1 From women's rights to human rights

The influence of Pan-American feminism on the United Nations

Katherine M. Marino

Introduction

Soon after arriving at the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) in San Francisco in 1945, Brazilian delegate Bertha Lutz wrote to friends back home that “Latin American women” would be “the most helpful” in advancing women’s rights.¹ Although women from the U.S. and British delegations refused to promote women’s rights in the Charter, the female representatives from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Uruguay were self-identified *feministas*. For the past two decades, they had all been engaged, with Lutz, in a Pan-American feminist movement that elevated women’s rights to international treaties. At the UNCIO, these Latin American women collaborated to achieve a number of key goals: incorporating women’s rights into the purposes of the organization, asserting women’s rights as human rights, and ensuring the representation of women in all UN bodies. Bertha Lutz also proposed what became the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women. They accomplished these objectives against the objections of U.S. and British women who believed women’s rights goals too divisive or not important enough to include in the Charter, and of the U.S. and British delegations that opposed human rights demands more generally. Without the work of these Latin American women, the UN Charter would likely have contained little to nothing about women’s rights.

Their pivotal work represented a culmination of over two decades of Pan-American feminism, a transnational movement that fuelled grassroots exchange and inter-American diplomacy for women’s rights. This essay explores how and why this movement drove their UNCIO contributions. Since the mid-1920s Pan-American feminism provided a critical forum for Latin American feminist innovations in international law, starting with an international treaty they devised to advance women’s rights, the Equal Rights Treaty. The movement also pioneered the first inter-governmental organization in the world to promote women’s rights, the Inter-American Commission of Women, or *Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres* (CIM) that for the next two decades, launched the Equal Rights Treaty into Pan American Union and other international meetings. In the 1930s and 40s inter-American feminists connected their international defense of women’s rights to what was becoming known as international “human rights,” based on multiple and inter-connected grassroots struggles against fascism, racism, and imperialist

capitalism. Latin American feminists' insistence that after the Second World War the United Nations must enshrine rights for all regardless of race, sex, or class, and must include women in the peace deliberations compelled both the presence and actions the Latin American feminists in San Francisco. Their work also shaped Latin American feminists' contributions to the 1948 UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Pan-American feminism not only pushed women's rights into human rights but also helped formulate international human rights.

Pan-American feminism's equal rights treaty

Pan-American feminism emerged from a broader moment of Pan-Americanism ushered in by the First World War that shattered the notion of European cultural superiority and opened a space for the "new" Latin American nations on the world stage. The U.S. government sought stronger ties with Latin American countries to protect its economic and political interests following the 1914 completion of the Panama Canal and resulting dramatic rise in trade with Latin America. This period saw a flourishing of new Pan-American organizations, congresses, publications, and institutions around culture, hygiene and medicine, child welfare, and feminism. Changes in transportation, communications, and industrialization sped these collaborations. Though a thin cover for U.S. imperialism, this new Pan-Americanism represented an opportunity that many Latin-American diplomats and lawyers seized to advance a new inter-American system promoting multilateralism as well as their own countries' political sovereignty and cultural advancement.²

The Great War and the 1917 Mexican Revolution raised the stakes around national self-determination and women's rights in the Americas. Having organized in regional gatherings since the 1910 International Women's Congress in Buenos Aires, Latin American feminists found in new Pan-American collaborations with U.S. women ways to gain legitimacy for their demands for women's political, civil, social, and economic rights. After the First World War, when many European countries had passed women's suffrage legislation, a number of Latin American male political leaders equated women's rights with cultural and civilizational advancement. At the 1923 Pan-American conference in Santiago, Chile, male diplomats from Guatemala and Chile made such arguments when they passed resolutions to charge the Pan American Union with the study and promotion of women's rights, responding as well to feminist pressure.³

Although Latin American feminists looked with high expectations to the Pan-American realm, they were often dismayed by interactions with U.S. counterparts who deemed themselves and their approaches to feminism as superior. Anglo-American women took on the role of "teachers" at the 1922 Pan American Women's Congress in Baltimore, Maryland, organized by U.S. feminist Carrie Chapman Catt and the U.S. League of Women Voters. Latin American activists were even more disturbed by Catt's subsequent disparaging comments about Latin American women lagging "forty years behind" those in the U.S. and her doubts that they were ready for the franchise.⁴ Catt and other U.S. feminist leaders also routinely failed to grasp that political and civil equality under the

law did not represent the highest priority of many Latin American feminists who also sought women's economic and social welfare and anti-imperialism. At a time when U.S. military interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, and economic imperialism in the region were cresting, U.S. feminists' failure to condemn imperialism repelled many Latin American counterparts. While utilizing Pan-American institutions, Latin American feminists also mobilized their own south-south collaborations that almost always emphasized anti-imperialism and a regional feminism led by Latin American women.

