

## *Introduction*

This book examines the complex interrelationships between female philanthropic groups and feminists in their advocacy of child welfare programs and family reforms in Argentina in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Members of female philanthropic groups, who generally were representatives of the middle and upper classes, organized and provided help, often voluntarily, for people poorer than themselves. In contrast, feminists came from all walks of life and organized to promote equal legal, social, and political rights for women. I argue that the activities and conflicts between these two groups provide an excellent historical vantage point for examining the origins and rise of the Argentine welfare state between 1880 and the fall of the Juan Perón government in 1955.

This project began as an effort to understand why Argentine and other Latin American feminists lobbied explicitly to gain greater legal authority over their biological children than did their counterparts in the United States. In my research I discovered that Argentine feminists only rarely addressed the plight and rights of non-biological children and orphans. Instead, they combined the goals of protecting mothers and their biological children at the same time that they supported campaigns for equal political, social, and economic rights. In contrast, elite philanthropic women, who were usually identified as members of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* (but by my findings also included middle-class and immigrant women), organized to help poor children who had been orphaned and abandoned. In the political sphere, some of these nonfeminist women supported adoption laws so that married and unmarried women could legally adopt a child, a theme that remained outside most feminist discourse. Why did such differences in attitudes toward child welfare divide Argentine female philanthropists and feminists?

I have taken much inspiration from the recent literature on women and

the welfare state in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> These studies have forged a new understanding of how women fought for both protection and rights within nascent welfare states, ones that often discriminated on the basis of class and race and, in the case of the Middle Eastern countries and many European ones, arose out of both religious and feminist movements in response to similar concerns. However, the publications that have examined both progressive and conservative women's movements rarely touch on the issue of orphanages. As Sonya Michel, an exception to this generalization, noted in her work published in 1999 on U.S. child-care policies, "Parents' use of orphanages for child-caring purposes became so widespread that by the second half of the 19th century, 'half-orphans' (children with one living parent) outnumbered full orphans in most asylums," but such institutions increasingly ran into feelings of "anti-institutional sentiment."<sup>2</sup> The direct links between feminism, the anti-institutional sentiment, and the role of women in these institutions became the focus of my work on the Argentine case, and more recent studies, including works on Latin America, have also begun to fill in this gap. This is particularly true of Christine Ehrick's work on the role of women within the formation of the Uruguayan welfare state.<sup>3</sup>

This scholarship on cases outside Argentina has paid great attention to the role of local groups and policies in the construction of the welfare state, and it has divided the concept of the welfare state into diverse components with different histories. This work has been helpful in bridging the gap between the local and the national, and between charity and state obligations, by arguing that such categories are not mutually exclusive. Young-Sun Hong's study of the Weimar state, supposedly the beginning of the welfare state model, hypothesized that "one of the reasons for the neglect of poor relief and charity in most studies of the development of the welfare state has been the perception that they retained their traditional forms and thus perpetuated their anachronistic existence until they were rendered superfluous by social insurance and social welfare systems during the twentieth century."<sup>4</sup> Hong argued that such "traditional" organizations in Germany proved to be functional rather than anachronistic. Even in the classic Weimar welfare state, many reform groups organized according to religious affiliations "whose political and religious cleavages mirrored those of German society itself."<sup>5</sup>

Lynne Haney, in her study of local institutions and their impact on the welfare state in mid-twentieth-century socialist Hungary, noted that contrary to traditional accounts that posit that the Hungarian socialist regime

created an entirely new welfare state, many of the social policies within the new state utilized earlier concepts of welfare and charity rooted in the role of family members. In particular, Haney focused on a 1952 Hungarian law that declared that all children had two parents, which subsequently enabled caseworkers to investigate paternity—a long-standing conundrum of child welfare policy as a whole. Enforcing male paternity recognition involved giving single mothers more political leverage until new full employment laws caused the regime to target the moralization of working mothers. Thus Haney distinguished between the formation of the *welfare state* and what I call *social policies* (what she called welfare regimes), with the latter consisting of policies created to implement welfare reform. Social policies could have consequences unimagined by national lawmakers. Haney clearly delineated the difference between welfare states as opposed to social policies, and she placed the family directly within the range of the welfare state.<sup>6</sup> These two works by Hong and by Haney on European welfare states offer productive avenues for thinking about the Argentine welfare state not only as a concept but also as a historical process.

