

Housewives, Mothers, Feminists, Fighters: women in the 1994 Brazilian elections —

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The presence of women as protagonists in the institutional political game in Brazil has traditionally been weak. Even the growth of feminism in the 1970s and important gains in women's rights were not enough to significantly change this picture. Until the 1990 Congressional elections, the numbers of both women candidates and those that won were quite limited; even more restricted was the range of women's rights issues raised in campaign discourse.

This article is intended to discuss women's positions as candidates in the 1994 elections. I am interested in knowing whether the candidates used the fact that they were women to seek votes, how being women was formulated in their discourse, and to what extent women candidates incorporated the feminist movement's agenda into that discourse. That is, to what extent women and the issues from the feminist agenda gained space in the electoral dispute.¹

The 1994 elections were without a doubt the most complex in Brazilian history, not only because of how many offices were at stake and how important they were, but also because of the country's recent history, marked by the impeachment of the first

directly elected President following the military dictatorship and a series of corruption scandals inside Congress. As a consequence, the electoral process came to be experienced and constituted by candidates as the milestone of a new era, in which corruption was no longer expected to have a place and major national problems could begin to be solved.

As a result, there was a constant concern over proof of honesty and the various candidates' demonstrations of serious proposals for Brazil as a whole and the various States in particular. Throughout the campaign there was a constant effort at warding off the phantom of the 1989 elections, marked by Fernando Collor's marketing fireworks. If there was indeed one marketing ploy shared by all candidates in 1994, it was to show a serious, committed stance towards solving the country's real problems.

Another characteristic of the 1994 campaign process was the overlap of issues discussed by the candidates. Beyond political positions and electoral alliances, the campaign agenda was defined by the country's socio-economic crisis over the last ten years and the need for the contenders, particularly those running for executive offices, 'to define the solutions. This central issue far outshaded what are highly popular issues in countries less problematic than Brazil, like ecology, minority rights, etc.

In the past, the above characteristics have been more common in Gubernatorial, Senatorial, and Presidential elections, while more specific issues have been left to candidates for State and National Houses. However, this trend was not totally true in 1994. Legislative candidates also tended to underrate corporatist interests in favor of

¹ This article was finished in the first week of October, 1994, in order to meet this journal's deadline. This imposed limitations in terms of the overall figures for Brazil as well as for an analysis of the election returns.

the broad issues, or at least in favor of a discussion of the latter at the regional or municipal level, contrary to what happened in previous elections, where the candidates' professional backgrounds and trade union activities were keys to defining their discourse.³

Considering this tendency in campaign discourse, the question that concerns me here is the position of women as candidates and the theme of women's rights as raised historically by the feminist movement. On a previous occasion, I argued that women had not succeeded in articulating their own struggles with more general ones in society, and that this had led to their isolation in general (and that of feminists in particular) in the electoral political game⁴. In a situation where general interests tended to direct the field of discourse and left little maneuvering room for expressing specific or corporative interests, the issue that needs to be addressed is the space found by women for running for office and expressing the struggle for their rights.

In this article, I examine two dimensions of

women's participation in an electoral process: the first has to do with the meaning of women's presence as candidates; the second is concerned with the presence of a feminist discourse and/or defense of women's rights in the women candidates' campaigns. These two dimensions do not necessarily coincide: there are female candidates who do not even mention the fact that they are women, and there are male candidates who incorporate women's rights issues into both their television campaigns and their campaign leaflets.⁵ This article is divided into two parts: the first deals with women from various States of Brazil running for Senator, Governor, Assistant Governor, and Vice President, and the second with those from the State of Rio Grande do Sul running for the National and State Houses of Representatives. In the second part, my analytical material is made up of transcriptions from the Free Electoral Program on Television and the candidates' respective pamphlets. The choice of the particular State of Rio Grande do Sul was based solely on ease of access to the material. I presume that this may somewhat limit my conclusions. Still, while the State's characteristics cannot be extrapolated to those of Brazil as a whole, they are not so far removed as to not be taken as indicative of national trends.

