The Rise of Regionalism:
The Challenge of Promoting Economic and Social Integration

by

Amanda Buescher

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of graduation requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

Boston College

Political Science Program

Advisor David Deese

April 2008
Abstract

In recent years, the rise in the formation of regional organizations such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Mercado Común Del Sur (Mercosur) has drawn an increasing amount of attention from political scientists and economists. However, countries preparing for entry into regional organizations have the challenging task of promoting both economic and social integration. When preparing for accession into regional organizations, Mexico and Argentina implemented multiple changes in their economic and political practices. As a result of these changes, citizens who perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional integration formed social movements such as the Zapatista Army for National Liberation and El Movimiento de las Mujeres en Lucha to voice their opposition. This thesis explores the policy changes made as Mexico and Argentina prepared for accession into regional organizations, the social movements formed in opposition to these changes, and the responses formulated by Mexico’s and Argentina’s leaders in reaction to these movements. I conclude that countries preparing for entry into regional organizations must implement policies which address the political concerns of these groups, rather than simply their economic concerns. Failure to do so will lead to deep social divisions which will hinder the formation and development of regional organizations.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... 1
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ 2
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. 3
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 4
Chapter 1: The Rise of Regionalism .................................................................................. 8
Chapter 2: The Threat of Social Disintegration ............................................................... 16
Chapter 3: Changing Government Policies ..................................................................... 26
Chapter 4: The Rise of the Zapatista Movement ............................................................. 40
Chapter 5: The Formation of the MML .......................................................................... 57
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 86
Appendix A: Interview Guide ........................................................................................... 90
Appendix B: MML Petition ............................................................................................... 91
Works Consulted .............................................................................................................. 92
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my thesis advisor, David Deese, for his guidance throughout this project, as well as Professor Susan Michalczyk and Professor Donald Hafner. I would also like to thank my mother, Vanessa Buescher, for her love and support during the project. Most importantly, my time in Argentina with the women involved in El Movimiento de las Mujeres en Lucha formed the foundation for my project, and I would like to thank them for their support throughout my time in Rosario.
Introduction

In my thesis, I conducted a study of the social movements formed in response to the economic and political reforms instituted by countries preparing for entry in regional organizations. In recent years, the rise in regionalism has been noted by scholars; however, the economic and political reforms associated with entry into regional agreements may have negative effects on certain economic and social groups within member countries. While political, economic, and business leaders aim to formulate economic reforms which will benefit their constituents, in practice the implementation of these policies has various effects of different sectors of society.

I focused my studies on the social movements formed in Mexico and Argentina in reaction to the introduction of regional trade agreements in their countries, specifically, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur). Mexico and Argentina have undergone neo-liberal economic reforms which their leaders implemented in an effort to stabilize their economies and prepare their countries for entrance into regional trade agreements and competition in the world market. The reforms introduced in both countries have many similarities, thereby making them ideal candidates for comparison. By examining these two case studies, I was able to explore the economic and political reforms introduced, why these groups perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of membership in a regional organization, the actions these groups took in response to this perceived loss, and how governments can effectively participate in forms of economic integration which do not result in social disintegration.
While writing my thesis, I utilized a variety of sources. A literary review of books and journal articles provided me with a background on the rise of regionalism, the effects of regional agreements on vulnerable constituents within member countries, and the responses formulated by these constituents. In recent years, the number of regional organizations formed has grown dramatically. Researching the history of regional organizations and the factors influencing their formation and growth enabled me to gain a better understanding of why states participate in such agreements and why certain groups perceive that they are negatively affected by their formation.

For my study of the social reaction formed in Mexico, I focused on the Zapatista Movement formed in Chiapas. The Zapatista Movement has attracted substantial attention from the international community, and the media attention devoted to the movement both within and outside of Mexico has produced a variety of publications which supported my research. News and journal articles, as well as the many books which have been written about the movement, allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the Zapatistas response to the economic reforms introduced by Mexico’s participation in NAFTA. While the history of the Zapatista Movement is extensive, I chose to study the movement from its origins in the 1980’s through 1994, the year when the Zapatista Movement first emerged in public.

For my study of the social reaction generated in Argentina, I utilized a research project which I conducted on El Movimiento de las Mujeres en Lucha (MML), a social movement formed by the wives of Argentina’s small farmers. The MML was formed in response to their community’s perceived economic losses as a result of Argentina’s neoliberal economic reforms and participation in Mercosur. During a month-long period,
I was able to travel throughout the Argentine countryside and conducted interviews with the movement’s leaders, participants, and scholars who have studied the movement from its beginnings. Although the movement has attracted some attention within South America and Europe, the MML has not attracted as extensive an amount of international attention as the Zapatistas. Consequently, I relied primarily on the literature review and interviews I conducted during my time in Argentina for my understanding of the MML. While my research resources for the MML are not as extensive as those available for the Zapatistas, my past research allowed me to study the movement from its origins in 1994 through 2007. Originally conducted and written in Spanish, this project includes a variety of first-hand interviews with the movement’s leaders and Argentine scholars who have followed the movement’s development from its inception.

In recent decades, regionalism has grown markedly. By studying the effects of regionalism on groups which are socially and economically vulnerable to the changes brought about by regionalism, I was able to examine the responses formulated by such groups. Through careful study of their responses to regional agreements, and what effects, if any, they have brought about in their government’s participation in regional trade agreements, I gained a fuller understanding of how governments entering in to regional organizations can manage the effects of such agreements on vulnerable socio-economic groups through a variety of responses.

The study of the social reactions to regional agreements is particularly timely as many regional organizations, such as Mercosur, are beginning to extend offers of membership and associate membership to new countries. By studying the social movements by those groups who perceive themselves to be marginalized by free trade
and regional economic agreements, we can gain a better understanding of how these sectors can be better incorporated into regional agreements. Although political and economic elites enter into regional and free trade agreements with the belief that their constituents will experience a net benefit, there may be certain economic and social sectors which perceive themselves to be excluded from these benefits. Understanding who these groups are and how they perceive the effects of regional organizations will allow political and economic leaders to formulate provisions designed to help these groups transition into the new political and economic reality created by their country’s participation in a regional organization. Because certain groups may perceive that they are negatively affected by their country’s participation in a regional agreement, political leaders hoping to maintain and deepen their country’s participation in regional trade agreements must work to promote both economic and social integration in order for regionalism to continue to thrive.
In recent years, the rise in regional free trade agreements has been noted by both economists and politicians. In order to gain a complete understanding of the reactions to regional agreements, it is important to first examine the political climate in which international organizations emerged. An understanding of the historical context surrounding the rise in regional agreements is important in understanding the political and economic climate in which these agreements are formed, as well as the social reactions formed by sectors who perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of such agreements.

International organizations began to emerge in significant numbers after World Wars I and II as nations sought to cooperate with each other to reduce the possibility of engaging in another costly war. The League of Nations, formed after the conclusion of World War I, is an important example of the movement towards the use of international cooperation to minimize international tensions. In his discussion on the sequencing of regional economic integration, economist Jeffrey Bergstrand notes that the proliferation of economic integration agreements began at the end of World War II and was sparked by the October 30, 1947 signing of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and the 1957 signing of the Treaty of Rome, which led to the creation of the European Community. These two signings, within a decade of each other, represented major political and economic shifts towards cooperation.
As illustrated by the above graph, since the end of World War II, there have been two distinct periods in the growth of regionalism. Economist Jagdish Bhagwati labels the two periods as “first regionalism” and “second regionalism.”¹ Bhagwati states that the first regionalism began in the late 1950’s and lasted until the early 1970’s; however, this period ended in failure as the regional organizations formed were too weak and ultimately collapsed. However, the data collected by the World Trade Organization and reflected in the above graph shows that the number of preferential trade agreements formed during the 1970’s remained quite strong; therefore, it may be more appropriate to designate the early 1980’s as the end to the period of first regionalism. These first agreements were an “extension of the import-substitution-industrialization strategy from the national to the regional level,” and agreements formed during this period were

focused inward. During this first period, developing countries received their independence from colonial powers and began to form regional associations. Developing countries saw the formation of regional organizations as a vehicle for economic development as their participation would increase their access to large-scale markets and ultimately lessen their dependence on former colonial powers. However, the “outbreak” of regional organizations such as the Latin American Free-Trade Area, the Central American Common Market, the Andean Pact, and the Caribbean Community and Common Market failed in developing countries because they attempted to allocate industries through bureaucratic negotiation, rather than relying on the market. In addition, regionalism failed to take root because the United States, already an important world power, was considered to be indifferent towards such agreements. Although World Wars I and II played an important role in encouraging the development of international organizations, the growth of such organizations would be limited until the end of another important war: namely, the Cold War.

Although the Cold War began in 1947, the re-invigoration of the Cold War during the administration of Ronald Reagan from 1981 through 1988 led to a significant decline in the formation of new regional trade agreements. During the Cold War, the formation of regional organizations slowed to a crawl as countries were divided into the Communist and anti-Communist blocs. In this bipolar world the possibilities for cooperation and the formation of multilateral organizations were limited by the division between the two political blocs. It was not until the Cold War’s end in 1989 that this bipolar world order

---

3 Bhagwati, 28.
ended and the possibility of multilateral political cooperation re-emerged. With the removal of political obstacles which had hindered the growth of international cooperation, international organizations such as the United Nations were able to resume their efforts of encouraging political cooperation. Due to the significant change in the world’s political and economic order, opportunities for political integration and cooperation were ripe around the globe, particularly in Latin America.

At the conclusion of the Cold War, the world was introduced to the period of second regionalism which is characterized by traits which are quite distinct from that of the first regionalism. While the bipolar political environment created during the Cold War hindered the formation of multilateral regional organizations, its conclusion led a dramatic increase in the number of multilateral preferential trade agreements. After the conclusion of the Cold War, more regional agreements were signed during the late 1980’s when compared to the number of agreements signed during the 1960’s.⁴ Although the regional organizations which emerged during this period were remarkable in number, they are noted for many other distinguishing characteristics.

One major influence on the growth of second regionalism was the expansion of the European Union towards Eastern Europe. This expansion awakened the United States from its period of indifference towards regionalism, and for the first time, it began to look past the political benefits accrued from such organizations. The United States began to realize the economic benefits accompanying participation in regional organizations. The recognition of the possible economic benefits, as well as the increasing desire within the Americas and Asia to form a response to the expansion of the European Union helped resurrect the growth of regionalism. Scholars such as Bhagwati believe that the support of

⁴ de Melo, 159.
the United States is a key component in regionalism’s resurrection, and that the support
of the United States for regional organizations is a signal that this second era of
regionalism will enjoy greater longevity and success when compared to the first period.

Unlike previous periods of regional growth, in the early 1990's countries formed
preferential trade agreements to "prompt and consolidate economic and political
reforms."5 Mexico underwent extensive economic reforms in the late 1980’s and early
1990’s, and it began to discuss the feasibility of establishing a preferential trade
agreement with the United States and Canada. In South America, Argentina, Brazil,
Paraguay, and Uruguay were all undergoing profound economic and political changes
which sparked dialogue on the creation of a regional trade agreement. While the first
period of regionalism was characterized by agreements formed among developing
countries in Latin America and Africa, the second period was characterized by the
formation of regional agreements between developed and underdeveloped countries,
particularly in Latin America.6 During the period of second regionalism, preferential
trade agreements were no longer formed in an effort to shelter their members from the
world economy. Rather, countries began to view regional trade agreements as a way to
simultaneously consolidate economic reforms and boost their participation and presence
in foreign political and economic arenas.

In addition to the desire to consolidate economic reforms, there are also several
other characteristics typical of the new wave of regionalism. Mansfield states that
democracies are more likely to form economic integration agreements than non-

---

Rienner Publishers, 2005), 341.
6 de Melo, 159.
democratic states; therefore, democracy may be a precondition for the formation of successful regional agreement. The presence of a democratic government is particularly important in Latin America as many governments used democracy as a prerequisite for entry. Many leaders also saw the participation of their newly democratic country in a regional organization as a way to consolidate and protect this new form of government. While a democratic government is an important characteristic of participation in a regional trade agreement, Bergstrand denotes three characteristics of economic integration agreements. These agreements are typically regional in nature and occur most often among countries located on the same continent. Regional trade agreements are formed among countries that are economically large and similar in some respects, such as among countries with similar economic and political structures. Also, many regional organizations begin as free trade agreements rather than as preferential trade agreements, customs unions, or economic unions.

Presently, more than 300 economic integration agreements have been signed. Countries agree to integrate economically believing that cooperate will ultimately benefit their country. One benefit is the access to a larger market. For those countries that belong to preferential trade agreements, the cost of joining successive agreements is lower than the costs associated with signing the first agreement, as the first agreement established the basic foundation on which later integration efforts could expand. Primary agreements on trade are easy to establish because trade is divisible, and countries can focus on specific industries and tariffs. Although trade agreements may begin by focusing on a specific sector or commodity, participation in these trade agreements establishes the linkages needed to increase cooperation in future endeavors. If the trade agreements are
believed to be efficient and beneficial, the countries will successfully cooperate in future endeavors. Negative externalities may also increase cooperation, as issues such as border congestion or air pollution will increase the demand for cooperation and the establishment of public goods to resolve these externalities. Once countries have established agreements on relatively easy topics such as trade, later agreements can extend to areas in which cooperation is more difficult, such as the areas of transport, border security, investment, mutual assistance, and the development of infrastructure.

There have been several recent developments in trade and economic agreements which have become characteristics of cooperation agreements. Today, even poor and underdeveloped states are participating in regional economic agreements. Cooperation is not restricted to wealthy states: rather, many poor states now see integration as the vehicle driving development within their countries. Those countries which cooperate with major global partners are more likely to increase the share of agreements that they have with regional partners. Therefore, cooperation within and outside of the region indicate that states will further deepen their involvement in the regional integration process.

Agreements with powers outside of a given economic region have become increasingly important, and there has been a rise in transcontinental bilateral trade agreements. Trade’s amenability has been an important force in driving the formation of economic integration agreements because it allows countries to focus on a specific commodity or industry, thereby simplifying the integration process.

