GENDER, ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND THE BREADTH OF SUFFRAGE IN CHILE AND PERU: PERSPECTIVES AMONG SUFFRAGISTS[1]

Género, etnia, clase y la amplitud del sufragio en Chile y Perú: visiones entre las sufragistas

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Cómo citar/Citation
Castillo, Isabel (2024).
Gender, ethnicity, class, and the breadth of suffrage
in Chile and Peru: Perspectives among suffragists.
Historia y Política, avance en línea, 1-28.
doi: https://doi.org/10.18042/hp.2024.AL.01

(Reception: 25/01/2021; review: 04/10/2021; acceptance: 18/01/2022; online publication: 05/03/2024)

Abstract

Who gets included and when are longstanding issues in the study of historical democratization. Latin America —as did the advanced industrialized world— followed a mostly piecemeal process of formal inclusion, extending suffrage to specific groups through different episodes of reform. This form of inclusion followed political logics of how new voters might alter officeholding patterns and the balance of power among existing political parties, minimizing degrees of uncertainty. At the same time, this approach to treating specific groups separately reflects how social categories were constructed and politicized. This article focuses on this later component analyzing how women suffragists in Chile and Peru viewed their inclusion and that

[1] The author acknowledges funding from Fondecyt Postdoctoral grant nº 3200323 and ANID/FONDAP/15130009.

of other groups along gender, class, and ethnic lines. The persistence of a literacy restriction to suffrage that had a disproportioned impact on indigenous women is the main vehicle to analyze how these exclusions were viewed. The analysis shows that most first wave feminists emphasized the need for a degree of education for citizenship, accepting the literacy requirement. In terms of ethnicity, the myth of an ethnically homogenous nation in Chile prevented linking the literacy requirement with the exclusion of indigenous people. In Peru, that link was clear, and some voices questioned the exclusion of indigenous peoples. Overall, the article shows the importance of dominant discourses and domestic contextual factors in suffragists' understanding of the relationship between the inclusion/exclusion of different groups.

Keywords

Suffrage; democratization; Latin America; illiterate vote; suffragists.

Resumen

Quién es incluido y cuándo son cuestiones de larga data en el estudio de la democratización en perspectiva histórica. América Latina —al igual que las democracias industrializadas— siguió un proceso gradual de inclusión formal, extendiendo el voto a grupos específicos mediante reformas separadas. Esta forma de inclusión siguió lógicas políticas sobre cómo los nuevos votantes podrían alterar los patrones de elección de cargos y el balance de poder entre los partidos políticos existentes, buscando minimizar los grados de incertidumbre. Al mismo tiempo, esta manera de incluir cada grupo por separado da cuenta de cómo las categorías sociales fueron construidas y politizadas. Este artículo se centra en este último aspecto, analizando cómo las sufragistas en Chile y Perú veían su propia inclusión y la de otras categorías en los ejes de género, clase y etnia. El análisis muestra que la mayoría de las feministas de la primera ola enfatizaban la necesidad de un cierto nivel de educación para la ciudadanía, aceptando el requisito de alfabetización para el ejercicio del voto. En términos de etnia, en Chile el mito de una nación homogénea en términos limitó la asociación entre el requisito de alfabetización con la exclusión de los pueblos indígenas. En Perú, tal vínculo era claro y algunas voces cuestionaron la exclusión de los indígenas. En su conjunto, el artículo muestra la importancia de los discursos dominantes y los contextos nacionales en la concepción de las sufragistas respecto a la relación entre la inclusión o exclusión de distintos grupos.

Palabras clave

Sufragio; democratización; América Latina; voto analfabeto; sufragistas.

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Once broad male suffrage was achieved through the lifting of income or property requirements, debates around the breadth of democratic inclusion in Latin America centered on three issues: sex requirements, literacy, and age. These restrictions for the franchise had differential consequences for specific groups of the population. In particular, the literacy requirement had not only class but also gendered and ethnic effects as these groups had lower literacy rates. For example, according to the 1920 census, the literacy rate among the Mapuche —the largest indigenous people in Chile— was 8% overall and only 3.6% among Mapuche women[2]. These numbers compare with 50% literacy rates at the national level, for both men and women. By 1952 there was still a gender gap in literacy of 13% in the rural areas of the province where the Mapuche concentrated (Cautín)[3]. Even more pronounced exclusions operated in Peru, where departments in the highlands were majority non-Spanish speaking. The fact that the literacy requirement had a disproportionate impact on indigenous is well documented[4]. Less explored is the additional gendered effect. In the departments where the indigenous concentrated (Apurimac, Ayacucho, Cusco, Huancavélica, and Puno), in 1940 there was an average gender gap in favor of men of 45% in literacy rates[5].

This article explores suffragists' views on issues of class and ethnicity in their struggle for women's political inclusion, how narrow or broad were their demands for suffrage, and how they confronted what today we call intersectionality. I focus on Chile and Peru as these cases are among the five countries in the Latin American region that maintained a literacy requirement to exercise the franchise after women's enfranchisement, a requirement that had the

2 República de Chile (1925: 603).
3 República de Chile (1956: 164).
4 Del Águila (2009).
5 Plaza (1979: 78).

particular exclusionary effects outlined above and that was only removed in 1970 and 1979 respectively[6]. Given the existence of this additional requirement to exercise the franchise, there were possibilities to advocate for the inclusion of other groups beyond literate women. At the same time, Chile and Peru differed on several dimensions, such as levels of social and economic development, the size of the indigenous population, the strength of women's mobilization, and the nature of political competition, which allow exploring how the different contexts impacted suffragists' views.

In advocating for women's participation, feminists pushed the social boundaries of who was to be considered part of the polity. At the same time, their views on other groups reflect dominant discourses and expose blind spots. Suffragists rarely demanded the elimination of education as well as sex requirements for voting rights, privileging a gradual approach to political inclusion. While this was partly a measure of political realism, as only revolutionary or radically reformist regimes carried out broad processes of enfranchisement (such as Bolivia in 1952), it also showed the degree to which certain exclusions were naturalized.

