



A Study of Right-Wing Women in Latin America

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by

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Considering the still-limited literature on right-wing women in Latin America, this paper will attempt to analyze common themes being discussed on the participation of conservative women in politics. The paper is divided into three sections. The first discusses the literature's approach to the study of right-wing women in Latin America, its motivations and *raison d'être*. The second section investigates the dichotomy between feminine and feminist organizing and how it plays out historically in Latin America between right-wing women and feminism. Finally, the third and last section explores the most common image associated with right-wing women in Latin America, that of apolitical Christian mothers fighting communist disorder.

The study of Latin American right-wing women

A clearly observable aspect of the literature on right-wing and extreme-right movements is a tendency to justify, right from the start, reasons to research individuals who have caused so much harm in contemporary history. Scholars often clarify that they do not agree with the political views of their research subjects, but this is just more reason to study these views. Federico Finchelstein, for instance, a scholar of fascism in Argentina went as far as to explicitly explain that he is “a historian of fascism and definitely not a fascist historian”.¹ For Janina Cordeiro, because historical far-right behaviors have generally become unacceptable in recent times, scholars have been

¹ Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

inclined to deliberately disregard such behaviors, choosing to focus on narratives of social struggle and justice. However, the scholar argues, the study of rightist behaviors and histories helps explain the roots of the Latin American conservative traditions that are currently flourishing once again in the region.²

Furthermore, the political term “right” can be all-encompassing and does not properly represent all of the variety and differences in time and place. Scholars, however, understand the “right” usually as a reaction to factors “it believes are undermining the socioeconomic order”.³ Some common aspects of right-wing ideology and movements include anticommunism, “opposition to class struggle, [...] the favoring of hierarchical survival strategies like patron-clientelism”, and a strong respect for “authority, private property, cherished traditions, and the particularities of family, locality, and nation”.⁴

When it comes to right-wing women, scholars have agreed that it is important to investigate their lives and ideals mainly to challenge the idea that “women” is a monolithic category of analysis, with equal political interests and purposes. Indeed, women’s involvement in right-wing movements has posed a challenge to feminist scholarship, according to Akanksha Mehta. The scholar argues that right-wing women “find themselves in the uncertain and tense ‘in-between’ spaces” of perpetuating “often patriarchal ideologies” while simultaneously disputing gender perceptions of women’s subservience and political aloofness.⁵ Because of this, feminist academics and activists have tended to construct right-wing women also as “monolithic

² Janaina Martins Cordeiro, “Direitas e Organização Do Consenso Sob a Ditadura No Brasil: O Caso Da Campanha Da Mulher Pela Democracia (Camde),” *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [Online] (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.71513>.

³ Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3.

⁴ Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth, eds., *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 2; Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 3.

⁵ Akanksha Mehta, “The Aesthetics of ‘Everyday’ Violence: Narratives of Violence and Hindu Right-Wing Women,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 8, no. 3 (2015): 418, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2015.1091656>.

pawns/victims/subjects of patriarchy with limited or no agency”, but Mehta proposes the reality is much more complex, in accordance with many other scholars, as this paper will show.⁶

The existing literature on right-wing women does often advocate for “the importance of the prevailing emphasis on women’s agency”.⁷ Although right-wing women are rarely individualized and are usually presented as unidentifiable women walking in marches or in uniformed party photographs, the scholarship on the subject does not characterize women as mere puppets of right-wing organizations or male leadership. They are shown to have the ability to exercise the choice to manifest in support of a cause, to adhere to a political party, and even to carve out space for themselves. Right-wing women have organized within feminine sections of fascist parties since the 1930s, evolving into the creation of full women’s organizations both among elite and working-class networks, able to mobilize political marches and international networks for the exchange of tactics.⁸ Despite often idealizing the male leadership to the extreme, right-wing women are seen as conscious and willing actors who believed in what they fought for. For Margaret Power, “[t]hey acted rationally, according to what they perceived to be in their own and their families’ best interest”, in addition to viewing “themselves as social actors” who “developed a political identity” through political participation.⁹

The more general literature on fascist and right-wing movements, however, does recognize that women “played a major role” in expanding rightist ideologies. In research on *Integralismo*, Brazil’s interwar extreme-right movement, female adherents – known as “green blouses” – are usually portrayed as a homogeneous, faceless mass of women who had secondary voices in

⁶ Mehta, 416.