These dynamics helped spur the innovation that would be critical over the next two decades: an international law to promote women's rights. Two anti-imperialist feminists, Clara González (Panama), and Ofelia Domínguez Navarro (Cuba), both young lawyers leading radical wings of the women's movements in their countries, announced the idea of an international law to promote women's rights at the 1926 Congreso Inter-Americano de Mujeres in Panama City. They were inspired by efforts of international feminists after the Great War who were utilizing the League of Nations to make new global demands.⁵ But more direct inspiration came from Latin American multi-lateral institution building and advances in international law: the Latin American Scientific congresses that since the nineteenth century sought uniform codes in the Americas in hygiene, health, and sanitation; the work of diplomats at the 1923 Pan-American conference in Santiago who had elevated women's rights to a Pan-American concern; and inter-American feminist ferment they saw growing. González and Domínguez sought social and economic justice for working women, rights of "illegitimate" children and their often single mothers, as well as Latin American sovereignty in the face of U.S. empire.⁶ They proposed a "uniform and extensive action in the effort to obtain...women's political rights," and "the removal from the legislation of all the American countries judicial discrimination against women."⁷ They believed that such an international treaty committing all signatory nations to women's equal political and civil rights would exert a moral weight in the hemisphere and provide the linchpin to other rights.

The passage of González and Domínguez's 1926 resolution in Panama helped galvanize new feminist activism before the 1928 Pan-American Congress of diplomats in Havana, Cuba. Feminists hoped the Havana conference would make meaningful the 1923 women's rights resolutions from Santiago. They were even more optimistic when the 1927 International Commission of Jurists in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, proposed uniform legislation to be submitted to the Havana conference including removal of all legal incapacities of women throughout the continent.⁸

When Cuban feminists learned that no Latin American country was sending female representatives to the Havana conference, several reached out to the U.S. National Woman's Party (NWP), a group they knew for its radicalism in the U.S. suffrage movement, to enlist their help. NWP president Alice Paul was immediately interested. Paul had just obtained a degree in international law which she believed could help advance the NWP's key goal: the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that she had co-authored. The ERA, a bold constitutional guarantee that "men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every

place subject to its jurisdiction,” had languished in Congress since its introduction in 1923.

Grasping that an international treaty could pressure domestic change, Paul dispatched to the January, 1928 Havana conference a number of uninvited NWP members, including its chair of international affairs, the outspoken and canny organizer Doris Stevens, NWP. When Stevens wrote to Paul from Havana about Cuban feminist and male Latin American diplomatic enthusiasm for an international women’s rights treaty, Paul sent her a draft text of what became the Equal Rights Treaty. Drawing on the ERA’s language, it was also similar to the resolution that González and Domínguez had asserted in Panama in 1926. It read: “The Contracting States agree that upon the ratification of this Treaty, men and women shall have equal rights throughout the territory subject to their respective jurisdictions.”⁹ Stevens inserted this treaty into the debates in Havana, where Cuban feminists supported it with alacrity and enlisted the U.S. women to march with them in the streets. Although Stevens faced stiff resistance to the treaty from U.S. State Department representatives, she found the “Latin American men... captivated by our treaty idea.”¹⁰

The delight of Latin American diplomats stemmed in large part from their own efforts to transform international law in the Americas at that moment. The conference took place amidst U.S. military assaults in Nicaragua, deemed by many as the greatest international crime of the day, and Latin American statesmen had come to the conference to defend Latin American sovereignty. They saw the Equal Rights Treaty as part of their fight against the U.S. government, especially when NWP representatives made known that they did not side with the U.S. State Department. Latin American support paved the way for Cuban and U.S. feminists to speak before the plenary, marking the first time any woman had spoken before a Pan-American conference. In her speech, Doris Stevens underscored that women’s equality and sovereignty mutually reinforced Latin American goals for national equality and sovereignty. Although the Equal Rights Treaty was not enshrined in the conference in Havana in 1928, this activism resulted in the creation of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), the first inter-governmental organization promoting women’s rights in the world.¹¹

CIM’s remit was to take up the charge laid out in the 1923 Santiago conference—to study, report on, and help advance women’s rights in the region. It would include one representative from each of the 21 Western Hemisphere republics that participated in the Pan American Union. Because of her leadership in Havana, Pan American Union representatives elected Stevens as its chair. Selecting several other countries by lottery, Pan American Union leaders also enlisted Panamanian feminist Clara González (author of the 1926 international women’s rights resolution) as one of its first commissioners. González’s appointment to CIM, whose offices were located in the Pan American Union headquarters in Washington, D.C., coincided with her studies in New York while on a fellowship from the Panamanian government. González devoted tremendous time and legal expertise to creating a large compendium of women’s status under law in the hemisphere. This volume, the first of its size and international scope, would be essential to CIM’s strategy at international conferences.¹² Over the next

decade, when CIM launched the Equal Rights Treaty into Pan American Union, League of Nations, and International Labor Organization (ILO) conferences, they insisted the treaty was necessary to removing the many documented legal incapacities women faced.

