The Feminist Movement and the Development of Political Discourse on Voluntary Motherhood in Mexico

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The feminist contribution to the defence of reproductive and sexual rights in Mexico has been based on two elements: activist campaigns and public discourses. In this paper I analyse the ways in which political contexts have affected how the feminist discourse on abortion has developed and argue that the effective defence of reproductive and sexual rights depends on further discursive work. We in the feminist movement in Mexico must reformulate and articulate shared values that oblige other sectors to join in the defence of these rights within the context of the development of democracy.3 This requires patient translation of old principles into new concepts and the integration of reproductive and sexual rights into the definition of modern citizenship.

In the early 1970s the feminist groups who made up the Feminist Women's Coalition in Mexico, and who worked together for the legalisation of abortion, organised a campaign to fight for 'voluntary motherhood'.2 This campaign emphasised four indispensable elements:

- sex education specifically developed for different age groups and social sectors,
- reliable and inexpensive contraceptives,
- abortion as a last resort, and
- rejection of forced sterilisation.

These four demands comprised – and continue to do so today – the basic components of the defence of reproductive and sexual rights in Mexico. At the time, we were so convinced of the legitimacy of our demands that we believed we had only to present our arguments to society and the government for our goals to be achieved.

In 1976, the last year of Mexican President Echeverría's mandate, the government decided to address difficult issues, presumably because it had nothing to lose. The National Population Council (CONAPO) set up an Interdisciplinary Group for the Study of Abortion, which consisted of more than 80 demographers, economists, psychologists, physicians, attorneys, anthropologists, philosophers, a Catholic priest, a Protestant pastor and a Jewish rabbi.3 This Group's work culminated in recommendations that all criminal sanctions against voluntary abortion be lifted and abortion offered as part of health services.

The government shelved these recommendations, which were never published. However, for those of us in the feminist movement, this statement by so many specialists confirmed the justice of our demands. It also revealed the problem of the power to implement such recommendations. We realised that it was not only important to spread the word about the legitimacy of our cause, but perhaps more importantly, also to gather greater support for it.

Public acceptance of an alternative, radical discourse is often minimal, and this was the case with the discourse on voluntary motherhood in Mexico in the 1970s. Although references to social justice and public health were included from the start in feminist discourse, it became difficult to translate these into the language of the formal political sphere, primarily because its perspective is one of ideological opposition.4
Thus, political attention centred primarily on the demand for the legalisation of abortion, partly because of its illegality. Slogans like ‘my body is mine, hands off’ and ‘women’s bodies as property’ became the main focus of attention, especially in the media. Eventually, in terms of discourse, the more inclusive demands of ‘voluntary motherhood’ were forgotten and the issue was reduced only to abortion, which was then repudiated as a self-centred feminist demand.

Effects of weak democracy in the 1980s
Mexico’s political system is characterised by weak democratic institutions and scarcely any participation in the political process on the part of its citizens. Sixty years of uninterrupted rule by the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), and the virtual non-existence of any opposition led to an absence of public debate and a lack of advocacy or negotiation of political goals. This situation has not favoured the development of wide public discussion of policies or civic issues. ‘Voluntary motherhood’ is an issue which profoundly concerns the democratic aspirations of women, but it has never been recognised as a political issue that belongs on the parliamentary agenda.

Despite the fact that feminist women increasingly participated in other social movements during and after the 1970s, most Mexican women did not see the feminist movement as a political option for themselves. The development in the mass media of a stereotypical feminist, influenced by US media images which portrayed feminists only as abortionists, also did not help to bring in the great waves of support we had hoped for. In contrast, popular organisations after the 1985 earthquake did become a viable means of social and political participation for many women. However, the demands that mobilised the women’s groups formed after that disaster were not related to sexuality or reproduction, even though the women in these groups were among those suffering most from the consequences of illegal abortion, the lack of sex education and reproductive health care abuses.

