

Conceiving Latin American Feminist Counterpublics

On December 6, 1873, the founder of *O Sexo Feminino* and girls' educator, Dona Francisca Senhorinha da Motta Diniz, wrote an editorial in her three-month-old, path-breaking Brazilian women's periodical. In this editorial, also entitled "O sexo feminino," she informed men that women, given the opportunity, could be their intellectual equals: "We have intelligence equal to yours, and if your pride has triumphed it is because our intelligence has been left unused." She exhorted women to take up the arms her new endeavor provided: "From this day we wish to improve our minds; and for better or worse we will transmit our ideas in the press, and to this end we have *O Sexo Feminino*; a journal absolutely dedicated to our sex and written only by us. *Avante, minhas patricias!* [Onward, my countrywomen!] The pen will be our weapon."¹ Speaking to both the men whose minds she sought to change, and the women she hoped to inspire, Dona Diniz charged into the public sphere. But she did so fully aware that she would need her own vehicle to propel her and her countrywomen's ideas forward.

As the work of Diniz and many other members of the keystone species of editors and publishers over the next century demonstrated, by the time the internet spread across Latin America in the 1990s, feminists had over a hundred years of experience constructing alternative media to achieve their own goals. In historical counterpublics, women learned how to shape media to their own ends, absorb and contest international ideas, and strategize how to achieve impact and inclusion

Anno I. Cidade da Campanha, 6 de Dezembro de 1873. Num. 14.

O SEXO FEMININO

SEMANARIO DEDICADO AOS INTERESSES DA MULHER.

Assignaturas.

Por anno 5000
 Por semestre 2500
 Publica-se 1 vez por semana.

« E' pelo intermedio da mulher que a natureza escreve no coração do homem »
 (AIME' MARTIN.)

Observação.

Toda a correspondencia será dirigida á D. Francisca Senhorrinha da Motta Diniz.

PRINCIPAL REDACTORA—D. FRANCISCA S. DA M. DINIZ.—COLLABORADORAS, DIVERSAS.

O Sexo Feminino.

Quando tomámos a ardua tarefa de dirigir este jornal, dedicade tão somente aos interesses do nosso deprimido sexo, não pensavamos nas difficuldades que havíamos de encontrar no cumprimento de nossa missão e conhecendo, que nos faltavão muitos dados para bem desempenharmos esta tão importante missão, rogámos ás nossas amáveis patricias nos quizessem coadjuvar com suas lucubrações, e com especialidade convidámo-las para que nos dirigissem seus ensaios litterarios, e que estes tivessem por fim sustentar nossa grandiosa idéa. Por este pedido ficarão nossas patricias sabendo que não inseriríamos em nosso jornal artigos alheios ao assumpto principal—a educação de nosso sexo e sua elevação na sociedade.

Teremos, pois, todo o cuidado em não só não nos afastar do plano, como em empregar todos os esforços que couber em nossas forças para encher-o com artigos de interesse geral.

Em tal intento não deixaremos de apresentar extractos de algumas obras que se dirijão ao mesmo fim, isto é, á nossa illustração, e á nossa capacidade intellectual para receber as luzes que se nos quizerem dar. Transcreveremos algumas

partes da historia antiga e moderna em que encontrarmos exemplos dignos de ser imitados, como por exemplo, as Cornélias, as Porcias e muitas outras que praticarão actos de valor e acções virtuosas, com especialidade as nossas amáveis patricias.

Se alguém nos sensurar de plagiarías, teremos valor para dizer-lhe em face :

E' a vós que é devida a nossa insufficiencia; intelligencia temos igual á vossa, e se o vosso orgulho tem triumphado é por causa do nosso descuido. Ergueremos de hoje em diante a cabeça; e torto ou direito, bem ou mal, transmitiremos nossas idéas pela imprensa, e para esse fim temos o *Sexo Feminino*, jornal absolutamente dedicado ao nosso sexo e escripto só por nós.

Avante, pois, minhas patricias! a péna seja nossa arma.

Pedimos ás nossas collaboradoras que seus artigos sejam assignados,

Vantagens da educação moral.

A educação moral corôa e domina toda a educação do homem; por ser ella quem fórma o caracter, quem nós ensina a dirigir-nos; quem faz fructificar a edu-

FIGURE 2. Front page of *O Sexo Feminino* I, no. 14 (December 6, 1873). Reprinted from <http://istioecampanha.blogspot.com>.

in wider publics. Wielding pens, typewriters, printing presses, and, eventually, copiers and fax machines, these women laid down the foundations upon which late twentieth-century feminists would build their internet-enhanced communities.

Writing in their own and other periodicals, Latin American feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries steadily amassed their written arsenal, as increasingly well-educated professionals sought to contribute their passion and perspectives to social reform. But because of their political disenfranchisement—women's suffrage would

not begin until 1932, in Uruguay, and took until 1961, in Paraguay, to extend across the region—and subordinate legal and social status, members of this keystone species helped to construct counterpublics centered in the distribution of their own writing and reinforced by face-to-face meetings. From these communities, they participated in general movements to improve social welfare, and their own movements to improve women's status.² Given the limitations of a social system that left the vast majority of women and men at the bottom of a steep economic and racial hierarchy, the early counterpublics were largely inhabited by educated, lighter-skinned, middle-class and wealthy women. But their approach of using their own media to find each other, develop their ideas, and wrestle with the world around them would continue throughout the twentieth century.

Two international developments expanded these efforts in the 1970s. The UN Decade for Women (1975–85) and its three international conferences opened global opportunities for Latin American activists to engage with new ideas about how to confront their subordination. Simultaneously, they found their own countries' contexts converging. Military and military-backed governments unleashed a wave of fierce authoritarian repression to silence reformers and revolutionaries alike. Many governments also imposed an economic model rooted in fiscal austerity and free markets that displaced and impoverished millions of workers. In response, widespread movements mobilized to demand the protection of human rights and a transition to democracy.

To respond to these international opportunities and regional challenges, feminists built a powerful regional counterpublic. Its most tangible instance, the likes of which does not exist anywhere else, was the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros, or encounter-based mass meetings. Begun in 1981 and continuing every two or three years afterward, the Encuentros have been a space of learning and solidarity, yet are always riven by profound disagreements over the methods and direction of women's activism. But again and again, activists from across the region have come together to have those debates, which have expanded with the explosion of feminist principles and perspectives spanning racial, ethnic, class, ideological, and geographical boundaries. Throughout, they have relied on their own media to circulate ideas before, during, and long after the participants have turned the outcomes of their workshops, panels, and protests into extensive lists of conclusions and demands. The propagation of the ideas and fierce discussions from the regional Encuentros has, in turn, nurtured and

challenged national and local communities. Latin American feminist counterpublics have grown through regional cross-pollination.

Feminist counterpublics in Latin America have relied on two forms of communication: the distribution of alternative media and face-to-face national and transnational opportunities to connect and strategize for change. These endeavors inspire each other. This chapter does not present an exhaustive exploration of either feminist media or regional organizing, focusing instead on illustrative examples and pivotal intersections. It begins with the founding of the first women's publications and transnational networks, and then profiles several alternative media projects created during the regional upsurge of feminist energies starting in the late 1970s. Just as their feminist descendants would incorporate and transform internet-based technologies based on their goals and values, these foremothers' previous alternative media strategies reflected their own objectives and ideas. As community media scholar Caroline Mitchell argues with respect to women's radio production, "feminist values tend to be central to both the production process and the content of what is produced."³ Although focused on different elements of counterpublic construction from different ideological perspectives, all of these projects encouraged regional solidarity. Such solidarity also spurred and supported the exceptional counterpublic space of the Encuentros.

