

# voices of MEXICO

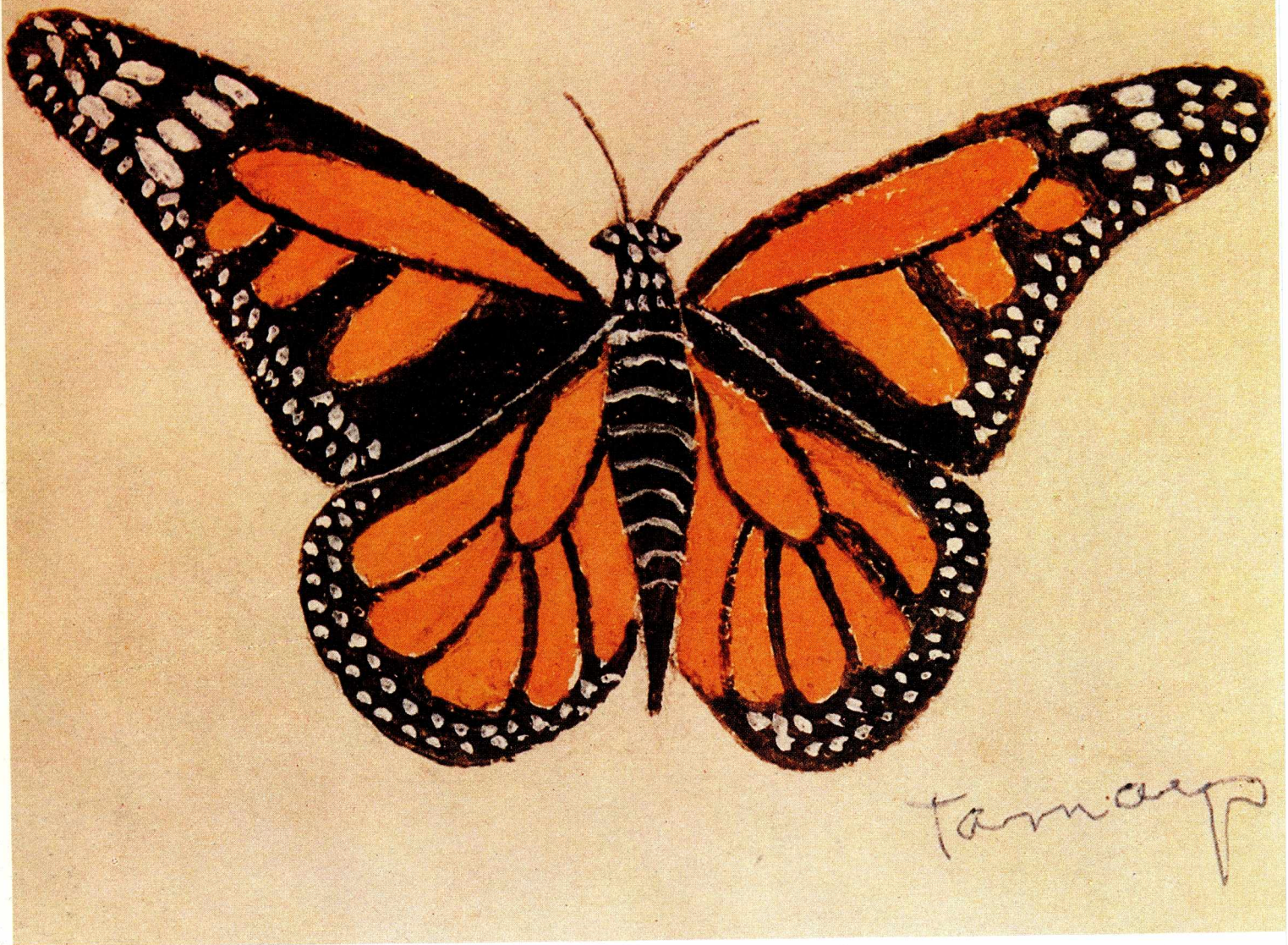
News, Commentary and Documents on Current Events in Mexico and Latin America

- *Alaide Foppa: Present after 10 Years Absence*
- *Elena Poniatowska: The Art of Questioning*
- *Mazahua Women in Mexico City*

16



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## VOICES OF MEXICO

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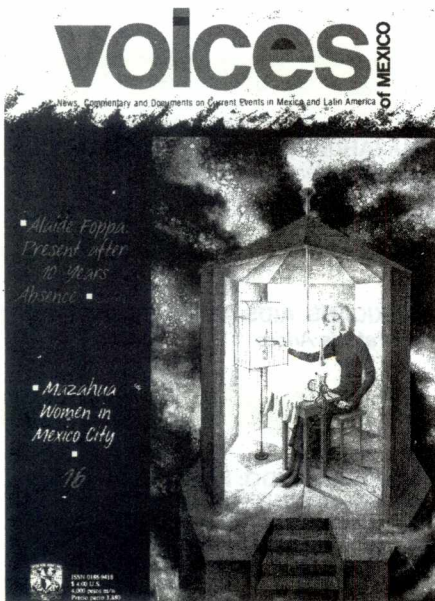
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# THIS ISSUE



Cover: Detail from the painting  
"Feeding the Moon"  
by Remedios Varo.  
Design by Angélica  
Hernández.

The end of 1990 brought us at least two motives for dedicating this issue to women: the tenth anniversary of the kidnapping and death of Guatemalan feminist Alaíde Foppa, and the fifth feminist encounter, held in Argentina last November, where Latin American and Caribbean women defined outlines for future work.

The loss of Alaíde was a painful one, for she was much more than a feminist or a social fighter against repression and all kinds of oppression; she was a poet, a writer, a journalist, an extraordinary human being and, above all, a fighter for human dignity. And precisely because of that Alaíde is still present, thanks to what she gave to all of us and to the world.

This small homage is completed with articles about the presence of women in other walks of life: the way they face work conditions in the in-bond industries of Tijuana; their presence as indigenous peasants, in Oaxaca, and outside their habitat: Mazahua women in Mexico City trying to survive in an urban jungle by creating a crafts cooperative. We present articles on how women deal with elections, economic crises, and political participation in a wide variety of social organizations.

Issues such as rape are still difficult to discuss and the society finds it hard to accept the growing and stronger feminine participation in important political decisions on something that seems to be permanent throughout history: sexual abuse. Perhaps this is so because discussion on this subject has always been silenced.

We also present an interview with an interviewer herself: Elena Poniatowska, whose joyful commentaries on life give a touch of sympathy and warmth, and three essays on prose and poetry books written by women who dare to give free expression to their erotic imagination.

**Mariclaire Acosta**

# FEMALE WORK FORCE IN TIJUANA

Tijuana, a Mexican city placed on the very border with the United States, has constituted a settlement of industries, mainly from the northern neighbor but nowadays also from the expanding Japanese economy.

At first glance, it seems to be a paradise of jobs, since the *maquiladoras* employ armies of workers, but when we look deeper, such workers (the majority of them young women) suffer low wages, high cost of living, lack of services and housing, according to Elaine Burns, whose article examines that reality.

Elaine Burns

The Rising Sun, the Stars and Stripes and the Mexico's own red and green flanked eagle cut the sky over the Mesa de Otay Industrial Park in Tijuana. Behind one side of these acres of windowless whitebrick buildings, a U.S. immigration van keeps vigil over a lonely vegetable field. Behind the other stretches a white dirt valley filled with housing fashioned out of old cars and scrap plywood. The air is hot and thick with the smell of glue.

Tijuana, only a step away from the most coveted market in the world, is booming. Here, U.S. and Asian capital meet economic refugees from every last corner of Mexico under a new game plan, the cornerstone of which are the *maquiladoras*-assembly lines for export production. With the announced "maquilization" of Mexico, this city holds clues to the entire country's future.

Not so long ago, *maquiladoras* were merely a Mexico-US border phenomenon, an exception. They date back to the 1965 "Border Industrialization Program", which punched loopholes in the protectionist import-export laws of both

countries. It opened the door for U.S. companies to shift labor-intensive portions of their manufacturing to plants along Mexico's northern border.

Once considered a "necessary evil" by the Mexican government, the *maquiladoras* are now held up by the Salinas administration as the model for Mexico's future: as rapid-growth, high tech industries of international quality, which bring in foreign currency and are free of labor conflict.

What began with jeans, microchips and blenders, assembled by the daughters of deported *braceros* is now taking deep root, having transformed even the country's auto industry. According to Northern Border College investigator Bernardo Areaga González, by the end of the century, 4 of every 10 industrial workers in Mexico will be employed by *maquiladoras*.

The landscaped drives of Tijuana's 30 industrial parks are the mere tip of an iceberg which includes some 500 registered factories spread throughout the city, employing nearly 75,000 workers. Only 1% of them (Matsushita, Video Tec, Sanyo) employ more than 2000 workers. But they are the ones which set the stage for all the rest.

Inside Sanyo at Mesa de Otay, Industrial Relations Manager Dr. Ignacio del Rincón walks leisurely along the production line as it zigzags the length of the brightly lit plant. He points out the sealed room where metal sheets are spray-enameled by programmable robots, the computer-adjustable laser dies. Along the way, women solder, glue and prepare packing materials.

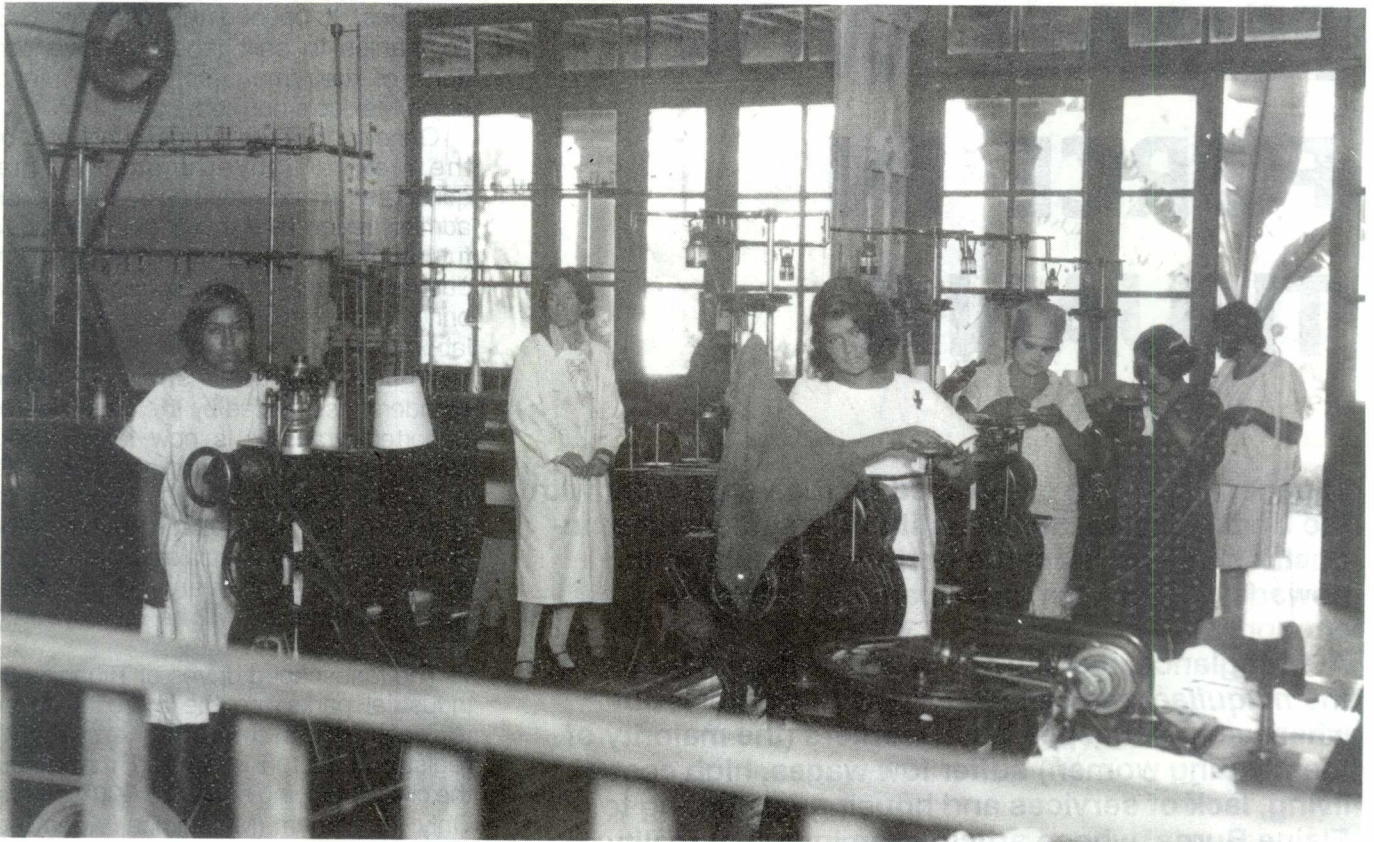
He explains: "Unlike the U.S. *maquiladoras*, when Sanyo came to Tijuana in 1982, they bought the land, built their own buildings, learned Spanish, trained Mexican management. They came to stay."

Six new refrigerators are on display at the far end of the plant:

Frigidaire, Westinghouse, General Electric, Kenmore "colonial" and "contemporary", and Sanyo. This plant produces them all. The machinery is easily reprogrammed to be always and only "just in time" for the demands of the market.

"This plant is not an assembly plant, it is a manufacturing plant. And it is highly automated—not so much to save on labor as to ensure flexibility and zero error."

Del Rincón is training 25 workers today. Every month, 300 of the company's total work force of 2500 quit. "They can't find housing here, so they head north or go back home. But for everyone who leaves, there's another to take her place."



Maquila exploitation, an old story.  
Photo from the Casasola Archive.

The *maquiladoras* in Tijuana have access to a labor pool which is actually more like a river. Each morning, dozens or hundreds of young men, women and children arrive at the Tijuana bus station, often penniless, with only cardboard boxes and dreams of heading further north. The giant "Now Hiring" banners of the Mesa de Otay Industrial Park are only a twenty-minute walk away.

With the current labor shortage (the unemployment rate in Tijuana is 0.6%), companies no longer require that women be under 22, only that they "pass" three-monthly pregnancy tests. And now that assembly-for-export has broken through to the other side of the sexual division of labor (cars, furniture), one out of every three maquila workers are men.

Whether one's work is tending a half-ton laser cutter or handling a pair of scissors, training takes no more than a day, and the pay is always the same—56 cents an hour. Though the cost of living in Tijuana is one of the highest in the country (due to its proximity to the U.S.), maquila wages are half the average national wage. And they have been falling. In 1965, women earned \$2 an hour (paid in U.S. currency); in 1975, they earned the peso equivalent of \$1 an hour.

Thus workers are increasingly dependent upon company "bonuses"—usually around \$1 a week in food coupons—for perfect punctuality and attendance.

Promotions, raises, seniority rights, year-end bonuses, overtime pay and pension plans are off the map.

Women cope by changing jobs frequently. Long-time maquila worker Irma Oliva García explained: "At Mexon [Surgical Supplies] the silicone made my hands so sore my sister-in-law had to do my wash. I switched to Video Tec, but the acetone there gave me anemia...You should see the women coming out of Matsushita, where they do welding under a microscope—their eyes look so bad we call them the *marijuaneras!*"

### U.S. Japan Competition

The Japanese plants have brought "friendly" management techniques to Tijuana, causing U.S. plants to soften their style. Recounts Irma, "Señor Carlos [at Mexon] started coming down to eat lunch with us to ask us how the factory could be improved. When we told him our idea of using Q-tips to clean the extra glue off the pieces, we were treated to a free dinner."

Mexon corporate wives bring in used clothes which workers can choose from during their 30minute lunch break. Each month's top quality, top production line is awarded a donut breakfast. At Christmas a Santa Claus from Houston hands out \$20 bills. And each year, a contestant is selected to participate in the city's "Señorita Maquila" pageant.

**With the current labor shortage, companies no longer require that women be under 22, only that they pass a pregnancy test every three months**

*Tijuana's labor force is officially presided over by a generation of "modern" unions so pale and passive that few workers are even aware they exist*

"There's no sense of unity in the plants," explains her daughter Marilu, who has worked at Swith Craft and Krantz. "Everyone is always gossiping about who the line manager is going out with, who got pregnant. If you complain, someone is sure to turn you in."

But women do resist. According to Marilu, one month before my visit, some 30 women from Jugueterama secretly began organizing. Before they could take any action, they were all fired. Word has it that they've been refused jobs at all the other plants.

In the last years, in cities with a more stable population, maquila women have managed to organize important but ephemeral strikes: at Acapulco Fashions in Ciudad Juárez (across from El Paso), at Crescent Designs in Zacatecas, and in various factories in Reynosa and Matamoros. Women from these cities met early this year to begin working towards a na-

tional conference of maquila workers. Attempts to organize a similar meeting in Tijuana, however, have not yet been successful.

Tijuana's labor force is officially presided over by a generation of "modern" unions so pale and passive that few workers are even aware they exist. Born out of the ashes of the massive union-busting which took place during the recession of 1975-80, they negotiate contracts before new plants are even built, with less benefits than those required by law.

Even the most optimistic activists in Tijuana, like José Luis Pérez Canchola, who participated in maquila organizing in the 70's ("when unions were still big and maquiladoras small") do not foresee gains for workers for a long time yet.

Yet everyone talks about how the *maquila* workers have changed, especially the women themselves. Says Irma, "When we first came to Tijuana, most of us saw the maquiladoras as a godsend, we'd never been paid for our work before. But things are changing, especially among the women who grew up here." Her daughter listens attentively in the close space of the house the two of them are building. "They stand up for themselves more..."

In the candle-lit dawn, hundreds of women descend the dusty ravines of the suburb Mariano Matamoros. As they wait in clusters for the buses, they remove the rubber bands and plastic bags which kept their legs clean for work.

The *maquila* plants where they spend 48 to 60 hours a week are modern and bright. But these dirt hills held in place with used tires are where life is. The kids. The husband who batters or who dances a fine *norteño* or who just left for *el otro lado*. The struggle to defend one patch of squatted earth and call it "home".

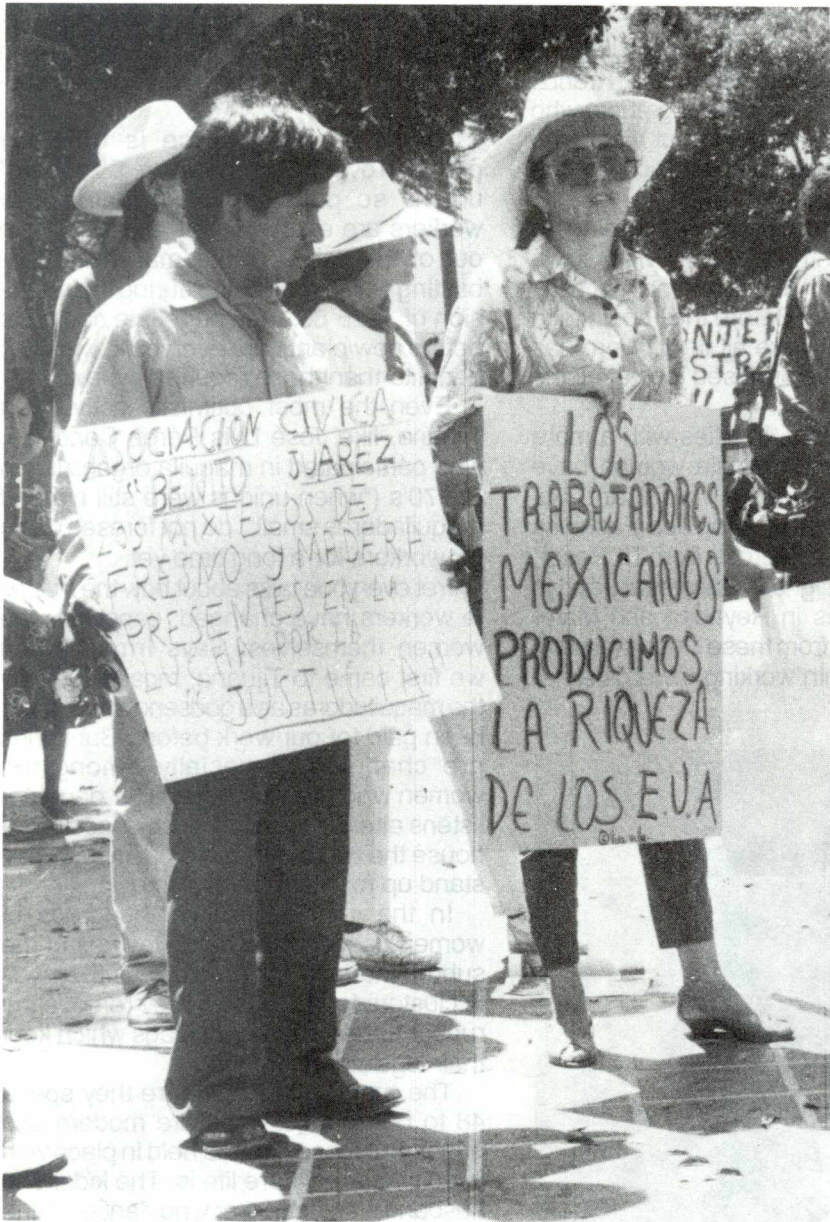
In 50 years, Tijuana has grown from a town of 16,000 to a sprawling city of over a million, fed by immigrants heading north, or deported south. Its varied neighborhoods tell its story.