Women candidates

A limited number of women were amongst the overall group of candidates for higher office in Brazil: 12 for the National Senate, 12 for State Governor, 12 for Assistant Governor, and two for Vice President. Unfortunately, at present I do not have all the returns on candidates for the National and State Houses for the country as a

² Since the majority of candidates for legislative office and especially those who are running for the first time enter politics because of outstanding activity in class organizations, unions, or professional fields in specific regions or cities, it is quite common for these candidates to present themselves as representatives of a category or region, with specific proposals.

³ As an example of this statement, I randomly chose a Free Electoral Program, part of the free television time provided by law to political parties during the electoral campaign. This particular program was devoted to legislative candidates, where in 60 minutes, 79 candidates for the State and National Houses from all the different parties in Rio Grande do Sul presented their positions. Of these 79, only eight addressed their remarks to specific voters, like truck drivers, teachers, or renters; 14 used the time to talk about their personal and political biographies; and the other 57 spoke about the major campaign issues, although their approach was sometimes based on regional problems (Free Electoral Program broadcast on the Regional Television Network at 8:30 PM).

⁴ Feminism Vis-à-Vis the Political Field, presented in the seminar Feminist Training, Research, and Publishing in the University: Quebec, Brazil, and France, June 1994, Rio de Janeiro.

⁵ Women's rights are referred to in the pamphlets of some male candidates in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. In the platforms of the two main Presidential candidates, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula, considerable detail is used in defending women's rights. In this article I do not particularly analyze this aspect, but I do call attention to the fact that even when the issue is treated superficially, it points to its importance as a theme that cannot be overlooked.

whole. In Rio Grande do Sul, 13 women ran for the National House of Representatives and 22 for the State House of Representatives, corresponding to less than 6% of the candidates from all the parties.

Considering women candidates for all offices, one observes that they entered politics by two routes: one group of women belong to families of politicians, and the other consists of women who have stood out as party or union activists or in their professional activities. Although it is true that male candidates also enter politics this way, what interests me is the peculiarity of these channels in the case of women. The first group of women who entered politics through family ties could be called "the Housewives", referring to women who have a "special role" to play in society as wives and mothers. This ideal type of woman is very present in the daily discourse of politicians and government officials when the issue is cost of living.⁶

During this election, women that entering politics through family ties ran mainly for Governor and Vice President: Gubernatorial candidates Ângela Amin in Santa Catarina, Lúcia Vania in Goiás, Lúcia Braga in Paraíba, and Roseana Sarney in Maranhão and Vice-Presidential candidates Íris Rezende and Gardênia Gonçalves are excellent examples.

The two women Vice-Presidential candidates have no profession and are married to politicians who have occupied at least the position of State Governor. Íris had no previous experience in elective office, while Gardênia had been mayor of the city of São Luís do Maranhão. The situation for these two candidates was significantly different from that of the women Gubernatorial candidates, since the latter used their family name or that of their husbands to run for

⁶ Fernando Henrique Cardoso's speech on the Free Electoral Program on September 2, broadcast at 8:30 PM, is a prime example. Referring to critics of the so-called Real Plan, he states: "You (as a housewife) know that (such criticism) is not true. That is why housewives that most understand economics approve of the plan."

office with a real chance of winning. The Vice-Presidential candidates were in a different situation: Amin and Quêrcia, respectively, were running for President under adverse conditions and with little chance of receiving a significant block of votes. Thus, the fact that they included women on their tickets should be interpreted in light of the men's difficulty in finding someone to run with them in a lost cause, in addition to the possibility that having women on the slate might increase their voting potential.

In the free television time during the campaign and in the press, the women Vice-Presidential candidates were given very little room, and when they did have the opportunity to speak they did so mainly as wives and mothers. Nonetheless, it is a matter of articulating a new terrain in such a way as to favor the feminist movement's struggle. When Íris was asked by the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* why she had accepted the invitation to run for Vice President with Quêrcia, she responded: "Because it is not merely an honor, but recognition of women's work. Women's participation in national life is limited. My message is, let us have greater participation for women. Women should not just be herded around, but should participate in political decisions".⁷

Gardênia Gonçalves refers to herself in similar fashion when she talks about her work as mayor of São Luís: "A few years ago nobody could have imagined that a woman could become mayor, much less undergo what I have experienced".⁸

Both the presence and discourse of these women is a far cry from feminist candidates or defense of women's rights. On the contrary, they come across as concrete examples of ideal housewives. Nonetheless, they are not a broken link in the chain of feminist struggle: by circulating within the most conservative sphere of Brazilian

⁷ *Folha de S. Paulo*, May 22, 1994, Section 1, p. 14.

