

- Offered support and technical advice to the associations of domestic servants in preparing their legal recommendations. Supported meetings and congresses of women rural workers. Prepared jointly with the Ministry of Agrarian Reform a document on violence against women and children in the countryside. Also campaigned jointly with this Ministry (which has since been abolished) for women rural workers to have the right to own land, irrespective of marital status.
- Collaborated with the Ministry of Labor in strengthening regional labor delegations to ensure that labor laws are respected, especially those referring to maternity leave.
- Set up a series of projects with UNICEF aimed at generating income-earning opportunities for women in the North East.

## CHAPTER 6

# The Mexican Feminist Movement and Public Policy-making

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### INTRODUCTION

The early 1970s marked a resurgence of the feminist movement in Mexico. The groups behind this new wave of Mexican feminism played a significant part in introducing a new political culture and a critical cultural discourse. However, these groups have not been able to sustain or renew their initial political impact, and in the 1990s the feminist movement cannot be considered a key participant in the policy-making process relating to women.

The movement is currently disorganized and fragmented. It functions like an underground stream,<sup>1</sup> with little public participation, but with hundreds of feminists scattered amongst disparate professional and political settings. The poor political performance of the organized movement contrasts with the creativity shown by feminists who, from their public and private work niches, bring their influence to bear on the design of government programs relating to women, on the inclusion of feminist categories in the census and surveys, on developing a critique of sexism in publishing and education. A few women functionaries openly declare themselves to be feminists, yet many more act as feminists whilst not declaring themselves openly to be so. Their presence has encouraged the creation of support networks between civil servants, female politicians and feminists.

The feminist movement in some countries has become an officially recognized political actor. By challenging institutional politics and developing considerable expertise on public policy and women, the women's struggle has gained in strength and legitimacy. Society as a whole and the political parties have come to accept the reality of women's oppression and to redress it through such measures as affirmative action or quotas. In this way, women's movements<sup>2</sup> have come to form a visible political presence, which must be taken into account by the ruling group.

Why is it that feminism in Mexico has not expressed itself so strongly as feminism in Europe or North America and why has it not entered into a political dialogue with the state? The answer lies partly in the specificity of Mexican national political culture: the lack of a tradition of political mobilization,

participation and debate amongst citizens, the widespread influence of the Catholic Church, political and cultural *machismo*, the paucity of independent social organizations and trade unions.

Although these factors account in part for the movement's weakness, there are additional aspects and conditions which gave Mexican feminism its particular stamp and hampered its ability to play an active role in public policy-making. Below I present a general picture of the development of new feminism, although I shall not situate this within the wider historical and political context nor shall I analyze different feminist tendencies in any depth.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINISM

In 1970 new feminism<sup>3</sup> first took root in Mexico City, and gradually spread to other cities. For the first ten years it was a vanguard movement, mainly composed of university women and female party militants who aimed to open up a space within and gain political recognition from the Mexican left. The movement placed such novel topics as sexism on the political and cultural agenda. However, unlike the North American and some European movements, the Mexican feminist movement never became a mass movement nor did it succeed in becoming institutionalized, as did the Peruvian and Chilean movements.

The first feminist nucleus arose out of a group with Marxist tendencies. This political perspective led to continuous internal questioning about its class commitment and to an emphasis on working with working-class women. However, attempts to forge links with women factory workers, especially textile workers, did not prosper. On the one hand, in the early years of feminism, both women and men workers found it difficult to understand the feminist message, especially that relating to the relationship between production and reproduction. On the other hand, women workers often reproduced a world view which reflected the dominant ideology. They defined the double shift and sexual harassment as "private problems" which had nothing to do with their employment situation. In addition, they resisted the idea that male workmates or trade union leaders could be accomplices in the oppression of women, preferring to avoid the topic altogether. This frustrated the task of raising consciousness in the way feminists had hoped. The failure of their political work with women workers led feminists to extend the movement by focusing on middle-class, university-educated women, who already expressed a sense of grievance and who were seeking a political alternative.

