The Abortion Issue in Brazil: a study of the debate in Congress

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A bill was brought before the Brazilian Congress in March 1995 to amend the Constitution so as to prohibit induced abortion under any circumstances if passed this bill would have led to the immediate supression of the only legal provisions that currently allow abortion: two items in the Penal Code providing for legal abortion when the life of the pregnant woman is at risk or when the pregnancy is the outcome of rape. Furthermore banning abortion in the Constitution itself would have hindered a democratic debate on this grave problem.

In April 1995 the above-mentioned proposed amendment to the Constitution was voted down by a wide margin in the Chamber of Deputies as discussed further on in this paper. However the mere fact that it was submitted at all not to mention the controversy it generated reflects a longstanding debate in Brazilian society on an issue considered divisive. Above all it reflects political discussions in Congress since the end of the 1940s and still more intensely in the 1980s and early 1990s alongside participation in the debate by a variety of extraparliamentary political and social groups. I referring to the Roman Catholic Church, segments of the medical profession, the women's movement and evangelicals in the chronological order of their entry into the controversy.

My concern with the abortion question has always been motivated on the one hand by the gravity of the problem of abortion in Brazil and a social commitment to tackling it and on the other by the dynamism of political debate about the issue and my interest in investigating it in depth. I set out to study the political process, the related parliamentary decision making process, the involvement of the Executive branch and above all the activities of political and social interest groups involved in the abortion debate.

Before detailing the methodology and results of this investigation to date however this paper presents a brief description of the reproductive health situation in Brazil focusing on fertility regulation as the context for any appraisal of abortion. As an introduction to this description I shall first outline some key demographic data and the main factors determining them.

Some introductory information

In 1991 Brazil had a population of 146,825,475 inhabitants according to the Demographic Census conducted that year. Women accounted for 50.6 per cent of the total and men for 49.4 per cent. 75.6 per cent of Brazilians lived in towns and 24.4 per cent in the countryside. In the 1980s the mean annual rate of population increase was 1.9 per cent continuing the tendency for population growth to slow down since...
the 1960s. The annual rate of increase was about 3 per cent in the 1950s slipping to 2.9 per cent in the 1960s and to 2.5 per cent in the 1970s. Contributing to the deceleration was a sharp drop in the total fertility rate which was some 2.7 children per woman in the 1980s down from 4.4 in the 1970s, 5.6 in the 1960s and 6.3 in the 1950s showing an overall reduction of more than 50 per cent in the period.

This decline in fertility took place alongside deep-seated changes in Brazilian society in the second half of the 20th century relating to the consolidation of Brazil's specific form of industrial capitalism. In a review of the theoretical debate about the issue in Brazil, Faria analyzes the role of the state as a mediator between the structural and proximate determinants of fertility. He particularly emphasizes the unexpected effects of non-demographic governmental policies.

The recent decline in fertility in Brazil is due to a complex set of processes associated with the pattern of development of the productive forces (development with accelerating urbanization, proletarianization and social exclusion) and the unanticipated consequences of government policy in telecommunications, consumer credit, social security, and health care—all strategic dimensions of the process of change for the reproductive behaviour of the structured totality which is Brazilian society.

These remarks bring us to the second item in this introduction, which is reproductive health. In this area, which relates to the previous paragraph, consistent with the above quotation, it can be said that Brazil has never had an explicit population policy relating to fertility. In 1983, the government introduced a policy relating to human reproduction, but it took the form of a health programme focusing on integrated health care for women during all stages of their life cycle. This was PAISM (Programme of Integral Health Care for Women) subordinated to the Health Ministry. It included reproductive health care and family planning but did not have demographic objectives. Later on, the issue of fertility regulation was included without birth control purposes in the new federal Constitution enacted in 1988. Here, family planning is defined as a right of married couples for which the state must provide. The Constitution also prohibits coercion by public or private entities in this sphere. A private member's bill is now before Congress to implement this constitutional provision through ordinary legislation. The bill reiterates the above points while adding new items that reinforce the distinction between full health care including family planning and population policy relating to fertility.

However, for a firmer grasp of the reproductive health situation in Brazil, particularly concerning fertility policy, three further points must be highlighted. First, fertility regulation in Brazil has historically been a sphere in which the private sector has been active with greater or lesser intensity through family planning and birth control organizations, mainly funded from abroad. Second, progressive segments of society have historically taken a critical stance on birth control policies and the activities of these private bodies. Such segments, especially the women's movement, acted as the motive force leading to formulation of the PAISM programme. And lastly, this programme has faced major implementation problems since its inception.

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2 FIBGE (1996) *População Home Page IBGE*


In connection with the above points and as part of an overall process of public spending cuts, particularly in the area of social policy, it must be stressed that the field of reproductive health and, within it, the part relating to fertility regulation is highly problematic in Brazil.

A nationwide survey conducted in 1986\(^6\) showed that some 70 per cent of formally or informally married women aged 15 to 54 used contraceptives of some kind. Surgical sterilization and the pill were by far the most prevalent methods used with 44.4 per cent and 41.0 per cent respectively. The practice of surgical sterilization, a virtually irreversible method, is widespread in Brazil and has taken on a genuinely cultural nature as shown in studies by Berquo. Attention has also been drawn to the excessive use of caesarean sections accounting for some 34 per cent of all deliveries in 1990. Depending on the state however the proportion of caesarean sections exceeds 50 per cent. These operations are frequently performed without medical prescription usually for the purpose of sterilization.\(^7\) Lastly, and very importantly, there is a strikingly high rate of maternal mortality around 118.6 per 100,000 live births for 1992, the most recent datum available. In this context abortions account for about 12% of maternal deaths induced abortions specifically account for some 7.9%\(^8\).

I now return to the specific topic of abortion and conclude these introductory remarks. The number of abortions in Brazil is estimated to have totalled 1443,350 in 1991 or about 44 per cent of live births.\(^9\) This high number of abortions coexists with a legislation making abortion illegal with the two exceptions mentioned above and with an intense debate on the subject in Congress and throughout society. It is to the debate in the legislative sphere that we now turn.

