep knowledge of psychological and sociological definitions and explanations of discrimination, it also raises a more practical doubt about the government’s ability to do anything about it. The current patterns of gender interaction, although gravely undermined by an increasing female presence in the public spaces, have been in place in Latin America for over 500 years, how is a four year term, of which 18 months had already passed, propose to reverse such praxis? Michelle Bachelet sees herself as a step in the process and hopes that though her efforts there will be achieved “a more equilibrated distribution of responsibilities amongst all people, men and women, that represent the totality of the citizenry…I’m saying more equilibrated, not majority, not identical…a little bit more in agreement with reality, not the terrible imbalance that we see today in many of the Latin American countries” (Bachelet 2007b; my translation). So here is where the tension between all her speeches lies: Michelle Bachelet is a pawn in a wider change that is about to come, but which she cannot guarantee will happen by the end of her term. While “equality is not a dream” Chileans, and women in general, might have to continue dreaming for a while longer because, despite having two female presidents in the same time just in the Southern Cone, there is still much work to be done. This evolution makes any relatively informed reader question if the near populist that spoke for and to the excluded, embodied mostly by women, a year before at the women’s conference in Guatemala has suffered a sudden loss of energy or commitment for the cause. The most probable answer is that this has not happened, but rather Bachelet, forged by her years in office, has become more pragmatic and sees direct policy as a way to recast a more abstract reality built upon cultural and social prejudice. Although she is ideologically committed to “profound changes, both in the context of the family and in the current logic of the market,” she leaves demagoguery behind in order to inflict real (and maybe short-term) changes upon her society through executive orders and laws: the solidarity pensions that give housewives the possibility of a minimum income at the age of retirement, crèche laws, work codes, quotas and so forth. Having realized that she cannot go at this alone, Michelle Bachelet, using the form we so as to identify her appeals with those of all women, asks for the support of the State, the labour market, the organized communities that make up the civil society and all the members of each family (Bachelet 2007b). “Social cohesion, she concludes, demands new mechanisms of inclusion, but also of participation, as a part of a process of deepening democracy.”

The last and, one of the shortest speeches, goes back to one of the themes that we were discussing in the beginning: the passionate involvement of the entire country in the process of undermining the system of values that holds women prisoners to male and societal arbitrariness.
The use of verbs and pronouns in the first person plural, the de-normalization of the patriarchal discourse, the condemnation of ignorance, male impunity and the perpetuation of violence and discrimination against women across generations are some of the procedures adopted by the President in this speech. Using one of the catch phrases of second wave feminism (‘the personal is political’), Bachelet announces that since violence is a problem that touches upon the entire society it has to stop being considered a ‘personal’ or private issue and be confronted as a matter of public politics because the State, as the sum of the people’s representatives, has the obligation to guarantee the survival of the ethic principles even within the family (Bachelet 2006c). Besides punishing, the State, the families, the mass-media, the institutions of the civil society, the Church, the sports clubs all have the obligation to “educate, prevent and orientate” so that the number of nearly one woman killed every week by one of the members of her family be tackled into non-existence. As a conclusion she reminds everybody that the State can never be the first instance for change, that this has to come about as a joint effort of the entire community and only when the society has failed, does the government have the responsibility to intervene. The current government aims at improving life standards in the country, instilling into the new generation the values needed for a respectful and healthy cohabitation, but it is primarily the family who is duty-bound to pass onto the children positive values and principles of interaction.

4.2.2. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner

For the purposes of this analysis four speeches have been selected: two given by the President in front of the National Assembly, one in front of a foreign audience and another two in front of the electorate present at a rally organized for the celebration of one of the landmarks of Peronism, 17th of October. The Legislative Assembly or the Congress is one of the institutions to which the President has to answer and the first place where the President-elect presents himself in order to lay out their political programme for the coming term. Since Mrs. de Kirchner was elected only little over a year ago, I believe that four speeches (of the almost 400 given since her election) will suffice to characterize her style as a speaker and define her intentions with relation to the future of the Argentinean people and particularly in relation to the issue of gender equality. The length of the speeches varies between roughly a thousand five hundred words represented by the rally intervention and nearly nine thousand, that is, the second speech delivered before the Congress in March 2008.