In the United States, the relationship between suffrage expansion along gender and racial lines has been explored from different perspectives. For example, Laura Free shows how in the case of the Reconstruction Era, part of the women's suffrage movement adopted racist language to advocate for their inclusion after the Fourteenth Amendment explicitly excluded women[7]. In Latin America, the relationships between processes of reform and how the inclusion/exclusion of particular gender, class, and ethnic groups were intertwined have received little attention. Studying these issues from the perspectives of women suffragists allows understanding the diversity of feminist thinking and its evolution in time concerning the breadth of suffrage and democratic inclusion more broadly. At the same time, suffragists serve as a gate to grasp broader conceptualizations of class and the political participation of indigenous peoples. With respect to this latter point, the analysis shows how in Chile, where a discourse of ethnic homogeneity was dominant, how the literacy requirement affected the indigenous more than other groups was not an important part of the debate. In Peru, on the other hand, such an association was clear at the time and calls to include indigenous people in democratic participation were made by some actors. These differences, I argue, were linked to 19th-century conceptions of citizenship and to how the indigenous populations were incorporated into

6 The other three countries are Brazil, Ecuador, and Guatemala.

7 Free (2015).

the state. As such, the comparative analysis sheds further light on how these questions varied across countries.

The rest of the article delves into each of the countries analyzed, followed by a comparative analysis. For each case, I first provide a brief overview of the development and evolution of the women's suffragists movement, to then focus on some key feminist figures in each country. For each of these suffragists, the analysis explores their views on the interaction of gender, class, and ethnicity, or lack thereof, attempting to capture the diversity of perspectives within first wave feminism. I close with a summary of the analysis and possible research agendas going forward.

II. DIVERSITY OF FEMINISMS IN CHILE

Like Peru, Chile was a late enfranchiser in Latin America, approving women's political rights in 1949, although women had been voting in local elections since 1935[8]. Unlike Peru, however, suffrage reform was frequently debated in Chile, largely because of a strong and diverse women's movement that spanned three decades. The first women's organizations not related to charity work, although timid in their approach to women's issues, emerged in the mid-1910s. Also from this decade —1917— is the first women's suffrage bill introduced by members of the Conservative Party. During the 1920s, and especially the 1930s, women's organizations flourished, presenting a broad set of demands and often including political rights. In the 1940s, the movement peaked with the formation of the Chilean Federation of Feminine Institutions (FECHIF for its Spanish acronym), an umbrella organization that brought together multiple organizations aligned with different political forces working for political and civil rights. Full suffrage rights were finally passed in Congress in late 1948 and turned into law in January 1949, under the presidency of Gabriel González Videla from the centrist Radical Party.

Given Chile's wealth of first wave feminist production[9], I focus my analysis on three important figures that reveal the political diversity of the suffragist movement: Amanda Labarca, Marta Vergara, and Adela Edwards de Salas. Although they had some points of confluence, these figures reflect

[8] Late and early enfranchisers are relative categories, which refer to the adoption of suffrage at the national level before and after World War II, respectively. See Castillo (2019).

[9] For a list of publications edited by women, see www.prensademujeres.cl

liberal, popular, and Catholic/conservative strands of feminism, similar to those that existed in other countries such as Uruguay[10].

Amanda Labarca (1886-1975) constitutes a key figure in Chilean feminism, whose writings between the 1910s and 1940s reflect the evolution of her feminist views and Chilean suffragism more broadly. She was a central figure in both domestic debates on feminism and in the Pan-American feminist movement that emerged in the 1920s[11]. Born into a middle-class family, Labarca was an educator. She conducted part of her studies at Columbia University and the Sorbonne, in New York and Paris respectively, in the 1910s. This experience abroad during her twenties exposed her to feminism, although she distanced herself from militant positions. Writing on U.S. feminism in 1914, she stated "I am not a militant feminist, much less a suffragist, because I am above all Chilean, and in Chile today there is no room for the suffragist question. To ask the vote here would be so absurd as if to dress a naked person we started by offering them a tie"[12]. She understood militant feminism as the result of a stage of civilization. In particular, when women incorporated into industries and saw the need to demand certain rights did the vote become a useful tool. In Chile, industrial development was incipient at the time, therefore the need to participate in political affairs had not yet arrived.

Around this same time, Labarca founded the first of a long list of organizations in her preoccupation with the education and the social condition of women. The Círculo de Lectura de Señoras (Ladies' Reading Circle) established in 1915, was one of the first secular autonomous women's organizations. According to Lavrin, the Circle and the Club de Señoras (Ladies' Club), a contemporary organization, were transitional institutions as they embodied new roles for women while pursuing only limited change[13]. The Circle brought together a group of mostly middle-class professional women such as Labarca, whereas upper-class ladies gathered in the Club. It was a space to debate feminist ideas and suffrage was not among its central concerns. But in Labarca's evolutionary understanding of feminism, and based on her observations of the United States' experience, the Circle would be the first step in a process leading to broader demands for social and political change[14]. In fact, in 1919 the Circle transitioned into the National Council of Women, this time with an explicit aim of campaigning for women's civil and political rights.

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10 Ehrick (2005).

11 Pernet (2000).

12 Labarca (2019 [1914]: 273). This and all following translations are my own.

13 Lavrin (1998: 287).

14 Verba (1995: 13).

In this early stage, Labarca favored suffrage restricted by income and education[15]. Income would later disappear from her considerations, but throughout her career, she would highlight the importance of educating both women and other excluded groups to be better citizens, in line her with her professional activities and her political militancy. Labarca joined the Radical Party, a center-left middle-class party that emphasized the importance of public and lay education, a program it pushed once it reached the presidency with Pedro Aguirre Cerda in 1938. In the 1930s, Labarca still considered that suffrage should be restricted to those "capacitated, sensitive to responsibilities, men and women, as they both suffer in an equal manner the mistakes of political leadership"[16]. Further, she stressed that even more important than a suffrage law, which would come eventually, was to prepare women to exercise the franchise. "If they do not know the foundations of the republican regime, if they have never tried to understand the different doctrines and methods among parties, if they ignore the problems of the national economy, the questions that municipalities and central governments must deal with on a daily basis, badly can they pretend to improve existing conditions"[17]. She would later no longer consider education a requirement for suffrage, but a need to have citizens concerned with the destiny of their country[18].