In the 1980s there were three important attempts to address the subject of abortion which gave rise to debate in the Mexican press, each under a different President. In 1980, after a long and hard discussion with parliamentary representatives of the Communist Party, most of whom did not want to ‘stigmatise’ the party with the issue of abortion, the feminist movement achieved a small victory. It persuaded them to table a bill in the Mexican congress on voluntary motherhood. The victory was short-lived, however, since the bill was never discussed.

In 1983, a bill put forward by the Attorney General, the Department of Justice of Mexico City and the National Institute of Criminology to reform the Penal Code caused a violent reaction on the part of the Catholic Church. The conservative Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), Pro Life and Opus Dei created an uproar in the media and, as before the government was dissuaded from pursuing it.

In 1989, the police raided a private clinic that was carrying out abortions. They detained women patients, nurses and a doctor and took them to Tlaxcoaque, a police headquarters, where they were jailed without a court order, mistreated (some women claimed they were tortured) and subjected to extortion. Some days after their release, one woman dared to file suit against them and the scandal was out in the press. There was widespread indignation about the brutality of the police. A group of feminists published an advertisement, signed by 283 well-known women with different political stances (writers, public officials and artists) and endorsed by 427 more. It was the first time that feminists had agreed to take action with other women, especially women from the ruling party.

This happened just after the post-electoral fiasco of 1988, caused when the computer system ‘failed’ while counting the votes. Final results were not made available until more than a week later. Word got round that the opposition candidate had been winning when the computers failed. Afterwards, all the parcels containing the ballots were burned, so there was no way to check whether the results, which favoured the official candidate, were accurate or not.

There was widespread public discussion and calls for respect for the right to vote. Peasants, teachers, workers, civil servants and other sectors spoke out about people’s experiences of defencelessness in the face of state power on the part of the police, the courts, government bureaucrats, the military or the public finance system. Although the criminal law on abortion is yet another manifestation of the arbitrariness of the state, the fact is that the discourse of Mexican
feminists has not clearly identified this as an issue of lack of democracy for women but rather, as one aspect of patriarchal control.

The incorporation of feminist arguments
In December 1990 the state congress of Chiapas passed a bill decriminalising abortion if it was requested by a couple for family planning purposes, or by a single woman, or on economic grounds. This bill was passed without debate or discussion by the ruling PRI. Their total disregard for the opposition backfired, however, and important sectors of Chiapas society, backed by the Catholic Church, made an uproar. The reform was ‘frozen’; the right-wing took advantage of the situation and orchestrated a campaign in the Mexico City media against the bill.

The traditional assumption that people have to be either for or against abortion was expressed in the debates inspired by the Chiapas bill, but the Catholic Church’s adamant stance got less social support than in the past. Apart from the usual feminist groups, first-rank scientists and intellectuals supported the bill, and unexpected statements in favour of decriminalising abortion were made by a number of organisations, including the Trades Union Congress.

This progressive stance comes from what Carlos Monsiváis describes as:

‘...the country’s cultural internationalisation, the increase in secondary and higher education, the general secularisation that uses tolerance as a tool for development, and the theories of feminism.’

The 1990s have been witness to, in the words of Monsiváis, ‘the transformation of feminist reasoning into civil society arguments.’ By this he means that the ideas that had traditionally belonged to feminist activists were, for the first time, being heard in the mouths of common people. The significance of this fact, according to Monsiváis, was that:

‘...almost all the arguments in favour of decriminalising abortion had been stated and repeated, but never before had they been so widely heard, or so spontaneously and frequently mentioned.’

Discourses that contradict each other co-exist in every society. Despite the fact that new practices, marked by the processes of modernisation, had introduced new cultural meanings, the dominant discourse on abortion – ‘Are you for life or against life?’ – remained the same:
abortion was a crime. Thus, it was necessary to develop a new discourse, based on the right to choose, that would reflect a democratic perspective on the conflict and transmit it to public opinion.