The final section profiles three relevant international endeavors to connect women through alternative media, two of which directly influenced Latin American feminist counterpublics. The third was the first attempt to use a computer-based network to promote international women's rights: "Hotline International," meant to broaden participation in the United Nation's 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City. This venture was not specifically directed by or at Latin Americans, and in fact effectively ignored the "heated confrontations"⁴ over class, sexuality, development, and politics among the diverse conference participants. Nevertheless, it offers a glimpse into the early problems and potential of computer-mediated communications for women's rights work prior to their expansion in the 1990s.

CONSTRUCTING COUNTERPUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

In the nineteenth century (and even before), educated women of means created journals, such as Brazil's *O Sexo Feminino*, *La Mujer* (Chile), and *El Aguila Mexicana* (Mexico), that were foundational for early feminist counterpublics because they offered a platform through which women

could discuss, debate, and publicize ideas largely absent in the male-dominated media. Due to their founders' lack of resources, the publications were often short-lived. But as their descendants would do decades later, these publishers, editors, and writers refused to allow scarcity to dictate outcome as they moved from one masthead to another in search of a venue.⁵ The historical record attests to their persistence: over two hundred women's magazines were published in Latin America before 1979.⁶ Across the region, the first generation of a feminist keystone species built the communications infrastructure for their counterpublics.

Although internationally connected, initial attempts at counterpublic communications interpreted ideas from the Global North through the reality of local and national environments. Activists eagerly read international feminist writings as they contemplated their own pathways toward improving women's status and rights in Latin America, and among them a "transnational, often multilingual network of print culture blossomed."⁷ Thus, the participants in this "transnational" conversation spoke in regional accents, with publications demonstrating collaborative cross-fertilization of ideas across Latin American countries. As in later periods, editors and writers often carried these ideas across borders along with their suitcases. Women such as the nineteenth-century Argentine writer Juana Manuela Gorriti, who spent much of her adult life in Peru, practiced journalism in more than one country; Gorriti herself founded both an Argentine and a Peruvian newspaper. Immersed in the realities around them, their feminist attention to circumstance was evident in the subjects they addressed—and how they addressed them.

As with feminist production in the United States and Europe, Latin American women's "literary-journalistic" activity blurred the "cherished boundaries" between a masculinized public and feminized private sphere: women wrote about domestic issues as well as their status in social, economic, and political life.⁸ They did so following their own set of priorities, driven by what historian Francesca Miller has termed their "different mission" from that of men.⁹ They focused on reforming legal and social conditions that impinged upon their ability, if not duty, to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. Education, employment conditions, and social status, particularly women's rights within marriage and divorce, topped their agendas,¹⁰ as "they expanded the definition of motherhood to include devotion to the pen."¹¹ However, crusaders like Diniz did not only focus on women's conditions; she herself used her pulpit to condemn Brazilian slavery. As times changed, writers and publishers followed suit. The over fifty feminist periodicals of the 1920s and

1930s—along with feminist contributions to other publications—reveal writers profoundly influenced by the politics of the day, including the growing anarchist, socialist, and conservative movements.¹² Counterpublic communications reflected shifting contexts.

Even when focused on improvement from within traditional gender roles, women writers' violation of those "cherished boundaries" between their private lives and the male-dominated sphere of public expression struck a nerve. Their public activity elicited negative, often satirical, reactions from male journalists. One Argentine publisher even went so far as to distribute a fake women's magazine for the sole purpose of slandering *La Aljaba*, a feminist publication from 1830.¹³ Such reactions illuminated the importance of creating and maintaining counterpublics. Those assumed, and thus often forced, to be on the periphery of public life needed alternative ways of acquiring, processing, and presenting information. The women's periodicals of Brazil and elsewhere offered "mutual support and intellectual interchange"¹⁴ fundamental to counterpublic construction, even as they sought wider audiences for their ideas.

Face-to-face exchange nurtured and reflected the production of counterpublic communications. Some of this took place at *tertulias* or salons, where writers such as Gorriti would host discussions of literature, women's emancipation, and other issues of social reform. Through personal visits, others acted "as 'godmothers' to one another's organizations."¹⁵ They also sought to draw attention to feminist issues in regional scientific congresses, an effort culminating in the first regional feminist meeting: the International Feminist Congress, held in Buenos Aires in 1910. As with the publication of feminist periodicals, this presaged the explosion of regional and global opportunities feminists created in the late twentieth century.

Organizing in Latin America and reaching across the north/south divide, this generation of activists sought to bring the perspectives nurtured in their counterpublics into wider spheres of influence. For example, working together, organizations such as the Alianza Femenina Cubana (Cuban Feminine Alliance), the Consejo Feminista Mexicano (Mexican Feminist Council), and the National Woman's Party of the United States successfully pressured nascent Pan-American organizations to consider an Equal Rights Treaty in 1928 and to establish the Inter-American Commission of Women, a specialized agency of the Organization of American States responsible "for hemispheric policy on women's rights and gender-related issues."¹⁶ This unique intergovernmental agency gave feminists an insider position from which to influence

regional governance. And advocates also were active at the international organizations of the League of Nations and United Nations.¹⁷ Both at the national and international levels, early Latin American feminist counterpublics supported the public-facing efforts of their members.

FEMINIST COUNTERPUBLIC COMMUNICATION AFTER THE 1970S

With the resurgence of feminist activism in the late 1970s, a new generation of the keystone species learned to support a diversifying set of counterpublics by producing and distributing their own publications. Between 1980 and 1990, this generation founded another two hundred women's magazines, many of which were outspokenly feminist, located in nearly every Latin American country.¹⁸ Instead of the brief lifespans of earlier publications, these had staying power, finding an eager audience in women across the region who were coming to feminist consciousness in local and national counterpublics. Moreover, new women's organizations, including some that produced regular publications, were committed to sharing their information in order to nurture feminist community and/or reach larger publics.¹⁹ Magazines including the influential *fem*, widely distributed *mujer/fempres*, and news service CIMAC circulated feminist perspectives on issues ranging from violence against women, to sexuality, to economic development. Both regional realities and international opportunities heavily influenced the construction of this communications infrastructure for local, national, and regional counterpublics.

Although Latin American feminists had begun to organize regionally by the middle of the twentieth century, their regional orientation took off with the traumatic dislocations of the 1970s. Waves of authoritarian repression, neoliberal economic models that increased inequality, and ongoing struggles against patriarchal and homophobic social mores showed many that they had much in common—as difficult as building alliances across class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and geography would prove to be. As *fem*'s foundational documents argued, “the struggle of women cannot be conceived as an issue delinked from the struggle of the oppressed for a better world.”²⁰ Latin American feminists understood their efforts as being joined to other work for social and political transformation.

But when progressive women sought to take part in the region-wide struggles against inequality, whether through socialist parties, guerilla organizations, or leftist movements, many became deeply frustrated with

the subordination of women's to workers' liberation in both theory and practice. Women frequently found their ideas and actions slighted by left male leadership.²¹ One outlet for their frustration was paradoxically created by the impact of political displacement. Those fleeing the fierce authoritarianism of military- and military-backed governments in the 1970s and 1980s traveled to Mexico or Europe, where they were exposed to other feminist ideas. There, some joined alternative media outlets, where they sought to draw attention to their home countries.²² As with earlier generations, shared political experiences encouraged regional feminisms, which were reflected in regional and international periodicals.