Her party militancy also came into play in considering the political consequences of enfranchising women. According to Erika Maza, behind her cautious approach to suffrage —privileging civil over political rights and the emphasis on educating women— was the belief that women were unduly influenced by the priest and would thus support conservative forces[19]. Writing to Uruguayan feminist Paulina Luisi in 1922, she asked "Would the vote of women in Chile favor the liberal evolution of the country or would it delay it by increasing the numbers and the power of the clerical-conservative party? This is the question... I much fear so"[20].

The argument about women's religiosity and conservatism was common throughout the region —as seen below in the case of Peru— but unlike other countries, starting in 1935 with the municipal franchise, in Chile it had empirical support. Labarca herself addressed the issue in her 1946 collection of essays *Contemporary Feminism,* but this time to dismiss the concern.

15 "Una Encuesta Sobre El Sufragio Femenino", *Revista Chilena* (1920), 70-71.
16 Labarca (1934: 53).
17 *Ibid*.: 54.
18 Labarca (2019 [1943]: 477-480).
19 Maza Valenzuela (1997).
20 Cited in Pernet (2000: 672).

Acknowledging that women had mostly supported the Conservative Party in municipal elections, the distance with the Radical Party had tended to decrease. More importantly, she claimed the difference was not due to some intrinsic feature of female voters but to the fact that Catholics and conservatives had worked harder to register women (Labarca 2019 [1946]: 310-311).

In the 1940s, Labarca's views had geared toward a forceful and unconditional defense of the franchise as necessary for democracy. This defense now also included illiterates. "The fewer people attend the elections, because they are illiterate, indifferent or, absentees, or, because half the population —constituted by female elements— is forbidden to vote, the feebler will the bases of government be and the closer it will be to become a dictatorship of a few"[21]. She had sustained similar views on democracy a decade earlier when referring to the critical state of democracy in the interwar period. She claimed South American countries did not know true democracies, as leaders had never been elected by a majority given the exclusion of illiterates and women[22]. Yet, she did not argue the answer was universal suffrage.

Despite supporting the inclusion of illiterates, Labarca did not reference any specific group as particularly impacted by the literacy requirement. Moreover, there is no mention of indigenous men or women in her discussions of voting rights. Writing about education and ethnicity, she referenced the re-valorization of Indigenous roots in Mexico and Peru at the same time she reflected a common understanding of Chile as an ethnically homogenous country. "In the Chilean valleys, in the Argentine pampas, and the Uruguayan prairies, it is not about Indians, but creoles, the product of racial mixing [*mestizaje*], in variable proportion, of autochthonous and neo-European elements"[23].

A second leading figure, Marta Vergara (1898-1995), presents a point of entry to the Movimiento pro Emancipación de las Mujeres (Movement for the Emancipation of Women, MEMCh), the most important feminist organization of the first wave in Chile. MEMCh was created in 1935 with a broad program for the "legal, economic and biological" emancipation of women, including measures such as full political rights, divorce, equal salary, protections for women with children, birth control, and abortion[24]. In addition to

[21] Labarca (2019: 305).

[22] Labarca (1934: 51).

[23] Labarca (2019: 464).

[24] "A las mujeres". May 18, 1935. Letter addressed to women upon the foundation of MEMCh. Archivo Nacional de Chile. Available at: http://tinyurl.com/bd8vz2ss [retrieved September 11, 2020].

its broad platform, MEMCh stands out for its territorial reach and the inclusion of popular sector women in addition to the professional and middle-class leadership. Politically, it was aligned with the Popular Front, a coalition of radicals, socialists, and communists —as well as a host of social movement organizations— that was elected to the presidency in 1938, and many of its members had strong links to the Pan-American feminist movement[25].

Marta Vergara, a middle-class self-taught journalist, was among MEMCh's founders and was the director of its publication, *La Mujer Nueva (The New Woman)*. Active in the initial years of MEMCh, in 1941 Vergara moved to the United States as she and her husband had a fallout with the Communist Party they were both members of, and as a consequence, she was away for the final years of the suffrage debate. Vergara also acted as a diplomat, participating and working in the Inter-American Commission of Women in Washington.

As MEMCh's agenda was broad and focused on the social and economic conditions of working-class women, suffrage was not the sole focus of its activism, and Vergara did not devote much of her work to the issue. She was, however, convinced that the class struggle should not put feminism aside, as leftist parties often did. Referring to the concern within the left that women were a conservative voting bloc, Vergara blamed the Popular Front for not paying enough attention to the concerns of women. In the face of a possible suffrage law, she claimed: "the only possible path is, therefore, the immediate work in the female camp, calling on women to fight for their revindications, to awake in them the clear consciousness of her inferior social, economic, and juridical condition"[26]. She also called out her party for not pursuing women's suffrage: "In the end, I argued, the Chilean Communist Party declared around that time that revolution in the country ought to be of the democratic-bourgeois type. Why, then, exclude bourgeois women? Why not help them obtain the benefits enumerated in the program?"[27]. Vergara was referencing the Popular Front strategy, which included alliances with middle-class (or bourgeois) parties. In this statement, she is addressing the view that civil and political rights were demands of bourgeois women and not priorities of the working class, arguing that in a popular front strategy both were not incompatible.

Despite her concerns for the working class, there is no argument to extend these women's rights to all women by eliminating literacy requirements. Given MEMCh's membership included considerable numbers of

[25] Marino (2019).

[26] Vergara (1936).

[27] Vergara (2013 [1962]: 106).

lower-class women, literacy was an issue they dealt with directly. For example, in informing of one newly formed local committee in the Southern city of Corral in 1938, a letter mentions that 15 of the 50 members were illiterate[28]. MEMCh worked on providing education to women and children, focusing on basic literacy skills, as well as some vocational training[29]. Education was a tool to empower women, allow them to be more independent, as well as being able to vote in municipal elections. But there was no discussion of removing the literacy requirement as another path to including these women. In a passage of her memoirs talking about moderate American activists, Vergara stated the "requisite that, in our judgment, must precede the obtention of any right: to be wanted, conquered and earned by the candidate"[30]. If Vergara held this general belief, she might have failed to see the issue of the illiterate vote as there was no organized demand for it; this particular form of exclusion was not politicized in the first half of the century.

