



**LIBERALS, RADICALS, AND  
WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP IN CHILE, 1872–1930**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes women's organizations in the anticlerical—and middle- to upper-class—segment of Chilean society from the late nineteenth century to 1930. It focuses on their leaders' positions regarding women's rights, especially the suffrage. The feminist organizations within the anticlerical segment developed later than the Catholic ones and they had less contact with women in the popular sectors. These organizations had varying degrees of anticlericalism. Some of their members were free thinkers, a few were Protestant, and many of them were Catholics who were critical of the clergy's influence in society and politics. This paper shows that, during the period studied here, the anticlerical leaders, both men and women, were opposed to granting women full suffrage rights. They argued that, before voting, women should be given their civil rights and access to secular education under state auspices. However, even after the Civil Code had been partially modified and the number of women with secular secondary education had become roughly equal to that of men in the mid 1920s, anticlerical leaders still only supported the vote for women in municipal elections. By enfranchising women only for local elections, anticlerical leaders—Liberals and Radicals—sought to 'educate' women politically while preventing them from tipping the balance of forces benefiting the Conservative Party in legislative and presidential elections. Catholic-Conservatives had been more inclusive of women in education, social life, and politics since the mid-nineteenth century, and for this reason they had a greater capacity to appeal for women's votes.

## **RESUMEN**

Este trabajo examina las organizaciones del sector anticlerical de clase media y alta de la sociedad chilena desde fines del siglo XIX hasta 1930. Enfatiza las posiciones que asumieron respecto a los derechos de la mujer, en especial al sufragio. Las organizaciones feministas del sector anticlerical se desarrollaron más tardíamente que las católicas y tenían menos contacto con mujeres de los sectores populares. Estas organizaciones variaban en cuanto a la intensidad de su anticlericalismo. Algunas de sus miembros y simpatizantes eran libre pensadoras o protestantes, aunque muchas eran católicas que criticaban la influencia del clero en la sociedad y en la política. Este trabajo muestra que, durante el período estudiado, los líderes anticlericales, tanto hombres como mujeres, se oponían a que las mujeres obtuvieran el sufragio pleno. Argüían que antes de obtener el derecho a voto, las mujeres debían gozar de derechos civiles y tener acceso a una educación secular auspiciada por el Estado. Sin embargo, aún después de que el Código Civil había sido parcialmente modificado y que la educación secundaria secular y estatal de las mujeres había alcanzado niveles semejantes al de los hombres a mediados de 1920, los líderes anticlericales sólo apoyaron el voto femenino a nivel municipal. Con la extensión del sufragio femenino sólo para las elecciones locales, los líderes anticlericales pretendían 'educar' políticamente a las mujeres sin correr el riesgo que ellas alteraran el equilibrio electoral en beneficio del Partido Conservador en las elecciones presidenciales y parlamentarias. El sector Católico-Conservador había incluido mucho más a las mujeres en la educación, vida social y política desde mediados del siglo XIX, y por esta razón tenía una mayor capacidad para atraer el voto femenino a sus candidaturas.

## Introduction

When the Chilean Senate began discussion in 1883 on a law proposed by the anticlerical government of Domingo Santa María (1881–86) instituting civil marriage as the only valid one for legal purposes, the Conservatives presented a petition signed by 17,236 women opposing the passage of the law. The Liberal Minister of Justice Aniceto Vergara Albano, who was defending the bill, revealed a dismissive attitude toward women’s opinions by insisting that “seventeen thousand signatures of women out of two million inhabitants in the Republic, *seems to me to be a very small thing which does not need to be taken into account.*”<sup>1</sup> Conservative Senator Melchor Concha y Toro then challenged him to present just “the signatures of one hundred women who ask for the approval of this law bill.”<sup>2</sup> The minister responded that “if somebody should intend to collect signatures [in favor of the law] not only one hundred or one thousand, but seventeen thousand would be presented. *But the fact is that nobody has the intention of taking on this task,* which would, however, be just as easy as it has been difficult to obtain those which have been presented.”<sup>3</sup> This statement showed that the anticlerical forces of the time had made no effort to involve women in an issue of central importance to couples and to family life.

Could Minister Vergara have obtained the 17,000 signatures in favor of the law that he claimed would be easy to collect? The notion that the Conservative Party had a ‘feminine reserve,’ to use the expression of Liberal Deputy Isidoro Errázuriz, was already well established among political leaders by the mid 1880s, and the Conservatives did resort to it, as this case shows, for political purposes.<sup>4</sup> In a letter dated 3 July 1865 the then Minister Santa María already grouped ‘clerics and women’ as opponents of change.<sup>5</sup> However, there is no indication in the debates of

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<sup>1</sup> *Cámara de Senadores*, Sesión 19<sup>a</sup>, Extraordinaria, 25 December 1883 (Santiago: Imprenta Nacional, 1883), 326; the italics are mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Cámara de Senadores*, Sesión 19<sup>a</sup>, Extraordinaria, 25 December 1883, 326.

<sup>3</sup> *Cámara de Senadores*, Sesión 19<sup>a</sup>, Extraordinaria, 25 December 1883, 326.

<sup>4</sup> See Ricardo Donoso, *Las ideas políticas en Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1967), 161, who quotes Errázuriz’s expression.

<sup>5</sup> The letter was written to José Victorino Lastarria. After commenting on the manner in which the law interpreting article 5 of the Constitution was passed—a law that permitted religious dissidents to worship in private—Santa María noted: “the clergy and women have done a thousand inanities, but in the end everything has passed, although you cannot imagine how excruciatingly difficult it

the time that the anticlerical parties had a similarly large 'reserve' of women that they could mobilize quickly and efficiently in support of their positions.

The one instance in which anticlerical women signed a public declaration was during the debate in 1874 of the law abolishing the ecclesiastical 'immunity' (*fuero*). At that point the anticlerical *El Ferrocarril* published signatures of 200 women, thereby responding to an initiative of the Catholic newspaper *El Estandarte* which had published 185 women's signatures.<sup>6</sup> It would seem, therefore, that the anticlerical leaders in 1883 did not attempt to meet the Conservative's challenge with women's signatures when these were numbered in the thousands rather than in the low hundreds. The anticlerical parties and organizations had a weak link to women and this feature would not change much over the next decades. As late as 1934 Manuel Rivas Vicuña, a leading figure in the Liberal Party, deplored the fact that liberalism had neither "popular *nor feminine* elements" (*ni elementos populares ni femeninos*).<sup>7</sup>

What could account for this difference between the Catholic-Conservatives, on the one hand, and the Radicals and Liberals, on the other? A plausible explanation is that social and political life in the secular and anticlerical world was structured around organizations that excluded women much more than in the Catholic-Conservative one. The key associations of the anticlerical groups were the political party clubs, the Masonic lodges, and the firemen's associations. The latter were the main channel for organizing their philanthropic activities. Cristián Gazmuri's comprehensive study of the mid-nineteenth-century origins of these organizations noted that they created an exclusively 'masculine' form of 'sociability', with a highly structured and hierarchical network that reached even the small towns throughout the country.<sup>8</sup> Women could not participate in any of these, except as organizers of banquets and other social functions.

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has been..." in "Cómo se dictó la ley interpretativa del antiguo artículo 5 de la Constitución," *Revista Chilena*, vol. 1, no. 1 (April 1917), 95.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of Catholic women's political participation since the mid-nineteenth century in Chile, see my "Catholicism, Anticlericalism, and the Quest for Women's Suffrage in Chile," Kellogg Institute Working Paper Series, #214, December 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Orígenes y transformaciones del sistema de partidos en Chile," *Estudios Públicos*, no. 58 (fall 1995), 42. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Cristián Gazmuri, *El "48" chileno. Iguatarios, reformistas radicales, masones y bomberos* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1992), 217. This author asserts that popular sectors were also excluded from this network. See also Gonzalo Vial Correa, *Historia de Chile (1891-1973)*, vol. 1, tome 1: *La sociedad chilena en el cambio de siglo (1891-1920)* (Santiago: Editorial Santillana del Pacífico, 1981), 60-63, for a description of Chilean masons.

Women of the anticlerical circles did participate in and organize occasional literary and political *tertulias*, the evening discussion groups that took place in private homes.<sup>9</sup> Conservative women also played these roles too, but they also participated with men in Church-related beneficence activities as well as Church worship. The plenary sessions of the Women's League's Marian Congress of 1918 were attended by many men, as can be seen in a picture published in the Congress's book of proceedings.<sup>10</sup> The equivalent to religious ceremonies among anticlerical leaders were the Masonic rituals, but these excluded women. Thus, the division between masculine and feminine spheres was much more pronounced within anticlerical groups than within those related to the Church. Given this greater separation between the genders in the anticlerical segment of Chilean society, women's organizations were important means to fill the void in which they found themselves.

This paper discusses the development of women's organizations and their leaders in the anticlerical—and middle- to upper-class—segment of Chilean society up to 1930. It focuses particularly on their positions regarding women's rights, especially the suffrage. The feminist organizations within the laic or anticlerical segment varied considerably. Their main common characteristic was that their leadership was in the hands of women who did not seek guidance from the Church hierarchy and resisted its considerable influence among women. They were willing to discuss measures, particularly the benefits of a divorce law, that the Church and the Conservatives opposed as a matter of dogma. While these organizations had varying degrees of anticlericalism, not all of their members were free thinkers. Many of them were in fact Catholic while a few were Protestant. Women's organizations of this segment of Chilean society were slower to develop in the nineteenth century than the Catholic ones and they had less contact with women in the popular sectors because they had hardly any beneficence activities and no unions of women workers.