The historical process in Argentina has often involved women in religious organizations. Within the United States, Maureen Fitzgerald's *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830–1920* directly addressed the role of religious women in the formation of New York's welfare system by examining the links between the Irish order of the Sisters of Charity, their self-defined mandate, and the subsidies they received at the local and state level through the influence of Tammany Hall. The Sisters were female religious figures who opposed Protestant feminists in many ways, and they did not fit the feminist imaginary of women totally submissive to the church. Indeed, the relative independence and social origins of the Sisters who operated in New York made them appear to be middle-class Irish counterparts to Protestant feminists rather than their antithesis, even though they opposed each other's views of charity.<sup>7</sup>

I have drawn on these works to formulate a framework that traces the historical process of welfare state formation. This framework analyzes the ways that social policies evolved over time (as opposed to the national welfare state created in the late 1940s); how public subsidies to philanthropic organizations, often run by women, linked the state to immigrant and religious communities; and how child social policies, often expressed by feminists and female philanthropists, provide insights into historical continuities from the rise of the liberal state until the fall of Juan Perón

in 1955. The interplay between philanthropy and feminism expands the universe of political actors to include traditional charitable organizations, immigrant welfare societies, public health specialists, child rights' advocates, and juvenile delinquency specialists. Although the often adversarial relationships of these groups are complicated, they put forward essential elements to the history of the welfare state as it evolved. The intricacies of these relationships justify the imperative for examining female philanthropy and feminism in the rise of the Argentine welfare state, and they provide a unique integrated vantage point from which to challenge a number of assumptions about the ways that welfare states develop.

Although specialists in the history of women and the welfare state have advanced female-focused welfare studies immensely, the field of grand, overarching social theory has been mostly gender neutral or focused on males. Within this category Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, published in 1992, created a firestorm of controversy by focusing on the origin of maternalist politics and promoting new questions concerning gender and the origins of the welfare state. Unfortunately, it also had the effect of excluding child welfare from these discussions. In this lengthy, brilliant monograph, Skocpol argued that the U.S. welfare system evolved in response to women's clubs and other groups that supported national mothers' pensions ("maternalist" policies), as well as the failure and corruption of the soldiers' pension plans ("paternalist" policies). At the same time she excluded the influence of all male and female "charity" work in the rise of the welfare state because it advocated a needs basis for aid and rarely reached the national level, a claim clearly refuted by others.<sup>8</sup>

Lisa Di Caprio has argued in her book published in 2007 that the French Revolution provided the seeds of the welfare state by providing work for poor women, often after women protested their plight in the streets. This perspective provides a variation of Skocpol's thesis by placing female rather than male workers at the forefront of the secularized welfare state and by directly addressing welfare issues at a very early time.<sup>9</sup>

For specialists in Argentine history, the pathbreaking efforts of Cole Blasier and his studies of the formation of social security systems formed the analytical model of Latin American social welfare until recently. Unless groups had specific national *cajas*, or social security funds, they remained invisible to the Latin American welfare state and often by theorists as well. Thus Blasier created the Latin American antecedent for the Skocpol thesis. A work on social security by Guillermo Alonso published in 2000 has built

upon the Skocpol and Blasier theses. Alonso argued that in the early twentieth century Argentine workers rarely went on strike to demand benefits from a welfare state. The state therefore had no need to respond to pressures, and early pension plans were devised for government bureaucrats, not for workers. Thus, Alonso contends, no “welfare state” existed. Equally important, Argentina fought no international wars that would have created a large demand for soldiers’ pensions. The time has come to meld gender analysis into the larger sociological and economic models often used in Latin American studies.<sup>10</sup>

For Argentines who oppose Peronist policies and its original leader, Juan Perón (1946–1955, 1973–1974), as well as for those who believe in the staunchly liberal nature of nineteenth-century Argentine society, a thesis that links female philanthropy to the welfare state may appear to be problematic. These factions would question how Peronism related to the formation of the liberal state, and whether a welfare state, that is, a complete set of national programs to provide benefits for all, ever existed in 1940s Argentina. Furthermore, they would never accord child welfare institutions and campaigns a significant role in the creation of the Argentine welfare state.