**Methodology**

The period analyzed ranges from the start of such discussions in Congress from the 1946 legislature until the present day but with greater emphasis on recent debates. Both the research project and the political debate on which it focuses are still in progress. However for the present purposes I shall restrict my comments to the period including the legislature which adjourned in February 1995.

I endeavoured to detect not only the emergence of the issue but also its evolution in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate Brazil's lower and upper houses during the long period just defined. It is important to stress that the section of the Penal Code containing the provisions on abortion to which I referred at the outset was enacted in 1940 under the Estado Novo dictatorship after President Getulio Vargas had closed Congress. The Legislative did not resume normal activities until the Constituent Assembly of 1946.

The empirical research material consisted of parliamentary documents from the Chamber and Senate mainly draft legislation and speeches by members of both houses. The speeches were used but not systematically incorporated during this stage of the project.\(^10\)

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\(^8\)BRASIL Ministério da Saúde. Mortalidade Brasil 1992 Brasília CENEP/Fundação Nacional de Saúde de 1996: in the data on maternal mortality abortions are the fourth largest cause of death, while the second largest cause post partum infection and the third hemorrhage no doubt include many induced abortions. When performed clandestinely abortions are also responsible for major sequelae in the morbidity profile of Brazilian women. COSTA, A M (1993) Direitos reprodutivos e encruzilhadas Paper written for teaching purposes and presented at the Program on Studies in Reproductive Health and Sexuality Campinas: NEPO/UNICAMP

This analysis of parliamentary documents will be supplemented in the future by information deriving from interviews with members of Congress and interest groups. Interviews have been held with all parliamentarians who submitted bills to the last legislature in the period analyzed and the information thereby obtained has already enriched the ongoing research work to a significant extent.

For the purposes of analysis, the parliamentary documents were divided into four stages based on the political evolution of the debate in Congress and in society at large. The resulting periodization comprised stages that included differing numbers of legislatures and legislative proposals. Thus, the first stage covering the period 1946–71 comprised six legislatures to which three proposals were submitted and saw the start of the debate as Congress reopened after the fall of the Estado Novo dictatorship. The second stage covering the period 1971–83 comprised three legislatures to which 13 proposals were presented; the debate became more heated during this stage although social and political interest groups did not yet participate intensely. The third stage covering the period 1983–91 comprised two legislatures to which 15 proposals were submitted; this was when the debate intensified sharply under the influence both of redemocratization after a long period of military rule and of the women's movement. The fourth and last stage covering the period 1991–95 contained one legislature to which 18 proposals were submitted and is when the debate was at its most intense to date.

The study outlined in this paper was based on an examination of the abortion debate in all four stages. For each stage, the following items were produced: a foreword presenting background information on the period, a chart containing a description of the bills submitted to Congress, which was the source of most of the data used, and an analysis of the legislative proposals described in the chart. This methodological approach produced a historical accompaniment to the debate itself, leading up to the present and showing how the past evolution of discussions on abortion has given rise to the current status quo.

Before moving on to a summary of the parliamentary debates on abortion, it is necessary to outline a number of characteristics of the Brazilian legislation on this matter, especially those provisions which members of Congress have endeavored to change. The legislative proposals submitted are of various kinds. Some are bills designed to amend existing provisions; others aim to repeal them while some seek to introduce an entirely new legislative framework without precedent in Brazilian jurisprudence. The majority refer to the Penal Code. The rest refer in descending order to the Misdemeanours Act, the Consolidated Labour Laws, and in a single case to the federal Constitution of Brazil. The Penal Code of 1940, in the section entitled Crimes Against Life, defines as crimes (with their respective penalties) an abortion deliberately caused by a woman bearing a foetus or with her consent (article 124) and an abortion caused by a third party with or without the woman's consent (arts. 125 and 126 respectively). In addition, the Code stipulates more severe penalties for abortions by third parties if they cause grave bodily harm or the death of the mother (art. 127). Lastly, art. 128 exempts from punishment any medical doctor who carries out an abortion defined as

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11 ROCHA M I B (1994) O Congresso Nacional e a Questão do Aborto. Campinas (mimeo) Research report submitted to the MacArthur Foundation. This study entitled The National Congress and the Abortion Issue has been developed with the Núcleo de Estudos de População (NEPO) at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas. It was originally supported by the MacArthur Foundation which provided me with a grant from 1991 to 1994. In 1994, I began receiving a research grant from the CNPq, the Brazilian National Research Council with an expanded research project including the current study. Jurst Silvia Pimentel now acts as consultant and sociologist Tania Margatto as research assistant.

12 Decree Law 2848 Dec 7 1940.
necessary i.e. when the pregnant woman's life cannot be saved by other means or when the woman has become pregnant as a result of rape

The Misdemeanours Act of 1941 in a section entitled Misdemeanours Against Persons defines as a punishable offence the advertising of a process, substance or object designed to bring about an abortion (art 20). It is worth recording that until 1979 this article also prohibited advertising of methods for avoiding pregnancy.

The Consolidated Labour Laws of 1943 when dealing in a section entitled Annual Paid Leave stipulates that a female employee must be given such leave when pregnant or for a non-criminal abortion (art 131 clause II). This provision was partially suppressed under the last legislature analysed.

Lastly, the federal Constitution of 1988 in article 5 of the section on Individual and Collective Rights and Duties defines as inviolable the right to life (without referring to conception) freedom, equality, security and property. In the context of several fundamental rights and guarantees, as already mentioned the abortion debate in Congress revolves essentially around these legal provisions and the next section deals precisely with this debate.

The abortion debate in Congress

The question of abortion has a strong appeal for members of Congress who submitted a total of 49 legislative proposals during the period analysed. Forty-six of these were bills including resubmissions and substitutions, and the remaining three were documents of a different nature (one was an indicative draft and two were requests for information from the Executive). The number of proposals submitted increased from one stage of the analysis to the next despite the fact that each stage comprised a shorter period of time. It is worth recalling here that three proposals were submitted during the first stage which covered 25 years. During the second, which lasted 12 years, 15 in the third lasting eight years and 18 in the fourth, lasting only four years. This is an indication of the extent to which the debate has intensified as time passes.