One of the biggest problems I have encountered in the collection of the data related to a possible feminist agenda or thematic is the rather striking lack of such a thread in the majority of the Argentinean president’s public appearances. This is connected to the fact that Cristina de Kirchner rarely gives herself the occasion to approach such a subject as she often attends conferences that are either dedicated to economy, (energetic) integration in the region or the discussion of security. Starting from her first speech in front of the Argentine Congress, Cristina de Kirchner (2007a) makes little reference to gender, including her own, besides feminizing some phrases such as President. She presents herself as a factor of continuation of her husband’s politics in a number of places: “his ideas and convictions are my own”, “you are a modern president in post-modern times, as I think I am myself”, “the President, here to my left, and me are both products of the public school”,” Kirchner and myself are people who belong to a generation that believed in ideals and convictions” and uses the plural form in nouns and pronouns to play upon the inclusion either amongst in the former President’s team or amongst the people of low material resources from whom she descends. Since both of the assertions are correct, she is in fact a long time Senator and comes from a working class background, it is hard to de-legitimize the claim of belonging. Although they are not exaggerations in any way, she uses both as political tools to gather support: the first shows that she was present and part of the body that improved the quality of life and the second that she is not of an elite breeding which is meant to counter the critics that have been directed against her after she was elected by Néstor Kirchner as his successor in the absence of primaries. In general she talks of social mobility, of improving
growth, of eliminating poverty, foreign debt, social and political inclusion, but makes little reference to women as a special social group.

The only startling reference comes towards the end when she says literally “I am convinced that we will achieve it [change the country] with the effort and the work of all Argentines. Also – because you know that sincerity is one of my characteristics – I know that maybe it will be more difficult for me because I am a woman, because you can always be a worker, a professional or a businesswoman but it will always be harder for a woman. I’m absolutely certain of it.” (de Kirchner 2007a) Here the applauses ring and she never explains why it is more difficult for a woman or what she intends to do in order to lighten the burden of women who want to succeed. As far as she goes, she knows it is possible because she has the model of the mothers and grandmothers of the square and that of Evita who “have not only dared to do that which nobody did, but also succeeded.” However, we have seen above that these women she names have had but ambiguous ideas about feminism and challenged authority only when it robbed them of something that it itself defined as their attribute (children, husbands, grandchildren), retreating after they have received what they had lost. This, although ambiguous, still possible connection with feminism is soon diluted into nothingness by the coming phrases where she identifies male independence heroes (Mariano Moreno, Sán Martín and Belgrano) as further examples for her to follow. Although the women seem to come attached to the fight for human rights and the men are associated with the struggle for economical independence in her context, this is never made explicit in the text. Nevertheless, the conclusion that is possible to draw from this speech is that the brand of feminism that Cristina de Kirchner represents (if any at all) is conflictive and, as in the quote on the cover, the Argentinean president switches between the “wife of K” to “Cristina Fernández (de)” at ease depending on the occasion.

The methods of inclusion/exclusion named above and the thematic orientation are something that is casually used throughout all of the speeches. Related to this, Cristina de Kirchner has another tendency: when she introduces women in her 2008 opening of Congress speech they are usually set in a network of connections – the president of the National Bank of Argentina is “a former legislator and an ex colleague of yours on these benches”, the current Minister of Health is referred to by her first name only “Graciela”, the dean of the University of Córdoba is the “young dean of one of the most prestigious universities” – and instead of referring to meetings and official gatherings as such the language used is very informal “we chatted.” Since by the time of this speech a period of three month had already lapsed since she took office, Cristina wants to emphasize the achievements of her presidency but she is careful not to take full credit for them: she gives a part of the cake to her husband, of course, and another to the cabinet, the Congress and her collaborators with which, again, she lives in the symbiosis of a plural pronouns and plural verbs. Interestingly enough Cristina de Kirchner talks about reducing poverty into one digit-numbers by the end of 2016\(^7\) as one of her objectives. Of course, this on a realistic plane could mean that she sees herself and her government as a step in the strategic process, but it could also mean that which the newspapers have been pointing at since the beginning of her campaign: that the Kirchners are planning to switch in 2011. Towards the end of this speech she touches on the claim to the Falkland Islands, which Argentina and the United Kingdom have been quarreling over since the independence of the South American state, to ask for the repatriation of the bodies and the reopening of flights between the island and the mainland so that the relatives of the soldiers fallen there could raise a monument to their memory. The claim to the islands has been advanced through the UN since the end of the 1982 war and no other president has referred to it in his domestic speeches since because it still is an open wound for the Argentineans who, after the period of dictatorship when the group of islands were colored in the same pink as the Argentine mainland have a great deal of resentment to the old empire. I think that this part of the speech reveals Cristina de Kirchner’s intention to adopt an ambiguous femininity: despite saying that they add the claim to the bodies to the claim to the islands, as a conclusion to the paragraph

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\(^7\) this year represents the Bicentenary: 200 years since the declaration of independence of the Argentines
she adds that “the only thing all the Argentines are asking the United Kingdom is to allow flights so that the commemorative monument can be inaugurated” (de Kirchner 2008a). Cristina wants to be both Mrs. Thatcher, the iron lady, a ‘warrior queen’ whom she confesses she admires greatly, and a softer more ethereal presence who speaks of collaboration, dialogue and reflection.