The concern for indigenous women was present but marginal within MEMCh. The 1930s were a period of organization within the Mapuche. In 1938, the Araucana Corporation was formed in an attempt to create a federation of Mapuche organizations[31]. A year earlier, the first Mapuche women's organization had emerged. Led by Herminia Aburto, the first female Mapuche candidate in the 1935 local elections, the Sociedad Femenina Araucana Yafluarin (Araucana Female Society Yafluarin) was created to defend the interest of Mapuche women, including conquering suffrage[32]. Some Mapuche organizations supported Pedro Aguirre Cerda and took part in the Popular Front efforts, also developing relationships with MEMCh[33].

One prominent feminist and MEMCh member, artist Laura Rodig did have a particular sensitivity for indigenous people and culture. Rodig lived in Mexico in the early 1920s when the postrevolutionary intellectual atmosphere sought to rescue indigenous culture and integrate indigenous peoples into the nation-building project, in particular with José Vasconcelos as Secretary of Education (1921-1924). But these relationships did not translate into specific demands for indigenous women in MEMCh's platform or in an emphasis on the importance of educating a mostly illiterate group and pushing for the removal of the literacy requirement for suffrage. Although what

28 Rojas Mira and Jiles Moreno (2017: 228).

29 [28] Antezana-Pernet (1996).

30 Vergara (2013 [1962]: 297).

31 *Araucano* was a name given to the Mapuche by Spanish conquerors in colonial times.

32 Calfio Montalva (2009: 95).

33 Rojas Mira and Jiles Moreno (2017: 349).

Katherine Marino calls "Popular Front feminism" had an antiracist component, this was stronger in countries with large Afro-descendant populations such as Cuba and Panama, or as a critique to the United States, but not a problem particularly relevant for Chile[34]. Antiracism was more a declaration of principles and an issue that other countries faced, as exemplified by an article in *La Nueva Mujer* centered on indigenous women in Peru[35].

Finally, Chile had an important strand of Catholic suffragism, well represented by the figure of Adela Edwards de Salas (1876-1958). An upper-class woman, daughter of a banker, politician, and director of one of the main newspapers in the country —*El Mercurio*— she was an active member of multiple women's charity organizations, including the Catholic Women's League and the White Cross, which she founded in 1918 to house and educate abused and abandoned young girls and women. She also contributed to establishing primary, secondary, and technical schools for girls, and promoted legal reforms to protect children from exploitation[36].

In parallel to her charity work, Edwards participated in organizations with strictly political goals, particularly suffrage. Although she was seemingly not active in the 1940s, Edwards was a strong defender of women's participation as women entered local politics. As a new municipal law was being debated in the early 1930s, she was a member of the Comité Nacional pro Derechos de la Mujer (National Committee for Women's Rights) —alongside Amanda Labarca and Marta Vergara—, an organization formed with the explicit purpose of demanding women's suffrage[37]. Edwards linked the call to women's participation with her charitable work in defense of vulnerable women and children and made forceful claims about the masculine nature of politics. "Laws fabricated by men for and by themselves and that we, that have not taken part, nor have been consulted, have to suffer and abide with all their errors and injustices"[38].

Once the municipal vote was a reality, Edwards organized the Acción Nacional de Mujeres de Chile (Women's National Action of Chile, ANMCh), a conservative organization seeking to defend Catholic principles, the family, and the homeland[39]. In an alliance with the Conservative Party, the ANMCh took several women as candidates for municipal councils, with Edwards

34 Marino (2019: 245, fn. 25).
35 León de Yzaguirre (1936).
36 Maza Valenzuela (1997: 25-26).
37 Gaviola Artigas *et al.* (1986: 41-42).
38 Edwards de Salas (1933).
39 Sanhueza (2022).

herself becoming one of the first elected women, as councilmember for Santiago. The work of the ANMCh is key to understanding the support that women gave the Conservative Party in the early municipal elections. In 1934, the organization referenced having registered 18,000 women "with akin ideas" of a total of 23,000 women registered in Santiago, helping them get their national identification cards for the registration process[40]. In the 1935 election, a total of 63,000 women voted nationwide, making the ANMCh's feat all the more impressive[41].

Edwards did not explicitly discuss the breadth of suffrage, but the ANMCh's paternalist approach to rights' expansion indicates they were more concerned with educated women's participation than with making working-class women take the reins to defend their interests. More so, the ANMCH saw in suffrage and the defense of working-class women's rights the opportunity to dispute the support of the lower classes to the left. "Women and the people [el pueblo], will be ours, ladies, when they see we have improved their luck and that of their children, because the Chilean people is not the revolutionary plebs that it is believed"[42]. Edwards was likely unconcerned with extending suffrage to the illiterate women whose living conditions she worked to improve.

III. BREADTH OF SUFFRAGE IN A WEAK AND FRAGMENTED PERUVIAN FEMINISM

Women's suffrage was approved in Peru in 1955, promoted by the authoritarian government of General Manuel Odría. Before this reform, which came suddenly and somehow unexpectedly, women's enfranchisement had been discussed in the context of the 1931-2 constitutional congress, when proposals for full and restricted voting rights were debated and rejected[43]. In between, the issue was not proposed by any parties and it barely made it into the agenda, except for 1938, when Lima hosted the Eighth Meeting of the Pan-American Union[44]. The lack of political salience of the issue is partly related to the weak suffragist movement, which unlike other countries in the

40 Unión Patriótica de Mujeres de Chile (1934: 17).

41 Maza Valenzuela (1995: 34).

42 Edwards de Salas (1935).

43 The 1933 constitution did consider women's suffrage for local elections. However, this right was not exercised as local elections remained indirect until the 1960s.

44 Aguilar Gil (2019); Towns (2010a).

region that saw movements strengthening in time, had a limited but more active stage in the 1910-1935 period[45].

The 1931-2 juncture represented the highlight of women's mobilization, largely through the campaign carried out by Zoila Aurora Cáceres (1877-1958), founder of Feminismo Peruano (Peruvian Feminism). The history of this organization is very telling of suffragism in Peru. Originally established in 1924, it had practically no activity between 1925 and the early 1930s, a period during which its founder lived in Europe. Internal records show that Cáceres successors had trouble maintaining a functioning organization, stating "when you left our side, the society entered in a dead silence"[46]. When a regime change in 1930 presented the opportunity to debate the expansion of the franchise, Cáceres returned to Peru and carried out an important campaign in favor of women's suffrage. Her correspondence, however, indicates the difficulty in recruiting women for the cause, particularly outside of Lima, and how it was she personally who did all the work of contacting decision-makers and attempting to expand the organization's grassroots[47].

