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"NEWS OF 'CRAZY' WOMEN DEMANDING FREEDOM": DOMINICAN FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN A POST-DICTATORIAL STATE (1961-1990)

Elizabeth S. Manley

Abstract

In the late 1970s a feminist movement in the Dominican Republic began consolidating around a loose set of objectives. Comprised of multiple diverse groups the movement drew on the legacies of the mid 1960s anti-imperial and anti-occupation struggles, as well as the half-century of authoritarian rule that had imprinted an intense form of paternalism upon the nation's political structure. Centering on the imperatives of a small island-nation transitioning out of an extended period of authoritarianism, late 20th century Dominican feminism was also impressively global and regionally influential. This article sketches the contours of this movement, heretofore neglected in scholarly and popular narratives of the larger regional movement and of the nation itself. It argues that, despite this silence, this case of local and global activism was deeply impacted by the legacies of intervention and authoritarianism yet still managed to carve out a crucial social and political space for feminist advocacy in the country and serve as a key model for the larger Latin American struggle for women's rights. The efforts of this movement are illustrative of the post-dictatorial challenges that many feminists across the Global South have faced (and face still), a model of the types of interventions possible with a trained focus on class and gender, and a lesson for understanding the resurgence of feminism following elite, conservative, "first-wave" feminist movements, authoritarianism, and neocolonial incursion. It is also a call to see the Dominican Republic as central to larger Latin American and Caribbean feminist/activist movements.

Keywords: transnational feminism; Dominican Republic; authoritarianism; class; gender; socialist activism

Resumen

A finales de la década de 1970, un movimiento feminista en la República Dominicana comenzó a consolidarse en torno a una serie de objetivos. Integrado por múltiples grupos diversos, el movimiento se basó en los legados de las luchas antiimperiales y antiocupacionales de mediados de la década de 1960, así influido por el medio siglo de autoritarismo que había dejado impresa una intensa forma de

paternalismo en la estructura política de la nación. Concentrado en los imperativos de una pequeña nación isleña en transición, este feminismo dominicano fue también impresionantemente global y regionalmente influyente. Este artículo esboza los contornos de este movimiento, hasta ahora ignorado en las narrativas académicas y populares. Sostiene que, a pesar de este silencio, este caso de activismo local y global fue profundamente impactado por los legados de la intervención y el autoritarismo, y todavía logró crear un espacio social y político crucial para el activismo feminista en el país y sirvió como modelo clave para la lucha por los derechos de las mujeres a través de América Latina. Los esfuerzos de este movimiento son ilustrativos de los desafíos post-dictatoriales que muchas feministas del Sur Global han enfrentado (y aún enfrentan), un modelo de los tipos de intervenciones posibles con un enfoque entrenado en clase y género, y una lección para entender el resurgimiento del feminismo después de los movimientos feministas de la "primera ola" élite y conservadora, autoritarismo y la incursión neocolonial. También es un llamado a ver a la República Dominicana como un punto central en los movimientos feministas/activistas de América Latina y el Caribe.

Palabras clave: feminismo trasnacional; República Dominicana; autoritarismo; clase; género; activismo socialista

RÉSUMÉ

À la fin des années soixante-dix, un mouvement féministe commença à se former en République dominicaine autour d'une série d'objectifs communs. Composé de divers groupes, le mouvement s'inspira des héritages des luttes anti-impérialistes et anticolonialistes du milieu des années soixante et tira les leçons des cinquante années de régime autocratique qui avaient marqué les structures politiques du pays d'une forte empreinte paternaliste. Bien qu'ayant les impératifs d'un petit état-nation en transition, le féminisme dominicain fut néanmoins impressionnant de par son rayonnement international et son influence régionale. Cet article esquisse les contours de ce mouvement jusque-là passé sous silence dans les récits populaires et les travaux universitaires. L'article montre qu'en dépit de ce silence, le mouvement a été largement influencé par les héritages de l'interventionnisme et de l'autoritarisme, et qu'il a su créer un espace politique et social crucial pour défendre le féminisme en République dominicaine et servir de modèle pour la lutte en faveur des droits des femmes sur le continent latino-américain. Les actions du mouvement sont représentatives des défis post-dictatoriaux auxquels de nombreuses féministes ont dû (et continuent à) faire face et, à partir d'une approche de classe et de genre, offrent des exemples de types d'interventions possibles, tout en servant de leçon pour comprendre la résurgence du féminisme après les mouvements féministes élitistes et conservateurs de la « première

vague », l'autoritarisme et l'incursion néocoloniale. Cet article donne également à voir combien la République dominicaine se trouve au premier plan des mouvements féministes et activistes de l'Amérique latine et de la Caraïbe.

Mots-clés : féminisme transnational ; République dominicaine ; régime autoritaire ; classe ; genre ; activisme social

In the late 1970s a feminist movement in the Dominican Republic began consolidating around a loose set of goals and objectives. It was comprised of multiple diverse groups, some with deeper roots than others. However, the movement drew on the legacies of the mid 1960s anti-imperial and anti-occupation struggles, as well as the nearly half century of authoritarian rule that had imprinted an intense form of paternalism upon the nation's political structure. The movement was at once intensely local, centered on the imperatives of a small island-nation transitioning out of a difficult and extended period of authoritarian rule, and impressively global given the insularity such dictatorial leadership had sought to impose upon the population. In the thirty years that followed the fall of dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961 a committed group of women dedicated themselves to changing societal standards of women's inferiority. Working with a stacked deck, their efforts must be measured within particular context of an authoritarian legacy; while they may not have made great legislative or juridical strides, they managed to impact an impressive number of lives both national and internationally and provide a framework for how we understand feminist activism in a post-dictatorial period.

As a number of recent studies have argued, the structure and function of authoritarian rule is deeply dependent upon the politics of gender deployed by regime officials and engaged by constituent populations (González-Rivera 2011; Power 2002). This is particularly evident in the Dominican Republic where both the thirty-one year rule of Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961) and the twelve years (1966-1978) of his successor Joaquín Balaguer imprinted unique yet complementary paternal styles on the practice of everyday politics and concurrently relied on female politicians to hold up their "family-style" political dramas (Manley 2017; Zeller 2012). The transition out of authoritarianism, beginning in the early 1960s and resuming in the late 1970s, served as the platform for the growth of a robust feminist movement, even if it was sometimes at odds with the paradoxical relationship between a long tradition of conservative women's involvement in Dominican politics and a heavily paternal state approach to rights. As many female activists argued, an effective and democratic transitional agenda demanded the inclusion of women's rights; they pushed on many fronts for such an inclusion, particularly with the return of Balaguer

and the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (Social Christian Reform Party, or PRSC) in 1986 (Alvarez 1990; Friedman 2000; Waylen 1994). Their successes and failures are illustrative of the frame through which we must understand not only many of the late twentieth-century feminist movements in Latin America, but also any effort to mobilize for women's rights in the wake of extended periods of authoritarian rule.

While the growth of this robust movement was intimately connected to transnational feminist activist networks that had roots in the early twentieth century, scant attention has been paid to the multi-lateral influences between those inter-American linkages and Dominican feminism. The pamphlets, programs, and projects of the multiple feminist collectives that began to coalesce after the fall of the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo and gathered steam in the late 1970s after a true transition to electoral democracy reflect a radical response to the top-down model of women's activism encouraged under authoritarianism yet did not discard the transnational model that had been built by their predecessors beginning with the fight for suffrage.[1] Moreover, the work of this loose coalition of feminist groups was intimately connected to the needs of the rural poor, anti-imperialist, and centered on consciousness-raising as a rejection of the state-led efforts that dominated during the dictatorial regimes of Trujillo and Balaguer.