The second rise in regionalism has produced three blocs within the world trading system. The European Community, East Asia, and the Americas are the three main blocs within this system, and each has begun to construct their own regional products. Within
my thesis, I will focus on the social reaction to the rise of regional trade organizations within the Americas. By comparing and contrasting the cases of Mexico and Argentina, I hope to understand the changes in national norms and values which were made to prepare these two countries for membership, why the two groups perceive themselves to be excluded from this second wave of regionalism, the actions they are taking to express their discontent, and the policies formulated by political and economic leaders in these two countries in an effort to promote economic and social integration.
Chapter Two

Many political, social, and economic leaders within Mexico and Argentina may have agreed to participate in NAFTA and Mercosur believing that their countries would benefit economically, politically, and socially. Even though the economic reforms introduced to prepare their countries for membership in regional trade agreements, such as privatization and a decrease in subsidies in certain industries, would be difficult and perhaps even politically unpopular, they were implemented nonetheless. Ultimately, the political leaders within Mexico and Argentina believed that their country’s completion of neo-liberal reforms was essential in order for their country to be economically competitive in the world market.

However, a country’s economic and political participation in regional agreements may also upset its domestic social order. Domestic norms and social institutions may change, leading to discontent among groups which were dependent upon or which benefited from these arrangements. The values and norms once embodied by government policies which afforded preferential treatment for certain sectors may change as countries prepare to enter regional agreements, and these sectors may lose their special treatment and benefits. In this atmosphere, “trade becomes contentious when it unleashes forces that undermine the norms implicit in domestic practices.” In the case of NAFTA and Mercosur, for example, changes in economic practices and land policies caused discontent among certain sectors and led to a rise in social protest. For groups which

8 Ibid., 5.
perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by such changes, the question of procedural fairness in economic practices becomes central. One response generated by sectors which perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by changes in the domestic economic order, such as small farmers, may be to call for “fair trade.” Although trade policy is frequently linked to redistributive consequences, either “among sectors, income groups, and individuals,” it is important that governments examine the fairness of these practices. Due to the unpopular redistributive effects of changing economic practices, it may be difficult for government leaders to obtain broad support for the regional project.

The change in national norms may lead to a rise in social discontent, particularly among groups which perceive themselves to be excluded from the debate surrounding these changes. In many countries such as Mexico and Argentina, the decision to participate in regional organizations is typically made among policy elites. Domestic politics play an important role in determining the type of regional organization formed, and leaders have the difficult task of “promoting [their] country’s aggregate economic welfare and accommodating interest groups whose support is needed to retain office.”

While regionalism in the past was characterized by a country’s desire to improve its political-military capacity, since the end of the Cold War, the defining characteristic of the new wave of regionalism has been the desire of policymakers to circumvent domestic barriers to continued liberalization. By binding their countries to these agreements, political leaders ensure that the process of liberalization will continue.

---

9 Ibid., 5.
10 Ibid., 6.
11 Mansfield, 343.
12 Ibid., 345.
However, the decision-makers in this new form of regionalism are frequently political and economic elites, as the majority of regional agreements are formed through a treaty process. Thus, representatives of national governments, who are in turn influenced by powerful national organizations and citizens, are charged with representing their nation’s interests in the treaty process. The country’s political and economic elite, particularly in developing countries, have begun to promote participation in regional trade agreements as a means through which export- and foreign investment policies will replace import substitution as the path of economic growth and stability.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, public policy leaders who stand to benefit from such policies may promote them, stating that such practices will promote aggregate economic well-being. The exclusion of the majority of a nation’s citizens from the decision to prepare the country for entry into a regional agreement, as well as their perception that their sector has experienced the negative effects which stem from their country’s participation in a regional organization may result in the formation of a social movement protesting these changes.

Another issue involved in the formation of regional agreements is the notion of social insurance. By entering into a regional organization, a country may severely restrict its ability to provide social insurance to its citizens. The reduction of social insurance is particularly dangerous because the government’s guarantee of insurance has aided its liberalization process by maintaining the “social cohesion” and domestic political support necessary for such reforms to occur.\textsuperscript{14} Through a variety of fiscal tools, governments have been able and have been expected to insulate certain sectors from market risks. By participating in a regional organization, a country’s ability to use its fiscal tools to protect

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 342.
\textsuperscript{14} Rodrik, 6.
and insulate certain sectors may be restricted or prohibited. The government’s inability to
insulate certain groups may make its participation in regional trade agreements unpopular
among certain sectors. As integration increases, certain sectors, such as small farmers,
may be increasingly dependent upon their government’s social insurance; however,
economic integration often entails “receding governments” and “diminished social
obligations,” leaving these sectors vulnerable and discontent.¹⁵

The changes in a government’s ability to protect domestic norms and maintain
social insurance pose serious threats to the future of international economic integration.
First, failure to address these questions may lead to an overwhelming lack of support for
participation in such agreements. In such an environment, countries may reverse earlier
decisions to participate in regional economic agreements and revert to protectionist
economic measures. Another real possibility is that participation in international
economic agreements may “solidify a new set of class divisions,” and that society will be
divided between those who benefit and those who lose from participation in regional
agreements.¹⁶ Social disintegration is a very real threat, and a failure to address this
possibility may harm the process of regional integration.

Recent changes in the nature of globalization and economic integration must also
be examined if governments hope to address the conditions which threaten to create
socially divisive situations. Unlike the 19th century, international labor mobility in
today’s market is not faced with as many restrictions. Presently, governments must
address the difference between mobile and immobile “natural” capital and policies which

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.
¹⁶ Ibid., 6.
will work to the benefit of both. Groups with higher levels of mobility and skills are able to flourish within the global market, whereas groups with limited levels of mobility and a lower skill set are unable to effectively compete within the world market. While globalization in the 1890’s involved trading “noncompeting products,” today’s system involves direct competition between goods which are identical or similar in nature. Also, governments today are also expected to provide their citizens with a certain level of social-welfare. Although governments were not expected to perform in this capacity during the 19th century, in many developed and in some developing countries governments are expected to provide a social safety net which cares for citizens’ needs in areas such as employment opportunities or medical care. The change in the process of globalization and the roles that individual governments are expected to play complicates a country’s participation in international economic agreements, and countries must carefully evaluate their participation in light of these changing expectations and responsibilities.

When examining potential sources of conflict within a country due to its participation in a regional agreement and trade’s effect on domestic norms and institutions, it is important to consider the mechanisms which countries may use to prevent and resolve such conflict. Countries should question the legitimacy and fairness of domestic norms and the economic policies which stem from their participation in regional trade agreements. By doing so, countries can determine whether the practices involved in integration are allied with their domestic values and institutions, and from there they can work to formulate an effective response. One potentially dangerous

---

17 Ibid., 8.
18 Ibid., 8.
19 Ibid., 9.
response to social protest is the extensive use of protectionism, which hinders the project of economic integration. According to scholar Dani Rodrik, fair trade and trade restrictions can only be considered if they will protect the values and institutions of the home country, and can never be used to impose one country’s norms on another.20 If certain social groups protest or express their discontent to the government, the government may institute trade restrictions to protect its country’s values and institutions. Thus, if a country such as Mexico determines that trade and economic integration violate its norms and values it may erect trade restrictions insofar as such barriers protect their home values. In this way, governments can erect certain restrictions which will help them satisfy the demands of social groups which perceive themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional economic integration.

Economic integration is oftentimes easier among countries with shared norms and domestic institutions. However, although shared characteristics provide the foundation for countries to deepen their integration, it also makes it difficult for them to implement social policies which are different from those of their trade partners. As integration depends, governments face the difficult task of simultaneously participating in economic integration and managing their social system’s needs and demands. Rodrik’s discussion of this balance is particularly interesting as he acknowledges that countries cannot simply accept trade liberalization without considering the specific policies and needs of their individual country. While economists see integration as an opportunity to increase everyone’s share of the economic pie, he acknowledges that there are both economic and social costs entailed in liberalization.21 Even though trade restrictions may not be the best

---

20 Ibid., 38.
21 Ibid., 48.
solution, they are one channel that countries can utilize to protect their institutions and values. However, Rodrik cautions that although countries have a legitimate need to be concerned about their domestic norms and institutions, they must find a way to maintain their national values without using blanket protectionism.

Although international trade has grown noticeably since the conclusion of World War II, thus far major social dislocations or significant opposition has not arisen in those countries with advanced industrial capabilities. However, as regional trade agreements begin to incorporate developing countries, it remains to be seen whether a significant movement will arise in response to economic integration. In this new form of globalization, developing countries are “perhaps even more exposed than the advanced industrial countries,” and citizens in developing countries are sharply divided into groups which benefit from globalization and those who are excluded from such benefits. Will an “embedded liberalism,” in which the governments provide the social funding needed to cushion certain sectors from the effects of free trade, arise? Economic integration is a dangerous project which “highlights and exacerbates tensions among groups.” Rodrik cautions that “If [tensions are] not handled well, then, the social pressures unleashed by global economic integration will likely result in bad economics and bad governance.” Economic integration must work to politically and socially engage these diverse groups, as these are the tools which allow a variety of distinct groups to work together as a community. Failure to do so may create a social reaction which, if it has significant levels of support, may generate significant change in government policies.

---

22 Ibid., 70.
23 Ibid., 70.
24 Ibid., 69.
In an era where national borders have become extremely porous, nations are faced with the difficult task of balancing economic liberalization while maintaining domestic stability. However, our policy choices, according to Keynes, should not be limited to a choice between protectionism or Marxist socialism. Imaginative responses, particularly from international economists, need to be formulated if we hope to create a set of policies which ensure that regional economic practices establish a social system which is inclusive, rather than divisive. While economists can refute the false arguments oftentimes used to dismiss economic integration and globalization as harmful, they can also formulate creative responses.

To engender support, it is important that politicians do not simply state that domestic economic reforms are necessary to maintain their country’s competitiveness. Using competitiveness as the basis for reform erodes domestic support for participation in international trade. Rather, politicians should explain why the reforms are taking place, and how these reforms will be good and beneficial for the country and its citizenry. Explaining reforms in this manner will help a country’s citizens gain a better understanding of the important issues and will facilitate public discussion and debate on the topic. When discussing trade restrictions, which may be used on the basis of fairness, countries must ensure that the norms which they are professing to uphold are widely held and have broad support at home. While a country may legitimately use the fairness argument to employ trade restrictions which uphold its own norms, it would be considered coercive for these countries to use trade restrictions to pressure other countries to change their domestic norms.
While deep integration and convergence among willing countries is possible, there must also be provisions for selective disengagement. Well-specified “breathing room” will provide countries with the space they need to satisfy their domestic requirements, especially if their domestic norms and institutions are not in full alignment with liberal trade practices.25 Nations may employ trade restrictions not because they are concerned about competition, but because they are concerned about the conflict between liberalized trade practices and domestic social norms and values. However, if a country is to employ trade restrictions, the member countries of an organization must agree upon a detailed process which nations must complete before such barriers can be erected. While import-competing groups are typically the most vocal groups concerning arguments about trade restrictions, it is important that all economic groups with a country are heard. A debate which is truly public will help determine whether protectionist measures are in the country’s best interest, and will provide legitimacy to their decision if they do indeed decide to enact trade barriers to protect their domestic norms.

In an era when countries are working to economically integrate their goods, services, and capital in regional agreements, it is important that countries take into account the changes in their traditional practices and values. As economic integration increases, especially among developing countries, it is important that we remember that trade liberalization and globalization “[are] not occurring in a vacuum.”26 Although changes in the fields of communication and transportation mean that a country’s economy is exposed to the international market in new and unexpected ways, thereby making it difficult for policymakers to protect certain sectors, it is important to evaluate

25 Ibid., 82.
26 Ibid., 85.
the ways in which a country may help these sectors participate in regional economic agreements without creating a socially divisive environment. While there is limited data available depicting “which domestic groups support regional trade agreements,” as well as “whose interests these agreements serve,” by looking at the social reactions to the formation of regional agreements we can examine who perceives themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional integration.27 Economic integration hopes to increase market access and spread economic growth throughout a given country or region; however, governments must plan for those groups which may be negatively impacted by the process of regional integration, specifically in regards to the changes in the government’s ability to insulate and provide for certain sectors. Although political and economic leaders believe that regional integration is ultimately an important and beneficial process, they must also take care to ensure that economic integration does not lead to social disintegration. Failure to account for the changes in the nature of globalization and the role of the state may create a system of globalization which is socially divisive and which leads to the emergence of social protests among certain groups. The challenge for countries involved in regional organizations is to increase integration without destroying the foundation of social cooperation; however, until we gain a fuller understanding of the policy changes made in countries preparing for regional integration, as well as those who perceive themselves to be excluded from the benefits of integration, it will be difficult to implement policies which promote both economic and social integration.

27 Mansfield, 344.
Chapter 3

To best understand the conditions which led to the rise of social movements in reaction to the formation of regional trade agreements, it is important to examine the changes in institutions and values within Mexico and Argentina. As these two countries prepared to become members of NAFTA and MERCOSUR, both underwent extensive changes. Beginning in the late 1980s, when dialogue on the formation of regional organizations began for these two countries, they began to prepare for membership by implementing changes in their economic and political structure. Even though these economic and political changes were made to prepare their countries for participation in a regional organization, obtaining an understanding of the changes which occurred at the national level is critical. Although the social movements formed in Mexico and Argentina denounce the involvement of their countries in regional trade agreements, they are reacting to the changes in national institutions and values. Therefore, it is important to understand what the members of these social movements perceive as changes in national institutions, as their movements were formed to counteract the perceived negative effects of these policy changes.

During the 1980’s, the economic and political systems of Mexico and Argentina were focused inwards. After the conclusion of World War II, Latin American countries adopted the inward-oriented import-substitution industrialization policies, believing that closing their markets to the world economy would provide them with the opportunity to develop away from the influence of powerful developed countries. Therefore, beginning in the early 1950’s, Latin American countries supported government efforts aimed at
regulating the effects of the international economy and fostering the growth of domestic industries. These economic and political policies were the institutional norm for nearly thirty years; however, by the 1980’s Latin American countries were described as having “inefficient governments, overregulation, and a highly protected economy.”28 It was not until the mid- to late-1980’s that Latin American countries began to recognize the limitations of their economic and political isolation, and began to look for opportunities to enhance their economic and political participation in the international arena. As they began to reassess their position within the world political and economic order, a “natural outcome,” both Mexico and Argentina began to prepare their countries to successfully compete within their regions.29 Consequently, beginning in the late 1980’s and the early 1990’s, these two countries began to introduce “far-reaching unilateral liberalization measures” and examine ways in which their countries could enter into the growing regional and world economy.