The need for a new feminist discourse on abortion
Mexican socio-religious reality is complex. For centuries the Catholic Church has been deeply embedded in Mexican life as an institution. But the Mexican Revolution, with its liberal and socialist influences, feared the political intrusion of the Church and established anti-clerical laws that not only created a separation between church and state, but outlawed the church. In the Constitution of 1917, churches were denied legal status; their members could not own property; priests and nuns were forbidden to wear their habits in public; mass could not be said openly in church buildings; and there were no diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

In 1939 the Catholic Church regained many of these privileges and from then on it had a much more substantive presence, but it was only in 1991 that the Constitution was reformed to establish freedom of religious belief and all religions granted the right to practise openly. For the first time in this century, the Mexican state established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. For the Catholic Church, with its great symbolic and economic power, this meant an awesome increase in public life in Mexico, especially the right to have a presence in the media.

In fact, one of its first campaigns was in opposition to the family planning programme and the massive AIDS prevention campaign promoting condom use, being carried out by the government at that time. Concerned about these easily foreseeable consequences, a group of feminists (including myself) decided that a new secular organisation was needed, capable of counterbalancing the force of this unleashed Catholic Church. We wanted to move beyond the traditional discourse 'for or against abortion' to ask: who should make the decisions regarding the termination of a pregnancy? We felt it was necessary to transform the profoundly subversive concept of women's re-possession of their own bodies into arguments that are more closely bound to democratic concerns. Formulated in this way, a question of morality becomes a question that is closely related to the concept of rights. Our objective was to move the abortion debate to the appropriate discursive context. The central issue became: who decides and according to what precepts are decisions made in a diverse society with democratic aspirations?

Multifaceted strategies
GIRE has a number of strategies aimed at transforming cultural values and legal norms in relation to sexual and reproductive rights. These include advocacy, research, dissemination of information and training our supporters as public spokespersons. We are mainly working with four target groups: decision-makers (parliamentarians, public officials, policymakers); health professionals (doctors, nurses and social workers); young people (especially student leaders); and political figures (union leaders, NGO directors, grassroots and feminist leaders).

When GIRE tried to find out the extent of the problem of clandestine abortion in Mexico, we discovered official figures that were inconsistent and underestimated the problem. So we analysed the available data in a way that stripped it of sensationalist overtones. At the Safe
Motherhood Conference in Mexico in 1993, it was said that there were about 850,000 illegal abortions in Mexico each year. Yet the National Population Plan 1995 put the number at 220,000 yearly. GIRE believes that this figure is so low for political reasons, so that the government need not acknowledge the real dimensions of the problem. In that way, they do not feel obliged to take the issue seriously. We contend that the higher figure is closer to reality.

The number of maternal deaths in Mexico is 1300-1400 per year. Abortion is the third largest cause of maternal deaths, but it is well recognised that haemorrhage and sepsis, the first two principal causes, often arise from complications of abortion as well. Stigma around abortion makes people say a woman died of haemorrhage or infection to avoid admitting that she had an abortion.

GIRE has also been concerned with the content of public opinion about abortion and decided to explore this from a different perspective than usual, when two polls on abortion were published in the journal Este Pais in 1991. One of the two polls asked people in Mexico City ‘Are you for or against abortion?’ The other, carried out by feminist researchers Susan Pick de Weiss and Marta Givaudan in Chiapas and Mexico City, asked questions such as:

- Who should decide if a woman is to have an abortion, only she herself, she and her partner, or others?
- Do you think that sexual education starting in childhood will prevent abortions?
- Which women are most affected by illegal abortion?
- Should women take into account their church’s position when deciding on abortion?
- Should public health institutions provide abortion services?

GIRE realised from this the importance of the questions that are posed. We got Pick’s help to prove this in a series of national surveys in 1992, 1993 and 1994, which Gallup carried out. GIRE did not want to repeat the traditional mistake of asking people whether they were for or against abortion. Instead, the questions asked included both closed questions with multiple-choice answers, and open-ended questions. For example, to the question ‘Who should make the decisions regarding an abortion?’ possible answers were: the woman alone; both the woman and her partner, when she has a partner; the government; the church; the man; doctors; or others. We also asked whether interviewees knew about the legal status of abortion, their opinion about the role of the church, whether abortions should be performed in public hospitals and whether they believed that legalising abortion would prevent many women’s deaths.

The results supported our analysis. In our 1992 survey, 42.5 per cent said the decision belonged to the woman alone and an additional 35.5 per cent said the woman in conjunction with her partner – together totalling 78 per cent.