#### The "Cushion"

It should be borne in mind that one of the mobilizing forces behind the feminist movement in general was increased awareness of the oppressive nature of domestic labor and housewifery. However, middle-class Mexican women, indeed even lower middle-class and many proletarian women, do not usually carry out household tasks alone. This means that they can on the whole avoid the internal tensions arising from domestic labor, and in particular the conflict between husband and wife. Mexican women are "cushioned"<sup>4</sup> from confronta-

tion and from the myriad of problems arising from domestic labor because they either have a maid or because other female family members help out with household chores and childcare. This specific situation means that feminism's political message did not fit so closely with the daily lives of women who were seeking a political alternative. With a maid at home, the struggle for childcare centers, laundrettes or communal eating facilities is blunted. Belonging to the middle class, it is easy to find the money for a safe and hygienic abortion, even carried out by your own gynecologist. Not depending on the movement to solve their daily problems nor to improve their lives, most Mexican feminists regarded their militancy as a matter of conviction rather than necessity.

In general, one can argue that as Mexican feminists could count on family support or domestic servants, they did not go through the process of rebellion and confrontation experienced by their North American or European sisters. Consequently, the dominant conception of feminism was as a mode of analysis or personal inquiry rather than as a struggle. The decision to form feminist groups represented more a discovery of women and of their common female condition, than an organizational necessity.

#### THE MOVEMENT'S FIRST DECADE: THE 1970s

The movement's first decade (1970-1979) can be divided into two significant periods: the appearance of disparate groups before 1975 and a strengthening of the movement's public face with the establishment of the Coalition of Feminist Women in 1976. In the second decade (1980-1989) the feminist movement went through three phases: the end of one of its most dynamic periods (1980-1982); a period of decline (1983-1984) until the earthquake (1985) and, thereafter, a period of revival until the VI National Encounter in Chapingo in 1989, preceded by the IV Latin American Feminist Encounter in Taxco in 1987. In the 1980s there was a significant growth of the popular movement of women,<sup>5</sup> especially after the social mobilization prompted by the earthquake and by the electoral process of 1988. At the start of its third decade, the movement entered into alliances with other groups of women, such as Women For Democracy (*Mujeres en Lucha por la Democracia*). In addition, the Feminist Coordinator of the Federal District (1990) was set up to coordinate activities in Mexico City, a plan for influencing public policy (Procurator of Justice of the Federal District (*Procuraduría de Justicia del D.F.*)) was drawn up and an umbrella group, the Women's Convention, was set up in 1991 to elect candidates for political posts.

#### Initiating a Dialogue with the State

Throughout these phases the different feminist groups attempted to form an organized movement by setting up a number of coordinating bodies. These joint spaces, such as the Feminist Women's Coalition (1976) and the National Front for the Liberation and Rights of Women (FNALIDM, *Federación Nacional para la Liberación y los Derechos de la Mujer*) (1979) were initially linked to a work axis. Later they became broader coordinating spaces, such as Net-

work (*la Red*) (1982), the Feminist Solidarity Committee (1985), the Coordinator of the Latin American Feminist Encounter (1986), and the Coordinator of the National Encounter (1988). With the creation of the Feminist Coordinator of the Federal District (1990), the movement attempted to project feminist concerns towards society at large and onto public bodies by electing representatives.

However, initiating a dialogue with the state has not been easy. This is partly due to the national political context. For several decades Mexico has had a political system in which the state has increasingly intervened in the economy but has not been concerned with political liberalization. The Mexican government has not been one to promote and uphold liberties. On the contrary, repression and corruption have characterized the political practice of the governing party, the PRI. The reverse side of this equation is accentuated class divisions, and marked inequalities of income and opportunity.