**Mexico**

On January 1, 1994, NAFTA went into effect, and counted Mexico as one of its three member countries. However, the discussions and policies formulated to prepare Mexico to become a part of NAFTA began many years prior. Mexico began dialogue with the U.S. concerning the formation of a regional trade agreement in 1988; however, at this point in time, Mexico’s economic woes made participation in such an agreement difficult. Conversely, in March of 1990, Mexico’s president Carlos Salinas believed that

---


29 Ibid., 288.
the formation of a regional trade agreement would be an important economic step forward for Mexico. Thus, Salinas opened negotiations between Mexico and the U.S., believing that regional integration would attract foreign investment and promote economic growth for his country.

Although Salinas presided over NAFTA’s implementation in Mexico, the changes made to prepare Mexico for entry into a regional agreement began far earlier. In 1982, the price of petroleum plummeted and international interest rates began to rise, prompting Mexico to look for alternatives to the inward-oriented, import substitution industrialization model. Under the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid, Mexico’s political leaders began to open up their country to the outside. By doing so, Madrid began government efforts aimed at developing a manufacturing export sector.30

With the discovery of oil, President Portillo began a fiscal expansion, rather than a contraction. During this period, government spending levels and the number of government-owned firms increased markedly as Portillo anticipated enormous oil profits. While the number of state-owned firms was below 300 between 1950 and 1970, by 1982 there were 1,155, and by 1983 over eighteen percent of Mexico’s GDP came from state-owned firms.31 The government owned the national oil company, PEMEX, the Aeromexico and Mexicana airlines, the national telephone company, and many other entities. Believing that Mexico’s economic boom would continue, Portillo increased spending levels dramatically.

However, Portillo’s economic expansion came to an end, and the end of Mexico’s economic boom placed the country in a precarious position. Beginning in 1981, oil prices fell and U.S. real interest rates rose, overvaluing Mexico’s exchange rate and leading to capital flight. By 1982, Portillo devalued the peso by 260 percent, converted bank deposits which were in dollars into pesos, and put a moratorium on foreign debt payments in an attempt to stabilize the exchange rate. However, the heavy level of government intervention into the economy was seen as a negative sign by foreign investors, leading to an inflation rate of 100 percent and a decline of over eight percent in GDP for 1982 and 1983. Mexico’s dependency on the continuation of oil profits was interrupted, and it became apparent that liberalizing the country’s economic structure and limiting the accumulation of foreign debt were necessary steps if Mexico hoped to participate in the world market.

Near the end of 1982, President De la Madrid came into office and was tasked with the responsibility of reforming Mexico’s economic structures. Although De la Madrid’s practice of tight monetary and fiscal policy reduced the annual inflation rate by thirty-five points, GDP growth slowed as De la Madrid cut government spending programs and transferred six percent of the country’s GDP towards foreign debt payments. However, De la Madrid railed to eliminate the causes of the inflation, and by 1986 the annual inflation rate had returned to the previous levels experienced under Portillo. The Mexican government did not have a fully open market, and the government limited foreign ownership and continued to control the banking sector. Despite these failings, between 1985 and 1987 an earthquake, further drops in oil prices, and a stock market crash...
market crash provided Mexico with another opportunity to address its economic infrastructure and prepare for its entrance into regional trade agreements.

At the end of 1987, De la Madrid signed what is commonly known as the *Pacto*, referring to the Pact for Economic Solidarity. Under President Salinas, an additional component of the *Pacto*, known as the Pact for Stability and Economic Growth, was signed with labor, farming, and business sectors. The *Pacto* is an example of the social programs and spending that Mexico implemented in an attempt to mitigate the transition from a closed to an open economic structure. The *Pacto* provided Mexico with the steps needed to initially tighten its fiscal and monetary policy while working to control wages and prices, and had the goal of eventually leading to deregulation and privatization.

The *Pacto* provided for the privatization of state enterprises, another important step in opening up Mexico’s economy to free-market forces. While Mexico had nearly 1,155 state enterprises when the *Pacto* was implemented, by 1994 nearly 940 of these state-owned enterprises were privatized.\(^{35}\) As a result, expenditures attributed to state-owned enterprises fell dramatically, and by 1994 they amounted to only 9.6 percent of Mexico’s GDP.\(^{36}\) Mexico has also reformed and simplified its tax system in 1989, and tax revenue increased by roughly 30 percent during the early 1990’s.\(^{37}\) The fiscal deficit fell to less than one percent of GDP, a dramatic decline from its 1987 levels of 16 percent, government spending fell by nearly twenty percentage points to 26.3 percent of GDP, and inflation fell to an annual rate of seven percent.\(^{38}\)

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 7.
In addition to the reforms made to public finance and government spending, important changes regarding the liberalization of Mexico’s financial system were also made. In 1988, compulsory bank reserve requirements and mandatory credit to state-owned enterprise were abolished, thereby creating financial resources available for privately owned companies. In addition to the liberalization of reserve requirements, between 1991 and 1992 Mexico privatized all state-owned banks, ended many of the controls on foreign capital, and authorized the entry of foreign banks and brokerage houses into Mexico’s market, extending over fifty licenses to a variety of banks and firms.

Another important step was the liberalization of trade. While Mexico began the process of trade liberalization in 1985, the process did not gain momentum until 1988. In 1988, discussion began regarding the possibility of a regional trade agreement between Mexico and the United States, and it is this discussion which may have cemented Mexico’s commitment to trade liberalization. By 1992, the share of imports covered by import permits fell to two percent from previous levels of one-hundred percent in 1983.\textsuperscript{39} In 1986 Mexico formally entered the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which was important preparation for its eventual accession to NAFTA.

In addition to liberalizing its trade practices, Mexico also experienced significant changes in its monetary and exchange rate policy. As part of the \textit{Pacto}, Mexico established a fixed exchange rate in which the peso’s value was tied to that of the U.S. dollar. However, a fixed exchange rate limits the monetary tools available to a country when faced with a financial crisis; thus, in 1991, Mexico widened the band in which the exchange rate was allowed to float, thereby beginning the transition from a fixed to a

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}, 8.
managed float exchange rate. While this band rose remarkably, Mexico experienced strong pressure from international investors and exchange markets to value the peso at its true market value, and in 1994 the peso was allowed to float freely. Therefore, Mexico’s abandonment of its fixed exchange rate policy allowed it to gain the confidence of international investors and increased the monetary tools available at its disposal, even though critics stated that it hurt Mexico’s ability to reduce its inflation rates.

While Mexico experienced significant changes in its economic policies under the leadership of President Salinas, important political changes were also made during this period. One of the major changes instituted by Salinas was the revision of Article 27 in Mexico’s Constitution implemented on February 27, 1992. The revision of the article changed Mexico’s land policy significantly, effectively ending Mexico’s policy of land distribution. The original article included in the Constitution of 1917 allowed Mexico’s citizens to petition Mexico’s Ministry of Agrarian Reform, which would redistribute land which was not being used to communal ejidos. The community would retain control over the ejidos as long as the land was being used for production or was lived on. However, the revision of Article 27 ended this long-held tradition of land distribution by allowing peasants to sell their ejidos holdings and by loosening restrictions on the purchase of land by foreigners and corporations. For Mexico’s small farmers and indigenous population, the revision of Article 27 was seen as a major change in the country’s norms and institutions.

The changes occurring in Mexico’s economy in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s signaled a major shift in the country’s “economic paradigm.”40 The economic and political decisions made during this era involved significant alterations in the country’s

40 Ibid., 11.
economic and political norms and institutions. These changes signal the possibility of a growth in political and social opposition, especially from groups who feel betrayed or excluded by the policy changes and the accompanying distribution of benefits. In previous decades, Mexico had established a political and economic order which focused on developing its domestic economy without the assistance or involvement of the powerful United States; however, Mexico’s economic and political liberalization culminated with its entry into NAFTA. The social movements formed in reaction to Mexico’s accession to NAFTA provide important clues regarding how these institutional changes were viewed, and it is important to understand these movements in order to comprehend why certain social groups perceive themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional trade agreements, and how they react in such situations.

**Argentina**

On March 26, 1991, Argentina signed the Tratado de Asuncion along with Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay. By signing this treaty, these four countries from the Southern Cone region agreed to the formation of a regional organization by the end of 1994, and established a schedule of tariffs reduction with the goal of eliminating them completely. Although Argentina made an important commitment to economic integration through its participation in the treaty, its program of economic reform and liberalization began long before in an effort to prepare the country for participation in a regional organization.

Beginning in 1988, Argentina began to open its economy to the outside world. Argentina’s movement towards openness and integration was fueled by the dialogue that it began with its neighbor, Brazil, regarding economic integration and cooperation. In
1986, the conversation between the two countries resulted in the November 30, 1985 signing of the Acta de Buenos Aires and the November 29, 1988 signing of the Tratado de Integración. Scholars have described these two agreements as pressure points which increased the urgency and necessity of domestic economic reform if Argentina hoped to successfully participate in an economic agreement with its neighbors. These two agreements symbolized the commitment of both Argentina and Brazil to shift away from inward-oriented economic policies and towards policies of liberalization and economic integration.

However, Argentina’s commitment to economic integration would lead it to make many important economic changes. As Argentina began to look towards the creation of a regional economic organization, it also began to implement changes at the national level. Neoliberal economic practices were implemented in an effort to prepare Argentina for entry into a regional organization, and these new policies were oftentimes remarkable changes from the national norms and values held by past regimes. The election of President Carlos Menem ushered in a new era in which neoliberal economic policies were introduced, to the chagrin of various social groups. For Argentina’s political and economic leaders, not unlike Mexico’s, liberalization and economic integration were viewed as the policies and tools which would provide the country with the opportunity to develop.

Spurred by its agreements with Brazil, beginning in 1988 Argentina began to implement far-reaching changes to prepare itself for participation in an regional economic agreement. The path of economic liberalization and reform followed by

---

Mexico served as an example to Argentina, which followed Mexico’s lead in implementing many of its economic reforms. Argentina and Mexico made a significant commitment to reduce both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, and implemented fixed exchange rates. Both countries saw the implementation of a fixed exchange rate as a policy needed to stabilize their domestic economies and successfully establish economic ties to the international financial community, such as through regional trade agreements.

In the late 1980’s, Argentina’s economic indicators showed that the country’s economy was in a state of crisis. In 1989, the inflation rate was 5000 percent, and thirteen of the 400 state-owned companies, which amounted to seven percent of the country’s GDP and over twenty percent of the country’s total gross investment, posted losses of four billion dollars (US) in 1989.42 Thus, it became clear that the large government role in state-owned enterprises and policies was not promoting the country’s economic growth. Although this crisis was pressing, the 1989 election of President Carlos Menem presented an opportunity for change. After entering office Menem began to enact a series of reforms designed to prepare Argentina for entrance into the regional and world market. Menem “seized the opportunity act against long held preferences for state ownership in Argentina.”43 By the end of 1989 Argentina passed two laws, known as the Economic Emergency Law and the State Reform Law, both of which allowed the Argentine government to begin the privatization process.

Under Menem’s rule, the two laws passed allowed Argentina to rapidly privatize government-owned firms. Consequently, Argentina began selling state-owned enterprises such as airlines, oil companies, banks, and telecommunications. Through the privatization

42 Ibid., 341.
43 Ibid., 341.
of state-owned firms, the Argentine government made a profit of ten billion dollars; however, the privatization of state enterprises had several flaws and attracted a large amount of public criticism.\textsuperscript{44} During the process of privatization, Argentina was also struggling with high rates of unemployment. Although government-owned firms only amounted to three percent of the country’s total employment, many Argentines blamed the privatization process for the country’s unemployment woes.\textsuperscript{45} Menem was also criticized because many firms were not sold to the highest bidder and because the state failed to create a regulatory framework which would prevent the formation of monopolies. Presently, foreign companies and investors control the majority of assets and technological inputs of these newly privatized entities, which has also exacerbated public discontent with the privatization process among Argentines.

Menem’s reforms have been described by scholars as “nothing short of a revolution,” and under his leadership Argentina has implemented the most extensive economic reforms in the country’s history.\textsuperscript{46} While Peron had established a welfare state in the 1940’s, Menem’s economic policies represented a radical departure, and he changed many of Argentina’s economic norms and institutions. The foreign control of major firms, technology, and market information created an economic structure in which small and medium-sized firms had limited access to these economic tools, thereby making their participation in Argentina’s new market economy extremely difficult. In addition to their limited access to technology and market information, limited credit availability also hindered their market participation. Whereas large firms paid interest rates ranging from eight to ten percent on business loans, small firms faced interest

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 341.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 342.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 343.
payments which were significantly higher, ranging from fifteen to thirty-two percent.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, the economic policies implemented to prepare Argentina for entrance into the regional and world market created a structure in which small and medium-sized firms found it difficult to compete against large, foreign-owned firms.

While Menem’s liberal economic practices made it difficult for small firms to compete in open market structure, income distribution also worsened. Specifically, tensions arose regarding the distribution of funding between the central government of Buenos Aires and Argentina’s provinces. Even though the Argentine government increased provincial funding between 1990 and 1995, the start of the economic recession in 1995 led to dramatic cuts in government spending in the provinces.\textsuperscript{48} The deficit in the provinces climbed to three billion dollars, and although the provinces were excluded from Menem’s early privatization efforts, the provinces began to privatize their banks and limit local borrowing in an attempt to resolve their deficit.\textsuperscript{49} However, many of these economic reforms hit the small agricultural producers and firms centered in Argentina’s provinces quite hard. Although Argentina has a population of roughly thirty-seven million, over eighty-eight percent of the population is urban.\textsuperscript{50} The majority of this population is centered in the region around the capital of Buenos Aires, and which is known as Grand Buenos Aires, which is seen as the center of the country’s economic and political power. During the process of neoliberal economic reform and the movement towards regionalism, the provinces felt excluded and discounted from political dialogue and debate regarding these manners. Thus, when the provinces and small farmers began

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 342.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 345.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 345.
\textsuperscript{50} Nicola Phillips, \textit{The Southern Cone Model: The Political Economy of Regional Capitalist Development in Latin America} (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.
to feel as though they were also economically excluded from the benefits of regionalism, many provinces witnessed the formation of social movements in protest of these politics and their effects.