In addition to Cáceres, two other key Peruvian suffragists were María Jesús Alvarado (1878-1971), teacher and self-taught sociologist who spearheaded the debate on women's civil and political rights and in 1914 created Evolución Femenina (Female Evolution), and Magda Portal (1900-1989), a writer who acted within the leftist party Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (American Revolutionary Popular Alliance, APRA). The analysis of the following pages focuses on these three first wave feminist and their views on the issue of political inclusion. Unlike in Chile, where the suffragists analyzed represent different strands of feminism, Cáceres and Alvarado do not reflect broader trends of the movement, as the few organizations did not amount to one.

In terms of class, Cáceres was a member of the elite. The daughter of a former president, she was educated in Europe and developed ties to the political class in Peru. Alvarado and Portal were middle class women, who had education but needed to work to sustain themselves. All three, however, developed ties to the working class. Cáceres was an important supporter of women's unions, and she helped organize the first seamstresses' union in 1930 and of

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45 García-Naranjo Moreno (2009a).

46 Unsigned letter to Zoila Cáceres, November 18, 1927, "Letters sent to miss Zoila Aurora Cáceres because of the campaign to obtain the female vote", National Library of Peru, code 2000020971.

47 See correspondence in Pachas Maceda (2019).

telephone operators the following year[48]. As a teacher, María Jesús Alvarado created a school to give vocational training to daughters of workers. In 1924, she was imprisoned and later sent into exile for lending the press at her school to workers and students to print pamphlets critical of Augusto Leguía's regime[49]. As a consequence, Alvarado was not in Peru when suffrage was debated in 1931. And Portal defended the working class through her work in APRA, a party that emerged as a continental, antiimperialist, and economically nationalist project, seeking to represent labor and middle classes[50].

Alvarado was the first to raise the issue of equal political rights in a 1911 conference. After a historical account of women's roles since Ancient Greece, she argued that differences between men and women were largely historical and cultural and could thus be overcome. She stated that "the intellectual, moral, and economic liberation of women, will bring as logic and precise consequence, the acknowledgment of her civil and political rights (…). And to reach the realization of this beautiful ideal, there is no other medium than education"[51]. She did not, however, mention illiterates in her speech. The emphasis on the redeeming role of education is perhaps why she did not make a defense of votes for illiterates; education was an entryway into modern society.

Similarly, in an early article, Cáceres expressed that workers could only better their social condition through moral and intellectual development[52]. Again, despite her concern for the organization of workers, Cáceres did not make explicit claims to extend suffrage beyond literate women. Literacy rates were higher in urban areas, where Cáceres and Alvarado lived and worked. However, with a national illiteracy rate of 57.6% in 1940, this requirement certainly excluded an important number of the workers they helped organize.

In 1938, when there was a brief resurgence of the issue of women's suffrage, a member of Peruvian Feminism made a defense of women's enfranchisement that again highlighted the need to educate women for adequate political participation. Describing different prototypical groups of women, she stated "the last category, the most numerous one, is the that of peasant proletariat and indigenous, which by their ignorance and molding to more imperative things, would constitute the total electoral failure, with the addition of illiteracy among the latter"[53]. She then explicitly advocated for suffrage

48 Guardia (2002: 183).
49 Chaney (1979).
50 Drinot (2012).
51 Alvarado Rivera (1912: 19).
52 García-Naranjo Moreno (2009b: 58).
53 Málaga de Cornejo (1938).

for women if there is adequate preparation. Moreover, as Peruvian women had only just begun to prepare, the demand for suffrage had been premature. For the task of providing civic education, she proposed a national league of voting women. The essay later specifically addressed the conditions of the indigenous population, stating that men were seeing greater progress in learning to read and write in the army, whereas women were left behind in ignorance and exploitation, unaware of their rights. But again, the solution was not to expand rights but to educate to incorporate into the polity.

Magda Portal differs from other feminists at the time in that she acted within a political party. In other Latin American countries, it was common that feminists would have a double militancy in women's organizations and political parties; however, party militancy was in an individual capacity and women's organizations usually remained non-partisan. On the contrary, Portal did not belong to any women's organizations and devoted her political work to the party. Moreover, she criticized the narrow focus and lack of commitment to the "feminist struggle" led by Cáceres, claiming the organization's members were all upper-class women[54]. She was part of the group that founded APRA in 1930 and had a permanent seat in the party's executive committee.

In its origins, APRA was a progressive party and its creation included a Women's Section headed by Portal[55]. During the party's first congress held in 1931, APRA fully embraced the cause of women's rights, supporting a Declaration on Women's Rights elaborated by the women's section of the party. The declaration included full legal rights for women, including political rights, all of which were included in the party's programmatic platform for the 1931 elections that had APRA's leader Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre as presidential candidate[56].

Despite her strong defense of women's rights, including the vote, the fact that Portal was first and foremost a party woman became clear in the context of the constitutional debate. Although the party's program included equal political rights for women and lowering the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, in the debate they defended restricted suffrage for women that met

[54] Portal (1933: 5).

[55] Another woman with an important role in a political party was Ángela Ramos, who in the early 1930s joined the Peruvian Communist Party and was part of the central committee. This party, however, did not include revindications for women as these were subordinated to the class struggle, a common position among leftist parties in the region García-Naranjo Moreno (2009a: 16-17).

[56] García-Bryce (2018: 171).

one of the following criteria: married or family mother, professional, employee, teacher, self-employed, worker, book author[57]. Portal followed the same argument, stating that "our opinion, then, is for the qualified female vote, only for working women, those who think, and professionals". Those who were not from the "producing classes", were considered parasites[58]. The reasoning behind APRA's position was that without any restrictions, women, as closer to the Catholic church and less educated, would vote for conservative sectors. In Portal's words, the conception of democracy the APRA had, the **quality** of the vote was more important that the **quantity**[59].

Compared to Cáceres and Alvarado, Portal and APRA's view on the franchise was that not everyone was prepared to exercise it. The former, however, were aligned with the dominant interpretation that preparation came essentially from education. On the other hand, and in line with Marxist interpretations, APRA's opinion was that the quality of the vote did not depend on education but on the voter's structural position in society, with upper-class women not being able to freely decide. In fact, APRA representatives in the Constitutional Congress also defended the vote for illiterates. They argued that given the state obligated everyone to pay taxes, and serve in the military, among other duties, there was no reason why rights should make distinctions based on who could read and right. Furthermore, they argued that illiterates' exclusion favored the oligarchy in the countryside[60]. What is clear is that, as with women, there was a strategic rationale behind APRA's position on the extension of the franchise[61].