⁷ Margaret Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile: Feminine Power and the Struggle against Allende, 1964-1973* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 5.

⁸ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*; Deutsch, *Las Derechas*.

⁹ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, 10, 251.

developing party politics and conservative ideals, despite a few token female leaders of feminine groups.¹⁰ Women are common feature in *Integralista* images in a variety of roles, giving speeches, voting, marching alongside men or celebrating rites of passage, such as weddings, usually in Integralist-style clothing and imagery. Still, their names, roles and opinions are largely unknown. Even Lidia Possas, who is one of the few Brazilian scholars studying Integralist women, refrained from using women's names in her analysis of Integralist leader Plínio Salgado's correspondence, presenting the female writers as they characterized themselves – “*Integralista* at heart”, or “a Brazilian”. Furthermore, the correspondence rarely seems to be a two-way conversation. A number of letters of female militants to Salgado express their pride, their discontent with national politics or make requests, but none seemed important enough to grant a response from the leader.¹¹ Nonetheless, Sandra Deutsch claims that “there were many different ways of being a Green Blouse” and encourages other scholars to put names and faces to these women. She gives the example of a female typist “who smoked and wore trousers” and “did not fit the soft feminine image the [*Integralistas*] attached to its female adherents”.¹²

A case in point to show women's agency is Power's observations of transnational connections between anti-communist women in Brazil and Chile in the 1960s and 1970s, in which women shared experiences and mobilization tactics on “how to successfully resist an attempted Red takeover”.¹³ As Brazilian right-wing women succeeded in helping the ousting of João Goulart from power in 1964, they toured the United States to meet with conservative political women such

¹⁰ Sandra McGee Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors: Extreme Right-Wing Women in Twentieth-Century Brazil,” *Journal of Women's History* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0062>.

¹¹ Lidia Maria Vianna Possas, “Vozes Femininas Na Correspondência de Plínio Salgado (1932-38),” in *Escrita de Si, Escrita Da História*, ed. Angela de Castro Gomes (Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2004).

¹² Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors,” 127.

¹³ Margaret Power, “Who but a Woman? The Transnational Diffusion of Anti-Communism among Conservative Women in Brazil, Chile and the United States during the Cold War,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47, no. 01 (February 2015): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X14001461>.

as Republican Phyllis Schlafly and Christian evangelist Beverly La Haye, and organized a South American Congress of Women in Defense of Democracy in 1967 that gathered women from all South American countries to “constitute a continental force, in defence of our religion, our homes, our homelands”.¹⁴ For Power, these transnational connections not only shaped perceptions of “supposedly apolitical housewives [...] successfully fighting the evil communists” but also encouraged women’s public and political participation, giving them concrete examples of actions and role models to follow.¹⁵

González and Kampwirth, in turn, argue that the smaller attention given to women within right-wing organizations is detrimental to a “more nuanced understanding of women and politics in Latin America”.¹⁶ As recent research suggests, Latin American “women are more right leaning, holding more traditional values and attitudes, than men on average”.¹⁷ If women in the region are more likely to support rightist candidates, and in 2008 represented 34 per cent of the electorate (a percentage that has probably expanded in the past decade)¹⁸, why do scholars not know everything there is to know about them and their motivations?

For instance, Beall and Barnes have identified that, in 2008, right-wing women voters in Latin America were more likely to report crime as one of the largest problem facing their countries than left-wing women *and* right-wing men.¹⁹ This is significant for two reasons. First is the fact that, historically, right-wing women have perceived communism as a threat critical enough to push them out of their traditional private spaces into political mobilization, and communists were usually portrayed as potential criminals, eager to invade private property or engage in terrorist

¹⁴ Power, 104.

¹⁵ Power, 108.

¹⁶ González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*, 1.