Almost all the proposals examined (43) originated in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house with four coming from the Senate and two from the Executive. It should be noted that the documents submitted by the Executive are in fact portions of comprehensive draft legislation designed to reformulate the Penal Code and Misdemeanours Act.

The majority of the bills submitted (26) deal with proposed amendments to provisions of the Penal Code or include new provisions changing the legal approach adopted in the Code. Eleven refer to the Misdemeanours Act and two to the Consolidated Labour Laws. Two bills set out to oblige the National Health Service to perform abortions permitted by law. One bill refers to the federal Constitution. Three of the remaining four bills propose to authorize contraceptive activities and practices but exclude those capable of causing abortions. Lastly, one bill provides for the issuance of civil certificates for foetuses.

Only two of all the bills submitted to date have ever been passed by Congress. While they do not relate to issues that are central to the debate, they indicate a change of attitude towards abortion. The first was submitted by Senator Aloysio Chaves to amend article 20 of the Misdemeanours Act by striking out the ban on advertising for processes, substances or objects relating to contraceptive methods. However, the prohibition regarding abortion was retained. Although this measure did not change the law on abortion, it had the effect of reiterating a prohibition already stipulated in the legislation in force.

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13 Decree Law 3688 Oct 3 1941
14 Decree Law 5452 May 1 1943
15 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil Oct 5 1988
It should be stressed that several other bills with a similar content had been submitted previously until one of them was finally passed in 1979 in a climate of governmental concern about population increase. Most of these bills were influenced by Bemfam (Society for Family Wellbeing in Brazil), an organization whose stated aims included lobbying Congress to remove legal obstacles to birth control and family planning.

The other bill passed which became law during the last legislature analyzed differed from the first by taking a position that was roughly speaking favourable to the permissibility of abortion. It was submitted by Deputies Eduardo Jorge and Sandra Starling, both progressive politicians who supported the ideas of the women's movement. The bill amended clause II of article 131 of the Consolidated Labour Laws so as to ensure that absences from work due to abortion are not deducted from annual paid leave regardless of the circumstances. In practice, this means allowing women to take time off work even for an illegal abortion—by contrast with the previous legislation which did so only for non-criminal abortions. According to Jorge and Starling, it is inadmissible that women who undergo abortion should be doubly punished, whether an abortion is legal or illegal; it entails physical, psychological, and social suffering for the woman in question who needs time to recover before returning to work.

With regard to the stance on abortion taken in these bills, 25 were favourable to permissibility whereas 21 were against. An analysis of the evolution of this attitude over time shows that in the first three periods, bills implicitly or explicitly opposed to permissibility were in the majority, although the number of bills favouring permissibility gradually increased. The fourth period marked a turning-point in the sense that the vast majority of the bills submitted—13 out of 16—were favourable to allowing abortion in one way or another. In fact, even in the first three stages the predominant trend among the bills relating directly to the issue—those referring to the Penal Code—was favourable to permitting abortion. However, the underlying definition of a favourable attitude here covers a broad spectrum of positions embodied in these bills which ranged between two extremes from providing for a single new exception to the general ban on abortion to changing the legislation more radically by decriminalizing and/or legalizing abortion altogether.

The various tendencies or attitudes expressed by bills and the differences among these tendencies in terms of their ideologies and goals in turn reflect the diversity of the political and social groups participating in the debate. Congress indeed functions as a sounding board for the interest groups involved. As mentioned above, these groups are as follows, in the chronological order of their entry into the debate: the Roman Catholic Church, segments of the medical profession, the women's movement, and the evangelical churches. These groups have appeared on the scene at different times and continue to participate in the action today.

The Catholic Church manifested its thinking on the issue from the beginning of the period analyzed. Back in 1949, during the first legislature after the end of the Estado Novo, Deputy Arruda Câmara, a monsignor, submitted a bill to remove the two exceptions to the ban on abortion from the Penal Code. Many years later, in 1986, when a tense debate on abortion was proceeding in Congress, Deputy Nilson Gibson submitted a bill that was also inspired by the ideas of the Catholic hierarchy. In 1994, when the controversy was particularly heated in civil society, 16 Deputy Osmanio...
Pereira representing the official position of the Catholic Church submitted the latest bill itemized in this stage of the research project. It sought to insert a clause on the inviolability of the right to life at all times starting with conception into the section of the federal Constitution dealing with individual and collective rights and duties. The bill also defined abortion as a heinous crime against life and proposed to amend the Constitution so as to prohibit any future attempt to pass legislation decriminalizing or legalizing abortion.

Although the official position of the Catholic Church appears transparently in only three of the bills analyzed, it was effectively manifested throughout the period studied in debates on bills relating to abortion and in speeches by members of Congress with ties to the Church. Most of these speeches were delivered as attacks on bills designed to increase the number of situations in which abortion would be allowed. More recently, the position of the Catholic hierarchy has been expressed through the activities of pro-life movements which are of a religious nature but not exclusively Catholic and have been lobbying Congress as part of their fight against legalization of abortion. However, Catholic influence can also be seen to point in the opposite direction. An example is a group called Catholics for Free Choice, which recently began lobbying Congress. These Christian feminists who identify with the women’s movement on the issue of reproductive rights have taken part in debates with members of both houses of Congress and members of the Catholic hierarchy. They disagree with the Vatican on this issue but see themselves as members of the Church and constitute a new interlocutor in Congress’s deliberations on the abortion issue.