Their work crested at the 1933 Seventh International Conference of American States in Montevideo, Uruguay, where four countries (Cuba, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay) signed the Equal Rights Treaty. The conference also unanimously passed CIM's Equal Nationality Treaty, a treaty requiring all signatory nations to grant independent nationality rights to married women. Many women in the U.S. and other parts of the world forfeited their nationality rights when they married. After Montevideo, even the United States, so opposed to treaty ratification that impeded states' rights, ratified the Equal Nationality Treaty in 1934 and, thanks to feminist pressure, passed a legislative act granting married women equal nationality rights.¹³ Other countries in the Americas also passed women's nationality rights laws upon ratifying the Equal Nationality Treaty.¹⁴

One person who noted the importance of such treaties was Brazilian feminist Bertha Lutz who served as a technical advisor to her country's delegation at the Montevideo conference. Lutz had engaged in Pan-American feminism since she was a delegate to the 1922 Baltimore Pan American Women's Conference. Before CIM existed, she had formulated an idea for an equal nationality treaty. Anticipating arguments for universal human rights treaties, she wrote, "I see not advantage in putting the unjust tradition over the fairness to all citizens, regardless of sex or marital status, nor putting the sovereignty of nations over the rights of people."¹⁵ After the 1933 consolidation of Hitler's power in Germany and 1937 rise of Getulio Vargas's Estado Novo, Lutz had even more reason to oppose national sovereignty in favor of supranational rights of people. Over the next decade, Lutz and other Pan-American feminists increasingly looked to the inter-American realm as a guarantor of rights and shield against dictatorships.

Popular front Pan-American Feminism: From equal rights to human rights

In the mid-to-late 1930s, CIM's international women's rights work grew in import and urgency following the Great Depression and rise of right-wing authoritarian regimes throughout Europe and the Americas that threatened women's rights. Throughout the Americas and world, "popular fronts" emerged uniting communists, socialists, workers, intellectuals, and feminists. Pan-American feminism entered a new stage, what I have called Popular-Front Pan-American Feminism. This inter-American movement upheld equal rights for women at the same time that it promoted working women's economic and social welfare and anti-fascism.

Between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s, Latin American and Caribbean countries saw a mushrooming of explicitly anti-fascist groups that demanded women's rights alongside a range of other causes: Puerto Rican nationalism, nationalization of Mexican oil, an inter-American workers' movement, freedom of Aprista political prisoners in Peru, the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, and rights for indigenous and African-descended people. These popular-front feminist

groups were connected to each other and included robust national organizations like the *Movimiento pro la Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena* (MEMCh) in Chile and the *Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer* (FUPDM) in Mexico. Both founded in 1935, these were mass organizations including several hundred thousand women.¹⁶

Popular-Front feminist groups saw CIM's Equal Rights Treaty as a useful tool in their anti-fascist fight. It gained the endorsement of socialist feminists around the world. The 1934 World Committee of Women against War and Fascism in Paris praised the treaty as a force against fascism, and the following year, Russian feminist and diplomat Alexandra Kollontai hailed it as "the first step in international action with regard to equality of the sexes."¹⁷ In 1937, Latin American statesmen pushed the treaty into the League of Nations General Assembly.¹⁸ These official measures as well as feminist grassroots mobilizations around the treaty helped block "fascist" legislation, such as a law that would have reduced women's minimum wages in Chile and one that would have made married women's legal status that of minors in Argentina.¹⁹ At the regional ILO conferences in 1936 in Chile and 1939 in Cuba, popular-front feminists drew on the treaty to demand state-sponsored maternity leave and child care, including for rural and domestic workers.²⁰

Because of the connections forged by the Popular Front between women's rights and the rights of racial and religious minorities, by the late 1930s, anti-fascist feminists utilized the term "human rights" to describe a broad array of rights "without distinction of sex nor of race, of fortune, of class, of beliefs."²¹ African-descended Latin American feminists were central to this articulation of what was becoming known in these years as international "derechos humanos." Drawing on legacies of Pan-Africanism, and on the vitality of Black communist thought and activism, Black domestic workers in Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, Panama, and elsewhere demanded that anti-racism be a fundamental part of the popular front feminist struggle. Afro-Cuban women articulated the concept of "triple aggression" against Black women that the popular front and feminism both must confront.²²

These influences were felt in the 1938 Pan-American conference in Lima, where Mexican popular-front feminist and FUPDM leader Esperanza Balmaceda promoted a resolution for women's rights that encompassed maternity legislation, and also worked in support of the Cuban and Mexican delegations that ushered in new resolutions for "derechos humanos."²³ Because of their work, the Lima Declaration pronounced "respect for the rights of all nations and of all individuals regardless of race or religion."²⁴ Popular-front feminism's force was evident in this developing language of human rights that grew even stronger during the Second World War.

