



# The incorporation of women into the public sector in Chile, 1860–1930: from rejection to encouragement

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## ABSTRACT

The incorporation of women into the public arena has increasingly attracted the attention of scholars in public administration. Yet there has been little analysis of this phenomenon from a long-term perspective. This article is an evaluation of the integration of women into the public sector in Chile from the mid-nineteenth century to the Great Depression, c.1860–1930. Based on the national budget and statistical yearbooks, the article provides the first estimates of Chilean female public employees, identifying the main sectors they entered, and analyzing both social and political factors which permitted the entrance of women into public administration. The employment of women in public agencies was facilitated by a change in the role assigned to women in society, fiscal crises, the emergence of nationalistic economic ideas, the actions of the feminist movement, and changes in the way administrative tasks were conceived.

## KEYWORDS

Female public employment; public administration; gender; administrative history

## Introduction

Recent figures show that, currently 58% of public employees in OECD countries are female, well above the ratio for the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, in top management and elected positions, women are clearly underrepresented (Rubin 2018). To account for this phenomenon, Stivers (1990) has argued that public administration has been conceived following male canons, while Naff (1994) has pointed out that there is a glass ceiling for women in the public sector. According to Naff, decisions on promotion are based on stereotypes about the performance of women and their commitment to work, which negatively affect the way they are assessed. Connell (2006) has suggested that gender regimes in organizations are characterized by: gendered division of labor, gendered power relations, emotions and human relations, and gendered culture and symbolism. Overall, most of the literature on women's participation in the public sector aims to identify factors which explain the incorporation of women into public agencies and propose policies to overcome the underrepresentation they face.

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Unfortunately, despite the importance of previous works, most such studies do not analyze the incorporation of women into the public sector from a long-term perspective (excepting Stivers 1991). This is, historically speaking, a relatively recent phenomenon. If a woman's chance to develop a successful career is mediated by culture, symbolism and stereotypes, then it is absolutely necessary to understand when women entered into public administration in significant numbers, and what kind of changes in cultural and organizational values made this possible. The available literature provides several accounts of female incorporation into the public sector which refer primarily to developed countries (Jones 2000; Aron 1987; Rung 2002; Clark 2000; Wheeldon 2014; Lewis 1988; Wishnia 1990, Boak 1990). These works have shown that increased female participation within the public sector is largely explained by: economic reasons as personnel can be hired more cheaply (i.e. female wages were lower than those of men)<sup>1</sup>; political pressures in favor of women's inclusion in the public sector, as part of a social justice agenda and due to the greater visibility of the feminist movement; and changes in the social perception of office work due to advances in administrative techniques. Unfortunately, the incorporation of women into the public sector has not been analyzed with reference to developing countries, including those of Latin America, with the exception of Mexico (see Porter 2003, 2004; Barbosa 2018).

This article deals with the process of women's incorporation into the public sector in Chile from the mid-nineteenth century to the Great Depression, c.1860–1930. We are particularly interested in analyzing what made this process possible, how it was achieved, and the pace of change. The Chilean case is worthy of research for several reasons. First, during the period under consideration the Chilean state greatly improved its institutional capacities (Soifer 2015), while also increasing its administrative apparatus (Barría 2013). This allows us to assess whether this growth improved women's employment options, while, thanks to this institutional improvement, we do have good primary sources with which to analyze the phenomenon both qualitatively and quantitatively (as we show in the next section). Latin American countries are different to those for which there are currently published studies: a 'macho man' culture has been deeply rooted in most of the region, and for longer than in more developed countries. Chile was a world pioneer as far as the incorporation of women into the public sector is concerned, a process that began in the 1830s (albeit in a very restricted fashion, until the end of the century), and which, therefore, deserves further attention. In Britain, for instance, the first industrial nation, the first women were employed as public employees from 1870 onwards, in telegraphy, when the telegraph system came under the jurisdiction of the Post Office (Wheeldon 2014). In the USA in 1859, only 1,268 employees worked in the federal government offices in Washington, and all of them were men (Aron 1987).

Furthermore, this article also improves our understanding of the labor market in Chile, another under-researched topic. General labor market studies for Chile during the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century (for the entirety of the economy), have been devoted predominantly to the role of men, and in particular to those working within the industrial and mining sectors, thus grossly neglecting the role played by women (Godoy, Díaz, and Mauro 2009; Zárate and Godoy 2005; Godoy 1995). Female employment in Chile received some attention in the 1960s, but more in the 1980s (e.g. Klimpel 1962; Pardo 1988; Gálvez and Bravo 1992; Elizabeth 2001; Klubock 1998; Lavrin 1995; Roseblatt 2000; Salinas 1987; Tinsman 2002; Reyes 2016; Elizabeth 2001; for a comprehensive review,

see Zárata and Godoy 2005). More recently, the incorporation of women into the labor market in areas that promoted their personal and professional development has also attracted the attention of some scholars (Godoy, Díaz, and Mauro 2009), but the public sector remains an unexplored area. Although there are some published works on Chilean public employees for our period of study, they are mainly concerned with male public employees' social background (De León 1964; Stabili 2000; Candina 2009, 2013; Barriá 2015, 2016, 2019). As a consequence of this bias, Salazar and Pinto (1999) pointed out that public employees' identity has been historically based on values such as 'manhood' and 'decency'.

Based on a quantitative analysis (from national censuses, statistical yearbooks and the national budget) and a qualitative examination (of national press, official documents, and other contemporary sources), this work identifies three stages within the process of women's incorporation into the public administration. They were mainly the result of changes in society's dominant perceptions, as well as the economic and administrative considerations of public officials. During the first stage (the nineteenth century), the role of women was limited to the performance of some limited duties within the health and education sectors. Female presence in other sectors or in any administrative duties was nonexistent, while women also faced legal barriers. Between 1900 and 1920 a transitional process started to take place. The female educational sector grew, thus increasing the number of school teachers being hired. Something similar happened within the health sector. There was increasing support for the appointment of women in white-collar positions. This was largely the result of nationalistic ideas and of a process of incipient protoindustrialization, aimed at ensuring that more men were employed in the industrial sector (rather than in white collar jobs), as well as proposals to hire more female public employees to reduce fiscal expenditure on personnel. Thus, female public employment started to be seen as a convenient option for state management. During the 1920s, there was an important socio-political change in Chile. More progressionist governments took office, which, amongst other modernizing policies, sought to improve women's position within Chilean society. Most legal barriers for female public employment were derogated, while many policies that explicitly promoted the hiring of more women within the public sector were implemented, this time not only to reduce the nation's expenditure, but also to promote more female economic independence.