The medical profession began to have a perceptible influence on the congressional debate in the second half of the 1960s and especially in the 1970s. Senator Vasconcellos Torres, for example, submitted a bill to make abortion permissible under certain conditions based on a paper delivered to the 19th Brazilian Conference of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians. Another example is the attack led by members of the National Academy of Medicine and Bemfam on a bill providing for therapeutic abortion submitted by Deputy Jose Sampaio. During this period, moreover, members of Congress frequently made references to a report published by physicians in Rio de Janeiro when endeavouring to legitimize their stance against making abortion legal. Bemfam’s participation in the debate during this period was also significant, especially as regards its ties with the medical profession. Bemfam was set up in 1965 by gynaecologists and obstetricians during their 15th Brazilian Conference, and in 1967 it joined the International Planned Parenthood Federation. This interest group can be considered a key participant in the debate on abortion inside and outside Congress. As already mentioned, it influenced several bills that set out to allow contraceptives to be distributed while maintaining the ban on advertising or dissemination of abortion. There are also recent examples of participation in the debate by segments of the medical profession. In the 1990s, they have advocated permission for abortion in two situations: when the mother is HIV-positive and when there is evidence of a grave and irreversible foetal anomaly. Discussions on these issues especially the latter went so far as to cause the drafting of a bill by the Federal Council of Medicine and its analysis by several of the profession’s regional councils. A bill dealing specifically with abortion justified by a grave foetal anomaly submitted by Deputy Luiz Moreira during the last legislature studied was not directly influenced by the Council but indirectly reflects the Council’s participation in the debate in Congress. Indeed, this medical organization was represented in two public meetings held on the premises of Congress to debate the issue in the second half of 1993.
The women's movement began participating in discussions on abortion in Congress in the 1980s and as time went by became the most active of the interest groups involved. Taking a position in favour of permitting abortion, it directly or indirectly influenced the submission of a number of bills, the organization of public meetings in Congress to debate the issue, and the contents of speeches delivered by several parliamentarians. This active role was largely made possible by the fact that Congress now had women members and by the movement's proximity to parliamentarians of a progressive tendency, especially in the Chamber of Deputies.

A chronological analysis of this movement's participation points first to the activities of Cristina Tavares, a deputy who submitted two bills on abortion one in 1983 which was the first bill ever submitted to Congress under the influence of the women's movement. Another salient feature of the 1980s was the presence of Jose Genoino, who also submitted two bills on abortion and of Luiz Salomão, who submitted one. Both of these deputies identified with the demands of the women's movement.

Three of these bills sponsored by Tavares, Genoino, and Salomão were submitted after the new Constitution was promulgated in 1988. During the Constituent Assembly when abortion was one of the most controversial issues, even the portion of the women's movement that insisted on the importance of including a clause on abortion in the Constitution eventually agreed with progressive parliamentarians that this was not the appropriate way to deal with the issue. The National Council for Women's Rights played a key role in this decision.

The influence of the women's movement on routine congressional activities intensified during the early 1990s, especially during the last legislature analyzed. Five bills submitted by Deputy Eduardo Jorge in certain cases jointly with Deputy Sandra Starling were influenced one way or another by the movement. As were a bill re-submitted by Genoino and particularly a substitutive bill by Deputy Fatima Pelaes. The movement also influenced two bills submitted by Deputy Jandira Feghali and Senator Eva Blay both feminists. On different occasions while debates were going on in Congress, these women led two seminars and a public hearing. Their intention in conducting such activities was to involve more people in the discussion both in Congress itself and in society at large.

The women's movement was active during the last decade in the sphere of Congress, including the period of intense debate by the Constituent Assembly which is not covered by this paper. More recently, the movement reinforced its opportunities to influence the political and legislative process by setting up the Feminist Centre for Studies and Parliamentary Assistance (CFEMEA) in 1991. Headquartered in the capital Brasília, this organization is an important instrument for lobbying Congress and publicizing its activities in relation to women's rights besides joining forces with other feminist individuals and groups to provide assistance to parliamentarians on discussions of abortion.

In the second half of the 1980s, a new social actor comes onto the stage as the latest of the groups I have mentioned so far. The evangelical churches, like the Roman Catholic hierarchy, advocate the right to life from the moment of conception. Extempore this position in speeches and bills. Examples of the latter are two bills submitted in the penultimate and last legislatures analyzed by Deputy Matheus Jensen, a Protestant pastor proposing more severe penalties for abortion in the Penal Code, and another submitted by Deputy Francisco Dias to allow civil certificates to be issued for foetuses.

Besides the social groups mentioned above which entered the political and juridical debate in Congress at different times, it is also worth registering the presence of the Executive and the participation albeit limited of the political parties. The Executive submitted two bills on abortion in the 1970s during the period of authoritarian military rule when the issue was not yet intensely debated in Brazil.
These measures involved a number of proposed changes to the Penal Code of 1969 as amended in 1973 neither of which versions of the Code was enforced and set out to introduce a new law on misdemeanors.

Specifically with regard to abortion the first bill included a provision on the legality of abortion when pregnancy is the outcome of rape. Such a provision had been struck out of the Penal Code by the 1973 amendments. The second bill repeated the ban on abortion advertising in the Misdemeanours Act but increased the amount of the fine imposed as a penalty. These proposals submitted by a dictatorial regime merely reiterated existing provisions enacted by the equally dictatorial Estado Novogovernment.

Since 1979 when a gradual move to restore democracy was timidly begun by the generals and particularly after redemocratization gathered momentum in 1985 the Executive has taken further initiatives to revise the Penal Code. In 1984 the general section of the Code was reformulated and the Executive circulated a draft of a new special section although Congress did not debate it. This draft retained the definition of abortion as a crime but included a new exception that allowed abortions in cases of foetal anomaly.

Moving up to the 1990s two initiatives have been taken recently to revise the Penal Code. The first was originated by the administration of President Itamar Franco the predecessor to the present Executive and the second under the incumbent administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso who took office in 1995. Both involved the creation of a special committee subordinated to the Justice Ministry charged with proposing amendments to the Penal Code. The first committee did not complete its mission but maintained some contacts with segments of civil society including the women’s movement and drafted preliminary texts indicating an increase in the number of exceptions to the ban on abortion. The second committee set up in April 1995 has not resumed the work done by the first committee but has also received proposals from segments of civil society.

With regard to political parties their participation in the debate in Congress was negligible throughout the entire period analyzed. Only very recently did the issue of abortion appear on the political agenda of the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B) especially its congresswomen and the Workers Party (PT). Abortion is a highly divisive issue for this latter party however which is strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic Church. The degree of controversy provoked by the issue is illustrated by the decision to exclude the abortion question entirely from the PT’s election manifesto in 1994 when the party’s candidate Lula was considered a clear favourite for much of the campaign.