José Luis Moreno’s wonderful compilation of essays in *Social Politics before Social Politics (Charity, Beneficence and Social Politics in Buenos Aires, 1800–2000)* paved the way for understanding the history of social policies and the difficulties in forming a welfare state in Argentina. As the title implies, social policies rather than the welfare state have determined the distribution of public beneficence since the colonial period. The essays record a very long history of such social policies, female volunteerism, and governmental involvement. How can historians reconcile the existence of extensive documentation on social policies at every level of the Argentine state when some argue that Argentina had no real welfare state before Peronism? And how do we place the role of philanthropy and feminism in welfare state history?<sup>11</sup>

I have envisioned the Argentine welfare state (which is never explicitly defined within the Moreno collection) as a process that through a series of social policies began to form at the local level, particularly in municipal settings. But it is a process that did not become clearly visible at the national level until the 1940s. For example, by the 1880s municipal authorities in Buenos Aires offered free medical care to the indigent, as well as special education to future mothers, as an effort to deal with the consequences of extensive European immigration. These efforts paralleled those of philanthropic private citizens, especially women volunteers and female religious

orders. Subsequently organized philanthropies sought additional funding from municipal, state, and national governments. The process of petitioning government officials who allocated such funding, called subsidies or subventions, became a feature of Argentine politics particularly devoted to helping marginal children. The full-blown but still patchy Argentine welfare state only belatedly appeared under Peronism after the national government attempted to end these subsidies and assumed the burden of protecting minors.

This process may be similar in other countries, but most Latin American welfare state history contains neither a component of mother and child welfare nor studies of subsidies. Based upon grand theory, it begins with the implementation of a national set of policies, often in response to economic distress such as the world depression of the 1930s or a result of the emergence of a powerful leader or ideology like Juan Perón and Peronism. The fact that Latin American welfare state history ignores the charity and child rescue movements where female participation became so prevalent makes it difficult to understand the contributions of both female philanthropists and feminists. An exclusive focus on welfare activities at the national level hides the participation of actors at local and state (or in the case of Argentina, provincial) levels. Women's groups often disappear altogether unless they are involved in female suffrage or in campaigns focusing on the rights of mothers. The time has come to recast Latin American and Argentine welfare state history to include the state at all levels as well as all types of women's activities in service to the state. Now is the time to ask whether the welfare state evolved separately from social policies.

I argue that in Argentina what emerged as a Peronist welfare state became the scaffolding built around earlier social policies that offered a disjointed but rather effective edifice comprised of national subsidies to philanthropic groups. The subsidies not only provided funding but also government recognition to literally thousands of child welfare institutions operated by religious, immigrant, and municipal entities. Women led most of the organizations, particularly those focused on orphanages and young girls, and they were staffed with numerous female volunteers or members of female religious orders. Perceived gender-appropriate female roles gave these women the authority to help disadvantaged children. Female volunteerism also reflected the absence of professional jobs that would have increased female participation in the labor force as social workers, doctors, and psychologists in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth. Philanthropy became a time-consuming job and women became central to its

unpaid labor force, just as poorly paid female religious workers helped reduce the costs of paid labor.

From the early nineteenth century onward, diverse Argentine women's philanthropic and feminist groups opened up workshops, orphanages, milk programs, and juvenile reform schools. They ranged from the Sociedad de Beneficencia [Society of Beneficence] founded in 1823, the most famous and most highly subsidized agency, to lesser-known Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim organizations, immigrant-sponsored orphanages, and finally to the Eva Perón Foundation, a charity founded by the wife of President Juan Perón in 1948.

Initially, the high rates of illegitimacy and infant abandonment during the era of massive European immigration to Argentina between 1880 and 1914 served to mobilize immigrant, religious, and municipal organizations as well as politicians and public health specialists. Local groups, usually but not exclusively operated by female philanthropists, set up child-care institutions, and political groups granted municipal, provincial, and national subsidies to care for abandoned infants. After 1914, public officials shifted their concerns to support state institutions and new legal reforms for juvenile delinquents, a topic that remained in the public mind throughout the twentieth century. Female philanthropists responded accordingly by providing funding and personnel for such entities.