At the same time, the UN Decade for Women (1975–85), with its three global conferences, increased the transnational connections of Latin American counterpublics beyond anything they had experienced in the first half of the century. The location of the United Nations' 1975 International Women's Year conference in Mexico City inspired discussion of feminism across the region, and especially in Mexico.²³ Moving on to the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women (1980), and culminating (for that time) at the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women (1985), these conferences provided some political "shade" for Latin American feminist organizing. Even the authoritarian governments that restricted political activity in general sought international recognition through their lip service to women's rights issues (if not their fulfillment). When their governments came together to negotiate positions on women's rights and status at the official conferences, feminists sought to articulate their own positions and fought for space at the table. In non-governmental forums linked to official processes, they participated in strategy sessions and debates with women from around the world. Participants brought home ideas and tactics to their national and local counterpublics, but those who could not attend still could engage by reading accounts and analysis in feminist media outlets.²⁴

Inspired by a feminism that was beginning to take into account not only gender subordination but also the cross-cutting impact of other social hierarchies, the editors and writers of this period confronted the dominant portrayal of women in the Latin American mass media. They objected to profiles and pictures of women as middle class or wealthy, light-skinned, and conforming to the commodified gender norms of eager, happy consumers. Adriana Santa Cruz and Viviana Erazo, founders of *mujer/fempres*, critiqued what they named the "Transnational Feminine Model," circulating in mainstream media, which "does not

have a single physical or cultural characteristic that originates in one of the many cultures of the continent.” Instead of reflecting the diverse racial, ethnic, and class positions of the region’s women, this model presented “an essentially consumer woman who belongs to a socio-economic level to which, in this continent, less than 10% of women reach. The young, slender, Western and sexually ‘irresistible’ image is put forward as the possible dream of all women and a goal to fight for.”²⁵ These feminist editors argued that such images had little to do with regional reality. Just as their forerunners had before, their goal was to counter such images with their own pictures.

Latin American feminists increased the numbers and stability of their publications by taking advantage of then-new technologies, “especially the ubiquitous Xerox machine.”²⁶ The technology itself was not responsible for the expansion of feminism’s reach; feminists adapted it to their local settings. In the widely available copying machines they found a means through which they could sidestep mass media outlets dominated by men and often subject to political control.²⁷ Some publications also used a graphic format to reach women with low literacy, and many media activists turned to community radio to transmit their research and opinions where journals did not circulate or could not be read.²⁸ As with the internet, women incorporated these technologies and adjusted them to serve feminist goals: sharing perspectives on Latin American women’s lives with regional audiences.

As the four examples below illustrate, alternative media outlets focused on distinct counterpublics and/or distinct elements of counterpublics. The three publications—*La Correa Feminista*, *fem*, and *mujer/fempress*—all enhanced the identity development and community building dimensions of counterpublics. But *La Correa Feminista* was intended to support the regional counterpublic of radical feminists, and less concerned with strategizing for public impact. *Fem* had an academic, as well as activist, feminist audience in mind, and encouraged action in wider publics. *Mujer/fempress* also covered all three counterpublic functions, while seeking to place its articles in the mass media. Finally, CIMAC, a women’s news service still active today, concentrates on the circulation of feminist production in wider publics. Whether reaching local, national, or regional audiences, all of these efforts distributed information and analysis that framed women’s issues within broader regional contexts.

La Correa Feminista, active in the 1990s, focused on the nearly free distribution of radical, anarchist, or socialist feminist writings in order to stimulate the identity and community aspects of a militant regional

counterpublic. The editors published theoretical reflections, essay collections, photojournalism, and reports on feminist meetings; their influential collection *Feminismos cómplices: Gestos para una cultura tendenciosamente diferente* (Feminist Accomplices: Gestures for a Tendentiously Different Culture; 1993) became a loadstar for grassroots-oriented, politically independent feminists across the region. The publishers increased their impact by effectively bartering the majority of each press run for other printed material from feminist and women's organizations, or giving copies to those with no means to pay or material to offer.²⁹ Through their largely volunteer efforts, they brought together a regional counterpublic of producers and readers known as autonomous feminists.

The influential publication *fem* sought to inform activist struggle with academic research, deepening Mexican feminism while bringing it into a transnational dialogue. Taking on one subject at a time, the initial editorial board of scholars, journalists, and community organizers contributed their distinct perspectives to issues such as abortion, feminism, women and science, domestic workers, maternity, young women, and peasant women.³⁰ They published a range of feminist views, from liberal to radical, from abroad as well as inside the region. The January 1985 issue on women and violence illustrates their approach. It included the articles on state torture, rape in the Soviet Union and the Mexican court system, feminist nonviolence, and translations of eco-feminist Susan Griffin, lesbian feminist poet Adrienne Rich, and radical feminist theologian Mary Daly, all from the United States.³¹ As with earlier counterparts, this feminist publication drew ideas, and increasingly translated key feminist texts, from the United States and Europe. And here again, it selectively adapted them to its readers' contexts.³² *Fem's* editors and writers were more than a mirror for other women's ideas; they broadcast their own feminist fusion.

Reaching out to Mexican women and around the region, these members of the keystone species enabled the three central elements of a counterpublic. They contributed to identity formation. Letters to the editor in the late 1980s from women far from the dynamic feminist activities of the major cities, particularly Mexico City, attested to how energizing it was to read coverage of women's successes and their participation in contemporary politics.³³ In addition, *fem* fostered what would become a central characteristic of Latin American feminist counterpublics: thoughtful and passionate debate incorporating distinct perspectives. For example, writers offered multiple interpretations of sexuality politics rather than hewing to a party line.³⁴ This exploration connected directly to the third task of counterpublics: strategizing about

ways to make an impact on broader publics. In this case, writers offered “pragmatic assessment of what concessions the feminist movement might expect to wring from the male-dominated state.” In their pages was to be found not only the initial discussions about sexual violence legislation, such as the criminalization of rape and incest, but also reform proposals themselves.³⁵ *Fem*’s articles offered insights for feminist counterpublic construction and impact.

Mujer/fempres, the most widely circulated feminist magazine in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, focused on generating original reporting from across the region to support feminist counterpublics, and was more dedicated to reaching a wider audience than either of the other two publications. The founders, Adriana Santa Cruz and Viviana Erazo, two Chilean exiles from the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–88), brought their regional solidarity orientation from the organization where they got their start, the Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales (Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies; ILET). According to Erazo: “We thought it was fundamental to create a magazine that would transcend the local, that would be able to be a Latin American magazine, . . . that would have another discourse, the discourse of women, what they were really living, feeling and what they were struggling for in that moment.”³⁶ Santa Cruz made clear that Latin American women needed to build more solidarity to achieve their goals: “Whether working out of universities, churches, institutions, international organisations or governments, women in research, in activism, in politics, and in the media, badly needed to come closer in order to be effective.”³⁷ The editors modeled this collaborative approach with a team of contributors who spanned fourteen countries and a territory—Puerto Rico, where many felt as much, if not more, affinity with the Latin American and Caribbean region as with the United States. Each contributor was expected to generate one substantial piece of reporting on her location, in addition to shorter notes, each month. Face-to-face meetings at the regional Encuentros reinforced their collaboration. Although *mujer/fempres* started with a modest run of two hundred Xeroxed copies, it soon became a full-fledged regional magazine, distributing five thousand printed copies by the mid-1990s, including an annual edition in Portuguese to reach Brazilian audiences.³⁸ In the pre-internet era, this magazine was one of the few ways activists across the region, as well as their extraregional supporters,³⁹ could stay up to date on developments outside of their countries.