This article sketches the contours of the Dominican feminist movement that arose in the late 1970s and has been neglected in scholarly and popular narratives of both the larger regional movement and of the nation itself. It argues that, despite this silence, this case of local and global activism was deeply impacted by the legacies of intervention and authoritarianism, yet still managed to carve out a social and political space for feminist advocacy and serve as a crucial model for the larger Latin American struggle for women's rights. As a result, the story of the rise of a feminist movement in the late 20th century Dominican Republic not only helps to explain the struggles of feminist movements in post-dictatorial regimes but also gives insight to the function of transnational feminism across the region. This period and its feminist activism deserves much more extensive study both for its impact on national narratives and its implications for second-wave feminist movements in the Global South; what follows here provides a starting point and an encouragement for greater academic and non-academic analysis of this inspiring and dedicated group of women and revolutionaries.[2] Their work is illustrative of the post-dictatorial challenges that many women's movements face across the Global South, a model of the types of interventions possible with a trained focus on class and gender, and a lesson for understanding the resurgence of feminism following elite, conservative, first-wave feminist movements, authoritarianism, and neocolonial incursion.

The Origins of Late 20th Century Dominican Feminism (1961–1975)

The growth of a second-wave feminist movement in the Dominican Republic during the 1960s and early 1970s was gradual, yet demonstrated an important transition out of the maternalist model established under authoritarianism. While advocacy for women as mothers and moral guardians had been a touchstone during the dictatorship, voices slowly began to emerge that centered women's rights as humans and discussed gender equality as an important political development. Through this same period, women who had advocated class-based change during the end of the Trujillo regime and through the U.S. occupation and rule of Joaquín Balaguer also began to realize that gender was being ignored in the conversations about social revolution. By the 1975 International Women's Year, there was a considerable presence of women who were demanding, from various political positions, gender equality in the Dominican Republic.

After the upheaval of the fall of Trujillo in 1961 and the U.S. occupation in 1965, the presidential field assumed a relatively two-sided nature. Juan Bosch, the once democratically-elected (1962) but overthrown president ran against the former dictator's right hand man, Joaquín Balaguer. With the aid of scare tactics and maneuvered elections, Balaguer won the presidency in 1966 and ushered in twelve more years (commonly referred to as the *doce años*) of authoritarian rule. In the early 1960s, following the assassination of dictator Rafael Trujillo, the predominately-available vehicles for women's activism existed in the growing NGO model or in female auxiliary-type groups aligned with existing parties or political collectives.[3] Political activism among the opposition during the early Balaguer years generally centered on demands for basic human rights.[4] While the work of these groups was groundbreaking, it also implicitly contained the old threads of the maternalist model solidified under the dictatorship.

In addition to this legacy of maternalist politics, several obstacles impeded the advancement of a singularly-focused feminist movement. First, for most of the 1960s and early 1970s, feminism was generally associated negatively with either a Western-centric women's liberation model or with the women's rights gained by upper and middle-class women under the dictatorship. The rejection of the term was centered in two larger concerns: the resistance to US cultural and political imperialism and the desire to quietly forget that the suffrage movement had been completed by a group of elite women under the dictatorship. Although early 20th century women's activists had engaged feminist ideologies, the term was tainted for many when the dictator granted women the vote in

1942. The political gains for women during the Trujillo regime, as well as the advancement of individual female politicians, were associated with this period of authoritarian, top-down leadership and generally not embraced as progress. Moreover, feminism in the mid-20th century was a word associated with US "yankee" political and cultural imperialism much in the same way it was critiqued by women of color in the United States (Crenshaw 2009). As feminist Magaly Pineda pointed out in the 1980s, the introduction of second-wave feminism in the Dominican Republic received immediate and harsh critique in the press, becoming "a polemical word and an anathema" (quoted from the XI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Estudios Latinoamericanos, Mexico, 1983, in Equipo Mujeres en Solidaria 1986, 30). As a result, most activists initially soundly rejected the label feminist. Second, as most female activists were associated with left-leaning and socialist political collectives, received wisdom dictated that women's "liberation" could only come with the full emancipation of Dominican society from capitalism and neo-colonialism.

Nonetheless, activists outside of human rights-focused groups began to cautiously advocate for women's rights in the Dominican Republic in the late 1960s. The Primer Congreso Revolucionario de Mujeres (First Revolutionary Women's Congress) held in August 1968 led to the formation of two distinctly new women's organizations for women of the left (Ferreras 1991, 212) and was one of the first steps towards a renewed feminist movement. The first group, the Revolutionary League for the Emancipation of Women (LIREMU), focused their concerns through the lens of class and socialist revolution; women's oppression served merely as a starting point for discussion.[5] The second organization, the Women's Social Participation Group (Grupo), began to explore selective topics of feminist theory, taking Dominican women's oppression as a foundation for their activism. While members like Magaly Pineda, Vivian Mota, and Martha Olga García all claimed political membership among the country's leftist parties, the group's overall goal was to focus on study of the Dominican woman "in terms of her beliefs and attitudes, her lifestyle, her economic situation, her role in the village and countryside as well as in urban centres;" other goals included the creation of a center of documentation, the study of sexual relations, and networking with movements of women's liberation in other countries (Graham 1971).

By the early 1970s, the financial austerity measures imposed by the Balaguer regime began to motivate another set of women to activism. *Comités de amas de casa,* or housewives committees, began flourishing, particularly in poor barrios and around issues of daily necessity including electricity, water, and basic foodstuffs.[6] They combined the rhetoric of motherhood, maternalism, and family protection to draw attention

to the general failings of the Balaguer regime yet were most basically "a tool to gather forces in order to combat the skyrocketing price of staple goods" (Santos de Rivera et al. 1976). Moema Viezzer argues that such committees, growing in poor Santo Domingo neighborhoods, focused on campaigns "against scarcities, against the pessimistic conditions of sustenance and education, and against the insecurities of life due to the lack of work" (Viezzer 1982, 81-82). Their efforts were occasionally successful; engineer Marcelo Jorge Pérez argued that it was the militancy of one such group in the Santo Domingo barrio of Los Prados that essentially resulted in the announcement a more fair system in October 1975 by the Balaguer regime through their calling attention to the unequal distribution of blackouts (Pérez 1976). These women, generally not mobilized through left-leaning parties, demonstrated the larger importance of women's contributions to shifting social and political debates.

At the same time, debate began brewing in the press around the meaning of the Western women's liberation movement for the Dominican Republic. A left-leaning publication called *¿Que? La revista del pueblo* ran a short series called "Survey on the Situation of the Women's Movement in Our Country" from late 1971 through early 1972 in which they invited diverse voices to weigh in on "women's liberation."[7] Of the three featured articles, most voices included viewed the idea of female emancipation, at least from a western perspective, as counterproductive to the larger goal of advancement. Most contributors argued that the integration of women into the political, social, and economic activities of the nation required more than just an elimination of the "marital yoke" but rather a revolution led by the working classes. LIREMU, who actually included women's full emancipation in their own mission, felt compelled to reject feminist theories that sought to make "the struggle against the male sex." Conversely, among the conservative upper classes at the opposite end of the political spectrum, to speak of a women's liberation movement was both "absurd and amoral" because it ignored the crucial role played by women's innately altruistic character in the "human partnership" (*¿Que? La revista del pueblo*, November 1971).

Contributor Grey Coiscou saw the "situation of the women's movement" within a slightly more measured frame. While very much part of the revolutionary left and an active supporter of radical social change, Cosicou argued partially against her compatriots, calling for Dominican women to listen to the "young, radical, white women" demanding liberation. She contended that while important to understand the privilege of such voices calling for equality and liberation, she certainly had been marginalized by her fellow male colleagues and revolutionaries sufficiently to want to see a "movement within a movement" for women's equality. Her argument, carrying the weight of women tired of being

marginalized within a larger revolutionary struggle and ready to integrate some of the ideas of women's liberation from the Global North, began to take hold in the Dominican Republic.