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<sup>9</sup> For descriptions of these evening discussions and the role of women in them, see Lieut. J.M. Gilliss, *The US Naval Astronomical Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere during the years 1849-'50-'51-'52*, vol. 1 (Washington: A.O.P. Nicholson, Printer, 1854), 143–44; and Martina Barros de Orrego, *Recuerdos de mi vida* (Santiago: Editorial Orbe, 1942), 60–61, 71, 102–3, 194–97, 246–47.

<sup>10</sup> *Relaciones y documentos del Congreso Mariano Femenino* (Santiago: Escuela Tip. "La Gratitude Nacional," 1918), 52.

The first organization for women without Church links was created in Santiago by Lucrecia Undurraga v. de Somarriva in 1877. It was followed by the Mercedes Marín del Solar Academy founded in 1897 in Curicó, although further research may show that there were other organizations in the intervening years as well. Led entirely by women, both of them published a periodical entitled *La Mujer* that had women correspondents in important cities throughout the country. The Academy also had close ties to women's state-run secondary schools, as will be noted below. Subsequently in 1915 Amanda Labarca, the most prominent woman leader linked to the Radical party, formed a Reading Club (*Círculo de Lectura*) in Santiago. It inspired Delia Matte de Izquierdo to organize the Ladies' Club (*Club de Señoras*) that same year, an organization of mainly upper-class Liberal women that mirrored the Union Club (*Club de la Unión*), the exclusive club of Santiago's wealthy men. As Gonzalo Vial notes, the Club's "very name was a challenge, because it suggested a counterpart to the exclusive male clubs, like the Union one."<sup>11</sup> All these organizations were mainly devoted to cultural and literary discussions, although they had sessions on current affairs, feminism, and women's rights, and they examined the progress of women's suffrage in leading countries.

Analysts of Chilean history and society have focused on the anticlerical feminist leaders as the ones who presented the most 'progressive' views on women's issues. This may have been the case regarding attitudes toward divorce and contraception, although the anticlerical parties did not change the legislation on these matters despite their power to do so. However, regarding other issues, such as reforming the Civil Code to enhance married and widowed women's legal status and role in family life or demands for equal pay for equal work, the anticlerical and the Conservative feminist leaders took very similar positions. Both were also in favor of women's education, although anticlericals sought to develop state-run education whereas the Conservatives preferred Church schools. (Church schools for women began operating in the 1820s, and—as will be noted below—all women's secondary education was left in the Church's hands until the 1870s.)

The main difference between the anticlerical and the Church-related feminists leaders, both women and men, had to do with voting rights for women. Those most closely associated with the anticlerical parties were unwilling to support women's suffrage on equal terms with men until the 1940s, while a Conservative leader,

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<sup>11</sup> Vial, *Historia de Chile (1891–1973)*, op. cit. n. 8, 281.

Abdón Cifuentes, first proposed this measure in 1865 and the party presented the first women's suffrage bill in 1917. Relevant to this difference is the fact that the Conservatives were seen as benefiting politically from women's enfranchisement.

Opponents of women's suffrage in Chile did little to explain their opposition to it. The anticlerical Congress of 1881–84, which decided to add women to the categories of people who could not vote, did not even debate the matter. The clearest statement by an anticlerical leader explaining his opposition to women's enfranchisement is that of José Maza Fernández in his 1913 book *Sistema de sufragio i cuestión electoral*.<sup>12</sup> Although Maza recognized that “a great number of women may have better intellectual and moral preparation than many men,” he questioned whether that was enough justification (*¿basta eso sólo?*) to grant them voting rights. The suffrage, he argued, brings with it “countless obligations that a citizen cannot avoid (*desprenderse*) because they are inseparable from that political right.” For this reason, quoting Herbert Spencer, he noted “the day in which women obtain equal political rights without submitting themselves to identical obligations, their position would be of superiority and not of equality.” Moreover, he emphasized that women's roles precluded their participation in public affairs, for which only men were properly suited. In his words, “woman in society, in the home, and in the family, principally, has most important functions to perform in which she cannot be replaced by man, the same way that he cannot be replaced by her in those which are proper to his sex or his constitution.” And, “the practice of politics as it is exercised in all the countries of the globe, forces compromises with certain degrading behavior which the essentially delicate character of a woman could not tolerate without degradation... Should a woman compete under such circumstances?” But if she does, Maza added, would this not be “shameful for her condition, demoralizing for society and disorganizing of the family and the home?” Maza concluded with his vision of a sharp separation between genders by stating that “the pretense of mutually invading each other's functions, under the pretext of inequality, is as if oxygen pretended to be hydrogen!”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> José Maza, *Sistemas de sufragio i cuestión electoral* (Santiago: Imprenta La Ilustración, 1913), second edition. Maza dedicated this book to the Law Students's Union and to the Liberal Center (Centro de Estudiantes de Derecho and the Centro Liberal). Although Maza was a young man at the time of this publication, he was to become one of the most prominent Liberal politicians of the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>13</sup> Maza, *Sistemas*, op. cit. n. 12, 80–84.

As women's suffrage was adopted in important countries after the First World War, most anticlerical leaders expressed willingness to support it in principle. However, they insisted that before granting it the majority of women had to be educated in a secular environment and that their civil status had to be changed in order to ensure their independence. But progress on these issues was very slow. State-run secondary education for women only began in 1891, and the first proposal to change the Civil Code, presented by the Liberal deputy Julio Zegers in 1877, never came out of a legislative committee. In spite of the anticlerical majorities in the legislatures and a succession of Liberal Party presidents, the Civil Code was only slightly amended in 1925 with a decree-law enacted by José Maza as Minister of a provisional government. The decree gave the mother the right to exercise *patria potestad* (i.e., control over the property of her children and the ability to act in their names in all contractual and legal matters) in the event of her husband's death or incapacity; it also allowed married women to keep the income generated by their own work, and it entitled all women to act as witnesses.<sup>14</sup> And yet, even after these changes and after state-run schools finally educated as many girls as boys by the 1920s, anticlerical leaders were only willing to grant women suffrage rights for municipal, not national, elections.

Feminists<sup>15</sup> most closely linked to the anticlerical parties shared the party leaders' reluctance to grant women the vote, because they feared the electoral effects of enfranchising women. Thus, they did not develop a 'radical feminism' in Evans's sense.<sup>16</sup> While they did not oppose women's suffrage in principle, they preferred to increase the secularization of women's education while proceeding gradually toward their full enfranchisement. In the anticlerical feminist view a complete fulfillment of feminist goals could not be obtained in a society dominated by the Church hierarchy. The importance of this notion was highlighted by Amanda Labarca when she summed up her life's work as an effort to "organize women around

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<sup>14</sup> See Elena Caffarena, "La situación jurídica de la mujer chilena" in *Actividades Femeninas* (Santiago: Imprenta La Ilustración, 1928), 75–84, for a full and authoritative discussion on the status of women before the law after the 1925 decree.

<sup>15</sup> For the definition of feminism used, see Maza Valenzuela, "Catholicism, Anticlericalism, and the Quest," op. cit. n. 6, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).



activities directed by themselves, separating them insofar as possible from ecclesiastical influences.”<sup>17</sup>

Further research may uncover as yet unknown secular or anticlerical women’s voices during the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Presently it seems that Martina Barros de Orrego was the first feminist writer of this segment of Chilean politics. She translated John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* in 1872 and published it with an extensive prologue in the *Revista de Santiago*.<sup>19</sup> Her arguments are important because they were repeated with varying emphasis by subsequent anticlerical feminists. She focused on the importance of advancing women’s education in a secular environment, and while she did not clearly advocate women’s enfranchisement, she did forcefully rebut all arguments given against it.

### **An Early Feminist Voice: Martina Barros (Borgoño) de Orrego**

Martina Barros Borgoño, who was born in 1850, was educated by a Protestant British woman until age 11, and subsequently by her uncle, the Liberal educator, historian and political figure Diego Barros Arana.<sup>20</sup> As a regular participant in Barros Arana’s *tertulia*, which she helped organize, she met all the leading Liberal and Radical intellectuals and politicians of the time. In her early twenties she contributed translations to the *Revista de Santiago*, a literary and political affairs journal of Liberal intellectuals. Guillermo Matta, a Radical deputy, lent her a copy of Mill’s book in which she took a great interest. Her soon to be husband, Augusto Orrego, who was an editor of the *Revista de Santiago*, encouraged her to translate it

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<sup>17</sup> Georgina Durand, *Mis entrevistas* (Santiago: Editorial Nascimento, 1943), 226.

<sup>18</sup> Teresa Pereira, “La mujer en el siglo XIX” in Valeria Maino et al., *Tres ensayos sobre la mujer chilena* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1978), 133–41, discusses women writers in the nineteenth century. Most were apparently very religious. An exception is Carmen Arriagada (1807–1900) who confessed in a letter dated 27 July 1844 that she was ‘less than devout’ (*no soy muy creyente*) and that she held liberal political views. However, later in life, after the death of her husband and of her beloved friend Mauricio Rugendas, she took her vows as a Franciscan sister. See Oscar Pinochet de la Barra, *Carmen Arriagada. Cartas de una mujer apasionada* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1990), specially 9–15.

<sup>19</sup> Martina Barros Borgoño, “Prólogo” in *La Revista de Santiago*, II (1872–73), 123–24.