⁸ Transcript from the Free Electoral Program broadcast on television on September 2, 1994, at 8:30 PM.

society - in terms of both the parties to which they belong and the voters to whom they must appeal - they foster acceptance that a traditional woman and politician's wife can run for a position like that of Vice President, revealing a new way of conceiving of feminist spaces diluted in social discursiveness and reaching even the most conservative groups. On the other hand, running for Vice President under these conditions meant a sacrifice for politicians from both parties, due to the limited possibilities for victory by either Amin or Quércia.

In short, these women appeared in politics in spaces that had been avoided by men, in electoral contests that were lost *a priori*, thus adding nothing to women's representation as citizens in the political arena. In addition, given their traditional stances, the little space they did succeed in occupying in the press and on free campaign broadcasts were not used to expound on women's

rights issues. Still, even given these limitations, their presence revealed that the struggle for space in politics has reached the more conservative groups in society through a cascade effect. This break with the notion of politics as an essentially male sphere means a real spread of the possibility for women's political participation in Brazil.

The twelve women Gubernatorial candidates have a varied profile and reveal other facets of women's participation in politics. In order to better define them, it is worthwhile to observe the data below:

It is possible to identify three different groups here. The first consists of women with family connections and who are running for Governor because their fathers or husbands either are impeded from running during the current election or have other interests at stake. Contrary to the Vice-Presidential candidates, their presence represents the continuity of a given group in power, and thus all of them have a real chance of

GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES

State	Name	Party*	% Votes
Alagoas	Angela Canudo	PDT	1
Ceará	Rosa Fonseca	PSTU	1
Federal District	Maria Abadia	PSDB	22
Espírito Santo	Rose Freitas	PSDB	5
Goiás	Lúcia Vania	PP	21
Maranhão	Roseana Sarney	PFL	51
Mato Grosso do Sul	Rita Lima	PRONA	2
Paraíba	Lúcia Braga	PDT	43
Paraná	Rosemeri Krenden	PRN	1
Roraima	Elvira Fonseca	PT	0
Santa Catarina	Angela Amin	PPR	40
Sergipe	Vera Tourinho	PRN	1

Source: *Zero Hora*, October 2, 1994.

* PDT - Democratic Labor Party; PSTU - United Workers' Socialist Party; PSDB - Brazilian Social Democratic Party; PP - Popular Party; PFL - Liberal Front Party; PRONA - Party for Renovation of the National Order; PRN - Party for National Renovation; PT - Workers' Party; PPR - Renovative Progressive Party; PMN - National Mobilization Party; PMDB - Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (Translator's note).

getting elected.⁹ The second group, which is quite small, is made up of candidates with good prospects for votes and with political careers of their own, like Maria Abadia in the Federal District, who built her political career as administrator of a working-class suburb of Brasília and later as national Congresswoman.

Finally, the third group consists of candidates with an insignificant percentage of votes, mostly members of parties with no political tradition, like PRONA and PRN. Even where such candidates belong to politically consolidated parties like the Workers' Party (PT) or the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), one notes their limited potential for votes. Unfortunately, I lack the data to make more categorical statements about how they established their political careers. Nevertheless, according to the underlying logic in the process of choosing candidates, it seems reasonable to state that the presence of such women as candidates corresponds to the low value of the offices they are running for in the auctioning process within their respective parties.

The group of women running for the Brazilian Senate has different characteristics from those observed for the Vice-Presidential and Gubernatorial candidates. In addition to women of reknown in national politics, like Benedita da Silva and Luiza Erundina, this list includes women who have already been successful in municipal or even regional political experiences. It is surprising that four out of the 12 women running for the Brazilian Senate were elected, including PTB candidate Emília Fernandes in Rio Grande do Sul.¹⁰ As a total unknown in the State, she was in ninth place in a poll published by *Zero Hora* on July 18, with 3% of the projected vote.