In her speech before the Rio Group (2008b) Cristina Kirchner again takes on one of the high political matters of the moment: the violation by Colombia of the sovereignty of Ecuador in their efforts against the FARC. Her themes change somewhat: she appeals to all the countries of the continent to adopt anew the principles of multilaterality, legality, dialogue and mutual understanding, however, using the same rhetorical tricks – reminding everyone of the long relationship she has had with all of those present through the government of her husband. At the end in the frame of the mad accusations thrown at each other by the two presidents and the demands for apologies she raises the issue of the supposed malady of nerves that women have been accused by through the last hundreds of years and says in a rather humoristic tone “some of the scenes that we sometimes get to see make women seem the most rational people on the planet.” And although she receives applauses and laughter for this remark, she continues with apologies and states a fact that, again, shows her ambiguity towards gender equality: “we [women] are always tested and we always have to give proof that we can be better than men. I believe that in some things we are showing that we are a little bit better than men.” If this is meant to be a jest why say a little bit and why just some things? Despite the applause, she shows the tendency to withdraw so as to not step on any toes, at least not too much.

Cristina de Kirchner’s best attempt at defining peronism and her political programme can be found in her last year’s 17th of October speech. Here, like usual, she makes little reference to gender issues otherwise than in relation to the ambiguous model of Evita. Nevertheless, she describes very loosely the economical and ideological split in answer to which in Argentina peronism was created as a middle way between “the most individualist and selfish capitalism that one can know and the most stupid state control that fell in ’89 with the Berlin Wall” (de Kirchner 2008c). Today despite the dissolution of these two paradigms, peronism is till the most fitting solution because it has never been has never ossified, but remained flexible and inclusive to all Argentines. In this context, Evita is saluted “not as a female militant for peronism, but as an Argentine woman, as a woman who changed the life and the culture of the whole country.” In this short paragraph a lot happens: de Kirchner says that she has the honor of being the first woman President of the Argentines, remembers and pays homage to Evita who, despite “deserving it [the Presidency] more than any man, never became one” and she calls out to the young people involved in social movements and “to her gender mates, the Argentine women, relentless fighters, heads of households, professionals, workers to reconstruct this new paradigm”.

First thing’s first: Isabelita Martínez de Perón (1974-1976), Juan Perón’s third wife, not Cristina de Kirchner, was the first female President in Argentina after being elected vice-president and her husband dying in the second year of their term. Her assertion about Eva Perón changing the lives of the entire country is also an exaggeration because, although to this day she remains an important personality amongst many in the pantheon of spiritual leaders of Argentina, her preoccupations didn’t stray much outside the area of charity and the working classes. The call to the young and the excluded (who have been excluded even by Cristina from her interventions during what became known as the most “apathetic political campaign in the history of the country”) is reminiscent of the supermadre strand explained by Chaney (1979): as a woman, despite being in the lead, Cristina de Kirchner still has the complex of being in the shadow and talks about what she knows and what women traditionally know: those who also find themselves in the shadow of others. This impression is reinforced by the use of plural when referring to the achievements of her government who always start at the end of may 2003 when her husband was elected. Another possible interpretation of this paragraph where the only reference to gender is concentrated is that she commemorates Eva Perón as the creator and helper of the great man that Juan Perón has been, much like she sees herself – the supporter of another great man, Néstor Kirchner, who warmed the seat of the Presidency waiting for her arrival. Like Michelle Bachelet
Cristina Kirchner never comments on what it means that a woman received the keys to the presidential palace from a man, and worst of all, for a feminist that she declares herself to be, as least in the foreign newspapers, from her husband.