Despite stark inequality, the high level of state intervention in the economy and constant political repression, Mexican society has been going through a progressive democratization. In the past, important movements such as those of railway workers, teachers and electricians were decisively repressed, but the political crisis arising from the student movement of 1968 led to a fracturing of the PRI, and the start of democratization. During Echeverría's six-year presidential term (1970-1976), known as the "opening", the feminist movement occupied every space it could, and focused on criticizing and challenging.

#### International Women's Year

This became clear during 1974, when the Mexican government was making preparations for the United Nations-sponsored Conference for International Women's Year. As the host country, Mexico could not be seen to have backward legislation. In 1972, feminists undertook an analysis of Mexican laws,<sup>6</sup> which revealed the unequal position of women before the law: a married woman needed her husband's permission to take up employment; a man conferred his nationality on his foreign wife, whilst a woman did not, etc. Following this, a progressive official, Lupina Mendoza, invited some feminists to participate in a government working party to amend existing legislation relating to women. This informal invitation provoked a crisis of conscience. Should feminists collaborate with a widely discredited government or should they let this chance to exert influence slip by? This in turn led to a wider discussion on whether to participate in government-sponsored activities for the International Year of the Woman. The bulk of the movement (five groups) opted not to participate and to hold a counter-congress in a theatre in the South of the city. Only one group, the National Movement of Women,<sup>7</sup> opted to participate in the International Women's Year. The alternative congress did not receive much publicity. Despite holding a demonstration in front of the building where the International Year was taking place, most official delegates were not even aware that some Mexican feminists opposed the conference. The non-attendance of feminists made them invisible. This also generated an internal debate on political effectiveness and the limits of participation. By the end of

1974, several militant feminists decided to break with the movement and join in the official government program for the International Women's Year, Mexico's Program for Women. From then on, they attempted to influence the content of programs addressed to women, but their distancing from the feminist movement and their lack of identification with traditional female politicians kept them isolated.

#### Action on Abortion

In 1976 the government took up the issue of clandestine abortion and formed an Interdisciplinary Group for the study of Abortion in Mexico, GIA (*Grupo Interdisciplinario para el estudio del Aborto*). Composed of more than 80 specialists, demographers, economists, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, anthropologists, philosophers, a Catholic priest, a Protestant pastor and a Jewish rabbi, in 1976 this group advocated the abolition of criminal charges in cases where abortion was voluntary, and pressed for the introduction of technical and hygienic conditions required for such a service. Although GIA consulted some feminists, they did so in their capacity as specialists, and not as representatives of a movement. They did not seek to involve the feminist movement as a participant in the debate.<sup>8</sup>

The government did not act on the GIA's recommendations. Likewise, when the newly-created Coalition of Feminist Women presented a draft proposal on abortion to the PRI representative in the Chamber of Deputies, the proposal was not debated at the time. Nor was it debated in 1980, when feminists re-presented their legal recommendations to left-wing parties who were now represented in the Chamber, following the process of political reform initiated by López Portillo.

#### Supporting Rape Victims

At the start of its six-year term, the López Portillo government (1976-1982) closed down the offices of the Mexican Program for Women, transferring the documentation centre and the library to the Secretary of Labor. This symbolizes the lack of interest in retaining any formal space on women's issues. However, shortly after the movement made some informal progress in its relations with the state. In 1977, a sector of the Coalition organized the first support center for rape victims (CAMVAC), which was completely independent from the government. In 1978, upon hearing about the case of a young woman who killed her attempted rapist, a feminist group belonging to the Coalition went to see the Procurator of Justice of the Federal District. The Coalition monitored the trial and the young woman was set free on the grounds of "legitimate defence". The Coalition went on to establish good relations with the judicial authorities, with positive results. Volunteers from CAMVAC gained permission to be present in judicial cells and to accompany rape victims through the legal process. Above all, they won the right for rape victims to remain anonymous.