*Avenida Revolución*, tucked right up against the border, is a choice example of the quaint ugliness of U.S. tourism. Its discos, 'Mexican curios' stores, and rooms-by-the-hour hotels (now serving San Diego's military bases) are a living memory of the town's birth as a U.S. liquor and gambling haven during Prohibition. (Las Vegas was supposedly founded as a result of General Lázaro Cárdenas' "cleanup" of Tijuana in 1935.)

Ten minutes and a world away, Zona del Río's "almostlikeDallas" pastel malls and theme discos serve the city's small but growing consumer class. Eleven

Her best years...





"Mexican workers produce U.S. wealth". Photo by Antonio Ortuño.

**Even the PRI has organized land takeovers -recruiting among families camped out at the bus station- in an attempt to gain control over the movements of the homeless**

years ago this very ground was home to some 20,000 squatter families.

Then, at 2 am January 30, 1980, through a "mechanical error", the floodgates of the dam upriver opened. Within hours, chickens, dogs, roofs, mattresses, children and adults were swept up by the muddy torrent. Dozens or hundreds of people were killed. No one was allowed to rebuild there.

Squatting has a long and honored tradition in this mushrooming city where rent is charged in dollars. Even the PRI has organized land takeovers-recruiting among families camped out at the bus station-in an attempt to gain control over the movements of the homeless.

The current movement dates its birth to the "Zona del Río" tragedy. In its wake, formerly isolated squatters' organizations came together, becoming the strongest, clearest voice of the city's poor majority.

That movement is still a powerful force today, but, according to leading activists, it is ridden with political conflicts between leaders and lacking in vision. "People's desperation has made organizing almost too easy in Tijuana. It is easy to become a leader, hard to build a movement," explains Magdalena Cerda of the Guadalupe Victoria neighborhood committee.

More families are always arriving-finding refuge under tarps strung up behind a relative's plywood dwelling, setting up camp along the highways, river banks, or near the bus station. Rarely does anyone find work that pays well enough to build a permanent home.

### Lack of Services

The housing crisis has grown to such proportions that even the maquila industry is concerned. According to National Maquila Association spokesperson Ignacio Pérez, "The lack of housing is the number one cause of our number one affliction: high turnover. Jimmy Carter came in last year and built 3000 units, but we need 50,000."

Yet this town of monstrous tax-exempt industries is cash-poor. Sanyo, for example, was only able to get government support for 40 low-interest housing units this year, to be sold by lottery among its 2500 employees.

This beleaguered city-of-the future is one of the first in Mexico to be run by an opposition government-the rightwing National Action Party (PAN). Government by businessmen rather than the long standing Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI) is a new experience for everyone.

Until last year, land purchase, water lines and electrification were grudgingly accomplished in response to marches, land occupations, building takeovers and negotiations with movement leadership. Now squatting has been brought to a violent halt, and officials have announced that applications for lot purchase will be dealt with on a family-by-family basis. Organizations are re-grouping, seeking new strategies.

Urania Nolasco rushes in late. She's just returning from the jail, in response to an unexpected call from a group of prostitutes organizing a day care center in the city's red light district. Her energy is attractive, catching, as she centers rapidly on the theme at hand.

"Our major task now is education-it's the only way we'll be able to develop a movement led by the people themselves. We've been dependent on protest actions





Young labor. Photo by Herón Alemán / *Imagenlatina*

headed by charismatic leaders for too long. We haven't built anything that can last." Her organization, CERCOC, is promoting literacy groups, leadership development workshops, and women's community loan groups.

Later, in Colonia Mariano Matamoros, where 15,000 families live without electricity and buy water for \$1.50 a barrel, Mary Luz Velázquez, also of CERCOC, explains how the loan groups work.

"Women organize themselves in groups of 25 to manage a revolving fund to open their own food stands, vegetable stalls."

Many of the women have arrived recently from the countryside, and "have too strong an accent" to get maquila jobs. Their only other options are service jobs downtown or "home work"—such as this week's offer to clip and tie off tiny copper cables for \$50 per 5000.

When the loan groups decided to discuss issues of concern to them, women chose domestic violence, alcoholism and teenage drug abuse. Each woman describes her own struggles to make ends meet on a maquila salary, and to hold a life together with her battering, alcoholic husband. "We're working now towards building a women's meeting space and temporary shelter here in the neighborhood."

Says Urania: "We're having to develop new tactics, because the city has no

money. We just did a survey, and found that a great number of our families have members working at Jugueterama, Matsushita and Mexon, all nearby. Though the women employed there can't be involved directly, we decided to go to these companies as a neighborhood organization, to demand recreational facilities, childcare centers, employee lunchrooms. This is new for us, and we're not sure where it will lead us."

Carter's Habitatat for Humanity is building in Mariano Matamoros, coordinating closely with the local neighborhood organizations.

Urania, her husband and her daughter have all worked in the maquiladoras. As they talk, they are approached by the leader of the local PRI neighborhood organization who, with refreshing though dubious humility, urges joint action to remove the PAN appointed official assigned to their district. They agree to work together to pressure for an election.

The gullied street suddenly fills with dust. It soon settles, revealing a blue pickup truck with two blonde teenage boys. They are rapidly surrounded as they begin handing out used clothes and garish end-of-the-world pamphlets. Urania smiles, looks down and then up again, "It's easy to gather a crowd here, but real organizing takes a very long time." ■

*More families are always arriving -finding shelter under tarps strung up behind a relative's plywood dwelling, setting up camp along the highways, river banks, or near the bus station*

# Peasants Identify their Feminine Perspective

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**Abundant natural resources, numerous immigrants, many municipalities, the richest cultural diversity in the country, a long historical tradition of struggle: this is Oaxaca. Located in the southern part of Mexico, it is one of the poorest states in the national territory. Its inhabitants, who have populated a rough geographical terrain and have confronted processes of domination for almost five centuries, are spread out over seven regions in more than 3,500 villages and some fifteen cities.**

---

*Josefina Aranda Bezaury*

In this predominantly rural context, peasant men and women have had to invent various forms of economic, social and cultural resistance in order to survive and build a less unjust future.

How have they done it? This is a long and complex history. This essay attempts to cover a recent incipient process: the independent organization of peasant women in Oaxaca.

Ten years ago, when there was still a debate about the stereotypes of "crazy feminists", "militant women in the political struggle" and "double duty militants", it was just about impossible to think about the existence of something that is common in today's world: the women's movement in Latin America.

Different factors have encouraged the development and growth of this movement: the deep economic, social and political crises that our countries have suf-

fered; the influence of the "developed world" and its support for women of poor nations; the permanent search for a better life and even for life itself.

This movement has organized women who are struggling to transform their society in distinct ways and on different fronts. These women come from different places in the social structure, have different political ideas and confront different living conditions both in the city and the countryside. The societies they live in are characterized to a great extent by social inequality based on class and also on gender.

There is no doubt that women have always participated in political, social, economic and cultural life. What are we referring to then, when we say that the participation of women has been modified or broadened? We are implying that political participation (of women and men) has been and is to this day based on relations of class as well as gender. Women have been excluded from participation in political leadership and in decision making processes for reasons of gender.

Peasant women form part of different organizations and also have a certain participation in them. Their voices, problems and proposals are heard through their sons, husbands and distant male relatives, especially in the rural-indigenous context. Their voices are heard from the framework of daily life -that is, outside of the formal and political institutions. L. Stephen reiterates this in saying that "in indigenous societies, women are used to operating in a generalized political sphere... their abilities are related to such factors as knowing how to listen, how to build consensus as well as using persuasive attitudes with the women closest to them....".

Thus, this concept which sounds so contradictory is what we are going to analyze. How can women be excluded and be participating at the same time? We will also examine changes which occur when women organize themselves in groups, committees and commissions.

Recent processes of organization of peasant women show that we must reconsider the meaning of "political". It is much more complex than traditionally thought, and is not limited to voting, being in political parties, etc. Women's participation is oriented to the transformation of society through many different actions.

**"Political Women, Don't Associate with Them"**

Few organizational experiences of Oaxacan peasant women have been

documented. But we know about some of these experiences due to the relative or absolute success that women have had in obtaining their demands and by the importance of women in the composition and in determining the objectives of peasant organizations. One example of this is the Isthmus Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students (COCEI) in the southern area of Juchitán and Tehuantepec, where the presence of Zapotec women has been decisive in attaining electoral triumphs.

We mentioned that the present crisis is an element that has influenced the formation of an important women's movement. In the Mexican countryside, however, participation of peasant women in different groups and struggles is not a new phenomenon. Invariably women have been the support for school committees, community stores and cooperatives, religious groups and festivity commissions in villages, etc.

What is new about women's present participation is the phenomenon that arises when groups and organizations begin a reflection about what it means to be a peasant woman. Here it is important to point out that not all groups have the same relation with state and federal governments. They neither conceive the need for change from the same viewpoint nor do they all call themselves by the same name.

The First Encounter of Peasant Women's Organizations was the first time indigenous peasant women in Oaxaca were called together to exchange points of view. Among other things it helped women identify and later discuss the urgent need to break the isolation of independent peasant groups and organizations (the isolation is due to the scarce or non-existent information that these groups have about each other).

### "It's not a Bed of Roses"

After almost six months of preparation by women from three peasant organizations (the Upper Mixtec Region Cooperative, the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus and the Union of Yalaltepec Women) and with many problems and high expectations, the First Encounter of Women from Peasant Organizations of Oaxaca was held in April, 1988. One hundred and twenty indigenous peasant women from 40 different groups and independent organizations attended the encounter.

The first objective of "Exchanging experiences about participation and organization of women in peasant organizations..." was developed through general questions such as: "Why are we fighting?" and "What activities has our

Women's productive projects search for support. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagen-latina.





Rural conditions for women have not changed in many years. Photo from INAH Archive.

**Women's participation is oriented to the transformation of society through multiple and varied actions**

group carried out?" There were also discussions in seven round tables on the women's experiences in relation to the following themes:

- 1) food supplies and savings accounts;
- 2) corn mills and the production and sale of *totopos* (large corn patties);
- 3) farming projects (chicken farms, pig raising, honey and coffee production, vegetable gardens, etc.)
- 4) handicrafts;
- 5) health concerns;
- 6) problems concerning municipal governments;
- 7) advisors who work with peasants.

Participants talked about common problems and needs such as the presence of local bosses (*caciques*), the lack of markets for their goods and the high prices of raw materials, the scarcity or complete lack of institutional support and the political conditioning imposed in order to obtain credits (for instance, if one is not a member of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party). Other issues

discussed included lack of training for working and administering their projects, scarce economic resources for their activities, the high cost of living and the general lack of resources such as medicines, doctors, education, transportation, etc., and the confrontation with corrupt officials.

Some of the round tables were held in two or even three different languages since half of the participants were indigenous women and the organizers stated "that no one should be left without voice". This promoted a profound discussion on the second day about the second theme-objective of the event: "the problems we confront as organized women".

Though the different problems of the peasant women are intertwined, we can group them under three main headings: those that are tied in with their families, those that refer to their organization and those that are relative to their community and region.

#### *a) In relation to the family.*

The most common problem is that of the husbands, fathers and even male relatives such as brothers, grandfathers and uncles who do not let the women participate or who do not like the women to do this. Their principal arguments are that women have obligations at home and that when women leave the home, "who knows if they're going to go with another man (for the married women) or "they're going to loose their virginity out there" (for single women).

Males constitute the principal obstacle for organization since without their "permission" it is almost impossible for women to unite. The peasant women stated that it is difficult to convince the men because they normally consider that "we aren't worth anything" or that "we have no right to an opinion." However, the women also said that once they were organized, the men eventually recognized the benefits of their struggles, since normally the women's demands are directed to satisfying family or community needs.

The women also discussed problems they have in organizing themselves because they are responsible for child care, household chores and certain farming, handicraft and commercial jobs.

The majority of the women were clear about the need for changes in this area by "convincing husbands and fathers" to join the struggle and to help with the housework and child care. On the other hand a small minority stated that although

"the men don't like it" women should organize themselves and confront the family problems that this may bring about.

#### *b) In Relation to Organizations*

Different problems were analyzed in relation to organizations involving peasant women. Women in mixed organizations discussed such thorns as "in the meetings the men don't listen to us", "we don't have an education", and "we're afraid to speak". They centered on the lack of experience in political participation and also on the problem that women's points of view have little weight in internal decision making in these mixed groups.

However, when the women narrated their experiences one could frequently hear "but we're tougher and bolder than men" and "we're more responsible in the commissions".

In groups made up exclusively by women, participants referred to gossip, "envies" and to lack of understanding and/or solidarity among friends. They also talked about the conflicts that sometimes arise among women leaders and the masses. Another common problem the participants mentioned was the fact that sometimes there are persons —men and women —who have individual interests and not community ones.

Solutions put forward included the need to learn more and have more training. Another solution was that of women demonstrating that they too are capable of working on initiatives and organizational proposals and are capable of fighting.

#### *c) In Relation to Community and Region.*

The difficulties most mentioned in this category are similar to those discussed above but are specifically related to the different conceptions and practices concerning the woman's place in the community and in groups. These vary according to ethnic group, region, age, and legal status of the participants.

For some women the principal problem is related to their lack of participation in community assemblies. Other women thought it was absurd to think they had to participate in such meetings. Some stated that the males in their villages treated women with a lot of respect while others said that this was not their experience.

Finally the women talked about the differences when local authorities (presidents, municipal officials, etc.) were or were not in agreement with women's groups, their activities and their ideas. They also commented on having to con-

front internal community divisions due to religious reasons.

After two tiring days of work (the majority of the women were not used to sitting for so long to talk and exchange ideas ("because we usually only sit when our work forces us to sit down, for example when we remove the grain from the corn cobs"), the women worked on conclusions and agreements for future organization.

The women agreed that they must have regional coordination to continue the process of educational exchange among peasant women's groups. They must have meetings to discuss which demands are the most important ones, what are the possible common solutions, and to look for sources of financing for their projects. They must have training in politics and administration. The groups must be strengthened by inviting more women to join them. Finally the women must talk with people in their community and organization about the encounter.

But, who are these organized peasant women and what happens to them when they return to their communities? What happens to these women who have decided that "we have the right to defend ourselves and demand our rights?"

#### **"We who have fought so much..."**

The majority of women came from different groups or organizations with different activities:

1) In the Isthmus area, women who embroider huipiles (blouses), those who make totopos (a corn food), those who have farms and vegetable gardens and those who struggle to have honest authorities and representatives;

2) In the Mixtec area, women fight for better food in their communities and have food cooperatives as well as community corn mills, while others continuously confront corrupt organizations and fight with local leaders who destroy community forests.

3) In the Cañada area women work in fruit production while others organize saving accounts.

4) In the Coastal area, women are beginning to organize community stores and have begun to "realize the value" of the indigenous woman.

5) In the Southern Mountain area, women work in community health and are learning "analysis of reality" to organize their villages around different issues.

6) In the Mountain area, women work with handicraft groups and participate in municipal struggles.

*In the Mexican countryside, peasant women have been the support for school committees, community stores and cooperatives, religious groups and festivity commissions in villages*

*The most common problem is that of the husbands, fathers and even male relatives who do not let women participate*

7) In the Central Valleys, young people work in health projects.

8) In Tuxtepec, women continue their struggle to obtain basic foodstuffs and work in farming cooperatives.

Almost all are indigenous peasant women, predominantly adults with married sons and daughters and some single son and daughters, who have decided to confront their problems collectively. This is due to the worsening crisis and to increasing deterioration in food consumption. There is a rise of malnutrition and a general fall in the standard of living.

Not all participants of the Encounter have continued in the movement. Of all the groups and organizations present in the first meeting, one third are no longer in contact. However, new women and groups have joined the movement. A year and a half after the first Encounter we can see two principal successes. One has been the maintaining of at least a minimum coordination among the majority of the participants. The other has been a type of organizational process which the women call "becoming aware" and "learning" by continuing to meet together to discuss various themes.

#### **"We Want to Understand Our Rights"**

In the meeting entitled "Workshop on Human Rights and Women's Rights", held

in July, 1989, participants discussed the question: "What does it mean to be a woman?" The majority of peasant women have never had an opportunity to reflect on this, even though they have participated for a number of years in women's groups (for example, in groups running community corn mills). We heard the following questions:

"Why is there always a problem when a female is born? When a woman is born she doesn't deserve the celebration that includes the feast of the hen. On the other hand the male is always given his worth from the time of his birth. What do we do wrong?" (In the Mixtec region a hen is slaughtered for festivities when a male is born in a peasant family.)

"Being a woman means having children", "it means we have no right to own property", "it means doing household chores", "it means being a servant", "it means contending with everything in daily life to survive".

The diversity of replies shows what daily life means for peasant women from a certain region. It tells about the space they occupy as well as their work and role in the family and community. Forty women from ages 13 to 60 from 11 villages near the place of the meeting (Tlaxiaco) joined the workshop.

They went to "learn about our worth as women", "to not be slaves", "to understand ourselves", and "to listen to advice and see our errors and correct them". In other words, these women wanted arms with which to fight and get ahead, "even though we are women".

Other regional encounters and workshops held since that first Encounter have gained space for women little by little. There has been coordination of women's peasant groups on community and regional levels. Women have had the chance to find a space for discussion and learning where they have gotten to know each other as well as their work experiences, their rights and future possibilities.

Moreover, a minority of women have begun to untie the contradiction that we mentioned in the beginning: to be excluded and yet to participate at the same time. This means that they have begun to occupy places that previously were forbidden to women (for example, in certain commissions of the organizations).

They have begun to influence the decision making process that rules their lives, their families, their communities and their organizations.

The groups defend their "independent" character, not only because they are not working within Government structures or

As in the very Revolution.  
Photo from INAH Archive





Women participate in productive processes. What about in politics? Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina.

peasant women and agrarian reform in Mexico. They mention three roles of rural women in light of the agrarian crisis. They talk about the peasant female as: a) a member of a peasant family, b) a worker and c) a woman. One of the things that this experience has shown us is that organized peasant women are becoming more and more conscious of this triple role.

There are differences in the demands of the communities and organizations where the women work because everything depends on the specific context of each group. The different forms of struggle are related to the different groups that they have to confront and participate in. These include school committees, leadership of cooperatives, women's commissions of organizations. Here the women have been in a relationship of subordination because of gender.

However, one important characteristic of the recent process of coordination and organization, is the opening of new spaces of learning and struggle for peasant women. This has permitted them to forge paths previously unknown, where they can begin to claim a new place as women.

In this sense we can conclude that the tactics used by the independent peasant women of Oaxaca tell us of a long and complex process of organization. Little by little women have made their presence felt. Though this is still an incipient process it is nonetheless significant. In other words, without going against the patriarchal system that oppresses them, women have participated in groups that are working on immediate survival needs. They are working in spaces that do not openly confront the system since generally these are spaces that are socially and culturally "acceptable" or "tolerable". At the same time, women have begun a process of consciousness raising about their condition as women.

In this sense, the organized peasant women are not only presenting their demands of class but are also identifying the way in which the relations of gender are structured. Tactics vary and are not based on continuous confrontation with men. This would be going against their very culture.

Women peasants are fighting for their demands and also for those of men (which are those of the communities and/or the organizations) and they are doing this even when men "don't let them". ■

with the official party —the PRI— but because in one way or another they are clear about "not being a part of those who harm and oppress us".

### Conclusions

In the organization of peasant women, one of the fundamental characteristics is that their participation is not only a concern on a personal level but is also related to their families and their communities. When they attend a meeting or encounter or are acting as negotiators we can talk about a political event in the sense that we originally mentioned in the beginning of this paper.

In this sense I agree with the idea of L. Arizpe and C. Botey in their article about

Analyzing how women operate in social and political practice... Professor, Political Science Faculty, UNAM

# Women in Politics

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**The last two decades have seen an increase in women's participation in social and political life in general. Researcher Esperanza Tuñón analyzes this phenomenon, examining each form of its expression in its framework of social, political and economic meanings, not only for women, but for the whole society.**

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*Esperanza Tuñón*

The subject of this article requires a preliminary discussion of some analytical categories, especially the notion of women's politics. It also requires a definition of a particular personal conception for the interpretation of this process.

In this study and as part of a more general conception, we understand politics not only, nor primarily, as the exercise of power. Nor does it refer to the involvement of formal governmental or non-governmental agencies, in the form of political parties, unions or the legislature.

We speak of politics in a more comprehensive sense that takes into account the process of assuming a collective will, of assuming life as part of a community.

In this sense we join the category of "empowerment" that different currents in gender studies have contributed to the comprehension of this phenomenon.

Thus, the notion of politics is principally understood as a process that encompasses many forms of participation. In the case of women this takes into account the introduction of some of them into the public sphere, their electoral presence, their political organizations and the demands they propose. In a second sense, supporting the first, it refers to the construction of a collective identity that allows women to become active participants in society.

The struggle of women in general and feminism in particular allows us to view the intimate relationship between these two meanings and to contribute to a new conceptual redefinition of "politics" as such.

The feminist movement states that "the personal is political". This demonstrates not only the radicalism of the feminist conception (which tends to modify extant gender relations and the type of dominant human link in our societies), but also shows that feminists incorporate a new dimension into the political reading of society by taking into account a series of subjective (personal) elements for performance in the public arena.