⁹ Of the 12 women candidates for Governor, none was elected in the first round. Of the four who went on to the second round, three are wives of former Governors and one is the daughter of a former President of Brazil.

¹⁰ The other women elected to the Brazilian Senate were Benedita da Silva (PT), Rio de Janeiro; Marluce Pinto (PTB), Roraima; and Marina Silva (PT), Acre. Júnia Marise (PDT) has four more years to serve in her term from Minas Gerais.

During the election day opinion poll, she tied for second place with two other candidates, with 19% of the projected vote.¹¹ How did the Emília phenomenon come about?

Emília Fernandes is a teacher from the interior of the State, a local teachers' union leader, and city councilwoman for three terms in Santana do Livramento. She ran for the Brazilian Senate under the PTB (Brazilian Labor Party), a party which in the State of Rio Grande do Sul has the peculiarity of being virtually synonymous with Sérgio Zambiasi, the most popular radio broadcaster in the region and the commentator whose voice was used in the background for Emília's television spots in the Free TV Campaign Program. In order to understand her spectacular come-from-behind finish in the race, one should consider both Zambiasi's presence and the shaky competition she faced in the State. However, this does not appear to be sufficient to explain her victory. The question I would like to answer here is to what extent the fact that Emília Fernandes is a woman had an influence on her growth in the Senatorial race.

During the course of the Free Campaign Program, Emília Fernandes expounded on a set of themes discussed by candidates for Governor and the other Senatorial candidates: education, health, transportation, honesty in politics, and the State's interests vis-à-vis the Federal government. Because of her professional background, her major emphasis was on education and teachers' wages. At no point did Emília refer to women or women's rights, even when speaking repeatedly about teachers in the State public school system: i.e., she never mentioned the fact that the majority of the teachers are women. Still, she was a strong feminine presence because of both her meticulous appearance and the way she came across in speech. During her first television program, she presented herself as follows: "What I want is for people to know me and understand my proposal as the first and only woman candidate for the Senate in

¹¹ Election day opinion poll by Datafolha published in *Zero Hora* on October 4, 1994.

the history of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. I was born in Dom Pedrito, and I grew up in Santana do Livramento in the company of my parents and brothers and sisters. I studied to become a teacher there, I got married there, and I have my two children and two grandchildren there. My family is my reason for being. I have a history of struggle in social and trade union movements. I want to show you my ideas and open up my heart to you".¹²

This brief introduction was the only time that Emília linked her candidacy to the fact of her being a woman. The first phrase she expounds to viewers is to launch a new situation: a woman candidate. The fact that she is a woman appears to be central: it is herself that she asks viewers to know and understand. This way of introducing herself to viewers seemed to indicate that Emília would reinforce this stance over the course of the television programs, but this did not happen. This may have been due to the positive, even aggressive way in which Emília established her politician's image as a far cry from the sweet little grandmother type.

In constructing her condition as a woman, Emília gives great emphasis to the family: before mentioning her professional and political activities, she emphasizes the family environment in which she grew up and now lives. Her identity as a woman is shaped in the expressions "My family is my reason for being", and "I want to... open up my heart to you." It is interesting to observe how such expressions are associated with feminine identity. It would be difficult to imagine a male candidate using such phrases in an election campaign.

The centralness of a woman devoted to her family is also present in Emília's campaign pamphlets, where she is presented by Zambiasi in the following way: "Teacher Emília Fernandes is the first woman in the history of Rio Grande do Sul to run for the National Senate. She is a mother,

grandmother, city councilwoman, and tough, fighting union leader, com-mitted to taking proposals for change to Brasília, to improve our people's lives."

It thus appears reasonable to state that this Senatorial candidate combines the identity of a traditional woman, like the Vice-Presidential candidates discussed earlier, with the stance of a union leader and involved politician. The latter characteristic does not contradict the former - thus the lack of any planks from the feminist platform in her discourse. This may be a reasonable explanation for her surprising victory in the State, mainly in the conservative interior of Rio Grande do Sul: a woman who would not relinquish what the most traditional side of society expects of a woman, yet who became a politician.