<sup>20</sup> Barros’s early education with a Ms. Whitelock, who founded a school soon after her arrival in Chile 1856, led her to a life-long admiration of England. For details of her education and early life, see Barros, *Recuerdos de mi vida*, op. cit. n. 9, 54–69. Barros used her married name on all her writings after 1872.

for serial publication in the journal. The use of language in the prologue was almost exclusively, as Barros noted later, that of Orrego, although the ideas were hers.<sup>21</sup>

The prologue and translation caused considerable commotion. As Barros recalled when she was nearly 85 years old in an interview with *Zig-Zag*, “many women looked at me with horror (*espanto*) given the ideas of independence I expressed in a prologue to that translation, and young women, my peers (*compañeras*), would run away from me.”<sup>22</sup> However, she received letters of congratulations from two leading Liberal politicians, Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna and Miguel Luis Amunátegui for her work.<sup>23</sup>

The prologue addressed in the final section the question of women’s suffrage in Chile. It noted that women were not demanding ‘political rights’ but rather that “what they desire, what they need are their social rights...”<sup>24</sup> In Barros’s view “one can recognize the latter without granting the others.”<sup>25</sup> The fact that she did not demand voting rights for women is noteworthy because she was writing seven years after Abdón Cifuentes had publicly advocated them. Moreover, she was writing a prologue for a book that called for women’s voting rights on equal terms with men’s (although equally restricted, in fact).<sup>26</sup> Barros argued against the idea that women had to be given all their rights at the same time. The suggestion that women’s rights could be granted through a step-by-step procedure of gradual reforms became one that the anticlerical leaders would subsequently favor.

Although the prologue did not call for votes for women, it did repudiate the arguments made to deny them this right. Such arguments “appeal to sophistries that hurt women without convincing them. If the intention is to deny women those rights because it is believed that they are incapable of exercising them, if they are told that neither by reason of their education nor by their intelligence can they claim the right to elect the representatives and political leaders of their country, behind that condescending notion they will see an injustice and inconsequence, and they will feel hurt without being convinced... If those rights are denied to women because they

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<sup>21</sup> Barros, *Recuerdos*, op. cit. n. 9, 126–27.

<sup>22</sup> “Recuerdos de Don Diego Barros Arana,” *Zig-Zag*, Santiago, 12 May 1935. See also Barros, *Recuerdos*, op. cit. n. 9, 126–27.

<sup>23</sup> Barros, *Recuerdos*, 127.

<sup>24</sup> Barros, “Prólogo,” op. cit. n. 19, 124.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty with The Subjection of Women and Chapters on Socialism*, edited by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 168–69.

are said to only be an unconscious instrument of an alien will, in this supposed reason women will see an offense and a lack of logic. If their opinion is always the echo of a man's, what difference does it make if they express it? It would be the same as if men voted twice, and what is wrong with that? The true reason for this injustice...is the fear...of seeing women supporting ideas that are disagreeable to these sophists but to whose hold women have been abandoned."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Barros rejected the arguments of anticlerical leaders for denying women the vote, something that anticlerical feminists would continue to do over the next decades. She claimed that such arguments were merely a cover for their main concern, which was that women would vote differently from men given the greater proximity of their views to the positions of the Church.

It is clear from reading the Prologue that Barros thought that women were closer to the Church than men because they did not have the necessary means to broaden their horizons. "All doors" were closed to women "except those of marriage or of the convent," those to becoming "a wife or a nun."<sup>28</sup> Hence, Barros argued that women should be given more options in life in order to have the possibility of developing their talents in other directions. She agreed with Mill's emphasis on the need to provide women with greater educational opportunities. She noted that "women should be given the same freedom that men have, to use their faculties in the way that is most fitting to them, that is, give women the freedom of instruction and the freedom to make use of their knowledge."<sup>29</sup> This would allow women 'the liberty to choose,' leaving motherhood or an ecclesiastical vocation only to those who opt for them. Barros's Prologue was the first to express a demand for women's education as a means of enabling their independence from the Church, which became a central element of the anticlerical political leaders' discourse from then on.

In spite of Barros's refutation of the arguments used to deny women their voting rights, it is not clear which were in her view the proper reasons for not granting them. Given this omission, Barros may have been more prosuffrage than she was willing to argue with her male peers at the time. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Barros was profoundly disappointed with the explicit denial of women's

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<sup>27</sup> Barros, "Prólogo," op. cit. n. 19, 123–24.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 121.

voting rights in the 1884 electoral law. She seemed to have attended the congressional discussions of the electoral reform bill, for she noted that “you can imagine my disappointment to hear the orator who had moved us with his interest for our civil rights declare that the concession of our right to vote was inopportune. Inopportune, why?”<sup>30</sup> The speaker she referred to was Julio Zegers, the Liberal deputy who had introduced the 1877 bill to reform Civil Code provisions affecting married women. The 1884 electoral reform, in Barros’s ironic words, placed women “in the HONORABLE company of the deranged, the domestic servants, those condemned for crimes or misdemeanors that merited a sentence of more than three years, and those condemned for fraudulent bankruptcy.”<sup>31</sup> Her disenchantment with the persistent antisuffrage positions of anticlerical leaders eventually led Barros to drift away from the anticlerical circles of her youth back to Catholicism and to sympathize with the “the defenders of women’s suffrage.”<sup>32</sup> At that point the latter were to be found only among Conservatives.

Barros’s advocacy of women’s education and social rights, which were also major themes in Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, contributed to focusing attention on these questions. Education for women became a major topic in the 1870s.

### **Changing the Character of Women’s Education**

In 1875 a new periodical, *La Brisa de Chile*, joined Barros in demanding an expansion of educational rights for women including at the university level. From the first issue the periodical pledged to “work for the education of women, which has unfortunately been so neglected in our country.”<sup>33</sup> It called for women to “request the state to grant you higher education, let it be ashamed that it only gives you some paltry primary school knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> Nowhere did *La Brisa* mention the role of the

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<sup>30</sup> Martina Barros de Orrego, “El voto femenino,” *Revista Chilena*, II, 12 (December 1917), 393.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 392. It was only in 1914, under the Liberal government of Ramón Barros Luco (1910–15), that a change in the electoral law removed women from the unflattering list of those who were precluded from registering to vote. At that point the law simply added the word ‘men’ after ‘Chilean citizens’ (*ciudadanos chilenos varones*) in article 23 before stating the age, literacy, and residence requirements to vote.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 392–93. Barros indicated that the only Liberal Minister to defend women’s voting rights was Ignacio Zenteno. When Congress discussed the women who had registered to vote in 1875, he defended their right to do so. Barros noted that this was the reason he was forced to resign and to take up a diplomatic post in Washington.

<sup>33</sup> *La Brisa de Chile* (San Felipe), I, 1 (26 December 1875), 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Church in women's education, and the explicit mention of the state's need to assume such a role was indicative of the secularizing intention of the periodical.

Although the editors of *La Brisa* were probably men, they asked women to contribute articles. The first issue published an important one written by Lucrecia Undurraga v. de Somarriva. In it she supported the editors' call for elevating women's education and culture. She began by congratulating the editors for being "the first to open in Chile a periodical whose program sets for itself the high objective of working for the enlightenment of women."<sup>35</sup> She then noted that there were many political publications in Chile but very few that had literary and educational aims. She downplayed the importance of politics and political writings, arguing that "one cannot build a state administration in harmony with the sound judgment of a republican and democratic people through politics alone."<sup>36</sup> Literature also constitutes one of the mechanisms to fulfill the higher and better aims of a society, because "literature elevates the spirit; an elevated spirit is fond of perception in all its forms: it pursues beauty, and all that is good... Such a spirit would pursue in the sphere of political action these values as well. A cultured people...has to be a well-governed people."<sup>37</sup> She concluded that if ignorance were to diminish, "the number of fighters against every error and every problem (*desconcierto*) would increase so much that the latter would disappear under their force one after the other."<sup>38</sup> This would allow petty politics (*polítiquería*) to disappear, because it feeds on ignorance. As women are the "best fortified core that ignorance has amongst us" the periodical "marches head on to confront the menacing adversary by working for women's enlightenment."<sup>39</sup> And, as women enter "active life they will not fall, given their enlightenment, in the net of politics whose scope we want to limit."<sup>40</sup>

With its veiled references, Undurraga's article is not an easy text to interpret. However, in dismissing the value of political periodicals while praising those that elevate women's knowledge, Undurraga implicitly condemned the efforts of Catholic-Conservative women in founding *El Eco de las Señoras de Santiago* in 1865. By assimilating ignorance with petty politics, and women with one of the main areas where ignorance existed in Chile, she was probably lamenting the tendency

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

of women to support Conservative positions. This reading of her views is consistent with the fact that she argued that secular education was necessary to draw women away from petty politics. And by advocating women's involvement in a higher form of politics Undurraga could support women's engagement in public affairs while at the same time not demanding voting rights, for which she showed a lofty disregard. In her own periodical, *La Mujer*, founded in 1877, an editorial statement clearly reiterated the lack of interest women's suffrage: "we accept our incapacity as active citizens."<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, *La Brisa de Chile* first appeared at the end of December in 1875 in San Felipe. It was one of the cities where women who most probably supported Conservative positions had attempted to register to vote two months earlier. Such actions had placed voting rights for women on the political agenda. Given that voting rights were restricted to those who could read and write, the nature of women's education became a political problem to consider. If women were to have the vote, this meant that the electorate would expand to include new voters who had been educated to a large extent in Church-run institutions. Anticlerical leaders had reason from this fact alone to be against women's suffrage, but it also pointed to the necessity of including women as well as men under the educational arm of the state.