Indigenous rights were also an issue of interest for some of these early activists. Three first wave feminist writers shared a concern for the exclusion of the indigenous population: Clorinda Matto, Dora Mayer, and María Jesús Alvarado. Of them, only Alvarado was an active suffragist. Dora Mayer was unconcerned by the exercise of the franchise but interestingly claimed for universal suffrage without restrictions. Mayer headed the newsletter *El Deber pro Indígena* (The pro Indigenous Duty) of the pro Indigenous Society between 1912 and 1917. The society and her activism focused on denouncing the material and cultural marginalization of indigenous peoples, pointing to education as the tool that would lead to their betterment and full

57 República del Perú (1931: 402).

58 Portal (1931).

59 Portal (1933: 17). Bold in the original.

60 República del Perú (1931). *Diario de los Debates del Congreso Constituyente de 1931*, 403.

61 Castillo (2022).

incorporation into the nation[62]. And even though the literacy requirement (without exceptions) had only been established in 1896, making it a somewhat recent development by the time Dora Mayer was writing, political participation was not among the revindications. The pro Indigenous Society had a liaison role, taking the demands of the indigenous to decision-makers and publicizing them among Lima's educated circles, demands that did not include lifting the literacy requirement. One of the first peasant political organizations, the Central Committee pro Indigenous Rights Tahuantinsuyu created in 1920, had among its demands the return of communal lands, local authorities elected by the communities, the abolition of a forced road conscription law[63], better salaries and working conditions, and the separation of church and state[64]. Political participation beyond the local sphere was not a concern around this time.

The implications of the literacy requirement for the indigenous population, however, were known. In an opinion piece from January 1932, when conditions for suffrage were being debated in the Constitutional Congress, Mayer argued against voting in general, as a worthless act. "Much ado about nothing", she stated, about the campaign to enfranchise women. She also argued that rights without duties constituted a crutch, and as such, the vote should remain voluntary. At the same time, she stated there was no reason to deny women, illiterates, and eighteen-year-olds the right to vote; voting rights should exist for everyone. Regarding illiterates, she stated: "The vote for illiterates? The recognition of voting rights should be unrestricted in any order. The illiterate is not, firstly, blind within the horizons of his own direct interests, and if he were blind (…) the light will come soon through the competition of electoral propaganda that would seek him as a valuable contribution to the triumph of a candidacy"[65].

María Jesús Alvarado was also a member of the pro Indigenous Society. She was one of the early feminists who was strongly concerned by the unjust subordination of both indigenous and women. Revindications for both groups, however, remained separate; she did not show particular concern for the specific situation of indigenous women. An early proponent of women's

62 Zegarra (2019).

63 This was a law in place between 1920 and 1931, that forced all men to work one or two weeks every year in road construction. It mainly affected indigenous peasants that were unable to circumvent the law.

64 García-Naranjo Moreno (2009b: 90).

65 Mayer de Zulen (1932). The original is written in the generic Spanish masculine form that is inclusive of men and women.

suffrage, as in the case of Cáceres she failed to mention the vote for illiterates. The complete separation between the situation of women and indigenous was a common understanding. In the 1938 meeting of the Pan-American Union held in Lima, which included the parallel meeting of the Inter-American Commission on Women, there were declarations to address the specific situations faced by peasant and indigenous women that did not mention political rights[66].

Cáceres wrote about the indigenous people romantically, as the revolutionaries that had fought alongside her father against the Chilean invasion during the war that faced Bolivia and Peru against Chile (1879-1883)[67]. She also argued for the importance of rediscovering indigenous history and culture as part of the Peruvian national identity. Again, there was no mention of their political inclusion, however.

The preceding analysis shows suffragists broke prevailing views regarding the breadth of the franchise in demanding women's inclusion, but mostly replicated existing approaches to the exclusion of sectors of the working class, and particularly indigenous peasants through the literacy requirement. Through the case of Magda Portal, the discussion also highlights how the defense of women's rights was subordinated to party interests. In the case of Cáceres, although she advocated for women's suffrage in equal conditions as men, she was willing to settle for intermediate alternatives, indicating a pragmatic political stance. Cáceres strongly and proudly defended her independence from political parties, after different newspapers signaled her as allied with the government and with APRA[68]. Unlike Portal, this independence allowed her to prioritize her feminist cause. Before the elections to the constitutional congress, she proposed to her organization the endorsement of five candidates that had expressed support for women's suffrage[69]. The list included two APRA members even after party leaders had expressed they would support restricted voting rights, as most women were under "reactionary and pernicious influences"[70]. Cáceres was keenly aware of the limited chances of women's enfranchisement in 1931 and thus open to a gradual approach, a common strategy in Latin America and beyond.

66 Aguilar Gil (2019: 456).

67 Arango-Keeth (2012: 294-295).

68 *La Crónica* (1932). Carta de Evangelina. January, 11.

69 "Información política del 'Feminismo Peruano Z.A.C." n/d, in Pachas Maceda (2019: 208-209).

70 Luis Alberto Sánchez to Zoila Aurora Cáceres, May 1931, in Pachas Maceda (2019: 195).

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The preceding analysis indicates that suffragists in Chile and Peru were timid in their defense of suffrage expansion beyond literate women. Feminists advocated for equal rights with men, and since illiterate men could not vote, they were —with some exceptions— mostly unconcerned with a broader expansion of the franchise. This characterization is in line with Teele's argument that the size of the women's movement and how broad a reform they mobilized for depended partly on existing restrictions of the male franchise[71]. In fact, demanding the illiterate vote together with women's suffrage would have posed an additional challenge and reduced the likelihood of achieving success. This conclusion, however, does not preclude that, at least theoretically, suffragists could have pointed to the inconsistency of enfranchising some groups and not others, as Dora Mayer and Amanda Labarca did in occasion. In this sense, while challenging gendered structures, suffragists in these two countries —and Latin America more broadly— reproduced the dominant understanding of electoral participation along class and ethnic lines. This conclusion, although perhaps unsurprising, puts women's suffrage into broader perspective, highlighting the piecemeal nature of the politicization of different social groups' democratic exclusions. It also allows exploring how the exclusion of illiterates was construed in Chilean and Peruvian societies more generally.