Although Menem enacted sweeping economic changes with the belief that these policies would encourage the growth of Argentina’s economy, as the local level “social tension percolated.”\textsuperscript{51} Argentina did not enact safety net programs to protect its citizens from the distributional effects of economic reforms, choosing instead to follow the course established by privatization efforts and Cavallo’s Convertibility Plan. Despite the support that such reforms enjoyed among the Argentine elite, the poor and rural population began to protest the effects of these changes. The unprecedented use of executive power to enact many of the economic reforms made allowed the elite to make sweeping decisions, which may have come at the expense of some of Argentina’s citizens. Charges of corruption and mismanagement mounted, particularly in regards to the executive power used by Menem. While the previous Alfonsin administration used only eight “necessity and urgency” decrees, Menem passed over 12,000 executive decrees and 308 decrees of “necessity and urgency.”\textsuperscript{52} These executive and urgent decrees were used to enact the core of Menem’s economic reforms, leading many citizens, particularly the poor, to feel as though they were excluded from the decision-making process as well as the benefits of reform.

\textsuperscript{51} Pastor Jr., 345.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 346.
Economic Liberalization and Integration

The economic changes undergone in Mexico and Argentina during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s were extensive and signaled their countries commitment to participation in the second wave of regionalism and economic integration. However, the danger of such far-reaching reforms is that they will be politically unpopular and generate social unrest among Mexicans and Argentines. Scholars studying the movement towards economic liberalization and integration caution that:

“Political commitment to liberal economic reforms in Latin America has been critical in the process thus far. The economic and ideological shift that has occurred in the last few years in Latin America is without historical precedent. The countries need to continue with these reforms while at the same time developing institutional mechanisms that help to consolidate these changes.”53

Therefore, as Mexico and Argentina look forward to their full participation in regional trade agreements, they must carefully examine whether they enjoy the domestic support needed to consolidate economic integration without creating social disintegration. While certain sectors of society may find the adjustment costs resulting from the shift towards such policies to be unfavorable, political and economic leaders must constantly discern whether these costs promote economic integration as the expense of social integration. It is imperative that policy leaders examine their public support, or lacks thereof, to ensure that a majority of their citizens are committed to these reforms and experience the benefits of participation in a regional organization.

53 Nogues, 293.
Chapter Four

When NAFTA went into effect on January 1, 1994, a movement known as the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) proclaimed war on Mexico’s government. Centered in the southern Mexican State of Chiapas, the Zapatistas chose to emerge on New Years Day because “the free trade treaty is the death certificate for the ethnic peoples of Mexico.”

The occupation of San Cristóbal by five hundred members of the EZLN successfully attracted international and national attention to the social reaction, and the Zapatistas hoped that with the formation of their movement, “the whole neo-liberal project that Carlos Salinas represents is put in jeopardy.”

By gaining control of San Cristóbal, the EZLN planned to challenge the significant economic and political changes which the Salinas administration had made to prepare Mexico for participation in NAFTA.

President Salinas saw Mexico’s entrance into NAFTA as a positive opportunity for his country’s citizens. For Salinas, NAFTA was an invitation to participate in a regional organization which promised to boost his country’s economic performance, thereby allowing it to become a first world country. Mexico struggled economically during the late 1980’s and the early 1990’s, and a regional agreement with economically stable countries such as the United States and Canada provided an avenue through which Mexico could pursue sustainable economic growth. However, as the reaction formulated by the Zapatistas highlighted, certain sectors within Mexico believed that they were excluded from and were harmed by the changes their country had undergone in

55 Ibid., 21.
preparation for entering NAFTA. The challenges issued by the Zapatistas demonstrated that Mexico’s attempt to transition from a third to a first world country through its participation in NAFTA would be a difficult and painful process.

Changes in National Norms and Institutions

Throughout the 1980’s, Mexico’s political system was controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). During the mid- and late1980’s, Presidents Portillo, de la Madrid, and Salinas implemented a variety of neoliberal economic and political policies which departed from the institutional norms and practices established nearly eighty years prior, and it was these extensive changes which led to the formation of the EZLN. Although all three administrations made extensive economic reforms, the combination of the economic and political reforms made during the Salinas administration solidified the creation of the Zapatistas. In 1989, President Salinas announced the implementation of his “Reform of the Countryside” program, and in 1992, the New Agrarian Law reformed Article 27 of Mexico’s Constitution. This reform allowed the privatization of communal lands, known as ejidos, and facilitated Mexico’s transition from a state-centered corporatist to a market-oriented economic system. While the loss of agricultural subsidies and other neoliberal economic changes were painful, the revision of Constitutional Article 27 has been singled out by Subcomandante Marcos, the EZLN spokesperson, as the “detonating factor” which led the Zapatistas to emerge in public space.56 Believing that only the Mexican elite have benefited from these policies, and that the nation’s indigenous and rural populations have largely been excluded, the

56 Ibid., 241.
Zapatistas established a movement which sought to reform the outward-oriented land and trade policies adopted by Salinas, specifically focusing on Article 27.

**Life in Chiapas: The Peasant and Indigenous Experience**

Mexico has a large indigenous population, and nearly forty percent of Latin America’s indigenous population is concentrated within Mexico.\(^{57}\) The State of Chiapas is known as “Mexico Profundo,” or Deep Mexico, as it is removed from the urban centers of political and economic power in Mexico City. Social and economic indicators establish a grim portrait of life in Chiapas, where malnutrition rates are high and life expectancy rates are five years shorter than those of non-Indians.\(^{58}\) Of the fifteen million Mexicans who live in conditions of extreme poverty, the majority are concentrated in one of Mexico’s 803 municipalities in which the population is predominately indigenous.\(^{59}\) The State of Chiapas has roughly 3.2 million inhabitants, one-third of which are indigenous.\(^{60}\) Chiapas is divided into eight sections, and the state’s one million indigenous inhabitants are concentrated in Los Altos and the Lacondon, two of Chiapas’ poorest sections. Even within this remote southern state, there are marked disparities between the indigenous and non-indigenous population, and these disparities have contributed to tension between the elite and the non-elite.

---

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 58.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 71.
Organizing Resistance

On November 17, 1993, NAFTA was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, which signaled to Mexico and the international community that its passage was imminent. Although “many Mexicans have welcomed NAFTA as an undisguised blessing,” within Chiapas, the indigenous and peasant populations regarded NAFTA as an unwelcome death sentence.61 While the Salinas administration disseminated pro-NAFTA propaganda throughout Mexico, emphasizing that NAFTA was the gateway to economic prosperity, scholars warned that in the short term, policies associated with NAFTA “may only exacerbate the country’s already stark disparities and dislocations.”62

Although the Zapatistas first attracted widespread national and international attention starting in 1994, the grievances claimed by the indigenous and farming population of Chiapas stretch back over nearly 500 years. The struggle for land control began under the leadership of Emiliano Zapata, a peasant leader who worked for land reform during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Believing that Mexico’s rural population was discounted by the land-owning elite and the Mexican government, the early Zapatistas fought to gain control of land and to reform the political, social, and economic structures which inhibited their livelihoods and well-being.

The influence which Emiliano Zapata exerts on the modern-day Zapatistas is unmistakable, and the EZLN follows the important example he set during his leadership of the Mexican Revolution. Beginning in 1909, Zapata was elected president of the Anenecuilco village council, and although it was a small position, he began to organize

---

62 Ibid., 48.
citizens into parties which opposed the official government parties. In addition to organizing party opposition, Zapata also began organizing peasants in his home state of Morelos to help them gain access to land. During this period several land disputes occurred, and in 1910 Zapata and eighty armed man occupied disputed land in order to resolve the conflict. This initial occupation strengthened Zapata’s interest in land reform, and in November 1911, Zapata and Otilio Montaño worked together to write the Plan of Ayala. The Plan was important because it demanded land and water rights; however, the call for land was revolutionary because it “called not only for the return of property stolen by the haciendas but also for the expropriation of additional lands from the haciendas to give to landless peasants.” In addition to the Plan of Ayala, Zapata and his co-leaders declared themselves to be in rebellion against the government of Madero. During the Mexican Revolution, roughly two million citizens, or twelve percent of Mexico’s population of fifteen million, died during this struggle for access to land and other basic resources. However, this decade-long revolution was ultimately successful in its fight to establish peasant and indigenous access to land.

Zapata’s efforts at land reform were influential within Mexico and his views were reflected in the new Constitution of 1917. In Article 27 of the new constitution, the government established the right to ejidos, or community-owned lands which were available for peasants to work and inhabit. The constitution also established guidelines for land reform, stating that land holdings greater than 100 hectares of good quality or

64 Ibid., 37.
65 Ibid., 39.
200 hectares of poor quality would be redistributed. Although Zapata and his followers were disappointed that the land reform enacted was not more extensive, the constitutional changes were an important step forward in the peasants’ quest for land. However, Zapata’s efforts were ended when he was assassinated on President Venustiano Carranza’s orders, and his death silenced a major threat to the established political, economic, and social order within Mexico. Despite his assassination, the formation of ejidos and the constitutional right to communal lands were established, and as a result over 70 million hectares of land have been distributed to about three million peasants.

The Formation of the EZLN

It was ultimately the example set by Emiliano Zapata and his followers which encouraged the emergence of the modern-day Zapatistas. Described as “the most revered hero of the Mexican Revolution” and as a visionary, Zapata’s banner has deeply influenced the formation of the EZLN. The indigenous population of Chiapas believed that they were excluded from real political and economic power and that government policies and the divide between landowners and peasant workers tended to dehumanize the indigenous population. Therefore, in 1983 the modern-day Zapatistas were established, and began to organize and mobilize support among the indigenous population of Chiapas. The long history of exclusion of the indigenous population was evident by the poor social indices in Chiapas, which when compared to other Mexican

---

66 Ibid., 153.
67 Ibid., xxviii.
68 Castañeda, 44.
states, revealed that it had the highest rates of adult illiteracy, overcrowded housing, and lack of basic services such as electricity.⁶⁹

In 1983, the EZLN was formed by three members deep in the Lacandón Jungle. Although the organization of the Zapatista movement is largely shrouded in secrecy, several details have emerged which have led scholars to conclude that “these were not just a ragtag group of aggrieved and rebellious peasants.”⁷⁰ In spite of their limited financial resources:

“the several thousand fighters were undoubtedly part of a well-defined and coordinated structure, with a single command and a consistent political discourse. Their organizational capacity and logistics in communication, public relations, and military tactics and strategy revealed a group with years of preparation, and that included well-trained cadres and instructors.”⁷¹

The organizations and parties which formed what is now known as the EZLN emerged during the 1960’s and 1970’s. During this period, revolutionary groups such as the Fuerzas de Liberacion Nacional (FLN) were formed to protect peasants from the violent and repressive attacks conducted by large landowners and Mexico’s government. In 1982, the FLN began to network with similar organizations, such as the Union de Ejidos Tierra y Libertad and the Brigada Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata.⁷² In 1983, the violence practiced against peasants and the indigenous population escalated under the leadership of Governor Dominguez, a retired army general. The increase in violence led to the formation of the EZLN on November 16, 1983 as six leaders from Northern Mexico emerged to unite groups such as the FLN and other recruited guerrilleros.⁷³

---

⁷⁰ Castañeda, 79.
this moment, the variety of organizations and individuals working for peasant rights and protection formed the EZLN.

Even though the Zapatistas represent the peasants, in Chiapas the formation of the EZLN by non-indigenous peoples was problematic for the organization’s legitimacy. In its earliest stages, the EZLN began to organize itself militarily; however, if the organization hoped to expand to a larger audience, it would need to establish a broad base of popular support within the Lacandón Jungle. Thus, the early leaders of the EZLN formed an organizational structure which was egalitarian and communitarian in nature in order to form a strong base of population support among the indigenous population.74 The indigenous population formed the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committees (CCRIs), organizations which ordered the voice of the indigenous community. There were at least four CCRIs spread throughout Chiapas, and these community organizations were headed by the CCRI General Command, which worked to incorporate the voices of each committee. The CCRIs played a critical role in determining the support and growth of EZLN policies, as the EZLN leadership had to consult and involve its indigenous social base in its decisions and actions.

In particular, scholars have been intrigued by the Zapatista’s military organization. While there have been many armed revolutionary movements, the formation of the EZLN is unique because it is an armed reformist movement. While it was clear to observers that “the EZLN had more people than weapons,” the goal of the movement’s armed operations is what differentiates it from other armed movements, which frequently used military force to spark a revolution or the overthrow of

74 David Ronfeldt et al., The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico (Santa Monica, California: RAND Arroyo Center, 1998), 25.
government forces and officials. Instead of sparking a revolution, the Zapatistas hoped to transform Mexico into a true democracy which would take the voices and the well-being of all Mexican citizens into account. Even though the Zapatistas were armed, they did not depend on their arms for survival; instead, they depended on the international attention and public opinion which observed and monitored their attempts to combat the powerful Mexican army. Although the Zapatistas initially used armed force to gain control of San Cristóbal, their use of arms after the initial occupation ceased because engaging in armed resistance with government forces would be futile.

Although many of the Zapatistas were indigenous, the movement also attracted rural, non-indigenous members. Even at the highest levels of command within the organization, leaders such as Subcomandante Marcos were not indigenous, identifying himself as a “ladino,” or non-Indian. The EZLN’s supporters are divided into three categories: armed fighters, “milicianos” (aspiring armed fighters who are in training), and civilian supporters. Between 1,200 and 2,500 members of the EZLN were involved in the occupation of San Cristóbal; however, estimates place the number of total supporters at roughly 12,800. In addition to the actors directly involved in the Zapatista movement, the organization has received tremendous support from other groups within Mexico and from the international community.