Women in the race for state and national Houses of Representatives

Traditionally, the State of Rio Grande do Sul has not elected women to the State House of Representatives or the National House. Before 1994, only seven women had been elected to the State House in its entire history, while no woman had ever been elected to the Brazilian House. In the 1994 elections, out of 612 candidates to the National and State Houses, 35 were women. Thirteen were running for the National House and 22 for the State House. For the National House there were six candidates from the Popular Front, three each from the PSDB and PRN, and one from the PPR. For the State House of Representatives, there were 12 candidates from the Popular Front, two each from the PPR and PRN, and one each from the PSDB, PMDB, PDT, PMN, PTB, and PP. What is most striking about the above figures is the concentration of candidates in the Popular Front led by the PT, followed by the PSDB, and the limited number or even absence of candidates from traditional parties such as the PDT, PMDB, PFL, and PPR. Apparently, this distribution cannot be attributed merely to ideological factors. Certainly the parties with a more progressive world view would tend to be more open to the presence of women as candidates, yet

¹² Transcript from the *Free Electoral Program* broadcast on television on August 2, 1994, at 10:30 PM (Rio Grande do Sul regional network).

what I feel is a more plausible explanation for this distribution is both the type of party organization *per se* (which is no doubt more democratic than in the more traditional parties) and the ways in which the internal struggle is processed in these parties in terms of women occupying space. What mean in relation to this second characteristic is that these parties are less stratified, their leadership is less consolidated, and there are still available spaces to be occupied. As for the group as a whole, I am primarily interested in their profiles and identities as women candidates. Of the thirteen women running for the National House of Representatives, I found no information about the three candidates from the PRN or Jaci Borges da Silva of the PSDB. As for the former, I should point out that the party has absolutely no weight in the State and that it did not run any kind of campaign except for the free television time, so that these women's names fail to reveal anything about the party's position, since they can be included on the ticket for the slightest possible political reasons.

Of the other nine women candidates, the common characteristic which best defines their profiles is their having stood out as professional women and ones occupying public positions, like Esther Grossi and Maria Luiza Jaeger, both from the PT and municipal Secretaries of Education and Health, respectively; Yeda Crusius of the PSDB, who was National Minister of Planning; and Mercedes Rodrigues, also of the PSDB, Secretary of Labor and Social Action for the State of Rio Grande do Sul during the Pedro Simon Administration. Two other PT candidates were outstanding trade union leaders and a third was an outstanding party leader.

These women's campaign pamphlets were quite concerned with demonstrating their competence in their resués. These women are proportionally more qualified than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, their campaign pamphlets show a repeated concern with explicit competence in their respective fields, academic credentials, and proposals for action. For example, Esther Grossi ran a campaign based on the idea

of passion, and she appears in her pamphlets as "one of the greatest Brazilian authorities in the field of education". She has a solid academic background, with a Ph.D. in the Psychology of Intelligence from the University of Paris and a history of activities in the political and administrative field.

This exaggerated concern over proving one's professional competence in the campaign leaflets appears to indicate a need to counterbalance one's very condition as a woman (i.e., the traditional wife, mother, and grandmother). The question is thus how the candidates formulate their feminine identity in their political discourse without falling into a caricature as wife and mother. As I stated above, making explicit one's condition as a woman does not necessarily coincide with a feminist stance. An example of a woman who presents herself as such, but not as a defender of women's rights, is Carmem Dreyer of the PPR. Her speech on TV starts like this: "I come before you today trusting that old prejudices have been destroyed, because women are becoming more active with each passing day, particularly in the major issues facing our society; my struggle is for education and professional enhancement, better living conditions and decent wages for teachers".¹³

This is the traditional way for women to present themselves and is quite similar to Emília Fernandes' example. These are candidates without any experience in women's or feminist movements but who use the legitimacy of women's public position to run as such. They thus take a merely rhetorical stance for campaign purposes, since they are incapable of producing proposals that are even remotely related to women's rights issues. Another stance that is quite different from the former, albeit no less interesting, is that of Esther Grossi. Esther became an extremely popular woman in the State of Rio Grande do Sul for two completely different reasons: she is a widely respected

¹³ Transcribed from the Free Electoral Program broadcast on television on August 18, 1994.

and acknowledged educator with a number of successful projects in grassroots education, and is also known for her extravagant appearance, since she dyes her hair green, pink, and lilac and wears a lot of gaudy jewelry. Nobody mentions Esther Grossi's name without first referring to her clothing, hair, and costume jewelry. However, this intellectual, ludicrously feminine woman, whose campaign slogan was "Commit Passion", never once mentioned women's conditions or the need to defend women's rights in her brief TV appearances or abundant campaign leaflets.