### External and Internal Difficulties

Between 1979 and 1981 there was intense feminist activity in Mexico City. There were seven feminist groups,<sup>9</sup> representing different tendencies, including some with militants of ten years' standing in the movement, and several groups of feminist lesbians.<sup>10</sup> The Coalition of Feminist Women and the National Front for Women's Liberation and Rights (FNALIDM) prepared a legal bill relating to abortion (voluntary motherhood). At that time rapprochement with the PRI was unthinkable, and existing personal and political relations with the communists made them the bearers of the feminist project, even though this meant that the majority of the PRI would oppose it. The proposal was not even discussed in the Chamber and the right-wing waged a violent campaign against it outside. In addition to other problems, these personal and political attacks debilitated feminists and at the end of 1982 the Coalition and the FNALIDM were reduced to paper organizations, without any links to the grassroots they purported to represent.

The Coalition and the FNALIDM were largely undermined by operational problems. Most importantly was the failure to resolve democratically differences arising from the multiple perspectives and levels of consciousness which it expressed. Another reason, common to both organizations, was their inability to share power, leading to a crisis of participation. The FNALIDM became disconnected from the party or trade union bases it represented and the Coalition retreated to a space which represented very few.

Relations with groups in the different Mexican states were also inadequate, and did not lead to a system of national coordination. Consequently, the movement's deliberate lack of structure and its failure to coordinate actions led to fragmentation and the dispersal of its militants. The prickly problem of leadership, which had barely been addressed, weighed heavily in this fragmentation process. The initial refusal to designate spokespersons not only turned out to be operationally and politically ineffective but it also acted as a brake on the political development of some feminists. The inability of feminist groups to set up new structures which both facilitated internal development and effective channels of communication with other movements and political organizations was a decisive factor in the movement's decline at the end of 1982. In addition, this coincided with a national economic recession as a result of the fiscal crisis of the Mexican state.

### THE MOVEMENT IN THE 1980s

In the 1980s the PRI reversed the tendency for the state to resolve political problems by increasing public expenditure. Instead, the government restricted public expenditure, terminated public services and programs, and reduced the quality of the few which remained. In addition to selling off state enterprises which were considered to be neither profitable nor fundamental, it attempted to put an end to protectionism. This altered the traditional relationship between state and society, enabling new political arguments to emerge from the cracks and the opposition to grow and become more organized. "What began as a cleaning-up of public finance at the beginning of the 1980s, inevitably

ended up by extending autonomous politics at the end of the 1980s" [Aguilar Villanueva, 1991].

### The Impact of Economic Crisis on Women

The economic crisis which occurred at the same time as this process meant a worsening in living and employment conditions. The reduction in employment in small and medium industry and the growth of jobs in the service sector, brought thousands of women onto the streets. Male unemployment made the overwhelming majority of women responsible for family survival in critical conditions. The unpaid work of women in the home and the confinement of women wage workers to a low wage female ghetto, accentuated the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty. Many employers and landlords employed women because they could pay them lower wages. The number of female-headed households, in which women alone carried out the economic and affective tasks, increased. The adjustment policies pursued were implemented at the expense of women.

This situation created serious social and family problems. Although the social composition of the feminist movement remained unchanged (middle-class, university-educated women), female militants no longer had so much time available. In other milieux, women preferred to participate in actions which brought immediate gains, such as consumer cooperatives or school committees. The issue of low levels of political participation was, therefore, not exclusive to feminism. The economic situation, together with the inability of feminist groups to resolve internal questions and to establish an effective dialogue with other movements and political organizations, largely explain feminism's decline at the beginning of the 1980s. In recognition of the need for some form of internal evaluation, one group (GAMU) organized the First National Encounter in 1981. In 1982 the Women's National Network was set up in order to link up the movement nationally and the Network organized the Second Encounter. Notwithstanding the crisis of participation in both Encounters and in the movement as a whole, provincial groups pressed forward in 1983 with the Third Encounter in Colima in 1983 with a Fourth Encounter in Michoacán in 1984. A Fifth Encounter was held in Mexico City at the end of 1984. However, these meetings were not very productive; there was little participation, much disorganization, and no resolutions or collective agreements were reached. Five years went by before the Sixth Encounter was held in Chapingo in 1989.