State-run schools had favored the instruction of men. Up to the early 1860s girls were still less than a third of all students in state-run schools at the primary level while their proportions had been above that level for a decade in Church schools.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Cited by Pereira, "La mujer," op. cit. n. 18, 167. Undurraga's literary and cultural periodical *La Mujer* led to the creation of a broader organization of women. It had an editorial board composed entirely of women and provincial correspondents who were also all women. These were, in Santiago, Hortencia Bustamante, Mercedes Rogers, Enriqueta Calvo de Vera, Isabel Lebrún de Pinochet, Enriqueta Solar, Luisa Mena, Victoria Cueto, et al.; in Vaparaíso, Rosario Orrego, Eduvigis Casanova, Dolores Guevara, et al.; in San Felipe, Enriqueta Courbos; in La Serena, Mercedes Cervelló; in Talca, Emilia Lisboa, in Curicó, Carolina Olmedo; and in Chillán, Mercedes María de Gaete and Ercilia Gaete. Pereira, "La mujer," op. cit. n. 18, 141. In addition to its literary concerns, *La Mujer* expressed full support for Julio Zegers's 1877 bill to enhance married women's rights over their children, to testify before the courts, and to administer their own income. Pereira, 166.

<sup>42</sup> No secondary sources contain figures for the number of students by gender in primary education during the 1862 to 1891 period. Figures in Luis Galdames, *La Universidad de Chile (1843–1934)* (Santiago: Prensa Universidad de Chile, 1934), 63, show a steady increase in the proportion of girls in primary state-run schools from 14% of all students in 1853 to 28.5% in 1861. During the same years private, including Catholic, schools had an enrollment of girls that averaged 34.4%, oscillating between 27.9% and 42.3% while their enrollment in municipal schools

Secondary education for women was virtually all run by the Church, with a small proportion directed by private women teachers. Luis Galdames's figures show that private (mostly Catholic) secondary schools educated a yearly average of 1,581 women and 1,377 men between 1854 and 1861, while state-run secondary education during the same period enrolled a yearly average of 2,575 men and no women, except for 132 in 1854 and 50 in 1860.<sup>43</sup> Galdames himself notes "that the government had not created until then" (1861) any women's secondary schools.<sup>44</sup> By 1875 only three additional secondary schools for girls had emerged: the 'Santa Teresa' founded in Santiago in 1863, the 'Rafael Valdés' founded in Copiapó in 1874 but which proved to be short lived, and the 'Isabel Lebrún de Pinochet' founded in 1875 also in Santiago.<sup>45</sup> These three schools were private, although the ones located in Santiago had a state subsidy, as noted by Labarca.<sup>46</sup> Guillermo Matta, a poet and Radical leader, and Miguel Luis Amunátegui himself took the initiative in 1877 to organize 'parents' societies' (*Sociedades de Padres de Familia*) to open private women's schools in Copiapó and Valparaíso, respectively. Amunátegui also encouraged in 1878 an American Methodist minister, William Taylor, to found a women's school in Santiago which became the Santiago College two years later under the direction of a missionary couple, Adelaide and Ira LaFetra. Before meeting with Amunátegui, Taylor had already established plans for women's schools in other cities, especially in Concepción.<sup>47</sup> The first fully state-run secondary school for women was not founded until 1891, in Valparaíso. The War of the Pacific (1879–83) probably delayed plans for women's public high schools, and the school in Valparaíso only developed after a substantial gift from Carlos Waddington, a wealthy entrepreneur.<sup>48</sup> Other state-run high schools for women were created in the

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averaged 32.1%, varying between 27.5% and 36.8%. However, given the greater increase in overall enrollment in state primary schools, there were more girls in such schools (7,550) than in private-Catholic (4,639) or municipal ones (1,651) by 1861.

<sup>43</sup> Galdames, "La Universidad," op. cit. n. 42, 66.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>45</sup> María Eugenia Martínez, "La enseñanza femenina particular en Chile" in *Actividades Femeninas*, op. cit. n. 14, 375–80.

<sup>46</sup> Amanda Labarca, "Educación secundaria: Desarrollo de los liceos de niñas" in *Actividades Femeninas*, op. cit. n. 14, 193.

<sup>47</sup> See Goodsil F. Arms, *History of the William Taylor Self-Supporting Missions in South America* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1921), 30–31.

<sup>48</sup> Labarca, "Educación secundaria," op. cit. n. 46, 193.

decades that followed, so that by 1927 there were 50 such establishments, while there were 43 for men.<sup>49</sup>

Amunátegui's famous decree of January 1877 opening the doors of the University of Chile to women was a result of the debates over women's education that had begun earlier in the early 1870s. The University of Chile was the only one in the country at the time and had been controlled by the state since its founding out of the Church-run University of San Felipe in 1842. The Amunátegui decree was to remain the only important measure favoring women's rights adopted in the nineteenth century. As a result Chilean women were able to enter university before any other women in Latin America and before most in Europe. All texts on Chilean women's history mention this decree and give the names of the first women who graduated from the University: Eloísa Díaz Insunza and Ernestina Pérez Barahona, who received their degrees in medicine in January 1887.<sup>50</sup>

The Amunátegui decree has been presented as a demonstration of anticlerical leaders' progressive attitudes toward women's issues. Amanda Labarca, whose writings have had an enormous influence on the interpretation of women's history in Chile, has set the tone in this respect. She wrote that "the appointment of Mister Miguel Luis Amunátegui as Minister of Public Education signaled the dawn of a new era for the feminine culture of Chile. More than any other man, we Chilean women owe to him our cultural and economic emancipation."<sup>51</sup>

Amunátegui was an anticlerical Liberal, and his decree followed demands for opening opportunities at the university level for women, who were at the time, as noted earlier, all graduates from private schools. However, the origins of his decision cannot be understood, as Sol Serrano has noted, without a trail of events that began with Conservative Minister Abdón Cifuentes's controversial decree of January 1872.<sup>52</sup> It allowed private secondary schools to issue state-recognized degrees to

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<sup>49</sup> See Labarca, "Educación secundaria," op. cit. n. 46, 196–97, for a list of founding dates of women's high schools, and Amanda Labarca, *Historia de la enseñanza en Chile* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1939), 320, for the number of women's and men's high schools in 1927.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Labarca, *Historia de la enseñanza*, op. cit. n. 49, 166, and Pereira, "La Mujer," op. cit. n. 46, 131, 133. Sara Guerin de Elgueta, "La mujer en las escuelas universitarias" in *Actividades Femeninas*, op. cit. n. 14, 414–38, lists women graduates in all fields from 1884 to 1927. Guerin de Elgueta also mentions the first woman to graduate with a degree in dentistry, Paulina Starr in 1884, although at that time the Dental School was not considered a university-level course of study; 424.

<sup>51</sup> Labarca, *Historia de la enseñanza en Chile*, op. cit. n. 49, 163.

<sup>52</sup> Sol Serrano, *Universidad y nación. Chile en el siglo XIX* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Universitaria, 1993), 239, footnote 51.



their students. This meant that students graduating from private schools—after taking examinations organized by such schools under conditions specified in the 1872 decree—would be eligible for admission to the University of Chile.<sup>53</sup> Given the importance of private schools for women’s secondary education, Cifuentes’s decree obviously favored them disproportionately. The head of the ‘Santa Teresa’ school, Antonia Tarragó, rapidly took advantage of the new opportunity offered by Cifuentes’s decree. She not only informed the University Council, as required, of her list of examiners but also requested it to allow her graduates, all of them women, to apply for entry to the University. As there was no precedent for admitting women students to the University of Chile, except in special courses of obstetrics,<sup>54</sup> the Council referred this question to the Ministry of Education which in turn asked it for an opinion on the matter. The Council responded, as noted by Serrano, “on 17 November 1873...that it did not have any objections to women obtaining university degrees.”<sup>55</sup> It was then up to the minister to issue the necessary decree. However, Cifuentes had been forced by the political controversies he generated to resign his position on 17 July 1873, an event that marked the end of the governing coalition of Liberals and Conservatives. Cifuentes was therefore not able to issue the decree that Amunátegui was to write almost four years later to such lasting acclaim.

Cifuentes’s successor, a Liberal, withdrew the freedom of examinations provisions. However, in another decree, issued in January 1874, he did leave some room for private schools to grant valid degrees as long as their examiners were appointed by the University Council. This led several schools to request such

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<sup>53</sup> Following Cifuentes’s 1872 decree, in order to grant valid degrees private schools had to hold their examinations in public after having announced them with at least eight days notice. They also had to inform the University Council of the names of their examiners, and it could reject them unless they were members of the University’s faculty or its graduates in the same subjects in which they were to examine the students. The Council was also supposed to send its own observers to the examinations, who were to have both a voice and a vote in them. Cifuentes’s decree appears in *La libertad de enseñanza ante la Cámara de Diputados i el Consejo Universitario* (Santiago: Imprenta de El Independiente, 1874), 7–9. Until then all valid examinations in private schools had to be conducted by faculty of the Instituto Nacional, the elite high school attached to the University of Chile.

<sup>54</sup> Cifuentes took credit for reviving these courses at the University of Chile. As he noted in defending his actions as minister in 1873, “after twelve or more years of inaction and neglect, I was the one who took haste in establishing a course on obstetrics for women that now has more than a hundred women students.” *La libertad de enseñanza*, op. cit. n. 53, 37. The old University of San Felipe from which the University of Chile was created had at least one woman student, Dolores Egaña Fabres, who was allowed to register in 1810. See Guerin de Elgueta, “La mujer en las escuelas universitarias,” op. cit. n. 50, 413, who quotes Alejandro Fuenzalida Grandón on this point.

examiners, among them, once again, the 'Santa Teresa' school led by Tarragó. She succeeded with these requests, but her graduates were unable to apply for university admission for lack of the decree permitting women to do so. In 1875 Tarragó was joined in her petitions by Isabel Lebrún de Pinochet, who had founded that same year the school bearing her name.<sup>56</sup> It took another two years for Amunátegui to respond to these requests with his decree granting women access to university education under the same conditions as men. Hence, this decree was the delayed result of events that included Conservative initiatives and women's pressures.