This woman went overboard in stamping her condition as a woman on her forehead. Contrary to her competent running mates from the Workers' Party and even the women running under the PSDB, who sought to be completely neutral in relation to gender, Esther sexualized her candidacy, while failing to sexualize her platform, devoted totally to education. She even failed to mention the sexism in textbooks or in unequal opportunities for boys and girls. At the other extreme from Esther is Mercedes Rodrigues of the PSDB. Of the candidates for National Congresswoman, she is without a doubt the one that most identifies with feminism, having participated in the feminist movement through the so-called councils on women's conditions and the women's department in the PMDB (when she still belonged to that party). Mercedes' campaign has the mark of a woman who has always struggled for women's rights from the various positions she has occupied, particularly during the period when she headed the Rio Grande do Sul State chapter of the LBA (the Brazilian Relief Legion, a traditional philanthropic organization). She did not enter party politics through the feminist movement, but vice versa.

One particular leaflet from Mercedes Rodrigues' campaign material is particularly interesting, since it shows how a woman who presents herself as a feminist articulates this stance in order to garner votes. The pamphlet consists of two tabloid-sized pages. On the first page there are three

articles with the following titles: *Change the Face of Congress*, where an impersonal text talks about the lack of women's representation in the House of Representatives and the need to increase their quorum. *Dear Reader* is a short article in which Mercedes talks about competence in National Congress, expounding on her platform in boldface: health, education, fair wages, and jobs. In the last article, *A Life of Struggle*, one reads about this candidate's struggle for the teachers' cause ever since she was a young girl.

The backside of the pamphlet has a generic title, *A Defender of Women's Rights*, dwelling on all her achievements on behalf of women as president of the Brazilian Relief Legion. However, surprisingly, the second half of the page is occupied by photographs of Mercedes with Presidential candidate Fernando Henrique, Pedro Simon, and Antônio Britto, with quotes by each of these men supporting Mercedes. Britto's phrase is paradigmatic of the position this woman herself accepts in politics, to the extent that it is reproduced as campaign propaganda: "I have known Mercedes in all the circumstances that political life can reveal, and I have never seen her lacking in competence, dignity, or loyalty. Therefore, it is more than a matter of electing a woman candidate. It is the election of a competent politician, well-prepared to be a National Congresswoman".

Antônio Britto's discourse is revealing: in order to qualify Mercedes as a candidate, he deprives her of her condition as a woman. It is obvious that simply being a woman does not give anyone the credentials to be a member of the National House of Representatives. However, Britto appears to feel the contrary, that it would actually deprive her of such credentials, since in order to talk about Mercedes' qualities he refers to her as a "*político*" or "*deputado*" ("politician" or "Congressman", both in the masculine in the original Portuguese - T.N.), thus disguising her gender.

Mercedes' campaign leaflet shows a dubious posture in relation to both feminism as a whole and her own militancy. The fact

that male candidates are recommending her and the revealing testimony by the PMDB Governatorial candidate show how the candidate needs to appear with a broader profile, more in agreement with that of the campaign as a whole.

Mercedes is above all a competent, above-average, and thus capable woman. Yeda Crusius, the other PSDB woman candidate for National Representative, presents herself in the same fashion. However, Yeda takes the opposite road: while Mercedes is a woman involved in the women's rights struggle and who tries to prove her competency in any situation, Yeda, an economist and University professor who occupied the Brazilian Ministry of Planning for a little over three months, tries to incorporate some items from the women's rights struggle into her campaign. In her two-page, dissertational leaflet, where she describes what her activity will be in the struggle for "employment in an open, democratic economy", amongst other actions one sees integrated women's health programs and home loan plans for women as heads of households.