Mujer/fempres made such an impression because it was central to the identity- and community-building aspects of counterpublics across

mujer/fempres

Nº76

DICIEMBRE 87

unidad de comunicación alternativa de la mujer

fempres

MEXICO

La búsqueda de una política feminista

MEXICO

Hay mucho dentro y detrás de cada una de las dos mil mujeres

MEXICO

Taxco 87: problemas de la autogestión

BRASIL

Reconocimiento del trabajo invisible

ECUADOR

Confiar en nosotras

PARAGUAY

La escritura del cuerpo

URUGUAY

Un triste triunfo machista

ARGENTINA

Develar la pesadilla

recortes

DOBLE JORNADA, México

Del amor a la necesidad

EL INDEPENDIENTE, España

El banquete misógino de la política

EL NACIONAL, Venezuela

Es muy difícil negar la paternidad

LA EPOCA, Chile

Mujer en el tercer milenio

MUJERES, Argentina

La mujer conquista el derecho de votar

EL DIARIO, Paraguay

La mujer no quiere que nadie mande por ella

COLOMBIA

La violencia de la sin razón, de la sin alternativa

reseñas

Nuevas Publicaciones
Investigaciones

comunicándonos

Al reproducir artículos, cite la fuente: **mujer/fempres**

ilet



FIGURE 3. Cover of regional feminist magazine *mujer/fempres*, no. 76 (December 1987). Reprinted from *mujer/fempres*. Photo reproduced by permission from *La Raíz y el Camino*, Mariana Yampolsky (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985). All rights reserved © Fundación Cultural Mariana Yampolsky, A. C., Mexico. Scan by Dan Battle.

the region. Readers circulated articles among their communities: “organisations inform us on the way they xerox *Fempres* articles for a workshop; documentation centres write on the fact that our magazine is the one most requested . . . and indigenous groups let us know they are translating our materials into Aymara in order to reach Peruvian and Bolivian campesinos in their own language.”⁴⁰ Besides circulating their own articles, editors used the last pages of each issue to alert readers to new publications of all kinds, further socializing potentially useful information. Through original articles written from and about the majority of Latin American countries, *mujer/fempres* reached organizations working on behalf of a wide array of communities.

But *Fempres*, the magazine’s sponsoring organization, sought more than internal counterpublic development. It put considerable emphasis on a major goal of marginalized communities: making an impact on wider publics by convincing the mainstream media to take up counterpublic perspectives. As attested to above, the editors were well aware of the steep uphill climb this would be, given the stereotypical presentation of women in women’s magazines and daily newspapers. In a 2014 interview, Puerto Rican correspondent Norma Valle explained that the editors hired feminist journalists who could not only draw on their political commitment and activist counterpublics, but also access mass media outlets, where they hoped to place articles. To educate mainstream journalists on feminist values, they also offered seminars on nonsexist publishing. To perform the essential “publicist” role of a counterpublic—“to disseminate one’s discourse into ever widening areas,”⁴¹ they circulated a free summary of the work published in the magazine to hundreds of newspapers; media outlets frequently picked up relevant articles. Valle’s article on the 1989 Puerto Rican legislation against domestic violence, one of the first, and most advanced, laws in the region, republished hundreds of times, resulted in legislators from other countries contacting her for further details about its passage and function. Another article, on a female basketball player who successfully sued to play on a professional Puerto Rican team, was reprinted in sports sections throughout the region. Seeking to spread counterpublic ideas as widely as possible, *Fempres* did not limit itself to print journalism; the organization also circulated a ninety-minute radio service, which was broadcast by over 250 stations.⁴² The magazine traveled to the highest decision makers, with legislators attesting to how articles spurred their policy making.⁴³ *Fempres*’s strategy of outreach to the mainstream helped to change the context of Latin American women’s lives.

To capitalize on the strategy of publicizing the ideas, perspectives, and demands of feminists to mainstream audiences, feminist journalists in Mexico altered the model of founding a publication: they established their own news service, documentation center, and training program. Veterans of the left Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, who first came together to generate material for a regular newspaper supplement on women's issues, founded Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (Women's Communication and Information; CIMAC), in 1988. CIMAC took on the mainstream media in two ways: improving feminist organizations' capacity for media outreach, and "insur[ing] that journalists incorporate the human rights of women in their daily work" by providing the information and training they needed.⁴⁴

CIMAC believed that the mainstream media could be convinced to broadcast the work of feminist counterpublics if appealed to from the outside and the inside. Sara Llovera, a central member of the keystone species as founder and former general coordinator of CIMAC, described this two-pronged approach in an interview. CIMAC helped women's organizations publicize their work through media-strategy training and publicity campaigns. Llovera explained that, if women were to "demand [their] own spaces, [they have] to know how to do it." To appeal to journalists, CIMAC made it as easy as possible to use their news, circulating their news service, CIMAC Noticias, by fax, mail, and broadcast-ready radio programs. Moreover, they built a network of journalists trained to understand the importance of women's rights, who could facilitate transmission from counterpublics to the wider public. And finally, they founded a documentation center to provide research resources for these journalists. CIMAC used an array of techniques to encourage media coverage of women's issues; determined to adapt to a new technological context, its efforts would continue online.

All of these initiatives required a serious commitment of resources, not only in staff time and energy, but also to publish and distribute the magazines and news service. But in general, feminist publishers sought to avoid the economic relations that produced traditional coverage of women's issues. Because of its dependence on advertising, mass media sold "what sells best, . . . violence, exploitative and abusive sex, and greed for power and consumer goods."⁴⁵ So *fem* did not take advertising for its first ten years; and instead of taking advertising, Fempress applied for foundation support. By 1995, the organization boasted a budget of \$400,000, entirely underwritten by foreign assistance from European countries, private foundations, and the United Nations. CIMAC also

depended on foundation support, as well as the income generated by its work with news and other organizations. Although much better funded than other projects, dependence on external support left them vulnerable. In the case of *Fempres*, the withdrawal of financial support when foundation attention shifted elsewhere, compounded by the challenges of negotiating the world of then-new internet technology, proved too difficult to overcome. *Mujer/fempres* stopped circulating in 2000.⁴⁶ In fact, all of the publications profiled here attempted some kind of online format, however brief; but only one, CIMAC, survived the digital transition. Financing, a long-standing contentious issue for feminists in the region, is one problem purportedly solved by the internet. But as their fate and that of other online initiatives will demonstrate, this solution is more complex, and more potentially costly, than initially assumed.

The alternative media feminists published and circulated prior to the widespread use of the internet attested that these communities supported their own development through their own means of communication. In different ways, the keystone species of editors and writers empowered their audiences to explore topics that the mass media overlooked or denigrated. These audiences, excited by the perspectives they read or heard, formed or reinforced the kinds of organizations profiled in the next chapters. The outward-directed efforts of *Fempres* and CIMAC attempted to ensure that some of their stories reached larger audiences.

REGIONALIZING FEMINIST ACTIVISM: THE ENCUEENTROS

Building on the same regional solidarity that inspired *La Correa Feminista*, *fem*, *mujer/fempres*, and CIMAC, Latin American feminists, alongside their Caribbean counterparts, have established a regional counterpublic space like no other: the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros. Only in Latin America has feminist commitment to regional solidarity resulted in such an undertaking. From its start in 1981, it has become a place where women could consider and articulate their own feminist identities; debate—often furiously—the meaning and goals of feminism; and strategize for transformation across the region. It has meaning beyond the face-to-face experiences of participants, as media outlets such as the ones above have been inspired by, and in turn, inspired, the interactions and results of the meetings. For two decades before the popularization of the internet, Latin American feminists assembled, debated, and disseminated at the regional level.

These regional meetings vividly illustrate a regional counterpublic in action: local organizing committees from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru have taken responsibility for organizing thirteen Encuentros. Each committee has chosen the major themes and decided how they will be discussed, in plenary sessions, workshops, and panels, through artistic displays and performances, and more. They have also been responsible for finding a locale and providing financing. As “critical forums” through which an ever-wider range of women has shared experiences of and debated strategies for addressing gender inequality,⁴⁷ these counterpublic spaces have reflected and influenced the development of the region’s feminisms.