This has permitted the overcoming of the traditional dualistic explanation of a woman's private and public life to show her social oppression and the "why" of her assigned and assumed roles. This opens the way to a more complete vision of both worlds, where it might seem that politics and culture operate as articulating agents.

Thus, today the relegation of women to the private sphere as the preferential place for her social participation, has been questioned and denounced. Similarly, the concept of what is macrosocial determines and influences actions in everyday life.

Women are now incorporated into this broader social and political struggle and exercise specific responsibility and power in their daily actions.

Analyzing how women operate in social and political practice concretizes these two levels: public and private. This can show how and on what basis they construct (or may construct) a gender defined identity that guides their actions. How is this translated into the elaboration of demands in political programs, in long and short term objectives, in different types of organizations, in tactics and strategies as a movement, in sum, in the specifics of policy making? These are some of the questions to be answered by arduous and extensive research still to be done, of which this article is only a preliminary introduction.





Demonstration protesting violence against women. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagen-latina.

What interests us here is an indication of some of the characteristics of the women's struggle in Mexico during this decade. This is contrasted with some of the movement's characteristics in the 1970s, as well as with the aims that will eventually confront the feminist movement in the future.

We can say that the 1980's, characterized since 1982 of the economic crisis and a questioning of political legitimacy, saw the irruption of new social actors on the public stage. These new participants have modified the dynamics of the traditional struggle of worker, farmer and urban movements in the country.

Among these actors are women from popular sectors whose participation has become so important that some political-social agencies, such as the Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Urbano Popular (CONAMUP: National Coordinator of the Popular Urban Movement), have even declared that women are the backbone of the organization.

And certainly, as the economic crisis has decisively affected the current generation of youth, the buying power of salaries as well as the general conditions of life for the population, women—precisely because of their assigned and assumed roles in society—have joined the social struggle.

### Feminism Rising

Thus, important nuclei of women workers, farmers and above all urban residents ("colonas") have protagonized struggles over working conditions, for the implementation of productive projects in the countryside, the supply and provision of urban public services such as drainage, electricity, transportation and the opening of state subsidized stores in marginal neighborhoods in large cities.

It is worth mentioning that these women face difficulties because of their political participation. In addition to the ideological and cultural recriminations of which they are the focus on the part of the men in their families, they have to carry out a double and triple day's work load. They must also combat sexist discrimination that occurs in the heart of political and social organizations that they share with men.

Within this context, this popular women's movement was influenced by the "social contamination" that generated feminism in the 1970s and supported by groups that have maintained popular links since then (mainly CIDHAL Women's Center in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, and Women for Dialogue). This movement on the rise became dedicated to the establishment of their own organic struc-

*In addition to the ideological and cultural recriminations of which they are the focus on the part of men, women have to carry out a double and triple day's work load*

*The interest and need to maintain contact and open communication among women's groups has brought about the formation of national networks*

tures within women's organizations (Women's Commissions, Regional Women's Committees, and so forth) and of forms of communication between them. In recent years eight national, regional and sector meetings have been held of women in popular movements.

In this process a grass roots feminism has been growing. Women of different sectors have stamped their class demands with a feminist responsibility and an awareness of gender, while feminist groups linked to them have also succeeded in incorporating the dimension of the country's sociopolitical reality into their own perspective.

With respect to the feminist movement as a whole, we can say that during the years of the 1970s, with groups of consciousness raising and later with more consolidated agencies and attempts at national coordination, the precise articulation of a political plan was not achieved. In the 1980s, this need for developing a plan took on a new dimension.

In the first half of the 1980's, the feminist movement opened up its channels of expression, and became dispersed in different circles. Confronted by difficulties of political and organizational unity experienced in previous years, the

movement sought new forms of expression and social participation to give it new life. At the same time this provided elements to consolidate its own identity.

In this vein, many groups oriented their activities to the academic field and to the dissemination of the specific problems of women in the mass media.

Training programs and research centers dealing with women acquired greater presence in the country's main institutions of higher education, such as the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), the Mexico College and some universities in the provinces. Similarly, important television and radio space opened for debate and feminist exchange.

Academic and political participation has also changed dramatically in the provinces and numerous women's groups have emerged in the states of Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Colima, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Morelos, Puebla and Chiapas.

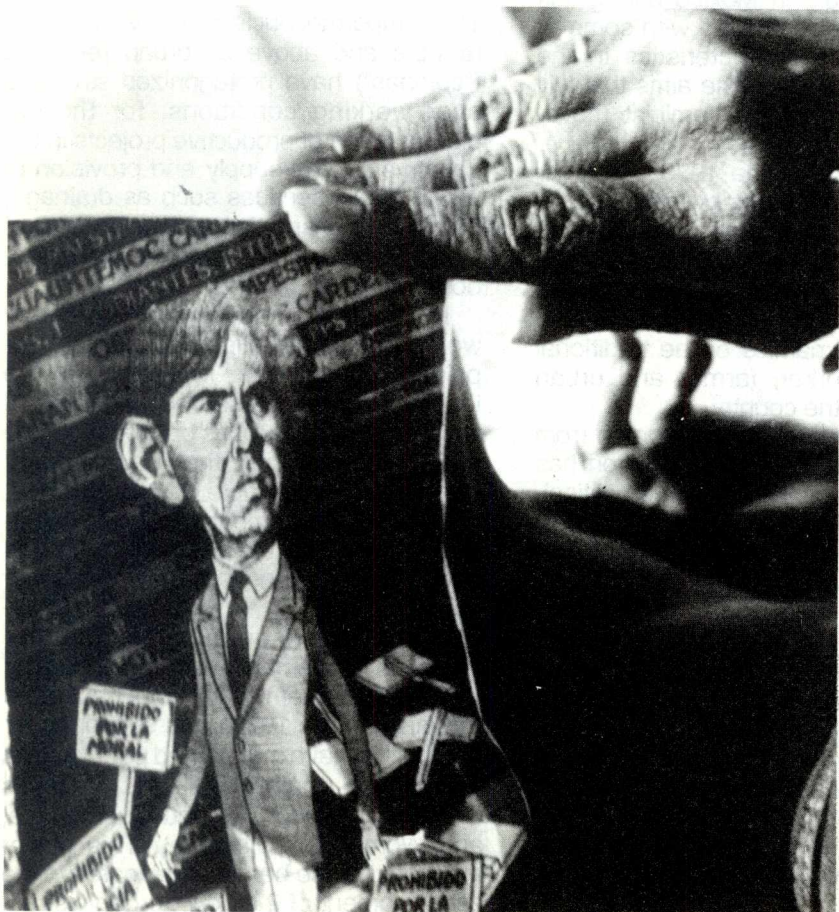
The interest and need to maintain contact and open communication between these groups brought about the formation of first the Coordinator of Autonomous Feminist Groups (1982) and later, the National Women's Network, with the strictly operative purpose of maintaining contacts between groups working totally independently.

The part of the movement linked to women from lower income sectors also acquired great strength in this period. Between 1980 and 1984 five groups arose, which pooled with those already in existence, and formed an important current in the movement.

The formation of women's support groups for lower income sectors and as part of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO'S) that rely on financing from international agencies, has allowed women's groups to make important incursions into and to work with these sectors. Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that difficulties have also been generated in political relations between women's groups and social organizations. These difficulties put the issues of power/alliances/autonomy and of the political plan/welfare work on the debating table.

An important landmark in this process was the earthquake that shook the country in September, 1985. Both a consciousness and a solidarity of citizens arose from the tragedy and rubble of the quakes. These new sentiments modified the political and social identity of the great metropolis, as new groups of homeless women were incorporated into the

Expressing political preferences. Photo by Patricia Aridjis.



general democratic struggle from their specific conditions of life, work and gender.

An outstanding example of this process has been the seamstresses guilds. From the ruins of the clandestine sweatshops where they worked, they constructed a nation-wide, independent, democratic union with feminist orientation.

The magnitude of misfortune altered the political logic and the very dynamic of social movements and political groupings as well as of the government itself. The spontaneous response of the majority of the population in the face of state inefficiency and authoritarianism generated what has been called a counterpart to the physical phenomenon of the earthquake, the political phenomenon of the rise of civil society.

We believe that the capacity to organize themselves demonstrated by the inhabitants of the city on that occasion is linked with and present in political events following 1985, such as the electoral race of July 1988.

### Women in Mass Movements

The second half of the 1980's thus condensed different elements of the process undergone by the nation: the already mentioned economic crisis; the political crisis of legitimacy of the governing party that makes the development of other new political options possible; and the growth and consolidation of social movements, among which the women's movement occupies an important place.

Between 1986 and 1988 the country lived very intensively the broad political eruption of the masses. Here, the common line of action was the search for a democratic alternative that would establish limits to institutional power and create a system to counterbalance this.

There was a profound internal crisis in the official party expressed at that moment, both in its structure and composition as well as in its historical capacity to generate the needed social consensus to be able to govern. On the other hand, conservative and militant rightist positions developed considerably through the National Action Party (PAN) while spectacular growth in influence and organization was seen in the country's liberal, leftist opposition.

This opposition, overcoming a tradition of deeply rooted sectarianism and division, gave rise in that period to a broad popular alternative front for electoral participation: the National Democratic Front,

which gathered together five political parties and multiple social movements.

The official results of the presidential and legislative elections (which gave 51% to the PRI, 30.5% to the FDN and 18% to the PAN) made evident the changes in Mexico's contemporary political profile.

In the case of women it is interesting to note that this democratic political opportunity presented them with the need to define their political plans. Now these plans had to be defined in reference not only to themselves or to the sectors in which they participated, but rather in more general terms of a long term political movement.

Possible social and political alliances, democratic perspectives, the particular ways in which these may be articulated with feminist demands and even the specific partisan preferences of women in the recent political context, have all been incorporated into the debate.

In reference to this latter aspect, there are few studies that focus on the issue of women's electoral participation. This makes any follow-up of their participation in this area difficult. Furthermore, polls and estimates of electoral behavior have begun only very recently in Mexico.

This is due, we believe, to the fact that the political hegemony of the governing party has been unchanged throughout the 60 years of the PRI government. Furthermore, only recently have specific experiences of political participation in some regions of the country resulted in the development of local electoral studies.

From this information, which we believe is exclusively valid as indicators (since the biases of different polls do not permit the generalization of their results and only through follow-up of these in later studies will guidelines of electoral preference be truly shown) we may note the following:

In regional experiences where the opposition has succeeded in altering traditional, national partisan logic, the sex variable seems to have had particular importance.

Both in the states of Chihuahua and Baja California Norte where the PAN has strong support, as well as in Oaxaca where the COCEI (Isthmus Coalition of Workers, Farmers and Students) is an important political force, the opinions and electoral preferences manifested by women polled correspond to these new tendencies.

But by contrasting the national level of the distribution of general electoral preferences and preferences for sex for the major presidential candidates in June of 1988, the following is reported:

*It is also interesting to note the new rise over the last years of old demands for penalization of rape and legalization of abortion*

Candidate	General Preference	Preference by sex
Cárdenas (FDN)	32.4%	31%
Salinas (PRI)	32 %	37%
Clouthier (PAN)	13.3%	12%

Nevertheless, the fairness of this appraisal, its statistical validity and its eventual analysis may only be carried out as new electoral opportunities allow the evaluation of these variables of information.

### Growing Gender Organizations

As for women organized on gender issues, the need to give the movement a clearer political profile and outlining guidelines for participation in this democratic search, explains the emergence over the last few years of three women's organizations:

Women in the Struggle for Democracy (Mujeres en Lucha por la Democracia) which joins close to 400 professional, intellectual, feminist and political women.

The Benita Galeana Coordinator (Coordinadora Benita Galeana) which assembles 33 women's union organizations, neighborhood groups, feminist groups and political parties; and the Network against Violence and for Women's Rights, (Red contra la violencia y por los derechos de la mujer) which, reviving specific gender demands, also calls together many of the participants of the two other groups.

Women of different socio-economic backgrounds and diverse politics meet in these three organizations. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in generating accords and commitments for actions.

It is also interesting to note the new rise over the last year of old demands for penalization of rape and legalization of abortion.

With reference to abortion, today's legal initiative elaborated by important sectors of the movement is outstanding. It has been approved by social organizations and political groups and has been presented to the Nation's House of Deputies by legislators of different parties represented in this chamber.

This initiative again takes up what was presented in 1979 but it constitutes an advance, because of the greater public presence of women today, and to the con-

Looking to the future. International Women's Day. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina.



Time passes. Photos by Patricia Aridjis.



solidation of their organizations and the consciousness-raising that has occurred in important sectors of public opinion.

### **New Openings for Women**

As a result of its electoral difficulties, the government has begun to respond to popular demands. In the case of women—who have lived an especially extreme

form of poverty and have seen the deterioration of their way of life due to the economic crisis and governmental policies— new public policies take into account:

The presidential initiative to increase the sentence for rape to 20 years;

The creation of Support Centers for Raped Women as well as three Investigative Agencies for Sexual Crimes in the metropolitan area;

The creation of forums for public discussion of women's issues;

The consideration of underground abortion as a public health problem and its debate in the highest governmental circles, especially those responsible for the administration of health and justice and the possible creation of the Women's Public Prosecutor as the specific agency where women could denounce and make their rights count in the event of any type of aggression or discrimination.

The possibility of the State's implementation of these policies as part of their modernization plan has thrown into the arena of political debate the positions of women who support these measures in different ways and those of conservative and ecclesiastical sectors who beligerently oppose them.

Among these latter groups, notable is the performance of the group Prolife (Provida) that has come out against abortion and against any type of sexual liberalization. There have even been acts of violence in cultural contexts, such as forceful closures of art exhibitions.

*Various women's groups linked with workers have formulated alternative proposals for an eventual democratic exercise of power in the Mexican capital in the areas of safety, health and basic supplies*



These attitudes of the State mean the women's movement is again discussing its political plans and the alliances and possible strategies necessary to achieve their aims.

Thus today, the discussion takes place among women who support and see the advantages of governmental measures (among them prominent members of the official party who have endeavored for years to open partisan organizations and to promote women's demands, among them Beatriz Paredes and Gloria Brandenfer) and women from feminist or leftist traditions, who fear for the movement's future autonomy in the case of these policies being implemented.

Between these extremes there are also sectors of women who consider it relevant that the movement itself present proposals for public policies with a clear sense of feminist responsibility. This is because they believe that an essential condition for the maintenance of autonomy is the consolidation and achievement of demands that give life to the movement.

Thus various women's groups linked with workers have formulated alternative proposals for an eventual democratic exercise of power in the Mexican capital in the areas of safety, health and basic supplies.

These proposals reflect years of accumulated political labor, which include support centers for raped women, abortion and mother-child medical attention as well as community level mechanisms for price controls on basic articles and for the creation of consumption cooperatives.

The idea is that these proposals be submitted to debate in the capital's legislature: the Assembly of Representatives in Mexico City. However, several of its postulates have already been taken up again in presidential initiatives and in the designing of public policies which we mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, what stand out are the size and relative consolidation of the movement in recent years. This is made evident in several ways, ranging from the annual Women's Day celebration on March 8, when large numbers of women from all classes gather in downtown Mexico City, to the broad support for abortion and against rape in public petitions gathering more than a thousand signatures, many of them of personalities recognized in political and cultural spheres.

Likewise, this process of discussion generated in different social, political and academic circles (union organizations, neighborhood groups, political parties in-

cluding the PRI, and teaching and research centers) expresses the coming of the eventual need for women to cease to be exclusively situated in specific, otherwise limited organizations. They will have to move on to being more integrated and to having a greater presence and responsibility in the overall processes of the organizations in question.

Some sectors call for doing away with or for increasing the functions of Women's Committees in social and political organizations. On another level, there are sectors that advocate introducing greater interdisciplinary elements into women's studies.

### Future Goals...

Within the political panorama described above and with the tradition generated by the movement itself, women organized around gender demands in the country face different aims for the future, among which may be mentioned:

The real possibility for growth and development even more as a broad social movement and for influencing, from its specific, women's orientation, the democratizing process that the country is experiencing;

This will be possible in terms of what demands may be formulated and developed in accord with the collective feeling of women and what broad political plan may be delineated that attends to their public participation;

This design, both in the articulation of the axes of the struggle as well as its short, medium and long term political objectives, although they exist, must be delved into more deeply and extended in the coming years;

This task implies the generation of a wide political-ideological debate that permits the articulation and planning of possible social and political alliances, along with democratic participation;

It also implies, within the movement itself, valuing the different expressions of the struggle, developing tolerance in the face of political and personal differences, recognizing leadership and allowing the imagination to develop.

The path taken, the experience accumulated and the resolution of these goals among others, permits one to suppose that in the coming years the women's movement in Mexico will be consolidated, it will make advances in its demands and it will contribute to modifying social relations defined by gender. ■

*There are women who consider it important that the movement propose public policies with a clear feminist perspective.*

# The Concept of Rape in History

**Women – and people considered weak and defenseless, such as children – have suffered violation all through history. Legislation on this form of violence has not always existed, as researcher Rafael Harrel explains in his analysis of the history of laws concerning this problem. In addition, Patricia Pedroza, feminist researcher on violence against women and children, presents a succinct presentation of the reactions this violence can cause in its victims.**

*Rafael Ruiz Harrel*

The definition of "rape" does not present conceptual difficulties of any great importance, at least at first glance. As everyone knows, it is a matter of forcing a person by way of threats or physical coercion to carry out a sexual act against their will.

The concept, nonetheless, is not as simple as it seems, because Western culture took several millennia to come to recognize it. It is not until the end of the eighteenth century or perhaps the beginning of the fourteenth—more precise definition of the date is not simple either—that there are laws against forced intercourse. Before this, according to the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian notion reiterated in the Bible, sexual violence was not seen as an act that merited punishment, rather it was proof of a woman's innocence.<sup>1</sup>

The problem arose from two opposing principles. One, applicable in the case of adultery, ordered the death of an unfaithful wife as well as her rapist or lover. The other was the deflowering of a virgin of marriageable age. In this case the young woman was judged innocent and her seducer was condemned to marry her, or if he was already married, to pay a high fine. The practice, common in the Near East, of celebrating the wedding when the bride was still a child, created another

problem: how should the case be judged if the bride had relations with someone other than her husband before her marriage was actually consummated? Because she was formally married it should be considered adultery and as a consequence, she should be condemned to death. On the other hand, she was also a deflowered virgin, and in this case was presumed innocent and left free. The problem was overcome by focusing on whether the intercourse had been forced or not. If the plaintiff had employed violence, the young girl was innocent and should not be punished. In the opposite case, she was just as guilty as her lover and she should die. The man in either case received the same punishment the death sentence—because he was not sanctioned for the violence committed, but rather for having had sexual relations with a woman who was not his wife.<sup>2</sup>

The notion was applicable in such a specific case—the illicit deflowering of a virgin who was already married that other ancient peoples did not adopt it. Although the Greeks and Romans, as well as the Medieval Christians, punished the illicit deflowering of a virgin and the infidelity of a married woman, they did not pay any heed to violence. What was considered important was the loss of virginity or the dishonor of a husband, not how the event occurred.

From the period of Augustus, however, a new crime became relevant: the abduction of the marriageable virgin or of the rich widow. The crime turned out to be important for the matter at hand because in this case violence was taken into account, only that it was understood as an offense to the home from where the woman had been abducted. It is not until the middle of the twelfth century, when Graciano compiled his Decree, when the notion was put forth that sexual possession that usually accompanied abduction was also an act of violence against the woman.

The so-called Laws of "Fuero Juzgo", which were based on the Liber Iudicorum promulgated in Toledo in the mid-seventh century and then underwent constant reforms until the beginning of the thirteenth century, were perhaps the first in consecrating the new concept by saying: "When a man commits fornication or adultery by force with a free woman, if the man is free he shall receive one hundred lashings and be given as a servant to the woman whom he took by force; and if he is a servant, he shall be burned at the stake". In the case of virgins still in the care of their parents, and perhaps to prevent all virgins who wanted to marry

*According to Medieval English law, the man who had relations with a virgin was obliged to marry her, independently of whether the act had been characterized by mutual agreement or violence*

from claiming to have been raped, they condemned the man to marry her only if the deflowering had been violent. But if she had given herself "to the man of her liking, he may take her as his wife if he should so desire; and if he does not, the blame falls on her, who committed adultery by her own choice".<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately later Spanish legislation did not incorporate the new notion into its mandates. Although isolated principles from other judicial systems may be cited in all cases invariably referring to the deflowering of a virgin by the eighteenth century, an advance in the concept had to be made.

According to Medieval English law which repeated the Biblical notion—the man who had relations with a virgin was obliged to marry her, independently of whether the act had been characterized by mutual agreement or violence. The situation seemed unfair to the famous jurist William Blackstone, because "it placed the blame of a mutual error on only one of the transgressors". To consider that it was truly a matter of a crime, Blackstone demanded proof that the act had been carried out against the woman's will, conquering her resistance by force. Some of these proofs have already been noted in the Bible, but others, particularly the medical part, constituted a novelty. In spite of Blackstone's reservations, another new concept was that any woman, including a prostitute, could be raped.

The advanced notions of the English jurist met with good fortune, and throughout the nineteenth century the majority of European countries incor-

porated them into their legislation. The concept obviously suffered from serious defects and limitations: the victim was necessarily a woman and the victimizer had to be a man; husbands were excluded because "they had the right" to have sexual relations with their wives; the burden of proof remained the responsibility of the victim and the "violence", also referring to threats, was reduced to whatever evidence doctors could discover.