However it can be said that in the 1980s as redemocratization advanced and the struggle to decriminalize and/or legalize abortion intensified many parliamentarians belonging to progressive parties some of them women individually identified with the demands of the women’s movement. From the standpoint of the research project discussed here this demonstrates that the abortion debate reflects a political dimension of the social movement rather than a party political configuration. Past or future decisions on abortion by Congress – to maintain the law as it stands partially modify it or profoundly reformulate it – depend on the balance of forces among the various political and social groups which lobby or are active in Congress. The strongest political tension at present however is located in the following on one hand initiatives to decriminalize and/or legalize abortion by the organized civil society including the women’s movement and drafted preliminary texts indicating an increase in the number of exceptions to the ban on abortion. The second committee set up in April 1995 has not resumed the work done by the first committee but has also received proposals from segments of civil society.

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women’s movement and progressive parliamentarians allied with it and on the other the stance adopted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and evangelical churches to oppose legal abortion usually as a reaction to the former initiatives.

1995-96 the debate proceeds

When Congress reconvened in February 1995 the topic of abortion almost immediately became the object of bills including both ones from the previous legislative period which were brought up for debate again as well as a proposed constitutional amendment (PEC 25/95) as mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The debate on these bills intensified during the latter half of 1995 and continued albeit less intensively in 1996 an election year.

Five bills from the previous legislature continued before Congress and four new proposals were submitted. All nine were originated by the Chamber of Deputies and seven were favourable to allowing abortion. Of the two remaining bills one is explicitly against allowing abortion while the other takes an ambiguous stance on the issue. Six of the nine bills refer directly or indirectly to changes in the Penal Code. Two seek to decriminalize and/or legalize abortion fully or partially (in the latter case without incriminating pregnant women who have an abortion). They were submitted by Deputies Jose Genoino and Eduardo Jorge respectively. The other four are designed to increase the number of situations in which abortion is legal. Each addresses one or more specific cases authorizing abortion in the following situations when the pregnant woman is HIV-positive when pregnancy represents a health hazard and/or when grave and irreversible foetal anomalies are detected.

19 The second and third parts of this article are a revised and updated version of two sections from the study ‘The National Congress and the abortion issue in Brazil’ The work was published at the 9th Meeting of Population Studies in the first issue of the Cadernos do CIM and at the 1st Meeting of Researchers on Induced Abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean during the latter half of 1994 when such a foetal anomaly is detected and when the foetus is incapable of surviving due to a malformation incompatible with life or an incurable degenerative disease. The first two of these four were submitted by Eduardo Jorge and the latter two by Luiz Moreira and Marta Suplicy respectively. As one can observe, three of the bills in question were submitted by Deputy Eduardo Jorge in some cases jointly with Deputy Sandra Starling Jorge’s strategy in the current legislature has been to take a gradualistic approach submitting various bills focusing on specific situations in which abortion is to be permitted. He also submitted another bill to oblige the National Health Service to perform abortions permitted under the Penal Code. It is worth briefly commenting on this latter bill which was responsible for much of the abortion debate in 1995.

The rapporteur for this bill and most of the others being examined by the Social Security & Family Affairs Committee is Deputy Jandira Feghali who like Jorge is a progressive politician and a campaigner for women’s rights. Pressured by parliamentary rules and aware of the findings of an opinion survey conducted among members of Congress by CFEMEA indicating that one of the bills on abortion stood a strong chance of being passed, Feghali took measures to speed up the committee stage backed by segments of the women’s movement. The result was an intense debate at hearings of the Social Security & Family Affairs Committee which finally passed the bill by a narrow margin. This bill is to be discussed and voted on by the Constitution & Justice Committee. The first rapporteur was Deputy Helio Bicudo who identifies with the official position of the Catholic Church on abortion to the point of submitting an alternative bill to the Committee. However, Deputy Bicudo has moved to another Standing Committee and the current rapporteur is Zulaiê Cobra, a congresswoman who is sensitive to the ideas of the women’s movement. It is relevant to point out that the only bill explicitly opposed to abortion was...
submitted precisely when the debate in the Social Security & Family Affairs Committee was at its fiercest. Sponsored by Deputy Osmário Pereira also a supporter of the official Catholic position this bill states that voluntary interruption of pregnancy (and euthanasia) are heinous crimes against life violating article 5 of the federal Constitution. The bill considers article 128 of the Penal Code unconstitutional as it does any legislation creating exceptions that allow abortions (or euthanasia) or aimed at their legalization or decriminalization. The concerns were similar to those of the alternative bill sponsored by Deputy Helio Bicudo and Pereira’s bill ended up being withdrawn by the sponsoring deputy. The last bill to be mentioned is that of Deputy Wilson Leite Passos submitted in July 1996. It authorizes medical professionals to refuse to perform abortions under whatever pretext in both public and private health care institutions. Submitted to the Chamber of Deputies and referred to the Constitution & Justice Committee precisely now when this Committee is reviewing the previously mentioned bill obliging the National Health Service to treat the cases provided for under the Penal Code it would appear that the Leite Passos bill is a reaction to the one ensuring legal abortion. It is relevant to note that the project on legal abortion allows the individual physician to refuse to perform an abortion on the basis of personal objections while obliging the Health Service as a whole to comply with the law under any circumstances. Thus it can be seen that the political conflict over the issue is intense and it is no accident that this conflict manifested itself once again when the above mentioned bill to amend the constitution was submitted particularly when a special committee was set up to examine the bill. In the midst of a comprehensive review of the federal Constitution with many committees being set up to discuss important amendments on a variety of issues it is striking that groups advocating the right to life from the moment of conception had the political strength to set up a special committee to discuss the abortion issue.

However as stated in the title of this concluding section the debate proceeds. Following the creation of this special committee in October 1995 the opposing camps in the abortion debate firmly entrenched themselves on the battlefield and at once began lobbying to influence the choice of members to sit on the committee and expert witnesses to be called working hard to explain their viewpoints to the parliamentarians involved and publicizing their ideas in the media.

As mentioned previously the committee completed its work in the first half of 1996. The constitutional amendment (PEC 25/95) proposed by Deputy Severino Cavalcanti received an unfavorable opinion from rapporteur Deputy Armando Abílio it was subsequently voted down 9 to 2 by the Special Committee itself and later by the floor of the Chamber of Deputies with 351 against 33 in favor and 16 abstaining. The vote was conducted by Deputes Marta Suplicy and Jose Genoino campaigning against the amendment and the author of the bill in favor.