Although the EZLN is organized as a system of councils and collective leadership, Subcomandante Marcos has emerged as the Zapatistas spokesperson and most visible leader. Marcos’ leadership within the organization has been criticized by many who question the leadership that a fair-skinned criollo from Mexico City’s upper class

75 Castañeda, 81.
76 Ibid., 86.
77 Ross, 285.
can offer to a movement which claims poor, indigenous farmers as its popular base. Despite the divergence in backgrounds, Marcos has been an important leader for the EZLN primarily due to his ability to communicate with ease in Spanish. Many of the movement’s followers speak one of a variety of indigenous languages, making communication among indigenous groups and with the news media and government officials difficult. Thus, Subcomandante Marcos, identified in 1995 by the Mexican government as Sebatián Guillén Vicente, has become the movement’s most popular figurehead. Although Marcos is a spokesperson for the movement, he is guided by collective Indian leadership; more specifically, by a directorate of Tzeltals, Tzotzils, Tojolabals, Zoques, and other Indian communities. Although these communities determined the direction of the organization, the indigenous leaders “thus far remained relatively silent and invisible,” and Marcos assumed the responsibility of communicating with the public.78

New Year’s Day: The Public Emergence of the Zapatista Movement

Prior to their occupation of San Cristóbal, there had been no mention of the Zapatista movement in the international press. Although the major U.S. newspapers focused on the potential social and economic impacts of NAFTA on both the U.S. and Mexico, the EZLN did not receive any coverage in these media outlets. Even though Mexico’s Secretary of the Interior had monitored EZLN activities beginning in 1990 and despite the fact that the Mexican government was involved in several firefights with the EZLN beginning in May of 1993, the U.S. public and political leaders had no knowledge

of the Zapatistas movement prior to New Year’s Day 1994. The assassination of Cardinal Posadas on May 24, 1993 drew attention towards Guadalajara and away from the fighting between the Mexican government and the EZLN in Chiapas.

On New Year’s Day 1994, the Zapatista Movement made its public debut, attracting the attention of national and international media and political leaders. On January 1, 1994, NAFTA went into effect in Mexico, and the Zapatistas chose this moment to begin their movement:

“The Chiapas rebellion…was largely motivated by a series of convergent trends that had been in the making for several years in Mexico: the fall in world prices for coffee (the main crop in the Chiapas highlands), the dismantling of the old price-support system, the consciousness-raising effort carried out by priests and lay workers in the area, the organizational work undertaken by agrarian semi-Maoist activists from the north, the eviction of indigenous communities from their land by cattle grazers and timber companies. None of these trends was recent; they were all set in motion some time ago. It just took time for them to come to fruition.”

Although the significant number of changes in the Mexican government’s economic and political structures, such as the alteration of Article 27, influenced the formation of the Zapatistas, it was not until Mexico made its formal entry into NAFTA that these forces would come to fruition. However, when these trends did come to fruition, they created one of the most powerful symbols of grassroots resistance to changing economic and political norms made in countries preparing for accession into regional trade agreements and organizations.

Shortly after the New Year began, both men and women began to arrive in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the capital of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Their faces covered with dark masks, the group headed to strategically valuable locations throughout the city, and marched into the 31st of March Plaza, the city’s center of economic and

---

79 Castañeda, 41.
political power. The group focused their efforts on blockading the road, controlling the city’s two gas stations, and controlling the Municipal Palace, which housed the locality’s police station. After gaining control of the police station, the group focused on blockading the square and began distributing leaflets. These leaflets declared that the group was at war against the Mexican government and labeled the Mexican Federal Army as “the basic pillar of the dictatorship under which [the Zapatistas] suffer[ed].”

Thus, the social movement known as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation began its protest of its country’s economic policies and participation in el Tratado de Libre Comercio (TLC), also known as NAFTA.

After gaining control of the city, the Zapatistas read the Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle, a document detailing the exploitation of Mexico’s indigenous peoples throughout the country’s history. One of the main goals of the EZLN was to force the resignation of President Carlos Salinas, the man they deemed responsible for the neoliberal economic and constitutional reforms. The EZLN believed that the reforms instituted by Salinas exacerbated the precarious economic, social, and political situation of the indigenous peoples. In fact, the EZLN’s leaders summarized their demands in eleven words: “trabajo, tierra, techo, pan, salud, educación, democracia, libertad, paz, independencia, y justicia (work, land, shelter, bread, health, education, democracy, liberty, peace, independence, and justice).”

Although Salinas offered a ceasefire to the EZLN on January 6, the EZLN never responded to his offer. Instead, they chose to quietly return to their base in the Lacandón Jungle. However, in February 1994, attempts at negotiation began between the CCRIs

---

80 Ross, 10.
81 Ross, 17.
and the designated Peace Commissioner, Manuel Camancho. In March 1994, Jornadas for Peace and Reconciliation were called by the Mexican government in an effort to promote understanding and cooperation between the Mexican government and the EZLN. Held in the cathedral of San Cristóbal, the world waited in anticipation, wondering if the EZLN and the Mexican government would be able to successfully formulate a peace agreement. The Zapatistas sent 19 delegates chosen by the CCRI to the meeting. Of the 19, twelve were political leaders within the indigenous community, and seven were involved in the movement’s military activities, including Subcommandante Marcos. Marcos became an important spokesperson for the Zapatistas due to his ability to speak Spanish; the majority of the Zapatistas spoke one of ten traditional Mayan languages, which limited their ability to communicate with government officials and ladinos.

At the meeting in San Cristóbal, the EZLN presented the government delegation with their demands in the form of a “pliego petitorio.” The Zapatistas had 34 points on their petition on which they hoped to reach an agreement with the Mexican government. The EZLN presented petitions for Salinas’s resignation, the revision of Constitutional Article 27 to return the original protections granted to ejidos, and the renegotiation of NAFTA to include provisions to protect the Mayan farmers from the cheap corn imports from the U.S. The demands made by the Zapatistas are noteworthy because they sought reformist and redistributive goals, rather than pure state power. Although the Zapatistas and the Mexican government reached a tentative agreement during the meeting, the Zapatistas could not yet fully accept the peace accords. Before doing so, they returned to the Lacandón Jungle to seek the approval of the people. This task was a daunting one which required the Zapatistas to meet with over 1,000 communities, a difficult task
considering that the peace proposal would have to be translated into a variety of indigenous languages.82

Although international observers strongly believed that the Zapatistas would accept the peace accords, by late March the CCRIs had rejected the accords. The Committee claimed that the Mexican government “had broken the cease-fire by bombing an area along the Comitán-Altamirano highway and that troop strength in Chiapas had doubled.”83 This rejection was a major setback for the Mexican government, which had depended on the acceptance of the peace accords as a key to assuage the fears of foreign investors and the U.S. Government. Despite this setback, the Salinas administration began to employ a variety of spending measures in an attempt to curry favor among the Zapatistas and bring peace to the State of Chiapas.

Social Spending: Mexico’s Response to EZLN Demands

Ultimately, the social movement formed by the Zapatistas did change the policies of the Mexican government. In an attempt to diffuse the situation in Chiapas, the Mexican government instituted a series of economic measures designed to quell the violence in Chiapas, as well as the concerns of U.S. political leaders and foreign investors. On February 10, 1994, Salinas announced that the government would increase its spending in rural areas by 78 percent, and that 55 percent of this increase would be earmarked for social projects.84 During February, Salinas also announced a 350 million dollar (U.S.) spending program which would assist over 200,000 small coffee producers throughout the production process, and during March Salinas announced the

82 Russell, 70.
83 Ibid., 71.
84 Ibid., 52.
implementation of 600 new Solidarity projects.\footnote{Ibid.,\ 52.} The federal funding for Chiapas skyrocketed, and between January and May of 1994, spending increased by 129 percent.\footnote{Ibid.,\ 73.} Spending was allocated for programs which would support small farmers producing goods such as “corn, beans, chile peppers, potatoes, cabbage, and tomatoes,” and which would also support the development of basic services such as electricity, potable water, and healthcare.\footnote{Ibid.,\ 74.} Thus, the government’s main strategy in quelling the violence in Chiapas was to increase spending and establish a safety net for its citizens.

The spending of these programs was strategically placed on the edges of areas held by the rebels. In total, the Salinas administration announced that it would spend 298 million dollars (U.S.) in Chiapas in 1994.\footnote{Ibid.,\ 85.} In addition to the millions of dollars spent on these programs, the government also pledged that it would employ workers implementing these programs seven dollars (U.S.) per day.\footnote{Ibid.,\ 84.} While the Salinas administration would not agree to a re-negotiation of NAFTA to establish terms which would protect the small farmers in Chiapas, the increase in spending in the state signaled that the government was willing to establish a social safety net for those who perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional cooperation. Specifically, Salinas gave 24 million dollars (U.S.) to small farmers through the distribution of over 120,000 checks.\footnote{Ibid.,\ 84.} The implementation of social spending programs were a success of sorts for the Zapatistas; although they were unable to agree with the government on a variety of demands, they successfully staged a social movement which captured national and international attention.
attention, and ultimately led the Mexican government to implement programs which helped alleviate the perceived negative effects of Mexico’s neoliberal economic practices and participation in NAFTA. In due course, the movement formed by the EZLN sparked a desire for change among broader segments of the population, and as teachers and municipal workers began to rebel, the Mexican government was faced with the difficult task of maintaining support for its economic and political reforms in Chiapas amidst a “general climate of civil disobedience.”

Looking Forward

By the end of 1994, the EZLN had clearly rejected the government’s offers, and the negotiated peace never materialized. The reaction formulated by the Zapatistas in response to the changes in economic and political institutions made in preparation for NAFTA was widely publicized and drew attention and support from the international community. Although Mexico’s government desperately sought to quell the attention surrounding the Zapatistas, the measures used to do so were primarily financial in nature. The reforms offered to the Zapatistas made it clear that the government was not willing to make major changes at a political level, such as the revision of Article 27 or of the NAFTA treaty. Rather, many of the reforms instituted in an attempt to assuage the Zapatistas were financial in nature. The unwillingness or inability of Mexico’s government to meet the political demands of the Zapatistas allowed the conflict and international attention to continue for over a decade. Although the Zapatista Movement has changed significantly since its first appearance in public in 1994, it remains an

---

91 Ross, 211.
international symbol of a peasant grass-roots movement formed in response to changing national norms and the rise of regional organizations.
Chapter Five

In June 1995 El Movimiento de las Mujeres en Lucha (MML) surged into Argentina’s public and political arena. During the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, Argentina began to implement a variety of economic and political policies aimed at preparing the country for entrance into Mercosur and the world economy. However, by the mid-1990’s the changing government policies left Argentina’s small and medium-sized farmers without traditional protections, and many were in danger of losing their fields and farms to foreclosure. Renowned for its agriculture, the distinct culture of the Argentina’s small farmers has played an important role in the country’s history. Consequently, when the farmers began to perceive that they were excluded from the benefits of neoliberal economic practices and regional integration, their wives formed a social movement to protest their exclusion from the regional project and to protect their traditional way of life in the countryside.

Menem’s Policy Changes

At the end of the 1980’s and during the 1990’s there were many changes in Argentina’s political economy as President Carlos Menem began to implement a variety of neoliberal economic policies. With Menem’s election as president in 1989 the second era of neoliberalism began, and Menem opened the economy to foreign capital. This period marked the beginning of an era of “international collaboration” with the participation of Argentina in the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the
World Bank and with the implementation of the convertibility system in 1991. With the opening of the economy and the implementation of a fixed exchange rate, inflation rates began to rise and Argentina became vulnerable to fluctuations in the international market. This vulnerability was exacerbated by the economic crises in Mexico and Brazil, both of which deepened Argentina’s domestic economic woes. At the same time, Menem began to privatize the majority of the publicly-owned businesses, selling them below their market value. As a result of these economic practices, Argentina’s external debt began to rise, and inequality and poverty rates also increased during this era. While certain sectors within Argentina benefited from the country’s participation in Mercosur and other regional organizations, other sectors, such as small farmers, perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of economic integration.

The change in Argentina’s economic model was particularly difficult for the country’s small farmers. Argentina is well-known for its agricultural products, and its farmers were “historically the engine of the country.” Menem was elected to the presidency on a platform based on a “production and wage revolution,” and he promised that this platform would provide Argentina’s small farmers with the economic support and policies needed to modernize their outdated systems and increase their efficiency. The majority of Argentina’s small farms were family-owned enterprises which lacked the funds needed to modernize their systems of production. Trusting in Menem’s campaign promise, many small farmers financed the modernization of their farms by taking out credit from provincial and national banks. Believing that Menem would continue the

---

country’s traditional economic policies which protected and provided for Argentine farmers, many families used credit to pay for new tractor and planter models.

However, with the opening of the countryside to international trade and the convertible currency, the prices of exported goods fell and small farmers were unable to pay their debts. In 1996 La Sociedad Rural Argentina estimated that “the debt of the country surpassed 100 billion dollars (US)” and that the interest rates for new loans were 15%.95 Many of the farmers’ fields were mortgaged as a guarantee of their debt, and during this period 12,500,000 hectares were mortgaged to the Banco de la Nación alone.96 The decline in provincial spending, as well as the privatization of provincial banks signaled that Menem was committed to neoliberal economic reforms and preparing Argentina for economic integration, even though the small farmers perceived themselves to be excluded from these economic benefits. While small farmers had taken out credit to enhance the competitiveness of their family enterprises, the change in Argentine economic and political policies made it difficult for small farmers to pay back their debts and placed many landowners in a precarious position.

Gender Roles in Rural Argentina

Before the establishment of the MML, women in the countryside did not have a role in rural Argentine politics. In Argentina, the rural areas outside of the capital city of Buenos Aires are known for being quite conservative and for “machismo,” a culture which glorifies the man. In rural areas men and women divide the work according to

traditional gender roles, with the men in charge of the fieldwork and the women in charge of the housework.