### Years of Feminist Retreat

During this period of decline the struggle for abortion, amongst other demands, was toned down. Feminist demobilization was such that when the government presented its own abortion bill in 1983, the movement was not in a position to respond by expressing its support. The violent opposition of the Catholic Church led the government to withdraw its proposal [Tarrés, 1991].

Despite the low public profile of the feminist movement at this time, new groups such as GEM (1982), APIS (1982), CIDHAL-México (1982) and EMAS (1985) appeared. Working with women from low-income groups, this form of "popular" feminism is mainly composed of socialist feminists, Christian women and ex-militants from left-wing parties.<sup>11</sup> The difficulties which the movement encountered in becoming institutionalized stemmed not only from the left-wing orientation of most feminist groups, but also from lack of finance. The fact that Mexico was not prioritized by many donors prevented the establishment of feminist centers, such as Flora Tristán in Peru or La Morada in Chile. It was not until the beginning of the 1980s that many feminists decided to form non-governmental organizations and seek funding. However, the financing they received was not aimed at setting up a feminist infrastructure, but for working directly with women from the popular sectors. This represented a style of working known as "popular" feminism [EMAS et al., 1987].

The years of feminist retreat coincided with a strengthening of feminism in the university sphere and with the mobilization of the women's movement following the earthquake of 1985. The need to negotiate on pressing and immediate matters gradually changed the feminist view of its relationship with the state. The 1985 earthquake acted as a trigger which led to the formation of numerous social and civic organizations and movements. Most of these groups sought to maintain their independence from official political organizations (such as trade unions and political parties) and to resolve their grievances by alternative means to the established. This new configuration of social movements, popular demonstrations and mobilization symbolized a new relationship between citizens and state marked by popular participation. The problems which concerned people rapidly became public and political. In other words, the crisis led to a strengthening of civil society.

From 1986 women's organizations (from the CONAMUP, the Neighborhood Councils, and the dressmakers' trade union "19th September") took over the leadership of a number of rallies which had traditionally been organized by the feminist movement: International Women's Day (8th March), Mother's Day (10th May), and the Day against Violence towards Women (25th November). The social composition of these mass demonstrations changed from middle-class feminists to rural women and female industrial workers. Paradoxically, the popular appropriation of feminist themes and banners led the feminist movement to abandon these spaces.

The eruption of a serious electoral conflict in 1988 opened up a new dimension of civic consciousness. Although many women regarded democracy as a way of furthering their emancipatory project, the feminist movement's vision of feminism as a "revolutionary alternative" meant that democratization was largely regarded as a reformist question. The electoral process of 1988 prompted an about-turn in the thinking of many feminists. In the absence of a feminist initiative on democratization, a new non-feminist women's organization, Women For Democracy (*Mujeres en Lucha por la Democracia*), was able to attract more than 600 leading women (feminists, party militants, trade

unionists, artists, scientists, independent intellectuals) to its programme for combatting the obstacles to full civic participation.

#### THE MOVEMENT IN THE 1990s

In the 1970s and 1980s the feminist movement had concentrated on opposing rather than negotiating with the state. The anti-PRI stance of the majority of the feminist movement led them to reject entering into any dialogue with state agencies. This position made it difficult for feminists to appreciate the need to influence the policy-making process. Mexican feminists paid a high price for directing their energy into winning space and recognition from the political left. By distancing themselves from wider political and social processes, their global perspective became restricted, hampering the development of a strategy to integrate themselves into national processes. In the past three national elections (1976, 1982 and 1988), the movement had not publicly presented itself as a movement, had not entered into alliances, and had not stood for election or expressed support for candidates. The movement operated in a fragmented and inefficient manner. Its ability to respond to national events was limited and it rarely acquired a political presence. Devoid of links with other political forces, the movement's position was either unknown or manipulated by the mass media.