¹⁷ Victoria D. Beall and Tiffany D. Barnes, “Mapping Right-Wing Women’s Policy Priorities in Latin America,” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 41, no. 1 (2020): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2020.1701929>.

¹⁸ Beall and Barnes, 45–46.

¹⁹ Beall and Barnes, 50.

attacks. Therefore, women of the twenty-first century who rate crime as a major problem are likely reflecting historical fears of communist disorder. Second, Latin America is considered one of the most violent regions in the world, in terms of homicide, and violent crime is usually (and wrongly) associated with poverty, also a significant issue for Latin America.²⁰ The unconscious bias connecting crime and poverty in the mind of right-wing women can indicate their refusal to acknowledge class struggles and approval of neoliberal economic policies, for instance. However, these are speculations that require more comprehensive research, which, in turn, reveals the importance of studying right-wing women as critical political actors.

Scholars also agree that investigating right-wing women can further contribute to a wider comprehension on right-wing politics. Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power's book, for instance, attempts to challenge "dominant notions of the right" by centering on women in order to "more fully understand the scope of right-wing political projects", including the ideologies and identities they produced, as well as their modes of recruitment and participation. The scholars show that women, although understood by right-wing men "as just tea makers", often join and participate in these movements as their own subjects rather than as wives or daughters, and "see themselves as essential" to the cause. The study of right-wing women – following their path from the individual level, "through the family, to the community, the nation, and the transnation" – can be a way to fully explore the totalizing projects of right-wing movements because women are the only individuals who truly transit and act in all public and private spaces of socialization.²¹ Brazil's *Integralismo*, for instance, is considered successful in the recruitment of women and in widely

²⁰ Marie-Louise Glebbeek and Kees Koonings, "Between Morro and Asfalto. Violence, Insecurity and Socio-Spatial Segregation in Latin American Cities," *Habitat International* 54 (2016): 3–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2015.08.012>.

²¹ Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power, eds., *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–3.

spreading its ideals through their lifestyle, fashioning a way of life “based on rituals, symbols, celebrations of rites of passage, and social projects”.²² Possas noted that the introduction of “cultural practices” into women’s lives – which even included household utensils branded with the Integralist Sigma symbol – allowed for their wider replication and disseminating within women’s domestic spheres of action.²³

This comprehension is also important because it benefits current anti-extremist efforts and feminist projects, which can act based on a greater understanding of how far-right movements operate and permeate everyday lives. This is aligned with Sandra Deutsch’s argument that right-wing organizations *needed* women because rightist ideology demands that its members live a certain way, through practices that can only be implemented by women in everyday life. For this scholar, the far right is varied, but in reality the everyday actions are the ones who “put ideology into practice”, which requires the examination of both “lowbrow and highbrow figures” of its movements.²⁴

The connection to present times is also prominent in the justifications for the study of far-right movements. Finchelstein’s investigation of Argentina’s fascism, for instance, had the purpose of understanding how the ideology worked “in their context and beyond”, connecting the past with the present to “decipher the roots of Argentine political violence and its illiberal political culture”.²⁵ Leandro Gonçalves and Odilon Caldeira Neto also show that Brazilian *Integralismo* ideals have survived long beyond its heydays in the 1930s, and even past the 21-year rightist military dictatorship. *Neointegralismo* have had an important role in the 2016 manifestations in

²² Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors,” 129.

²³ Lidia Maria Vianna Possas, “As Blusas Verdes e as Marchadeiras. Movimentos de Mulheres e Participação Política Nos Anos 30 e 60,” *Revista Nuevas Tendencias y Antropologia* 3, no. 2012 (2012): 1–50, <http://hdl.handle.net/11449/114814>.

²⁴ Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors”; Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 4.