The way that women's rights issues appear in Yeda's campaign material is very similar to that of male candidates' leaflets. That is, women's rights discourse is expressed strategically in order to show that the candidate, whether she or he, is sensitive to the issue. Just as the appearance of the classical housewife in the campaign scenario reveals a new position for women in the public arena, the presence of a feminist agenda in the campaign discourse of various candidates - men and women who do not identify with feminism - is indicative of the space that the feminist issue has gained over the course of years of struggle. Based on the rather obvious premise that the short text in a tightly packed campaign leaflet is drafted according to a strict cost/benefit analysis, the fact that women's rights are mentioned by non-activist candidates is particularly indicative of this situation.

Among the women candidates for the National House, only one stresses her

militancy in women's rights movements: a native of the interior of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Marlise Fernandes, 27, stresses in her campaign leaflets her experience as a militant in the Rural Women Workers' Movement, member of the women's national committee in CUT (the United Workers' Confederation), and participant in feminist meetings in Chile and Mexico. Surprisingly, despite this emphasis, women's rights do not appear as priorities in her campaign leaflets. Unlike other women candidates, who point to specific women's struggles in the midst of a list of various other proposals, Marlise takes the struggle against misogyny as the point of departure for a struggle against discrimination in general. Her pamphlets read: "One of my proposals is to build - with you - a country where various forms of discrimination are combatted, where one can develop all of a human being's potential and virtues".

Finally, among the women candidates for National Representative, there is a third type, whose best example is Maria Luiza Jaeger. Her curriculum emphasizes her militancy in the Workers' Party, her professional qualifications, and the position she occupied as head of the municipal health department. At no point does she mention her being a woman, nor does she link her platform in defense of public health to any of the demands from the women's or feminist movements. This gap is significant, since the health issue has been a priority concern for these movements. One would have expected it to be highlighted in the campaign materials of a woman belonging to the Workers' Party.

As a whole, with few exceptions, women candidates for National Representative from the State of Rio Grande do Sul tend to identify in some way with women's rights issues, yet without having a history of involvement in the feminist movement. They do not seek to identify with these struggles. The presence of women's rights issues is less a militant attitude and more a recognition of their importance as an enticing theme, one that allows them to have a kind of

rapport with voters. On this count, such women candidates do not differ from various male counterparts, who acknowledge the importance of the women's rights issue and defend it in their campaign materials.¹⁴ The women candidates for the State House of Representatives have the same characteristics as those for the National House. They are divided up among party militants, some of whom have already held State and municipal legislative office, and women who have stood out in professional and trade union activities. Of this group of candidates, only one woman identifies completely with feminism, running for the State House under a feminist agenda. She is Helena Bonumá of the Workers' Party, currently city councilwoman from the State capital, Porto Alegre.

Helena Bonumá's perspective is that of a militant feminist with a proposal for radical democracy. The front page of her main pamphlet says the following: For a Brazil of Free and Equal Women and Men. Helena attempts to incorporate the women's issue into the class struggle and the struggle against all forms of discrimination. In her leaflet entitled *Who Turns Your Head?*, she presents her proposal: "...free nights, light days, and plenty for all, where poverty only exists in dictionaries, where male chauvinism, racism, and everything else that divides, oppresses, and represses is nothing but a faded page thrown away in the trash can of humankind's history".

An interesting aspect in Helena Bonumá's campaign is that when she lists the rights for which she struggles, she makes no mention of decriminalizing abortion. Still, when her pamphlet describes women's subordinate condition, one can read between the lines a stance in favor of legalizing abortion: "We lack access to safe contraceptive methods, we are the victims of mass sterilization, maternal mortality, and illegal abortions with complications and death,

and we are affected by the AIDS virus to an alarming extent".

It is interesting to observe that abortion is virtually ignored by women candidates for both National and State Representative. Except for Helena Bonumá, who refers to the complications of illegal abortion, only one other woman candidate refers specifically to a demand for legalizing it: Vera Guasso, candidate for State Representative under the ultra-leftist United Workers' Socialist Party (PSTU). Vera has a pamphlet addressed to women with the title *We Need to Dare*, where she openly defends decriminalization. Vera's discourse equates domination of women with capitalism, and when she speaks of oppressed women, she specifically addresses working-class women. When she defends legalization of abortion, she makes clear the way she perceives oppression: "That abortion no longer be a crime, that it be legalized, is a vital issue for working-class women, since these are the women who are forced to risk their lives at underground butcher-shop clinics, while bourgeois women go to sophisticated private clinics".