The division of work also corresponds to a family structure which is more rigid that the family structures in the larger cities, such as Buenos Aires. In the rural areas “the extended family is hierarchically organized, and governed by the father.”97 The man “leads the agricultural activities” and “feels total liberty to make decisions which involve the rest of the family.”98 The men belonged to the agricultural organizations and cooperatives and there was not a forum within agricultural organizations such as the Federación Agraria Argentina (FAA) for the women. The women could not sell agricultural products in their own name, and although they were able to sell agricultural products in their husbands’ names and were expected to help in the fields during harvest periods, they spent the majority of their time in the home.99

With this strong division of labor in the rural areas, women’s participation in the political and public field was limited. In the rural areas the men dominated the public forum, and the women dominated the public forum. There was the belief that “a woman who takes good care of her husband, her children, and her house does no have time to leave, and she should remain in the house.”100 Even though the women participated in the selling and production of goods, it was uncommon for them to participate politically and “when decisions had to be made, it was rare for the women to open her mouth, as her husband always spoke for her.”101 There was not space for women in the political arena,

97 K.A. Stolen, La Decencia de la Desigualdad: Genero y Poder en el Campo Argentino (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Antropofagía, 2004), 69.
98 Stolen, 69.
99 Silvia Cloquell, Familias Rurales: El fin de una historia en el inicio de una nueva Agricultura (Rosario, Argentina: Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 2007), 47
100 Stolen, 135.
101 Karina Bidaseca, “Colono/as Insurgentes: Discursos heréticos y acción colectiva por
and the men continued to dominate the political and public spaces in the agricultural organizations and the social movements.

The Formation of the MML

The division between gender roles in rural areas was quite strong, and while men dominated the public space, women traditionally dominated private spaces, such as the home. However, in 1995 a great change occurred among the women in the countryside: a cry from La Pampa began a new chapter in which rural women began to participate in the political process. The women began to organize because the economic policies implemented by Menem created a debt crisis in the countryside. While men traditionally led social movements and political protests, the men did not organize against the foreclosures because they were depressed and embarrassed, believing that the debt signaled that they had failed to provide adequately for their families.102 Noting the change in their husbands’ attitudes, the women began to organize themselves to defend their families and their land from the effects of Menem’s neoliberal economic policies. While Menem had promised that integration into Mercosur would benefit all Argentines, the women in the countryside believed that regional integration was hurting, rather than helping, their families.

On May 27, 1995 a banker arrived at the house of Lucy de Cornelis, a housewife in the town of Winifreda in the region of La Pampa, to announce the foreclosure of her family’s property. Desperate, de Cornelius decided to go to the radio station and “tell what happened to me and hope that there were more women with the same experiences

---

el derecho a la Tierra Argentina 1900-2000” (PhD diss. Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, 2006), 280.
who were also willing to organize.” During this moment, these women formed “a new collective identity” because they each identified with the problems created by Argentina’s debt, which stemmed from neoliberal economic policies. For these women, losing their land symbolized the loss of their culture. Believing that “[the debt] wasn’t an individual situation” and that their husbands were not to blame, the women began to raise their neighbors’ consciousness and worked to communicate that many small farmers were struggling in similar situations. In rural areas, the women began to leave the privacy of their individual homes, and began to transition into the public area of collective action. This transition was solidified on June 3, 1995, when the MML held its first general assembly meeting.

The MML, the social movement formed by the spouses of small farmers, is a social movement which emerged from civil society. This social movement emerged in 1995, during a period in which there had been a nationwide increase in social movements by groups who perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional integration and changes in economic policies. These social movements were directed towards producing transformations for the groups which found their new economic and political positions intolerable; in the case of the MML, the women wanted to transform the difficult situation facing small farmers. The participation of these women in the

---

104 Karina Bidaseca, El Movimiento de Mujeres Agropecuarias en Lucha (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social, November 2000), 16.
105 Coll.
107 Giarracca, 131.
108 Di Marco, 40.
MML “politicized their everyday lives” and the women came to feel that their role as a woman was to protect their family from the dangers of foreclosure.\textsuperscript{110}

The women who participated in the MML had a long family history in the countryside, and many of their grandparents settled in one of Argentina’s provinces after immigrating from France or Italy. Their grandparents fought to obtain fields to farm, and it is this fight which has inspired the women. On June 25, 1912 the Grito de Alcorta was the first strike launched by the immigrants who worked as agricultural laborers. The immigrants fought the modification in the rent contracts that they had established with larger landowners.\textsuperscript{111} Even though the MML is not directly linked to any previous social movement, the Grito de Alcorta set an important example for the women. Even though women were not direct participants in the strike, they played an important role in encouraging their husbands to fight against the land-owning oligarchy and to attain a better life for their families.\textsuperscript{112} The powerful example set by their ancestors has encouraged the women of the MML to fight to maintain rights to the land women by their parents and grandparents.

The history behind the name of the MML provides interesting insight into the movement’s goals. The women included “mujeres” in the name because it was the women who organized the response to the crisis created by the debt and the foreclosures in the countryside. Although there was some dissension, the women included “en lucha” because they were actively fighting the debt structure and Menem’s changing economic policies. In some provinces the movement was called “El Movimiento de las Mujeres

\textsuperscript{111} Coll.
\textsuperscript{112} Emma Martin, interview by author, May 8, 2007, Rosario, Argentina.
Agropecuarias en Lucha.” However, in the province of Santa Fe, “agropecuarias” was removed because the women wanted to include all women, whether they were wives of farmers or not, who identified with their fight.113

For the majority of the women who participated in the MML, their participation was their first experience in the public and political arena. The women participated because they felt that it was their role as mothers and housewives to protect their lifestyle from the danger posed by foreclosures. The traditional gender roles in the countryside which confined women to the home meant that the majority of the movement’s participants were unfamiliar with economic and political dialogue, as their only previous organizational experience was their participation in the parents’ organizations at their children’s schools.114 Even though some of the MML’s participants were lawyers or were employed in other professional careers, the vast majority were housewives who finished their schooling at the end of either elementary or secondary school. Therefore, many of the women lacked a basic knowledge or comprehension of the economic and political issues facing their country.

But with the debt crisis and the foreclosures in the countryside, the women had the opportunity to form a deep knowledge of Argentina’s economy and politics. Before the crisis many of the women lived a “fantasy life,” and were unaware of the credit that their husbands took out to finance their farm.115 The women learned about the economic effects from their family’s economic situation and “from looking at their own purses.”116 Women involved in the MML began to read the newspapers, listen to radio programs,

113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
and watch the news broadcasts on the television. By immersing themselves in different forms of media, the women began to increase their knowledge of Argentine economic and political policies. The women also began to meet amongst themselves in small groups to discuss and develop their own opinions about these themes. Through these various methods, the women of the MML gained a better understanding of their government’s policies and the changes made in traditional economic and political structures as Menem prepared Argentina for integration into Mercosur.

**The Structure of the Movement**

The MML is a social movement; therefore, its structure is not as formal as those found in non-governmental organizations or in political parties. The MML does not have a rigid meeting schedule, and at times months may pass in between meetings. The movement does not have headquarters or a physical center of activity, and while critics may charge that this decentralized structure signals the movement’s weakness, the MML believes that it creates a movement in which “all are equal” and in which all the women have the opportunity to participate. Even though the MML lacks a formal structure, the women do utilize certain networks and methods to organize themselves to fight against the debt.

The MML is a nation-wide social movement which plays an important role in many of Argentina’s provinces, such as Santa Fe, La Pampa, and Buenos Aires. The movement’s national leaders are Lucy de Cornelis, the movement’s founder and president, and Ana Galmarini, the movement’s vice president. In additional to the

118 Norma de Astorquia, interview by author, May 9, 2007, Rosario, Argentina.
movement’s national leaders, the MML also has leaders at the provincial level. In the Province of Santa Fe, Ana Galmarini, the national vice-president, is the provincial president. Although the movement has national and provincial leaders, the women are not elected to these offices; rather, in keeping with the MML’s decentralized structure and egalitarian goals, the women decide amongst themselves who will assume office.

Even though the MML does not have a rigid meeting schedule, it does organize meetings at the national and provincial level. An annual meeting known as the “Mesa Nacional,” is held in the town of Rosario and attracts women from all of Argentina’s provinces. Because of the great distances and travel costs associated with attending such a meeting, the women only hold this meeting one time per year.\footnote{Ana Galmarini, interview by author, May 8, 2007, Rosario, Argentina.} Even though these meetings are important, the Mesa Nacional has not been held in over two years due to the high costs of transportation. At the provincial level, the organization of meetings is quite different. Unlike the Mesa Nacional, there is no fixed meeting schedule. Each zone and province is autonomous and the women decide where, when, and how frequently meetings will be held. The number of meetings held is dependent on the situation of each zone. During crisis periods, such as before the trial which involved the leaders of the MML began, the women met at least once a week to organize and plan their response. Although national and provincial meetings are an important part of the MML’s structure, the high costs involved in attending such meetings means that they may occur infrequently depending on the situation within a given region.

Even though the MML has national and provincial leaders and meetings, the movement is not organized in a bureaucratic or centralized manner. Although some critics may state that the decentralized structure of the movement shows that the MML is
a weak movement, the women involved see the movement’s loose structure as an advantage. For the MML it is important that the movement is “horizontal, pluralist, and democratic,” and that all of the women are equal to each other.\textsuperscript{120} The MML’s structure is very flexible, and the absence of a bureaucracy gives the women the opportunity to “maximize solidarity” and “stimulate social experimentation and internal discussion.”\textsuperscript{121} Within this structure the women have the organization and flexibility needed to attract a greater number of women to participate in their movement, which is truly open to all. In the MML, “no one is worth more than anyone else,” and the movement has the tools needed to adapt itself to a variety of distinct situations and events.\textsuperscript{122}

**The Goals of the Movement**

There are a variety of goals that the women have already reached and goals which they hope to reach in the near future. The MML is a unique social movement because the women are reactive and proactive; reactive because they are “oriented towards resisting the changes connected to modernization,” and regional integration and proactive because they want to implement policies and obtain resources which will protect the future of Argentina’s small farmers.\textsuperscript{123} The women plan to change their government’s policies by participating in meetings, foreclosures, marches, and publicizing their situation through radio stations. The heavy debt burden in the Argentine countryside has created a crisis situation as many small farmers who lost their lands have moved to the slums, or “villas

\textsuperscript{120} Bidaseca (2000), 18.
\textsuperscript{121} Di Marco, 32.
\textsuperscript{122} de Astorquía.
\textsuperscript{123} Di Marco, 32.
de miseria,” surrounding Argentina’s large cities.\textsuperscript{124} By utilizing a variety of different methods, the women hope to change the reality faced by Argentina’s small farmers and ensure a future for small and medium sized agricultural producers within Argentina.

The foundation of the MML is the rising debt faced by the small farmers. Between 1988 and 2002, the number of farmers in the province of Santa Fe fell from 36,844 to 28,034, a decrease of 24 percent, as changes in government spending and the privatization of provincial banks caused many small farmers to lose their fields in foreclosures.\textsuperscript{125} The women acknowledge that the debt does exist; however, they believe that the debt is unjust. The women of the MML are fighting to change the structure of the debt and are asking for “twenty years of refinance” to pay their debts.\textsuperscript{126} The MML wants to refinance the debt because the interest rates due increased markedly during Argentina’s economic crisis and the end of Menem’s convertible currency regime. The MML’s main goal is to refinance the debt in a plan which allows small farmers to simultaneously pay off their debt while maintaining their traditional lifestyle in the countryside.

One important event related to the refinancing of the debt is the privatization of the Banco de la Nación. In March 1998, the MML and other groups and individuals which are in solidarity with the movement formed a “historic and massive circle around the central building of the Banco Nación” in an attempt to thwart Menem’s plans to privatize the bank.\textsuperscript{127} The privatization of the Banco Nación would signal a loss of a credit source, in addition to the 12 million hectares which were mortgaged through the

\textsuperscript{124} de Astorquia.
\textsuperscript{125} Cloquell, \textit{Familias Rurales}, 52.
\textsuperscript{126} Bidaseca (2006), 280.
The women want Argentina’s financial institutions to remain under Argentine control, because if the bank was sold to a foreign enterprise, the main goal of the bank would be the accumulation of wealthy, and it would begin to institute policies which “are not in the interests of the citizens.”

The MML protested outside the Banco Nación on the day it was to be privatized; however, Menem did not sign the privatization contract. For the women, this was an important achievement because had it been privatized, the farmers would have been unable to refinance their debt. In 2001, the MML conducted another march outside of the Banco Nación to continue the fight against the bank’s privatization. Through their marches and protests, the women successfully prevented the bank’s privatization, which was a major achievement for the MML.

Another goal of the MML is to prevent the concentration and purchase of land by foreigners, because the presence of large and wealthy foreign landowners makes it difficult for the small farmers to compete. In 2001 the Argentine Census on Agroproducers revealed that the 936 most powerful land owners held 35,515,500 hectares, and that 137,021 small producers held only 2,288,000 hectares. The largest landowners were Benetton, Cresud, Bunge, and Amaliz Lacroze. These four landowners hold the title to two million hectares, an area equivalent in size to the country of Belgium. The women of the MML believe that the government’s policies support the large foreign owners, not the small farmers, and that these policies are particularly egregious because many foreign owners do not inhabit their land or participate in the

---

129 de Astorquia.
130 de Astorquia.
131 Bianchi (2005), 10.
132 Ibid., 10.
culture of Argentina’s provinces. Therefore, a major goal for the MML is to establish policies and practices which limit the concentration of land in the hands of foreigners.

For the MML the concentration of the land is a great danger because many small producers, unable to compete with larger enterprises, are selling their lands to foreign companies and owners. Many of the towns in the countryside have become “ghost towns,” and are symbolic of the threat that the growing concentration of land owned by foreign entities pose to small farmers.\(^{133}\) In 2002, the average size of farming enterprises increased by 33.6 percent; therefore, the women believe that it is critical that the Argentine government limit the number of hectares that foreigners and large landowners can purchase.\(^{134}\) The women are also asking for agricultural subsidies and price supports for small farmers. Argentina’s integration into Mercosur led to a reduction in subsidies and provincial spending, and small farmers found it difficult to modernize their farming equipment and sell their products without these supports. The MML argues that the European Union, the United States, and Japan spend 1000 million dollars each day to “protect and sustain their farmers and livestock owners.”\(^{135}\) The concentration of land in foreign hands and the lack of subsidies create a situation in which Argentina’s small farmers are unable to compete in the world market; therefore, the women are fighting to limit the number of hectares sold to foreigners and to lobby for government subsidies to underwrite the costs involved in production.

