8
Comparisons and Conclusions

This book has traced the diverse ways in which parties in Brazil and Chile behave as gendered gatekeepers to political power and policymaking, guardians of state resources, arbiters of social relations from the most intimate and private to the most public, and a transmission belt between society and government. This chapter now compares and contrasts the two country cases, revealing the complexity of the party political variable for gender equity and equality at a time of democratization, state restructuring and party system realignment. In Brazil, gender policy and women’s representation have been advanced in the last 15 years not by the central state, but primarily by one progressive political party, the PT, which has used political power and the state machinery to craft new institutions for promoting grassroots participation and a range of social rights, mainly at local government level. Conversely, the Chilean case of SERNAM showed a relatively well-endowed, centralized state bureaucracy charged with promoting gender rights, that has been caught in the midst of inter- and intra-party political conflicts that it has struggled to resist. In this way, we see the same phenomenon – the impact of parties on women’s claims for representation and resources – from two complementary perspectives.

Here, I test the factors hypothesized in Chapter 1 as determining the relative porosity or impermeability of individual parties and party systems to gender issues. These are: the presence or absence of a secular–religious cleavage that crosscuts the left–right, class-based divisions; the quality (horizontal or vertical) as well as the intensity of party institutionalization; and the development of a gendered political habitus in the origins of individual parties. In this way, I seek to draw out some comparative and generalizable conclusions for a gendered analysis of political parties. This is not an attempt to quantify which country or party performs

F. Macaulay, *Gender Politics in Brazil and Chile*
© Fiona Macaulay 2006
‘better’ or ‘worse’, but rather to urge a more complex understanding of the, sometimes contradictory, gendered and gendering characteristics of parties and party systems. This can help explain how parties such as UDI can elect the most women mayors and city councillors (but the fewest deputies), whilst excluding women almost totally from the party leadership and holding highly gender-regressive policy positions. This example highlights the other key aspect of this study; namely, its attention to the spaces and places of politics – manifest in the variations in party conduct at the different levels of government.

**Paragons, proxies and petistas**

The first dependent variable examined was the degree of women’s ‘*voz y voto*’ (‘voice and vote’), measured in terms of their ability to express political preferences and their representation in party leadership positions, elected office and government appointments. The early construction of women’s political citizenship in the two countries reflects, on the one hand, Chile’s long history of structured party political competition and, on the other, Brazil’s very limited political democracy and the discontinuous and under-institutionalized character of its party system. In Chile, intense party political competition along two axes (left–right and secular–religious) and the electoral survival needs of parties of different hues led to female suffrage being consciously framed within a maternalist discourse that allowed women access to a male domain only on the basis of their alleged special feminine qualities. This resulted in the persistence of the *supermadre* conception of women’s political agency only now being displaced by the language of rights and justice. In Brazil, where women’s suffrage was not connected to party political ideology or competition, sympathy with the equality claims of early feminism was greater, and moral or difference-based definitions of female political agency much less prevalent.

The availability of women for political recruitment is a function of several inter-linked factors: a party’s original social base, the patterns of gendered sociability and habitus that stratify the roles of different types of members and its institutional rules and culture. For example, the PT’s heterogeneous genesis and relatively high degree of internal mobility have enabled it to recruit women leaders and representatives from the social movements and unions, whilst UDI’s strongly hierarchical and masculine formation has restricted its women activists largely to municipal posts. We may conclude that, where a party’s horizontal linkages to civil society organizations are fluid and democratic, it is easier for