In fact it would be no easy matter to pass this proposed constitutional amendment. In addition to the political pressure brought to bear against it it would have required a three fifths majority to pass a difficult vote to reach quite apart from the fact that it is a radical proposal on a controversial issue. Furthermore few political parties in Brazil have a clear position on abortion and all three representatives of the Executive branch who gave witness before the special committee stated their opposition to the amendment. Rejection of bill PEC 25/95 prevented a legal measure from being incorporated into the Brazilian Constitution that would have ruled out the possibility of performing abortions in the two situations already provided for under the Penal Code and which would thus have had dire results for the health - indeed even the lives - of Brazilian women.

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women. From a political perspective, rejection of PEC 25/95 avoided constraints being placed on a democratic debate in Brazil over the issue of induced abortion. In fact, the debate will soon proceed in the National Congress focusing now on the bill concerning legal abortion which as mentioned previously is under study by the Constitution & Justice Committee of the Chamber of Deputies.

Such are the pitfalls of the political game. Although it may appear contradictory, recent developments in effect indicate a tendency for events in the political sphere to proceed by chain reaction. Intensification of the debate on abortion both in Congress and in other national and international fora has led to a conservative and fundamentalist religious backlash in Brazil. The latter position confronting an organized movement by groups taking a progressive stance on abortion has in turn triggered an even stronger response by progressives in defence of the Penal Code's provisions permitting abortion on which some existing health services are based. In denunciation of the grave public health hazard caused by the need to perform abortions in secret for dissemination of the idea that abortion is one of women's reproductive rights and publicizing the decisions taken on the abortion issue by the International Conferences on Population & Development and on Women.

It is opportune to recall in conclusion that Brazil unreservedly signed the documents produced at both of these Conferences the former recognizing abortion as a grave problem of public health and the latter recommending that signatory states consider the possibility of revising the laws that contain punitive measures against women who have illegal abortions.
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"She had it Coming!" the stigma of sexually transmitted HIV infection in women

For the past 15 years of the epidemic in Brazil, the sexual high risk categories for HIV/AIDS defined by the National Program for STD/AIDS for prevention programs refer to socially discriminated populations such as the female prostitute. On the other hand, statistics over the past six years indicate an important rise in cases of family women—the majority from the popular classes. This fact has not generated the same interest nor produced specific prevention measures. According to official discourse, the vulnerability of these women is due to their lack of social and personal resources. Once satisfied, the problem is solved. However, from the women's perspective, the value of the family and the moral feminine code of sexual passivity is what guarantees her dignity and self-respect as opposed to the woman of the street. In times of AIDS, these characteristics are reinforced to avoid discrimination to the point of ignoring safer sex at the cost of her life.

"Elle le Mérite!" le stigmate de l'infection sexuelle du SIDA chez les femmes

Au bout d'une decennie de la presence du SIDA au Bresil, la population cible du Programme National HIV/SIDA est toujours la même: l'homossexuel le bissexuel du sexe masculin, la prostituee et les drogues. Et cependant, le fait que l'on ait constate une nette augmentation des cas de SIDA chez les femmes au foyer, la plupart d'entre elles appartenant aux milieux populaires. Pour ces femmes, aucune mesure de prevention. L'article cherche a demontrer que la raison pour laquelle ces femmes ne sont pas prises en charge s'explique non pas du fait de leur vulnerabilite social mais pour des questions morales compte tenu de leur insertion familiale.

"Bien Merecido!" el estigma de la infección sexual de las mujeres a través del HIV/SIDA

Después de mas de una decada de la epidemia en Brasil, el Programa Nacional de DST/HIV/SIDA continua escogiendo a los homosexuales y los bisexuales masculinos la (el) prostituta(o) y los que usan drogas inyectables como grupos de riesgo. a pesar de que en los ultimos seis años ha habido un gran incremento de casos de SIDA entre las mujeres consideradas como dueñas de casa, la mayoria de los sectores populares, sin que se hayan desarrollado acciones preventivas de peso. El articulo plantea que la baja percepcion de riesgo que se atribuye a estas mujeres no proviene apenas de su vulnerabilidad social sino que se sustenta en factores morales que garantizan su insercion familiar y que se quieren preservar a todo costo a pesar del HIV/SIDA.
Motherhood and Social Links
The article discusses how mothers have been approached in social policies focused on families and points that it is necessary to recognize the social nature of the mother child relationship. It is based on data about daily life organization in different types of families with teenagers and children especially relating the co residence and contribution of parents and children.

Maternité et Rapport Social
La centralité de la figure maternelle dans les politiques sociales adresses à la famille et la reconnaissance nécessaire de la nature sociale de la relation mere enfant sont les themes de cet article. Ils appuie sur des données concernant l'organisation quotidienne des différents types de famille où sont présents adolescents et enfants et traite aussi des rapports de convivialité entre parents et enfants.

Maternidad y Vínculo Social
El artículo discute la centralidad de la figura materna en las políticas sociales direccionadas a la familia y la necesidad de reconocer la naturaleza social del vínculo madre-hijo. Se fundamenta en datos sobre la organización cotidiana en diferentes tipos de familia con niños y adolescentes especialmente en lo que se refiere a la co habitación, contribución y convivencia de madres y padres con sus hijos.
A Farmer's Wife in France

Based on a research done on a village of French Alpes it could be suggested some theoretical questions about the familiar character of little agricultural production and the specific situation of woman. It was observed that changes occurred in the French rural society by the process of technological and social modernization were seen as responsible by the transformation of social relationship among man and woman. This study talks over the limit of this change, the continuity and breaks in the values system that guide the social relations of gendre in the context of family agriculture.

Épouse D'Agriculteur en France

En s'appuyant sur une recherche réalisée dans un village des Alpes françaises sont suggérées quelques questions théoriques concernant le caractère familiale de l'exploitation agricole et la situation de la femme. La recherche a démontré que les changements provoqués dans la société rurale française par la modernisation technologique et sociale sont vus comme cause des transformations des rapports sociaux de genre. Cet étude discute les limites de tel changement les continuités et les ruptures dans les systèmes de valeurs qui orientent les rapports entre hommes et femmes notamment dans les exploitations agricoles familiales.