²⁵ Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*, 3–4.

favor of president Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, and, since then, have engaged more visibly in politics and expanded its influence under Jair Bolsonaro's presidency.²⁶

Feminine and feminist women of Latin America

Scholars of right-wing women also agree that they challenge the common idea of what it means to be a feminist. According to González and Kampwirth, “we are stuck with a one-dimensional model of politics – a straight line from left to right – that has no space for right-wing women who embrace a gender perspective”.²⁷ The spectrum, thus, should be much more fluid, nuanced and contradictory than commonly expected, particularly because right-wing discourse is highly gendered and based on the essentialist idea that men's and women's biological difference reflect on their social differences, in which each sex has a specific and complementary role to one another.²⁸ Therefore, the heteronormative family is idealized and motherhood, as a consequence, is exalted as crucial to the moral and hygienic advancement of the family and of the nation. The nation, in this view, is an extension of the family, with defined roles for men and women, and right-wing women see their political involvement as a last resource to save the nation from great immoral threats.

Latin America's recently-independent countries spent most of the nineteenth century struggling with state formation, in which two main groups, liberals and conservatives, fought for power without presenting largely different visions of society, as inequality remained unaddressed. The first wave of Latin American feminism appeared in this context, developing into organized movements in the interwar years, mostly through middle and upper class women already accepted

²⁶ Leandro Pereira Gonçalves and Odilon Caldeira Neto, *O Fascismo Em Camisas Verdes: Do Integralismo Ao Neointegralismo* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2020).

²⁷ González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*, 22.

²⁸ Bacchetta and Power, *Right-Wing Women*.

into political spaces, who did not have much contact with working class demands. The changes were significant – including the right to vote –, but superficial, usually obtained under authoritarian governments and unable to truly tackle unequal gender relations and expectations.²⁹ At this time, both in Chile and in Brazil, the extreme fascist right employed greater efforts to recruit women because they had voting power – Brazil obtained female suffrage in 1932 and Chile in 1934. In Argentina, where women were only allowed to vote in 1947, the fascist *Nacionalistas* saw little incentive to promote female political participation, most likely being the movement with the least female involvement.³⁰

In her comparison of Argentina's *Nacionalismo*, Brazil's *Integralismo* and Chile's *Nacismo* in the inter-war years, Deutsch explains that they all “found allies in the church, the military, and ruling circles”, in addition to presenting themselves as a radical opposition to liberalism, democracy, progressive feminism and communism. On the other hand, out of the three countries observed, the extreme right in Argentina attained a “deeper, more persistent influence”, leaving a “profound imprint on governments in every decade between 1930 and the 1980s”, although Brazil's movement was possibly the largest and Chile later suffered the longest right-wing dictatorship.³¹ Nonetheless, all three countries had some distinguished right-wing women, usually upper-class and well-educated, who favored female suffrage in light of women's crucial role as guarantors of religion, home and children's education. In Brazil, Irene de Freitas Henriques, “the lone woman in the *Integralista* Supreme Council”, supported women in politics in order to strengthen the state and with it, family, love and solidarity. Chile's Isabel Carrera de Reid similarly advocated in favor of female suffrage because “the city was the prolongation of the home and their

²⁹ Susan Kent Besse, *Modernizando a Desigualdade. Reestruturação da Ideologia de Gênero no Brasil. 1914-1940*, Edição: 1ª (São Paulo: EDUSP, 1999); González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*.

³⁰ Deutsch, *Las Derechas*.

³¹ Deutsch, 5–7.

problems were interrelated”. Finally, in Argentina, Isabel Giménez Bustamante favored the vote for the “literate, Argentine-born woman” who was the preserver of society’s stability.³²

The relationship between right-wing movements in these three countries and feminism also presents similarities, in the sense that they employed a gender perspective within traditional visions that would fit their political purposes. The *Integralista* movement tended to support “a moderate Christian and Brazilian variant of feminism”, which included women’s right to vote in the hope that this would increase the party’s chances in national politics.³³ Extradomestic activities were accepted, but women’s main duties continued to be seen and fostered as “motherly, beneficent, and wifely”, with the ultimate purpose of raising “stalwart children for the cause”.³⁴ Although women posed a dilemma for Chilean *Nacismo* because of its promotion of a virile masculinity, the movement recognized the importance of a “well-organized home” both for members and the nation. Chilean women *nacistas*, thus, differentiated themselves from feminists at the time claiming that they did not wish to compete with men, but rather wished to work alongside them, making the best use of their feminine attributes in helping “poorer women perfect their femininity”. The Argentina *Nacionalista* movement, on the other hand, saw feminism as an imperial threat and export from the United States, with the purpose of inducing “passivity so that men in other countries would not fight imperialism or set up strong military governments”.³⁵

Because of the more elitist characteristic of the first wave, González and Kampwirth argue that it was “nearly forgotten by second wave feminists”, promoting a myth that this posterior wave came to life merely as a result of foreign influence from feminists in the Global North.³⁶ However,

³² Deutsch, 288, 171, 237.