The article has been divided into five sections. First, we account for the sources and methodologies we have used, providing the first estimates of Chilean female public employees, and identifying the main sectors they entered. The three following sections deal with the different stages associated with the gradual process of women's incorporation into the public sector. We provide detailed information on how many women worked for the Chilean state, in which sectors, and which factors shaped the gradual increase in numbers of women within the public sector, from very specific roles (linked to 'female' duties), to a final stage of governmental promotion, characterized by a modification of the legal framework to remove all barriers for women. Finally, we provide some conclusions.

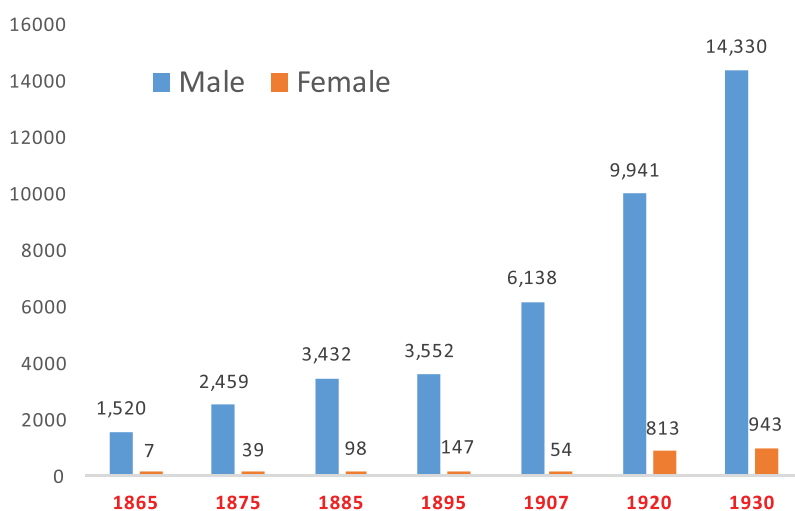
## **Estimates of female public employees**

In this paper we explore the process by which many Chilean women entered public administration between circa 1860 and 1930. We have consulted three sources in particular: the Chilean censuses from 1854 (the first national census to distinguish employment per

gender was undertaken that year, although it did not identify any female public employee. Chile 1854–1930), the *Anuarios Estadísticos* (Statistical Yearbooks. Oficina Central de Estadística 1911–1930) of the republic, from the 1860s; and the national budgets from 1865–1925 to 1925 (sampling one every five years. Chile 1865–1925). These three official sources provide a rich vein of information, and as Zárata and Godoy (2005) stated, the lack of sources (in particular statistical information) can no longer be cited as a reason for the absence of studies on women’s participation in the labor market in Chile during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Of these three sources, the accuracy of the figures from the censuses on female labor participation within the formal economy have been widely challenged by many authors (e.g. Hutchison 2000; Klimpel 1962; Gálvez and Bravo 1992). They grossly underestimate the actual number of women that served the state. For example, according to the censuses of 1865 and 1907 (Chart 1), only 0.5% (7 out of 1.527) and 0.9% (54 out of 6.138) of all public employees in those years, respectively, were women. This is mainly due to the fact that these statistics were produced after asking people their own opinions on what their occupations were. More often than not female public employees reported other occupations rather than describing themselves as ‘public employee’, thus generating this gap between both sources.

What is clear, though, is that the census data is inaccurate. It is widely believed that the information from statistical yearbooks, although it is based on different methodologies from those employed in the censuses, and irregular in the coverage of public sector employment per gender, is still more accurate regarding female labor participation, broadly defined (Hutchison 2000). The inter-census data contains some suspicious variations, for instance, regarding overall female public sector labor participation, such as the sharp fall between 1895 and 1907 (Pardo 1988). Furthermore, the statistical yearbooks, when available, also provide more detailed information per sector within government. For example, the 1870–1871 statistical yearbook (one of the first with relevant information for our purposes), recorded



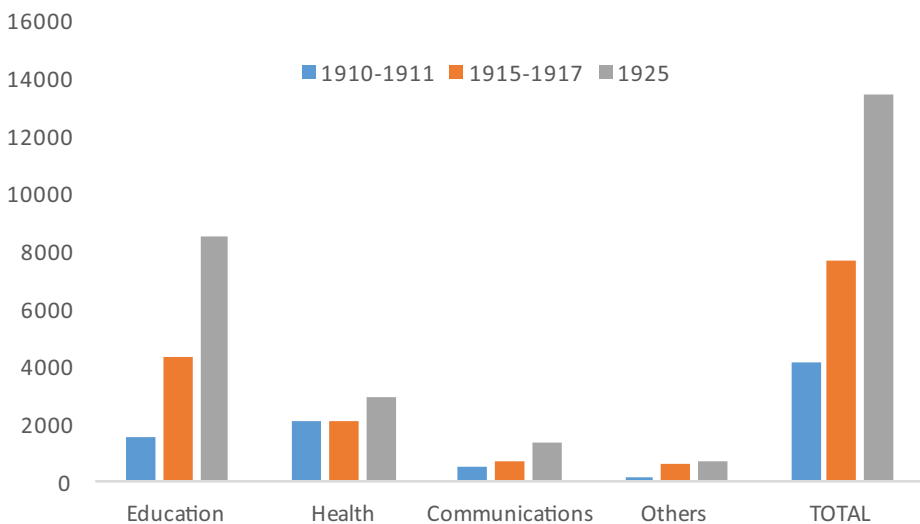
**Chart 1.** Public employees per gender, according to census data, 1865–1930. Source: All censuses from 1865 to 1930.

942 female public employees that year in Chile, and we know that of these, 601 worked in public education (i.e. 64%). According to the same source, in 1911 there were slightly over 2.000 women working in the public health sector, and this figure had doubled by 1930. Meanwhile in the education sector 5.000 women had been appointed at public schools by 1915.

Our third source of information, the national budget, is an annual law, which provides the government expenditure per sector at a disaggregated level. For the period under study, it contains information for each ministry, at such a detailed level that it is possible to identify every expenditure item, including public employees' salaries, so that we could identify the number of public employees per gender, something ignored by figures provided by Humud (1968).

Thus, it was possible to reconstruct the total number of Chile's public employees, and per gender, for all selected years. Table 1 provides a summary of the data for period 1885–1925, per five years. This is the first time that figures of Chilean public employees per gender have been provided for these decades.

A weakness of the national budget data is that it does not account for the totality of female public employees working for public schools for several years during our period of study. This is clear when analyzing the women working in the sector between 1885 and 1920. Although the coverage of the sector is wider in the national budget than in the statistical yearbooks, the national budget did not record some sectors recorded by the statistical yearbook (e.g. health and communications), and vice versa. Yet, we can combine both sources of information, at least for several years, to provide sound estimates of the minimum number of women working for the public sector in Chile, which we do for selected years in Chart 2.