Esposa de Agricultor en Francia

Basandose en una pesquisa llevada a cabo en una aldea de los Alpes franceses se sugieren algunas cuestiones teóricas acerca del carácter familiar de la pequeña producción agrícola y sobre la situación de la mujer. La investigación demostró que los cambios provocados por la modernización tecnológica y social de la sociedad rural francesa son vistos como los causantes de las transformaciones en las relaciones de género. Este artículo discute los límites de tales cambios la continuidad y las rupturas en el sistema de valores que orienta las relaciones entre hombres y mujeres en el campo sobre todo cuando ocurren en el contexto de la agricultura familiar.
Recuperating Methis  What has Become of this Knowledge?
The aim of this essay is to recover from oblivion women's achievements in scientific and technical domains from ancient times to Renaissance. We take into consideration the social, political, and economic context that characterize the different historical periods emphasizing the influence of religious authorities and other male conspicuous representatives of the intellectual milieu in preventing or restraining women's access to education to science or medicine. We point out nevertheless the special circumstances in which women managed to overcome many such obstructions and were able to learn to teach, to practice science and medicine, and to publish treatises that in some cases have not survived. The contributions of such outstanding women are treated in some detail as well as those of numerous anonymous women practitioners in several technical fields and medicine.

Récupérer Methis  Qu'a-t-on Fait de ce Savoir?
Cet essai a pour but la mise en evidence de la contribution des femmes aux realisations de la science et des techniques depuis l'antiquite jusqu'a la Rennaissance. A cet effet on a pris en consideration le contexte social, politique et economique de chaque periode historique. Nous mettons l'accent sur l'influence exercee par les autorites religieuses et intellectuelles qui preconisent des mesures restrictives afin de limiter ou empêcher l'acces des femmes a l'education et a l'etude des sciences et de la medicine. Neanmoins dans quelques occasions et malgre bien des contraintes les femmes arriverent a surmonter ces barrières et réussirent a réaliser des études à enseigner et de faire des recherches et a publier des traités dont plusieurs disparurent. Nous accordons une importance particulière a ces femmes sans pour autant oublier la contribution a la medicine et a d'autres connaissances par des praticiennes anonymes.

Rescatando Methis  Qué Sucedió con ese Saber?
Este ensayo tiene por objeto rescatar del olvido la contribución de las mujeres a la ciencia y a la técnica desde la antigüedad hasta el Renacimiento. Hemos tomado en consideración el contexto social, político y económico de cada período histórico haciendo hincapié en la influencia de autoridades religiosas e intelectuales que preconizaban medidas restrictivas para limitar o impedir el acceso de las mujeres a la educación y especialmente al estudio de la ciencia y de la medicina. Sin embargo, a pesar de los obstáculos, algunas mujeres lograron realizar estudios enseñar dedicarse a la ciencia y escribir obras que aunque perdidas han quedado registradas. Detallamos algunas de las contribuciones de esas mujeres excepcionales destacando además la participación significativa de la masa anonima de mujeres en diversas técnicas y en la medicina.
The Abortion Issue in Brazil: a study of the debate in Congress

This article focuses on the political debate and decision-making process pertaining to the abortion issue in the Brazilian Congress, attempting to identify the presence of the Executive Branch and in particular the pressure exerted by political and social groups in this process. The article analyzes the debate on the issue from the moment it first emerged in the legislature beginning in 1946 until the present, highlighting the more recent discussion. The study examines documents from the House of Representatives and National Senate, particularly bills on abortion. Finally, the author points out that with regard to this issue, the interests of the Catholic Church, segments of the medical profession, the feminist movement, and Evangelical churches are reflected in the National Congress, by order of entry into the discussion.

Avortement au Brésil: le débat au Parlement

Cet article s'intéresse au processus politique entamé par le débat sur l'avortement au Congrès. Il cherche à identifier comment se sont manifestés à ce sujet le pouvoir exécutif et surtout les groupes de pression politiques et sociaux. L'auteur refait la trajectoire de ce débat depuis 1946 jusqu'aux temps présents. Elle analyse des documents officiels de la Chambre des Députés et du Sénat, en particulier les projets de loi. Les positions en jeu sont celles de l'Église Catholique, de certains groupes de médecins, du mouvement féministe et des églises évangéliques.

El Aborto en Brasil: su debate en el Congreso

En este artículo se focaliza el proceso político de discusión y decisión en relación a la cuestión del aborto en el Congreso Nacional, buscando percibir la presencia del Poder Ejecutivo y principalmente la presión de los grupos políticos y sociales en este proceso. El debate sobre el tema es analizado desde que este se inició en la legislación a comienzos de 1946 hasta los días de hoy, privilegiando la discusión más reciente. Se examinan los documentos parlamentarios de la Cámara de Diputados y del Senado Federal sobre todo los proyectos de ley. Finalmente, se constata que en relación a esta materia, los intereses de la Iglesia Católica, de segmentos de la categoría médica, del movimiento feminista y de las iglesias evangélicas se ven reflejados en el Congreso Nacional, en la misma orden en que entran en esta discusión.
Governabilidade, Democracia e Reforma do Estado Os Desafios da Construção de uma Nova Ordem no Brasil do Anos 90
Eli Diniz

Corporativismo, Pluralismo e Conflito Distributivo no Brasil
Bruno P W Reis

Microfundamentos do Clientelismo Político no Brasil 1959-1963
Fabiano Guilherme M Santos

Partidos Políticos na Câmara dos Deputados 1989-1994
Fernando Limongi e Argelina Cheibub Figueiredo

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Herbert S Klein

“Novo” Sindicálismo e Democracia Sindical Um Teste e uma Crítica do Modelo Eleitoral
Jorge Ventura de Morais

Cidadania Por Que Não? Estado e Sociedade no Brasil à Luz de um Discurso Religioso Afro-Brasileiro
Rita Laura Segato
ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

295 "She had it Coming" the stigma of sexually transmitted HIV infection in women
Elle le Mente le stigmate de l'infection sexuelle par le SIDA chez les femmes
Bien Merecido el estigma de la infeccion sexual de las mujeres a traves del HIV/SIDA
CARMEN DORA GUIMARÃES