The debate over feminism in the Dominican press continued fairly actively up through the U.N.-declared International Women's Year in 1975. Writing for the liberal monthly *¡Ahora!* sociologist Vivian Mota pointed out that despite all their promises of equality in the struggle for social revolution, political organizations ranging from student collectives to parties systematically ignored women's rights (Mota 1973).[8] This failure to attend to gender equality was, in Mota's eyes, "one of the biggest contradictions of the left." She argued that women, who had been active in revolutionary struggle since before the fall of the dictatorship, should no longer wait for men to hand them their liberation. Such challenges made their way into more mainstream papers as well.

A June 1975 debate between a female teacher and male journalist in the national *Listín Diario* exemplifies the general tenor of these polemics over women's place in public life at the end of Balaguer's *doce años*. Guest contributor Dr. Altagracia M. Herrera Miniño responded aggressively and rather sardonically to the proclamations of regular writer Domingo O. Bergés-Bordas, who had claimed that there was no need for a women's liberation movement in the Dominican Republic (Herrera Miniño 1975b, 1975a). Bergés-Bordas, who argued that the paternalist state ensured that women were neither oppressed nor subject to the will of men, provoked Herrera Miniño to highlight the daily struggles for Dominican women. She questioned why, "in our country, Mr. B.B. an adult or a married woman who wants to travel must submit written permission from her husband or father to the General Office of Passports? Do you know, Mr. B.B., of similar limitations for men who want to abandon their family and use a trip as an excuse to achieve their ends?" While Herrera Miniño still deployed the specter of inherent male vice, she pushed her readers to stop seeing the differences between men and women as made by God but rather by "ignorant and close-minded men that have used us only to attain their goals." Even if still tinged with the maternalist approach so central to Dominican women's activism since the rise of the Trujillato, Herrera Miniño's editorial exemplified a crucial turn toward an equality-focused movement that, while concerned with human rights and social revolution, saw feminism as an autonomous path and independent movement.

In December 1975 female professors, activists, and politicians gathered at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) to honor the United Nations-declared International Women's Year (IWY) and discuss the status of women in Dominican society. The seminar, named in honor of the three Mirabal sisters killed by the Trujillo regime for their

resistance, presented many of the pressing issues Dominican women faced in the final years of Balaguer's twelve years, or *doce años,* and echoed the marked change in the debate about "women's liberation" in the Dominican Republic from the decade prior. In centering issues of women's rights, the very essence of the *Seminario Hermanas Mirabal* was a testament to a changing discourse as well as to the power of international feminist organizing. The content of the multiple presentations also demonstrated how many women with varying perspectives had begun to advocate for a distinctly feminist agenda divorced from either socialist groups or state directives.

Throughout the conference, presenters focused on the need for transformative social change but also on the creation of a truly indigenous and sovereign feminist movement. Ivelisse Prats-Ramírez de Pérez, an educator and ranking member of the oppositional Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party), argued that while Dominican women had been receiving, predominately from US media, "a misconstrued idea of liberation based on misled patterns of consumerism, sexual licentiousness, and the copying of foreign practices," women's rights were still fundamental to revolutionary social change (Prats-Ramírez de Pérez 1982, 171-185). While conditions were somewhat abysmal, there were rays of hope; among university women, Dr. Ivelisse Prats-Ramírez de Pérez pointed out, a large percentage were "developing new attitudes that dismiss their familial enslavement and the patriarchal role of the Dominican man" (Prats-Ramírez de Pérez 1982, 171-185).

Overthrowing a patriarchal structure, after nearly half a century of authoritarian rule, was no small task yet the women beginning to engage with this agenda saw the International Women's Year as a platform to broadcast their message. Historian Francesca Miller argues that the dispersal of ideas, the legitimation of feminist concerns, and the international attention that the IWY, its conference (held in Mexico City), and its attendant year created were crucial in catalyzing various women's movements across the region (Miller 1991, 202-203). In the Dominican Republic this was certainly true. As Magaly Pineda pointed out a number of years later,

> [h]owever distorted and/or minimized, news of "crazy" women demanding freedom, equality, and participation in countries all around the world did not fail to reach the ears of Dominican women. The "officialization" of the theme of women through the declaration of International Women's Year extended the radius of influence. There [was] a broad radio-communications network in our country, as well as an able and generally progressive press corps, both of which saw to it that echoes of International Women's Year reached even the most isolated regions of the country (Pineda 1984).

Student leader Myrna de Peña's expressed displeasure that the IWY had distracted women from the "real struggle," but could not help but admit that it "served as a platform for denouncing the situation of oppression and inequality in which women lived" (quoted in Ferreras 1991, 211). Education scholar and feminist Ángela Hernández argued a decade later that the attention of the year essentially reformulated the imperialist discourse of development and modernization as a call to see women's contributions to society as "essential to the progress of the nation" (Hernández 1986, 151). Despite their reservations, most women of the movement agreed that the increased attention to women's issues had distinct advantages that included local organizing and activism, education, and government attention. Many certainly agreed with Hernández that the year had been guided by an "imperialist discourse of development and modernization" and maintained a healthy skepticism of North-South feminist directives. Still, the IWY engendered a more active contemplation among Dominican women about their specifically gendered marginality, provided avenues to attack the patriarchal legacies of authoritarianism, and demonstrated the possibilities of an independent feminist movement.

Building on the International Women's Year (1975-1983)

As a result of this increased attention and intellectual discussion, a number of women moved to create gender-centric collectives and organizations during the second half of the 1970s. The formation of a number of foundational feminist organizations demonstrates a level of concerted action in both practical and ideological activism for women's issues in the Dominican Republic.[9] These organizations energized a burgeoning conversation about women's rights in the late 1970s and served as a springboard for the creation of over thirty women's rights organizations by the end of the U.N. Decade for Women in 1985. They also pushed forward increasingly public and media focused agendas. Their organizational missions demonstrate the importance transnational networks continued to play in their fight for women's rights and the presence of Dominican women on the international scene indicates they were equally influential there as well. Finally, given their critical and collective turn of attention toward the needs of rural and urban poor women as the country's most oppressed class, they demonstrated a linking of gender and class analysis that laid the foundations of a women's movement concurrently responsive to local need and global feminist theory and inextricably linked to the previous decades of authoritarianism, neocolonialism, and revolutionary resistance.

For a large percentage of the feminist activists leading these new

organizations, their activism was profoundly marked by the final years of the Trujillo dictatorship, the US intervention of 1965, and the twelve years of what many called Joaquín Balaguer's *continuismo* (continuity) politics. The resistance that had developed in the Dominican Republic as early as the 1940s was deeply imbedded in the socialist networks of class-based analysis, even if it was narrowly trained on the overthrow of the dictator. Women were central to this resistance movement, as well as the response to the 1965 occupation (the April Revolution) and the subsequent long decade of continued authoritarianism under Balaguer (Manley 2017). A number had spent time or trained in Cuba since the revolution, had fought directly against occupation, and/or were leaders in leftist political parties or coalitions. In addition to rejecting the paternalist and top-down model of women's political involvement proffered by both Trujillo and Balaguer, they were committed to an agenda of socialist reform. Despite a realization that the left was not addressing their concerns about women's rights, they remained attentive to the country's vast imbalance of wealth and resources.