Towards the United Nations: Women's rights and human rights

During the war, popular-front Latin American feminists kept their demands for an inter-connected set of "human rights" that included "women's rights" at the forefront of the fight against Nazi-fascism. They paid close attention to the January,

1942 Pan-American conference in Rio de Janeiro that upheld the Declaration of the United Nations and committed Latin America to Allied war aims. This Declaration reaffirmed the connections between individual and international security enshrined in Franklin D. Roosevelt's Atlantic Charter and Four Freedoms—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These four freedoms, and especially the social rights implied in “freedom from want,” became central to growing articulations of “human rights” throughout the Americas and the world. Recognizing the pivotal role that women were playing to work for the Allied cause, inter-American feminists hoped that women's and human rights would be enshrined in new global order to emerge after the war.²⁵

Latin American popular-front feminists and diplomats were thus disappointed by the 1944 Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks conferences that charted post-war plans for the United Nations. Both conferences presaged a global order dominated by the United States, Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, overlooking decades of Pan-American multi-lateral institution-setting. The Dumbarton Oaks agreements also gave cursory mention to “human rights” and neglected women's rights entirely. Popular-front feminists pushed CIM representatives to bring these concerns to the February, 1945 Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace, at Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City.²⁶

At this Chapultepec conference where Latin American delegates aired grievances with the Dumbarton Oaks resolutions, Minerva Bernardino from the Dominican Republic, and Amalia de Castillo Ledón from Mexico, now CIM president and vice president, conveyed popular-front feminist demands. Bernardino and Castillo Ledón were not popular-front feminists. They were liberal feminists who emphasized legal equality, social and economic rights for working women, and cooperation with their nation states, which in Bernardino's case was the Trujillo dictatorship.²⁷ Castillo Ledón, appointed as the new Mexican CIM commissioner in the government of Manuel Ávila Camacho, represented what historian Gabriela Cano has called “state feminism.”²⁸

Nevertheless, both women shared some women's rights goals with popular front feminists, and the latter viewed them as allies on whom to apply pressure. One list of demands addressed to Castillo Ledón before Chapultepec urged her to promote resolutions for international women's political, civil, social, and economic rights; a “Charter for Women and Children” that specifically recognized the social function of maternity; measures against imperialism, racism, fascism; and a resolution for all Allied countries to include female delegates in their delegations that would chart the postwar peace.²⁹

Although Bernardino (Dominican Republic) and Castillo Ledón (Mexico) did not incorporate all of these goals, they did insist upon women's civil and political rights as well as social and economic rights, a Women's and Children's Charter that stipulated maternity legislation, and anti-racism.³⁰ Emphasizing women's work during the Second World War, they anticipated the “chaotic avalanche of unemployment” for women that would follow the war and urged proactive study of and measures to address this problem.³¹ They underscored that anti-racism was central to their women's rights agenda, emphasizing that specific attention must be paid to the social, economic, and political rights of “Latin American women,

black women, and women of different indigenous races.” Drawing on the language of many Latin American diplomats at that conference, they asserted that “rights of all nations” were inter-dependent with women’s and human rights.³² Their resolutions particularly resonated with those of Cuban and Mexican Delegations that defined human rights as “social and economic rights” for both individuals and nations, and for “equality in sovereignty of the States and of the individual liberty [of all peoples] without religious or racial prejudices.”³³ As one U.S. State Department bulletin noted, commitments to individual rights under international law “were more positively defined” at Chapultepec “than at previous inter-American meetings” that had over the “past half-century” been “leading toward the establishment of the ideal of social justice as a cardinal objective of international relations.” It explained how women’s rights resolutions represented the most meaningful manifestation of individual rights and social justice under international law.³⁴

Also important, at Chapultepec, Bernardino and Castillo de Ledón inserted a resolution insisting that Latin American countries must send women in their delegations to the conference that would form the United Nations several months later in San Francisco.³⁵ Latin American governments responded to this resolution, sending a number of women, including Castillo Ledón and Bernardino themselves. Their Chapultepec resolutions primed them for their activism in San Francisco in 1945.