#### The National Women's Movement

However, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, there was a substantive change. In 1989 the National Women's Movement MNM (*Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres*), which had always expressed more interest in influencing public policy but which had held back for the sake of unity, took a step which was initially widely criticized. Together with a woman functionary from the Procurator of Justice of the Federal District, the MNM proposed the setting up of Specialized Units for Sexual Offenses dependent on the Procurator of Justice. When this initiative became known, the MNM confronted a wave of verbal abuse and questioning about their "collaborationism" and "priism" (support for PRI).

The pioneering work of MNM led to the formation of a "Plural Group" in the Procurator of Justice of the Federal District. Composed of feminists from diverse groups, women from politics, and deputies from various parties the group collaborated on a project to reform the law relating to sexual offenses. The task of convincing female deputies from across the political spectrum was successfully undertaken by a feminist left-wing deputy<sup>12</sup> and led to an unprecedented alliance between female parliamentarians. The bill was jointly presented by all women deputies and approved in 1990.

The experience of the "Plural Group" and the links forged with women deputies led feminists to reconsider their position on forming alliances with women in the state apparatus. Political agreement between women was now discussed as a democratic mechanism which was both politically responsible and a form of legitimation. Although a fair distribution of power between the sexes involves much more than a progressive increase in the number of wom-

en filling political posts, it was recognized that numbers were important. Whilst quantity is no guarantee of quality, a large group of women, even if still a minority, can form an important "critical mass".<sup>13</sup> Where women are few and far between, opportunities for contact and support are less forthcoming. Although a body of women does not guarantee that women's viewpoints will be upheld nor a commitment to women, it is vital to have more women in posts of political decision-making. The ease with which women deputies from different parties reached agreement on the topic of sexual violence, in spite of the jeers of their male colleagues, had to do with the fact that they were women. A substantial female presence in political institutions enables women to generate strength and unity in the face of male opposition. Consequently, the next step was seen to be the election of more women candidates in order to remedy the prevailing numerical imbalance.

#### "Women for Democracy"

As Mexican electoral law prevents the direct participation of social movements or of citizens, the "Women For Democracy" group met in March 1991 with the aim of forming a united body which could canvass parties to appoint women with a gender commitment to posts of popular representation. Although the resulting National Convention of Women for Democracy (*Convención Nacional de Mujeres para la Democracia—CNMD*) aimed to form such a broad alliance, women from the PAN and the PRI did not join. The CNMD began with 39 female candidates, rising to 45 after a few weeks. Although the overall results were poor (only one deputy and 2 "*asambleístas*"<sup>14</sup> being elected and in several parties women's presence decreased substantially [Lovera, 1991], the participation of members of the Feminist Coordinator of the Federal District was significant as the new feminists had historically spurned the electoral contest.

The poor results notwithstanding, the CNMD opened up the possibility of bringing together party militants, feminists, and rural women. It was a wise political move on the part of the Feminist Coordinator to support this attempt to combine the range of women's thought and actions by extending women's electoral representation. Undoubtedly, the political will of women candidates from different parties to work together to reform discriminatory laws and implement laws in favor of women was most encouraging. In addition, the example of CNMD had repercussions for national political life. Although restricted to the Federal District, the CNMD's strategy of electoral participation aroused the interest of women in several states of the Republic.

For the first time the subject of quotas began to arouse interest as an effective way of reducing the stark disadvantage experienced by women. Neither the government, nor the ruling party, accept quotas for women, while the only opposition party to support quotas (the PRD) does very little to put this into practice [García et al., 1991].

Following the electoral experience, the Feminist Coordinator fell back on "private" ways of acting and sectarian practices. Rooted in a politics of identity, the Feminist Coordinator proved incapable of negotiating since it had

nothing to offer. Its failure does not reflect a process of co-option as it has no social base to be co-opted. In addition to problems of leadership, the movement scarcely grew in size and underwent a serious generational crisis: its feminist militants being over 35 years of age. The marked absence of younger women is not only a problem of political ineffectiveness on the part of feminists but the resistance of youth to organizational spaces which it does not consider to be of its own making.