Likely the first group of this period, the Association for the Promotion of Women of the South (PROMUS) formed in 1975 and had parallel roots in the feminist movement of the nation's urban centers and in a Catholic Church *Caritas* project in the southwest.[10] Centered in rural Barahona, their efforts focused on education and consciousness-raising among women in the small towns of the southwest region where "the repression . . . is most evident" (PROMUS, n.d.). Their goals were to encourage women to take an active role in their own social realities, to affirm their value and dignity as human beings, and to engage in an active popular or grass-roots education campaign around women's rights and realities. PROMUS planned educational workshops, helped community women's groups organize for more effective advocacy, and coordinated public manifestations and activities. They believed in a "participatory methodology" and by the mid 1980s were also publishing a bimonthly magazine called *Abriendo Camino* (Opening a Path) and running a regional radio program "Mujeres en marcha" (Women on the Move).

Organized in 1979, Women in Dominican Development (MUDE) similarly focused on rural women and their particular challenges with the aim to "promote the development—social and economic—of women of limited resources to improve her quality of life and that of her community" (Mujeres en Desarrollo 1987). More specific objectives included creating support groups of community women, financing small projects by and for women, implementing technology and support, promoting equality between men and women, and serving as a channel for the transfer of financial support and human resources to women's groups. While they maintained an office in Santo Domingo, most of their work

was with women in the central valley provinces in the country. MUDE produced a trimonthly bulletin called *Mujer y Desarrollo* (Women and Development) and they began holding a national conference of affiliate women's groups in 1982; like PROMUS, their efforts centered on training, education, and capacity building. Also similar to PROMUS, they maintained ties to conservative allies. One of the early supporters of MUDE and member of the Executive Board was Licelott Marte de Barrios who had not only served as the director of all activities during the Dominican International Women's Year but had been one of President Balaguer's most powerful female politicians during the *doce años*.[11]

In seeming contrast to these rural-focused organizations were CIPAF, CUDEM, and CEF. All three were based in the capital, Santo Domingo, had a socialist-feminist theoretical approach, and held no ties to institutional power structures. CIPAF, the brainchild of Magaly Pineda, was formed in 1980 to take on the challenge of "doing research for and about women;" despite the death of its leader in 2015, it continues that work into the present (CIPAF, n.d.). Pineda, a fighter in the April Revolution and founding member of one of the first post-dictatorship women's groups, the Federation of Dominican Women, was then professor at the UASD, having worked on feminist issues through journalism and educational projects throughout the 1970s. She had been a core member of the Grupo and she saw women's studies as the principal enemy of class-based and patriarchal structures of knowledge and power. Fiercely committed to Dominican feminism, she argued in 1983 for the construction of a movement that was "feminist, of the popular classes, committed to the struggle for power, with clear determination to gain for us, the women, 'half the sky," a space where all our subjugated, millenary potential can flourish and where equality is no longer a utopia. And we will attain it!" (*Revista CEPAE* 1983, 10).[12] CIPAF also sought to understand the connection between Dominican and global realities for women, work in solidarity with other feminist causes, and demonstrate their support for all efforts to "overthrow sexual and social hierarchies" (CIPAF, n.d.). The organization formed after Pineda presented a proposal at the July 1980 Copenhagen Conference and garnered fiscal support from the Holland Organization for International Development and included participation from Dominican feminist Isis Duarte and a group of female faculty at the UASD.[13]

Several other groups gathered during this time similarly focused on feminist study and analysis. The Committee for Unity and Women's Rights (CUDEM), formed by fellow former revolutionary Lourdes Contreras in 1978, also based its work in the capital and around research and ideological battles. A year later, Miriam Zapata formed the Circle of Feminist Studies (CEF), a group also devoted to study and discussion

of women's issues in the Dominican Republic. Around the same time, Carmen Fortuna and Sergia Galvan began working with local housewives groups through their Santo Domingo based organization Feminist Action Incorporated (AFI). While none of these three organizations had the longevity of CIPAF, collectively they demonstrated a rapidly expanding circle of women engaged in feminist theory and willing to put that thought into action. They also showcase the diverse and varied nature of this loose coalition of feminist activism and its resistance to alliance with state structures.

Despite the seemingly disparate agendas and constituencies of these women's organizations, they maintained at core similar approaches to feminist concerns for the Dominican Republic. First, they argued that rural and urban poor women deserved the most attention, whether practical or theoretical, in the struggle to improve women's issues nationwide. Second, they focused their efforts on consciousness-raising among women at all levels of experience and education. Finally, they understood that effective change could not be managed without transnational support, be that fiscal, ideological, or juridical. As a result of the deeply embedded paternalist state, a long history of imperial incursion, and their own socialist political leanings, attacking male privilege took on an intensely local sheen, demanding careful understanding of and attention to historical and social conditions that had created the Dominican woman's status not just different from but inferior to her male compatriots.[14] All of these pioneering women's groups understood that, in both practical and ideological terms, their feminism had to be infused with class-based analysis and they demanded liberation less for themselves than for the women of the lowest classes. In essence they argued for an emancipation that would trickle up rather than down.

These efforts began to coalesce in the early 1980s with a growing number of international conferences, collective actions, and the proliferation of new regional and national women's organizations. In early 1981 the Center of Education Studies (CEDEE) and the Latin American Evangelical Commission on Christian Education (CELADEC) coordinated a conference convening women's groups from the Dominican Republic as well as Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela and hosting noted French (by way of Chile) feminist Michele Mattelart as featured speaker (CEDEE-CELADEC, 1981). Dominican groups included the abovementioned collectives as well as several new ones like the Dominican Women's Union (UMD) and the Organizing Committee for the Socialist Feminine Movement. The focus of the conference was on grass-roots educational efforts for women's empowerment, yet it also provided a venue for women within the movement to begin circulating among international feminist networks.

At the same time, many of the newly minted leaders of these groups began an effort to create an umbrella structure for their work. In late 1980 they held a "National Meeting for Organizations Working with Women" (Coordinadora Feminista 1984). The goal, to create a organizational structure to both coordinate efforts and maintain autonomy for individual groups, initially failed due to lack of consensus. While the effort would continue to flounder for the next several years given the diversity of goals, the motivation behind it grew after 16 Dominican delegates attended the "Primer Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe" (First Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting, shortened as *Encuentro*) in Bogotá, Colombia. The delegation, second in size only to the host country, seems clearly to have left an outsized mark on the conference. One of the final resolutions was to declare November 25th, the date of the assassination of the Mirabal sisters by the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in honor of their sacrifice.[15] In a remark during the conference proceedings, Magaly Pineda compared the struggles Dominican women faced on the most basic levels with those of her Latin American colleagues. As she noted, across the region *feminist* was "still a harsh word which jolts people—although we are beginning to defend it" (Navarro 1982, 154).

Defending feminism, once an "anathema," and incorporating it into larger demands for social change took on a number of formats. For Pineda and the women of CIPAF it meant undertaking several massive studies of poor women—both urban and rural—and their daily realities. They looked at data from the Secretary of Labor on women in the workforce, studied sexual violence cases, began gathering surveys from women living in marginalized barrios, and published a comprehensive analysis of the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy in the national labor code. For example, their pamphlet *When work is hell* detailed the conditions of workers in the free trade zones, combining statistical data and intense scholarly analysis with a general education and awareness approach (Pineda 1986). They also began a series of publications and workshops directed at housewives on female/maternal health issues. One of their earlier pamphlets, *¿Quién defiende a quién?*, (Who defends who?) demonstrates the general style and content of their publications (Mones, Montes de Oca, and Mejía 1982). The publication, a short guide of the legislation protecting (or not) women and children workers in the Dominican Republic, was illustrated, straight-forward, and gently infused with theory, all the while pointing out that the legislation both did not work to protect women and was paternalistic.