Pan-American feminism shapes the United Nations

At the largest diplomatic conference in history in San Francisco that began in April, 1945, Latin American women represented a proportionately high number of the delegates and technical advisors. Of the only six female full delegates, three were from Latin America: Bertha Lutz from Brazil, Minerva Bernardino from the Dominican Republic; and Isabel Pinto de Vidal, a senator and long-time feminist from Uruguay. The other three were Virginia Gildersleeve, dean of Barnard College, from the U.S.; Wu Yi-Fang, president of Ginling College, a Christian women’s college, from China; and Cora Casselman, a member of Parliament from Canada. Amalia de Castillo Ledón was an advisor to her country’s delegation, as were Adela Formoso de Obregón Santacilia from Mexico, Isabel Sánchez de Urdaneta from Venezuela, and María Piedad Castillo de Leví from Ecuador. All of these Latin American women were Pan-American feminists.³⁶

Bertha Lutz emerged as a key leader of this Latin American feminist bloc. Having played a central role in Pan-American feminism since attending the 1922 Pan-American Women’s Congress in Baltimore and the 1933 Montevideo conference, Lutz had also promoted working women’s rights globally at the 1944 ILO conference in Philadelphia. Before the Chapultepec conference, she convened a large gathering of feminists in Rio de Janeiro that supported Bernardino and Castillo Ledón’s work there.³⁷

However, like Bernardino and Castillo Ledón, Lutz was not a popular-front feminist. Appointed to the conference by Getulio Vargas, Lutz identified proudly as an “Anglo-Brazilian,” due to her mother’s British ancestry and her own

connections with English-speaking feminists whom she had long deemed more capable than Spanish-speaking feminists. Her global feminism was inextricably bound up in her admiration for British and Anglo-American "liberalism" and in colonialist and white supremacist politics. Although a decided opponent of Nazi-fascism, she also decried the growth of Brazilian Communism in the mid 1940s, in part because of what she described as its "race and colour feeling."³⁸

However, Lutz's work in San Francisco was only possible because of the mobilizations of popular-front Pan-American feminists who understood women's rights as connected with rights for all regardless of race, class, or religion. Before the conference, Popular-Front feminists applied pressure on Latin American women going to the conference, insisting they include in the UN Charter an array of "human rights" and explicit anti-fascist commitments.³⁹ Lutz realized, as the conference went on, that the most influential voices for women's and human rights were not the U.S. or Great Britain delegations, but rather representatives from a host of U.S. non-governmental organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and representatives from smaller countries—those from Latin America, as well as Ethiopia, India, and elsewhere. She collaborated with these representatives around human rights resolutions for all regardless of race, class, and sex.⁴⁰

Lutz also quickly realized that Virginia Gildersleeve from the US and British advisers and MPs Ellen Wilkinson and Frances Hosbrugh objected to including women's rights in the Charter, believing women's rights were either too controversial or not important enough to include. She was more disappointed to learn that most "unofficial observers" from U.S. women's groups that gathered at the UN with "consultant" status as believed the same.⁴¹ The internecine debates around U.S. feminism that had divided groups for over two decades around the Equal Rights Amendment that many feared would eliminate protective labor legislation, hamstrung U.S. women's ability to form a united front. A representative from the NWP, one of the few U.S. groups that supported feminist resolutions in San Francisco, noted the "surprising situation" that the most organized and avid supporters of women's "civil, political, and economic equality" were "from South America" and Australian feminist and adviser Jessie Street. Meanwhile, "women of the United States are so divided among themselves that there is no effective demand at this moment."⁴²

This Latin American feminist vitality would not have been not surprising to anyone paying attention to Pan-American feminism for the past two decades. Drawing on decades of experience at Pan-American conferences, the Latin American women worked expeditiously to form a drafting committee with Street and several U.S. women. They drew up a number of proposed amendments to the Dumbarton Oaks agreement to insert women's and human rights into as many parts of the UN Charter as possible.⁴³

Their plodding work in committee meetings and lobbying of delegates outside them also drew on skills they had honed in Pan-American conferences, and they enabled signal victories that Elise Luhr Dietrichson and Fatima Sator provide more detailed descriptions of in their chapter in this volume. On May 5, 1945,

Lutz, Bernardino, and Castillo Ledón were the first to propose that “Chapter 1, Purposes,” of the UN Charter should include the following sentence: “To ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, without discrimination against race, sex, condition, or creed.” Their proposal influenced the human rights wording incorporated into the Charter in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 9.⁴⁴ Later, based on the amendment Isabel Pinto Vidal drafted, and a long, uphill battle, they were responsible for the wording in Article 8 of the Charter, that the UN “shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in the principal and subsidiary organs.”⁴⁵