As might be supposed, they found then, just as today, very little evidence. Of one hundred and fifty women who presented charges of rape in 1989 in Mexico City, 146, or that is 97.33 percent, did not present visible signs of physical violence. The majority, terrified at the time of the attack, remained paralyzed and did not put up any resistance.<sup>4</sup>

### The Question in the 19th Century

Something similar must have happened in the nineteenth century. When confronted with the lack of physical "evidence", doctors then concluded that most of the accusations lacked proof. There were some who demanded changes in legislation to make it more severe. Rape, it was said, had to be exercised directly on the body of the woman and she had to put up constant and strong resistance. The logical result was a marked decline in the number of those who were sentenced for rape. If the annual average around 1875 in France was 1006, by the beginning of the next century, after uninterrupted declines, the courts found only 440 guilty.



Women organizing against violence. Photo by Patricia Aridjis.



*By the end of the World War II women's political rights were finally recognized and little by little they conquered new areas*

In the first half of this century, attitudes toward rape had not changed much, but by the end of World War II women's political rights were finally recognized and little by little they conquered new areas. The efforts of numerous feminist groups, the growing participation of women in public circles and the changes that occurred in the so-called "sexual revolution" broke the barriers that many men would have preferred to have kept hidden. Rape was one of them.

Today-and note that this is for the first time in Western history-there is a new, more severe attitude toward the rapist. The whole world is no longer ready to coincide with the comfortable macho notion-predominant until a couple of decades ago-that the woman, rather than the victim, was deep down the cause of the aggression and she should be considered as the provoker or inciter. Perhaps more importantly, today rape is viewed as a social problem that merits urgent attention.

This fact has given rise at the same time to an important change in the concept of rape so that it is not seen so much as a "sexual" crime, as a form of aggression, an act of violence intended to humiliate and subjugate a person. It is a violation of the very right of all human beings to make use of their body and to freely decide their sexual conduct.

The survival of a great number of traditional notions has obstructed complete legal acceptance of the new concept, but there are many legal systems in which the change is already clearly marked.

One of them is the increasingly firm conviction that the husband who exercises his "sexual rights" by means of rape is also a rapist. In almost all traditional legislations this notion is rejected by defining rape as "forced intercourse with a woman carried out by a man who is not her husband"-as is stated in the criminal codes of all states that make up the United States of America.<sup>5</sup>

**Comparing Countries**

The situation was not very different in Mexico and Argentina before the middle of the century. The Mexican Supreme Court of Justice, for example, declared in the mid-1930's that if a husband exercised "moderate" violence and did not intend to do anything "against nature"-such as anal intercourse or oral sex-it could not exactly be considered a rape. The doctrine, fortunately, has been changing and today the general principle is accepted and admitted in all modern legal systems, that it is illegitimate to exercise or demand a right by violent means, so that it turns out that the husband who exercises violence on his wife commits the crime of rape. Addressing this principle, Scandinavian countries recently modified their criminal legislation to sanction conjugal rape.

Another change that has been developing is that the victim does not necessarily have to be a woman and a man may also be raped. There are traditional legislations, noteworthy among which is legislation in the United States, that preserved untouched the old religious notion that homosexual intercourse is such an abominable crime that, although it be imposed by means of violence, in some way both parties are responsible. As a consequence, they treat it as an independent crime, calling it "sodomy" or "grave attempted crime against modesty", expressions that in any case tend to cover many other sexual conducts branded as "abnormal".<sup>6</sup>

Woman's right to choose, a conflict for Catholics. Photo by Patricia Aridjis.





Prostitutes and wives also suffer rape. Photo by Patricia Aridjis.

The tendency today differs in legal use and no one speaks of "forced sodomy," but rather simply of "rape", coinciding with those legal systems that do not limit the definition of this latter term only to cases in which the victim is a woman.<sup>7</sup> This conceptual change, although it may seem irrelevant, has permitted the observation that rapes with men as victims have grown in recent years, at least in terms of the number of charges presented, which have increased at a higher rate than the number of reported female rape victims.<sup>8</sup>

To accept that men can also be raped does not present serious conceptual problems, above all because the old unconscious prejudice remains unaltered. That is, in the exercise of sexuality, the one who penetrates is the active subject and the penetrated, by definition, is the passive one. Based on this notion and the complementary idea that rape is a "forced penetration", the range of conduct that is considered punishable has been broadened.

Thus there are legal systems that include, whether directly in their laws or via legal interpretations, not only vaginal intercourse and anal intercourse, but also forced oral sex-"fellatio". These systems come to equate rape with the introduction of objects or instruments other than the male sexual organ, with the understanding, of course, that the act occurs against the will of the person.<sup>9</sup>

The last point reveals a tendency that is still in the process of formation. When the penis ceases to be the only instrument with which a person may be sexually assaulted, nothing prevents abandoning the notion that a woman may actively participate in a rape only as an accomplice, which has been an assumption up until now. Although it may be extraordinarily infrequent and even retaining the understanding of rape as a "forced penetration", it is obvious that there is nothing that prevents a woman from penetrating another person with some object, an act that would convert her into the principal subject of the crime and not a mere accomplice.

The true problem, however, arises from an act no longer so infrequent that it forces us to critically reassess the old model of rape as "forced penetration." In a sample obtained in 1984 in Mexico City, we discovered that in 293 cases of female rape victims, ten women had helped or assisted the rapists. In three cases the participation of women accomplices was reduced to giving the victim the impression that she was safe and that the men accompanying them were "good people". In the seven other cases, however, the women "accomplices" actively participated in the rape, whether caressing the victim, practising oral sex-cunnilingus-or demanding that she perform a similar act. It will be admitted, I hope, that

*Now, rape is not seen so much as a sexual crime, as much as a form of aggression, an act of violence intended to humiliate and subjugate a person*

**The rapist is the one who forces another person to participate in any sexual conduct that he/she does not wish to participate in**

to force a person to practice cunnilingus against one's will is no less humiliating or degrading than other sexual acts, and if the door is opened to oral sex to consider fellatio, there is no reason to exclude cunnilingus.

By overcoming the idea that "the rapist is the one who penetrates", substituting it with the much fairer idea that "the rapist is the one who forces another person to participate in any sexual conduct that he/she does not wish to participate in", nothing prevents us from accepting that men can be raped by women.

When a woman or a group of women, which is more common, attack a man, tie him up and via masturbation bring him to an erection to then insert the penis into the vagina of one of the attackers, this is also "rape". Although very infrequent, this act is amply documented in anthropology, sexuality and in criminology.

Accepting the idea that the one who penetrates may be the victim of rape, reveals a final fact. In punishing rape, what should be protected is not the right to "not be penetrated", but rather the right to say No. In positive terms: what is at stake is the right of all adults, no matter

what sex, to make decisions for oneself, in any circumstance, regarding one's sexuality. To recognize this expressly will be one of the tasks that criminal legislation should address in the next millennium. ■

**Footnotes**

1. For reasons of space, I must omit most of the bibliographic references. The interested reader may find them in my book *Inventario de prejuicios: Violación, Mujer, Sexualidad* (Inventory of Prejudices: Rape, Woman Sexuality), that will be published by Editorial Posada, Mexico, this year. Many of the topics that I discuss here are dealt with in more detail.

2. The Bible preferred to base itself on a spatial notion: if the act took place in the city and the young woman did not cry out for help, she was guilty. If it happened in the countryside, where no one could hear her, she was innocent. See Deuteronomy 13: 2326.

3. Fuero Juzgo: Section V, Book III, Laws 14 and 17.

4. See Luis Rodríguez Manzanera et al.; *"Victimas del delito de violación en el Distrito Federal"* (Victims of the crime of rape in Mexico City), mimeographed communication at the Third National Criminology Congress, San Luis Potosí, 1989, p.10.

5. See for example Section 264 of the Criminal Code of the State of California, or section 2010 of that of New York. If the husband helps, assists or forces another man to have carnal contact with his wife, however, he may be accused of rape (See *People vs. Meli*, 193 N.Y.S. 365 (1922); *People vs. Chapman*, 62 Michigan 289, 28 N.W. 896, 4 A.S.R 857).

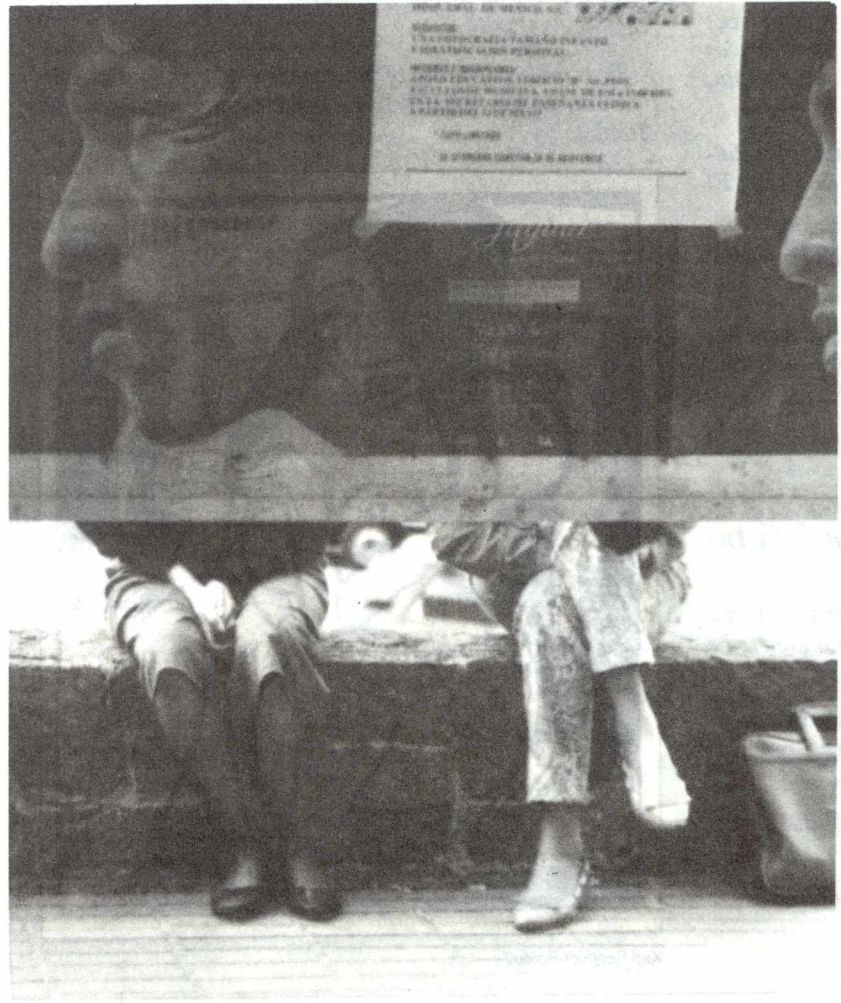
6. The expression "attempted crime against modesty" is from the Brazilian Criminal Code now in force (Art. 214), and it includes any "libidinous act other than carnal conjunction" to which someone is forced-no matter what sex-by means of violence or serious threat. The sentence in this case is two to seven years in prison. For rape it is three to eight. "Sodomy" in U.S. legislation includes homosexual sex (*Konanz versus People*, 82 Colorado 589, 263p. 19), fellatio and cunnilingus (*State versus Murphy*, 136 La. 253,259, 66 so. 963) and animals and necrophilia (*State versus Vicknair*, 52 L. Ann., 28 So. 273, 1921). The punishments vary in different states of the union, but the average is 20 years in prison.

7. This is the regime that rules in Italy, and in Latin America, in Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Panama, Paraguay, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela.

8. In 1980, of the total number of charges presented in Mexico City, 3.68 percent had men as victims. In 1989, the proportion had increased to 6.73 percent.

9. The reform promulgated in 1989 added to Article 265 of the criminal code in force in Mexico City a paragraph to this effect.

Untitled. Photo by Patricia Aridjis.



## AN EXTREME FORM OF VIOLENCE

Patricia Pedroza

There's not much difference between being raped and being hit on your head by a rock, except that afterwards you're not afraid of rocks, you're scared of half the human race.

The reactions we have in the face of violence range from indifference, fear, censure, anger, anxiety and despair, to tendencies to lock ourselves into complex rites of personal security aimed at keeping us safe from any possible attacker: attitudes which slowly but surely eat up our daily life.

Violence inspires fear, and fear paralyzes, it inhibits our individual and social freedom and development.

Violence against nature, against ethnic groups, infants, animals, old people, minorities and against women, has existed throughout our human history, in slavery, feudal, capitalist and even socialist systems.

Violence against women is often disguised, legalized, institutionalized, but rape is an extreme form of violence against our sensuality and our erotic intimacy, it is an expression of destruction, spite, hate and frustration.

*The following information from newspapers was selected from just a few days of one month, from just some of the Mexico City newspapers, on the theme of sexual violence.*

*"In July 1989 the Tornel Rubber Factory employees began their strike because the widow of a worker was sexually harrassed," says Tornel spokesman. El Día, 22/7/90.*

*"Hostilities towards women continue in the state of Hidalgo," says Congress woman Guadalupe Silva de Paz." El Sol de México 24/7/90.*

*Massive arrests of prostitutes in Acapulco. El Universal 26/7/90.*

*"Sexual crimes are increasing in Mexico City; there are four rapes a day in the Federal District," says the City's Attorney General. El Universal 27/7/90.*

*Only 10 of every 100 sexual crimes are denounced. El Sol de México, 29/7/90.*

*"Mexican women demand respect for their physical integrity," says Representative Gómez Maganda. El Día 1/7/90.*

*The police agent who tortured four women in Tecpan, Guerrero, was only changed from one zone to another; he was not punished. El Universal 1/7/90.*

*Of all women workers, 95 percent suffer sexual harrassment, says the Federation of Working Women's Organizations. El Día 1/7/90.*

*Penalties for sexual crimes will rise, to stall increasing violence. El Heraldo 1/7/90.*

*Prostitutes in Puebla are organizing to defend their human rights. La Jornada 2/7/90.*

*Rapists are being investigated and more arrests are expected, while the women who denounced the crimes, dubbed "the brave ones from the south", are constantly receiving death threats. El Nacional, 2/7/90.*

*There are more than 50 rapes a day in the Federal District. El Día, 2/7/90.*

*Of sexual crimes denounced to the Mexico City Attorney, 95 percent of the victims were women, 5 percent were men, and 68 percent of the rapes were against minors. El Día 2/7/90.*

*Three women found murdered. Zinapécuaro, Michoacán. El Nacional, 7/7/90.*

*The Mexico City Attorney General registers 19 complaints of sexual aggression daily. El Sol de México. 9/7/90.*

*Special watch in Iztapalapa because of high rape rate. El Excelsior, 11/7/90.*

*New law on sexual crimes approved by Chamber of Deputies. El Nacional, 13/7/90.*

*Protection for personal sexual values, a deeply felt demand of social justice and respect for human values. El Nacional 13/7/90.*

*Text and selection of newspaper items by Patricia Pedroza, of the CIDHAL Women's Center, Cuernavaca, Morelos.*



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff



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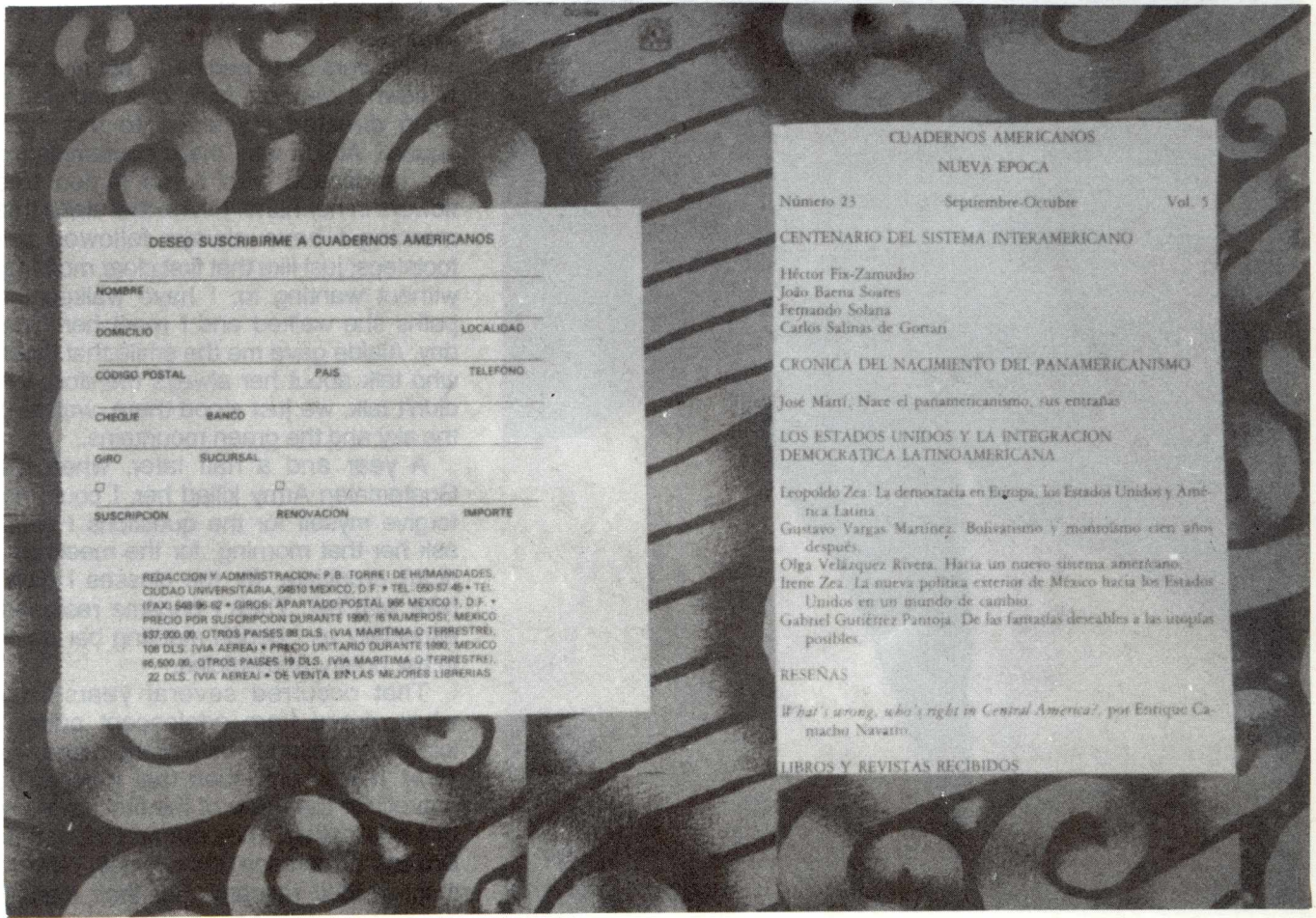


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# Alaide Foppa: Present after 10 years Absence

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Although I was lucky enough to meet Aláide only once, I feel a little like her daughter. Not only because in many ways I am close to Silvia, Laura, Juan Pablo, Mario and Julio Solórzano, her sons and daughters, but also because I inherited, along with many other women, those spaces which Aláide opened for the dissemination of feminism. The image I've had of Aláide has changed with time. I first knew of her existence when the magazine *FEM* appeared, in 1976. My friends of the paper *La Revuelta*, who were close to her children, spoke to me about Aláide as a generous mother and as a woman from the well-off classes. At *La Revuelta*, we considered Aláide and the other women who produced *FEM* to be a group of bourgeois ladies, and we thought the magazine was academic and elitist.

In our twenties, we were convinced that the marginal option of a small newspaper distributed by hand, was the only valid, revolutionary way. In those years we never read *FEM* or discussed its contents. Along with most youths, I was not interested in the words of older people; we needed to speak our own, to make our own original fantasies, absolutely different from those of other groups.

But one day, in 1978, I met Aláide. A new feminist group in Jalapa, Veracruz, invited us to a conference, and I immediately loved her intelligence, warmth and kindness.

She went off to bed early, but next day at dawn, I went out for a walk and something directed my steps to the main square. Aláide was there contemplating the landscape with some lemon tree flowers in her hand. I think that since that morning I have always followed her footsteps; just like that first clear morning, without wanting to, I have walked the paths she walked and I meet her. That day, Aláide gave me the smile that those who talk about her always mention. We didn't talk, we just stood there, watching the sky and the green mountains.

A year and a half later, when the Guatemalan Army killed her, I could not forgive myself for the questions I didn't ask her that morning, for the meetings I didn't propitiate, for the classes I didn't take with her. Then I became resigned, especially as I began meeting her again in her poetry and articles.

That occurred several years later when, freed from adolescent pride, I joined the editorial team of the magazine *FEM*. It was only then that I began to appreciate the value of the first issues of that publication. They are real treasures. Dozens of persons, even today, refer to them in their research, for their theses,

reports, or for their simple desire to learn about feminism.

Alaíde's first article there, titled "Anatomy is not Destiny", should be included in school text books. It is a synthesis of the origins and expressions of sexist discrimination, that would do a lot of good if everyone were to read it. The same can be said for many of her later articles, about the family, about women's writing and many other themes.

Besides her writings, Alaíde left open many spaces where women could express themselves. She never forget about other people, she never fell into the temptation of making an individual career for herself, she always shared everything: spirit, resources, knowledge.