³³ Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors,” 128.

³⁴ Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors.”

³⁵ Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 171, 173, 235.

³⁶ González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*, 13.

second wave feminists arose mostly as a leftist and classist response to dictatorships and civil wars throughout the region, organizing as part of armed guerrillas or in groups that publicly questioned state violence and the price increase of basic goods.³⁷ Between the two waves, nonetheless, right-wing women continued operating in politics, particularly mobilizing conservative forces against leftist governments in Latin American and supporting several coup d'états and authoritarian governments.

Margaret Power, leading scholar of right-wing women in Chile, interviewed several of these women and found that, although they were somewhat reluctant to disclose information about connections with the United States and sources of funding, women were in general eager to be interviewed in order to demystify what they perceived as the wrong image forged by the international progressive media about the Chilean dictatorship. These women recounted their activism with excitement, defended the military regime for implementing social order and discipline, and disclosed that ideas about gender were always a significant part of their political agenda, since “their political activity [w]as an extension of their role as mothers”.³⁸

Including gender, therefore, was not the same as including feminist ideals. In fact, Power explains that women on the right “rejected feminism as an attack on the family” and, once again, as a “North American phenomenon, one that had little to do with Chilean reality”. Instead, they used gender to attack the left, claiming that communist governments would “take and indoctrinate their children, destroy their families, and deprive them of the opportunity to be mothers”. They also used gendered notions to shame the military into action. Questioning soldiers’ masculinity

³⁷ Norma Chinchilla and Liesl Haas, “De Protesta a Propuesta: The Contributions and Challenges of Latin American Feminism,” in *Latin America After Neoliberalism: Turning the Tide in the 21st Century?*, ed. Eric Hershberg and Fred Rosen (New York: New Press, 2006), 252–75.

³⁸ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, xviii.

and demanding to be protected, right-wing women would throw corn at military personnel to ridicule them as “chickens” and as afraid of taking up arms and fulfilling their duty to the state.³⁹

After redemocratization, new social movements emerged from the left in the region and incorporated a more diverse group of women into feminist organizations (black, indigenous, sexuality, etc.) as well as more women into different thematic movements (environment, development, globalization, etc.).⁴⁰ This helped solidify the association of feminism with the left. Scholar Sonia Alvarez presents a useful distinction here between feminine and feminist organizing, arguing that the first “accepts prevailing female roles and asserts rights on the basis of those roles” – more closely associated with ideologies of right-wing women – whereas the latter is transformative and also seeks to challenge “existing gender power arrangements”.⁴¹

However, as we move to the twenty-first century, right-wing political women once again are blurring the divisional lines between feminine and feminist organizing. Giordano and Rodríguez have studied the trajectories and visions about gender of six prominent right-wing female politicians in Latin America: two former presidents (Mireya Moscoso of Panama, and Laura Chinchilla of Costa Rica); two vice-presidents (Gabriela Michetti of Argentina, and Marta Lucía Ramírez of Colombia); and two presidential candidates (Keiko Fujimori of Peru, and Evelyn Martínez Fonet of Chile). The scholars observed that all these women are connected to religious movements, particularly the Catholic Church (with the exception of Fujimori, who has aligned herself with evangelical groups), and that most of them have ascended politically supported by a male politician. Because of this, the authors argue that although they are all professional and

³⁹ Power, 9, 250.

⁴⁰ González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*, 5–7.