Finally, with the help of Indian delegate Arcot Ramaswami Mudaliar who chaired the commission tasked with organizing the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Lutz proposed what became the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women. Known as the “Brazilian Declaration,” this resolution declared ECOSOC’s promotion of “human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of sex,” necessitated a commission devoted to women’s rights. This Commission would “study and prepare reports on the political, civil, and economic status and opportunity of women with special reference to discrimination and limitations placed upon them on account of their sex.”⁴⁶ In spite of U.S. opposition, a large majority, including many Latin American diplomats, supported it. The Mexican delegate commended Lutz on “a grand slam.”⁴⁷

A number of historical factors facilitated these achievements. Antifascist promotion of women’s rights connected with a broader human rights agenda, and for many, women’s contributions to the war effort justified their full citizenship. But another key factor was the alliance the “smaller and medium powers,” including the Latin American bloc, forged around women’s and human rights proposals, especially when delegations from “the Great Powers,” such as the United States and Great Britain, worked against them. The U.S. delegation actively opposed human rights because it would be held accountable for Jim Crow and other human rights violations against African Americans in the South.⁴⁸ When the Great Powers held UN veto power, smaller and medium powers saw ECOSOC and other UN subsidiary organs that promoted human rights as one way to expand their power within the UN. Because of Latin American and other nations’ lobbying, ECOSOC grew from a tangential to a “principal” organ of the UN.

By the end of the conference, UNCIO attendees and the press recognized how instrumental Latin American feminists were to the Charter’s human rights and women’s rights resolutions. In her report afterward to Brazil’s foreign minister, Lutz urged him to ensure the UN Commission on the Status of Women was in fact created, and that its leadership be “in Latin American hands since our republics... are currently in the vanguard of feminist demands.”⁴⁹

In spite of Lutz’s hopes, when the UN formally created the Commission on the Status of Women in June 1946, U.S. women led it. Some of these U.S. women had in fact opposed its creation as a separate body from the newly-created Commission on Human Rights. US women’s continuing internal debates shaped the perceived viability of the UN and its Commission on the Status of Women in the

aftermath of their creation, although Latin American feminists like Bernardino would also play critical roles in it.⁵⁰

As Rebecca Adami has demonstrated, Latin American feminists and other women from the Global South continued to make their mark on the UN, and most notably on the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt, chairing the committee, opposed explicit inclusion of women's rights, asserting that women were tacitly included "human rights" and "rights of man." Hansa Mehta (India), the other female delegate on the drafting committee, worked closely with Bernardino, Castillo Ledón, and Jessie Street, to revise the Declaration's statements of equality for "all men" to "all human beings" and to insert women's rights.⁵¹ As a representative at the Lake Success meeting that finalized the Declaration, Amalia Castillo Ledón drew on these collaborations to advance a firmer assertion that men and women had "equal rights" under marriage in Article 16. She also expanded the definition of "family" in that Article so it was not defined by marriage only. The original statement, "The family deriving from marriage is the natural and fundamental group unit of society" (that went on to aver rights for men and women), excluded illegitimate children. The committee accepted Castillo Ledón's suggested alternative—"the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and shall be entitled to protection." Her work reflected long-standing Latin American feminist efforts for the rights of children born out of wedlock and those of working women seeking maternity support.⁵² Castillo Ledón had just come from the 1948 Ninth Pan-American Conference in Bogota, Colombia, where seven Latin American countries ratified CIM's Inter-American Convention to Grant Political Rights to Women, and nine its Inter-American Convention to Grant Civil Rights to Women.

All of these international treaties were critical to women's rights throughout the region. In the 1940s, amidst a wave of democratization, Latin American countries passed women's suffrage: in Guatemala and Panama in 1945; Argentina and Venezuela in 1947; in Chile and Costa Rica in 1949; Haiti in 1950; Bolivia in 1952; Mexico in 1953; Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru in 1955; Colombia in 1957; and Paraguay in 1961.⁵³ As historian Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz explains, democratization was not primarily responsible for women's suffrage legislation which transformed "Latin American women's political and citizenship-based identities." Rather, "the international mobilization and organization of women and the international conventions on political rights of women," and resulting "growing international pressure," were critical for their approval.⁵⁴

Pan-American feminist legacies in the UN and human rights

Soon after these conferences, the Cold War and militarization of the hemisphere diminished the viability of interlinked fights for women's and human rights. Sharp distinctions emerged between "civil and political rights" associated with capitalist democracy versus "social and economic rights," associated with communism. A number of CIM representatives in the 1950s and 60s who promoted women's civil and political rights supported dictatorships in the hemisphere. Government repression against leftists and outlawing of communist parties throughout the

Americas tremendously limited formerly broad and socialist-inspired feminist movements.