**Chart 2.** Minimum number of female public employees in Chile, estimates for 1910–1911, 1915–1917 and 1925. Source: national budget (1910, 1915, 1925) and statistical yearbook (1911, 1917, 1925).

**Table 1.** Number of public employees, per gender, according to the national budget, 1885–1925 (excluding war and navy ministries, and railways).

Ministry / Year	Gender	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925
<b>Interior</b>	<b>Male</b>	1,232	1,323	1,635	2,389	10,273	11,762	4,618	14,066	21,129
	<b>Fem.</b>	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	1,234	1,323	1,635	2,389	10,273	11,762	4,618	14,066	21,129
<b>Foreign Office</b>	<b>Male</b>	78	121	141	843	1,007	1,397	1,029	832	950
	<b>Fem.</b>	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	80	121	142	844	1,007	1,397	1,029	832	950
<b>Finance</b>	<b>Male</b>	1,405	1,607	1,549	1,598	2,139	2,612	2,517	2,697	2,754
	<b>Fem.</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	1,405	1,607	1,549	1,598	2,139	2,612	2,517	2,697	2,754
<b>Justice</b>	<b>Male</b>	966	1,118	2,376	2,245	2,742	2,459	1,075	2,685	3,105
	<b>Fem.</b>	26	46	58	1	0	1	2	1	0
	<b>Total</b>	992	1,164	2,434	2,246	2,742	2,460	1,077	2,686	3,105
<b>Public Instruction</b>	<b>Male</b>	0	0	0	2,032	3,017	1,814	2,447	9,077	2,484
	<b>Fem.</b>	0	0	0	1,841	3,163	1,293	456	728	1,206
	<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	3,873	6,180	3,107	2,903	9,805	3,690
<b>Industry and Public Works</b>	<b>Male</b>	0	194	204	259	671	765	813	853	914
	<b>Fem.</b>	0	13	0	0	114	231	170	222	0
	<b>Total</b>	0	207	204	259	785	996	983	1,075	914
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Male</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	743
	<b>Fem.</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	625
	<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,368
<b>Hygiene</b>	<b>Male</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	257
	<b>Fem.</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25
	<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	282
<b>Land</b>	<b>Male</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	98
	<b>Fem.</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	3,681	4,363	5,905	9,366	19,849	20,809	12,499	30,210	32,434
	<b>Fem.</b>	30	59	59	1,843	3,277	1,525	628	951	1,856
	<b>Share Fem.</b>	0.8%	1.3%	1.0%	16.4%	14.2%	6.8%	4.8%	3.1%	5.4%
<b>Total</b>		3,711	4,422	5,964	11,209	23,126	22,334	13,127	31,161	34,290

Source: National budget of 1885–1925.

Thus, circa 1910–1911, there were at least 4,099 female public employees in Chile.<sup>2</sup> It is also possible to combine information from 1915 from the national budget with that from 1917 in the statistical yearbook, and to do the same for 1925, estimating that there were 7,678 and 13,401 female public employees in Chile for those periods.

By the end of the period covered by our study, there were, to the best of our knowledge, more than 13,000 female public employees in Chile, working in education, health, communications, and many other sectors of the government. This shows a dramatic increase if compared to the figures of the 1860s, the earliest period for which there is some official data available.

We have identified each of the women that received a salary from the national budget, and the governmental unit they worked for. The data is available for the country as a whole, rather than per province. When there were some lacunas, we complemented the budgetary information with complementary sources, as explained above.

It is highly uncommon to find information on female public employees for other countries for the period under study. Even works dealing specifically with this topic, for other countries, mainly perform qualitative analysis, without providing comprehensive data series as we do here for Chile. For example, for the USA, the widely mentioned data used by Stivers (1990) came from Aron (1987), who showed detailed data per sector, when providing a general table, but only for the executive departments of Washington DC. For example, for 1859, the data accounts for 1,268 public employees (all of which were men). In 1870, out of 5,824 public employees, 958 were women. A decade later, there were 1,773 women, out of 7,866 employees. In 1893, there were 5,637 women out of 17,304 public employees. Finally, for 1903, out of a total of 25,675 workers within the executive departments, there were 6,882 women (Aron 1987). Clark (2000) writing on France, did not provide any figures for total public employees; rather, there is patchy data for some government units and for selected years only.

The absence of comprehensive data for women in the public sector is surely due to the challenges faced by researchers attempting to reconstruct/estimate these figures. Our work could be used as a guide for researchers aiming to produce similar figures for other countries. Thanks to our original data, we were able to answer many important research questions, such as: When, why and how was there an increase in female participation in public employment in Chile? Which were the most important sectors women worked in? Which stages can be identified? Which factors facilitated or impaired this process? We deal with the answers to these questions in the following sections.

## **The limited female presence within the public sector during the nineteenth century**

There has been female participation in the Chilean labor market since its foundation. However, women's participation in the wage labor market did not begin until the late eighteenth century. After independence, as the wage labor market intensified in Chile, more women started to receive wages in cash (Hutchison 2000), although they have been invisibilized by the historiography (Zárata and Godoy 2005; Franco 1978). During the first decades after independence (achieved in 1817), it was unthinkable that in Chile, a conservative society culturally shaped by the Spanish inheritance (Sarasúa 1997), a woman could hold a government post, as was the case in many other

countries during the 1810s-1830s, even in the USA or France (Guy and Newman 2004; Naff 1994; Clark 2000). Even though some Chilean women participated in politics from independence, they did so as the 'wives' of male politicians (Chambers 2015).

The pioneer Chilean female public employees of the nineteenth century were first employed in very specific sectors, linked to the 'female roles' within society, according to the social perceptions of that time. Women were nurses, midwives, and schoolteachers. As Stivers (2000) noted with regard to the USA, the incorporation of women into the public sector was closely linked to the widening of the social sectors. During the nineteenth century, Chilean social policies aimed to improve health and education (Mac-Clure 2012). It would be difficult to state which was the first Chilean women public employee, but we do know that there were some women heads of public schools (for girls), and that they were first employed in the early 1830s (Serrano et al. 2012). Many women subsequently worked in hospitals, or in the telegraph and postal services. The main sectors that first accepted women as public employees were education, health, and communications (Gálvez and Bravo 1992; Lastarria 1928). The post office was so important as a gateway for the earliest female public employees that for Berta Lastarria (1928) the first proper Chilean public employee was Carmen Quiroga de Aravena, appointed in 1869 by president José Joaquín Pérez as Head of Lota's Post Office.