⁴¹ Sonia E. Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 24.

political women, “they do not necessarily constitute leadership, but rather a strategic [political] positioning”.⁴²

All of the six women, however, coincide in refusing to identify themselves as feminists, although some assimilate and appropriate a feminist discourse as a political mechanism, which the authors argue is a common aspect of right-wing movements of the twenty first century. Some of the women adopted or endorsed some policies that benefited female constituents, particularly in regard to violence against women, but as a group they all defended patriarchal and traditional family values, and saw biological differences between men and women as complimentary. For vice-president Ramírez of Colombia, for instance, teenage pregnancy is a symptom of absent family values and only through family, home and parental supervision it can be solved. According to Giordano and Rodríguez, these women justify their careers within “liberal, entrepreneurial and meritocratic feminism”, defending women’s empowerment on the basis of individual efforts rather than structural change.⁴³

Right-wing women: apolitical Christians mothers against communism

For Margaret Power, the primary goal of her research on right-wing women in Chile is to “dispel the idea that men were the primary political actors” of anti-leftist mobilization and political action.⁴⁴ Similarly, Deutsch’s reflection on the existing gaps in the Brazilian literature about women’s participation in *Integralismo* demonstrates that pioneer studies were conducted prior to the development of gender as a significant category of research analysis, although there has also

⁴² Verónica Giordano and Gina Paola Rodríguez, “Las Mujeres de Las Derechas Latinoamericanas Del Siglo XXI,” *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, no. 126 (December 2020): 231, <https://doi.org/10.24241/rcai.2020.126.3.215>.

⁴³ Giordano and Rodríguez, 231, 229, 232.

⁴⁴ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, 3.

been a recurrent focus on Integralist leadership and ideological formation that “usually excludes women, few of who were in the top circles”.⁴⁵ The most common narrative of Brazil’s *Integralismo* is that its ideals were forged and fostered by a group of male intellectuals, who were mostly Catholic and European-inspired. But for the past two decades, scholars have attempted to include women into these historical narratives.

Power argues that women were “critical actors” in shaping the political events that led to Chile’s military coup in 1973, succeeding in developing a movement that went beyond the elite and incorporated the masses, particularly working-class women who struggled with food scarcity and shortages of essential goods.⁴⁶ Chilean right-wing activists took advantage of leftist emphasis on male workers to successfully coopt women with a rhetoric focused on the female role as mothers and wives. Similarly in Brazil, conservative women’s groups were considered to be responsible for the massive mobilization of marches in various Brazilian cities in favor of military intervention in 1964, particularly the infamous March of the Family with God for Liberty and the March of Victory, two days after the coup.⁴⁷ Therefore, the study of right-wing women is also useful to understand how conservative ideology has been so successful in appealing to women.

Describing female participation in right-wing movements expands our understanding of “the development of dictatorship and authoritarianism”, particularly in Latin America.⁴⁸ Current scholars highlight the importance of female support to the legitimization of such regimes, as they are considered to be the last frontier of political support because women are understood as naturally uninterested in the vile world of politics. However, once female support is guaranteed, women can prove to be some of the most loyal of followers. Cordeiro, for instance, argues that women from

⁴⁵ Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors,” 125.

⁴⁶ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*.

⁴⁷ Cordeiro, “Direitas e Organização Do Consenso.”

⁴⁸ González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*, 1.

Brazil's *Campanha da Mulher pela Democracia* (CAMDE) strongly backed president Castelo Branco's efforts (and institutional acts) to maintain the military regime after the coup, in detriment to the alternate choice, Carlos Lacerda – a conservative, but less authoritarian civilian politician.⁴⁹ Similarly, Chilean women supporters of Augusto Pinochet continued showing up in large numbers in his favor once he was imprisoned and also after his death.⁵⁰ As crucial organizers of the marches against leftist governments, if women had not supported the military presidents who usurped power, it is debatable whether these new regimes would have gained the strength to consolidate as authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.