The opening of the university to women and the subsequent expansion of secondary education for them led over the next decades to the formation of a sizeable group of professional women in Chilean society. Many of them were high school teachers in the newly created non-Catholic schools. Given the fact that Catholic opinion was against the growth of this form of education under state and Protestant auspices, the teachers of the new schools tended to favor anticlerical positions. They also became significant social and cultural leaders in the cities where the schools were established. Graduating ceremonies, theater and dance presentations, poetry and short story readings, art exhibits, etc., had an impact on the local communities that went beyond the students and enhanced women's public presence.

Further research is needed to reveal the extent to which women teachers in these schools developed local organizations and links among themselves from city to city. Evidence of such organizations may be found in the large number of local newspapers and periodicals that were intermittently published at the time.<sup>57</sup>

An important example of this type of association formed by secondary school teachers is the Mercedes Marín del Solar Academy founded by Leonor Urzúa Cruzat in Curicó in 1897. It was based at the school organized and directed by Urzúa Cruzat with the assistance of her sisters between 1892 and 1906, after which it was transformed into a state-run institution.<sup>58</sup> The

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<sup>55</sup> Serrano, *Universidad y nación*, op. cit. n. 52, 239, footnote 51.

<sup>56</sup> See Martínez, "La enseñanza femenina," op. cit. n. 45, 375–80, for a description of the educators' petition.

<sup>57</sup> It is possible that a weekly entitled *La Lectura*, published in Santiago in 1883 and 1884, contained the collaboration of women educators. If this proves to be the case, it would be the first publication reflecting the creative work of this new group of Chilean women.

<sup>58</sup> Labarca, "Educación secundaria," op. cit. n. 46, 196. Soon after the formation of the Academy in Curicó, a group of women founded a similar organization in Santiago called the Academia Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna out of an older Academia Becquer. They also pledged

Academy published a biweekly journal, *La Mujer*, which first appeared in April 1897. The Academy's Board was composed of eleven women with Leonor Urzúa as president. It had fifty-five local women members, and eleven members who contributed to the journal from other cities.<sup>59</sup> During the second year of its publication *La Mujer* had sixty-seven subscribers (excluding its members). The list of their names shows that a majority of them were men, including Guillermo Matta, a Radical, Zorobabel Rodríguez, a Conservative, and Liberals such as Vicente Reyes, Miguel Luis Amunátegui, Eusebio Lillo, and Guillermo Blest Gana. Eloísa Díaz, the first woman medical school graduate, was also a subscriber.<sup>60</sup>

The purpose of the Academy was to contribute to women's education and culture by publishing literary works by women. The journal also included articles of opinion on women's issues and Leonor Urzúa's speeches on various occasions such as graduating ceremonies at the her school and at the Academy's public meetings. It is clear from one of these speeches that her school was criticized by Catholics for 'not teaching religion,' to which she responded that "a priest, a worthy disciple of Christ, now forms part of the teaching staff."<sup>61</sup> Courses on religion were part of the national curriculum even in state-run schools, although students could ask to be exempted from attending them.

The major thrust of *La Mujer* was to insist repeatedly that women had enormous personal capacities and virtues. These included much greater sensitivity than men. Women did need to gain more education and self-confidence, and they had to patiently try to convince men that they were worthy of much more respect than they were receiving from them.

None of the articles of the journal demanded the vote for women. In fact the very first issue stated that men should not "fear that Chilean women will follow the same course as in other countries, in which there was talk...of approving laws that will permit women to take part in political suffrage. This is because Chilean women do not want, nor will they accept such prerogatives, that are in their view detestable."<sup>62</sup>

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themselves to work for the 'progress and regeneration of women.' The new organization was named after the fiery Liberal politician of the nineteenth century who was among those who congratulated Martina Barros for her translation and prologue of Mill's work. Its board was composed of Rita Figueroa, president; Cupertina Hurtado, vice-president, Edelmira MacClure, secretary; Lucila Gonzalez, undersecretary; and Luisa Figueroa de Besoain, treasurer. This information appears in correspondence between the two Academies published in *La Mujer*, I, 5 (1 August 1897), 12.

<sup>59</sup> *La Mujer*, I, 4 (June 1897), 1.

<sup>60</sup> *La Mujer*, I, 4, 1, and *La Mujer*, II, 1 (January 1898), 182–83.

<sup>61</sup> *La Mujer*, II, 1, 1.

<sup>62</sup> *La Mujer*, I, 1, 1. *La Mujer*, II, 1, 29 also transcribed a lecture given by Enrique Piccione at the

However, several articles argued that women exerted a higher form of power and influence because they were in charge of the education and moral upbringing of the new generations of voters. This notion of women's superiority can be seen in the following passage: "Instead of seeking suffrage rights women should instruct men—for they are their teachers—to respect their family names, to be dignified and honest. Women should give the motherland voters who are fully aware of what they are doing and who are disinterested and noble, because the happiness and progress of a people does not depend on the number of voters but on their quality."<sup>63</sup> The same article concluded that women needed even better education to carry out this transcendental mission: "Women need to educate themselves because they are the educators of humanity... Their mission is greater, more elevated than that of men."<sup>64</sup> In this and other articles the journal expressed the same lofty disregard for politics first formulated by Undurraga in 1875. Women contributed to democracy without having the vote. The journal also published contributions that called for changes in the Civil Code to eliminate the glaring inequalities between men and women.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Reading Circle and the Ladies' Club**

The next important organization of women to appear without any direct links to the Catholic Church was the Ladies' Club (*Club de Señoras*). Founded in Santiago in 1915 and presided over by Delia Matte de Izquierdo, its origins stemmed from a public convocation that Amanda Labarca issued to all women 'interested in letters' to create a 'literary circle.'<sup>66</sup> Labarca, a Spanish teacher, who had recently returned from studies at Columbia University's Teachers' College and at the Sorbonne, became Chile's foremost expert on educational policy in the first

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Academy in which he also spoke against women's suffrage because it violates 'the natural order of things.' He did call for greater social and economic rights for women.

<sup>63</sup> *La Mujer*, II, 1, 135.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *La Mujer*, II, 1, 33, contained a strongly worded article calling for the 'social and economic emancipation of women.' On pages 70–71 another article in even stronger words demanded civil equality with men and called for a first women's convention in order to better coordinate these demands. Otherwise, "we will be left to continue complaining about women's civil rights," 71.

<sup>66</sup> The quotations are drawn from Delie Rouge, *de escritora* (Santiago: Talleres Gráficos Casa Nacional del Niño, 1943), 26.

half of the twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> The first meeting of what Labarca called the ‘Ladies’ Reading Circle’ (*Círculo de Lectura de Señoras*), following the example of the American women’s Reading Clubs, took place at the headquarters of the woman’s magazine *Familia*, which had advertised the invitation to join it. The meeting was attended by, among others, the novelists who used the pen names Delie Rouge (Delia Rojas de White), Roxane (Elvira Santa Cruz Ossa), and Iris (Inés Echeverría de Larraín) and by Delia Matte de Izquierdo and Delfina Pinto de Montt.<sup>68</sup> Labarca subsequently claimed that the Reading Circle was “the first women’s institution created with the sole purpose of supporting the task of their emancipation.” It was therefore unlike charitable and beneficence organizations directed “by priests or secular clergy who designed their overall orientation,” in which “women played the role of intelligent and industrious (*afanosas*) collaborators.”<sup>69</sup> Labarca’s claim has been repeated by subsequent scholars as a historical fact.<sup>70</sup> However, as shown above, Labarca’s literary discussion group was by no means the first pioneer. Lucrecia Undurraga’s 1877 initiative was most probably the first such organization of women without any direct link to the Church.

Labarca noted in an article written in 1923 that there were two tendencies within the Reading Circle from the very beginning: The first was formed by those who wanted to have only a literary circle, and the second by those who wanted a “larger center, with a social character—a club.”<sup>71</sup> Delia Matte, a sculptress, was the principal proponent of the latter. With her upper-class friends she founded the Ladies’ Club, acquiring spacious, even luxurious, headquarters for it in a prime central location. It had facilities for conferences, discussion groups, and tea parties and a library and a theater.<sup>72</sup> The Reading Circle led by Amanda Labarca continued to meet in the Ladies’ Club, although its activities declined after Labarca went back for

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<sup>67</sup> For a biography of Labarca, see Catherine F. Paul, “Amanda Labarca H. Educator of the Women of Chile,” PhD thesis, School of Education, New York University, 1966. Labarca taught in her youth at Santiago College and was a member of its board until the 1960s.

<sup>68</sup> For an elaborate description of the Reading Club and its participants, see Luisa Zanelli López, *Mujeres chilenas de letras* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1917), 164–87. Rouge attended the first meeting after hearing about it through the convocation published by Labarca in the magazine *Familia*; Rouge, *Mis memorias*, op. cit. n. 66, 26. Labarca was an editor of *Familia*.

<sup>69</sup> Amanda Labarca, *¿A dónde va la mujer?* (Santiago: Ediciones Extra, 1934), 144.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Ericka Kim Verba, “The Círculo de Lectura de Señoras [Ladies’ Reading Circle] and the Club de Señoras [Ladies’ Club] of Santiago, Chile: Middle- and Upper-Class Feminist Conversations (1915–20),” *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 7, no. 3 (fall 1995), 7.

<sup>71</sup> Labarca, *¿A dónde va la mujer?* op. cit. n. 69, 145.