This is manifested in the pain that her disappearance caused among so many people, and by the fact that most public spaces she opened for feminist debate are still functioning. We still have *FEM*, the

course on the condition of women is still given in the National University, and in some way we are carrying on her radio work - for eight years she had a weekly program on women, where she made known and gave voice to the problems and struggles of all women.

I am particularly close to this part of her legacy; with other women I have participated in radio series in Michoacán, Oaxaca and in Mexico City. We carried out a feminist project for eight years on Radio Education - a program that has been ended now because of the economic crisis and indifference on the part of the authorities. Now we have begun a new project, in our Center for Alternative Communication "Alaíde Foppa", with the aim of continuing the radiophonic labors which Alaíde began. In this way, we hope to acknowledge her legacy and render her homage.

Berta Hiriart

## ALAÍDE, A DEDICATED LIFE

Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán

For poets, university people, artists, human rights defenders and especially for women, last December was reason to listen once more to the voice of Alaíde Foppa, in those same spaces where she talked and walked up until ten years ago.

Her voice, of a Guatemalan woman deeply identified with the life and feeling of her people, was silenced by the cruelty and torture of her country's army. In 1980, on December 19, we heard that Alaíde had disappeared while on a trip to Guatemala.

Her family and friends received the news with extreme pain and anxiety, as that country was suffering the rigor of a military dictatorship where opponents of the regime were commonly executed soon after their arrest. The hope of finding her alive gave rise to an intense international campaign demanding her presentation by Guatemalan authorities. However, on January 10, 1982, it was confirmed that the army of that nation had killed a woman whose life was dedicated to poetry, to teaching in the university, to translation work, to art criticism, to feminism and to the defense of human rights.

The soft yet critical voice of Alaíde Foppa is not only simply remembered; in Mexico, her integrity is widely recognized, her integrity in creative and intellectual work, in her tireless defense of individual and collective dignity. Her work and influence are still alive today in literature, politics and in the university. She began the course on

Sociology of Women in the Political and Social Sciences Faculty of the National University, she opened radio programs on women, she founded the magazine *FEM*, pioneer of feminist publications in Mexico, and she was a militant in several groups defending human rights. It was recognized during the week's homage held in Mexico last December, that Alaíde was killed after three days of torture at the hands of the Guatemalan Army without having given away the whereabouts of her children Silvia and Mario. However, she was not killed for being the mother of guerrillas. The government of the then president, General Lucas García, knew Alaíde's plans and desires to become a representative of the Guatemalan people in Europe. It knew, therefore, that Alaíde would be an excellent ambassador of a Guatemalan Resistance.

Her fellow countryman and writer, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, has recognized that Alaíde was a woman with a profound knowledge of that painful hidden life of their nation, personified in the tens of thousands of disappeared and missing Guatemalans.

An extract of her poetry can indicate her deep feelings for life and freedom:

*When I have bled to death  
light and clear my life will be  
like a river, loud and transparent  
freely will flow the imprisoned song.*

# Wanted: Attractive Beauty for Office Duties

Barbara Délano Azocar

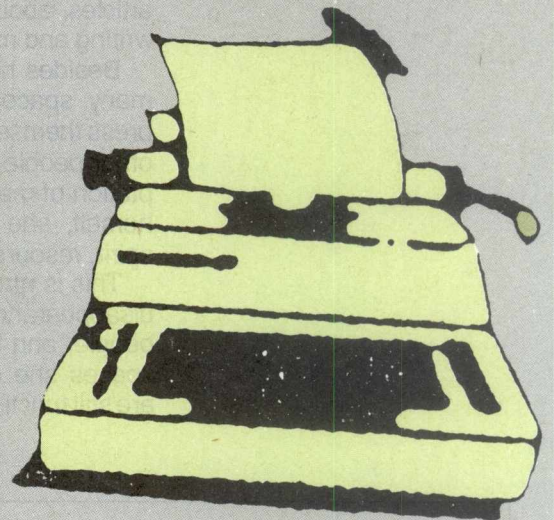
When women began to be incorporated into the work force, they were tried at different jobs. Within offices they started to substitute the old male secretaries who began to move into other areas.

The women offered a series of comparative advantages for the employer. They proved to be as responsible as men. In general they accept lower wages and their psycho-physical image fits wonderfully into this type of work. The fact that a woman is considered "more pleasant, prettier and more cordial" than men, plays a role in her hiring.

This "presence" that is demanded of secretaries hides an unacceptable discrimination that is missed many times even by the secretaries themselves. This is considered to be a natural fact, though it is not natural, for example, to look for a sales representative who is six feet tall and has blue eyes.

The secretary, like the housewife, is a collaborator, her work is considered a kind of support. It is not this "helping" factor, however, that bothers secretaries. It is the conditions that are imposed on women: authoritarianism, underestimation, a rigid hierarchical structure, lack of creativity and the exclusion of individual development. The idea of support or help is changed into the expression of a relationship that is basically unequal and discriminatory.

One major problem faced by secretaries in their work is related to the disorganization in which they are expected to function.



This is expressed in many ways: a duality of orders, an overload of work, useless repetition of tasks, etc. Such events are the ones that most irritate the secretaries in their work. We think that this is also related to another aspect of their job: the ambiguity of her functions that comes from a particularly close relationship with the boss.

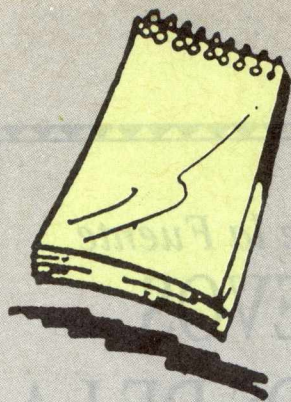
This relationship generates a series of loyalties where reservation and discretion form an important part of the job. This factor generates a situation of maximum ambiguity in which tasks are not clearly defined and where the will to do things "to please the boss" becomes the essence of the work.

Some 52 percent of secretaries themselves state that loyalty and reservation are more important qualities than technical ones.

These come in second place. Thus, we have a profession where obligations are highly unspecific. The tasks involved here are, for example: attending to the public and to the boss, paying the boss's personal accounts, keeping his check book, reminding him of his wife's birthday, keeping order, giving a good impression, smiling whenever possible, being well dressed, being polite with the clients, etcetera, etcetera.

In the office, the woman is subjected to a kind of mini-double working day in which her job as woman-helper becomes another advantage for the employer.

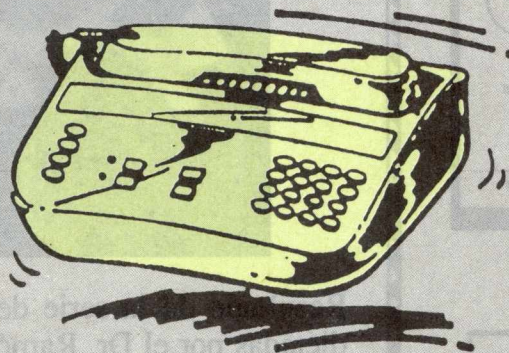




Just as we don't "see" a clean house, we also don't "see" a type-written paper with no errors. These are services rendered that enable everything else, that which is really "important", to be accomplished. At home, we can then eat and live together. At the office, the boss can carry out his business.

The invisibility of housework also now extends to the area of paid work. The work of the woman does not shine, even though the floor might.

There is a contradiction in the fact that secretaries state women are capable of taking over and being boss, and at the same time they say they do not like to work under a woman boss. They declare that while a woman who is boss is working, she is still worried about running her home and thus is not competent as a professional.



This is why secretaries say that a woman does not make as good a boss as a man. In our sample, there was not one secretary who would prefer to work with women as bosses:

They're "domineering", they can't make a distinction between their roles at home and at the office and "they make everything neurotic". These difficulties among women themselves, contribute to maintaining sexual discrimination.

Promotion is very slow or sometimes just doesn't exist for secretaries. In our sample, of the 73% of secretaries who had worked for more than four years in a company, only 8% had been given a promotion at least once. Mobility within the office turns out to be excessively rigid for the women who soon learn that their present jobs are the only positions they can aspire to.

In relation to job satisfaction we have found an interesting piece of data. Since the relationship boss-secretary demands

very close collaboration, and also demands that there must be a "golden mean" of understanding on both sides, the way the secretary is treated becomes an essential factor in the secretary's job satisfaction.

Seventy-eight percent of the secretaries considered that the most important factor to evaluate a boss was to look at the warmth with which he treats his subordinates.

Thus, fair treatment is linked with the notion of job dignity. On many occasions, good treatment has hidden poor working conditions, low wages and low expectation of promotion.

Sexual harassment to which secretaries are subjected to is a problem that 68% of the sample declared as being "frequent". At the same time, the percentage that this factor occupies in relation to causes of job dissatisfaction is significant. Harassment constitutes and affronts the individual and labor rights of women and must be openly confronted without fear. We do not have any stipulation of this matter in our laws, but in other countries this matter is being addressed.

In relation to union participation we have found that most women, for different reasons, do not participate in union activities.

Solutions to increase participation of married women in unions are multiple. The secretaries themselves have proposed some of these. Children, for example, could be taken care of when there are union meetings. Training courses could be held within certain time frames that would not keep the woman out of her house all day long. There could also be the creation of a space for discussion of the problems and specific demands of women in relationship to the whole concept of trade unions.

We consider it of utmost importance that the union movement reflect on the sexual segregation that exists in jobs and that it propose measures to make a more flexible structure of the rigid molds that have been imposed on men and women. There must be an end to job selection based on the sex of the person. There must also be an end to demanding "attractive presentation" as a job requirement. The denouncement of sexual harassment and the promotion of the idea of shared domestic responsibility are some of the demands that unions, especially women's unions, should begin to address if they wish to move towards more democratic societies.





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Resultado de la serie de conferencias dictadas por el Dr. Ramón de la Fuente en el Colegio Nacional, este libro lleva a cabo una revisión crítica de las corrientes psiquiátricas actuales, estableciendo sus aportaciones y límites en relación al diagnóstico y la rehabilitación del enfermo psiquiátrico en nuestro tiempo.

Otros títulos del autor en el F.C.E.

**PSICOLOGÍA MÉDICA**



# Elena Poniatowska: The Art of Questioning

**Writer Elena Poniatowska has essayed almost all literary and journalistic genres, although she seems to be better known for her novelistic work, perhaps because of the public's tendency to read more novels and short stories. But it is precisely her work of interviewer that journalist Beatriz Zalce wants to emphasize in the conversation she held with the author of *Tlatelolco Night*, *Silence is Strong*, and *Dear Diego*, *Quiela Embraces You*, among many other works.**

Beatriz Zalce

Lilus Kikus was devilishly restless: she ran to question a philosopher to find out if he was the owner of the lizards who basked in the sun outside her window; she asked how to make god a nest in her soul without committing adultery, while with the maid, Aurelia, she investigated the size and flavor of her sweetheart's kisses.

Elena Poniatowska is no different from the protagonist of her first book. Even before opening her front door, she is already asking: "Who is it?" and while you go into the living room, she finds out the rest: "How are you?" She is interested, she looks at you, she listens, she smiles, she offers you coffee, sweetbread.

### Why were you interested in the genre of interviews?

"In general it didn't interest me any more than other genres.

I could tell you that chronicles attract my attention more than interviews. But I was, and still am, such an insecure person that to say anything I needed the support of someone better prepared than myself, with greater authority. I remember that many things that were attributed to interviewees were things that I was thinking.

"The interviewer", continues Elena, "when conducting an interview almost always takes it where he or she wants to and makes the interviewee say sort of what they expect. In general, interviewers are much less objective than one might think."

When Elena began to write, she read the interviews published by Bambi in the newspaper *Excelsior*. They seemed very original to her. When she had the opportunity to work at that newspaper, it occurred to her that she could use the byline of Dumbo.

"Eduardo Correa told me that he wasn't about to have all of Walt Disney's characters in the Society section and that I would have to sign my own name.

"It seemed to me that my name sounded Russian, that it was difficult to pronounce. Sometimes I signed my articles as Anele: Elena spelled backwards or also as Helene, my name in french.

"The most difficult interviews are those with movie stars. People like Lola Beltrán already have a recording inside of them and it is almost impossible for them to say something original. Also, they are very inaccessible: you have to talk to their business managers, with the secretary's secretary. They don't need the publicity at all, nor do they seek it out, and they say the same thing to all the journalists.

"A man who seemed like a real person to me was El Santo (The Saint), the masked wrestler. He came to the bed (cama), look what I'm saying, what a subconscious! He came to the house (casa) with his mask on and I liked that very much.

"We got along very well and every February 14, Valentine's Day, the day of love



Photo of the author by Lourdes Almeida.

and friendship, he used to send me a huge bottle of perfume. Until he died. For me he was a great dream.

"One day he gave us front row tickets. I took my children to see the fights. It was then that their true character was revealed to me. Felipe my son, with infinite kindness, said: 'Don't hit him, don't kill him, don't do anything to him!' He was upset by everything he was seeing, while Paula, the really evil one, yelled: 'Blood, blood!'. She must have been about five years old and Felipe seven."

In April 1954, Elena went to interview the writer Francois Mauriac. He was very angry because his interviewer had not read his books and had wanted him to speak about them. He refused to talk.

"Now I understand that he was absolutely right. Sometimes people come to interview me and I have to tell them everything right down to my name.

"Many people come here to the house to interview me and to pass their examinations. In the month of June students begin to arrive in groups of eight or ten. At the beginning I felt flattered until I realized that they came so that I could do their homework for them.

"And I continue doing it because I think that I am very supportive of the youth. They come to me because other writers tell them to go jump in a lake.

"An interview is good if one goes prepared. After what happened with Mauriac, I never again did an interview without being prepared.

"At that time I was completely hare-brained. I did things totally unconsciously. If they had told me that I had to interview general Charles de Gaulle, I would have said 'yes', without thinking of a single question, thinking only that at the very moment of the interview, the Holy Spirit would appear to me and help me."

**Elena, you have become famous for asking the most appalling things with great equanimity...**

"Yes. I would ask the first thing that came into my head. I repeat that I had no preparation whatsoever. I photographically tell everything that I see and hear. It is my way of approaching the subject of the interview. It caused great surprise when I said to Diego Rivera: 'Why are you so fat?'"

Poniatowska compared the painter with a stuffed toy elephant and in two lines she paints a portrait of the master. During the interview with Rivera the lights went out, so she asked, "And now what should we do?" He answered, "Well, I think you should go home, Elenita, because there is no virtue in the dark".

However, the author of *La noche de Tlatelolco* (The Night of Tlatelolco) does not remember this.

### **How do you interview people who are suffering?**

"You can never interview people in prison with a tape recorder. You simply can't take a recorder into jail, nor a notebook, nor any little thing. They examine you very carefully before you can enter.

"They perform a gynecological examination of poor women every time they go, searching for drugs in the vagina.

"They've known me in prison since 1958, the time of the railroad worker problem. I went to visit Siqueiros and those arrested in 1968. The very well known photo of Siqueiros with his hand out in front, protesting, was taken by Héctor García because he asked General Martín del Campo, the director of the prison, to let him come in and take photographs.

"In the case of the 1985 earthquake, nothing can be added to the horror of death. Nor could a tape recorder be used. If they came to the house to give me their testimony, then it could be used. But out on the streets, it's very difficult to carry a tape recorder, taking it close to people who are crying...

"I talked with them and since in days of crisis you are extremely sensitive, you remember everything they say to you. Everything was recorded inside of me."

Elena Poniatowska's capacity for work is enormous. She is filled with enthusiasm, she publishes an interview daily and she still finds time to write, and to smile at her loved ones.

"García Márquez says that an interview is like love: it takes two people who are disposed, but it doesn't always work...

"In the first place, I can tell you that I once did an interview with Guillermo Haro, my husband, and it was not an act of love in any way. He was very negative and bad-tempered with me. I interviewed him about a very good collection he was editing at the time, called *Scientific and Philosophical Problems*.

"If a very close contact is established between the interviewer and the interviewee, you succeed in establishing a dialogue, a very friendly conversation. Don't you think it's like love?"

### **Sometimes...when they interview you, don't you start to think what questions you would ask to improve the interview?**

"No, never. I never think that because I am very supportive of the person who interviews me. I think that this is how they were with me.

"Rarely do I refuse to give an interview. If they had said 'no' to me upon seeing my ignorance and stupidity, I would have felt very bad. You will be measured with the same stick that you used to measure.

"There are people who ask you something and they never look at you. They say, 'Why are these green plants that are so tall, so poorly arranged?' And while you answer, they say to you, 'what do you think of Gorbachev?' They go from one extreme to the other and you feel as though you don't matter to them. They are doing something that is a little outside of themselves."

### **Is there anyone whom you have not interviewed and you would like to interview?**

"Alberti", says Paula, Elena's daughter, who sits herself down in front of her mother and responds without any hesitation.

"No, because anyway I've interviewed him", clarifies Elena. "There are people whom I would have loved to have interviewed and I didn't do it or else I didn't pay enough attention to them.

"For example, Dr. Atl. He was extremely kind to me. He came to the house to leave me his books and to chat with me. He gave me a letter that he had written to Diego Rivera. I have several things that he gave me.

"Since I spent all my time being friends with him, I never said to him: 'Oh, I'd like to interview you'. He was fairly elderly and it didn't occur to me.

"There are other people...Frida Kahlo. She died in 1954, the year when I began in journalism. I could have had access to her.

36

"Look, I'm not that kind of journalist, I have no sense of opportunity. I don't rush out to get news.

"Who else? Máximo Pacheco, a not very well known muralist.... Goitia...I would have liked to talk with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz."

### **If you interviewed God, what would you ask?**

"God? Which god?," asks Felipe who settles down on the arm of the chair where Elena is sitting and he puts his arm around her shoulders. The question remains unclear.

"If you interviewed Cinteotl (this spelling is more common than 'Zenteotl'), the god of corn, you would say please..."

"Don't be a hypocrite, mom. You don't think about that."

"Oh Paula, honestly. Let me say...I would say that it is absolutely necessary that there be more corn to make more tortillas.

"If I interviewed the god of my childhood...It's that I don't have him drawn in my head. Rather, I have an image of Jesus Christ."

### **What would you ask him, Elena?**

Paula interrupts, "The question would be why doesn't he give private classes to priests?"

Elena reflects. She says nothing. She looks at her cup of coffee with milk. Finally she speaks, for herself.

"It would be very difficult. One is very resigned to one's childhood prejudices.

"When something very serious happens to me, such as the death of my father, the death of my brother or Guillermo Haro, I need a handle.

"Above all with the death of Jan, my brother, so unexpected, so inexplicable. You start to say, 'Please, help me, let me see him again, please, let him not be dead'. You ask God, you are prepared for everything, I promised him that never in my life would I eat sweets again, that I would get up every day at six in the morning and bathe in cold water. I promised these tasks...

"My mother paid her tribute of pain to god. She sacrificed her son. Let's say that they took her heart. Afterwards, you think that nothing so serious can happen again in the family. And then the son of my sister Kitzia is left paralyzed for life in a car accident and there is nothing on earth that can cure him..."

"So, I would ask him: 'What are you thinking about, God?'"

Within a few months, Editorial Diana will publish the first volume of interviews written by Poniatowska, among which are those with Luis Barragán, Jorge Luis Borges, Tongolele, María Félix, El Santo, and Lola Beltrán among others.

"I have always felt that I have been a bad mother. When my children were little, I did lots of interviews. With the publication of this book, they will see the fruit of my work and why I was not with them.

"In school they asked Felipe to do a portrait of his mother. He drew a table with skinny, skinny legs and a typewriter. All the other children did their mother in the kitchen, cooking...I said to myself that I'm not here for my children. I pass the day in front of a typewriter, like someone obsessed, like someone with a mental illness.

"When my children come in from the street, they go upstairs and they always go to my room. They don't look for me in the kitchen or in the laundry, rather in front of the typewriter."

"Aw, mom, I'll tell you why." Felipe removes one of Elena's earrings and begins to play with it. "I'd rather have you writing than being in the kitchen and turning sixty wondering what you're going to give us to eat.

"What we all search for in this life, when we're 50, 30, 25 or any age, is to know where we're going. Some look for it in painting, others in the broom and dustpan. You found it in writing.

"We all look for something that we fall in love with to dedicate ourselves to that love. You write for love and not for the pittance they pay you. Writing makes you come alive as a person, to resolve your emotional and intellectual problems. By writing you come out of yourself to give yourself to others." ■

# Mazahua Women in Mexico City

Mazahua women, members of an indigenous group from the state of Mexico and part of Michoacán, have gained recognition and identity and their own arts cooperative in Mexico City, where they have migrated over the last several decades. Their efforts to earn a decent living for themselves and their families, to form the cooperative *Flor de Mazahua*, and as such, to be independent of government and political groups, and to educate themselves, are all part of their struggle to express their pride and dignity as members of an indigenous group and as women, rejecting and protesting against discrimination and insults.

Rosa María Ortega, who has worked with the Mazahua women since 1985, and who is writing the memoirs of their struggle, relates their story. *Voices* presents this history, together with testimonies from *La Lucha del Pueblo Mazahua* (The Struggle of the Mazahua People), published recently by the Mazahua Center and the Mexican United Nations Association.