Most scholars of right-wing women claim to be motivated by the question of why women join and support right-wing movements or parties. The most common assumption to demystify is that women are motivated (or influenced) by their husbands or male relatives, to which Deutsch responds that many women, in fact, found right-wing movements compelling “for gendered ideological reasons”.⁵¹ Conservative ideology in Latin America has been successful in two main rhetoric exercises when it comes to appealing to women: first, it praised women's domestic and maternal roles as crucial to the nation's survival and as a burden shared by all women equally, even if they worked extradomestically; and second, it associated communism with atheism as well as economic mismanagement, presenting it as an urgent threat to morally religious families and requiring the complete societal mobilization against it. Thus, the traditional assumption of a South American right-wing woman is twofold: as a middle-class Christian housewife concerned about communism's threat to family values, usually promoting the notion that women were to blame for spreading communism whenever they did not accept “their true condition of a dedicated

⁴⁹ Cordeiro, “Direitas e Organização Do Consenso.”

⁵⁰ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*.

⁵¹ Deutsch, “Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors,” 126.

housewife”; or as a working-class woman who saw in right-wing movements “their best avenue into the political arena”.⁵²

Indeed, a common feature of mobilized right-wing women is that they are usually portrayed as apolitical actors, especially in Latin America. Because female roles are traditionally associated with private matters and spheres, their political and public mobilization is portrayed as spontaneous and natural, as if their demands represented a universal public opinion of discontent. In this sense, Power explains that anti-Salvador Allende women in Chile promoted first and foremost their role as mothers, claiming that their discontent with the government’s inability to provide enough basic goods for all Chilean families was an issue that affected all women equally, as motherhood and marriage embraced almost all women in Chilean society.⁵³ Additionally, it was their responsibility to guarantee food and care for their families, which the government was impeding. Because of this framework, Chilean right-wing women were able to reach all classes, specially the lower-class masses, who showed up in large numbers to anti-Allende demonstrations. Their supposed lack of a natural interest for politics was used both by the women themselves, who, according to Power, “refused to recognize, at least publicly, that they were carrying political activity” in demonstrations, but also by the right more generally, who strategically portrayed these female protesters as spontaneous, genuine, victimized, innocent and also as courageous and heroic.⁵⁴

González and Kampwirth discuss two interesting aspects of women’s political mobilization: autonomy and maternalism. Either as an individual or as movement, women have always sought autonomy from male peers. Usually incorporated into political movements within

⁵² Deutsch, 126; Gonçalves and Caldeira Neto, *O Fascismo Em Camisas Verdes*, 44.

⁵³ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*.

⁵⁴ Power, 252.

traditional “feminine roles” or as part of a faceless mass of uniformed militants, women fought for and constantly negotiated autonomous participation. Prominent and outspoken right-wing women, specifically, would even support “moderate feminism” to defend their autonomy and their political position.⁵⁵ The second aspect, maternalism, is somewhat unique to Latin American women, but encompass both left and right activists, according to González and Kampwirth. From first wave feminists who embraced motherhood and argued that the vote was a way for mothers to have a say in their children’s moral future, to right-wing women afraid of communist’s threat to family values, and to second wave “mother’s groups” created during dictatorships to claim the truth about their disappeared children, the authors see that Latin American women “have had a relatively conflict-free relationship to motherhood”.⁵⁶ It is often the central idea behind right-wing ideology and right-wing women in Latin America have rarely wished to defy “essentialist notions of womanhood” – instead they “drew on them to explain and justify both their involvement and their success”.⁵⁷

For Cordeiro, however, the essentialist position right-wing women took to justify their political mobilization was also the aspect that rendered their militancy as temporary phenomena. As naturally private beings, women could only rationalize their occupation of public spaces in the face of an existential-level threat that would force them to sacrifice and leave the place they belonged, the home, to defend the maintenance of their lifestyle. However, “after the great danger that threatens no only the world of politics, but also the private space [...] women should return to their traditional roles, in benefit of family harmony”.⁵⁸ The most obvious threat that united right-wing women certainly was communism. Anti-communist ideology was able to gather women from all social classes and even women who could otherwise be considered feminists. Power, who

⁵⁵ González and Kampwirth, *Radical Women in Latin America*, 18.

⁵⁶ González and Kampwirth, 23.

⁵⁷ Power, “Who but a Woman?,” 94.