<sup>72</sup> Zanelli, *Mujeres chilenas*, op. cit. n. 68, 190, 194. Zanelli reported that the Club had about

an extended period to the United States in order to prepare a report on its educational system for the Chilean government.<sup>73</sup>

The creation of the Ladies' Club could be seen as a consequence of the stark gender separation within largely secular upper-class circles in Chilean society. Thus, Martina Barros de Orrego praised Matte for her initiative in creating the Ladies' Club, stating that "with her clear intelligence Matte realized that men's club life, which drew them away from their homes and from feminine society, had left women relegated to a life of banal cares, gossip, and frivolity." Barros added that Matte was trying to "secure for us [i.e., us women] a center for high culture meetings, agreeable, and useful" to replace the "evening social discussions" (*tertulias sociales*) which at the time "were disappearing."<sup>74</sup>

According to Barros, Matte's project created much opposition. The accusations were that the Club was "a place from which to resist the duties of the home, and that women would therefore acquire a dangerous independence. They attacked the Club by ridiculing it with the crudest mordacity, with intrigues and a full arsenal, even the most backhanded."<sup>75</sup> Labarca also noted that columnists in the Conservative newspapers *El Diario Ilustrado* and *La Unión* had criticized both the Circle and the Club.<sup>76</sup>

The Club was a highly visible institution given the social prominence of its leading members, and it did lead to public expressions of feminism that must have shocked some male observers. Thus, the novelist and social critic Iris, in a lecture at the Club, argued that "the worst enemies of the evolution of women were those who saw themselves displaced from their secular domination; in other words MEN in their capacities as clergy, fathers, or husbands...to us corresponds the honor of being the first WOMEN who open the door to the old colonial cage."<sup>77</sup>

Was the split noted by Labarca among the founding members of the literary circle only a matter of some women wanting to have a social club, or were there

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300 members, including women from provincial cities.

<sup>73</sup> Paul, "Amanda Labarca," op. cit. n. 67, 25, 26. This resulted in Labarca's book *La escuela secundaria en los Estados Unidos* (Santiago: Imprenta Universo, 1919).

<sup>74</sup> Barros, *Recuerdos*, op. cit. n. 9, 342

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 342–43.

<sup>76</sup> Labarca, *¿A dónde va...?* op. cit. n. 69, 141. This point is also noted by Barros, *supra*, and by Rouge, *Mis memorias*, op. cit. n. 66, 12, where she mentions the attacks of the critic Belisario Galvez who wrote under the pseudonym Pedro Sánchez.

<sup>77</sup> Cited by Felicitas Klimpel, *La mujer chilena. El aporte femenino al progreso de Chile, 1910–1960* (Santiago: Andres Bello, 1962), 236–37.

deeper differences? The latter was most likely the case. Matte and her friends were part of “the most select group of Santiago society,” as noted by Delie Rouge, who added that she decided many times not to go to the Club because “I did not have an elegant attire in which to appear. The members of the Club were people...who made ostentation of luxury and I could not present myself so poorly.”<sup>78</sup> Martina Barros indicated that the Ladies’ Club became a place where “teas were organized to promote social life,” as well as “dances” and “great receptions.” “Royal princes,” she added, “have been feasted with great brilliance, as have the most powerful figures of the world of knowledge and letters, omnipotent heads of state, and foreign military full of glory. Movies were shown, singers and magnificent musical concerts were heard, and instructive literary lectures were given. Delia received her relations on Mondays and extended special invitations to diplomats, illustrious travelers, government personalities...notable artists, writers, musicians—men and women who stood out in some way.”<sup>79</sup> In this high society environment the women of the literary circle who were not part of it felt out of place, and without Labarca’s presence the Circle disintegrated.

The women who led the Club were also willing to maintain relations with the Church hierarchy which Amanda Labarca, as a lifelong anticlerical and freethinker, was probably reluctant to accept. After writing the Club’s statutes, Delia Matte de Izquierdo, Luisa Lynch de Gormaz, and Inés Echeverría de Larraín sent Bishop Rafael Edwards a published copy of them with a handwritten note, dated September 1915, stating that “we hope that you will form a true notion of what the Ladies’ Club will become.”<sup>80</sup> In describing the activities of the Club, Martina Barros also indicated that “on certain occasions we find here the highest Church dignitaries, and some members of the clergy have given us very interesting lectures.”<sup>81</sup> In 1925, following the example set by the Catholic women’s movement, the Club organized a ‘Store for the Protection of Women’s Work’ (*Tienda de Protección al Trabajo Femenino*). This initiative was blessed on the day of its opening by Reverend Oscar Larson and dedicated to the Heart of Jesus.<sup>82</sup> Its stated aim was

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<sup>78</sup> Rouge, *Mis memorias*, op. cit. n. 66, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Barros, *Recuerdos*, op. cit. n. 9, 344, 345.

<sup>80</sup> *Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago*, Correspondencia del Obispo Rafael Edwards, folder on the Liga de Damas.

<sup>81</sup> Barros, *Recuerdos*, op. cit. n. 9, 345.

<sup>82</sup> *Actividades Femeninas*, op. cit. n. 14, “Obras Sociales,” 628. Oscar Larson was a leading representative of Social Christian views in the Chilean Catholic Church.

to protect working women, although the main function of such organizations was a direct consequence of the fact that the Civil Code entitled husbands to control all income generated by their wives. Therefore, the stores sold products made by women while ensuring their anonymity, giving them an income they could keep.<sup>83</sup>

The Ladies' Club collaborated in some activities with the Women's League as well.<sup>84</sup> In particular, they jointly sponsored conferences that were held at the Ladies' Club. One of them focused on women's suffrage, a topic that was discussed on several occasions at the Ladies' Club from Conservative and Liberal perspectives.

### **Discussions of Women's Suffrage at the Ladies' Club**

The lecture on women's suffrage that was jointly sponsored with the Women's League was given by a Conservative deputy and former minister of finance, Ricardo Salas Edwards. It was not the first presentation on the topic at the Ladies' Club; Martina Barros de Orrego had spoken on it in one of the first meetings of the Club in 1917.<sup>85</sup> Barros at that time had clearly prosuffragist views, as did the Conservative deputy Salas who was not, however, among the signers of the October 1917's suffrage bill introduced by the Conservative Party in the House of Deputies. His speech contains one of the most elaborate advocacies of women's suffrage in Chile and follows well in the footsteps set by Cifuentes in 1865. Salas's lecture took place at the end of 1919 or at the beginning of 1920 and deserves to be examined in detail.

Salas seemed to assume that the women in his audience were all practicing Catholics and supporters of women's suffrage, although he was aware that "perhaps your father or your sons and some of your brothers or your husbands act in politics as Liberals,"<sup>86</sup> especially because he was also speaking to the women of the

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<sup>83</sup> While José Maza's decree no. 328 of March 1925 was supposed to have eliminated this discrimination against women in the Civil Code, its terms were unclear and its effects were not seen as definitive. For this reason law no. 5,521 of December 1934 returned to this issue in order to clarify it in favor of married women's control over their own income.

<sup>84</sup> For a description of the *Liga de Damas Chilenas*, a Catholic women's organization founded in 1912, see Maza Valenzuela, "Catholicism, Anticlericalism, and the Quest," op. cit. n. 6, 21–25.

<sup>85</sup> Barros's lecture was published as "El voto femenino" in *Revista Chilena* (op. cit. n. 30).

<sup>86</sup> Ricardo Salas Edwards, *La futura acción política de la mujer (Conferencia leída por el autor ante la Liga de Damas y en el Club de Señoras de Santiago)* (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1920), 22. On his assumption that all the women in the audience favored women's suffrage, see page 7.



Ladies' Club. In his lecture he rebutted the arguments made against women's suffrage in Liberal and Radical circles. Knowing that "the majority of our legislators and almost all opinion looks with indifference and even with condescension" at the question of women's suffrage, he encouraged the women in his audience, whom he saw as "a very select group of the leading voices of your sex," to work for women's enfranchisement so that its "advent may be hastened as demanded by justice itself as well as political propriety."<sup>87</sup>

Salas began his lecture by referring to the advance of women's political, social, and civil rights in the world and noting how much women in Chile had progressed culturally and in their participation in the nation's society and economy over the last twenty-five years. These changes were the consequence of "the spread of primary and secondary schools for women; the development of teaching positions converting them in the instructors of the present generation such that their intellectual capacity can no longer be doubted; the establishment of large factories and commercial establishments that have given them lucrative employment out of the home; the creation of unions and clubs; and finally the artistic and literary activities and the Catholic social action of women of the more elevated classes that have proved to be an example for all women."<sup>88</sup> Women's 'independence' had been enhanced by these transformations. Salas's use of this word was significant because the supposed lack of such 'independence' by women had long been employed as an argument against women's suffrage.

Salas then referred to the advancement of democracy in Chile by noting that presently "a larger proportion of inhabitants intervene in the formation of public powers and therefore in determining the direction of the government."<sup>89</sup> When compared to the nineteenth century, the proportion of voters in the population "has increased nearly tenfold and presently in the main regions of the nation the majority of adult males are eligible to vote."<sup>90</sup> He argued that this outcome was the result of "natural democratic evolution,"<sup>91</sup> and that the same democratizing forces that led to this result were now pressing for women's enfranchisement. This latter measure "is of 'transcendent importance, as it would double the number of people who act in

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<sup>87</sup> Salas, *op. cit.* n. 86, 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

political life.”<sup>92</sup> He also saw as an important influence on this development the fact that the United States, Australia, and some countries in Europe “had experimented successfully with or were about to implement...women’s collaboration in public action.”<sup>93</sup>

Salas then highlighted both the injustice and the impoverishment of democracy generated by the denial of voting rights to half the population, i.e., to women. He did so by inviting his audience to think of a country where only landowners, only manual workers, only the aged, or only the young could vote. The first such situation would “provoke a social revolt.”<sup>94</sup> The second would be a Bolshevik ideal, the third would be equivalent to “living in a historical museum,” while the fourth would be a country with too many “reformist and novel drives.”<sup>95</sup> From these hypothetical examples Salas concluded that a democracy needed the contribution as citizens of all its people. Each group makes a difference as it participates in political life.