From 1833 midwives were trained in Chile (Zárate 2007a; González and Zárate 2018), after which they typically worked in public hospitals. Accordingly, public health became one of the first sectors to allow women within its ranks. In 1854 there were 317 midwives registered in the census of that year; by 1907 this number had increased to over 1.700 (Zárate 2007b). It is unclear exactly how many midwives worked for the state, but it is likely to have been the majority. Midwives were employed not only by the health service, but also by other public offices. As can be seen in Table 2, midwives worked for the Home Office or for the Foreign Office, and were destined for some distant or strategic locations in the country.

1854 saw the creation of the *Escuela Normal de Preceptoras*, to train female school teachers mainly for primary public schools, which from 1860 spread countrywide.<sup>3</sup> Initially they were mainly established in Santiago, but from the late 1880s onwards they were set up in multiple regions (Puebla 1928; Walker 1928). According to the statistical yearbook of 1870–1871, there were then 601 Chilean women working in the public education sector. Many of the Professional Schools of Girls that were opened from the late 1880s (see above), besides training girls for the industrial sector, also trained future school teachers, who later were later employed by public primary and secondary schools, to teach handicraft courses (Godoy 1995; Tables 2 and 3). It is estimated that about 5% of graduates from these schools ended up working as teachers (Hutchison 2006). Many of these female teachers became heads of public schools, and also worked on public railways (Godoy 1995).

In 1889 the Pedagogical Institute was created to train secondary school teachers; it attracted many women, who later also joined public schools (Mauro-Cardarelli, Godoy, and Ximena 2009). Education was the sector that included most female public employees (Caffarena 1928). Female teachers were employed in a wide range of public institutions such as the *Escuelas Normales de Preceptoras* located in many regions, in the *Liceos de*



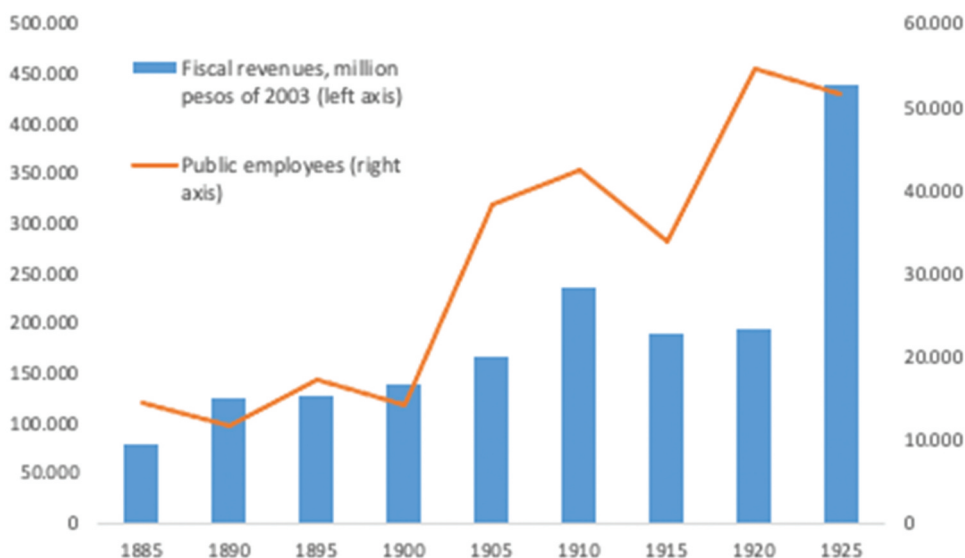
**Table 2.** General profile of some female public employees in Chile, according to the national budgets: some examples for 1885, 1890 and 1895.

Ministry / Year	1885	1890	1895
<b>Interior</b>	Valdivia's midwife (from 1883); San Fernando's midwife. <b>Total: 2.</b>		
<b>Foreign Office</b>	Escuela de Mujeres de Magallanes (teacher and assistant). <b>Total: 2.</b>		Magallanes's midwife. <b>Total: 1.</b>
<b>Justice and Public Education</b>	Nurse in Escuela de Artes y Oficios; Escuela Normal de Preceptoras de Santiago and Chillán (directors, teachers, inspectors, nurse, cook, doorkeeper). <b>Total: 26.</b>	Conservatorio de Música (teachers; assistants); Escuela Normal de Preceptoras de Santiago y del Sur, Escuela Práctica de Aplicación (directors, sub-directors, teachers, inspectors, housekeepers). <b>Total: 46.</b>	Escuela Normal de Preceptoras de Santiago, La Serena y del Sur, Escuela Práctica de Aplicación, Instituto Carlos Waddington (director, sub-director, teachers, inspectors, housekeeper, librarian). <b>Total: 58.</b>
<b>Industry and Public Works</b>		Nurse in Escuela de Artes y Oficios; Escuela Profesional de Niñas (director, inspector, teachers, housekeeper) <b>Total: 13.</b>	
<b>Summary (sectors employed)</b>	Education (90%) and Health (10%)	Education (98%) and Health (2%)	Education (98%) and Health (2%)

*Niñas* across the country, in primary schools throughout Chile, and in other public schools such as *Escuela Práctica de Comercio*, *Instituto Carlos Waddington*, amongst others (see Table 2 for some examples).

In 1877, a policy change inaugurated a new stage, which in the following decades impacted female participation in both political affairs and the administrative sector. The Universidad de Chile started to allow women as students, thanks to the famous Amunátegui's decree,<sup>4</sup> and despite fierce opposition from conservative sectors of society (Sánchez 2006b). Chile, became a pioneer in Latin America, paralleling the advances made during this decade in more developed countries (Dyhouse 1995; Wheeldon 2014). Nonetheless, it was not until 1886 that Eloísa Díaz became the first South American woman to be awarded a university degree. Other important degrees were obtained by Chilean women, and their skills were in demand by the public sector: they were school teachers, nurses, midwives, and social workers (Zárate and Godoy 2005; Roseblatt 2000; Zárate 2007b). Between 1881 and 1919 a total of 1.339 women graduated from the University of Chile (Sánchez 2006b).

In 1879 Chile started a war against Bolivia and Perú, which ended in 1883. A result of this international conflict was Chile's annexation of two provinces rich in nitrate, to such an extent that Chile started to enjoy a world monopoly of this product. This not only changed the geographical extent of the country, but also inaugurated a period of increasing fiscal revenues due to the imposition of an export duty on nitrate shipments, which funded the growth of the Chilean state and its range of operations (Barría 2013; Badia-Miró and Díaz-Bahamonde 2017, 2018; Badia-Miró and Ducoing 2013, 2015).