5. Conclusions
The aim of this essay has been to investigate whether the two newest South American women presidents, Michelle Bachelet and Cristina de Kirchner, represent a feminist ideology or if their election represented a move towards deepening gender equality as they either promised in their respective campaigns or since they took office in 2005 and 2007 respectively to further the ‘women’s issue’. In order to do this I have, with the help of secondary sources, looked at three separate campaign questions: why did their parties run women, why did the public (constituencies) vote for women politicians and why did they, the candidates themselves, run. After having performed what I believe to be a thorough revision of the sources in existence, which in the case of Cristina de Kirchner are much less extensive probably because of her shorter years in office, I can now say with relative certainty that of the two, Michelle Bachelet is the one that has the most overt feminist inclinations. The society around the Chilean President is more acclimatized and more respondent to such demands on the part of the women because these developments have been projected since the very first years after the fall of the dictatorship. SERNAM, although sluggish and inefficient at best, represents as much of a cornerstone for feminine independence in the country as the election of a female president that has run as such. In Argentina the women’s movement has not been institutionalized in a subordinate position to another Ministry that lumps women together with children, poor and the disabled thereby reinforcing the notion that women need protection, but most of all charity. In this country feminism, once made controversial by the military juntas, failed to organize as such after the fall of the dictatorship and was absorbed by other issues and more importantly other organizations (trade unions, parties, human rights groups) that have made the struggle for gender equality a bi-issue to leadership, winning elections, improving the gap between classes and so forth.

Cristina de Kirchner, despite her efforts to be perceived as a feminist in the international press because comparisons with the Clinton couple can only win the Kirchners popularity points, has built her campaign entirely on continuing the model of economic growth put in place by her husband in 2003. She has made little reference to women as a particular class that need the protection of the State outside the usual remarks to women as consumers that would be damaged by rising inflation and food prices, which are two of the most serious problems the country is battling at this point. Although it is difficult to say if women voted for Cristina in higher numbers than men because the Argentine vote is not segregated like it is in Chile, it was decidedly those from the lower classes as it was in the case of Michelle Bachelet. If you assume that women, as single heads of household, find themselves more often than men amongst the poor, then it is perhaps safe to say that it was indeed overwhelmingly women who brought her the presidential seat. Instead of the person Cristina, people in Argentina voted for a party or, at best a team, the Kirchners, who were the only ones capable to bring them out of misery after the debacles in the 1990s by stimulating growth. Although there was a strong identification between the oficialist candidate Michelle Bachelet and Ricardo Lagos’ office (as they both belong to the same coalition and party), which brings up some questions about the quality of this perhaps patriarchy endorsed feminist, Bachelet has made a clearer stake for feminism in the years following her win. She has named women to her cabinet and her government, creating the first government completely equal on the basis of gender, and when the women failed she replaced them with others, thereby keeping the balance. Cristina Kirchner named only four women ministers, two of which she simply confirmed in their posts, and the rest were assigned by promotion from her husband’s administration period. While this proves attention to merit it also raises some questions about the President’s commitment to gender equality and parity.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that these women’s policies are the product of a balancing act between all the actors in society. As they do not create policies in void they are influenced
both by the current climate in their countries (for instance Argentina’s economic problems tend to relegate any other issues to a distant back seat) and by the historical evolution of gender-related issues. Parties, for one, are gendered institutions in the sense that they reflect in practice and documents the gender ideology of their members and founders and gendering institutions in the sense that they act as gatekeepers framing, encouraging and restricting women’s involvement in politics to the usual roles as party supporters and activists and therefore normalizing gender norms that exist in the greater society through their campaigns (Macaulay 2006:8). The parties in Chile, and this goes for all the political parties in general, have since the democratization process’ rebirth attempted to harness the radical change demanded by various social movements including the women’s movement because, being based on bureaucratic forms of organization, their inherent function is that of ‘guaranteeing moderation in socioeconomic change and limited innovation in the political and legal spheres’ (Cañadell 2001:167). In the case of Argentina, there has been a move towards legislating for women’s needs in the early 1990s when the patria potestad, equality of inheritance between legitimate and illegitimate sons and the anti-discrimination laws were adopted in a rather neutral fashion. It is important to reiterate in this context Cristina de Kirchner’s party, the PJ, to which the Frente para la Victoria is but a catch-all branch, has always been ambiguous about gender. Having made women’s issues a bi-matter from the beginning and put them in the care of Evita Perón who campaigned for the female vote ‘under the guidance of the husbands,’ gender equality is even today foreign to a party that has been struggling with economical crises from the start. This trend is continued by Cristina de Kirchner who appeals to women, when she deems it suitable, and forgets about her ‘gender mates’ as soon as it is not. She, like Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua, presents herself not as an independent candidate, as the European newspapers would have us believe, but as the wife and continuator of the political project of her husband.