The Cold War also contributed to a broader historical amnesia around Pan-American feminism. Such amnesia was facilitated by accounts by U.S. figures like Virginia Gildersleeve who not only downplayed but erased critical work of Latin American feminists at the UN San Francisco conference in her memoir *Many a Good Crusade*. Her memoir pokes fun at Lutz and other Latin American feminists there, and even asserts fallaciously that Lutz's resolution for the Commission on the Status of Women was rejected. This misrepresentation infuriated Lutz who wrote in the margins of her copy of Gildersleeve's pages "much wrong and biased information" and "liar!"⁵⁵ Later in her life, Lutz believed that her work instilling women's and human rights into the UN Charter was one of the greatest accomplishments of her life, and bemoaned that she received "no credit for it."⁵⁶

Decades later, Lutz did receive credit at the 1975 UN International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City that formally acknowledged her work in the founding charter. More broadly, the critical groundwork that she and other Pan-American feminists laid from the 1920s through the 40s would be taken up again by social movement mobilizations in the 1970s and 80s when Latin American feminists emerged en masse to oppose violence of dictatorships and U.S. imperialism, and to demand social justice and women's rights. Latin American groups were again critical to shaping the array of global feminisms that emerged from the 1975 UN Conference in Mexico City that launched the UN Decade of Women.⁵⁷ In regional gatherings called *Encuentros feministas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, Latin American feminists continued developing the idea of "women's rights as human rights" years before the concept became a cause célèbre at the 1995 UN Beijing conference for women. The first encuentro in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1981 instituted an "International Day against Violence against Women" in honor of the Maribal sisters assassinated by the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.⁵⁸ In 1988, CIM, which revived around this time after having suffered budget cuts, drafted the first international convention that defined gender-based violence as a violation of human rights in the Convention of Belém do Para. When the Organization of American States adopted it in 1994, it became the first legally binding international treaty on violence against women. CIM acknowledged this accomplishment as a direct legacy of its work dating back to the 1920s and 30s Equal Rights Treaty and of its human rights work with the 1945 UN Charter. In the years since, feminists' use of this treaty has intersected with grassroots mobilizations and drawn on the understandings of personal, private violence, and state violence as interconnected phenomenon.⁵⁹

Feminists who draw on these inter-American and UN treaties recognize that they are not perfect instruments, nor do they represent the sum total of their demands. International agreements can become empty promises in pursuit of legitimacy, especially when countries refuse to hold themselves accountable to international human rights law. Yet, throughout Latin America, UN, Inter-American, and ILO treaties have shaped constitutions, legislative reform, policy development, and judicial decisions in ways that meaningfully affect people's lives.⁶⁰ Activists who defend a broad array of human rights deem them important levers

in political climates that are otherwise unresponsive or hostile to their goals. The history of Pan-American feminism and its influence on the United Nations demonstrates the long history of these movements, and of the global power of Latin American feminism.

Notes

- 1 Bertha Lutz to "Amigas," April 30, 1945, Q0.ADM, EVE.CNF, TXT.27, VOL 6, Fundo Federação Brasileira pelo Progresso Femenino, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (AFBPF).
- 2 Katherine M. Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2019), 18–21; Juan Pablo Scarfi, *The Hidden History of International Law in the Americas: Empire and Legal Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Greg Grandin, "The Liberal Traditions in the Americas: Rights, Sovereignty, and the Origins of Liberal Multilateralism," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (February 2012): 68–91.
- 3 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 35–36.
- 4 Ibid. 29–35.
- 5 Mona Siegel, *Peace on Our Terms: The Global Battle for Women's Rights after the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- 6 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 42–52.
- 7 Clara González, "La mujer latin-americana ante la conquista de sus derechos políticos," *La Ley* 2, nos. 16–18 (1926), 892–93.
- 8 Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, *50 años de una vida* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1971), 80–81; Jane Norman Smith, "For the Equal Rights Treaty," *Equal Rights*, February 25, 1928, 21.
- 9 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 53–58; Alice Paul to Doris Stevens and Jane Norman Smith, January 27, 1928, box 70, folder 15, Doris Stevens Papers (DSP).
- 10 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 61. Paul recognized that using an international treaty for women's rights would be "revolutionary" in the U.S. where states' rights prevailed, but she found legal precedent in the 1920 Supreme Court case, *Missouri v. Holland* that protected migratory birds in the United States and Canada that concluded "a treaty applied against the interests of an individual state did not constitute a violation of the Tenth Amendment."
- 11 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 64–66.
- 12 Ibid, 70.
- 13 Beatrice McKenzie, "The Power of International Positioning: The National Woman's Party, International Law, and Diplomacy, 1928–34," *Gender and History* 23, no. 1 (April 2011): 130–46.
- 14 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 118.
- 15 Ibid., 99; Untitled notes from Lutz, "Tese a nacionalidade de mulher casada," Q0.ADM, CPA.NMC.3, AFBPF. Lutz fiercely opposed Doris Stevens's leadership of CIM in spite of her support for international women's rights treaties. See Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, Chapter 3.
- 16 Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), Karin Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Culture and the State in Chile, 1920–1950* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000).
- 17 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 128.
- 18 "Letters from Geneva," and "Debate at League of Nations," *Equal Rights*, October 15, 1935, 1–3; "Move to Save Feminism from Dictatorships Pushed," *Washington Post*, September 26, 1935, 10.
- 19 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 142, 147.
- 20 Ibid., 130–34, 184.