For rural women's groups like MUDE and PROMUS, defending feminism in the Dominican Republic meant bringing together

the ever-growing number of rural women's informal groups (former housewives and mother's clubs) into Federations of Campesina Women (Federaciones de Mujeres Campesinas) in places like Villa Altagracia, San Cristóbal, and Baní.[16] Through these larger collectives they taught organizing techniques and helped support public activism and demonstrations, particularly on key dates. MUDE launched a program of micro-credit for rural women (Mujeres en Desarrollo 1987). Publication was also an important consciousness-raising tool; CEF began publishing a newsletter called *Mujeres* and CIPAF started their monthly *Quehaceres.* Regardless of format, however, all these efforts sought to demonstrate that the daily challenges of poor women were essential to larger struggles of justice, democracy, and development. These feminist groups also continued the work of disassociating feminism from images of free-love, bra burning, and radical white women emanating from the US media and embedded in male defenses of the status-quo, and constructing a feminism in keeping with Dominican visions of revolutionary social change that had been part of the politics of struggle since the overthrow of Trujillo.

For many, claiming feminism also meant engaging in public demonstrations. Returning in the summer of 1981 energized from the *Encuentro* in Bogotá, a number of the Dominican delegates came together to finally form the umbrella Coordinator of Feminist Organizations (COF) (Coordinadora feminista 1984). Their first public activity was the November 25th "Day of Protest Against Violence Against Women" (Jornada de Denuncia a la Violencia contra la Mujer) in honor of the martyred Mirabal sisters. The event—possibly the first public, feminist manifestation of the growing movement—had three central goals, including making public the discussions that had been occurring amongst participant organizations, denouncing the violence against women committed by state and societal actors, and expressing their solidarity with women and popular movements in "Nicaragua, El Salvador, Haiti, and other countries" of the Global South (Coordinadora Feminista 1984). While clearly centered on everyday realities both historical and present, the collected activists sought to demonstrate solidarity across Latin America and use their platform to broadcast rights violations occurring regularly on Dominican soil. The event called attention to the growing demands of the women of the left who felt their activism for social change had yet to make a dent in the conditions for women in the Dominican Republic.

Although they ultimately failed on their first attempt, the women of the COF also sent a proposal to the government for the creation of a formal division of women's issues under then president Jorge Blanco. While the Dominican state had decreed a of Division of Women's Issues as part of the Department of Foreign Relations in 1979, likely as a result

of planning for the IWY and the influence of Licelott Marte de Barrios, Blanco's government initially balked at stand-alone department. However, in 1982 a number of marches and demonstrations, planned for both International Women's Day (March 8) and the newly-minted International Day Against Violence against Women (November 25), as well as the increasing vocality of the feminist collective, may have influenced the government's decision to create the General Directorate for the Advancement of Women (DGPM) that would report directly to the President's office.[17]

The year 1983 marked a watershed for the Dominican feminist movement. Several new national women's organizations formed, including the highly influential National Council of Rural Women (CONAMUCA), the COF coalesced into a more organized Feminist Coordinator (CF), and two foundational conferences were held: the "First National Seminar for Research on Rural Women" (Primer Seminario Nacional de Investigación sobre la Mujer Rural) and the "First National Meeting of Campesina Leaders" (Primer Encuentro Nacional de Dirigentes Campesinas). Over 500 women attended a March 8th march and demonstration organized by multiple federations of *campesina* women. Dominican women also continued their engagement with transnational feminism. Margarita Cordero, a founding member of CIPAF, represented the organization in Haiti's "Feminism Week," seeking to "strengthen the bonds of friendship and solidarity" between Dominican and Haitian feminists. A large delegation attended the second Latin American and Caribbean feminist *Encuentro* in Lima, Peru, and Magaly Pineda and a number of other feminist leaders attended regional conferences connected to women and popular activism.[18]

The two national conferences, held in May and July of 1983, demonstrated the increasing militancy behind improving conditions for rural women. The Primer Seminario Nacional was organized by CIPAF and kicked off what would be a two-year-long study of the conditions of poor women in the countryside. Participants included local organizers and an international feminist cohort, "all women fully committed to the work of feminism" (Pineda 1983, 10). According to Magaly Pineda, who offered the opening lecture, the course and corresponding study were meant not to produce fancy academic articles but "to make it possible for peasant women to discover together the root causes of their oppression and present condition, so as to enable them to take ownership of the knowledge of a reality that they can comprehend and transcend." Such action was primary in the feminist agenda in the Dominican Republic, Pineda argued, because it served as "an important step, basic, but also inextricably linked to transformative activism" for society (Pineda 1983, 10).

The second major national conference grew out of the ever-expanding

cohort of Federaciones de Mujeres Campesinas, particularly in the Southwest. The Primer Encuentro Nacional was organized with the goals of creating a national umbrella organization for local campesina collectives, raising awareness of the shared experiences of these groups, and creating a larger power base for collective action (*Revista CEPAE* 1983, 13). Over 200 rural women's groups were represented at the gathering (Reyes 1985, 17). The resulting National Confederation of Campesina Women (CONAMUCA) quickly became an important power base for intersectional class and gender activism. As two foreign observers remarked, CONAMUCA was significant from its inception because of its ability to integrate class and feminist theory "in a framework of a total and complete organizational autonomy from the left and related organizations across the country." Further, their effort was "an example of the fruits of Dominican idiosyncrasy, of the mobilization of women, of the clarity of the popular peasant movement, and of the activism of feminist groups" (Lozando and González 1986, 31).

Together with previous work, the two national conferences demonstrate the real arrival of an autonomous feminist movement in the Dominican Republic, one that was at once inextricable from the legacies of authoritarianism and, at the same time forging new paths for women. Precisely by cautiously adopting a transnational and equality-focused theoretical perspective, intertwining it with class-based analysis as was appropriate for the Dominican case, and tackling the most pressing local issues without ignoring international feminist linkages, the Dominican feminist coalition had created an autochthonous movement that was making a difference for women "de base" (grassroots) and impacting similar movements across the region. Pineda argued that there were multiple reasons the Dominican feminist movement had not become yet another group of elite intellectuals, including the legacy of the country's elite first wave, the existence of massive numbers of domestic workers (eliminating the "double burden" for most of the middle and upper class women), the powerful influence of the Catholic Church, and the "emotional dependence and taboos connected to women." She argued that the work of feminism, up to 1983, had developed through a focused attention to grass-roots education and bringing ideology into practice (quoted in Lozando and González 1986, 31). As a result, according to Pineda, the Dominican political left was beginning to understand feminism as an integral pathway in advancing its agenda; perhaps more crucially, the Dominican population was seeing a palpable and local response to gender inequality.

At the Second Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentro* in Lima, Peru (1983) Dominican feminists left another lasting impression. Reporting for *off our backs,* Latina feminist activist Rita Arditti noted

that the Dominican delegation was again very engaged. She claimed to have left the conference "feeling that the Dominican Republic feminists were breaking new ground and taking personal and political risks" and "found their presentation to be particularly uplifting and hopeful" (Arditti and Disch 1983). It was this same year that the United Nations chose to establish the headquarters of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in Santo Domingo. The fact that an urban center on a comparatively small, albeit historic Caribbean island was selected as the base of women's development globally seems to have gone somewhat unnoticed.[19] While undoubtedly there were specific negotiations involved, it is indicative of the outsized influence of the Dominican feminist movement that Santo Domingo came to be the epicenter of U.N. gender development efforts.

By the end of 1983, Dominican feminists had established themselves as an undeniable presence on the political scene not only among the left, but through established national and international institutions as well. They had accomplished this through the formation of numerous organizations, the coordination of regular demonstrations, their attendance at international conferences, and their continued pressure on the press and government to pay attention to issues of gender equality. The final two years of the International Women's Decade and the subsequent five years would demonstrate continued growth and expansion of the movement, including its incorporation into more theoretical and academic homes and its consistent focus on class-based and grassroots-focused societal transformation.