In the 1993 survey, we did not give a separate choice between the woman alone and the woman and her partner. The number who answered the woman with her partner was 88.4 per cent and in 1994, it was 82.7 per cent. The percentage who said the Church should decide was only just over one per cent in each poll.

Thus, we showed that more than three quarters of the Mexican population respects a woman’s right to choose. In fact, this majority public opinion was reflected in cutting-edge juridical, political, medical and moral arguments, by a number of government and civil service spokespeople, in support of the decriminalisation of abortion during the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. At last, abortion was being discussed as a public health issue by public officials and as a social justice issue by politicians.

Yet the symbolic, political and economic weight of the Catholic Church and its supporters continues to obstruct decriminalisation. At the same time, the conservative party PAN has won many of the governorships in several states. Where the PAN has a majority in a state Congress, as in Chihuahua, it has changed the local Constitution to include ‘the right to life from the moment of conception’, even though this contravenes the Federal Constitution and state penal codes.

Hence, the situation today could not be more disheartening: reproductive and sexual rights are gaining more recognition than ever before, precisely at a time when conservative forces are moving into public positions where they can impede the implementation of policies that make the exercise of those rights possible.
Countering traditional ideology

The weight of official Catholic ideology in the cultural fabric very much affects the discourse on abortion and the changing identities of women and men’s roles. Although in some places old identities are being shed, this is not yet possible everywhere in Mexico. The process of severing ties with a guilt-based, Catholic discourse is not easy, especially for the rural population. The Catholic ideological framework still influences reproductive behaviour and affects public and governmental responses.17

The acceptance of certain aspects of feminist thinking by international institutions, such as the United Nations, has been helpful in the construction of a new discourse, through which new understandings earn legitimacy. The weight of the discourse on women in the Cairo and Beijing documents, with the use of contemporary terms such as ‘gender’ and ‘empowerment’, has been decisive. Furthermore, the fact that previously silenced demands have become part of international debates has forced at least some governments to re-think and re-define their positions. Political debate has been generated and cracks have been opened in the previously monolithic refusal to address abortion publicly.18

Even before the official Mexican delegation left for Beijing, Secretary of Health Juan Ramón de la Fuente found it necessary to state that the debate on abortion – a serious public health problem of concern to the whole society – was not closed.19 In an attempt to undermine any possibly favourable responses to the 1995 Beijing resolutions, right-wing forces such as the PAN and the Catholic Episcopate began to attack abortion in the media.20 Shortly after the Beijing conference, the PAN published an advertisement in a national newspaper21 that criticised the government for having accepted the resolution which urged governments to:

‘...consider the possibility of reviewing laws that provide punitive measures against women who have had illegal abortions’.

The following day Norberto Rivera, the Catholic Primate of Mexico, declared that the Mexican government’s willingness to open a discussion on decriminalising abortion was ‘wrong’ because it would ‘divide and confront Mexicans’.22 Two days later, Pro Life, the largest anti-abortion organisation in Mexico, called for the resignation of the head of the National Population Council for having sent ‘a pro-abortion, feminist’ delegation to Beijing, and for ignoring a resolution on abortion passed by three pre-Beijing meetings to which only conservative groups sympathetic to PAN’s politics were invited. Yet in none of those three meetings was a single representative of the 250 women’s NGOs who had held national discussions in preparation for Beijing invited – nor any feminist groups.

On the basis of the anti-abortion consensus in those three meetings, attended by more than 1300 people (who were not randomly selected), it had been proposed that Mexico’s position in the Beijing conference be anti-abortion.23 The head of the Mexican delegation listened and said nothing. The same day, the conservative newspaper El Heraldo asserted that rejection of the decriminalisation of abortion had been the consensus of that day’s meeting.24 The Mexican government was urged not to support commitments that the people did not accept and that were ‘against the values and principles of the nation’. These words came from someone who himself ignored the Gallup results showing that 80 per cent of the country were pro-choice.