The tripling of attendance between the first and second Encuentros—from a mere 180 women in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1981, to 600 in Lima, Peru, in 1983—attests to the power of counterpublic communications. As word spread of this stimulating event, more women were determined to attend. The Encuentros grew to incorporate thousands of participants, with a high of 3,200 in San Bernadino, Argentina, in 1986. Reflecting the increasing identification with feminism as well as its diversification, those attending multiplied not only in number but also in terms of who they were and what they did. At the first Encuentro, mainly light-skinned, middle-class, and educated women representing twelve regional countries (and a few extraregional observers) attended. However, they manifest their diversity through the countries they represented and their occupations: participants included doctors, agricultural workers, staff at battered women’s shelters, leaders of peasant organizations, and, of course, feminist journalists. Over fifteen hundred participants from every country in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean managed to make their way to the fourth Encuentro, held in Taxco, Mexico, in 1987; in a striking development, hundreds of women from grassroots women’s movements in Central America attended. Mexico seemed ideally located geographically for bringing together the many new participants who broadcast their entry into what seemed like a restricted community by chanting, “Todas somos feministas!” (“We are all feminists!”) at the final plenary. But the region’s media also played a key role, with “unprecedented advertising in the feminist press” a central factor in the Encuentro’s growing numbers and impact.⁴⁸ Clearly, feminist press had arrived in feminist hands across the region.

In keeping with its counterpublic roles, every Encuentro has provided this expanding community multiple opportunities for self-reflection and

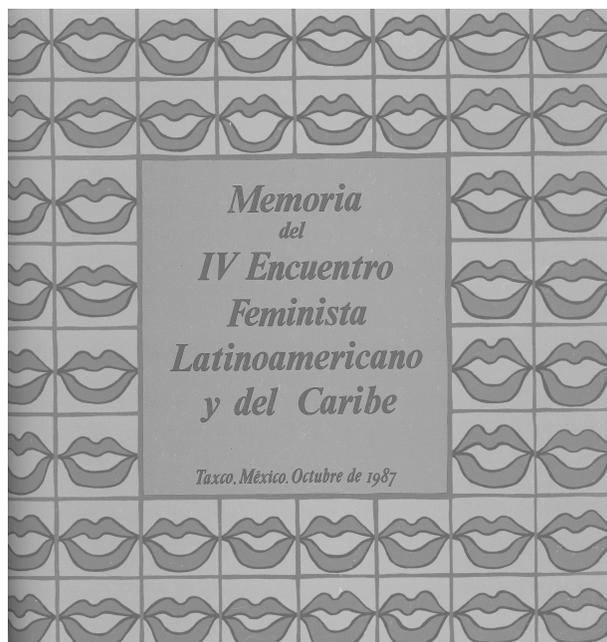


FIGURE 4. Commemorative book of the fourth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter (Coordinadora del IV Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe, October 1987). Reproduced by permission of Carolina Herrera, designer. Scan by Dan Battle.

political engagement. In artistic workshops and structured discussions, participants share their personal and political experiences. Those newly aware of patriarchal repression vent in intimate gatherings, while more jaded veterans of many years' conversations and campaigns retreat for savvy strategy sessions focused on lobbying policy makers. Friends reconnect and new relationships begin on shuttle buses, in registration lines, over lunch, and during drum circles. The Encuentro is a place for the region's feminists and feminisms to come together.

But this is no protected enclave. As feminisms have diversified across the region, debates over identity and strategy have grown apace. At early Encuentros, women deeply committed to left politics debated whether it was more effective, or even ethical, to create feminist groups separate from political parties and movements. With the growth of urban grassroots movements, low-income women insisted that the middle-class feminist founders of the Encuentros take into account many women's difficult material conditions.⁴⁹ Afro-Latin and indigenous women soon drew

attention to the intersection of the issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender.⁵⁰ By the end of the 1990s, Caribbean women, sensitive to the politics of language, challenged the hegemonic dominance of Spanish as the *lengua materna* (mother tongue) of the Encuentros.⁵¹ Challenging as they may be to experience, these and other examples of dissent and debate have been inspiring to the region's activists and organizations. They, too, help to build communities seeking to recruit, honor, and engage a highly diverse membership.

The feminist press continued to be a key transmission belt for information before the Encuentros as well as reflection on their process, debates, and conclusions—which would then influence the next Encuentro. For example, in December 1987, *mujer/fempres* considered the problems of self-financing for the previous Encuentro. In 1993 *fem* published an article titled “The Disagreement [*Desencuentro*] of the Feminist Encounters,” by one of the regular contributors to *La Correa Feminista*.⁵² This piece and others published by *La Correa* itself helped to provoke the painful debate at the seventh Encuentro in Cartagena, Chile, in 1996, over whether the professionalization of feminism through work in nonprofits and state agencies, as well as the previous years' focus on preparing for the last of the UN conferences on women in Beijing, inherently co-opted their activism. *Fem* also covered the conferences, in reports such as “The 9th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro: Active Resistance to Neoliberal Globalization.”⁵³ The regional counterpublic has depended on regional media.

Following the Encuentros's model, other meetings, bolstered by general and more thematically specific publications, have captured the diversification of regional feminisms. Afro-Latin and indigenous women, lesbian feminists, activists focused on health, the prevention of gender-based violence, and sustainable development have called their own periodic encounters to focus on their challenges and common strategies, establishing their own counterpublic arenas. Magazines such as *Mujer y Salud*, the Latin American and Caribbean women's health journal, sprang out of such organizational efforts, but the publications above also wrote about them, for example in *fem*'s coverage of the Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian Feminist Encounter and Black Women's Encounter.⁵⁴ As described in chapter 4, countries such as Argentina “nationalized” the Encuentro idea, establishing their own vibrant feminist encounters, which would in turn inspire an online feminist media initiative. But these media were always reflective of, as well as influential on, the activism itself.

Mirroring the region's diversity and divisions, the counterpublic of the Encuentros has been far from harmonious. But it has provided a space for exchange across difference, exchange that could lead to discursive and organizational innovation. As sociologist Millie Thayer explains: "It offered an arena in which battles could be waged and conflicts at least partially adjudicated. It was also a productive space, in which new discourses were generated and refined, and collaborations fostered."⁵⁵ Regional feminisms progressed through this opportunity. Beyond the meetings themselves, the wide circulation of Encuentro documents, debates, and personal experiences strengthened local and national counterpublics, as well as those focused on specific regional issues.

THE TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTERPUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS, OFF- AND ONLINE

As with earlier efforts, the regional effervescence of women's rights advocacy in the late twentieth century happened within a larger transnational context. Latin American feminists drew on, and in turn shaped, transnational projects to connect women's rights activists around the world through alternative media circuits. Two of these initiatives illustrate differences in political location and orientation: the UN conference-linked International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC), an information and communication clearinghouse formerly located across from the United Nations headquarters in New York, and Isis International, a research-based clearinghouse and publication aimed at strengthening grassroots women's activism in the Global South, with offices in Chile and the Philippines. As Alice Gittler, a former program associate with IWTC, argued, "Even before the word networking became synonymous with the Internet, women's information-exchange strategies facilitated, and, to a large extent, made possible the growth of an international movement."⁵⁶ The media were diverse, and would continue to be relevant even as the internet took off: "Popular theatre and radio listening groups, wall newspapers and women's wire services, fax trees and newsletters have informed, mobilized and built a global network of women activists. New information tools have joined rather than supplanted this media mix."⁵⁷ Long before the internet, Latin American feminist counterpublics benefited from the inception of global communication networks to support and connect local and national activist communities.

Although neither one of these initiatives used computers to communicate as far back as the 1970s and 1980s, another effort focused on the UN conference process did: Hotline International, intended to connect advocates who could not attend the 1975 International Women's Year (IWY) conference in Mexico City to their contacts on the ground. Hotline International suggested the potential of a proto-internet network, even as it was significantly limited in size and scope. Taken together, these three efforts reveal the transnational communications groundwork in place before the advent of the internet.

IWTC's founders sought to follow up on the energies released after the IWY conference. They included Mildred Persinger, the convener of the nongovernmental IWY Tribune, which hosted six thousand women in a parallel set of meetings during the official conference. In 1977, she and other IWY participants, such as the future executive director of IWTC, Anne Walker, established the IWTC in order to sustain the international ties from that dramatic encounter.⁵⁸ Such powerful members of the keystone species made IWTC a key player in the creation and expansion of global women's rights-oriented communication.