**Chart 3.** Fiscal revenues of Chile (pesos of 2003) and public employees, Chile, 1885–1925. Source: Díaz et al 2016 for fiscal revenues, own data for public employees.

As a consequence of the increasing public revenues mainly due to the nitrate boom (Chart 3), overall public employment increased (Barría 2015). However, the impact on female employment was not automatic. Until the late nineteenth century the presence of women within the public sector was still limited, and restricted to some positions within the education and health sectors, as seen in Table 2.

Entrance into other sectors of the economy faced both legal and fearer social challenges. In the mid-1880s a famous Chilean writer, Juan Rafael Allende, went as far as to accuse women public employees at the Post Office of (regularly) having affairs with male colleagues who were married men (*Padre Padilla*, 4 April 1886). The incorporation of women into the public sector not only posed cultural and idiosyncratic challenges but also legal ones. For example, in 1893, when a young female lawyer applied for a position at the Judicial Secretary, Notary and Real Estate Registry of Ancud (in the province of Chiloé), the Concepcion Appeals Court requested a formal legal report from a Fiscal stating whether this female lawyer was entitled to apply for the job or not. The Fiscal's verdict was that her application was not admissible because, although the law was unclear about whether a woman could be a judge, social custom dictated that she was unable to hold the position. Eventually, the Supreme Court allowed this young lawyer to apply for the job, but she did not get it, unsurprisingly (Sánchez 2006a, 316).

### **Female public employment in a transitional society, 1900–1920**

The first decades of the twentieth century were a transitional period in Chilean politics and society. Despite still having an elitist political system, new middle-class voices emerged, promoting new social reforms, such as the incorporation of new actors into

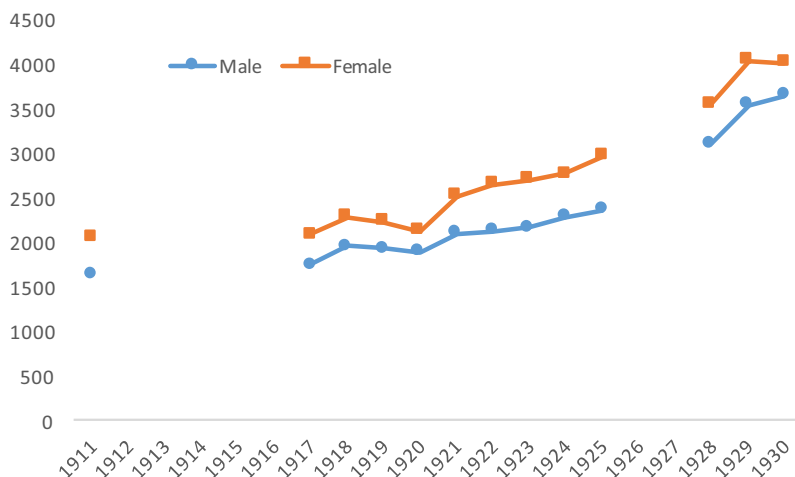
**Table 3.** General profile of some female public employees in Chile, according to the national budgets: some examples for 1900, 1905 and 1910.

Ministry / Year	1900	1905	1910
<b>Foreign Office</b>	Magallanes's midwife. <b>Total: 1.</b>		
<b>Justice</b>	Jail Guardian in Copiapó. <b>Total: 1.</b>		Jail Guardian in Copiapó. <b>Total: 1.</b>
<b>Public Education</b>	Midwife in School of Medicine; Liceo de Niñas No1, No2 de Santiago, Escuela Normal de Preceptoras de La Serena, Santiago y Concepcion, Primary Schools in the whole of Chile (directors, teachers, teaching assistants, inspectors, housekeepers, accountant). <b>Total: 1.841.</b>	Midwife in School of Medicine; Washerwoman Instituto Nacional; Liceo de Niñas No1, No2, No3, No.4 de Santiago, Tacna, Iquique and the rest of Chile; Escuela Normal de Preceptoras de La Serena, Santiago, Concepcion and other locations; Primary Schools in the whole of Chile; Escuela Práctica de Comercio (directors, teachers, teaching assistants, inspectors, housekeepers, accountant, librarian, secretary). <b>Total: 3.163.</b>	Kindergarten; Liceo de Aplicación; Liceos de Niñas, many cities; Primary Schools in the whole of Chile; Escuela Normal de Preceptoras in several locations (Directors, inspectors, teachers, visitors). <b>Total: 1.293.</b>
<b>Industry and Public Works</b>		Cooks in agricultural school; Escuelas Profesionales de Niñas in several cities (Directos, Inspectors, teachers, accountants). <b>Total: 114.</b>	Escuelas Profesionales de Niñas in several cities (Directos, Inspectors, teachers, accountants, library assistants, housekeepers). <b>Total: 231.</b>
<b>Summary (sectors employed)</b>	Education: 99.9%; Health 0.1%; Public Order: 0.05%.	Education: 99.97%; Health 0.03%	Education: 99.9%; Public Order: 0.1%.

public life. Additionally, unions became more visible and active in many sectors, leading to many strikes, which were repressed by the state, and the mass killings of workers and civilians in the nitrate district (Barr-Melej 2001).

Furthermore, from the mid-1900s, a new political force emerged, linked to nationalism, which promoted new economic policies associated with industrialization. However, this did not necessarily imply a change in the position of women in Chilean society. Some ideas circulating in the public sphere were explicitly opposed to female participation in public affairs. For example, in 1904, *Raza Chilena*, a very influential book (one of the first best sellers of the country), which spread nationalistic and pro industrialization ideas, was released. The author, Dr Nicolás Palacios, argued that feminist ideas both distorted societies (by promoting a distribution of benefits to favor those lacking in merit) and undermined families (the foundation of social life). He also bitterly complained about philanthropic initiatives run by Chilean women in the early decades of the twentieth century (Palacios 1904).

Despite Palacios, women gradually infiltrated public administration. As shown in Table 3, by 1900 16,4% of public jobs belonged to women signaling the beginning of an expansionary period in terms of the state's involvement in social affairs. The increase in female public employment can also be explained by the increase in the numbers of women in the education sector (Guerin 1928; Sánchez 2006a). In 1905 the government



**Chart 4.** Number of employees within the public health sector per gender, 1911–1930. Source: statistical yearbooks, 1911–1930.

launched special courses at the *Escuela Normal de Preceptoras* to train female kindergarten teachers, mainly for public nurseries (Walker 1928). A year later, Leopoldina Maluschka inaugurated the first public kindergarten in Santiago (Peralta 2006).