The Coordinator has not been able to go beyond the framework set out by the previous Coalition of Feminist Women in 1976. This coalition was the first attempt to unify the movement around the struggle relating to abortion, violence against women and sexual freedom. The Coordinator was founded 14 years later (1990) around the same three points, but has not had the influence that the Coalition did in its time.

A comparison may help to illustrate the current situation of the feminist movement. Although the number of feminists in proportion to the total female population has always been derisory, in the earlier period the movement formed an active minority whose practices and discourse resounded in various quarters. Today, the movement's activism has stultified. Three clear expressions of this are: the professionalization of groups of militant feminists as a result of funding; the academic legitimacy of women's studies; and the consolidation, in official political circles, of female political figures holding a feminist perspective.

#### Rethinking Relations with the State

A fundamental change in the 1990s is the increased readiness of a number of feminists to negotiate with the state, following the left's reassessment of the role of representative democracy. The willingness to rethink relations with the state has brought to the fore new organizational and leadership styles. Among female politicians, there is a tendency to assume a feminist stance without following this through to a logical conclusion. For example, although they may defend quotas they do not engage in a serious debate on affirmative action. Thus the feminist struggle has been reduced to the symbolic political presence of a few women who are used to bolster the argument that there are no obstacles to women's participation so that their separate organization is unnecessary.

Carlos Monsiváis [1990] detects a "change of mentality" in Mexico as a result of the "country's cultural internationalization, the extension of secondary and higher education, the widespread secularization which regards tolerance as a means of development and feminist theories". Although feminists have pushed the debate forward over the past twenty years, they are absent from politics, and from public positions. The movement faces a serious decline. Some feminists have attempted to address in a limited and specific way the many daily problems besetting women. This involves influencing public policies in order to develop new options. A first step towards this is to dispense with the self-complacency of the victim discourse and to rethink the contradiction between work and reproduction (in its widest sense) with a view to

making policy recommendations for all women, but especially for those who remain outside traditional political policies: mothers, housewives, maids and prostitutes.

There is no such thing as a natural unity of women. This unity has to be politically constructed and this means building alliances. In the past feminists have carried out much of their politics on the side of the political left, making an alliance with those in the state apparatus who support feminist proposals difficult. This is slowly changing. At the end of the day, what the political struggle has shown is that the sexist basis of power remains intact. In the face of such a panorama, it is left for us women to be cognizant of one thing only: we must actively participate if we are to achieve change. Only the maturation of feminist political practice will lead to a transformation of the balance of power between men and women. This task involves seeking out facts and perspectives which document the existence of sexual difference in society and transforming relations between women.

As contemporary forms of politics and the state have been built on the basis of masculine dominance, women are faced with a dilemma from the start: they must work to improve the position of women within the existing social and political order whilst at the same time aspiring to destroy this order and build a new one. Maria Luisa Boccia [undated] has suggested that feminist practice should acknowledge its ambivalence if it is not to be weakened. This means both "participating in and keeping a distance from politics; struggling to have a presence whilst at the same time questioning that presence; participating, but making clear the 'idiosyncratic' position of non-adherence to the political order"; demanding civil liberties and policies on women, whilst being aware that women's freedom does not depend on extending social justice or civil rights.