Although located in the Global North, this initiative responded to the demands of activists from the Global South, who most keenly felt the need for more connection. Because the convening organization for the IWY Tribune, the NGO IWY committee, based in New York, was "deluged with requests for information, support, finance, and technical assistance" from Tribune participants,⁵⁹ the IWTC focused on linking women, NGOs, governments, and the United Nations with an emphasis on the situation of women in the Global South. Their publication *The Tribune*, started as a modest cut-and-paste newsletter featuring the post-IWY updates IWTC staff received from around the world, became a major source of information about women's organizing. They also assembled regional resource kits. As the Latin American media outlets had for their region, these efforts helped national women's counterpublics assimilate the information and analysis circulating globally.

The IWTC continued to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the other UN Decade for Women conferences, establishing on-site resource sharing and networking hubs including Vivencia! at the 1980 Mid-Decade conference in Copenhagen. Under Colombian Vicky Mejia's coordination, the space became a key point of contact for Latin American women who gathered to share experiences and insights.⁶⁰ Afterward, IWTC's *Tribune* continued to provide connective tissue, circulating news about the flourishing networks formed during the conference.⁶¹ During

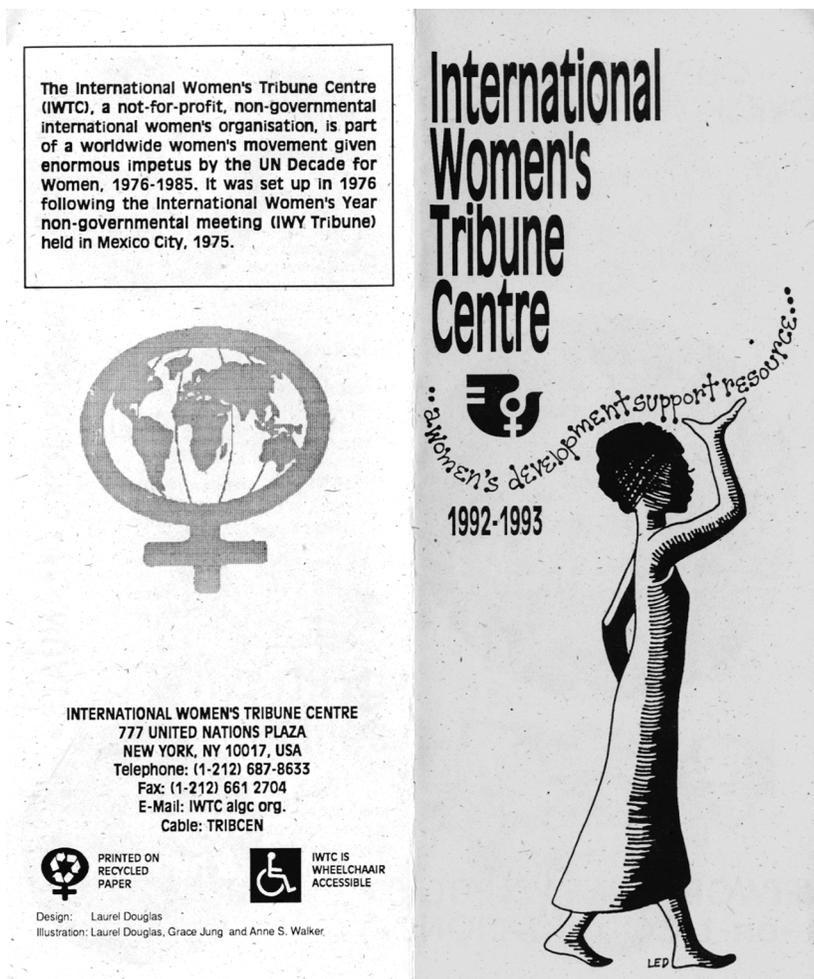


FIGURE 5. International Women's Tribune Centre pamphlet. Reproduced by permission of Anne S. Walker. Design by Laurel Douglas. Illustration by Laurel Douglas, Grace Jung, and Anne S. Walker.

the UN World Conferences of the 1990s, IWTC would take on a similar role helping to coordinate global efforts to strategize and lobby governments. It sought not only to ensure that the information generated at the conferences got into the hands of local and national counterpublics, but also to channel women's demands to conference attendees. The Tribune Centre used information to make the spaces opened by the UN conferences into an ever more effective target for activists.

In contrast to IWTC, Marilee Karl, Jane Cottingham, and Judy Sidens, who were working from Rome and Geneva to support progressive international communication in the 1970s, founded Isis as a feminist information documentation center and publisher focused on connecting women outside of government-sponsored opportunities like the UN conferences. They were inspired by the 1976 First International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels, where two thousand women came together of their own accord, rather than under the aegis of governments, to publicize the brutal as well as the subtle ways in which women around the world suffered from violence, and to strategize about how to end it.⁶² Isis responded to the low-quality coverage of the Tribunal in the mass media by producing its own coverage in the first issue of their *Women's International Bulletin*.⁶³ Isis's mission became providing opportunities for women from the Global North and South to "shar[e] their ideas and experiences internationally, without the distortion of the male-dominated transnational-controlled press."⁶⁴ This direct communication was needed "so that women could recognize their situation and fight to change it."⁶⁵ Isis founders also established a center to collect women's media and research in order to counter commercial media's portrayal of women's rights activism. Inspired by women's autonomous transnational activism, Isis strengthened women's alternative media.

The circulation of Isis's *Women's International Bulletin* demonstrated how activists could leverage even modest publication runs to undergird their counterpublics. Peruvian activist Ana Maria Portugal, who helped bring Isis International to Latin America, described the *Bulletin* as forming part of a burgeoning women's alternative media: "newsletters, mimeographed pamphlets, silk-screened posters, and so on, produced in small quantities and distributed by and among the earliest feminist groups."⁶⁶ Like these other media, the *Bulletin's* impact was larger than its small numbers: they were "recirculated among new groups and information from them was reproduced in the alternative media of the South and North."⁶⁷ Passed hand to hand from group to group, women's alternative media reinforced transnational networks and local and national counterpublics, again long before the development of a technology that would ease such transmission.

Although Isis was headquartered in Europe, its founders realized that work for women in the Global South would be better undertaken from within their own regions.⁶⁸ Because Latin American women's groups were active in both providing and asking for information, Isis opened an office in Chile in the mid-1980s, run by two returning Chilean exiles who

had worked in Isis's headquarters. Among other duties, the office took on the coordination of two of the networks nurtured by the regional Encuentros, focused on women's health and violence against women. To solidify these networks, Isis-Chile published their newsletters and analysis.

This office also put out two other magazines that served their regional audience. Following in the footsteps of other regional publications in reinforcing the counterpublic space of the Encuentros, the first number of *Ediciones de las Mujeres*, distributed in 1984, focused on the second Encuentro, which had taken place in Peru the year before. Published until 2002, its thirty-three numbers took up subjects ranging from health to women factory workers to masculinities. From 1996 to 2002, Isis also issued twenty-five numbers of *Perspectivas*, which focused on analyzing current issues for women's movements.⁶⁹ Isis's publications met a similar fate to those described above: with the withdrawal of foundation support early in the twenty-first century, all of them had to close.