⁵⁸ Cordeiro, “Direitas e Organização Do Consenso.”

investigates the “outstanding features of the Chilean right [in] its ability to appeal to and win the support of women”, argues that as women were esteemed as mothers and wives first, economic hardships felt during leftist governments were easily appropriated into right-wing discourse.⁵⁹ Because socialist governments “prevented them from adequately fulfilling their maternal responsibilities”, working-class women sprung into political action against communism. In a similar vision, upper-class women also saw communism as preventing them from guaranteeing traditional family values and morals.⁶⁰ The “impeding communist takeover”, thus, was the great threat that “so disturbed” “apolitical Christian housewives and mothers” to the point that “they were willing to engage in atypical activities to prevent it”.⁶¹

To illustrate this, Brazil’s Nilza Perez, editor of the women’s section in an *Integralista* magazine, believed that fighting communism was more urgent than demanding women’s right, defending instead the “restoration of the patriarchal and Christian family”. For her, communism put women into a “subaltern position as society’s object”, and had the potential to destroy private property as well as indissoluble marriage ties.⁶² A few decades later, in the 1960s, the *Campanha da Mulher pela Democracia* (CAMDE) was born out of female preoccupation with the country’s future in the face of communist infiltration in Brazilian society. As The Cuban Revolution brought the Cold War too close to Latin America, CAMDE’s director and founder Amélia Bastos, who was elected as “mother of the year” by the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* in 1965, would associate communism with atheism and declare that women who opposed João Goulart “did not want their children to live under communism”.⁶³

⁵⁹ Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*, 45.

⁶⁰ Power, 11.

⁶¹ Power, “Who but a Woman?,” 118.

⁶² Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 283–86.

⁶³ Cordeiro, “Direitas e Organização Do Consenso”; Power, “Who but a Woman?,” 102.

Perhaps because of their religiosity or overall spiritual inclinations, women's organizations within right-wing movements almost always engaged in philanthropic activities. Considering essentialist ideals, female political militancy was directly connected to engagement in social assistance activities. This was the case of Chile's *Nacismo* and Brazil's *Integralismo* in the 1930s, of CAMDE in 1960s Brazil, and of Chile's Mothers' Centers spread across poor neighborhoods of Chilean cities in the 1970s, which also succeeded in giving women a political identity.⁶⁴ Female roles within right-wing movements usually entailed "running educational projects, distributing food, and offering health services to the poor", all activities closely associated with a supposed feminine "nature".⁶⁵ However, according to Bacchetta and Power, the common sex-segregation that often existed within right-wing movements, in which women acted mostly within feminine sections, has had the benefit of enabling women to "forge their own discourse, practice, and modes of solidarity" that are normally denied to women within traditional organizational structures.⁶⁶ Thus, right-wing women's political involvement is complex and full of nuances.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to examine the existing scholarship on right-wing movements and particularly right-wing women's political participation in Latin America to understand some of commonalities identified so far. I investigated commonalities found in how the scholars themselves approached the study of right-wing women as well as in how right-wing women are currently understood within the literature. For the first aspect, we can see that scholars tend to reason on the importance of studying people on the right, frequently mentioning the right's success

⁶⁴ Deutsch, *Las Derechas*; Cordeiro, "Direitas e Organização Do Consenso"; Power, *Right-Wing Women in Chile*.

⁶⁵ Deutsch, "Christians, Homemakers, and Transgressors," 125.

⁶⁶ Bacchetta and Power, *Right-Wing Women*, 5.

in furtively permeating aspects of everyday life and in surviving despite its many setbacks and showing up supposedly unannounced in recent times. The scholars of right-wing women, interestingly, advocate an almost feminist stance in their reasoning, wishing to give voices to these women and show how critical they have been to right-wing movements, because they are also erased and often ignored from traditional right-wing scholarship. For the latter aspect, two factors are made clear: first, that gender perceptions have and will always be used by political right-wing women, and that they are extremely efficient in appropriating and adapting feminist discourse to suit their needs; and second, that domesticity (motherhood and marriage), religiosity and anti-communism are ingredients mixed together in right-wing feminine discourse.