Rosa María Ortega



Photo by Mariana Yampolsky

The Mazahua migration to Mexico City is the result of hunger, poverty, unemployment, unjust distribution of land, soil erosion, injustices suffered by the Mazahua rural community at the hands of local bosses (caciques) who operate hand in glove with imposed authorities, the discrimination suffered as indigenous people... With no other alternative for survival, the Mazahuas have come in thousands to Mexico City in search of a better way of life, and for space and recognition that society— even in their place of origin—has denied them.

In the 1960's the problems of migration had a qualitative change: not only were men migrating, but women were now arriving in the city with their children. These women confronted a hostile atmosphere in the capital, where they dedicated their energies to selling fruits, nuts and seeds and other products on the streets.

Felisa Segundo Mondragón: "I came to the city aged 8, I spoke only Mazahua and my aunt helped me. I didn't know anything about the city - neither the language, nor the traffic lights, nor about the police who came by and threatened us and took away the lemons and peanuts I used to sell.

"After a short time on the streets I began working as a maid, I didn't know about electricity and telephones and doorbells, but I soon learned. My boss made me change my clothes, she said if I went to the shops dressed as a Mazahua (in a silk skirt and embroidered blouse), they wouldn't attend me. She told me I looked horrible dressed like an indian. Also, she changed my name because she didn't like Felisa.

"From that time, I became confused and anxious about speaking my own language. Because when I spoke Mazahua, I got treated badly. And so when my son was born, I didn't teach him Mazahua, I thought, if he speaks my language, he'll be treated badly too."

On the streets, the Mazahua women were victims of various acts of hostility and malice by the police, ranging from confiscation of their produce, beatings, even rape, and detentions in prison for 72 hours periods. These were young women, often mothers.

Juan Esquivel Avila, now grey-haired, respectfully addressed as *Tía Juanita* (Aunt) by her community:

"I worked selling on the streets for about seven years. During that time they put me in prison many times, they would take away whatever I was selling and they would put me in the prison *La Vaquita* for 72 hours. They used to bathe us with cold water at 5 o'clock in the morning. I think it was part of the punishment, so that we'd stop selling, but I always went back to work. What else could I do?"

This was an offensive situation, and women began to express their demands for respect for their right to work. Following talks with Mexico City authorities (DDF), the Mazahua Center was opened in 1972, with the aim of providing social protection and employment for this community of migrants. The Center was equipped with sewing machines, cloth, thread and so on, all that was needed for the production of embroidered blouses, table cloths and napkins, dolls and shawls. In the beginning, the DDF also provided teachers, who gave literacy classes, as well as two meals a day and a wage for their work. Within a short time, the Center became a center of exploitation disguised as a program of social assistance. The Center never accomplished its declared objectives, the women were not trained, nor were they paid a just wage for their work.

The Center had administration staff, employees of the DDF. Mazahua women were in charge of the services—cleaning, preparing meals and providing child care—and worked on the production of crafts. Their number grew during the 1970's, reaching up to some 800 women.

The Center functioned with a revolving fund of 50,000 pesos each week. This paid for the food, for cloth and thread, and maintenance costs. The finished products which left the Center each fortnight, were worth around 1 or 1.5 million pesos. The goods were sold in the Mazahua shop, which belonged to the DDF, but we didn't know where the money went to.

Agustina Mondragón Paulino: "I used to earn 3,000 pesos (one dollar) weekly. I used to cut the cloth and make dolls—I'd make 20 or 30 dolls every day, and I was paid seven pesos for each one. That was in the Center workshops; at night I'd take extra work home, I'd embroider until one in the morning, sleep a little, and get to the Center around 8 a.m. All together, I'd manage to make 3,000 pesos each week."

In spite of the low wages, the women stayed at the Mazahua Center because it was a place where they could speak their own language, dress in their traditional costumes and be with their own people. They could identify themselves as Mazahuas without people despising them or scorning them. That's why the women

Photo by Mariana Yampolsky







Photo by Mariana Yampolsky

stayed in the Center over those 15 years, sewing, embroidering pretty designs, ruining their eyesight and damaging their lungs, they embroidered their very hopes!

"That tablecloth I was telling you about, it measured 2.5 meters, took 15 days to a month to embroider. The embroiderers received 1,500 pesos; it was sold in the Mazahua shop for 35,000 or 45,000 pesos."

### 1985, the Watershed

In this year, the DDF transferred responsibility for the Mazahua Center to the Delegation of Venustiano Carranza (one of 16 political divisions of the city), and this delegation, ignoring the importance of the Center for its participants, announced that it would close down the Center, due to lack of funding, the poor physical conditions of the Center (it was, and still today, is located in the market *La Merced*). They invented a bunch of pretexts to make the women leave, obviously reasoning that they would accept this decision and obediently go away from the Center—as if they had various alternatives for survival.

The Mazahua women began to organize so as not to lose their place in the city and their employment. A period of several years of visits to government offices, to law courts, to newspaper offices, radio and television stations, was to follow. The women proposed that if the Delegation did not have money to pay them, they would form a cooperative and manage for themselves the production and sale of their goods. They asked the authorities for the physical space and for the equipment.

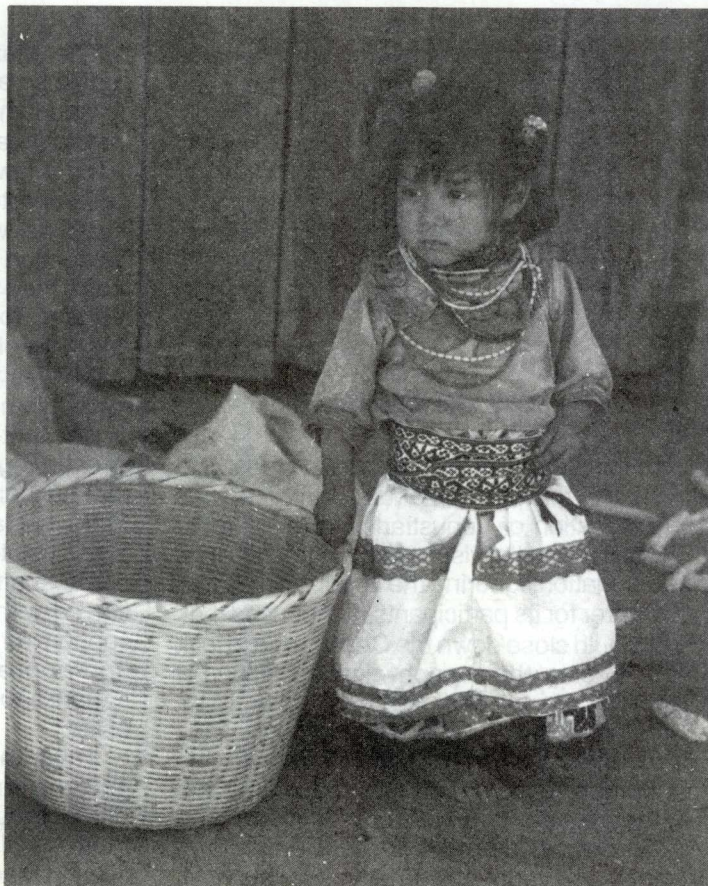
"We put up with government officials threatening and insulting us by day, and with husbands beating us at night."

"Five years later, if we are forty women in the Center, only ten of us are still with our husbands. But those men who have stayed with us, have learned a lot, they support us in our troubles and conflicts, and appreciate that we have all won—thanks to those efforts—a better quality of life."

Thus, they had to fight their battles in government offices and in their homes. The bureaucrats argued that the government could not give the women the sewing machines, because the machines



Photos by Mariana Yampolsky



Yampolsky Mariana

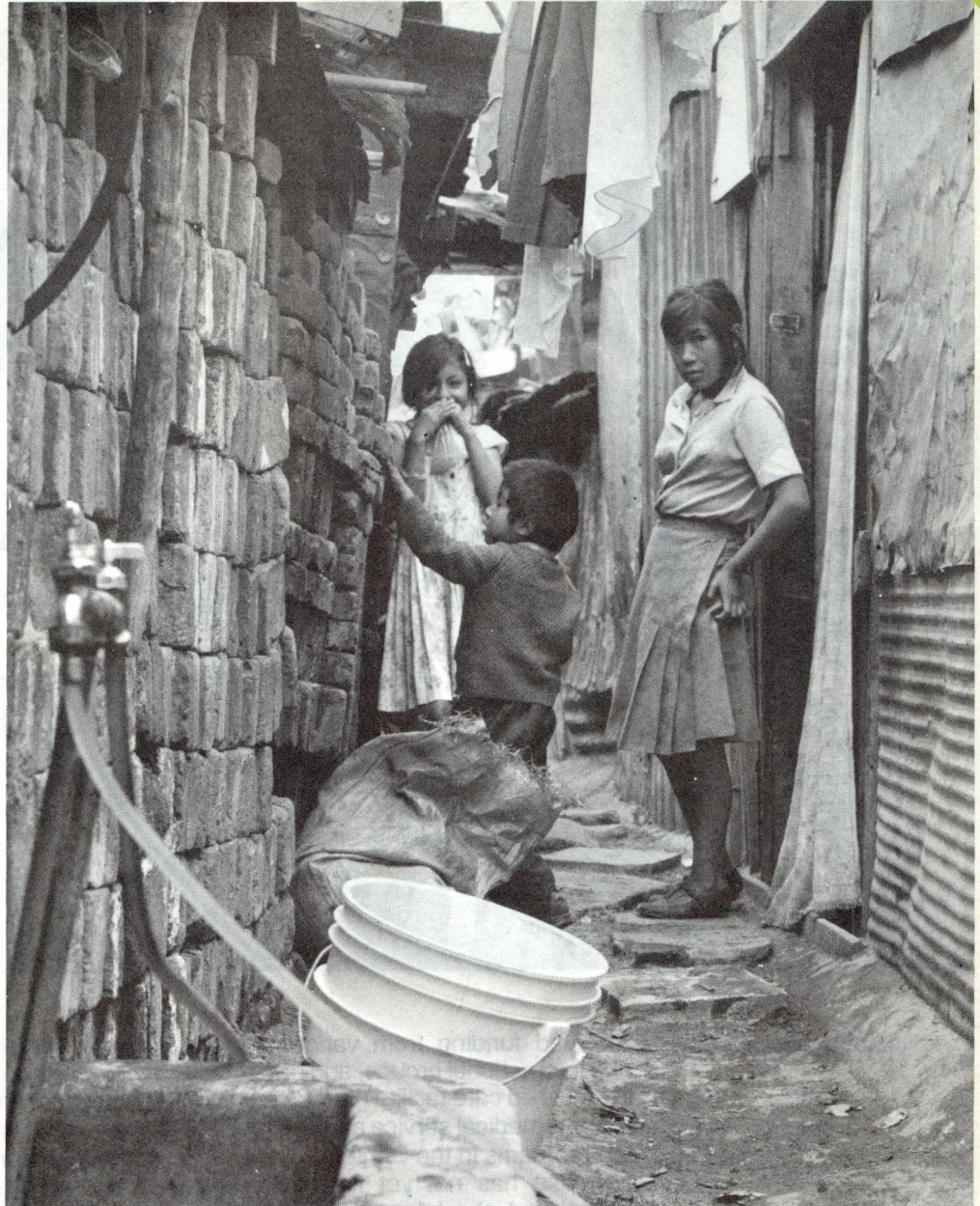


Photo by Mariana Yampolsky

"belonged to the nation". They refused to listen to the women's reasoning: "But we are part of the nation!"

Negotiations broke down, and 22 sewing machines were embargoed in 1985, along with raw materials and finished products valued at 5 million pesos at that time.

All was demagoguery, lies and humiliations. The women had no money and the authorities took away their working tools, merchandise and raw materials, but the women did not lose their spirit and their determination to be respected, listened to and recognized by the society as indigenous peoples, as human beings with capacities and limitations like any other. They were determined to win their struggle for better living conditions, for better working conditions, for their own cultural values.

The Mazahuas formed a legally constituted group (civil association) in 1987, and sued the Venustiano Carranza delegation for the embargoed sewing machines and materials. They won this case, but so far, say Felisa and Agustina, they have only received the finished products and cloth - which were all falling apart, due to moths and other aspects of poor storage conditions during the embargo. As for the sewing machines, they say, "they must be all rusty iron and rotted wood by now, after five years".

Since 1985, the Mazahua women in Mexico City have made advances in their efforts to maintain their Center by themselves. At first they went to sell food in certain schools, with that money they managed to buy cloth and thread to make and sell more handicrafts, gradually they have increased their assets. They have

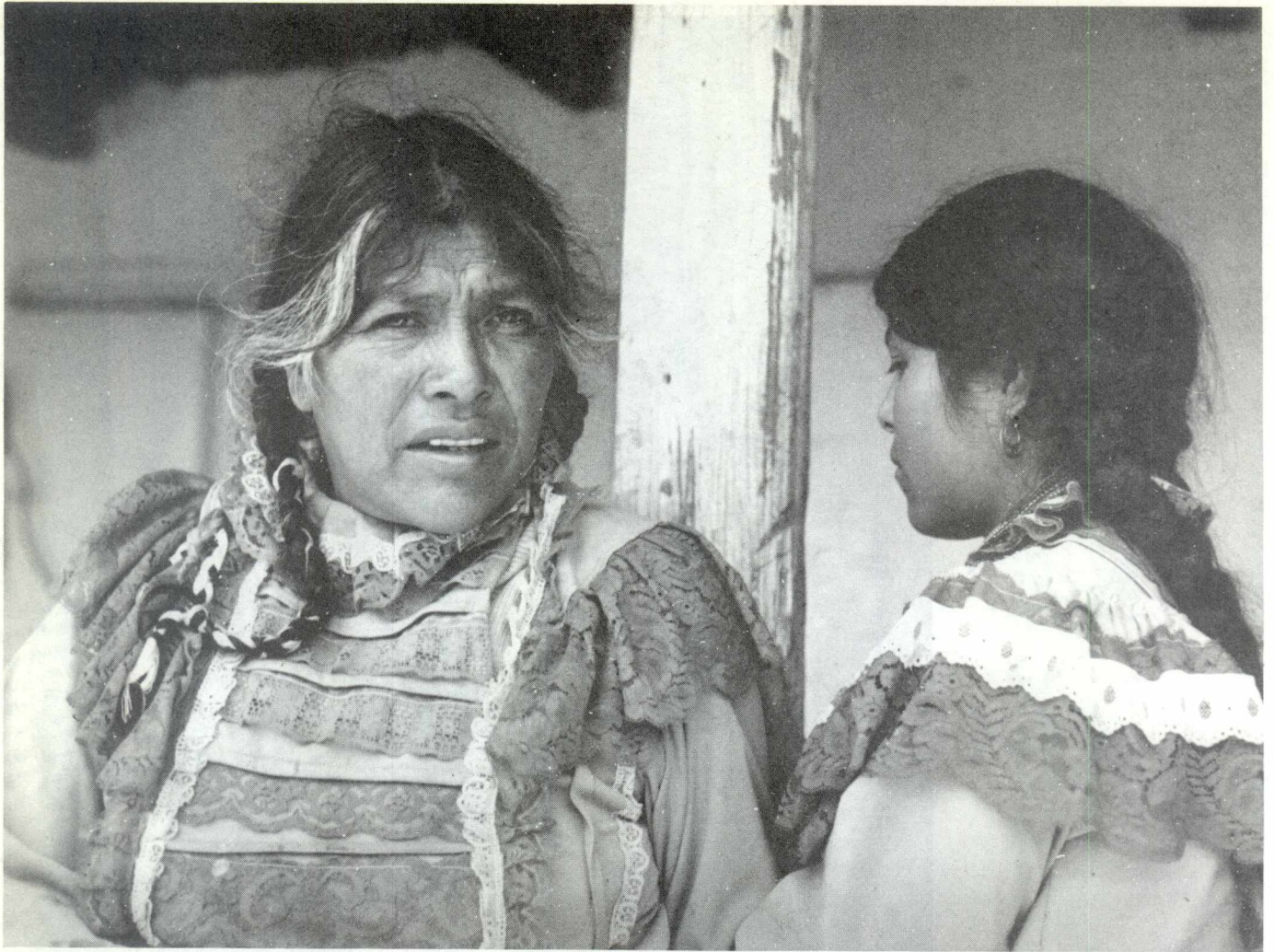


Photo by Mariana Yampolsky

received funding from various national and international groups, and have established child care facilities, a kitchen/dining room, a medical service and various training programs in the Center.

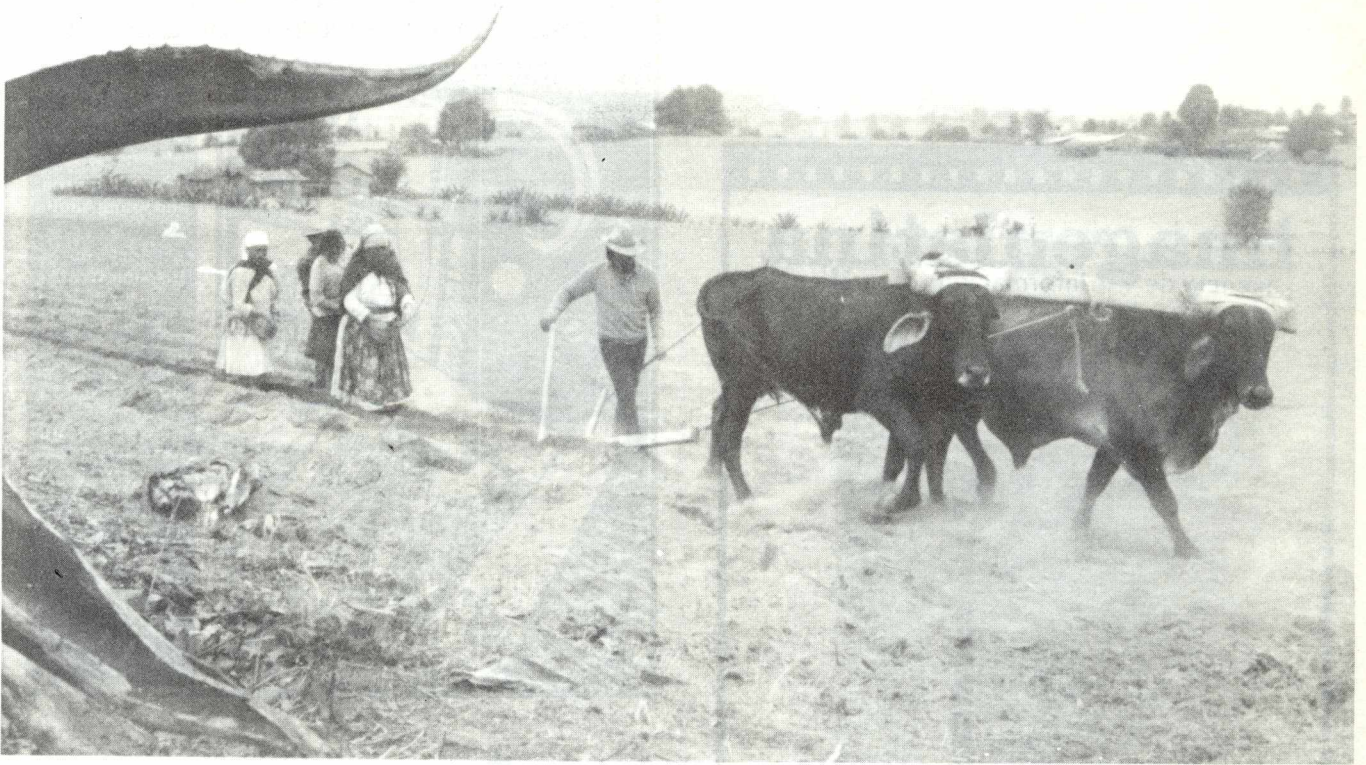
Felisa has not yet finished primary school, but she has studied accounting and does the books for the Center. In the clinic, the women take courses to study herbal medicine, massage techniques and other healing methods. In 1990 they set up a workshop for metal crafts, where the older children are beginning to learn new skills. This workshop arose out of concern for the adolescents, "they needed something to do, we don't want them roaming the streets getting into trouble".

Felisa, Agustina and Rosa María agree that the Center has meant years of struggle, but their reward has been that they have learned a lot. Rosa María, coordinator of the group for five years, took a course organized for grass roots organizations on how to conduct a legal process on domestic disputes, about laws on domestic violence and divorce and so on. Later she was able to sue the father of her children for their food allowance. "It

was very hard, but it was a wonderful experience. I won the food money for my children! I'm very grateful for this training, we need more of this kind of thing. We have to transmit knowledge and increase our self help capacities."

The women have more confidence in themselves as Mazahuas and as women. "We don't deserve to be humiliated, to be called ignorant Indians." Among their objectives today, the women are working to re-establish their cultural values - thinking over what it means to teach the Mazahua language to their children or not - and to consolidate their own survival strategies. "We don't want to be in the city forever", says Felisa. "We want to go back to our villages and create workshops there, teaching what we've learned here." If this becomes a reality, future generations of Mazahuas will not have to migrate to the city, they will be able to make their living in their home towns.