Women too would make a difference, because they “*are different*” (*sí diversas*)<sup>96</sup> from men. “To those who tell you,” Salas said forcefully, “that there are no changes in state policy as women gain political rights because they have the same tendencies as men, and therefore men already represent their mothers, daughters, wives, or sisters, tell them that you will vote instead of them, and you will see how instantly they will retract from this argument.”<sup>97</sup>

Nonetheless, Salas added that women do not seek confrontations with men nor do they become their antagonists. “Experience shows...that women do not form exclusive political parties but rather distribute themselves among the preexisting groups. Their action is exerted through ways which as natural as that of the old or the young we spoke of earlier; they do not figure either in an exclusive circle given their age, but this does not mean that their opinion does not weigh in the public balance.”<sup>98</sup> Women modify the views of the organizations in which they act, “but they never place themselves on a single line against men.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.; emphasis in the original.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Salas asserted that women had already exerted a beneficial influence on municipal governments in the countries where they had voted at the local level for years. With the influence of women voters housing and sanitation in Chile would improve, and the anti-alcoholic restrictions that “our mayors today do not apply” would be enforced effectively.<sup>100</sup> The same benefits would occur at the national level. In particular, Salas surmised that had women been able to vote, the ‘social question,’ which emerged with industrialization and “today reaches a violent crisis, perhaps would not have arisen.”<sup>101</sup> He explained his reasoning by noting that “the sentimental fibre of women would have led them to comprehend, more opportunely than us men, all the justice enveloped in the clamor of working people...thereby favoring the creation of an economic system with more justice and morality, and more driven by social charity.”<sup>102</sup> By a more just economic system Salas meant, in particular, “a more just regulation of work and the implantation of a regime of participation of workers in the profits of industry, the only ways to create a lasting solution to this artificial antagonism of interests.”<sup>103</sup> All these measures would be reached more readily with the assistance of women as citizens, because without the vote, as he noted, “the means that you have, simple propaganda and private influence, have proven inadequate for this task!”<sup>104</sup> Women’s influence would also favor peaceful agreements instead of war between countries.

Salas then addressed the opposition to women’s suffrage that stems from the belief that women would “neglect the fundamental mission that nature has given them in family and home.”<sup>105</sup> This was one of the major points made by Liberal José Maza, as noted above, against enfranchising women. Salas argued that it was “ridiculous to fear that just because Chilean women were to contribute, every three or five years, to select those who will govern through the ballot boxes...that the upbringing or education of children, or the correct management of the home, would suffer.”<sup>106</sup> Similarly, not all women will be interested in public affairs to the same extent, even though “their good sense will rapidly make them see the moral side of

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

any question.”<sup>107</sup> And yet some women may want to become much more involved in politics than just by voting, while others may want to become municipal councilors, and a few, eventually, may even occupy seats in the national legislature. Only good can come of this, Salas insisted.<sup>108</sup>

Salas went on to note that other opponents to women’s suffrage have tried to scare women into thinking that they will be less attractive to men if they become involved in public affairs. He rebutted this argument by saying that the exact opposite would occur. Women would become more attractive to men because “they would cease to be people who never opine on topics of public welfare, worrying only about artistic frivolities, but would become true companions to men, sharing their same intellectual life.”<sup>109</sup> Women would become persons with “physical, moral, and intellectual affinities” with men, thereby “dignifying and completing love.”<sup>110</sup>

Salas concluded his lecture by claiming that women as voters would also lead to the formation of governments committed to the national interest and with strong legislative majorities. The reason why such governments did not emerge, he argued, had to do with the conflict over religious issues, which prevented any one group from securing a majority. Salas assumed that most women would support candidates favoring religion. This would then tip the political scales because most Liberals would also adopt this attitude rather than following those who “beat the old drum of a doctrinaire irreligiosity.”<sup>111</sup> This change would not increase conflicts over religious issues, because women would impose their sense of tolerance on the parties, a tolerance they have long practiced at home while living with husbands who have favored anticlerical views. The parties would then be able to address national issues more effectively instead of fighting over the religious question. Obviously, this line of argument was bound to strengthen the antisuffragist positions of the more anticlerical politicians, especially the Radicals but also many prominent Liberals, who would lose politically with the coalition envisaged by Salas.

One of the most prominent such Liberals, Arturo Alessandri, also spoke on women’s rights at a lecture he gave at the Ladies’ Club. Alessandri was at time in

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 20–21.

the middle of his successful presidential campaign with Radical support. Hence, his lecture took place within months of Salas's. His speech was not published, and the main source for his words are the reminiscences of the writer Iris, who always wrote with a satirical style, based on her intimate diary. Nonetheless, she did include what appeared to be direct quotes from Alessandri's words.

Iris claims that Alessandri argued strongly that women should not have the vote before changes were made in the Civil Code. Alessandri pointed out that the coachmen who had brought the women to the club could serve as witnesses to a testament and their husbands' shoe shiners could exercise *patria potestad*, while they could do neither.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, given Civil Code provisions, women could be subjected to reprisals from their husbands if they voted in ways that the latter disliked. As Iris quoted his words, "what good would the vote do for you if you cannot dispose of your own income? Let us suppose that a women votes against the opinion of her husband. He could then take away the credit for her small expenses and the money for the market..."<sup>113</sup> Alessandri finished his speech by referring to the necessity of having legislation instituting divorce.<sup>114</sup>

Although Iris's style may have colored her account of Alessandri's words at the Ladies' Club, the position she attributed to him was consistent with his speeches and interviews as reported in other sources. Thus, in his presidential candidacy acceptance speech he referred exclusively to granting women greater civil rights without mentioning the vote.<sup>115</sup> And in his message to Congress in 1922 he reiterated that changes in the Civil Code were needed to give women "the citizen's rights that correspond to them as mothers, as owners of the goods they bring to marriage and those that are the product of their own efforts...eliminating also...antiquated precepts...that prevent them from performing acts of civil life."<sup>116</sup> He ended by reaffirming the need to have a law on divorce. Again, he said nothing of the vote on that occasion. He did refer to the vote in a talk given to the National Council of Women. He claimed to be "in favor of it" but added that the suffrage "in

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<sup>112</sup> Iris, *Alessandri: Evocaciones y resonancias* (Santiago: Empresa de Letras, 1932), 27. Iris's chapter on Alessandri's presentation at the Ladies' Club is entitled "Alessandri before Women" ["Alessandri ante la mujer"].

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>115</sup> See the transcription of this speech, given 25 April 1925, in Mariana Aylwin Oyarzún et al., *Chile en el siglo XX* (Santiago: Editorial Emisión, n.d.), 336.

<sup>116</sup> *Acción Femenina*, year 1, no. 1 (May 1922), 6–7.

the hands of people without the proper preparation to exercise it would only be a disgrace” and that he thought “a census would reveal that an infinitesimal percentage of women would know how to use it well.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, although he gave lip service support to women’s suffrage, it is clear from his words that he was more interested in postponing it.

Iris reports that Alessandri asked women of the Club what they thought of the suffrage, to which several responded “we do not want it.”<sup>118</sup> This was indeed the case. When canvassed for her opinion to be included in an article published by *Revista Chilena* in 1920 containing the attitudes of prominent people toward women’s suffrage, Adela Rodríguez de Rivadeneira, one of the members of the Ladies’ Club board of directors, stated flatly that “in the present circumstances I do not think that women are prepared to exercise the vote.”<sup>119</sup> This was exactly the same argument given by Alessandri three years later, which shows that it was a prevalent notion in Liberal and Radical circles. Even Iris herself, responding to the women’s suffrage questions put to her by the *Revista Chilena*’s ‘survey’ on the subject, stated: “When we educate our children properly, *we are making* in fact the voters, and we can perhaps abstain, with advantage, from going to the polls.”<sup>120</sup>

### **Amanda Labarca Hubertson and Her Strategy for Women’s Rights**

After Amanda Labarca returned from the United States in 1919, she created the National Council of Women (*Consejo Nacional de Mujeres*). The new Council was linked to the London-based International Council of Women and it was part of a network with other international feminist organizations in the United States, Argentina, and Uruguay. Given Labarca’s well-known ties to the Radical Party, the Council recruited its other leaders and members primarily among women associated with the Radical and, secondarily, the Liberal Parties.

The Council organized lectures by leading political figures such as President Alessandri and key ministers and legislators. It was not difficult for Council leaders to have access to political figures, as they were linked by marriage to the most

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., no. 11 (June 1923), 3

<sup>118</sup> Iris, op. cit. n. 112, 27.