Despite her feminist ideals, Vera Guasso fails to see any autonomy in the women's struggle, thus blending it into the greater struggle for socialism: "There is only one way for our demands and struggles to result in the liberation of women from our age-old slavery: we must defeat this system, which uses our oppression to better exploit the working class. We must fight for a new society that is just, egalitarian, and democratic - a socialist society".

Of the women candidates for State Representative, except for Helena Bonumá and Vera Guasso, only one of 19 mentions her subordinate condition as a woman. Rosinete Bispo of the Workers' Party presents herself during the free television campaign time as a Black woman, linking these two characteristics to oppression. It is interesting to note the way in which she formulates her text: "We women are excluded from all spheres of power and political decision-making, and we Black women especially so". However, Rosinete's discourse places more

¹⁴ Rio Grande do Sul elected women to the National House of Representatives for the first time: Esther Grossi of the Workers' Party (PT) and Yeda Crusius of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB).

emphasis on her being Black than on her being a woman. She appears in several of her pamphlets alongside Congressman Paim of the Workers' Party, who is also Black. As for the other women candidates for the State House, only three refer to their condition as women, but not to raise a platform of struggle for women's rights, rather to make their gender condition a quality for office. Psychologist and psychoanalyst Sandra Fagundes of the Workers' Party uses a pretensely post-modernist discourse to propose a "feminine way of legislating". This is a typical way of formulating one's very condition as a woman without establishing any sort of commitment to the struggles for gender rights. Although they may come in different wrappings, such slogans are very close to those of traditional women who come across as housewives and mothers and also propose a feminine way of practicing politics.

The most popular woman candidate for State Representative is Maria do Carmo Bueno of the PPR. Commentator on a local television program with a large viewing public, Maria do Carmo was actually the major anchorwoman for her party's candidates, having appeared in all the programs covering the State legislative elections for two months. Elegant, charming, with a sophisticated command of TV as a medium, she became her party's main hope in terms of votes. Lacking a line of her own, she uses her TV time to defend her party, its past administrations and proposals. Maria do Carmo uses her image as a woman without ever clearly enunciating it.¹⁵

Based on the characteristics described in this article, it is quite difficult to imagine what kind of work these women are going

¹⁵The following women candidates were elected to the State House of Representatives in Rio Grande do Sul: Luciana Genro of the Workers' Party (PT), Maria Augusta Feldman of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), Jussara Cony of the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B - Maoist)(reelected). These three belong to the Popular Front. Maria do Carmo Bueno of the PPR was also elected, with the second largest vote in the State. None of these women formulated any issue related to women's rights.

to do once they are elected. Except for the feminists who entered politics through their militancy in the feminist movement, and who are a minority, the candidates - and even those who formulated some women's rights issues in their campaigns - will no doubt be more inclined to engage in discussions of major national issues than to identify with the women's struggle.

Still, even considering this reality, the Brazilian national political scenario will be changed by such a strong female presence. The consequences of this new situation cannot be predicted, but it is possible to state that the women's and/or feminist movement will have a greater potential for dialogue and negotiation within the field of institutional politics. In the Senate, there will definitely be a woman who one day presented herself as "a woman, a Black woman from the *favela*" (Benedita da Silva, Rio de Janeiro). It is quite probable that Brazil will have its first woman State Governor (Roseana Sarney, Maranhão). There will be a significant increase in the number of women elected to the National House of Representatives. For example, this is the first time that the State of Rio Grande do Sul will be electing women to the National House. The number of women elected to the State Houses will increase in a number of States.

Regardless of whether they defend the feminist cause, by their very presence these women say a great deal about the space conquered by the female gender in the political arena. On the other hand, the fact that they are still few in number shows that this is a field where women's gains have only just begun.

The majority of these women have certainly entered political life by roads distant from feminism, as the examples above have shown. Yet many of them cannot avoid incorporating the simple fact that they are women into their political identity in one way or another, by either presenting themselves as wives and mothers, using feminine aesthetics, realizing that defending feminist causes is strategic, or because they are actually feminists in some cases.