Although IWTC and Isis carried out their media-based networking years before the popularization of the internet, another initiative attempted to use computer-mediated communication to enhance women's international rights advocacy. Hotline International was a computer-based network that allowed a group of U.S. advocates who could not attend the IWY conference in Mexico City to participate remotely. Organizers described it as "a limited time, action program operating on the dates of international conferences to enable interested NGOs and individuals to receive information, participate in decision making and to plan action strategy." What was unique about the initiative was its means of transmission: "All this to be accomplished without having to be physically present at the site of the conference. . . . And if someone asks you why you aren't in Mexico at the conference, you can say I am at the conference via the HOTLINE."⁷⁰ Although limited in time, scope, and participation, the Hotline offered the first experience of presence-at-a-distance in women's rights advocacy by attempting the blur lines separating physical and remote participation. And, as feminists from Latin America would experience with the internet, they adapted the technology to suit their own ends: in this case, attempting to influence elites at the official conference.

Hotline International had a distinct orientation from the more grassroots-oriented global communications networks assisted by IWTC and Isis, or those taken up two decades later at the 1995 Fourth World Conference in Beijing. Glen and Mildred Leet, a New York-based couple dedicated to fostering NGO participation in UN global conferences,

became the keystone species for introducing computer-mediated communication to their community. In this case, it was largely limited to a preexisting group of U.S. middle-class and high-profile women's organizations with experience lobbying at the United Nations. But because the Hotline brought together a focus on global networking with the first use of an internet (although not the internet), its history offers an understanding of the initial difficulties with such networking, and a basis for comparing for how subsequent projects addressed them. Moreover, although the Hotline largely enabled discussions among women and men who were already part of the conference-lobbying process, it also facilitated the emergence of alternative perspectives.

Two decades before the widespread dissemination of the internet, these proponents understood the potential of computer-mediated communication for transnational civic participation. As they enthused about the Hotline, "This could lead to the development of an important capability through which NGOs can take a more active role in significant meetings. IT [Information Technology] can be a breakthrough by applying technology in a new way to enhance communications for global action."⁷¹ The Leets had already begun to experiment with IT during other UN conferences of the 1970s, including the Human Environment Conference (1972), World Food Conference (1974), and Population Conference (1974). They helped to set up computer networks that were connected by telephone, enabling those in New York, Washington, and San Francisco to participate by receiving daily briefings and sharing their ideas.

As with IWTC, they believed that conferences could inspire work beyond the immediate goal of influencing governments. They sought to have "conferences serve as launch pads rather than splash downs to keep interest and action at a high level." The technological metaphor of space exploration, gleaming behind this conceptualization, reflected their sense that modern technology could provide answers to thorny global problems. However, the limitations of such technology, the "phone booths of our global environment,"⁷² manifest in their descriptions of how people could join: all that was needed was access to a computer terminal—available at "universities and corporations"—that could communicate via phone lines at the relatively affordable rate of fifty cents per minute.⁷³ In the mid-1970s, the population with that kind of access was far from global, making this a restricted, Northern initiative.

Despite their international aspirations for the Hotline, the Leets were not able to get the funding and organization in place for widespread distribution across countries or communities.⁷⁴ Instead, they set up

what they called “focal points,” an individual or group with access to a computer terminal, in ten U.S. cities and Vancouver, British Columbia. The choice of focal points, in large urban and almost exclusively U.S. cities, necessarily limited the reach of this endeavor. The two IWY satellite conferences, where Hotline International participants discussed the information they had received from Mexico City and formulated collective responses, included around three hundred people in Philadelphia, with another fifty-three people from forty-nine organizations in New York. Many of those organizations, a set of mainly well-established NGOs, also had representatives in Mexico.⁷⁵ Although it did connect people across the Rio Grande, the Hotline did not succeed in widening participation far beyond already established networks.

Organizers’ desire for the Hotline to be a “global town hall” connecting people, rather than machines, was reflected in their instructions to users, or what would become known to the next generation’s internet users as “netiquettes.” They entreated the participants to put the date on their missives, and consider using Greenwich time “to develop the sense of talking world wide at a specified instant.” They also asked that everyone give their name on their entries to give “a people feeling, and not a computer machine feeling.”⁷⁶ But the “people feeling” in this virtual meeting place was to be elevated by the technological interface. A summary of the “special features” of this mechanism for communication make clear that the town hall was intended to maintain a certain tone: “A typed input results in a more carefully considered response. There is less likelihood of an emotional one”; “New form of communication at conferences: absence of voice and body and facial movements and expressions creates a different quality to the communications.”⁷⁷ The Leets believed that computer mediation would not only widen communications, but also bestow a kind of rationality they prized.

The rudimentary development of IT at this stage, made plain by multiple instructions from the keystone species about how to “code” contributions, manage virtual conversations, and deal with bad weather, meant that even those who had computer access depended on older technologies, like telephone calls and mail, to assist computer-mediated communications. There was no attempt to digitize the Hotline’s archival legacy: the Leets were anxious to distribute physical copies (which they also hoped to sell to recoup some of their costs). Their instructions to participants reflected their intention to distribute the archive: organizers warned that nothing shared across the Hotline could be confidential, and exhorted participants to cite their sources.⁷⁸ The futuristic

Hotline International was embedded in its present reality in more than one way, as technological development did not match organizer goals.

However, this endeavor was quite plugged in politically, to use a technological metaphor of the times. One of the primary boosters was no less than Margaret Mead, at the time the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, who, in her “hearty congratulations” to the team, called their use of computer communications an “important break through.”⁷⁹ The list of Hotline International “friends” in Mexico City,⁸⁰ from whom staffers solicited reports on a session, commentary on the NGOs’ role, resolutions that need reinforcement from the United States, or help placing “special attention memos” from the Hotline in delegate mailboxes,⁸¹ were well-known women’s rights advocates, including Gloria Steinem and the secretary-general of the Tribune itself, Helvi Sipilä. The Hotline implored Sipilä to incorporate their voices: “Call on us, the NGO’s, to help you as you seek equality, development and peace for humanity and for women. . . . Call on us—through our IWY Hotline we are listening.”⁸² Another major Hotline International booster was Esther Hymer, the international relations director of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women and a central figure in NGO representation to the United Nations. She affirmed the importance of the Hotline’s work in networking and representation: “We feel that you are with us and we are here to advance your interests.”⁸³ Even Senator Charles Percy congratulated their initiative and used what he termed this “creative and imaginative use of modern technology” to transmit his remarks.⁸⁴ At the conclusion of the conference, Hotline International staff sent letters congratulating Sipilä and Ms. Mildred Marcy, IWY director for the U.S. State Department, on the conference’s success, and offered them copies of the entire Hotline communications. They thanked Marcy in particular for “encouragement and assistance.”⁸⁵ Thus, even as Hotline International organizers enthused that “the technology is at hand for a continuous town meeting of the world,”⁸⁶ it reinforced a preexisting network of high-profile, U.S.-based advocates.

Reflecting its limited participation and aspirations to influence high-level decision makers, Hotline International proceeded from an understanding of the role of information provision different from that of the transnational feminist efforts of groups such as Isis. Isis insisted that theirs was a political act: “We realize that the information we need to prioritize, document, file, and distribute is not neutral. It is directly related to the changes we want to bring about to achieve women’s full

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IWY ENTRY 015, FILE IWY DC005. MESSAGE TO MRS. HELVI L. SIPILA, UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, AND SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, AND THE IWY CONFERENCE IN MEXICO CITY.

(THE MEXICO CITY FOCAL POINT OF THE NGO "HOTLINE TO MEXICO CITY" COMPUTER-AIDED CONFERENCING SYSTEM, WHICH IS UNDER THE OVER-ALL COORDINATION OF HILDRED ROBBINS LEET, GLEN LEET, AND MARGARET HEAD OF THE NORTH AMERICAN COMMITTEE OF NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED WITH THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT, IS REQUESTED TO DELIVER THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO MRS. SIPILA.)