- 21 Paulina Luisi, Comité Femenina Paz y Libertad, Congreso Mundial de Mujeres, October 1939, caja 252, carpeta 5, Archivo Paulina Luisi, Archivo General de la Nación, Montevideo, Uruguay (PL-AGN).
- 22 Takkara Keosha Brunson, "Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Republican-Era Cuba, 1902–1958," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2011), 209–10; 221–23; Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 166–67.
- 23 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 162–66.
- 24 *Diario de sesiones [de la] octava Conferencia Internacional Americana*, Lima, diciembre de 1938 (Lima: Imp. Torres Aguirre, 1939), 562; "A Program for All," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, January 11, 1939.
- 25 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 178–90.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 190–92.
- 27 Bernardino later wrote that achieving women's political rights under dictatorships in fact helped preserve those rights after such regimes fell (though she did not comment on human rights violations committed by the dictatorship itself). Minerva Bernardino, *Lucha, agonía y esperanza: trayectoria triunfal de mi vida* (Santo Domingo: República Dominicana, Editoria Corripio, 1993), xxviii. Ellen DuBois and Lauren Derby, "The Strange Case of Minerva Bernardino: Pan American and United Nations Women's Rights Activist," *Women's Studies International Forum* 32 (2003): 43–50.
- 28 Gabriela Cano, "El 'feminismo de estado' e Amalia de Castillo Ledón durante los gobiernos de Emilio Portes Gil y Lázaro Cárdenas," *Relaciones Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* 149 (Winter 2017): 39–69.
- 29 Untitled list of demands, 1945, caja 7, exp. 130, Archivo Particular Amalia González Caballero de Castillo Ledón, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico (AGC-SRE).
- 30 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 193–95.
- 31 *Diario de la Conferencia Interamericana sobre Problemas de la Guerra y de la Paz* (Mexico, 1945), 92.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 84.
- 33 *Diario de la Conferencia Interamericana*, 43, 46.
- 34 Marion Parks, "That Women May Share," *Bulletin of the Department of State* Vol XIII, no. 317, July 22, 1945, p. 112.
- 35 *Diario de la Conferencia Interamericana*, 232.
- 36 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 200.
- 37 Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), Chapter 2; Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 202.
- 38 Lutz, "Reactions to Events in Brazil," March 1–15, 1945, QO.ADM, p. 1, AFBPF. For more on Lutz's racism, see Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 201, 205–206, 211.
- 39 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 211.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 207–211, 213–220.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 202–206.
- 42 Edith Goode to Laura E.W. Kendall, May 23, 1945, series 7, reel 174, National Woman's Party Records microfilm.
- 43 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 207.
- 44 *Ibid.* 209.
- 45 *Ibid.* 212–14.
- 46 *Ibid.* 216–220.
- 47 Quote from *Ibid.*, 220.
- 48 Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8 and Chapter 1.
- 49 Quoted in Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 221.
- 50 *Ibid.*; see Rebecca Adami's essay in this collection.

- 51 Rebecca Adami, *Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
- 52 Speech by Amalia Castillo Ledón, proceedings of 1948 Lake Success meeting, caja 9, esp. 150, Archivo Particular Amalia González Caballero de Castillo Ledón, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico.
- 53 Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991) 96.
- 54 Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz, *La Guerra Fría y la transformación de las identidades políticas y ciudadanas de las mujeres en Guatemala, Costa Rica y Chile (1945-1973)* (San José: Universidad de Costa Rica, 2018), 3–4.
- 55 Lutz's notes on pages of Gildersleeve's book, Q0.PIT.96/100, AFBPF; Virginia Gildersleeve, *Many a Good Crusade* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).
- 56 Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, 233.
- 57 Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 58 Nancy Saporta Sternbach, Marysa Navarro, Patricia Chuchryk, and Sonia E. Alvarez, "Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogotá to San Bernardo," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 393–434; Elizabeth S. Manley, "Revitalizing Feminism in the Dominican Republic," *NACLA Report*, November 17, 2018.
- 59 Mariana Prandini Assis, "Violence against Women as a Translocal Category in the Jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights," *Rev. Direito e Práx., Rio de Janeiro* 8, no. 2 (2017): 1507–1544.
- 60 Elisabeth Freidman, "Regionalizing Women's Human Rights in Latin America," *Politics & Gender* 5 (2009), 349–375.

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