The rise in the number of women in public employment is also reflected in the health sector. This is not captured by the national budget, but fortunately it can be assessed from the statistical yearbooks. More women became nurses leading to the creation in 1902 of the first course for nurses in Chile, and in 1906 of the first nurses' school of South America, the State Nurses School, whose director was a woman (Díaz 1928). Twenty years later the Sanitary Nurses School was created, which was merged in 1929 with the State Nurses School as the University of Chile Nurses School (Mayers 1928; Muñoz, Isla, and Alarcón 1999; Adams 1927; González and Zárate 2018). Due to the mass incorporation of nurses and midwives, women dominated the health sector. By 1911, 56% of employees in public hospitals were women; between 1911 and 1930 the range was 52–56% (Chart 4). Apart from providing aggregate information on employment per gender in the public health sector, it is also possible to acquire data about women in specific occupations for certain years. This data suggests that most women employed in public hospitals were nurses or performed administrative duties, while the number of female medical doctors and dentists was very small. For example, in the period 1928–1930, only 3% and 10% of medical doctors and dentists, respectively, were women. Yet, women were dominant in other professions besides the nursery, such as pharmacy and social work.

The increase in the number of public employees soon became a contentious issue in national politics. From 1892 new proposals to reduce the number of national public staff were formulated. The dominant idea was to suppress the useless and politically motivated appointments (Hutchison 2006). Public employment was seen as detrimental to the nation's development. For example, in his celebrated book *Nuestra Inferioridad Económica*, Francisco Antonio Encina 1972 [1911] strongly criticized the growth of public employment, considering it unproductive. In his opinion, Chile needed more education to help promote industries. Yet, to those arguments of 1909, a new idea was added: the inclusion of women within the public sector. *El Mercurio*, the most influential newspaper

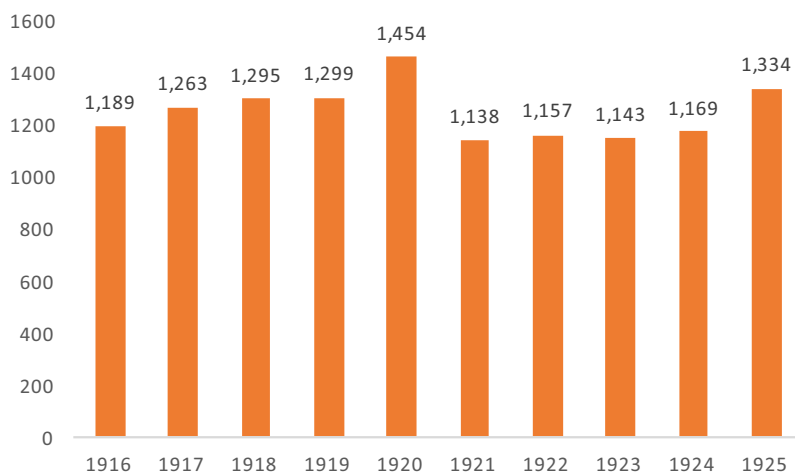
**Table 4.** Distribution of public employees according to rank and gender in the State Telegraph Office, 1915 and 1925.

1915			1925		
Role/Position	M	F	Role/Position	M	F
General Director	1	-	General Director	1	-
General Inspector	1	-	Vice director	1	-
Secretary	1	-	Heads of department	2	-
Accountant	1	-	Heads of First Class Section	2	-
Vice inspectors	9	-	Vice inspectors	4	-
Deputy secretary	2	-	Heads of Second Class Section	3	-
Post officer	1	-	Consultant lawyer	1	-
Major Office	1	-	Major Officers	8	-
Store keeper	1	-	Vice Heads of district	21	-
Valparaiso's agent	1	-	Officers	77	13
Officers	38	1	Telegraphists	485	654
Heads of district	14	-	Agents of telegraphic first class offices	17	201
Telegraphists	360	510	Headmaster workshop	1	-
Aspirants	24	46	Mechanics	7	-
Heads of Gangs	17	-	Thread's Custodian	315	-
Thread's Custodian	279	-	Delivery couriers	458	-
Mechanic	3	-	Agents of telegraphic second class offices	1	3
Packer	3	-			
Doorman	4	-			
<b>Total</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1406</b>	<b>871</b>

Source: statistical yearbooks, 1915 and 1925.

in Chilean history, started to show some sympathy with the idea, as a means to reduce expenses, and therefore mitigate the impact of fiscal crisis. In an editorial in 1909, a year in which there was a public deficit equivalent to 1,9% of GDP (Díaz, Lüders & Wagner 2016), it was stated that Chilean men should quit their jobs in trade and the public sector and be replaced by women. The editorial went even further, predicting that female graduates from technical-commercial institutes would quickly displace Chilean men in those jobs that did not require physical strength. Chilean women 'were happy receiving lower salaries than men, females are also more constant, more patient, and sober . . . and they do not adhere to Saint Monday' (i.e. the usual practice of men of not attending their jobs on Mondays due to the drinking excesses of the weekend) (Hutchison 2006: 220–221). Women started to be regarded as a cure for both fiscal crisis and the mismanagement of public agencies. In the next few years, fiscal deficits continued to be a critical issue for the government, to the extent that the Ministry of Finance tried to reorganize the structure of the entire public administration, to control expenses. In 1913 an *ad hoc* commission was created, which aimed to reduce both the number of offices and of public employees. This plan was unsuccessful, but in 1915, when the 2.987 Law was issued, public employees' salaries were reduced.

Official statistics for the 1910s show women performing white-collar workers' duties within the public sector. In 1914, for example, Tancredo Pinochet, Director of the *Escuela de Artes y Oficios* (School of Arts and Crafts), decided, for the first time in its history, to hire a women secretary rather than a man. Following this controversial decision, he was approached by members of parliament asking him to reconsider such an unusual (and



**Chart 5.** Number of women working for the Public Post Office and Public Telegraphs (including railways telegraph), 1916–1925. Source: statistical yearbooks, 1916–1925.

‘inconvenient’) appointment (Pinochet 1915, 73–74), which he refused to do. Rather than being an isolated example, it seems that the notion of including women in the public sector was gaining momentum.

In 1911 there were already 534 women working for the public telegraph service, while in 1913 there were as many as 689 working in the public post office. Adding both services from 1916 (the first year when data is available for both of them), and including the public railways telegraph service (which incidentally did not employ many women, unlike other public sector telegraph services), we can see from Chart 2 that by 1916 there were nearly 1.200 women working in these public offices alone, and nearly 1.500 in 1920.

In the case of the State Telegraph Office, even though a large number of women were appointed, they were employed predominantly in middle ranking positions. Table 4 shows the sort of jobs taken by women in this sector. Most women performed operative tasks. No woman was appointed in high ranking or lower positions. The data suggests that ‘proper’ positions for women within these offices were those that required them to fulfil recurring tasks associated with white-collar workers (i.e. sending and receiving messages).