The Catholic Church into action

In a September 1995 memorandum,25 the Catholic Episcopate called for a pilgrimage ‘in favour of life and the family’ the following month. A separate letter, on unheaded paper, was distributed along with the memorandum, which contained a number of equivocations:

‘Mexico: Do you really support this? Mexico has agreed to the accords reached by the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, with no reservations. We Mexicans support the aspects of the document that promote women’s dignity, but we question:

1. Decriminalisation of abortion and its presentation as an additional health service.
2. Acceptance of homosexual and lesbian families’ right to adopt.
3. The elimination of the word ‘mother’ in the family.
4. The promotion of contraceptives without parental consent among pre-adolescents (11
It is interesting that the concept of decision-making is raised here, alongside distortions of meanings in the Beijing resolutions, intended to play on people's fears, such as eliminating mothers from the family or encouraging pre-adolescent sex regardless of parental opinion. Just as we feminists seek to modify and update our discourse, Catholic fundamentalist groups are also transforming their language.

Their taking over of progressive language for reactionary ends was clearly a feature in the Cairo and Beijing conferences. The Vatican accused the UN of imposing First World cultural standards on the Third World and accepting pressure on the part of the USA to impose 'contraceptive imperialism' as a manifestation of concern about discrimination against women.

In Mexico, the most visible change has been in the discourse of the anti-abortion group Pro Vida. Conscious that their sensationalist, condemning arguments have been losing ground, Pro Vida has tried to turn the tables, making women the victims of abortion and an anti-abortion stance as a defence of women's rights. A number of aspects of feminist discourse were incorporated into their new discourse: opposition to discrimination against women, respect for motherhood and support for informed consent. Thus Pro Vida strove to disguise their rejection of contraception and family planning to win the support of a sector of disorientated women. Pro Vida has a low rating amongst poor and middle-class urban women, who shy away from their aggressive and fundamentalist views. With a more tempered and up-to-date discourse, they hope to gain ascendance in these sectors. Among rural and poorer women, the Church continues to dominate.

When concepts articulated by the Left are used by the Right to support their own views, it is necessary to clarify precisely what is going on; often it requires much creativity to defend democratic positions effectively. For example, the office of Catholics for a Free Choice in Mexico, which has attempted in various impressive ways to reclaim democratic values within an anti-democratic context, produced a poster of the Annunciation with the statement: ‘Mary was asked if she wanted to become the Lord's mother. The right to choose belongs to everyone.’

The challenge of transforming cultural traditions
As Chaneton has observed, dissident discourses are strengthened by discussion of their meanings within the very group they were born into. It is very important that Catholic women question the Vatican's fundamentalist position in the face of the possibility of achieving choice for women.

Feminists in Mexico have found little support in their struggle for 'voluntary motherhood' from political parties, and an apparent lack of interest on the part of government. Political parties tend to limit their interest in women to electoral promises, and they have not yet considered issues of gender in defining their platforms and strategies.

Integrating reproductive and sexual rights into the national political agenda implies the reformulation of values that are an integral part of tradition. It is not easy to question the myth of the self-sacrificing mother, for example. On the contrary, it is complicated to accept the cultural significance of the idea that a potential mother may wish not to become a mother.

Cultural changes inspired by modernisation, film and other media images of women are helping to challenge traditional ones, even if not always in realistic or valuable ways. On the other hand, there is often an enormous breach between these images and the reality of many people's lives. In a social context marked by widespread unemployment and a lack of housing, sexual and reproductive practices are called into question in other ways. There are serious material and ideological obstacles to preventing or dealing responsibly with unwanted pregnancies, leading to an increase in both the numbers of abortions and of unwanted children, in a society like Mexico's, that offers little help in the difficult task of raising children.

One of the most important changes to come out of these past decades - women's increased control over their fertility - is a by-product of modernisation. This has undoubtedly contributed to the transformation of traditional women's roles and had a liberating effect. Yet
there have also been violations of women’s rights, resulting from pressure being put on physicians in public hospitals to fulfil high contraceptive use quotas, including for sterilisation, to bring down population growth rates. Sterilisation has been particularly ‘promoted’ among women who come from the most vulnerable social strata and who use the public health services.26

Yet it is precisely because of difficulties in exercising reproductive and sexual rights that the potential for democratic mobilisation exists. This raises questions of how to bring feminist demands into the social context, and integrate them into people’s political aspirations and the country’s political agenda. Breaking with tradition requires the construction of an inclusive, comprehensible and attractive discourse.