Surviving and Thriving in the "Lost Decade" (1984–1990)

The last two years of the International Women's Decade proved highly productive for the feminist movement and demonstrated the momentum the loose coalition of groups would carry through the end of the decade. The agendas and impact of existing organizations continued to expand, while many new organizations formed to contribute to the work of gender equity. Through the remainder of the 1980s, feminist organizations would continue to flourish and their interests would expand further throughout the diaspora and to topics of family, culture, birth control and abortion, prostitution, domestic violence, gynecology, feminicide, and education and professionalization for women. Moreover, they would begin to attain Magaly Pineda's hope of establishing women's studies as a "principle enemy" of class struggle and construct a degree of acceptance for a distinctly Dominican vision of feminism in the wake of authoritarianism.

At the end of 1983 the Coordinator of Feminist Organizations

gathered to reassess their role in the Dominican feminist movement. By early the next year, during a February convention, they had managed to come to a consensus on a general definition of feminism and constructed a plan to move toward their role as "a vigorous organization of women committed to a future of equality and liberty for all" (Coordinadora Feminista 1984).[20] They set down eight major feminist objectives, opened membership to all women who identified with feminist ideals, regularly attended meetings and paid their dues, and created a structure for the organization with a central organizing committee and ad-hoc work teams for special projects. Finally, they vigorously defended their need to be autonomous as an organization while still attentive to local and global realities for women. The reconstituted collective was renamed the Feminist Coordinator (CF).

The state-led General Directorate for the Advancement of Women (DGPM), formed in 1982 through pressure from women's groups, began to formally prepare for the 1985 World Conference in Nairobi. They convened a "National Evaluation Conference," began developing rural programs on women and nutrition, and coordinated with INSTRAW to spread the strategies discussed at Nairobi (CEDEE Programa de la Mujer 1985, 4). While their programming through the mid to late 1980s was not extensive, they did help to garner development funding and formally represent the country at INSTRAW events. In March 1986 they held a celebration with president Jorge Blanco and awarded 10 medals of merit to women who had made contributions to feminist efforts; several were awarded posthumously including to the Mirabal sisters, rural activist and martyr Mamá Tingó (Florinda Soriano), and a member of the youth movement, Yolanda Guzmán, who had died fighting during the 1965 April Revolution (CEDEE Programa de la Mujer 1986b, 9).[21] The DGPM was certainly less effective in making the quotidian changes at the grassroots level desired by most the country's feminist groups, but under the leadership of Martha Olga García they maintained the links between local efforts and national government, as well as drew international conferences to the Dominican Republic. In 1988 the department created a separate Coordinator of Non-Governmental Organizations to help organize the many NGOs that had developed over the past decade; over 30 different groups, working in topics of education, health, violence, and political participation, incorporated into the collective (*Mujer/fempress* 1989).[22]

A number of feminist groups began or continued promoting their message through publications and writings across the country, significantly expanding access to feminist tracts and ideas. The Programa de la Mujer of CEDEE published a monthly newsletter that summarized nearly all women's related events happening across the country, as well

as international news and space for editorializing in "Así Pensamos" ("What We're Thinking"). In 1983 they had also begun publishing short "fotonovelas" (graphic pamphlets) on women's daily challenges using a fictional character named Tomasa. A group called *Nosotras,* whose name was a clear homage to the early 20th century women's group *Club Nosotras,* began publishing weekly articles in the Santiago paper *El Sol.*[23] CIPAF continued publishing their monthly *Quehaceres* and a number of other groups published regular or semi-regular newsletters, like CEF's *Mujeres,* that reported on organizational efforts, national advancements and continued struggles, and international feminist solidarity. Occasional pieces, generally in a grassroots educational style, on women's empowerment and daily struggles, were also part of a number of organizational campaigns. Several new feminist publishing ventures began serving as venues for the work of the movement, and the international ILET-Fempress validated Dominican efforts globally, including the voices of Dominicans Margarita Cordero and Ángela Hernández. In one typical publication, *Mujeres 1984*, writers for CEDEE argued that feminist activity for the year was "groundbreaking in the history of the popular movement in our country" (CEDEE Programa de la Mujer 1984). While still fighting a predominate image in the press of women as satisfied housewives, the collective efforts to publicize both women's successes and continued struggles made it possible for CIPAF to create a Centro de Documentación (Research Center) Camila Henríquez Ureña in 1986 that contained as much international materials as local, open to anyone "interested in learning about the problem of gender" (CIPAF 1992).

Feminist groups continued their grassroots efforts to empower women, create a uniquely Dominican movement, and bring their message to a wider public. On March 8, 1984 over 4,000 women in San Cristóbal, organized by CONAMUCA, marched to demonstrate the importance of women in society. That same month, the Mirabal Sisters Feminist Movement in Santiago declared their formation to struggle against women's oppression within a capitalist society, unite women in a single fight against exploitation, and end female enslavement and inferiority. Their manifesto and first publication, *Mujer Adelante,* demonstrated an unequivocal feminist agenda to create "one way, one voice, for the defense of your rights, women" as well as strong ties to the importance of the Dominican past in both their name and cry "NO AGUANTAMOS MÁS" ("We Will Not Take Any More") and their emphasis on the historical strength of solidarity (Movimiento Hermanas Mirabal 1984). The twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of the Mirabal sisters at the hands of the dictator in 1985, now the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, also provided a critical

platform from which women's groups could celebrate their success and demand more. By this point there were more than 30 organizations committed to feminist causes, all of whom sought ways to engage in this historic commemoration. Thousands showed up to the sisters' home in Salcedo, now converted to a caught-in-amber style museum, to march in remembrance of their lives and sacrifice. In addition to opening up discussions of the role of women in Dominican history (being also the 20th anniversary of the 1965 April Revolution and the end of the International Women's Decade), the year provided ample opportunities to engage in public debate about continued physical and sexual violence against women, including feminicide.

Continuing the work of feminist activism, CIPAF remained the vanguard but was increasingly joined by other women's groups seeking to create and conserve a record of women's roles and engagement in public life in the Dominican Republic and reach out to the rural and urban poor. In 1984 and 1985 at least half a dozen of feminist organizations or auxiliary groups formed or reactivated.[24] Others that had formed earlier ramped up their work and public activism, particularly in respect to the upcoming 1986 elections. MUDE continued their crucial rural educational and organizing campaigns, and housewives committees became more and more visible across the rural landscape. The formation of Women in Action for Liberation (MUALI) in 1985 was illustrative of the direction of the Dominican feminist movement during the second half of the 1980s. The group drew on the militancy of the 1960s, maintained a decidedly urban focus and transnational solidarity approach, and sought to draw out the particular concerns of Afro-Dominican women.

Transnational solidarity and anti-imperial activism intensified for feminist groups in the second half of the 1980s. MUALI, for instance, demonstrated their concern for the situation for women in Haiti under dictator Duvalier through events and publications. In an article on a female Haitian exile that appeared in their second edition of ¡*Ahora* e*scúchame*! (Listen to Me Now!, February-March 1986), they discussed the need for solidarity between Haitian and Dominican women, particularly among women in poor barrios. They concluded another piece on the general situation of the neighboring country, demanding "Yankees, get out of Haiti and the whole island."[25] Other feminist organizations were similarly concerned for women in neighboring countries, like Guatemala and Nicaragua, run by dictators and held up by US military support. In part due to these efforts, Dominican feminists became even more prominent internationally. In addition to the III Feminist *Encuentro* in Brazil, Dominican women participated individually and collectively in a number of international conferences, sharing their experiences and seeking support and solidarity from the international community. Through the late

1980s, Dominican feminists continued to travel to work with feminist groups across the region and attend international conferences as well as host events in the country with expansive invitation lists.