Feminists participated in this process by promoting civil code reforms to give mothers more custody rights over their children, as well as the right to control the use of their own salaries. Unlike U.S. feminists, they did not all see private patriarchy as the root cause of their malaise. State codes created inequities and feminists decided they needed to force the state to change laws. Furthermore, as women demanded entry into Argentine universities, their presence as teachers and students in the early twentieth century prepared the next generation of female professionals who eventually replaced unpaid voluntary female workers.

By the 1940s the expanding welfare state, along with the decreased importance of affiliation with immigrant communities, led many female philanthropic institutions to close down. A new generation of feminists and male and female political activists championed child welfare at the same time that they continued to insist on increased rights for women. Most children benefited from these campaigns because feminists believed that all mothers needed equal legal rights to protect and govern their children whereas under Argentine law only fathers exercised such rights. Furthermore, the number of orphans decreased, although single mothers contin-

ued to have economic burdens that sent their children into the streets only to be castigated by police disapproval of children working in public spaces. Thus in different ways feminists and female philanthropists worked for common goals—ensuring the welfare of mothers and children.

The rise of the Peronist welfare state has been a contentious issue for traditional historians. Contemporary Argentine feminist scholars also disagree over the meaning of the Peronist welfare state for women. A controversy emerged over the definition of the Peronist welfare state and whether it had both maternalist (mother-focused) and pro-natalist components that demanded women become mothers. Some viewed Peronism as an Argentine version of fascism. They looked at assorted child- and mother-focused laws and presented them as a Foucauldian discourse of state power demanding that women stay at home and have babies. Others, like Dora Barrancos, pointed out that contraceptives had been available throughout the period, and many typical extreme pro-natalist laws based on eugenics did not become a central focus of the Peronist tradition. A study of Peronist public health propaganda published in 2003 has supported Barrancos's views.<sup>12</sup>

Another way to approach the history of the Argentine welfare state and its relationship to female philanthropy and feminists has analyzed what volunteer women received in lieu of wages and compares it to what feminism offered. Welfare state history has ignored the unpaid labor of mothers and daughters, as well as that of female charity volunteers, even though an analysis of these contributions is fundamental to understanding the origins of gender inequality. Reversing this trend, Daniel Giménez's *Gender, Pensions and Social Citizenship in Latin America*, influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, argued that salaries formed only one form of compensation for women's social work. Giménez contended that alternative compensation must be considered, since "there is no reason why care cannot be exchanged for other forms of payment, including both material and symbolic goods (social position, among others)."<sup>13</sup> Although Giménez did not specifically address the contributions of women's philanthropic groups in Argentina, his hypothesis provides a new way to explore their contributions.

In the Argentine case, the accrual of social status and community recognition, along with an opportunity to perform good works outside the home, something that I call the "performance of charity," initially led immigrant and native-born women to engage in welfare activities. For them, charity became an empowering experience. Married women, who were particularly limited by patriarchal authority, found philanthropy to be one



of the few acceptable work options for middle- and upper-class women. The new status of philanthropic women became embodied in the substantial edifices they constructed for child welfare as well as the number of children aided. Subsequently Argentine feminists supported reforms enacted in 1926 that permitted married women to work without their husbands' permission and keep their salaries. They also campaigned for equal access to higher education and wages to improve the conditions of female laborers outside the home. Within the home, feminists believed that married women needed equal rights to govern and protect their children, while philanthropic women promoted marriage rather than consensual relations. Together, despite ideological and class antagonisms, the commitment by female philanthropists and feminists to mothers and child welfare underpinned the logic of the child-focused components of the Peronist welfare state. Peronism created new agencies to promote child welfare in which women received salaries commensurate to their education and job description. Perón also opened public universities to all students at no cost, thereby creating an educated labor force that would eventually need less help from the state.

This child-focused, gendered approach to Argentine history offers new insights revealing surprising continuities as well as shifts of social policies from the 1880s to the first Peronist era (1946–1955). Studies of political parties and the personalities of leaders obscure such relationships. Indeed, traditional Argentine history abounds with stories of the rise of political parties and their male leaders, and it privileges male-dominated political history. Such an approach makes it difficult to view continuities in Argentine social practices and policies, and it often ignores the reactions of adult inhabitants, citizens, and minors, both male and female.

