

DARING TO BE Different.

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and its 3 authors tried in court for "offending public decency." After a national and international feminist campaign of protest on their behalf, they were released.

Women were active in the Revolution and in pressing for the policy of decolonization which followed. The Revolution of Apr. 25, 1974, truly propelled women's entry *en masse* into political and economic life. In 1979 Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo became the first woman Prime Minister, and women were admitted to the magistracy, the diplomatic service, and all posts in local administrations. After the "Three Marias" trial, a feminist campaign for abortion and contraception began, and some feminists established links with women's groups in Leftist political parties and women active in the trade-union movement. Women in Sogantal took control of a textile factory and were attacked by the local population; another women's strike was held at the Via Longa brewery. Feminist lawyer Lia Viegas published *The Constitution and the Status of Women*. In

1979 journalist Maria Antonia Palla was acquitted—after feminist protest—of the charge of "outrage against public morals" and "incitement to crime" for her production of a documentary television film which discussed abortion. In 1981 a new law prohibited the use of a female image as an advertising object. Current women's publications include *Boletim Informação* (Information Bulletin), *Documentação das Mulheres* (Documentation of Women), and the work of a women's press, *Edição das Mulheres* (Women's Edition).

MYTHOGRAPHY. Deuladeu Martins is a woman folk-hero dating from the 12th century; she is thought of as a hugely tall and strong woman whose actions were so feared by invaders that, because of her, the country of Portugal itself came into being. Portugal was a center of Mariolatry during the 14th and 15th centuries, with adoration of Mary often superseding worship of Jesus Christ.

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PORTUGAL: Daring to Be Different by Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

I can no longer count the number of times I have been asked: "How do you explain that a country like Portugal has had a woman Prime Minister?"

Usually I react with a great outburst of indignation: women in Portugal are not like the image which has been put forth to portray us! If statistics say that women are only 28 percent of the "economically active population," then what is wrong is the statistics—and the definition of being active!

What about, for instance, the 32 percent of the rural population, more than half of whom are women? Aren't they working? What about the activities carried on by so many women which are (or have been until recently) totally unpaid? What about the women writers who represent, in the last thirty years, a most astounding cultural phenomenon in Portugal, since most of them are in the forefront of literature, portraying in extremely perceptive ways the deep shifts and trends which agitate our society beneath the surface? And what about the women in technical professions—a higher percentage than in any other Western country? (In my own field, chemical engineering, we have moved from a 20 percent women's presence when I graduated a quarter of a century ago to more than 50 percent in 1981.)

Of course, I could also argue the case by pointing out the enormous leap made in the



law since April of 1974. The Portuguese Constitution is a unique example of the integration of the principle of equality in the basic text of a country. The sheer quantity of new legislation passed in recent years has drastically changed the identity of women, their image, and their status in society.*

Statistics and laws reassure certain souls. But the question I am asked—about the general situation of women and a female Prime Minister—belongs to another realm. In 1979, the appointment of a woman Prime Minister created a strong reaction in my country. Many expressed support and solidarity, speaking of new hope, a "fresh breeze," another style and concept of politics. But many others rejected the idea in the most violent way. I will never forget the undisguised loss of control of most members of the conservative parties when, in the Parliament, I denounced the lies they had used to attack the program of my government. It went so far that some of the house-desks cracked under the fury of their fists! Neither the enthusiasm nor the rage was connected, though, with the personality of the Prime Minister (I think). Rather, they were responses to what was obviously still a *revolutionary act*, belonging to the "new tradition" of the April 25th process. Through the appointment of a woman Prime Minister it was clearly demonstrated that such a tradition would no longer be an exclusively male heritage. It was one of the few situations when men and women transcended their conflictual relationship and worked together in full equality toward a new future. Seen from that perspective, the fact of a woman as Prime Minister was a totally logical result of the participation of women on equal footing with men in the revolution.

How did we get there? Let me briefly review the paths we had covered in the preceding years.

Women's Struggle and Political Change

Before the political change in 1974, the situation of Portuguese women was deeply affected by the closed, horizonless society in which we lived. War with the colonies in Africa drained us of money, dignity, hope—and people. Unrest among women had already begun to be expressed, through denunciations of the war's effect on women's lives—uncertainty about their families, the loneliness of those women left behind by men serving in Africa or who had fled elsewhere in Europe running away from the war, the weight of so many burdens carried alone, and the very fact of many women's being for the first time independent from men.