ON BEHALF OF THE NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS FOCAL POINTS BECOMING DISTRIBUTED AROUND OUR WORLD, AND OUR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR "HOTLINE TO MEXICO CITY" COMPUTER-AIDED CONFERENCING SYSTEM, MAY I GREET YOU AS YOU PREPARE TO DELIVER YOUR REMARKS FOR THE OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 19 1975. MANY OF US WHO CANNOT BE WITH YOU IN MEXICO CITY ARE WITH YOU IN SPIRIT, AND IN GROWING NUMBERS ARE SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES AND STANDING BY AS RESOURCES TO ASK QUESTIONS AND SUGGEST ANSWERS THROUGH THE TECHNOLOGY OF COMPUTER-AIDED COMMUNICATION. CALL ON US, THE NGO'S, TO HELP YOU AS YOU SEEK EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEACE FOR HUMANITY AND FOR WOMEN, THE "MOST UNDER-DEVELOPED OF ALL HUMAN RESOURCES, BECAUSE OF LACK OF OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY AN EQUAL PART WITH MEN IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE, AND BECAUSE OF THE STEREOTYPING OF MALE AND FEMALE ROLES", AS YOU HAVE STATED. (PRESS RELEASE, IWY/23, 16 JUNE 1975, UN OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION.) CALL ON US - - THROUGH OUR IWY HOTLINE WE ARE LISTENING.

WE WOULD WELCOME A STATEMENT FROM YOU FOR THE IWY HOTLINE AND OUR NGO HOTLINE CONFERENCES WORLDWIDE.

- CARL C. CLARK, TECHNICAL ASSISTANT TO KIT GAGE, COORDINATOR
OF THE NGO DC FOCAL POINT, TRANSMITTED
197506180100 UNIVERSAL (GREENWICH) TIME.
VAYA CON LAS MUJERES!

FIGURE 6. Hotline International message of support to the secretary general of the IWY conference, Helvi Sipilä (1975). Reprinted from International Women's Year Records, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 220, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Photo by Jocelyn Olcott.

participation in society."⁸⁷ In contrast, the Hotline "rested on the liberal distinction between information and ideology, assuming that more thorough dissemination of information would lead reasonable people to draw similar conclusions."⁸⁸ Intent informed technology use, even when organizers insisted otherwise.

The Hotline's approach, so embedded in the U.S. framework for public deliberation that it harkened back to the Puritan governance model of the town hall, had at its core an assumption that every voice could be heard, despite its limited reach to a small number of Northern participants. However, although they designed its question and answer relay with conference participants to ensure "a broad spectrum of points of view and a wide diversity of issues, comments and criticisms may be brought to bear on the conference held in Mexico City,"⁸⁹ organizers

believed that those voices should sing in harmony for greatest impact, suggesting: “We [should take] all the resources of the women’s organizations from the garden clubs to the professional [*sic*] women[’]s clubs to the mothers[’] clubs and the park bureaus and [stand] firmly together, with one voice saying: no more money no more programs until women have a voice in setting national and international priorities.”⁹⁰ While many women might have been interested in such a shift of priorities, the organization of women’s energies through garden and professional clubs reveals the Hotline’s assumption of middle- and upper-class women’s protagonism. But, as the repeated failures “to distill the tumult of conflicts and encounters into unified statements of purpose” at the NGO forum revealed, those priorities were considerably different from country to country, and between the Global North and South. Rather than harmony, the voices of “radical heterogeneity” were raised outside of the official conference walls.⁹¹ IWY historian Jocelyn Olcott finds the Hotline’s attempt to incorporate more voices into IWY deliberations tainted by the same brush that Nancy Fraser used to critique Habermas: the assumption that the public sphere can ever be a “space of zero degree culture . . . as to accommodate with perfect neutrality . . . interventions expressive of any and every cultural ethos.”⁹² The Hotline was using computer-based communications to promote women’s rights, but not to strengthen counterpublics.

Although it sought harmony, the Hotline itself was not always in tune. Its one international partner, the focal point in Vancouver, pointed out that different national situations should be taken into account. Staff there reported a low turnout for their face-to-face meeting, in part because of “limited preparation time and budgetary restrictions”—the same reasons the Hotline organizers gave for the limited reach outside of the United States. But they went on to describe the Canadian politics at work: women’s groups felt as if their government had mishandled their issues, from equal employment to abortion, refused to spend IWY funds on their priorities, and did not allow them to appoint their own delegates. Even the Canadian IWY slogan, “why not,” was felt to be “tasteless and condescending.”⁹³ The politics on display here told a different story than the main Hotline narrative. Here were organizations that had a strong critique of their government’s appropriation of the IWY opportunity. And because of their experience, they fostered a different aspiration for the Hotline, one that would wait a generation to be realized. They thought that computer-mediated communications should be used for horizontal exchange among women’s organizations. To that

end, they suggested that the Hotline put itself at the service of women's rights activists by pulling together a catalog of existing women's organizations and programs. They offered the Vancouver listings for a starting point.⁹⁴ In Canada, these women were ready to rely on computer-based communications to build counterpublic community.

On the ground in Mexico City, dissonance was also heard. After the Hotline reproduced Senator Percy's praise for their efforts and his remarks on development assistance for third world women,⁹⁵ the reporter summarized the reactions in the room: "The entire meeting seemed to focus on letting Senator Percy know that aid should be channeled through NGOs that work on the Grass-root level."⁹⁶ The Leets themselves eventually became convinced of this perspective, going on to become trailblazers in the area of microcredit loans in the Global South.

CONCLUSION

The history of Latin American feminist counterpublics shows that, considerably prior to the advent of the internet, this was a region in which women were determined to build communities where they could collectively address their subordinate status. They refused to accept inaccurate portrayals of their reality in the mass media, using their own publications to offer each other, and the wider world, a picture of the obstacles in their way and their many ideas for change.

This was also a region where, again long before the internet, increasingly diverse feminist communities relied on alternative media to construct regional solidarity with room for dissent. The keystone species of feminist publishers and writers demonstrated a regional sensibility as they supported different elements of counterpublics, from identity building to influencing mass media coverage of women's issues. The globally unique manifestation of regional feminist activism was the Encuentros. These gatherings were an opportunity for women from many different countries to reflect, debate, and celebrate together as they learned who they were in the world and how they wanted to change it. This most tangible example of a regional counterpublic in turn nurtured other spaces for connection and deliberation.

Regional counterpublics benefited from solidarity. But in what might seem a paradoxical development, they also grew through disagreement. Through their media, and in the classrooms, beachfront patios, hotel meeting rooms, and other locations of the Encuentros, feminists aired deep differences in identity and strategy. While difficult to experience,

these opportunities for exchange enabled Latin American feminists to constantly and productively redefine themselves in the face of often-shared sources of oppression with distinct manifestations in women's lives. The diffusion of regional meetings' dynamics and conclusions through regional media rippled across local and national counterpublics, transforming their conversations and enhancing their activist repertoires. Latin America was a region ready for a technology of connection and diffusion.

It was also one that was already firmly embedded in global communication networks focused on the empowerment of local, national, and regional counterpublics. Initiatives such as the International Women's Tribune Centre and Isis International demonstrated distinct ways of circumventing "the distortion of the male-dominated transnational-controlled press," to quote the latter. Whether sharing women's UN-focused efforts or promoting more decentralized information exchange, the keystone species in these organizations also laid the groundwork upon which later transnational media endeavors would build.

As regional counterpublics and their transnational alliances developed largely without computer mediation, an experiment was underway in the first attempt to use computers to link women's rights proponents. Hotline International was an innovative step at the global level. Building on experiences outside of women's conferences, founders and organizers applied an infant technology to the goal of including more voices in the first UN conference on women. Limited in reach, the Hotline reinforced the elite nature of international negotiations even as it expanded participants beyond those who could physically attend the 1975 conference in Mexico City. In this way, the computer-mediated communications were bent to the perspectives of those who used it. It would take a feminist reorientation of global technology at a UN women's conference twenty years later to push forward the internet's potential for undergirding women's communications around the world—and its incorporation into Latin American feminist counterpublics.