"We're making new designs for our embroidery and blouses", says Agustina. And thanks to their experiences in the Mazahua Center, the women are making new designs for that fabric called life. ■

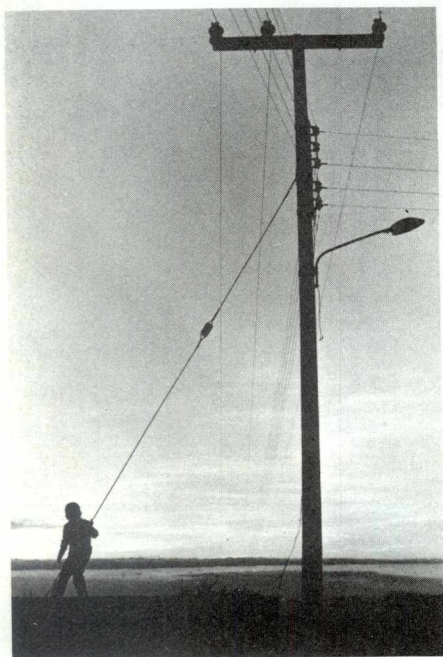


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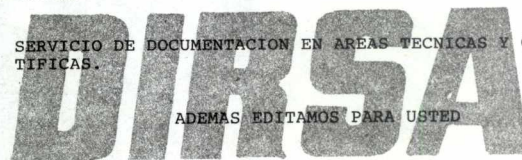
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# Mexicans, Aids and the Condom

**Before the menace of AIDS no one could imagine that use of the condom would extend as much as it has today. Since the times when it was designed for contraceptive use, the invention of chemical and other products to avoid non-desired pregnancies, seemed to put the condom out of fashion. Journalist Patricia Aridjis reminds us here of the role of condom use in preventing AIDS, the way people accept or reject it, and other details and figures about that terrible malady.**

*Patricia Aridjis*

Condom use in Mexico is not frequent, although 90% of Mexicans with AIDS have contracted it sexually.

When the malady first appeared, homosexuals were the group most affected, and many of them began to take preventive measures. In contrast, the rest of the population believed that it was not a health problem that concerned them. The result is that half of those who now have AIDS are heterosexuals, 50% of whom are women, and of these, 10% are housewives.

In addition to abstinence and mutual fidelity, over the last years the rubber condom has been considered the most effective method against AIDS. Statistics on condom use in Mexico, although imprecise, indicate that the number of condom users is low, fluctuating between 1 percent and 7 percent of the sexually active population.

Some people claim they do use condoms. Proving how many of them are telling the truth is a little difficult. What is undeniable is the high index of those who have contracted AIDS sexually. Those who openly reject condom use tend to

argue, half joking, whole in earnest, that loss of sensitivity during sex "is like taking a bath with a raincoat or like forcing a child to eat sweets wrapped in plastic". Casanova, the famous 18th century gigolo, surely would not have agreed with these statements. For him, using the condom removed a great weight from his shoulders. "It is the English vestment that gives peace of mind", he once said.

Dr. Patricia Uribe, of the National Council for AIDS Prevention (CONASIDA), believes that reticence to use condoms is due, among other things, to the fact that "among adults it is very difficult to change habits, above all when it is a matter of sexual habits".

What does it mean to use a condom? Sometimes distrust, sometimes holding back. The housewife, for example, cannot easily insist that her spouse use it.

"For this reason it's important to inculcate the use of the condom from formative stages. I do not think that youth are very highly aware. They know perfectly well what a condom is, but few use it. This is shown in the high number of pregnant adolescents, who obviously did not protect themselves. It is what is called children having children."

## Conservatives Insist It's Immoral

Some non-governmental groups and CONASIDA itself, through Dr. Patricia Uribe, propose an alternative on how to convince people of the benefits of condom use. "We view it as a medicine and we must change this image. The mental phase is very important in sexuality, so the condom needs to be eroticized. Incorporating it into sexual play can be very enjoyable, it does not decrease pleasure and at the same time, it protects.

"If cigarettes, Coca Cola, and everything that is not inherently erotic has been eroticized, why not something that is related to sexuality?" asks Dr. Uribe. We, on the other hand, ask:

Why is it that this twist hasn't been given earlier to the campaign against AIDS? Is it because the country's more conservative groups have prevented it?

The official spokesman of the Mexican Catholic church, Genaro Alamilla, stated in 1987 that the campaign against AIDS "will promote homosexuality and loss of values that the Mexican people have managed to preserve in spite of everything. Also it will increase prostitution and will induce young people to begin sexual activity when they still are not physically or mentally prepared". More recently (September 1990), the National Parents' Union (UNPF) stated that this campaign "pol-

lutes the morality of adolescents". The UNPF demands the resignation of the director of CONASIDA, Dr. Jaime Sepulveda Amor, because "he promotes condom use among young people and children, a situation that is detrimental for minors. The campaign is acceptable for homosexuals or bisexuals but it should not be extended to the rest of the population, especially not to young people and children. It must be concentrated exclusively on high risk groups." Also Jorge Serrano Limón, who heads the ultraconservative group PROVIDA, has voiced his thoughts on numerous occasions, rating the use of the condom as "immoral".

Patricia Uribe says that these are minority groups and that they do not stand in the way of the work of CONASIDA. "Their stance is valid. They promote abstinence and mutual monogamy as the sole alternative in their community. The Public Health sector has to be realistic. Not all people opt for either of those two options, which is why other possibilities must be offered and one of them, of course, is condom use", she states.

Nevertheless, there are sectors that believe the CONASIDA campaigns have not been open, and that they have not been sufficiently explicit.

### Don't Help Me, Brother

In August 1990 the National Consumer's Institute (INCO) carried out quality tests

on 26 brands of condoms that are sold in the country (9 Mexican and 17 imported). The lot was made up of 3,100 condoms acquired in different zones of Mexico City, in the same way that any consumer might get them. The experiments were suggested by the National Union of Consumers' Organizations. The results were published in the newspaper *El Nacional* and in the magazine *Examen*. The latter publication noted repeatedly that "these tests far exceed the norms required in our country". Why they are so rigorous is never explained. In contrast, they do demonstrate the failures in detail. Part of the article is summarized below.

It was found that:

Brands cancelled long ago by the Health Ministry were on sale.

Condoms with expired shelf life date were on sale.

There were condoms on sale that did not have an expiration date and/or date of manufacture, and none included instructions saying "Do not use after such month in such year", or "Store in a cool, dry place". More than half the imported brands had clear plastic packaging. In this way, light and ultraviolet rays may easily affect the condom, speeding up the aging process.

Some condoms were poorly finished and had small holes.

More than half the lot passed mechanical and ageing tests. In contrast, four national brands and six imported ones did not pass the stretching test; after ageing, they broke.

The brands Supermacho and Lifestyles got the highest ratings and the lowest, Argis and Tahiti. (The first and third were national brands, and the second and last, imported.)

Finally, the article in *Examen* concluded that in spite of the rigor of the tests, 19 types of packaging of imported condoms and three national ones met the required standard of quality.

### Handle with Care

Dr. Patricia Uribe discards the possibility that the failures are due to manufacture. "There is good quality control in prophylactics. We have been to exhibitions where they have been tested with great water pressures. Rather I believe that the error is in storage and use. People carry them in the subway, in their pants pocket, with friction, heat and humidity".


If condom storage conditions are good, its useful life fluctuates between two to five years. Conditions that may contribute to the deterioration of a prophylactic are:

The contraceptive for men...  
from responsible couples

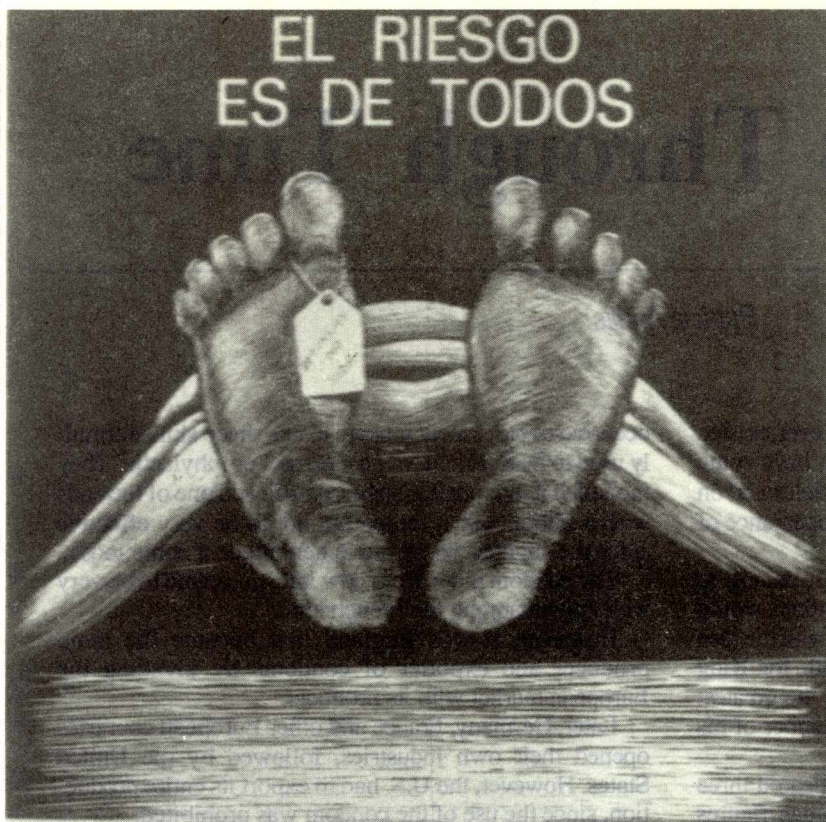
Sólo para manejo en tiendas

**Rotektor**

El anticonceptivo sólo para hombres... de parejas responsables







Mexican health authorities frequently play on words in their AIDS prevention campaigns

- Extreme temperatures. In a storeroom with a zinc roof in a warm climate, temperatures may exceed 60 C. In some countries, prophylactics are stored in these conditions for up to five years.
- Humidity. Sealed packages may come open, allowing insects, mold or fungus to enter.
- Light. Ultraviolet rays, generated by the sun and florescent lamps, reduce condom effectiveness within hours, for this reason transparent wrappings are not recommendable.
- Ozone
- Abrasion (action and effect of wearing something out, through friction)
- Flattening
- Prolonged storage in wallets and tight pockets.

Latex (rubber tree sap) condoms are a barrier against sexually transmitted dis-

eases such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia infections and AIDS. It has been scientifically proven that the microorganism responsible for these infections cannot penetrate latex condoms, which are generally between 30 to 70 micrometers thick. Its molecules overlap, producing a barrier effect with a magnitude calculated to be a thousand times smaller than the size of the AIDS virus, so that there is no doubt about the protection that it offers.

However, its effectiveness varies depending on the type of sexual practice, the quality of the prophylactic, the conditions of its storage, handling during transport as well as individual handling.

**Condoms in Mexican Society**

Our system of sexual education deals with a double moral standard. On the one hand, the media bombards us constantly and indiscriminately with subliminal and not so subliminal messages. Sex and sexuality emanate from products and attitudes of men and women in an infinite number of programs and commercials.

On the other hand, the Mexican society is mostly Catholic, with deep-rooted conservative customs, which do not allow formal sexual education to be more complete and open. As an example, it is enough to remember the negative reactions provoked long ago by the introduction of sexual topics into primary school textbooks. We have also already mentioned the conservative groups' disapproval of campaigns organized by the Health sector and non-governmental groups against AIDS. Furthermore, our culture does not allow for a woman to exercise very active participation when it comes to sex. How many women are incapable of having an orgasm for fear of being judged if they take the initiative during sex? Many women do not even dare to suggest the use of a condom for a simple cultural reason: the man defines the terms of the relationship. The use of the condom is not a moral question, it is a matter of health. To substitute the psychological barrier with a true protective barrier is almost the only way to stop a disease that over a short period of time has become pandemic. Sexual preference is unimportant, the risk is latent at all times.

In 1988 for every 23 men with AIDS, there was one woman.

In 1989 for every 9 men with AIDS, there was one woman.

In 1990 for every 4 men with AIDS, there was one woman. ■

# Condoms Through Time

Patricia Aridjjs

Dr. Condom (although whether he really ever existed is doubtful) and the prophylactic or condom have come to occupy an important place in scientific articles and on the pages of newspapers as a result of the appearance of AIDS.

The inventor and his supposed invention belong to different eras. If he had been real, Dr. Condom would have lived in the 18th century. He is credited with the idea of using a sheep intestine as a penis sheath for King Charles II, so that the monarch could enjoy the greatest degree of pleasure without increasing the number of his illegitimate offspring.

On the other hand, the condom itself appeared three thousand years ago. Egyptian art shows human figures with penises enveloped in a covering, probably made of a vegetal fiber. It is believed that the sheath was used to protect them from parasite infection, insect bites or contact with irritating plants.

Two thousand years ago, the Chinese also made condoms from oiled silk paper, and it is said that Roman soldiers of the empire made use of their enemies killed in battle to secure material necessary to make their own version.

The first description of a condom dates to 1560. In *De Morbo Gallico*, Gabriello Falopi (Italian anatomist, famous for his description of oviducts and Fallopian tubes) proposed the use of cloth sheaths as a prophylactic, especially against syphilis.

It was in the 18th century when the first condom was born, made from the intestine of an animal, when it

occurred to parchment makers to use sheep skin, normally used to heal wounds or gashes, as a prophylactic. They modelled it into phallus shape, and closed one of the ends with a ribbon, but it turned out not to be very effective since the slightest brusque movement made it come loose.

The condom made from cow intestine came to be very well known among the French elite.

However, it was England that became the main producer and exporter of condoms by invading the European market with its products.

Later, Germany, France and other European countries opened their own industries, followed by the United States. However, the U.S. had to export its entire production, since the use of the condom was prohibited.

In 1838 Goodrich invented a process for treating rubber latex. It consisted of heating it under pressure with sulphur and other substances. In this way, the material did not become deformed when exposed to heat, nor brittle with the cold. Goodrich baptized the process "vulcanization" in honor of Vulcan, the god of fire.

With the introduction of thin films made of rubber latex, condoms which were cheaper and more reliable than those made of sheep intestine were manufactured, and their mass production became possible.

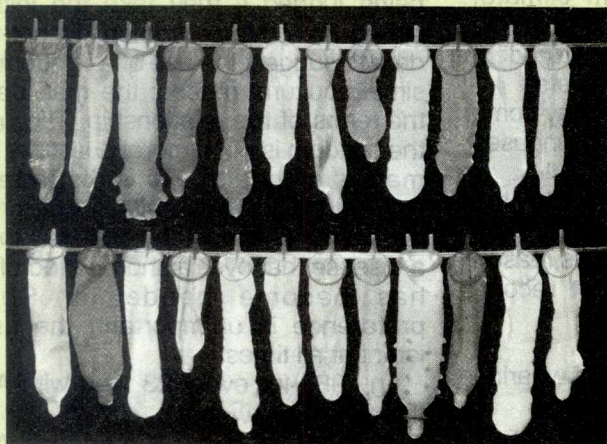
The English working class began to use these condoms, some of which had the portrait of Queen Victoria and her prime minister, William Gladstone.

In comparison with today's condoms, these still presented some discomforts. They had a seam and they were very thick. The problem disappeared in 1930 when the rubber condom was introduced.

In the process of manufacture, the liquid state of the rubber permits the introduction of molds into the solution. The results are seamless condoms as thin as 0.03 micrometers.

## Etymology

It is possible that the English word "condom" comes from Latin *condere* which means "to hide, to protect". Or perhaps it has its origins in the Latin *condus*, which means "recipient". This word in turn comes from the Persian *kondu*: a long recipient made from the intestine of an animal.



Condoms of all shapes, sizes and colors... a far cry from versions made centuries ago



## Novedades

### ANTROPOLOGÍA DE LA ESCLAVITUD Claude Meillassoux

Su conocimiento del terreno africano, la utilización de un abundante material histórico y antropológico, permiten a Claude Meillassoux ir más allá del enfoque jurídico de la esclavitud y hacernos penetrar en las relaciones orgánicas que vinculan a pueblos, bandas saqueadoras y reinos, clases y sexos.

### ÁRBOL DE LA VIDA Lisandro Otero

Novela que refleja múltiples momentos de la vida de una familia cubana en la historia de la isla. En esta novela engolosinada y colorida, el autor no deja que las sombras invadan el escenario.

### REVOLUCIÓN Y POLÍTICA ALIMENTARIA

*Un análisis crítico de Nicaragua*  
Brizio N. Biondi-Morra

Esta obra presenta el análisis más complejo y detallado de la política alimentaria que se realizó durante la revolución sandinista hasta 1985.

### HISTORIA DE LA ASTROLOGÍA OCCIDENTAL

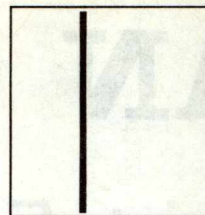
Jim Tester

Ésta es la historia de la astrología ese, "antiguo arte" que abarca todo, desde una vaga aceptación de la influencia de los astros en la vida de los hombres hasta las predicciones precisas y fatalistas del futuro.

### LA INTEGRACIÓN COMERCIAL DE MÉXICO A ESTADOS UNIDOS Y CANADÁ

*¿Alternativa o destino?*  
Varios autores

¿Qué se persigue con un acuerdo de libre comercio? Como resultado de la relación histórica y de la vecindad geográfica se han producido una estrecha interrelación y una amplia complementariedad económica. ¿Para qué más y en qué?



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# SAN BERNARDO

## Feminist Encounter in Argentina

Text by Luz Guerrero

Photos by Lucero González



The feminism that exists in Latin America and the Caribbean is a multi-faceted movement in search of its own identity. Nearly 2,500 women attended the Fifth Feminist Encounter of this region, held in San Bernardo, Argentina, last November 18 to 24. From neighborhood organizations, labor unions, political parties, support centers, schools, religious institutions, human rights groups, cultural organizations and so forth, all of them gathered together to reclaim possession of the rights of the feminine gender.

The intention was to exchange experiences in the struggle and to discuss four main themes: the present-day situation of the feminist movement; the collective identity of feminism in Latin America, organizational variants and areas of development; relations of the feminist movement with other areas of struggle; and finally, proposals for the future.

The Encounter included open workshops dealing with topics as diverse as the participants themselves, the permanent exhibition of videos made by women on women's themes, reading of works and a documentation center. Through the years Latin American and Caribbean feminist encounters have awakened interest, even among European women who traveled to this continent to participate in it. Nevertheless, this Fifth encounter was marked not only by its disorganization, but also by obvious rejection by the men of San Bernardo, who thought that only lesbians, who were better off in the kitchen, were gathered together there.

Organizing a meeting of 2,500 Latin women from all over the continent was not an easy task. Participants' lodgings and

workshop locations were spread out all over the city. At the last minute, food and board had to be sought for more than half of those who attended. Because the San Bernardo Light and Energy Union did not fulfill its original commitment, the organization of the meeting was turned upside down. Workshops were held in the most unexpected places: in banquet halls, cafeterias, street passageways, hotel lounges, galleries, cafés, and so forth.

Journeys of one sort or another were indispensable to find workshops. They might be either next door to one another, or several blocks away in any direction. At the beginning there was total confusion: "This is no encounter, it's a search", was heard frequently. Nevertheless, by the second day, things fell into place. Lesbians, women neighborhood representatives, union members and indigenous women did not have their own slots in the initial program, but soon they organized themselves into open workshops to discuss and share experiences.

We Mexican participants, some 150 women, could never organize ourselves into a delegation. Two meetings were called, which were attended by less than a third of us, which made the fragmentation of the feminist movement in Mexico clear, in spite of the national encounters held here. This situation is not exclusive to our country, in fact there has never been a proposal for participation by delegations in any of the Latin American and Caribbean encounters. This characteristic of the meetings of Mexican women motivated the proposal to initiate future encounters with presentations by delegations on feminist movement advances in each country and that this be a point of departure for the topics of discussion.

Mexican delegates also proposed that organization of the next encounter be given to a continental commission, not in only one or two countries, as was the case in this meeting, and that professional women be hired in the organization of events of this magnitude to avoid repeating the same mistakes. It was also proposed that the participants have greater access to information on the economic side of the encounter and on the relationship with financing agencies.

One of the most interesting discussions in the search for identity of the Latin American and Caribbean feminist movement is the relationship between the theory and practice of feminism and the relationship of this with other social movements. There was a consensus that practical reality has gone beyond the theory of

the feminist movement. Those who work on this indicate that new currents or new concepts are still not very clearly seen where the diversity of feminism's forms and tendencies might be able to group themselves.

Today's theory requires modification in order to explain the increasingly greater participation of women from popular sectors, indigenous groups and blacks. This is one characteristic that defines the Latin American feminist movement in contrast with that of Europe, where these sectors do not participate, only those of the middle and upper classes. Lesbians could have been included as lesbian feminists in gender studies and they demanded their own spaces for the next encounter.

As for the relationship of the feminist movement with other social movements, it was clear that in fact it was a matter of a struggle for survival, housing and work along with the gender struggle. "We have begun fighting for governmental subsidies of basic foods and for suitable housing, and now we also have gender demands", said Mexican women from neighborhood organizations.

The work of women for human rights and for the presentation of political victims was magnificently represented by the presence of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They showed a video on children found, their grandchildren, in which the untiring activities of these women is shown. Their work now includes the use of the most modern technology to detect the "Grandmotherly Index": through sophisticated blood analysis, it is possible to know if a child is a grandchild of some of them although their parents, who have "disappeared", no longer live. These analyses have permitted the identification of children who lived with military families and others who had been adopted by trustworthy families. In the latter case, if the children are happy and well cared for, they remain with the family that has adopted them and in addition they gain another grandmother. But many children and grandchildren still remain to be found. The Grandmothers demand their presentation, their struggle continues.