In recent years, the economic situation has somewhat improved in the countryside because the number of foreclosures has decreased. The Argentine government has halted the number of foreclosures, believing that the foreclosures have generated a social and

---

\(^{133}\) de Astorquia.

\(^{134}\) Cloquell, *Familias Rurales*, 52.

political response from groups such as the MML, which protest the foreclosures, which is working against the government. Even though this is a significant policy change, the MML continues to work for change in the countryside. For the women, “the cessation of the foreclosures was the opportunity to see what more we could do,” and the MML is currently working on other issues such as education and healthcare in Argentina’s rural areas. The implementation of neoliberal economic policies and the rise in foreclosures caused a decline in the rural population, which is linked to the closure of many rural schools. In the rural areas, it is now very difficult to reach a school, whether it is elementary school or a university. Many of the women involved in the MML are housewives and have children; therefore, these issues will be an integral part of their fight as the movement looks towards its future.

The Methods Used to Achieve Change

The MML is best known for its presence at foreclosures. Although long distances and high transportation costs have prevented the MML from establishing a schedule for formal meetings, the women organize their participation in the foreclosures through a telephone network. It is cheaper for the women to use the telephone, and “one woman calls another, and she calls another.” In the countryside, internet access is difficult to obtain, and it is difficult to hold meetings; therefore, when notice of a foreclosure is received, the MML uses the telephone to notify its members and organize the participation of as many women as possible.

---

136 de Astorquia.
137 Coll.
138 de Astorquia.
Participants in the MML believe that the foreclosures and the debt faced by the small farmers are unjust; therefore, they are using their social movement to stop the foreclosures and to ask the government to refinance the debt. The MML is characterized by its practices of civil disobedience, and unlike Mexico’s Zapatista movement, it does not use violence or weapons.\textsuperscript{139} During the beginning stages of the movement, the women improvised and decided to protest the foreclosures, and were greatly surprised when they successfully stopped a foreclosure.\textsuperscript{140} Protesting the foreclosures has become the movement’s trademark, and the women consider their presence at the foreclosures to be a legal protest against foreclosures which they see as illegal.\textsuperscript{141}

Another method that the women use to attract attention is marches. The women participate in marches and protests in many places; however, they are known best for their participation in the march on International Women’s Day. On March 8, 1996, the MML’s march in Buenos Aires attracted attention from Argentines and from international observers. The women marched from the plaza in front of Argentina’s Congress to the Casa Rosada, Argentina’s presidential palace, and one woman, Norma de Astorquia, led the march on a tractor.\textsuperscript{142} Roughly 800 women participated in the march, and they were supported by many men and Argentine Congressional leaders.\textsuperscript{143} The women brought a petition to President Menem listing their demands, asking for changes such as “the immediate suspension of foreclosures,” twenty-five years to pay their debt, and new forms of credit that could be used to allow small farmers to continue their

\textsuperscript{139} Di Marco, 40.  
\textsuperscript{140} Cloquell (interview, 2007).  
\textsuperscript{141} Martin.  
\textsuperscript{143} de Astorquia.
agricultural production.\textsuperscript{144} The day after the march, La Nación, a major Argentine newspaper, ran a front-page article on the MML and its march through Buenos Aires, with a picture of Norma de Astorquia and her tractor. The women’s story attracted international attention, and organizations in countries as far away as France offered support for the women’s movement.\textsuperscript{145}

The media has been another important method used to promote the goals of the MML. When the women participate in foreclosures, marches, or protests, they use a telephone network to contact as many media outlets as possible. Radio stations, newspapers both large and small, and television news outlets are examples of some of the media outlets that the women contact in their efforts to draw attention to their movement. In particular, the MML focuses on the large newspapers as some of them, such as La Nación, have a national as well as an international readership.\textsuperscript{146} Communication outlets provide the MML with the opportunity to raise awareness of the movement both within and outside of Argentina, and the women hope to construct a worldwide network of solidarity for their cause.

Even though news of the MML runs in Argentina’s newspapers and news programs, the women’s main medium of communication is the radio. The MML began when Lucy’s desperate pleas were broadcasted on the radio, and even today the women continue to use the radio to announce their presence at foreclosures. One of the major obstacles faced by the MML is that they lacking sufficient funding for publicity; however, the women can use one of the many radio stations throughout the countryside which stand in solidarity with the women’s movement free of charge. In the town of

\textsuperscript{144} Corujo.
\textsuperscript{145} de Astorquia.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
Maceal, radio station 94.3 FM stands in solidarity with the MML. Even though 94.3 FM only broadcasts to a zone which is equivalent to 10 kilometers, the women’s advertisements on the station attract seventy or more supporters to a foreclosure.\(^{147}\) Despite the small zone and audiences reached by these radio stations, they remain important to the MML because they facilitate the growth of a network of solidarity in between the MML and the small farmers in the Argentine countryside.

**The MML: An Autonomous Organization**

One of the defining characteristics of the MML is that it is an autonomous organization. The movement does not have formal ties with other organizations such as the FAA, political leaders such as members of Argentina’s Congress, or with Argentina’s political parties. The MML believes that the FAA has failed its stated goal of protecting small farmers, and that the political parties fail to realize their platform promises once they arrive in office.

On August 15, 1912, the FAA was founded as an organization which would “join together small and medium sized farmers.”\(^{148}\) Even though many of the husbands of the women involved in the MML had participated in the FAA and had close ties with the organization, within the organization there was not a space for the women to participate. All of the leaders of the presidents of the FAA were male, and the women felt that the FAA failed to realize that women wanted to participate as well. As the FAA developed, it became a meeting space in which the men would gather to discuss topics and issues affecting the lives of the small farmers.

\(^{147}\) *Ibid.*

Even though the FAA stated that it supported small farmers and that the organization’s goal was to defend them, within the MML there is a shared sentiment that the FAA abandoned them during their time of need. The stated goal of the FAA is to “develop sustainable agricultural practices;” however, the organization did not involve itself in the debt controversy, nor did it have a presence at the foreclosures which threatened the very survival of the small farmers.\(^{149}\) The MML’s participants believe that the FAA has abandoned its stated goal of protecting small farmers, and that if the organization hopes to continue to fight for small farmers, it needs to conduct a self-evaluation. If the FAA is truly working to defend small farmers, the MML believes that it cannot afford to ignore the threats posed by the debt and the foreclosures.

The lack of concern that the FAA showed for the small farmers during this period was an important event which sparked the formation of the MML. While the MML is not tied in any way to the FAA, at times the women do work with the Federación Chacarero. The Federación Chacarero is “an organization which opposes the FAA,” and unlike the FAA, the Chacareros do address the debt and other threats which place the future of small farmers in peril.\(^{150}\) When the goals of the MML are aligned with those of the Federación Chacarero, the two movements participate in marches, strikes, and foreclosures together.

Although the MML does work with The Federación Chacarero, it does not have formal ties or linkages to any political party. Among the women, there is a general consensus that the political parties do not support the small farmers in the countryside, and that their primary interests are in serving the urban population. Corruption within the Argentine government and political parties are important issues for the women, and many

\(^{149}\) *Ibid.*

of them do not trust their government leaders. The women believe that although many candidates campaign with platforms promising policy changes and new ideas to improve life in the countryside, after the elections these promises are never realized. Despite the efforts on the part of the political parties to attract the support of small farmers and the MML, the women’s lack of trust and belief that there is no one political party which represents the interests of the countryside has led them to work outside of established political parties.

Although the MML currently eschews ties with all political parties, when the MML first began, it has a loose connection with the FREPASO party in the province of La Pampa. However, the relationship between the MML and FREPASO was short-lived. The alliance between the MML and FREPASO led many women to leave the MML because they supported other parties and political ideologies and believed that the movement had moved away from its founding principles by establishing ties with FREPASO. In the province of Santa Fe, no formal ties exist between political parties and the MML, or between Congressional leaders and the MML. Even though political parties such as ARI have sought to establish ties with the MML, the women say that they are “anti-partisan” even though “they are making politics.”151 Although the women within the MML may discuss political candidates or political parties, the movement is not formally tied to a political candidate or party.

There are a variety of women within the MML, and for the women it is important that the movement fosters an environment in which all the women feel comfortable participating in the movement. Because the MML is not tied to a particular political party, the movement has established an environment which is welcoming to women from

---

151 Bidaseca (2006), 283.
a variety of political allegiances. While some women show their lack of confidence in the
government and vote in protest by leaving their ballots blank, other women may become
heavily involved in projects coordinated by specific political parties if the project is in
accordance with their personal beliefs and values. The women involved in the MML
believe that the Argentine government and Argentina’s political parties do not have the
best interests of the small farmers at the heart of its policies, and it is this belief which has
led the women to work outside of the government and the political parties in an effort to
achieve change.

The MML in the Judicial Field

On September 12, 2003, the MML went through an important period of change.
Beforehand, the MML had relied on marches and protests at foreclosures to attract
attention to their cause and to change the economic policies implemented in Argentina.
However, in 2003, the MML protested the foreclosure of Ricardo Vasallo, who was in
danger of losing his 40 hectare farm in Chivilcoy. During the protest, the women
followed their traditional routine of singing the Argentina’s national anthem and
peacefully attempting to prevent the banker from completing the foreclosure.

However, this protest turned out to be quite different from the others in which the
MML routinely participated. The police arrived at the scene accompanied by a judge, and
the women participating in the protest were detained. The women were detained for many
hours and claimed that the police treated them violently during their arrests.152 The judge
accused the MML’s leaders of resisting authority, and presented the women with a plea
deal. However, the women refused to accept the proposed deal of probation, because to

accept it “would mean recognizing that we had committed a crime.”¹⁵³ Also, if the women did accept probation, the terms of the deal would forbid their participation in future foreclosures; therefore, the women decided to reject the judge’s offer.

With their decision to reject the judge’s offer of probation, the women’s case went to trial. The trial began on March 23, 2007, and many agrarian organizations, Congressional leaders, and various social organizations arrived to show their support for the women and to present a petition asking for their acquittal. The trial lasted six days, during which the women’s supporters maintained a constant presence within the courtroom. On March 29th, the trial ended, and based on the testimony of witnesses, the judge declared “the total acquittal of all of the accused.”¹⁵⁴ For the MML, the acquittal was a great success and an important milestone for the movement because the judge decided that their practice of civil disobedience was not illegal.

The trial was a great success for the leaders of the MML, and it also put the foreclosure they had been protesting on September 12, 2003 under scrutiny. During the trial, various witnesses testified that “there is a group of bankers who keep the goods obtained during the public foreclosures, selling them at extremely low prices.”¹⁵⁵ An investigation began into this ring which was formed by the banks performing the foreclosures and who were then selling the fields at prices which were significantly lower than the land’s stated value. Richard Vallejo’s fields, for example, were valued at 12 to 15 thousand pesos per hectare; however, the bank sold his property for 3,800 pesos per

¹⁵³ Ibid.
¹⁵⁴ de Astorquia.
¹⁵⁵ Movimiento de las Mujeres en Lucha, Reprimen y detienen a Mujeres en Lucha en Chivilcoy (Rosario, Argentina, 2007).
hectare. The judge froze the foreclosure of Vallejo’s property and ordered that an investigation into the practices used by banks to sell these foreclosed properties.

While the judge’s suspension of the foreclosures was important for the Vallejo family, the decision also had wider ramifications. The investigation signaled that a change in policies, which would protect all the small farmers in danger of losing their homes and fields to foreclosures, could occur. The judge’s investigation meant that in the future, it would be extremely difficult for banks to sell foreclosed properties at unfair prices which were far below the land’s market value. The suspension of foreclosures could result in the implementation of laws and policies which would assure that the banks sold foreclosed properties at prices which reflected their true market value. Through their trial, the MML achieved more than a validation of its social protest methods; it also caused the judge to suspend the foreclosures and investigate whether the banks were selling the land at fair prices. The corruption and changing economic policies involved in the mounting debt and foreclosures posed severe threats to Argentina’s small farmers. Unlike the Zapatistas, the MML was unable to encourage Argentina to establish spending programs which would form a social safety net for its small farmers; however, it was able to encourage the Argentine government to examine the fairness of the policies and practices implemented by President Menem as he prepared Argentina for integration into Mercosur.

The Movement’s Future

Presently, both the women within the MML and outside observers are unsure about the movement’s future will bring. The MML was formed spontaneously, and its

156 Ibid.
roots are formed in the reaction of the women in the countryside who faced losing their land and their lifestyle. Although the MML has become an influential political actor within Argentina, the women need to implement several changes in order to sustain the movement into the future.

The MML is a social movement, not a political party. Although it lacks the structure of a formally organized party, there are certain patterns and structures within the movement. The telephone network, which is used to coordinate the women’s arrival at foreclosures in the countryside or marches in Buenos Aires, is one such example. If there is a foreclosure in the province of Santa Fe, a designated contact with telephone another woman within the province, who will in turn contact other women. Through the use of their telephone network, the women facilitate the arrival of dozens and sometimes hundreds of supporters at events such as foreclosures, marches, or strikes.

One of the largest obstacles faced by the MML is the limited availability of financial funds and other resources. The MML is a national movement; however, Argentina is a very large country, meaning that the women must travel many hours and kilometers to arrive at foreclosures and marches. The women are fighting to defend their families who are in danger of losing their land due to their high levels of indebtedness, thereby making it difficult for women to ask their families for financial support. The financial burden of funding travel to the movement’s events is the responsibility of each woman, who must draw on her own personal funds. The movement does request financial support for travel from agrarian organizations, political leaders, and members of Argentina’s Congress. Although the women do occasionally receive financial funding from political organizations or leaders, the women never accept funds if the organization
or leader attaches conditions which would threaten or compromise the movement’s autonomy. Financial resources remain an critical issue when discussing the movement’s future, and it is important for the women to devise ways in which they can generate the funds needed to travel to the movement’s events.

Even though funding is an important issue, the future of the MML’s membership is another important topic. When the movement began, the average age of its participants was 45 years; however, many of the women are now approaching 60 years of age.¹⁵⁷ Attracting young women to the movement is difficult because many of them leave the rural areas to pursue a university education or a career in Argentina’s urban areas. These trends among rural youth present a problem for the movement’s future. While the MML is fighting to preserve the traditional lifestyles and cultures of the small rural farmers, the youth are seeking new opportunities and lifestyles outside of the rural areas.