On the ground, these efforts led to an extended project to make concrete legislative change in the second half of the 1980s. In 1986 a legal reform initiative began a project to make recommendations for changes to the existing code relative to women (CEDEE Programa de la Mujer 1986a, 3). An article in *Nuevo Diario* (March 5) demonstrated the significant support for the proposed legislation, noting backing from Magaly Pineda, Margarita Cordero, Carmen Imbert, Nelly Amador, and Dora Eusebio Gautreaux for laws that were truly an "expression of the reality" lived by Dominican women and acknowledged issues of adultery, child legitimacy, sexual violence, divorce, and other quotidian struggles (CEDEE Programa de la Mujer 1986b, 7). In 1989 the Women's Legal Services Center (CENSEL) began a renewed campaign to change the still outdated Dominican legal code that included multiple discussion-based events that would all culminate in a November visit and report to the Dominican national congress. In an article for *Mujer/fempress* Margarita Cordero noted that Dominican laws relative to women's rights, "dying in obsolescence," demonstrated that citizen equality was a fiction, few Dominicans even noticed or were much less embarrassed by the country's antiquated legal code, and the entire legislation was in desperate need of overhaul given its clear "legitimation of patriarchal oppressions" for women (Cordero 1989, 2).

One of the most potentially transformative actions of the feminist movement began in the mid-1980s with the formalization of feminist training within the university setting. In line with Magaly Pineda's vision of women's studies as revolutionary activism, CIPAF created the first collaboration with an institution of higher learning, joining with the UASD to create a Chair in Women's Studies "Minerva Mirabal" in 1986. Although it was a very slow and difficult growth process, the inclusion of women's studies curriculum in the institutions of higher learning in the Dominican Republic through the 1990s and 2000s brought the consciousness raising and feminist pedagogy from the small rooms of activist groups into the wider public. While fueled by the time spent by members of the movement in women's studies programs in the United States, Latin America, and Europe and supported by international funding sources, the fledgling programs sought to implement a more Dominicanized vision of feminism in the classroom.

In November 1987, the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo began a Program of Women's Studies, receiving its first international support from the Catholic Development Institute.[26] Although a small group, several committed faculty began by slowing expanding

gender-related course offerings and planning specific studies, including their first publication on gender, work, and ethnicity in the sugar bateys (Jansen and Millán 1991). Ginny Taulé and Cecilia Millán, the two principle faculty members, struggled to incorporate gender analysis into existing classes and convince faculty and students the value of their work. However, they sought international support by inviting Women's Studies directors from other countries to offer short courses they named in honor of noted Dominican teacher and early 20th century feminist Ercilia Pepín.[27] In 1992 Lourdes Bueno returned from postgraduate studies at Rutgers to join the program team. At this point, they changed the name to the Center of Gender Studies and continued to draw on the support of local non-profits and the CF. They also began working with an expanded group of faculty across the university to help them incorporate gender in their curriculum, in the process become a more established and directed initiative.

The university in Santiago, Pontificate Catholic Mother and Teacher University (PUCMM), also began a slow incorporation of women's studies courses into the classrooms of the Catholic institution, providing feminist programming for the country's central region. The very first team of women's studies faculty included five professors representing specializations in Languages and Literature, Art, Heath, Education, and Social Work.[28] Their efforts were supported by funds from the Ford Foundation (who had also assisted INTEC in their efforts).[29] Beginning in 1973, the foundation had provided support for women's studies centers globally; responding to a push from the International Women's Decade's NGO Forum, they included the Dominican Republic in their programming in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Korey 2016, 222). The University accepted a formal proposal for the Center of Women's Studies in 1990. Like the group at INTEC, the women's studies collective combined curriculum with investigative efforts, including studies of women and micro-businesses and the impact of work in the Free Trade Zones on family dynamics, and worked to disseminate knowledge on women's issues through workshops, conferences, and intellectual exchange.

In 1999 the General Directorate for the Advancement of Women became the Ministry of Women under the presidency of Leonel Fernández. While this formalization represented a relative win for the feminist movement, it more importantly highlighted the many successes and challenges of now thirty years of feminist activism stretching back to the First Revolutionary Women's Congress in 1968. Since the end of authoritarian rule Dominican women had been actively pushing a feminist agenda that sought to bring women's inequality into the public discourse and empower poor, rural women to become advocates for their own efforts. Their work was always very local in its scope and highly cognizant of the

Dominican context, while at the same time engaged with international feminist networks and global resources that might help further the cause. In responding to the paternal model of authoritarianism and engaging their own socialist training, leaders advocated for a class-conscious model of empowerment and feminist consciousness raising. However, it was also a movement that was not entirely cohesive and may have inadvertently marginalized issues of race and sexuality in its trained focus on class.

Despite all their efforts, Dominican laws continued to be highly retrograde as concerned women's rights, notwithstanding some small reforms in the late 1990s, and there was little economic advancement for rural women over the thirty-year span of the movement. However, bringing feminism, a word that had been quickly discarded by the late 1930s with the rise of Trujillo, back into the public discourse was no small accomplishment. Moreover, learning to work through many of the legacies of paternalist authoritarianism was also a significant challenge that the feminist movement faced through grass roots educational campaigns that touched even the smallest towns and villages in the countryside. In creating a new kind of women's activism, one that was distinctly not tied to allegiance to a populist authoritarian leader (or resistance to one) and was mobilized through multiple small, class-focused and democratically-oriented groups, the Dominican feminist movement created new spaces for female political engagement and provided the models for innovative, if occasionally problematic, styles of women's involvement with the public sphere.

In addition to the networks created with international feminist groups and the impact of the Dominican feminist movement on broader regional efforts, this period gives important insights into the role of women's activism in a post-authoritarian context. In responding to nearly fifty years of paternalist politics both from the dictatorships of Rafael Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer, women activists sought a new path to political engagement and empowerment. Mobilizing thousands of women to consider the sources of their own oppression may not have substantially changed a legislative structure that to this day remains mired in the legacies of authoritarianism and paternalism, but it did serve to create a significantly more engaged female citizenry. Moreover, embedded in this story of feminist activism are the central nodes of a democratizing project that continues to push against the entrenched legacies of dictatorship; for both the Dominican Republic and the region more broadly, this lesson of grass-roots empowerment should not remain silenced.

Notes

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[1] A significant portion of the materials discussed here are located in the archives of Bobbye S. Ortiz (David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University), a North American social activist and Marxist feminist who gathered documentation from a wide range of feminist groups across Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. Like most research on Dominican women's history, this paper represents a work of transnational (and creative) gathering of sources. There is currently no public repository of feminist materials in the Dominican Republic, and few of the most critical pieces have made it into the national archives. Research in this field (like many) requires a dedicated hunt for documents held privately and hidden in used bookstores, an employment of oral histories of participants, and a reading against the silences of more male-dominated repositories. It also often demands an attention to materials held by allies of women's activism, generally deposited within U.S. archives. As with the struggle for suffrage in the Dominican Republic, some of the most crucial primary documents on women's activism are currently only available in the archives of private U.S. institutions. (See Manley 2017, Chapter 1.) Despite the challenges presented by the nature of this work (including travel, funding, and no small amount of frustration), it ultimately allows for the reconstruction of a heretofore un-narrated past as well as serves as an important reminder of the value of these materials.

[2] There are a range theoretical implications of engaging a wave model, including its problematic application to the Global South, that I do not condone; the terms are used here simply to clarify a distinction between the earliest movements that fought for

suffrage in the earlier part of the century, and later struggles in the second half of the century impacted by a more global call for women's rights.