#### ENDNOTES

1. This expression is taken from Luciana Castellina, an Italian feminist.
2. In Mexico the feminist movement and the women's movement are not synonymous. The women's movement includes movements of peasant women and women from popular neighborhoods who do not necessarily embrace feminist demands.
3. For an appreciation of new feminism, see Acevedo [1978], Jaiven [1987] and Jamas [1987].
4. Rosario Castellanos, "La liberación de la mujer, aquí", *Excelsior*, 5 September, 1979, reproduced in *El uso de la palabra*, Ediciones de Excelsior, Mexico, 1974.
5. Mobilizations of women have occurred across the political spectrum. A preliminary attempt to classify the democratic struggles of women since the resurgence of new feminism in 1970 is found in Acevedo, Lamas and Liguori [1978]. This account is limited as it excludes right-wing mobilizations, such as the anti-abortion demonstrations and the activities of PRI activists. Five categories are differentiated: (1) labor and trade union struggles carried out by women workers and employees; (2) the mobilization of peasant

- women for land, water or the means of production; (3) actions traditionally undertaken by women in solidarity with male comrades in struggle, such as support committees or committees of mothers of the disappeared; (4) spontaneous mobilizations around women's issues, but which are not informed by feminism; and (5) mobilizations which are specifically feminist.
6. This research was undertaken by Cristina Laurel and presented to the Conference of the Ciptactli by the MAS in 1972.
7. In 1972 the National Movement of Women was legally founded. Its social composition differs from that of the MAS in that its members tend to be managers or professionals drawn from the world of advertising or publishing, with no links to left-wing parties, and some with family connections to the PRI or PAN. This group adopted a legal formula—Civil Association—and is structured with a president, treasurer, secretary, etc. Their main objective is to achieve the legal, social and political equality of the sexes, to defend women's existing rights and to combat discrimination against women.
8. Maria Luisa Tarrés et al. [1991] appropriately refer to this period as "the dialogue of experts".
9. These were the Movement for the Liberation of Women (MLM), the National Women's Movement (MNN), The Revolt (*La Revuelta*) (LR), the Women's Collective (CM), the Mexican Feminist Movement (MFM), Feminist Struggle (LF), and Autonomous Groups of University Women (GAMU).
10. Among these Lesbos, Acratas and Oikabeth stand out. Later the Seminar of Marxist-Leninist Lesbians and the Fourth Crescent (*Cuarto Crescente*) appeared on the scene.
11. In 1989 women from these groups organized the First Encounter of Women from the Popular Sectors, which led to the opening up of spaces for discussion and work with women from different sectors.
12. This was Amalia García, from the PRD, who had played a key role in presenting legislation on voluntary motherhood in 1980.
13. This expression is taken from Drude Dahlerup and cited by Boccia [undated].
14. The position of "asambleísta" arises from the fact that the Federal District of Mexico (where Mexico city is located) is not a federal unit and cannot therefore elect its governors. To alleviate this situation, the Assembly of Representatives of the Federal District (*Asamblea de Representantes del D.F.*) was recently created, with limited functions.

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## CHAPTER 7

# Women's Struggle for Equality and Citizenship in Chile

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### INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in public life is an ongoing and irreversible process which has become increasingly linked to global issues of democracy and development. Its resolution involves a range of actors: women and men, social entities, the state, public powers and the international community. From a feminist perspective, the aim is to ensure that these processes and relations move in a democratic direction. The project for change advocated by the women's movement is itself undergoing transformation: its tone has become less belligerent and it is seeking a more measured public agenda in negotiation with other social actors and interests. How is this transformed agenda regarded by feminists themselves?

In view of these developments it is appropriate to reflect on the future strategies of feminism. In the end we are left with the age-old feminist question of what it means to "do politics". The history of women's attempts to form a political movement shows that the movement for gender equality grows when feminism abandons introspection and makes inroads into the structures of power and reaches out to women in general. Achieving equality for women is therefore central to the concept of democracy. As Lechner [1994] remarks, "equality of opportunities for women is an opportunity for democracy".

With this in mind, this chapter explores relations between women, the state and civil society in two key areas: the development of public policies on women and political action by women as social actors and citizens. The Chilean case is illustrative partly because it is paradigmatic for many other Latin American countries but mainly because after nearly two decades of dictatorship it has come closest to attaining a level of development which articulates democracy, economic growth and equity.

### STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND WOMEN

Nearly three decades have passed since Latin American feminism first aimed to make visible the discrimination suffered by women. The issue of equal op-