Although I agree with Rosa Cañadell’s (2001:168) assessment regarding the irreversibility of the achievements of the women’s movements during the past 15 years, I believe that the institutionalization of the movements’ demands in SERNAM and in the political parties’ ideology has, despite bringing the issues into a field from where legislation could be formulated, also diluted the radicalism of the first years. Although in Chile there are certain parties, like PS and PPD, that have a clear feminist standing on gender issues, there are many more and much stronger rightist parties that still challenge women’s claim to the public space, while, interestingly enough, they use the progress made by the women’s movements to their advantage. Women’s ‘propensity to withdraw’ (Chaney 1979:23) has been employed against the women’s movement itself by parties who were interested in repackaging themselves as women-friendly, but consumed by efforts to improve democracy and their own political position within it have pressed for the relegation of women’s issues to separate departments only dusted them off during elections when the feminine vote becomes crucial for the male dominated political parties (Dandavati 2005:84). Women have lost twice because, according to Cañadell (2001:169), the women that have left independent municipal politics in the effort of making their pleas heard on the national level have had to ‘abandon many of their organizational practices, such as their preference for nonhierarchical structures’ and openly compete to take out each other in races for candidacy while men are still the ones that are more likely to be proposed as candidates because of their closer ties with informal decision-making circles.

We saw the same movement towards pragmatism in all the speeches analyzed. While initially there is great enthusiasm for the women’s issue and the collaboration of the entire society is demanded in order to change that which is regarded as harmful, namely discrimination against women, this tends to wear off slowly and be replaced by a more realistic orientation. It is perhaps this that has stopped Cristina de Kirchner from being present at more women’s conferences. At the moment Argentina is passing through some rather difficult decisions that have undermined the initial popularity of the President. Since her entrance into office, the ‘new Evita’ has been protested against by farmers, students and teachers alike. In the middle of this year her own vice-president, Julio Cobos, began obstructing her by opposing a law that would raise export taxes on
grain. In this context one could argue that her presence is required in the country and there is not enough of Cristina to go around for all the conferences. Despite not being able to attend such forums Cristina Kirchner she sent an envoy to the second Latin American conference on gender held in El Salvador. Notwithstanding, it is the lack of reference to gender issues in her speeches that is remarkable: of the thirty some pages analyzed in this thesis no more than a page could be put together by adding the paragraphs in which she makes some sort of allusion to gender. Unlike Michelle Bachelet who refers to party or equality in some way in nearly all her speeches, Cristina Kirchner’s associations are almost always anecdotes, accidents or pleas for votes. From what we have seen it is perhaps fair to draw the conclusion that she, like some of the parties, uses gender solidarity as a tool to gather votes and popularity.

In the anthology edited by Marit Melhuus and Kristi Anne Stølen called *Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery* (1996) one of the collaborators puts forward an interesting thesis about male political behavior following the fall of the Trujillo dictatorship of the Dominican Republic. Based on fieldwork carried out between 1991 and 1992 in a village on the southern Dominican-Haitian border, Christian Krohn-Hansen investigates the perceived characteristics of male politicians of ambiguous morals that make them popular with the crowds of this country. The males’ categories for judging other men with respect to their capacity is based on certain attributes and ideas that they perceive as closely knit to their maleness, namely, courage and ability to survive dangerous situations, public visibility and interaction with other men, eloquence, his seriousness or sincerity and, finally, his capacity as seducer and father which guarantees him a strong and reliable ties with other men (Krohn-Hansen 1996:112-120).

I believe that the same works for the women that I have analyzed in this study. In a society that is still *machistic* and expects politicians to be men or at least to emulate their characteristics, Michelle Bachelet and Cristina de Kirchner have both followed suit. Bachelet has been courageous surviving the dictatorship, taking upon herself the difficult role of interacting with men that had had some part in the murder of her father on a daily basis, partaking in the military exercises and rescue missions in Santiago during which she was photographed on a tank. Like Cristina Kirchner, who herself has had quite a lot of press coverage in her role as long time Senator and First Lady, Bachelet had been made visible to the public in her roles in the Ministries she conducted where she was both efficient and honest. They both had to interact with a high number of men that still dominate the high party levels and have through daily collaboration created strong ties with them. Based on this it is possible to say that the two female candidates might have been perceived as something more or different than women and that this perception was the additional piece of the puzzle that guaranteed their success. As stimulating as this thought might be, it is nothing more than a speculation at this point. Ethnographic interviews and a score of discourse analyses should be the background of such further work into the field that may or may not confirm my opinion. What is true, at least in the case of Michelle Bachelet, is that her presence in politics may well have changed the views of many about women’s capacity to lead and that it is not unlikely that she will be followed by another woman or at least that the coming cabinet will continue working in parity.
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