[3] Two key organizations, the Federation of Dominican Women (FMD) and the Dominican Feminine Patriotic Association (APFD) demonstrate the realm of political possibility for Dominican female activists during this period on either side of the political spectrum; both groups made important contributions but neither survived the transition back to authoritarianism in 1966. For many women of the left, their involvement in FMD was foundational to later activism. See Manley 2017, Chapter 4.

[4] One crucial example was the Committee of the Relatives of the Dead, Jailed, and Disappeared (CFMPD) led by Gladys Gutiérrez that focused attention on the regime's illegal actions against husbands, brothers, and fathers. See Manley 2017, Chapter 6.

[5] For more see *¿Qué? la revista del pueblo* (Santo Domingo), año II, no. 20; 38-46 (NACLA Archives of Latin Americana).

[6] Minimal attention has been paid to these groups despite their clear influence and their connection to other Latin American women's groups. See (Santos de Rivera et al. 1976; Secretaría de Estado de la Mujer 2000; Tancer 1973, 209-229; Viezzer 1982)

[7] The series ran from November through August. *¿Qué? La revista del pueblo* (Santo Domingo), año I, no. 11 through año II, no. 20 (NACLA Archive of Latin Americana).

[8] The magazine gave considerable space to debate over the women's movement, while also providing photos of full-color, swimsuit-clad beauty contestants and occasionally naked women, as well as illustrating stylish new feminine hairstyles. This juxtaposition highlights women's mounting frustration with the left particularly. Since even before their massive participation in the 1965 April Revolution against U.S. Occupation, most women accepted the subsuming of women's rights issues to the larger goal of social emancipation, but by the late 1960s many were indicating their patience with this argument—beginning to seem merely like lip service—was growing thin.

[9] They included the formation of the Association for the Promotion

of Women of the South (PROMUS) in 1975, the Committee for Unity and Women's Rights (CUDEM) in 1978, Women in Dominican Development (MUDE) in 1979, Circle of Feminist Studies (CEF) in 1979, and the Center for the Investigation of Feminist Action (CIPAF) in 1980.

[10] The Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic has a fascinating if troubled historic relationship with the state that has received minimal scholarly attention. They stood firm as one of Trujillo's strongest allies until the final year when they issued an encyclical denouncing the regime. However, this stance was short lived as they very quickly joined ranks with the Balaguer regime in the late 1960s. Still, this is not to say that at a grassroots level resistance to either regime was not present; more research is crucial to uncover the ways local groups advocated for the rural poor and democratic governance.

[11] Marte de Barrios was a lawyer who had received her degree from the University of Santo Domingo and worked briefly for the Trujillo regime before its demise. She allied with Balaguer and the PRSC and was rewarded with a number of important positions in the Department of Foreign Affairs during the regime, including as Sub-Secretary, as well as appointments to the IACW, the OAS, and the UN. However, she was one of a small number of more conservative politicians that began working across the political divide in the mid-1970s around the IWY.

[12] The phrase, "women hold up half the sky" is generally attributed to Mao Zedong and appeared in communist materials and on political banners from the 1970s.

[13] Ampara Arango recalls that Pineda relied on the support of a Peruvian and a Puerto Rican feminist to write the proposal and gathered several thousand dollars of initial support from the Holland group. Interview with Amparo Arango by Neici Zeller, July 11, 1994. Interview synopsis by Zeller in possession of the author.

[14] Despite their intense engagement with issues of class, there is a general elision of a direct discussion of race in the materials under review for this article. There is, nonetheless, a broad awareness in the writing and illustrations of the materials being produced by feminist groups that their target audience was poor, rural, and

predominately afro-descended women.

[15] On the anniversary of the Mirabal sisters' deaths in 2009, a Dominican newspaper published a photo of the delegates to the 1980 Copenhagen conference, noting that it was their work that established the international commemoration, adding that the 19 women delegates included Maritza Féliz, Melly Pappaterra, Mariví Arregui, Antonia Ferreras, Carmen Alonso, Isis Montes de Oca, Ana Teresa Rodríguez, Miriam Zapata, Elsa Ramírez, Magaly Pineda, Nelsu Aldebot, Virginia Alvares, Ramona Santana, Sergia Galván, Maritza Burgos, and Angela Hernández (Misol 2009). For more on the Mirabals, Trujillo, and the international declaration see (Manley 2012; Robinson 2006).

[16] This was reported in many of the organizational publications including the *Revista CEPAE*, May-June 1983; however, the formation of the Baní group, comprised of over 22 different women's clubs, was also lauded in the U.S.-based *off our backs* 13:10 1983, 3.

[17] The office was created with decree #46 on August 17, 1982. In 1999 it was elevated to the Secretariat of Women's Affairs and in 2010 became the Women's Ministry. See Ministerio de la Mujer, "Sobre Nosotras," at <http://www.mujer.gob.do/index.php/sobre-nosotros/quienes-somos>. Accessed July 11, 2017.

[18] For reports on several of these events, see *Revista CEPAE*, Año IV, No. 17 (May-June 1983).

[19] Again, more research is needed to uncover the roots of this decision by the United Nations' administration and the possible lobbying done by the Dominican Republic to attain the office.

[20] They defined feminism as "the acknowledgment and consciousness of an oppression specific to women, that demands an attitude of confrontation in all its implications" (Coordinadora Feminista 1984).

[21] Mamá Tingó (Florinda Soriano) was a rural activist leader who was murdered defending the land she had farmed for years in Hato Viejo against the claims of the putative land-title holder, Pablo Díaz Hernández. While Tingó has been held up as a leader/model for the rural poor and Afro-Dominican women, including among

many of the feminist groups of the late 1970s and 1980s, as well as a martyr in the historiography of resistance in the Dominican Republic, there is virtually no substantial research on her life and impact.

[22] Asunción Lavrín noted in a review in *The Americas* that *Mujer/fempress*, a feminist monthly magazine, published in Chile, was an "alternative means to communicate to women of the Americas" and "one of the best sources of information on contemporary women's issues in Latin America" (Lavrin 1990). It included reports from around a dozen Latin American correspondents as well as short news briefs and previously published articles from feminists across the region.

[23] *Club Nosotras* was formed in Santo Domingo in 1927 as a social and cultural group for women by women's rights pioneer Abigaíl Mejía de Fernández. It is considered the precursor to the *Acción Feminista Dominicana* group that propelled the women's movement toward suffrage, although the relationship between the two is slightly more complicated and could use further research.

[24] Examples include the Unión de Mujeres Dominicanas, the Casa de la Mujer, the Associación Dominicana de Apoyo a la Mujer, the Colectivo de Mujeres Dominicanas, and the Comisión Femenina para el Trabajo de la Mujer. Limited funding made it difficult for many organizations to stay afloat which may account for some of the disbanding and reformations of the groups.

[25] More research on these trans-Hispaniola linkages within the women's movement (and broader leftist struggles) provides another opportunity to resist the dangerous narrative of an ahistoricized Haitian-Dominican hatred.

[26] This history was documented by Neici Zeller in an interview of Lourdes Bueno and Ginny Taulé, July 15, 1994. Interview synopsis by Zeller in possession of the author. The Centro de Estudio del Género del INTEC is the longest running gender studies center associated with a major university in the Dominican Republic.

[27] Faculty came from Argentina, Mexico, and Puerto Rico according to Lourdes Bueno and Ginny Taulé, Ibid.

[28] This account comes from an interview of Carmen Luisa (Lilí)

González by Neici Zeller, July 1, 1994. Interview synopsis by Zeller in possession of the author.

[29] Following the international sources of funding via their institutional archives would help delineate a clearer picture of the possibilities and limitations of these nascent women's studies programs.

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