319 Motherhood and Social Links
Maternite et Rapport Social
Maternidad y Vinculo Social
MARIA LUCIA MIRANDA AFONSO
CRISTINA ALMEIDA CUNHA FILGUEIRAS

338 A Farmer's Wife in France
Epouse D Agriculteur en France
Esposa de Agricultor en Francia
MARIA JOSE CARNEIRO

355 Recuperating Methis What has Become of this Knowledge?
Recuperer Methis Qu'a-t-on Fait de ce Savoir?
Rescatando Methis Que Sucedió con ese Saber?
ADELINA PINHEIRO SANTOS
LUCIA TOSI

381 The Abortion Issue in Brazil a study of the debate in Congress
Abortion au Bresil le debat au Parlement
El Aborto en Brasil su debate en el Congreso
MARIA ISABEL BALTAR DA ROCHA

402 POINT OF VIEW/POINT DE VUE/PUNTO DE VISTA
Masks and Postscripts - women's strategy in the indigenous rebellion in Chiapas
Masques et Post-Scriptum - strategies feminines chez les Chiapas
Mascaras y Postdatas - estrategia femenina en la rebelion indigena de Chiapas
MARISA BELAUSTEGUIGOITIA RIOUS

ANO 4 524 2° SEMESTRE 96
DOSSIER ON PUBLIC POLICIES AND POVERTY /
DOSSIER POLITIQUES PUBLIQUES ET PAUVRÉTÉ /
DOSSIER POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS Y POBREZA

418 Presentation/Presentation/Presentacion
LENA LAVINAS

420 Subsidies for an Analysis of Gender Among Retired Individuals and Pensioners for a new concept of social protection
Réflexions Autour des Questions de Genre Posées par la Retraite pour un nouveau concept de protection sociale
Subsidios para un Analisis de Genero entre Jubilados y Pensionistas a favor de un nuevo concepto de proteccion social
VIRGINIA BOTELHO

447 Gender and Labor Legislation in Brazil some current issues
Genre et Legislation du Travail au Bresil questions d'actualite
Genero y Legislacion Laboral en Brasil algunas cuestiones actuales
LEILA DE ANDRADE LINHARES BARSTED

464 Women in the Universe of Poverty the Brazilian case
Les Femmes dans l'Univers des Pauvres le cas brésilien
Las Mujeres en el Universo de la Pobreza el caso brasileño
LENA LAVINAS

480 Income Generation Projects Among Low-Income Women
Projets Visant la Creation de Revenus chez les Femmes Pauvres
Proyectos para Generar Ingresos Atendiendo a Mujeres con Bajos Ingresos
ALICE ANGEL DE PAIVA ABREU
ANGELA JORGE
BILA SORJ

505 The Abortion Issue in Brazil a study of the debate in Congress
Avortement au Bresil le debat au Parlement
El Abortion en Brasil su debate en el Congreso
MARIA ISABEL BALTAR DA ROCHA

518 ABSTRACTS/RÉSUMÉS/RESUMENES

524 CONTENTS/SOMMAIRE/CONTENIDOS
BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTRE-RENDUS/RESEÑAS

529 Jenny Marx victim of the devil?
Jenny Marx: victime du diable?
Jenny Marx: victima del diablo?
MARCELO RIDENTI

532 Sacredness of Life and Abortion irreconcilable ideas?
Le Sacre de la Vie et L Avortement: idees (in)conciliables?
La Sacralidad de la Vida y el Aborto: ideas (i)reconciliables?
SILVIA PIMENTEL

538 Recognizing our Other in the Red-Light District
Quand on la Reconnaît l'Autre, dans le Quartier Rouge
Reconociendo a Nuestra Otra en la Zona de los Faroles Rojos
SANDRA AZERÊDO

542 Rebel and Conformist Tendencies
Tendances Revoltees et Conformistes
Tendencias Rebeldes y Conformismo
MIRIAM LIFCHITZ MOREIRA LEITE

543 Subjectivity as a form of Education
Une Education en Faveur de la Subjectivite
Educacion para la Subjetividad
MARIA JOSE DE LIMA

545 Between Athena and Arachne
Entre Athene et Arachne
Entre Atenas y Aracne
LIA ZANOTTA MACHADO

548 Brazilian Society and the Organization of Subjectivity
La Societe Bresilienne et l'Organisation de la Subjectivite
La Sociedad Brasileña y la Organizacion de la Subjetividad
MIRIAN GOLDENBERG

549 The Families of Working and Poor People
La Famille des Travailleurs et des Pauvres
La Familia de los Trabajadores y de los Pobres
SIMONI LAHUD GUEDES

552 Accommodation and More-of-the-same in School Books
Accomodation et Repetition du Livre Didactique
Acomodacion y Marasmo del Libro Didactico
LIZETE CASTRO PEREIRA NUNES

559 AGENDA

562 CONTRIBUTORS/COLLABORATEURS/COLOBRADORES
A geografia do voto em São Paulo — Carlos Alberto Marques Novaes

A sociedade ação pelo valor e a relação entre os sexos — Roswatha Scholz

A Europa do futuro — Perry Anderson

Evitar a polícia — Angélo Panchanco

Capitalismo turbulento — Edward Luttwak

Relação entre conservação e serviço — Regina Prandi

Reestruturação, no ponto de vista e do trabalho — Marcia de Paula Leite

Entre a negra e a mata virgem — Vinícius Dantas

Gonzalves de Malação e a historiografia do Império — Pedro Puntoni

EMPREGO E DESEMPREGO NO BRASIL

Debat com Claudio Salm, Jose Maria Camillo, Roberto Moch

Pechim, Paulo Nogueira Brito Jr e Paul Singer

DOSSIE CIDADES

As cidades como atores políticos — Manuel Castells e Jordi Botja

Rio de Janeiro metrópole perdida — Luis Carlos de Queiroz Ribeiro

Desvio de São Paulo — Aldaiza Sposati

A gestão petista de Porto Alegre — Luís Eduardo Utzig

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Poeira e estrelas de Cristina Menezes por Heloísa Buarque de Almeida

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