All forms of power translate into a capacity to impose meaning, and customs and traditions are often defined according to the views of those in power. Tradition and modernity in cultural identities oppose and fuse in various and contradictory ways. For example, just as the Catholic message ‘Have all the children that God sends you’ can be found in the cultural fabric, it is also important to recognise the tenacious reality of abortion present in Mexican society. Abortion is an indigenous reality, present long before the Spanish conquest.27

This point is crucial in a country that values its indigenous origins, and also is important to counterbalance the Vatican’s assertion that Third World women do not have abortions. Showing that Mexican women have had abortions throughout their history is a way to defend the right to abortion, which has not been forced on women as an imperialist idea by First World interests.

In Mexico, to legitimise the feminist discourse on reproductive and sexual rights we need to deal with the tension between cultural identity, modernity and modernisation. That begins with accepting our own cultural identities and, at the same time, recognising that the intercultural fabric is not one entity. There is an especially repressive Catholic ideology that contradicts modern democratic aspirations. How should the decision of thousands of Mexican women to interrupt unwanted pregnancies be understood? Their actions imply that, notwithstanding the illegality of abortion, throughout Mexico women are exercising self-determination in relation to their reproductive lives. This leads on to the influence of ‘basic values and attitudes associated with the promotion of social and individual liberties, social progress, development of personal potential, and a democratic calling that leads to the defence of tolerance and diversity’.28

GIRE is trying to build a new discourse on citizenship that includes reproductive and sexual self-determination. Reproductive and sexual rights are at the juncture between the social and the psychological, and for this reason gain fundamental relevance in the bodies of all citizens. In that direction, we must work to produce a new ideology, in the sense of ‘the symbolic articulation of ideas and values capable of bringing together and mobilising social groups.’28 As these new concepts are used and new arguments developed, alternative discourses and dissident views will gain the strength needed to put the infallibility of ecclesiastic functionaries and the blindness of bureaucrats and politicians into question, and put sexual and reproductive rights on the democratic agenda.

A ray of optimism
Although GIRE cannot possibly succeed in developing a new discourse alone, let alone legal and social changes, current transformations in Mexican politics bring a ray of light into a dark landscape. In July, the centre-left candidate Cárdenas (PRD) won the local election in Mexico City by a large majority over the official candidate (PRI), leaving the conservative PAN in third place. This suggests an urban, progressive constituency that is literally fed up with the traditional political discourse. The PRD has ‘voluntary motherhood’ in its platform. Now, the media have begun talking about the possibility of the legalisation of abortion. This has led, once more, to the inevitable declarations against it by the Catholic Church and its usual allies.

However, the PRD hold the majority in the Mexico City congress and could, very easily, table a bill on their own. Mexico City has the oldest criminal code in the republic: abortion is not punishable if it is done to save the life of the woman, if the pregnancy is the result of rape, or in cases of accidental miscarriage. Many
states reformed their criminal codes in the 1980s, and GIRE has been pushing for progressive legal reform in Mexico City as regards abortion as follows: abortion should not be punishable when it is done on grounds of fetal abnormality, risk to the woman's health or for economic reasons. Mexico lacks the legal means to hold a referendum or plebiscite; nevertheless, the newly elected mayor, Cárdenas, has promised a 'public consultation' on the issue of abortion. It is plausible that at the very least, there will be a public debate on the abortion question.

GIRE has been working for some years on a bill broadening the legal grounds for abortion, and alongside other feminists in Mexico City we are exploring ways of supporting the reform of the criminal code on abortion, measures that need support from other sectors. Curiously, economic reasons for abortion are rejected, while eugenic and health reasons are well accepted, as is the need to give HIV-positive women the option of abortion.