In terms of electoral participation of different social classes, debates in Chile and Peru show how calculations as to the effects of women's suffrage were common and brought notions of gender and class into conflict. Leftist feminists often opted to push for limited women's enfranchisement to not benefit conservative parties through a women's religious vote. This was particularly the case of Magda Portal in Peru and, to a lesser degree, Amanda Labarca in her earlier thinking. The conflict, however, was "resolved" for suffragists earlier in Chile than in Peru. By the mid-1930s, Labarca was leaving these apprehensions behind and MEMCh women did not express these concerns. Marta Vergara stated that unlike the Communist Party she would later be a part of, she put equal rights for women above the class struggle[72]. Portal, on the other hand, only reached a similar position in the 1940s, leading to a confrontation with party leader Haya de la Torre. In the Second Party Congress in 1948, Haya de la Torre refused to support Portal's request that women be allowed to vote within the party, and the

71 Teele (2018: 39).

72 Vergara (2013: 106).

revised party manifesto that emerged from this Congress included the female franchise only for women over twenty-five years old (and eighteen for men)[73]. Portal protested and ultimately left the party. That it took so long for Portal to defend this position is likely related to the absence of a feminist movement that could move the debate on equal rights forward[74].

Suffragists' views also inform us of how indigenous political participation differed in both countries. In Chile, the dominant discourse was one of integration and a racially homogenous nation. During the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), a nationalist myth of the *roto chileno* emerged, a *mestizo* or mixed-race figure that would symbolize the individual from popular sectors[75]. The nationalist discourse based on a homogenous mixed-race peaked with Nicolás Palacio's work published in 1904. Palacios was a doctor who argued the Chilean race had a unique and superior combination of Mapuche and Germanic blood, a view that was influential among certain nationalist and conservative circles[76].

In parallel to this view, Mapuche organizations flourished in the first third of the century. These organizations sought to revalue Mapuche culture and traditions, and to various degrees, they promoted autonomy from the national state. Many of these organizations believed in the importance of using institutional channels, which led them to participate in elections. The first Mapuche deputy, Francisco Melivilu was elected in 1924, and he was followed by Manuel Manquilef in 1926 and Arturo Huenchullán in 1930. Even the more radical branch led by Manuel Aburto Panguilef —father of the first female Mapuche candidate mentioned earlier— sought to gain individual rights including the franchise. Manuel Aburto was a remarkable leader who inaugurated the discourse of the lost ancestral lands and who advocated for autonomy and cultural rights[77]. At the same time, Aburto was close to the labor movement and believed these revindications would be achieved together with those of the Chilean poor. In this line, he also understood the importance of using existing institutional channels, running (unsuccessfully) for congress in 1932 and 1937.

The combination of the racially homogenous discourse with a considerable degree of integration of Mapuche leaders into the national political sphere

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73 García-Bryce (2018).

74 This could be an instance of how the institutional and intellectual contexts affect political ideas, as argued by Joshua Simon (2020).

75 Arellano (2012).

76 Palacios (1918).

77 Bengoa (1996: 332).

might have obscured the relationship between the lack of electoral participation because of the literacy clause and indigenous people. That the literacy suffrage requirement had as consequence the exclusion of the majority of indigenous people, and especially of women, was not mentioned by any of the suffragists studied here. Although in Peru removing the literacy requirement was not a central demand, at least among some suffragists it was clear that this restriction had targeted effects, indicating how there were important differences in how electoral exclusions were constructed in both countries.

I point to two key and related factors in understanding the differences in the association between literacy and indigenous voters: how indigenous were incorporated into the state and suffrage requirements during the 19th century. In Peru, the large indigenous population concentrated in the highlands was formally integrated into the state after independence. In the many debates around suffrage during the 19th century, there was a complete awareness of a literacy clause as excluding the indigenous population. As Alicia del Águila shows, during the 1830s there was an explicit exemption of the literacy requirement for indigenous and *mestizos.* And until 1896, there were alternative qualifications for suffrage, in what del Águila conceptualizes as a corporatist understanding of citizenship. As such, although illiterate, part of the indigenous population could vote because they owned property or paid taxes[78]. In Chile, on the other hand, for much of the 19th century, the Mapuche territory was not incorporated into the state. The armed colonization of the Araucanía region only ended in 1881. And by this point, the only remaining requirement for male suffrage was literacy. In other words, qualifications for suffrage were established without having indigenous peoples as part of the discussion.

Peru, as discussed, also saw the emergence of indigenous and pro-indigenous organizations. The Central Committee Pro-Indigenous Rights Tahuantinsuyo organized six indigenous congresses and it had a relevant presence of women[79]. Initially, its organization was favored by the discursive centrality that the "Indian problem" had in the early phase of the Leguía regime (1919-1930), but in the latter half of the 1920s, the regime started persecuting indigenous and ultimately aligning with big landholders. In addition to these organizations, a highly influential perspective on the "indigenous question" was that of José Carlos Mariátegui, a key figure in Peruvian political thought and founder of the Peruvian Socialist Party. Mariátegui provided a Marxist interpretation of Peruvian reality, which, in the absence of

78 Del Águila (2013).

79 Arroyo (2004).

an industrial working class, emphasized the problem of the land. The marginalization of indigenous people was then not an ethnic problem but an economic one and as a consequence, the agrarian question was the way to approach the issue, not popular sovereignty or universal suffrage[80].

Overall, both among intellectuals and indigenous themselves, liberal traditions emphasizing individual rights and electoral participation were much weaker in Peru than in Chile, reflecting different modes of colonization[81]. Since the 1920s, Peru again advanced toward a corporatist system, that although deficient, put the focus away from individual citizenship rights and towards collective rights as peasants[82]. Another key factor in explaining the different approaches is the fact that APRA and the Communist Party, which had some participation of indigenous leaders, were outlawed for much of the 1930-1955 period[83]. So, despite the relevance of the indigenous question in political and intellectual debates, the inclusion of indigenous to the democratic electoral system as a tool to address their problems was a marginal view, including among suffragists.