The changes in Argentina’s economy have also changed the economic situation in the rural areas, as well as the goals of the MML. With the end of the currency convertibility and the growth of soy, the small farmers who export their soy goods no longer occupy the same precarious position as they did during the MML’s formation. “The soy boom was one of the pillars of the national economy’s recovery,” and the fertile fields around the city of Rosario in the province of Santa Fe are filled with soybeans.¹⁵⁸ From 2002 to 2003, small Argentine farmers produced 70 million tons of agricultural products, 35 million of which were soy goods, amounting to roughly half of all agricultural goods harvested.¹⁵⁹ The soy boom has played an important role in the economic recovery of Argentina and the livelihood of its small farmers, and today

¹⁵⁷ Bidaseca (2006), 274.
¹⁵⁸ Bianchi (2005), 12.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.
farmers harvesting soy crops are not in as precarious position as they were during the early 1990’s.

Despite the role that soy has played in boosting Argentina’s economic growth, particularly in the rural areas, the MML remains critical of the soy boom. The MML believes that the soy has a number of negative externalities, and worries about the effects of monocropping and pesticides on the soil and local community. The movement is also concerned about the link between soy production and their efforts to prevent the concentration of land in the hands of foreign corporations, as well as the effects of government policies which favor large exporters and foreign business entities over the well-being of small farmers. In the province of Santa Fe, the foreigners who sell soy goods for export “pay few taxes,” and Santa Fe also “exempts them from income taxes.” By providing foreigners with tax exemptions, the small and medium sized farmers are largely excluded from the benefits of the soy boom, as tax revenue from the soy goods is not redistributed throughout the community.

For the foreseeable future, the women are planning to continue their fight to preserve the lifestyle and land of the small farmers. Even though economic conditions have improved somewhat, even today the women believe that “there is an absence of institutional intermediaries and state politics,” meaning that small farmers are still vulnerable to fluctuations in international prices and trade flows. The women are planning to fight for a law which would limit the number of hectares that foreigners and multinational corporations can buy, and they also hope that one day, the number of small

---

160 Ibid., 10.
161 Ibid., 12.
162 Cloquell, Familias Rurales, 64.
farmers within Argentina will increase to one million. The MML will not cease its efforts until it establishes a political and economic environment which protects and defends the rights of small farmers.

Conclusion

The MML plays a powerful role in Argentine politics, and many comparisons have been made between the MML and another important Argentine social movement, Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. Historically, the division of labor between men and women in the countryside has been quite strong, and women did not have a voice in agrarian organizations or other political or public spaces. However, neoliberal economic policies implemented by President Menem as Argentina prepared for integration into Mercosur and the resulting crisis among small farmers provided the women with a unique opportunity to immerse themselves into Argentine politics. The women saw the economic threat posed to the small farmers, and responded to the foreclosures by forming a movement which sought to protect their families and their lifestyle.

The MML is a decentralized movement, and it does not have a rigid, bureaucratic structure. Even though the lack of formal organization may make the MML appear weak, the movement’s decentralized structure provides the women with the space needed to operate efficiently and to attract women from around the countryside to their cause. The organization’s loose structure also provides the women with the space needed to discuss, change, or amend the movement’s goals in response to changing economic or political policies. Thus far, the women have achieved remarkable things through their presence at the foreclosures, marches, and through their use of a variety of media outlets. Also, 

---

163 Galmarini.
because the movement is not formally tied to an agrarian organization or a political party, the women have the sovereignty necessary to determine the movement’s direction and future.

The future of the MML should be extremely interesting. The women’s victory in the judicial system allowed them to successfully change the way in which the foreclosures were handled in the countryside, igniting hope that in the future, the Argentine government will take a closer look at the economic hardships faced by small, rural farmers stemming from its neoliberal economic policies. Although the trial was the first time that the movement had operated inside the judicial system, the trial was a successful mechanism that the women may consider utilizing again in the future. With the trial, the women had the opportunity to turn criminal allegations into a success when the judge decided to examine the foreclosures in which so many small farmers had lost their fields. Even though the economic situation is no longer as precarious as it once was, the legal system may provide a channel in which the women can continue their fight for justice for those who have lost their land and for those who are still in danger of losing it.

Although the examination of the foreclosure process and the beginning of the soy boom have temporarily alleviated the economic crisis in the countryside, the MML still has important issues to work on. Concerns about the sustainability of the soy boom and monocropping mean that Argentine farmers may soon again face a harsh economic reality, as monocropping and deforestation threaten the land’s future use. Even though it will be difficult to attract new members during a period of relative economic calm, the women must draw attention to the problematic agricultural practices, such as monocropping, and raise awareness about practices such as tax exemptions for foreign
companies and businessmen. Even though Argentina is undergoing a soy boom, the MML is ready and willing to continue their fight in these new areas.

Despite improvements in their economic situation, the MML still has work to do. The economy has improved; however, small farmers are not protected by government policies, and they remain vulnerable to fluctuations in the regional and international markets. A change in Argentina’s economic situation could place the small farmers in danger of foreclosures again, and many in the countryside still lack access to basic services such as schools. Small farmers believe that they are largely excluded from the economic benefits of regional trade, and the MML will not rest until the government enacts programs and policies which ensure the productive capabilities of small farmers and allow them to experience the benefits of regional economic integration. The movement did achieve an important milestone in 2003, when Argentina’s courts began an investigation into the debt crisis and foreclosure process. In the future, the MML will continue to act in ways which will further their fight for Argentina’s small farmers, because “although we may be more or less active, we will still be here.”164

164 de Astorquia.
Conclusion

With the marked rise in the formation of regional organizations over the past two decades, it is important to examine the policies implemented in countries preparing for accession to these organizations. Oftentimes, countries may initiate significant changes in their economic and political policies in an effort to comply with membership requirements or expectations; however, these changes may have important social ramifications. Social movements formed in reaction to the policy changes implemented, although narrow in the sense that they are limited to certain segments or sectors of the population, have the potential to create deep social divisions. These deep divisions may undermine domestic support for the regional project, thereby placing its future in jeopardy. Consequently, it is important to examine the policy changes implemented, the social reaction formed by groups which perceive themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regionalism, and the government’s response to these social movements.

In the case of Mexico, NAFTA has a direct and causal relationship with the formation of the EZLN. The Zapatistas were formed by the peasants and indigenous population in Chiapas who perceived themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional policies. Deep pre-existing economic and social divisions created a rift between Mexico’s elite and the majority of the population, which was living in poverty. The decision of Mexico’s political and economic leaders to join NAFTA, as well as the neoliberal economic policies and the revision of Article 27, was the trigger which ignited the underlying resentment of the participants in the Zapatista movement. The Zapatistas emerged as an armed reformist movement, and demanded a variety of political
concessions from Mexico’s government during peace negotiations. However, Mexico’s political leaders were unwilling to implement the political changes demanded by the Zapatistas, such as a revision of Article 27. Instead of implementing political changes which would have met the demands of the Zapatistas, the Salinas administration responded through economic measures. While the spending programs implemented were intended to establish a social safety net which would assuage the Zapatistas, these spending programs did not create significant change in the eyes of the EZLN. Consequently, the Zapatista movement has continued to protest Mexico’s decision to participate in NAFTA and has become a world-renowned symbol of the opposition to regional trade agreements.

While the Zapatista movement has a direct and causal link to the formation of NAFTA, the formation of the MML in Argentina has an indirect and general link to the policies implemented in preparation for integration into Mercosur. The majority of Argentina’s population is concentrated in the capital of Buenos Aires, the seat of the country’s political and economic power. The remaining minority of the population is spread throughout one of Argentina’s twenty-three provinces. While many Argentines living in the countryside often felt as though they were excluded from these centers of power, there was never as much underlying resentment as their was with the Zapatistas. However, the economic and political policies implemented during Menem’s presidency as Argentina prepared for accession into Mercosur led many small provincial farmers to believe that they were excluded from the benefits of regional integration. The unprecedented use of executive privilege through emergency decrees, the rise in foreclosures, and the farmers’ debt led to the spontaneous formation of the MML.
Formed by farmers’ spouses in protest of these policies, the women worked to establish
government policies which would protect their future as small farmers and would ensure
that the policies implemented were truly just. Unlike Mexico, the Argentine government
did not increase spending in the provinces; rather, after 1995 provincial spending rates
decreased drastically. However, the MML did achieve an important political victory in
2003 when an Argentine judge began an investigation into the foreclosure process and
debt crisis in the provinces. When an examination of the policies implemented led the
judge to rule that the foreclosure process was unjust, the immediate crisis was resolved,
and the social protests in the provinces declined as a result.

As regionalism looks to grow and expand, it is important that policymakers
closely examine the political and economic policies implemented in preparation for their
country’s accession into regional organizations, as well as the social reactions formed in
response to these changes. The complexity of this task is highlighted by the examples of
Mexico and Argentina, as a variety of factors such as neoliberal economic reforms,
constitutional amendments, the use of executive privilege, and allegations of corruption
led these groups to perceive that they were excluded from the benefits of regional
economic integration. Changes in long-standing government policies and promises made
in preparation for regional integration may lead to the formation of significant sources of
social division, and these divisions may place the future of the regional project in
jeopardy. In the case of Mexico, economic support programs were implemented in an
attempt to assuage the demands of the EZLN; however, these measures failed to address
the movement’s political concerns, and the Zapatistas continued to protest their country’s
policies and involvement in NAFTA. In Argentina, however, a court case involving the
MML led the courts to an examination of the fairness and legitimacy of the policies and practices implemented. The presiding judge ruled that the foreclosure process and debt crisis faced by small farmers showed evidence of corruption, and the re-structuring of these policies and practices satisfied the immediate political demands made by the MML.

Therefore, in order to promote both economic and social integration, economic spending programs may not be sufficient. Rather, the regional project must work to ensure that groups which perceive themselves to be excluded from the benefits of regional integration have a political voice. Oftentimes, groups such as the Zapatistas and the MML inhabit areas which are geographically segregated from their countries’ centers of economic and political power. While organizations such as Mercosur began to establish regional outposts in order to incorporate citizens’ voices in the organization’s policies, at the national level countries must ensure that the well-being and wishes of their citizens are incorporated in the policy changes implemented in preparation for accession into such organizations. Failure to provide citizens with a political voice in the process will perpetuate the formation of groups which perceive themselves to be excluded from the benefits of legitimacy. Incorporating the voices of the citizens in the process of regional integration will help ensure that the policy changes implemented are fair, legitimate, and in the best interest of the country as a whole. Enhancing citizen voice at the national level will create an inclusive environment and prevent the deep social divisions which threaten the future of the regional project.
Appendix A: Interview Guide

¿Por qué forman este grupo de mujeres? ¿Quién son las fundadores? ¿Por cuestiones económicos, las políticas/ el gobierno o algo en la sociedad?

¿Qué tipo de mujeres participan en el MML? Como su edad, tipo de trabajo, educación, situación económica o político, tienen hijos y esposos o no.

¿Pienses que este es un cambio en la participación política para las mujeres del campo?

¿Cómo forman el conocimiento político y económico de estas mujeres?

¿Qué fueron las acciones de las pioneras y las fundadores del grupo para atraer atención y mejorar el conocimiento de su situación económico y político?

¿Por qué decidieron a trabajar afuera de la Federación Agraria de la Argentina?

El MML es una organización autónoma. ¿Qué significa autónoma para ustedes?

¿En el pasado había conexiones entre el MML y partidos políticos? Si sí, ¿que tipo de conexiones y existen estos conexiones hoy en día?

¿Apoyan a candidatos específicos en las elecciones presidenciales? ¿Qué es la posición del MML durante las elecciones presidenciales/ provinciales /locales?

¿Qué cambios piden del gobierno? ¿Qué es que el MML quiere lograr?

¿Qué métodos usan en el pasado para lograr cambios? ¿Y hoy? Si había un cambio, ¿Por qué?

¿Qué tipo de relaciones tiene el MML con el gobierno (ejemplo: los oficiales, diputados) en el pasado? ¿Hoy?

¿Cómo organizan la red del MML? ¿Quién son las liderazgos y como eligen a ellas?

¿Qué es la visión del MML para su futuro? ¿Es una forma de participación político que pueden sustentar en el futuro? ¿Creen que el MML podrían lograr los cambios que piden?
¡ ¡ ¡ Solidaridad con el Movimiento de Mujeres en Lucha ! ! !

Las dirigentes del Movimiento de Mujeres en Lucha Ana Galmarini, Ana Maria Riveiro, Ema Martín y Sara Coll han sido procesadas y son llevadas a juicio en el Juzgado Correccional Número 2 de Mercedes, Provincia de Buenos Aires, por el hecho de entonar el Himno Nacional oponiéndose de manera pacífica al remate del campo del Sr Vasallo, pequeño productor agrario de la localidad de Chivilcoy (provincia de Buenos Aires) quien también resultó procesado junto a su familia.

Las militantes del Movimiento de Mujeres en Lucha (MML) son reconocidas nacional e internacionalmente por su lucha contra los remates por deudas usurarias ordenados por bancos y otras entidades financieras que han afectado y afectan las propiedades de miles de pequeños y medianos productores ahogados por la política liberal de la década del 90 y la falta de rentabilidad.

Hoy, cuando crece con fuerza el repudio y la condena a las violaciones de los derechos humanos implementada por la Dictadura Genocida a los luchadores sociales y políticos, es necesario impedir la criminilización del accionar del Movimiento de Mujeres en Lucha, tal como pretende la Fiscalía al acusarlas de la supuesta violación de los artículos 237 y 239 del Código Penal por resistencia y atentado a la autoridad al cantar el himno nacional ante la realización del remate.

Las personas y organizaciones abajo firmantes declaramos nuestra plena solidaridad y apoyo a la Justa Lucha del Movimiento de Mujeres en Lucha y exigimos el inmediato sobreseimiento y cierre de la causa contra Ana Galmarini, Ana Maria Riveiro, Ema Martín y Sara Coll.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apellido y Nombres</th>
<th>Número de Documento</th>
<th>Firma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Works Consulted