In the early 1970's, women journalists (who had managed to acquire a high status in their profession) started several newspaper-article series about women's lives and concerns. They denounced sexual discrimination but always put it into the general context of injustice in Portuguese society. It was during that period (in 1972) that the *New Portuguese Letters* appeared—for a moment—in the bookshops.** The book was of paramount significance for all Portugal. It was, in fact, the first Portuguese public act denouncing the global system of patriarchal oppression, and it would be central to the revolutionary movement that would have its climax and triumph on April 25th. Rebellion against the political status quo took, in my country, the form of a liberation cry from *women* and about *women*:

. . . We will make our way back to the root of our own anguish, all by ourselves, until we can say "Our sons are sons, they are people and not phalluses of our males." We will call children chil-

* See Statistical Preface preceding this article for details of legislation.—Ed.

** See HERSTORY section of the Preface preceding this article.—Ed.

dren, women women, and men men. We will call upon a poet to govern The City.¹

This is why, when the military coup of April 25, 1974, burst out, people's power became, to a large extent, women's power. Women were active in claiming fundamental rights for workers, in asking for better living and housing conditions, in shaping action committees at the neighborhood level, in denouncing the fraud that the capital owners from Portugal and abroad were ready to make in order to "save" their profits. Women themselves made their specific struggle a point of concern for the whole society: family law changed drastically, different forms of childcare centers and old-age day-homes were created to alleviate women's tasks, motherhood was assumed to have a social function (and thus part of the responsibility of the whole community), measures to attain equal work status were begun in all fields.

For almost two years, women and men were side by side in struggle on many fronts in order to shape a more just society. We can say that in Portugal women's struggle has been part and parcel of the whole process of change. It organized itself and changed modes, patterns, scope, and intensity according to the events and moods of the revolution. This experience tells us that there really is no theoretical question about priorities; women's struggle and the global process in society are two aspects of the same front. For the women's movement to emerge and make a significant contribution there must be some signs of a breakthrough in society. Otherwise, a women's movement seems to represent some kind of peculiar "sideline" goals, and its ideas can easily be taken up, mollified, and co-opted by the establishment. On the other hand, in order for the general political process to go beyond a mere game of superstructure, the women's movement is vital as a link to reality, to the new needs of a society in the process of creating itself.

But if the Portuguese women's struggle found in our Revolution its *reinforcement*, it is equally true that it also found its *limitations*. Women's issues had been regarded by the Right as dangerous, evil, political stands; therefore these issues could never be discussed on their own. Yet the limitation showed up as well in that the general enthusiasm of the Revolution disguised deep layers of subtle discrimination against women. As time went by and society entered the postrevolutionary period, women discovered that—beyond the structural and legal changes—there are concepts and values which are not so easily wiped out. Old attitudes keep coming up and shaping behavior at all levels.

The greatest limitation can be seen clearly in the question most central today to the Portuguese women's movement: when political evolution comes to a deadlock, when so-called democratic institutions get stifled (if not outright corrupt and contrary to the interests of the people), is women's struggle possible? Doesn't it become an isolated effort re-creating the pattern of earlier feminisms? Or does it in itself carry such potential that, together with other social forces, it may evoke a new turn in the sociopolitical picture as a whole?

Sex and Politics

While I was thinking about writing this article, I met (separately) with several groups of adult women and young women in their late teens. I asked them, "What is the worst obstacle for Portuguese women?" Adult women gave a unanimous answer: the theme of violence built around sexual life. Young women, on the contrary, felt that they have no specific obstacle! How to juxtapose these two contradictory reactions? What do they mean?

It is a fact that the changes of April 1974 brought with them all kinds of freedom. The

¹ *New Portuguese Letters* (US ed., Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 70.

permissiveness of society appears to be all but total in the sexual area. But adult women today are challenging the values *underlying* that "permissiveness." They are convinced that this is creating in younger generations the conviction that the end of tabus can be equated with full dignity for women—while their own experience as adult women has taught them that the old forms of sexual repression and abuse re-seized their lives as soon as the Revolution had ceased to mobilize the energies of the people. These women say that they still are viewed and treated primarily as objects of men's sexual lives, that violence is exercised on them, that they are required to behave according to men's modes and desires. They say that even when there is full equality between man and woman, the demands of sex according to the man's rule defines them as slaves—a feeling that cuts across all social classes and all distinctions between urban and rural women. Portuguese women feel that what is at stake is the introjection of a patriarchal model imposed on women under the label of "sexual liberation." They say that such a model is shaped by the competitive style of society and is charged with individualistic overtones which manipulate and employ the satisfaction of the "ego" in order to make the machinery of society run smoothly. (In other words, if you are too busy with yourself, you never get deeply and actively concerned with society around you; you relativize it, you see it in a mist, you imagine that you can "save" yourself alone, you become alienated through the very instrument that ought to free you.) For these women, such widespread slogans as "Women must be owners of their own bodies" are an ambiguous cry of freedom, since such ideas convey the concept of a society geared by "ownership of property" as the supreme value and sign of status.