<sup>119</sup> Paulino Alfonso et al., “Es conveniente en Chile conceder a las mujeres el derecho del sufragio,” *Revista Chilena*, year 4, vol. 10, no. 21 (May 1920), 73.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 70; emphasis in original.

prominent among them. Amanda Labarca herself was the wife of a leading Radical Party politician and writer, Guillermo Labarca Hubertson, who held ministerial posts in 1924 under Alessandri's presidency and later on under Pedro Aguirre Cerda's government (1938–41). Labarca's main coleader of the Council, Juana Aguirre de Aguirre, was married to Aguirre Cerda who, before his election as President of the Republic, occupied ministerial, legislative, and Radical Party presidency positions.<sup>121</sup> Through the Council's contacts with the International Council of Women, it also invited feminist leaders from abroad, such as Carrie Chapman Catt, President of the National American Suffrage Association (NAFSA). The Council's most visible social assistance activity was to found and operate a student hostel in Santiago to enable provincial women to attend the University of Chile. It also had some health and educational programs run by its affiliated professional women.<sup>122</sup>

On the question of women's suffrage, Labarca's feminism was clearly tempered by her commitment to the Radical Party's political agenda. She first stated her position on women's suffrage publicly in her book *Actividades Femeninas en los Estados Unidos*, which was published in 1914 with a lengthy prologue by Liberal party leader Eliodoro Yáñez.<sup>123</sup> In it she clarified that "I am not a militant feminist, and least of all, a suffragist, because above all I am Chilean, and there is no room in Chile for the suffrage question. To ask for the vote would be just as absurd as beginning to dress a nude person with a silk tie."<sup>124</sup> She added "that nowhere do women ask for political rights only to have the luxury of exercising them. They demand them because they are indispensable given conditions in the countries in which they live. Those conditions do not exist today in Chile; thus, it would be premature and ridiculous to ask for what is the result of causes that we ignore."<sup>125</sup> She argued that women's suffrage was the outcome of more advanced economic,

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<sup>121</sup> Among the other leaders of the Council were Celinda Arregui de Rodicio, Carmela de Lazo, Adriana Valdivia, Beatriz Letelier de Reyes, Fresia Escobar, María Ramírez, Isaura (or Elcira) D. de Guzmán, Julia Mac-Iver de Cousiño, Hayra Guerrero de Sommerville, Elena B. de Daroch, Josefina Day, Margarita Escobedo, Elena O. de Castro, Glafira T. de Salas, Virginia A. de Sander, Arinda Carvajal, María Castro, Amelia B. de Salas, Josefina Day, Etelvina Poblete, and Luz Rayo. For a description of the Council's objectives and activities, see *Actividades Femeninas*, op. cit. n. 14, 630–34.

<sup>122</sup> See Labarca, *¿A dónde va la mujer?* op. cit. n. 69, 135, 144, 146, 167–75; also *Actividades Femeninas*, op. cit. n. 14, "Consejo Nacional de Mujeres," 633–34.

<sup>123</sup> Amanda Labarca, *Actividades Femeninas en los Estados Unidos* (Santiago: Imprenta Universitaria, 1914).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–23.

social, and educational conditions than those found in Chile. Hence, “if we were to reach a degree of civilization like the ones in the United States, England, or the Scandinavian countries, then the feminist question would flow by itself... The word feminism is among us synonymous with something ridiculous... And, it is natural that this should be so given the reasons I have already expressed.”<sup>126</sup>

Labarca also echoed Maza’s reasoning in arguing that voting would lead women to “give their support to actions they would find repugnant given their moral delicateness.”<sup>127</sup> Voting would mean participating in vote buying, and other forms of fraud; she asserted that “for men politics and vote buying form part of an unbreakable marriage.”<sup>128</sup> While Labarca praised the beneficial influence that women had exerted on public affairs, morality, and good government in countries where they had the right to vote, she still concluded that “in this Chile of today the efforts of organized women should follow other courses.”<sup>129</sup>

Six years after the publication of her book Labarca was among the public figures who were asked to answer the *Revista Chilena*’s three questions on women’s enfranchisement for its compilation of views on the matter. To the first one, “Are you in favor of women’s suffrage?” she answered, “In part.”<sup>130</sup> She elaborated: “I do not believe in the efficacy of universal suffrage while there is no universal education. The English suffrage law seems to me very wise because it restricts the vote according to certain education and income conditions. The best way...to grant women’s suffrage in Chile would be gradually; and only after enacting laws giving women their civil rights. Once women have been given their legal personality the problem can be resolved.”<sup>131</sup> She then repeated the analogy of the silk tie she had already used in her 1914 book in order to explain the importance of granting women’s civil rights before the vote.<sup>132</sup>

To the *Revista Chilena*’s second question, “Would you make it extensive to all elections, or would you limit it to municipal elections in order to try it out?” Labarca

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>130</sup> Alfonso et al., op. cit. n. 119, 70.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 70–71.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 71.



responded that she would “prefer to try it out gradually, with a suffrage restricted by educational and income conditions.”<sup>133</sup>

In answering the last question, “What results do you think it would have?” Labarca predicted that there would be very negative consequences if the vote were given to women prematurely: “If the vote is granted before civil rights, it would be disastrous from many points of view, even in terms of domestic peace and for the political inclinations of women. However, if women’s civil rights are given to them first and gradually those of suffrage, there would be time to educate their judgment, and the results would be as beneficial as they have been in all the countries where the vote has become a reality.”<sup>134</sup>

Under Labarca’s leadership the National Council of Women followed her thinking on women’s suffrage closely. It focused its priorities on pressing for changes in the civil status of women, especially to eliminate the inequality of married women relative to men before the law. Although, as noted earlier, the first legislation to make some of these changes had been proposed in 1877, by the early 1920s nothing had been done to reform the Civil Code. The Consejo drafted new legislation in 1922 after consulting, as Labarca indicated, with Aguirre Cerda and President Alessandri himself. They warned of the difficulties there would be in changing Chilean legislation to make it compatible with the ideas of the Council and suggested alternative ways of going about the reform that would “make it possible to evolve the new right in such a way that it will harmonize and be compatible with the old.”<sup>135</sup> The Council then gave the project to deputies Roberto Sánchez and José Maza, who presented it as their legislative initiative in the lower house of Congress. This bill was not approved, but Maza enacted its fundamental features by Decree no. 321 as minister of a provisional government on 12 March 1925.<sup>136</sup>

With Maza’s decree Labarca’s strategy for introducing women’s voting rights gradually had taken its first step. The leaders of the Council had also suggested to President Alessandri in 1922 that he should give women the vote in municipal elections, but no action was taken at that point.<sup>137</sup> Subsequently, General Carlos

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Amanda Labarca, “Evolución femenina,” *Desarrollo de Chile en la primera mitad del siglo XX* (Santiago: Ediciones de la Universidad de Chile, 1951), vol. 1, 120.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 120–21.

<sup>137</sup> Edda Gaviola et al., *Queremos votar en las próximas elecciones. Historia del movimiento femenino chileno 1913–1952* (Santiago: Coedición de Centro de análisis y difusión de la mujer,

Ibáñez, who established a dictatorial government in 1927 after forcing President Emiliano Figueroa to resign, enacted a decree granting literate women over 25 years of age the right to vote in municipal elections as long as they were owners of real estate, had a profession, or owned an industrial or commercial establishment. Its provisions were similar to those that Labarca had advocated in her comments to the *Revista Chilena* article after praising the British suffrage law of 1918, which gave the vote to women over 30 who were ‘occupiers’ or ‘wives of occupiers’ of a known residence.<sup>138</sup> The Ibáñez decree was never applied, but it included women’s suffrage in Chilean legislation for the first time.

During Ibáñez’s dictatorship the National Council of Women ceased to function, and Labarca, according to her biographer, “was deprived of her professorial appointment at the University of Chile.”<sup>139</sup> In August 1931, shortly after the fall of Ibáñez, Labarca founded with the participation of 47 women university graduates the Association of University Women (*Asociación de Mujeres Universitarias*) at the headquarters of the National Council of Women.<sup>140</sup> Its objective was “to extend and ameliorate the cultural, economic, civic, and social opportunities of professional women, and to elevate the condition of women in general.”<sup>141</sup> This listing made no mention of the vote.

## Conclusion

The historical record, as this paper has shown, contains consistent evidence that the anticlerical leaders, both men and women, were opposed to granting the women full suffrage rights. This opposition persisted even after the Conservatives presented a women’s suffrage bill in 1917. The anticlerical leaders argued that

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La Morada, Fempress, Ilet, Isis, Librería Lila, Pemci, CEM, 1986), 36.

<sup>138</sup> Johanna Alberti, “Keeping the Candle Burning: Some British Feminists between Two Wars” in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1974), 296.

<sup>139</sup> Paul, “Amanda Labarca,” op. cit. n. 67, 29.

<sup>140</sup> Emma Salas Neumann, *Mirada retrospectiva a la vida y obra de las primeras mujeres universitarias de Chile* (Santiago: Asociación de Mujeres Universitarias de Chile, 1989), 20.

<sup>141</sup> Gaviola et al., *Queremos votar*, op. cit. n. 137, 42. Ernestina Pérez, the first woman medical doctor to graduate from the University of Chile, was named the first president of this new organization. In addition to Labarca, Elena Caffarena, a lawyer, was named vice president. Irma Salas, an educator and graduate of Columbia’s Teachers’ College, was named secretary, and Elena Hott, a social worker, treasurer; 42. For brief biographies of these women, except for Caffarena and Hott, see Salas Neumann, op. cit. n. 140, 20–21.

women's suffrage should only be granted after women's independence had been enhanced by reforming the Civil Code and after women's education under state auspices had advanced. However, even after the Civil Code had been modified and women's secondary education had reached roughly equal levels to that for men in the mid-1920s, anticlerical leaders did not press for full enfranchisement of women. Rather, they proposed granting women the vote in municipal elections. Such elections would initiate women's participation in the nation's political life without altering the party balance in the national legislature or affect presidential contests.

The wariness of the anticlerical segment regarding the women's vote was a long-lasting consequence of the visible involvement of women in the religious-political disputes that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. More women mobilized to defend Church and Conservative Party views than those of the anticlerical Liberals and Radicals. This was most probably a reflection of the fact that the Church-related segment of Chilean society offered more opportunities for men and women to participate in social life together, while the anticlerical world was one of a starker separation between the genders.