The transitional character of this period is illustrated by the fact that, despite the growing numbers of women in administrative positions, there were still legal restrictions in place that precluded the appointment of women to higher ranking positions. In 1917, an officer of the Register Office asked the Secretary of Justice whether women could be officers of that department. The Secretary of Justice forwarded the query to the Accounts Tribunal, where it was seen by Valentín Letelier, one of the most prolific Chilean intellectuals of his generation, and known to hold progressive ideas for those times. In his analysis, Letelier recognized that Chilean legislators ‘issued administrative laws under the implicit idea that female<sup>5</sup> were excluded from all public positions’. On the other hand, he admitted that during the last four decades a profound change had taken place regarding female participation in the public sector. Based on the previous verdict of the Supreme Court, Letelier decreed that women could hold public positions but only in those cases in which there were no explicit legal prohibitions. In this particular case, Letelier’s interpretation of the situation was that Chilean women could not enter the

Register Office because they were not allowed to vote (a legal requirement), but that they could be alternate officers because the law did not require them to be allowed to vote to be an alternate (Letelier 1923, 535–536).

By the end of the 1910s, the fiscal crisis had not been resolved. Between 1900 and 1920, there was only a surplus in the public budget between 1916 and 1918 (Díaz et al, 2016). In 1918 *El Mercurio* proposed, once again, that most public jobs had to go to women because they were more inclined to accomplish the tasks entrusted to them, besides being more scrupulous and 'less demanding, now that a mountain of salaries afflict the State' (Hutchison 2006: 222). The policy window remained open to incorporate more women into the public sector.

In 1915, a group of women established the *Círculo de Lectura*. Four years later, the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres* was instituted, and both groups advocated for more justice for women, including enhancing their political and civil rights (Labarca 1947, 133–134). Led by Amanda Labarca, the *Consejo* managed to insert many of their ideas into the public agenda. Thus, from 1920, the issue was no longer solely a fiscal problem. It opened the door to a new age of female public employment.

### From rejection to encouragement, 1920–1930

From Independence, and until 1924, the political party system in Chile was dominated by interest groups (mostly from the elites), which were divided into liberals and conservatives. However, gradually, new political parties emerged as the voices of both the middle and the lower strata of society. By the 1910s, there were new calls for social change (Barr-Melej 2001).

In 1920, Arturo Alessandri Palma took office as Chilean president; he was a liberal politician who advocated for social change and the improvement of social rights. When campaigning for President, Alessandri Palma committed to the enhancement of women's rights (Giordano 2010, 106). During his administration, a number of bills were discussed by Congress with regard to the emancipation of women. Eventually, Law Decree 328 was issued on 12 March 1925, declaring women to be legally capable of acting on their own, of managing their assets, and allowing them to decide by themselves to work or run a business. A year earlier, another law on work contracts established that women could administer their wages by themselves (Giordano 2010).

Under Alessandri's government (1920–1925), more women were incorporated into the public administration, and on better terms. In May 1921, the then Minister of Interior and future President of the Republic, Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938–1941), sent a note to his fellow secretaries and other heads of public services advising them to prefer women over men when hiring for certain administrative duties. Aguirre Cerda's purpose was to release men for 'more productive duties', and he added that:

it could be thought that this is not the best moment to recommend such a policy, given that the ongoing economic crisis has restricted some economic activities and due to the relatively incomplete training of Chilean women if compared to that of men. However, it is important to mention that it is today when more urgency is required to increase national efficiency and to push men toward more productive activities. Likewise, it is important to show women the sort of activities that the country expects them to perform, for them to prepare and train in the best possible way (Own translation, *El Mercurio*, 16 May 1921: 15).

During the 1920s a comprehensive process of administrative reform took place (Olavarría 2018). Once again, public employment was one of the key targets identified by reformers. As in the previous decade, one of the main purposes of the reform was to reduce public expenditure. At the same time, after the fall of the parliamentary regime, in September 1924, a new political age began in Chile. In 1924 the first social ministry was created, and it was entrusted with health, labor and housing policies. In 1925 a new constitution was promulgated, ensuring several new social rights (Ibáñez 2003). Once again, concerns about both fiscal budget discipline and the expansion of the social sector deepened women incorporation's into the public sector.

The Labor Office started to hire women in 1924, soon after the first labor code was promulgated in Chile to regulate and protect working conditions. As part of this code, a women's inspection section was created in 1926 (Hutchison 2006). Among its members were Elena Caffarena and Elvira Santa Cruz Ossa, also known as Roxane, who were very concerned with the working conditions of women and children, to the extent that they are credited with the creation of the Department of Inspection for Women and Children (Corporación Humanas 2010; Hutchison 2006). 1925 saw the creation of the Social Service School in Chile, the first of its kind in Latin America (González and Zárate 2018; Illanes 2007), from which many future public employees graduated (Cordemans 1928), and were appointed by a number of public agencies: public hospitals and schools, General Sanitary Directorate (*Dirección General de Sanidad*), State Railways, Pedagogic Institute, Bacteriologic Institute, Housing Department, Police General Directorate, Prison Services, Army Social Service, Female Labor Inspectorate, Republic Presidency (Illanes 2007).

On 14 December 1925, the first *estatuto administrativo* was issued (Castillo and Rubilar 2018). It aimed to design a new civil service system. It forbade the hiring of married people in the same agency, which shows that women were clearly conceived of as public employees. Consequently, public offices such as *Cajas de Ahorros*, and the Civil Registration Office employed women (Guerin 1928).<sup>6</sup>

The process of cutting fiscal expenditure continued in the following years (in part due to the fall in public revenues in 1926 and 1927 (Chart 3). In 1926 the 4.075 Law was implemented in order to reduce wages and pensions by 15%. A year later a new Law, the 4.113, was issued, this time ordering the dismissal of 'unnecessary' public employees (Bernedo 1989). Once again, hiring women was one of the solutions considered to contain expenditure, and in June 1927, Aguirre Cerda's ideas were taken up by the then Minister of Interior, Enrique Balmaceda, who sent a note to all heads of public services, indicating that:

This Ministry considers very convenient the employment of women in bureaucratic jobs that demand little physical effort, since they are more suitable for women. I believe that increasing preference should be given to women in these positions, because this way we are promoting female economic independence, which is the foundation of her moral independence too. The working woman, as a general rule, spends her money in expenses that are productive for her family, because human vices are more disseminated amongst men than amongst women. Thus, women's salaries contribute more to the benefits of the household. Furthermore, by employing women in these positions, men would start seeking employment in the industrial sector or in more virile positions, which contribute more directly to the economic success of the country. Likewise, because women are more devoted to their duties (i.e. her labour yields more), she pays more attention to her tasks,



delivering better results, and of higher quality, without demanding higher salaries. This goes to the direct benefit of the Treasury, and will at the same time drive her away from many hazards that lurk for men, in particular as far as the management of financial funds is concerned [own translation] (*El Mercurio*, 15 June 1927: 3).