Dominant perspectives in Chile and Peru's debates on the breadth of suffrage point to how determinant national contexts were, an interesting observation in a scenario in which first wave feminism was constituted as a Pan-American transnational movement. A sizeable literature has analyzed the personal relationships, networks, and institutions of a Pan-American movement, that put Latin American women as pioneers in the international arena[84]. The creation of the Inter-American Commission on Women (IACW) in 1928 —led by American suffragist Doris Stevens in its first decade— constituted the first intergovernmental organization dedicated to advancing women's rights[85].

In addition to the transnational feminism movement, many of these women's life trajectories led them to live overseas, whether for political reasons as in the case of Magda Portal and Marta Vergara or as part of their education as in the case of Amanda Labarca. For both Labarca and Vergara, these experiences were vital in their involvement in feminism. Vergara wrote how her chance participation as the Chilean representative in a conference in the League of Nations in Hague in 1930, where she met Doris Stevens,

80 Mariátegui (2007 [1928]).
81 Mahoney (2010).
82 Yashar (2005).
83 Arroyo (2004).
84 See Ehrick (2005); García-Bryce (2014); Marino (2014, 2019); Towns (2010a).
85 Towns (2010a).

changed her life and put her on a path of feminist activism[86]. Cáceres in Peru and Labarca and Vergara in Chile were very active in the transnational feminist movement. And although Portal did not take part in these circles, APRA was born as a region-wide revolutionary movement, and her partisan activities translated into numerous international connections. In the late 1920s, Portal and her husband were accused of participating in a communist plot and exiled, after which they lived in Cuba and post-revolutionary Mexico. In the following decades, Portal lived in Chile for several years, also as a result of political persecution, coming into contact with MEMCh as reflected in an article of her authorship in *La Mujer Nueva*[87].

As a result of these transnational activities, these first wave feminists were likely aware that the electoral exclusion of illiterates was not inevitable or necessary, not even in countries with large indigenous populations such as Mexico. During the decades analyzed here, in Uruguay, the 1918 constitution introduced male universal suffrage. In Colombia, the literacy restriction was removed in 1936, and in Venezuela and Bolivia education requirements were eliminated together with women's enfranchisement, in 1946 and 1952 respectively. In the rest of the region, there were no literacy or education restrictions since the nineteenth century. As such, Chile and Peru were part of a minority. As discussed, this omission can be partly attributed, in the cases of Portal and Vergara, to the belief that deeply reformist and revolutionary programs —and not suffrage— were the path to alter social hierarchies. However, especially the MEMCh and the Chilean left more broadly were still part of an important liberal tradition that valued electoral politics.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to women's rights, Pan-American feminism included an antiracist program, importantly but not exclusively linked to antifascism[88]. This program, however, did not translate into increased awareness of the exclusion of indigenous people; the understanding of this exclusion was based on an economic and social perspective and did not extend to the lack of political participation. Being embedded in these transnational feminist networks, then, did not substantially alter suffragists' views on the breadth of suffrage in Chile and Peru. Conceptions on how suffrage requirements impacted the inclusion/exclusion of different social groups remained a mostly domestic issue.

86 Vergara (2013: 77).
87 Portal (1936).
88 Marino (2019).

V. CONCLUSIONS

Suffrage is currently understood as a basic right. Formal and informal restrictions and enforcement problems continue to limit the exercise of voting rights among particular groups of people in many places. The ideal of universal suffrage, however, is unquestioned as a standard of civilization[89]. The preceding pages have shown this was not the case throughout most of the twentieth century, as exemplified by the late enfranchisement of illiterates in both Chile and Peru. The analysis also showed how the particular gendered and especially ethnic effects of the exclusion of illiterates had points in common between both countries but differed in how the participation of indigenous peoples was understood.

Based on these arguments, I offer three concluding thoughts. First, as has been noted by Joan Scott, feminisms have historically exhibited paradoxes in their claims. Scott argued that while making *equality* arguments, French feminists could not avoid pointing to *difference* by showing women's exclusion as based on a collective identity[90]. Similarly, advocating for inclusion, Latin American suffragists largely focused on women achieving equal rights as men, bypassing the question of further extensions to other excluded groups or the gendered effects of the literacy requirement. In some cases, suffragists showed awareness of the inconsistency of also excluding illiterates, but political realism prevented them from making broader demands. Most of the time, however, the inclusion of illiterates seems to have been largely naturalized —even though most Latin American countries did not have such restrictions—, pointing to education as the mechanism to promote further inclusion. The limits of feminist advocacy also become clear in the fact that, like in most other regions, after obtaining voting rights women were largely demobilized and entered a "feminist silence"[91].

Second, the comparison of Chile and Peru allows for exploring commonalities and differences in claims for women's suffrage and the exclusion of illiterates. Comparative analyses of women's suffrage and first wave feminism are scarce in Latin America. The pioneering work of Asunción Lavrin on the Southern Cone countries[92], and more recently, transnational and multisite research such as the work of Katherine Marino, have added additional layers to our understanding of Latin American feminism. Further

89 Towns (2010b).
90 Scott (1997).
91 Kirkwood (1982).
92 Lavrin (1998).

comparative work can shed light on still unexplored questions, such as the political conditions that led to the politicization of specific suffrage restrictions, or why some revolutionary processes were inclusive of women (i.e. Bolivia) while others were not (i.e. Mexico).

Finally, this article has focused on debates around legal enfranchisement. There is an important and little-explored research agenda on how gender, racial, and class inequalities have persisted in the exercise of voting rights in Latin America, particularly from an intersectional perspective. We know that literacy was not the only impediment for lower-class women to vote. For example, when women were first partially enfranchised in Chile, registration was costly as it required having a birth certificate, purchasing an identification card, and the registration office was open only a few days a month, turning attendance into an additional hurdle for working women[93]. For the U.S. case, Celeste Montoya argues that most analyses have focused on the role of race or class for understanding gaps in voter registration or turnout, but that analyzing how those categories intersect with gender sheds light on the particular behavior and barriers faced by some race-gender groups[94]. Similarly, in Latin America there has been a greater focus on the role of class or ethnicity separately, leaving important underexplored issues in the exercise of voting rights that should be examined for both historical and contemporary periods, including case studies as well as comparative perspectives.

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93 Antezana-Pernet (1996: 65).

94 Montoya (2020).

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