From their experience, older Portuguese women strongly resent the path of "sexual liberation" which has been prevailing. They feel oppressed by the masculine mode of expressing sexuality as well as by values coming from alien and dominant cultures. Because they want to reinforce the cultural identity of the people to which they belong, they cannot accept a path of sexual liberation through which, in their view, foreign domination is imposed upon local lifestyles and choices.

What are women asking, then?

First of all, in a sudden transition like the one which took place in 1974 in Portugal, they plead for crystal-clear lucidity when sexual questions are analyzed. For them, sex and revolution must be seen together in the sense that the most personal experience is interwoven with the values, aspirations, and failures of the collective experience. In Portugal, sex has become for many the ultimate revolution, the other side of politics in a strange mixture of "the peace after the battle" and "the search for a place beyond all battles." Most of all, sex in practice has become the last bastion of the powerless revolutionaries—as well as the victory shout of the professional politicians. For the former, sex is what can be done when nothing else can; for the latter, sex is the exaltation, the paroxysm of politics. In such a situation, women not only are victims and objects but are even trapped as subjects, swept up in the same tide as men and repeating what men have always done.

Second, Portuguese women are clamoring for broader understanding of sexuality. They are very much aware of the sexual overtones of *all* human activity. They don't deny sexuality but are convinced that their own sexuality so far hasn't had any chance to be expressed. They cry out for the possibility of expressing a whole gamut of feelings, sensations, affections, and tenderness which they sense as inherent elements of their own sexuality. Even when these women are dismissed as "fusional" or utopian—because for them "to think of a flower is to see it and to smell its perfume"—they persist in exploring this path. They are convinced that a less Cartesian and rationalistic approach to societal questions is inextricably connected to the rediscovery of a much broader expression of human sexuality. For them, sexuality equated with mere genitality and commercialized



into the consumerism of the producer-owner-buyer is to be fought as a fatal cycle of a society led by the paradigm of "progress" and by linear reasoning. For them, the shaping of a new society is interwoven with the articulation—and the living out—of new modes of women's sexuality.

This awareness and experience is the greatest strength women in Portugal already possess. They know that they are—and can become even more—a real force in Portuguese society. They know, too, that the evolution of women in this country has a lot to do with women elsewhere.

For my part, I believe deeply that women can change society. I feel that what we must say to one another is based on encouraging each of us to be true to herself: "Now that we are equal, let us dare to be different!"

Suggested Further Reading

- Belleza, Leonor. "O Estatuto da Mulher na Constituição" (The Status of Women in the Constitution). *Estudos sobre a Constituição* (Studies on the Constitution). Ed. Miranda Jorge. Lisbon: Ed. Livraria Petrony, 1977.
- Gersão, Teolinda. *O Silêncio* (The Silence). Lisbon: Bertrand, 1980.
- Palla, Maria Antonia. *So Acontece Aos Outros* (It Only Happens to Others). Lisbon: Bertrand, 1979.
- Silva, Manuela. *Mulher Eo Trabalho* (Women and Work); publication available in Portuguese and French from any European Economic Commission Information Center.
- The Three Marias (collective book). *New Portuguese Letters*. US ed., Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974; New York: Bantam Books, 1976.
- Viegas, Lia. *A Constituição e a condição da mulher*. (The Constitution and the Condition of Women). Lisbon: Diabril, 1977.

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo was born in 1930 in Abrantes, Portugal. An engineer in industrial chemistry, she took her degree at the Superior Technological Institute in Lisbon, also doing autodidactic studies in anthropology, sociology, and theology. She served as researcher in the National Nuclear Energy Commission, is a member of "The Grail" international movement, and has been a member of the women's liaison group between the Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Council of Churches. She was president of the Interministerial Commission dealing with the Condition of the Status of Women (1970–74). She has also served as State Secretary for Social Security (First Provisional Government), Minister of Social Affairs (Second and Third Provisional Governments), Portuguese Ambassador at UNESCO, a member of the Executive Council of UNESCO, and the Prime Minister of the Fifth Constitutional Government of Portugal (1979)—the first woman Prime Minister in Portugal. A member of the Portuguese delegation to the UN General Assembly in 1971 and 1972, she is currently Special Adviser to the President of the Republic of Portugal. Her books include *Les nouveaux féminismes* (The New Feminisms), Paris: Cerf, 1980, *Imaginar a igreja* (To Think the Church Anew), Lisbon: Multinova, 1979, and *Sulcos do nosso querer comum* (Roads for Our Joint Efforts), Porto: Afrontamento, 1980.