Finally, the Secretary ordered all heads of public services to hire women under their direction, except for some management positions (*El Mercurio*, 15 June 1927: 3). That same month, Balmaceda issued a decree establishing that women should be preferentially appointed to positions at the Post and Telegraph Offices. The regulation stated that:

Male staff will be hired only in those cases when the Director of the Post and Telegraph Services declares that these positions cannot be filled by women because they entail too much physical effort, or because there are not enough skilled women to perform those duties, or any other similar reason. In these cases, the reasons for hiring male staff over women must be explicitly mentioned in the appointment decree (Own translation, Chile 1927, 2301).

Another indication that the 1927 administrative statute took into account the presence of women within the public sector, is that it also forbade family members (i.e. couples) from working at the same public agency (Chile 1927, 5023). But, as happened with the 1925 *statute*, this recommendation was not fully implemented. Consequently, as was suggested by the conspicuous feminist leader Elena Caffarena, women's chances of finding a job in the public sector were dependent on the specific regulations of each public agency (Caffarena 1928, 76).

In 1930 a new administrative statute was issued, which was in force until 1945, which did much to encourage women's participation in public administration. While maintaining the same prohibition for family members, it introduced social protection exclusively designed for women: it instituted a paid prenatal (one month) and postnatal leave (one and a half months).

As shown above, the political and social attitudes toward the inclusion of women in public administration changed from rejection to encouragement. Women started to penetrate most sectors and ranks of the public sector. According to Berta Lastarria, in 1927 a considerable number of women worked at the public Post Office, at the *Caja de Ahorros*, and on the State Railways. Additionally, female employees could be found at several ministries, *Caja de Seguro Obrero*, University of Chile, National Library, Social Assistance Directorate, local councils, Statistics Office, Jails, and the Inland Revenues (Lastarria 1928, 666). By the end of the period covered by this paper, Elena Caffarena was right to note that 'during the last years many women collaborate with administrative duties in ministries, reaching high ranking positions, showing great skills in their duties' (Caffarena 1928, own translation).

## Conclusions

In 2018, about 60% of Chilean public employees were women (Dirección de Presupuestos (DIPRES) 2019, 22), a remarkable figure if compared to the situation in the late nineteenth century, when there were only a handful of female public employees. Before this article, little was known about the timing and nature of this remarkable change. During the

nineteenth century only a few women were hired in the education, health and communication sectors. In the following decades, new public agencies opened their doors to female employees. Except perhaps for directors of schools, they were mainly appointed in operational positions, or in positions usually associated with women only (e.g. nursery, midwives). There was a clear glass ceiling, and expectations were far lower than for male public employees.

During Arturo Alessandri Palma's and Carlos Ibáñez del Campo's administrations (1920–1925 and 1927–1931, respectively), in particular, active policies encouraging the hiring of women for public posts were implemented, including preference for women in certain agencies and specific social rights for them, such as prenatal and postnatal leave. All this was not the result of a smooth and natural process, but of a number of social changes in the cultural, legal, and administrative fields. Since the late nineteenth century the status of women has advanced in Chilean society. Women have entered universities, and a number of conspicuous feminist leaders have advocated for the enhancement of their rights. Consequently, the political system has processed these demands and issued new regulations. The incorporation of women into public agencies was partly facilitated by the budget deficit crisis faced from the 1900s. Female public employment started to be seen symbolically rather than as an effective tool for cutting expenditure.

This is not the only variable which facilitated women's entrance into the public sector. A major change in the way public employment was conceived was also a factor. Since the 1900s, new ideas on economic issues have appeared. A nationalistic approach promoting the industrialization of the Chilean economy stated that men should be hired to perform physically demanding tasks. Therefore, administrative duties were no longer conceived of as appropriate for them. This idea was not only discussed by intellectuals such as Encina, but was also accepted by key political actors. The role of men in the industrializing project was pivotal in the directives issued by both the Alessandri and Ibáñez del Campos governments to foster the appointment of women to public agencies. Although all these factors were instrumental in facilitating the hiring of female public employees, the critical factor to understand the increased female presence is the enhancement of public intervention in the social arena. From the nineteenth century women performed social tasks in sectors such as education and health. Since 1925, a new social profession was instituted (*social worker*). Therefore, as in most other countries (Stivers 2000), the expansion of social welfare facilitated the incorporation of women into the public sector.

Nonetheless, the inclusion of women in the administrative state was far from being a linear or accumulative process. Social, legal and political changes experienced in Chilean society during the 1920s did not prevent the political system from retreating in the following decades. For example, as late as 1940 a government decree was issued stating that women employees of the *Caja de Seguro Obrero* had to resign from their jobs if they got married. In the same decade, Congress discussed a bill aiming to limit women's presence in the Postal Office to up to 20% of the overall workforce (Roseblatt 2000, 84–86).

Finally, most literature on glass ceilings conceives of women's underrepresentation as a consequence of gender biased promotion policies. As stated by Connell (2006), such an approach ignores the fact that there are gender regimes operating within organizations. She has suggested that there are key factors operating at public agencies, such as gender division of labor, culture and symbolism. But, as this article has shown, all these variables

are not stable through time. On the contrary, they evolve in different ways, depending on certain political, economic and social paths. Understanding these processes in time would allow us to better understand and manage women's underrepresentation in the public sector.

## Notes

1. There was a widely held belief that women could be easily trained to take higher-paying jobs traditionally held by men (Rung 2002).
2. The data from the national budget comes from 1910, while that of the statistical yearbook comes from 1911.
3. In 1860 a Primary Education Law was issued, that obliged the state to create and fund one public primary school for boys and girls per 2.000 inhabitants (Rengifo 2012). In 1854 there were 4.297 Chilean girls studying in public primary schools; by 1895 this number had increased to over 58 thousand (Serrano et al. 2012).
4. The name comes from Miguel Luis Amunátegui, Public Education Secretary, who signed this decree while in office.
5. Letelier used the pejorative Spanish term *hembra*, most usually associated with female animals, rather than the most obvious choice, *mujer* (female or woman).
6. Sara Guerin was Director of the School of Girls No. 4. In 1926 she retired after 30 years spent working in public education.

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