The major watersheds in modern Argentine history as currently constructed begin with the formation of the nation-state, which evolved through several periods including independence from Spain (1810–1816); the Rivadavian era of early liberal rule (1823–1826) based upon reforms implemented by Bernardino Rivadavia as minister of government for the province of Buenos Aires and, for one year (1826) as national president; civil wars and the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829–1852); and the struggle between Buenos Aires and the interior provinces for control of the nation-state (1852–1880). More modern Argentine history has been based upon the political party history that began in the 1870s with the creation of the first political party, the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN), led by Julio Roca. The second, much shorter, era involved the Argentine experi-

ment in democratic practices. It encompassed the rise of the first middle-class party, the Unión Cívica Radical [the Radical Civic Union] and its leader Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916–1922, 1928–1930). This second phase also includes smaller parties, especially the Argentine Socialist Party led by Juan B. Justo. A military coup in 1930 led by José F. Uriburu interrupted political party history and led to thirteen years of dictatorship and corrupt political administration from a military-political alliance called the Concordancia [Concordance], organized by Agustín P. Justo. And then, in 1946, Juan Perón rose to power from within the military and created an alliance with labor unions that led to Peronism and the Peronist Party. This movement lasted until 1955 and another military coup that ushered in years of economic and political instabilities. This periodization reveals little about the similarities and differences in social policies and attitudes toward child welfare, as well as the welfare state itself; instead, it embeds Argentine history with personalistic politics.

Originally written by the liberal victors of the nineteenth-century civil wars, traditional historiography reveled in the liberal triumph of male politicians in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. Furthermore it made the study of the welfare state particularly difficult because it ignored the liberals' support of Catholic philanthropic institutions. Later historiographical battles between conservative (the liberal PAN), Marxist, socialist, and Peronist advocates have focused more on ruptures between political eras than on their similarities. They ignored the reality that the Argentine national government, as early as the 1880s when it "resolved" the church-state controversy by eliminating religious education from the public schools, began to subsidize religious philanthropic and educational institutions. The national government paid for the construction of new churches as well as hospitals and orphanages. Subsidies continued under the more politically disreputable alliance of the Concordancia of the 1930s. This also proved to be an important moment to begin the expansion of the social security pension system. Later military regimes have been studied from the perspective of human rights and not for the dismantling of the welfare state and the privatization of the social security system, a process that continued under subsequent democratic governments. Indeed, the study of social policies and the welfare state in Argentina uncovers a series of political relationships that political parties of all stripes would prefer to ignore. Particularly important for this work, these ties reveal strong links between the social policies of traditional parties and Peronism—often identified as a deeply divisive political ideology.

Scholars who believe that a modern welfare state really existed in Argentina attribute it to Juan Perón and his wife Eva. During his administration, Perón created two Five-Year Plans to implement political, social, and economic goals. His welfare state goals emerged in the second plan, formulated in 1951. By this time, fewer women joined philanthropic organizations because they preferred wages to status. Equally important, the age of European immigration began to fade in the minds of Argentine inhabitants and thus fewer people joined the organizations and paid dues. Instead they joined labor unions and supported political parties. These social realities enabled Perón to link his political philosophy of social justice and his wife Eva's public commitment to welfare and her performance of public love to a long-standing concern about street children and child welfare. Together the Peróns reshaped, modernized, and nationalized—but did not totally replace—the existing child welfare organizations.

In many ways Perón's welfare state relied more on rhetoric and performance than on strong institutional roots. The high costs of the welfare state contributed to Perón's willingness to continue Eva's philanthropy rather than bureaucratize the entire system. He became reluctant to close down most philanthropies and relied instead on refusing to pay out the vast subsidies that his political cronies advocated. After Eva died, however, Perón's administration began to back away from her system of philanthropy to individuals. With all of these tensions and inconsistencies, it is easy to dismiss Perón's programs as falling short of a welfare state. The absence of a firm institutional base also facilitated the actions of subsequent political leaders who privatized pension funds and dismantled much of what existed as a welfare state. Nonetheless, state-subsidized child welfare has persisted as a critical focus of government policy.