The feminist movement also made other political demands: legalization of abortion, no to the exoneration of soldiers in Argentina, no to impunity for crimes against humanity, restitution of children born while in captivity, freedom for political prisoners, an end to sexual violence and to discrimination against women, and no to the celebration of the fifth centennial of the European invasion. ■

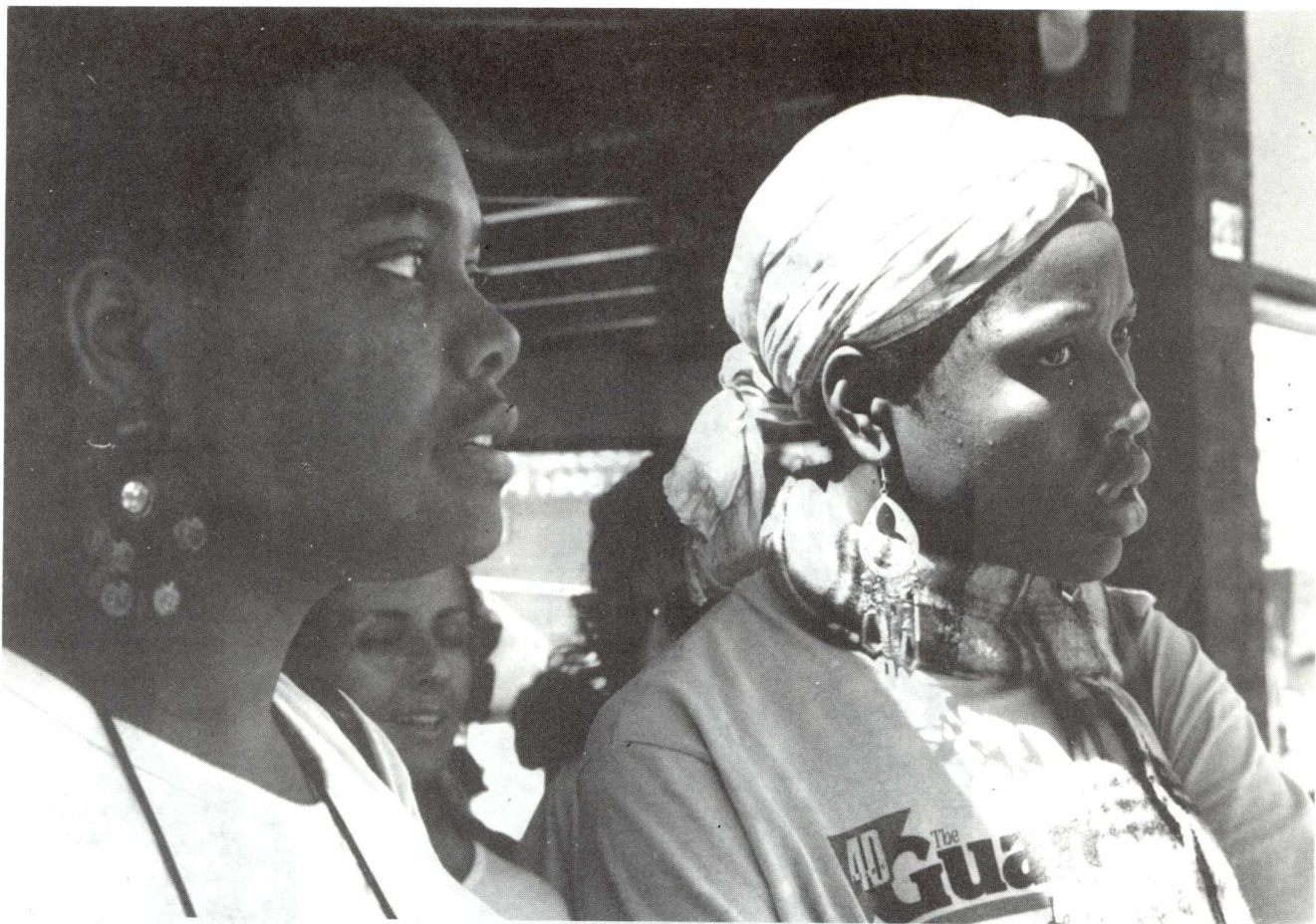
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# WOMEN

# MEETING

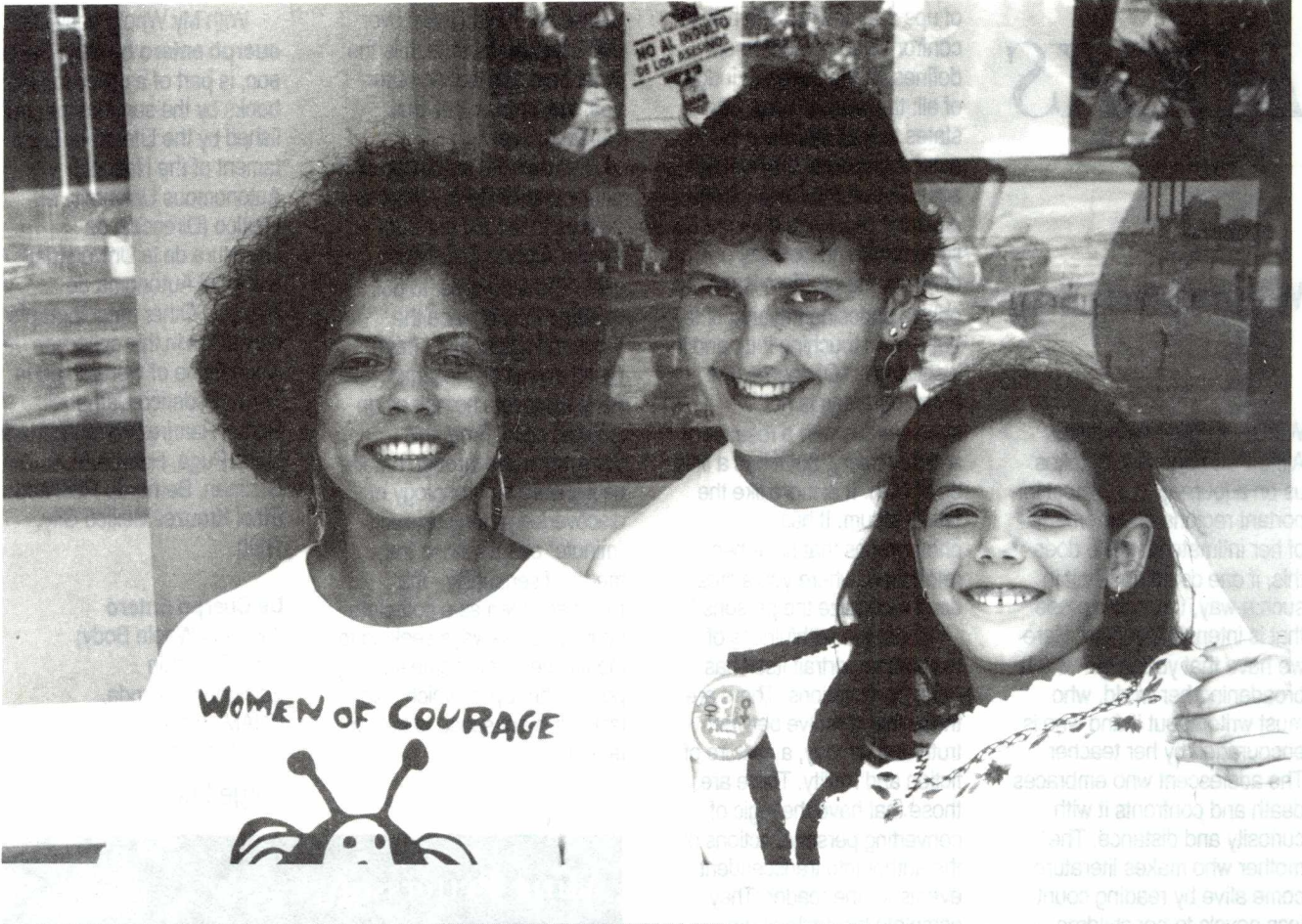
# WOMEN











# BOOKS

## With my Whole Body

With more glide than glitter, Aline Pettersson (1938) takes us on a journey to the most important regions and moments of her intimate life. She does this, if one could qualify it in such a way, through a prose that is intensely feminine. Here we have that young girl who is broadening her world, who must write about it and who is encouraged by her teacher. The adolescent who embraces death and confronts it with curiosity and distance. The mother who makes literature come alive by reading countless novels to her children. The adult woman who immerses herself in the world of young people who study literature in the University. The mature women at fifty who falls in love and decides that nothing is important except to live her "interior burning time". Her skin that is never satiated. Her way of shaking herself free of those things that convert the happiest being into the most unfortunate one, or the most suffering into the most fortunate.

To attain this true self-portrait, Aline Pettersson uses the old trick of direct prose with no contrivances. Nothing that happens to her or happened to her in the past can escape the task of converting her experiences into literary objects. The autobiography of Aline, a young writer in virtue of her spirit and freshness, reminds us of the things most dear to life that define themselves in the smallest everyday detail.

Aline chooses anecdotes, as does everyone, that are full

of ups and downs. She has to confront whom she herself defines as the severest judge of all: the written word. She states that all literature is autobiographical but humbly accepts that the literary transmutation of her life may not be so fortunate. In her way of thinking, the problem is not only in choosing the anecdote, but also in touching it up and illustrating it: "Of course (the autobiography) is not synonymous with a resume or a case history, but it has a little bit of both. It is more like the family album. It has photographs that have been retouched, where you almost don't recognize the persons."

Thus, the faithfulness of the written portrait itself has other connotations. There are those that dissolve between truth and fantasy, a mixture of fiction and reality. There are those that have the logic of converting personal actions of the author into transcendent events for the reader. They complete the circle of the literary phenomenon by stirring, not without promiscuity, the passions of the writer and her readers.

Which things that happened to Aline Pettersson happened also to me? What is my end in her story? How does her prose include me? When is Aline lying about her truths?

"Finally, writing is a device", says Aline Pettersson, "and as such it has limitations, enormous deceptions, great truths. The only way that I can justify these pages is to say that my life which has been so void of such adventures that may be called worthwhile, on the inside has housed a Leviathan."

That wonderful marine monster that dwells in each one of us, the symbol of passion, is expressed by Aline through a soft prose, without exaltations, throughout the book. And although she states that she doesn't have the words to transmit her passions, the principal character of her autobiographical story is

this same "I" who flows over into the need to write. It is the inner time that has no reserves, the inner voices that clamor to live.

Perhaps the autobiographic mirror and its literary devices help us to rebuild our fragments. Alberto Dallal once said: "I write in order to pull together in one place the thousand spirits that I have found myself divided into". Aline discovers herself as an isolated child. From this point, she runs through her life as if it were a chronology of discoveries picking up each "minute" event - those fragments of sensuality - that today are seen as a complete body. She is always seeking to identify herself in some shining point of her eyes, which also lack sufficient space to be contained.

With My Whole body **De cuerpo entero** by Aline Pettersson, is part of a collection of books by the same name, published by the Literature Department of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Dirección de Literatura de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). Other autobiographical stories in this collection include those of Gerardo de la Torre, Federico Campbell, Rafael Ramírez Heredia, María Luisa Puga, Humberto Guzmán, Bernardo Ruiz and Ethel Krauze. Mexico City, 1990.

**De Cuerpo Entero**  
(With my Whole Body)  
Aline Peterson  
Ediciones Corunda.  
UNAM, 1990.

Jorge Luis Sierra

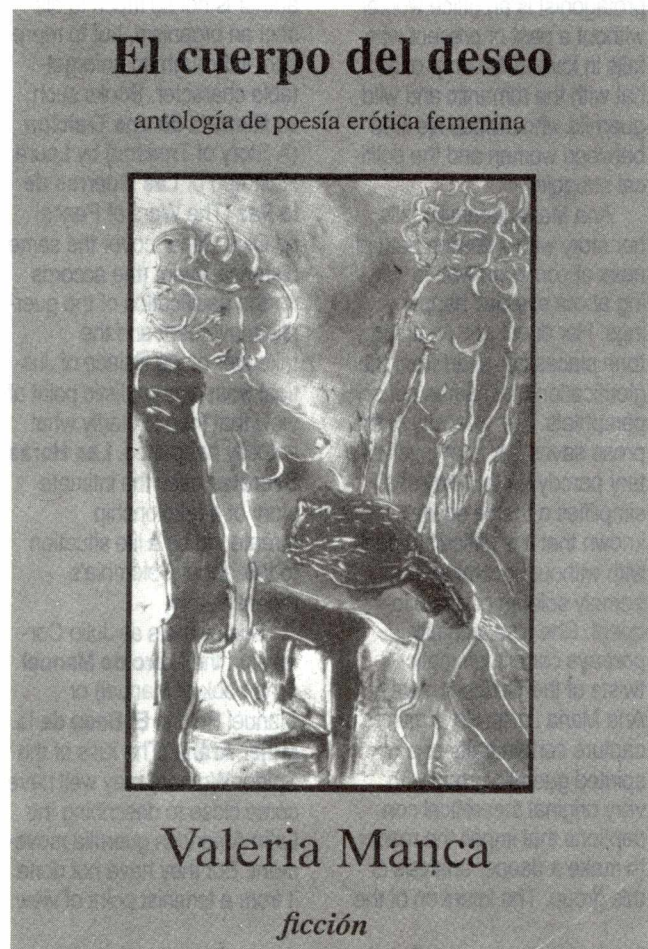


## The Body of Desire

Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska states that the majority of women use literature as a form of therapy. "We revert to writing to liberate ourselves, empty ourselves, explain ourselves to the world and to understand what is happening to us". And we would have to add that literature is also used by women to understand themselves in the most intimate dimension that the living and thinking human being possess: erotic imagination.

Through literature women have been able to see their image reflected in the mirror of words and have discovered their thought and spirit. From the battle that such renowned authors as Virginia Woolf or Simone de Beauvoir have won for their gender and earned a place and universal recognition for their works, we have new generations of women writers who are recovering their original identity through the body. This is not surprising if we think about women - they are made of much more tangible material than men. And they are more capable of understanding their condition - as poet Carmen Boullosa says - "obliged by the inevitable rule of the biological functions, (women are) marvelously body unto death". Thus it is natural that an almost intrinsic characteristic of feminine literature is an allusion to this theme.

In Mexico women writers have approached erotic poetry from different angles and nuances. But in general, up to the 1940's, erotic poetry was covered up by a certain mystical air and its tone, normally mournful, presented the body as a burden or as the principal motive behind sin. What



vision can women have about themselves in a society that marginalizes them?

Fortunately in the last thirty years Mexican feminine poetry has changed from this type of intimate lamentation to a joyful and uninhibited expression. Though this phenomenon is not completely unknown, it is fairly new. In the introduction to *El Cuerpo del Deseo* (The Body of Desire), Valeria Manca talks about the growing number of women poets who have made eroticism one of the principal sources of inspiration for their work. In this anthology, the Italian author Valeria Manca chooses the texts of only 22 poets born between 1943 and 1960 (and she misses some). However, the perceptive selection offers a diverse panorama of feminine eroticism that in its constant re-creation broadens its limits and can be recognized by its contrary. The poets included in the book are trying to take a new look at the

theme - a look that is not without pain but that is more serene and ready to place all bets on pleasure.

For one of the poets, eroticism is not only a form of knowledge through the specific continent of the skin, but "a way to fight and overcome the daily traps of life". (Frida Virginia Ramos). For another writer it permits her to broaden "the frontiers of language and pass from a monologue to a dialogue that aspires to be converted in the end into a polyphony where we all express ourselves" (Iliana Godoy). Another poet states that it permits her to internalize in the being of man and "talk about him as the object of erotic enjoyment" (Isabel Quinones). But almost all the authors coincide with the fact that this type of poetry shows a radical change of attitude not only in relationship to literature but also with life and society. "We women have recovered our body and all

that we live through it" (Monica Mansour).

Even though Mexican lyrics of today more critically reflect the spirit of a conflictive period of economic ups and downs, we can find a certain enjoyment for living in feminine poetry. We can find a strong consciousness about women themselves, about their own bodies and about all that flows from this. Although there is a predominance of free verse, this does not mean there is a lack of precision in the texts. Just as there are those who portray the most common ordinary things, there are also those who write in a more allegoric sense. They never, however, leave the sphere of the corporal nor do they hurry over the soft delight of their intimate geography.

Even though it has limitations (it covers just two generations of poets and excludes those who have not published a book) *El Cuerpo del Deseo* is a fine document about poetic work on a national level. It does not suffer from excesses as do other anthologies nor does it become a feminist argument. In the choice of theme (eroticism) we can find more points of encounter with the universe of what is "masculine" than unreconcilable differences. Fortunately it includes such young writers as Silvia Tomasa Rivera, Marcela Fuentes, Angelica de Icaza and Andrea Montiel, who, though they have been passed over by more meticulous research, represent a generation that is at the high point of its creative production. In any of their poems it is desire that dictates the words that are metamorphosed in the end by the indescribable body that we inhabit.

**El Cuerpo del Deseo**  
(The Body of Desire)  
Valeria Manca  
UAM, Universidad  
Veracruzana, 1989.

Jorge Arturo Borja

## Between Love and Hate

On November 5, 1985, a commando from the "M-19" guerrilla group stormed and took possession of the Palace of Justice in Bogota, Colombia. This group of people was pressuring the government of Belisario Betancur for not complying to accords signed with the guerrillas. They had demanded the publication of a manifesto of peace as well as the acts of the official commission of verification of the treaty. The guerrilla group also asked that the negotiations of the Colombian Government with the International Monetary Fund be made known. The Government replied with a siege that lasted more than 29 hours. This was broken when the army stormed the Palace, firing arms and shedding blood without worrying about the safety of the magistrates (including the head of the Supreme Court, Alfonso Reyes Echandia) who were being held as hostages. Among the dead was Afonso Jacquim, whose body was never found. His extraordinary militancy was the inspiration used by Colombian writer Ana Maria Jaramillo, for the main character in her first novel: **Las Horas Secretas** (The Secret Hours).

If, as Julia Kristeva says, "all stories end up by talking about love", this book is no exception. Although the scenario is a country dominated by violence and political confusion, the theme is one of passionate love that, in the act of trying to reach its own condition, must find a balance between love and hate. The characters lack names but can be easily placed within Latin American reality. The female

protagonist is an office worker without a past or present who falls in love at the drop of a hat with the romantic and wild guerrilla who divides his time between women and the political struggle.

Ana Maria Jaramillo tells her story with a flowing naturalness of someone who is talking about everyday happenings. Her direct and soothing tone places her apart from the glorification that comes out of pamphlets. The intensity of the prose saves her from involuntary parody. In this way she simplifies a theme so well known that it is difficult to deal with without becoming extremely solemn or grandiloquent. She also faithfully portrays certain idiomatic twists of the Caribbean area. Ana Maria Jaramillo is able to capture certain traits of a spirited guerrilla group with very original theoretical conceptions that impell the reader to make a deeper analysis of this group. The intention of the

author is not so much to dissect an organism, but to represent it through an unforgettable character. Books such as **Historia de una Traicion** (A Story of Treason) by Laura Restrepo or **Las Guerras de la Paz** (The Wars of Peace) by Olga Behar cover the same historical event (the accords for the pacification of the guerrilla movement and the takeover of the Palace of Justice) from a journalistic point of view that tries to clarify what actually happened. **Las Horas Secretas** uses the intimate story of a relationship threatened by a life situation to talk about Colombia's recent history.

Such writers as Julio Cortazar in the **Libro de Manuel** (The book of Manuel) or Manuel Puig in **El Beso de la Mujer Araña** (The Kiss of the Spider Woman) may well have come close to describing the Latin American guerrilla movement. But they have not done it from a feminist point of view

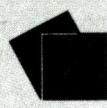
and have barely touched on the sentimental aspect of the life of militant leaders and the anguish that permeates their relationships as couples. In her short novel, Ana Maria Jaramillo represents a guerrilla fighter full of defects: ambitious, boisterous, deceptive and contradictory even in his most sincere convictions. But he is deeply human, seen through the eyes of the woman who loved him. She has no other choice but that of resignation or rebellion. She chooses to speak and her story is changed into an act of rebellion. "His scream will have to be heard and many will be frightened: the wind will be the wandering and brave lullaby that carries his breath." His death has more weight than that of others. The only way to lift this weight from our shoulders is to transform it into words that spring forth in incessant and unruly spirits until they find their natural course in memory.

**Las Horas Secretas** is not a book of testimonies nor does it have ideological bases or propose strategies for guerrilla groups to seize power. It does, however, coincide with the simple proposal, a product of common sense, that "M-19's" commander, Alvaro Fayad used to say. "If our continent writes the way it writes, if it sings and dances as it does, why can't it socially organize itself as it is?" In the 73 pages and 10 drawings (vignettes by Juan José Gurrola) this novel shows us an original search. It is a new way of making politics - with the joy of one who dances, the strength of one who sings and the fury and intensity of one who loves above all other things.

**Las Horas Secretas**  
(The Secret Hours)  
Ana María Jaramillo  
Editorial Cal y Arena  
México 1990

## Ana María Jaramillo Las horas secretas



 cal y arena

Jorge Arturo Borja

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La voz de quienes hacen el teatro  
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Materiales informativos  
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Por Luis Adolfo Domínguez  
Para que ya no se valga decir  
yo no sé redactar  
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