It is a good moment to articulate a discourse on citizenship, based on a model for a just society, in relation to sexual and reproductive matters. Surely many tensions and internal contradictions will come out in the next years. But if the recognition of 'sexual difference' in the modern definition of citizenship is necessary and urgent, changing restrictive laws that put women's health and lives at risk is even more so. Changes in the law, followed by the establishment of adequate health services, are needed to begin to achieve the exercise of reproductive and sexual rights.

After more than 25 years, the new political situation in Mexico City puts the original feminist proposal for 'voluntary motherhood' in the centre of political attention. The challenge is to fight against a repeat of the reduction of this concept only to abortion. This, and the task of interweaving the Cairo and Beijing accords into our demands is our task for the next three years. This is the first time in this century that Mexico City has had an opposition government. Feminists must take advantage of this new state of affairs.

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References and Notes
1. I am speaking for myself as a feminist in this paper, not for the feminist movement in Mexico, in which different tendencies co-exist. I do subscribe to the views of a substantial tendency within Mexican feminist thought, however, and some of my observations are shared by some of the groups that make up the movement.


5. In 1976, the PRI was the only party to run a presidential candidate.


7. I was responsible for this advertisement. The women's studies departments of the UAM (Metropolitan University) and UNAM (National University), the party that later became the PRD, and the ruling PRI, two feminist groups and one women's network signed it. It was published in three principal newspapers: Excélsior, La Jornada and El Día. 5 April 1989.


como problema de salud pública. 

Maternidad sin Riesgos en México. MC Elu and A Langer (eds). Comité Promotor de la Iniciativa por una Maternidad sin Riesgos, México. Dr López García was at that time general medical sub-director, National Institute of Perinatology, Mexico City.


14. The official number of maternal deaths, according to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática for 1992 was 1399 and for 1993 was 1268. Indicadores básicos de salud reproductiva y planificación familiar, (CONAPO, Mexico, 1996) states that abortion was the third cause of maternal mortality for 1992-1994.


16. The sample included 2595 people and was randomly chosen, half women and half men, according to age, socio-economic level, from six geographical zones and three main cities. The results of the first poll were published in Lamas M. 1992. El aborto en México. Nexos. 176(Agosto). A comparison of the results was published as a GIRE report.


22. La Jornada. 15 September 1995.

23. La Jornada. 30 August 1995.


25. Memorandum No. 95/33 of the Mexican Archdiocese.


29. This is GIRE’s evaluation based on its participation in more than 50 public debates on abortion in the last two years. One of the most important was in March 1997, at the Faculty of Medicine of the National University, where the auditorium with seats for 1000 was filled to the brim.

Résumé

Au Mexique, les féministes ont fondé leur contribution à la défense des droits sexuels et génésiques sur deux éléments: les campagnes activistes et le discours public. Le document analyse la façon dont le contexte politique a affecté le développement du discours féministe sur l’avortement, et arguë qu’une défense efficace des droits sexuels et génésiques passe par une poursuite de l’activité de discours. Les membres du mouvement féministe mexicain doivent reformuler et articuler des valeurs partagées obligeant d’autres secteurs à participer aux aussi à la défense de ces droits dans le contexte du développement de la démocratie. Il faut pour cela traduire patiemment des principes anciens en concepts nouveaux et intégrer les droits sexuels et génésiques dans la définition moderne de la citoyenneté.

Resumen

En México, la contribución feminista en defensa de los derechos reproductivos y sexuales se ha basado en dos elementos: las campañas de las activistas y el debate público. Este estudio analiza cómo los distintos contextos políticos han afectado el desarrollo de la reflexión feminista sobre el aborto; asimismo, señala que la defensa efectiva de los derechos reproductivos y sexuales dependerá de la búsqueda de nuevos razonamientos. La autora exhorta al movimiento feminista mexicano a reformular y articular los valores compartidos, de forma que otros sectores se vean obligados a unirse en la defensa de esos derechos, en el contexto del desarrollo de la democracia. Esto requiere de una paciente traducción de los viejos principios en nuevos conceptos; así como de la integración de los derechos reproductivos y sexuales en la definición de un concepto moderno de ciudadanía.