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ALAHPE Presidential Address

Women Economists in the Global South: The Case of Two Venezuelan Women Ministers of the Economy in 1968 and 1969

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The historiography on women economists has increased in the last three decades. When we examine the literature in the history of economic thought, we observe an absence of Latin American women, which attests to a two-fold discrimination: first for being Latin Americans, and second, for being women. Some questions I am working on here are what are some of the different trajectories of women economists? Is it different to be an economist in the Global North and South? What are the profiles of women economists in Latin American? what kind of careers do women have that are publicly recognized and renowned? Which women were able to gain access to these powerful positions and what role did they play? My overall goal is to rebalance the role of women, LGBTQ+, Black economists, Latin Americans and other groups in the history of economics.

What are the benefits of studying economics when you are a woman? What are some of the different trajectories of women economists in the Global North and South? What are the profiles of women economists in Latin America? What level of participation have women had in the public sphere, as for example in economic ministries? These were some of the questions I asked myself when I prepared the first Presidential Address of the Latin American Association for the History of Economic Thought (ALAHPE), held in Medellin in November 2023, and which formed the basis for this article. In the history of economic thought, there is an increasingly diverse range of approaches to studying women economists, their professional status as well as entrenched gendered notions and practices within economics. Although this literature has so far focused primarily on the US and UK (Kuiper 2022; Lundberg and Stearns 2019), there are recent groups such as the Women in Economics Initiative (WiE) and Barham (2023) which expand globally. The most frequently used approaches so far are general biographical studies, such as Aslanbeigui and Oakes (2009) for Joan Robinson or Dimand et al. (2000) in their biographical dictionary of women economists; research by subdisciplines in economics, as is the case of development economics, Marxist economics, feminist economics (Orozco Espinel and Gomez Betancourt 2022); the contributions of individual women to economics, as in Philippy et al. (2024) on Hazel Kyrk, or Blayac (2023) on Jessica Peixotto; women in the economics profession (Kahn 1995; Libby 1984; May 2022); the participation of women in institutions, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Gomez Betancourt and Orozco Espinel 2020); or, more generally, historical reconstructions of women political economists or writers, as some recent "herstories" of economics focusing on different periods – Rostek (2021) for the eighteenth century, and Kuiper (2022) mainly for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The historiography on women economists has expanded in the last three decades. Among historians of economics the books by Michele Pujol (1992), Mary Ann Dimand, Robert W. Dimand, and Evelyn L. Forget (1995), and more recently Becchio (2020), Chassonnery et al. (2022), and Bankovsky et al. (forthcoming) are changing the way we deal with women in the history of economics. There is a collective effort to reflect on education, sensitivity, and economics that comes from what has been happening for years in other social sciences such as sociology and political sciences, coming from the collaboration with other subfields like feminist economics and gender economics, from the request of our students, and also from personal experiences and engagements.

Why study women economists? One answer is the size of the critical mass of women in the economics profession, as asserted by Lundberg and Stearns (2019, 3): "although women are still a minority in the economics profession, female representation in the discipline has increased slowly over the past century." As professors and researchers, we cannot continue telling stories only about male economists while there are more and

more women economists. Nevertheless, this increase in the participation of women in economics was not always linear. In her analysis of American women, Forget (2011) "links the decline in female representation in academic economics to the emergence of home economics and social work as academic fields, the expansion of employment opportunities in government, and increased hostility and overt discrimination in economics departments."[1] In some periods of history, women economists abandoned academia and found refuge in office work positions at a national level. While economics was becoming a more professional and technical field and a more mathematical science, studied at many universities, women were directed into administrative, diplomatic, and often less well-paid positions (Buckles 2019).

A second reason to study women economists is to try to solve an old and persistent historiographical problem: the lack of diversity and the absence of women economists in the traditional historiography of economics. It is not possible to continue teaching courses and writing books on the history of economics without the contribution of women and authors from the Global South. According to Bayer and Rouse (2016, 221) in their article on *Diversity in the Economics Profession: A New Attack on an Old Problem*, "the economics profession includes disproportionately few women and members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups, relative both to the overall population and to other academic disciplines." This can be explained partially by "the absence of women in the room to ask the question 'where are the women?'," which has made it "easier to normalize the invisibility of women in science, including economic science. This, of course, was the same, if not more so, for people of color" (Kuiper 2022, 6).[2] In economics, there is a lack of diversity in terms of social origins and genders. Cohen (2022) also explains how economics – "The Queen of the Social Sciences" – remains resistant to diversity and is reproduced as a white man's field.[3] In her keynote address at the ALAHPE conference in Montevideo, Montecinos (2022) stressed that there is only one book on the global history of economic thought (Barnett 2015) and proposed the task of overcoming the "provincial universalism" that has characterized the field in order to move towards an "inclusive cosmopolitanism".

There are a number of things we should be changing. We should avoid continuing to overlook women economists, a phenomenon known in sociology as the Matilda Effect (named by Rossiter in 1993 in honor of Matilda Joslyn Gage), where women's contributions are systematically attributed to men. We should as well abstain from reproducing the Matthew effect (introduced by Merton in 1968), which explains that

[1] On women economists in academia from a historical perspective, see also Groenewegen and King (1994).

[2] Not many people are asking the questions 'Where are the Latin Americans?' or 'Where are the people of colour?' To explore this debate further, see Fairlie (2014) and Rutherford (2024).

[3] See also Nelson (2017), Hirschman (2017), Weetman (2017), and Kourany (2001).

the most recognized people, in this case men authors, tend to increase their advantages over others disproportionately in relation to co-authors and assistants. I also suggest that we do not conform to mentioning one women author, person of color, or LGBT person and proceed to consider that our story is global and inclusive. In economics we can call this the Mary Paley Marshall or the Joan Robinson Effect. This is the process of looking for one or two women heroines in our story, such as Joan Robinson in Western Europe or Maria da Conceição Tavares in Latin America, and considering this enough for an economic lesson or a book. When we do this, we are exalting the contribution of one author and eclipsing the rest of the cast of characters on the scene.

Another methodological problem is to study the contribution of a woman in relation to an economist from the canon as if it were necessary always to mention the venerated economist to catch the attention of our readers; or to study women only because they collaborated with important men, as was the case with some couples, such as Mill, Marshall, or Webb. Finally, we cannot remember women only for what they wrote about women (e.g., Barbara Bergmann). Instead, we should be doing more research on groups or categories of authors with diverse intellectual backgrounds, working in different institutional contexts, national and international agencies, research centers and labs, from under studied periods, with lesser-known trajectories. In sum, we should consider a much wider range of authors, coming from different regions of the world and different traditions.

To further this agenda, I focus my research on identifying who were the Latin American women who have contributed to economics, and which were the issues on which they worked. My overall goal is to rebalance the role of women, LGBTQ+, black, and indigenous economists as an exercise in the study of underrepresented groups in the history of economics through the lenses of feminist economics.[4] I want to identify who were the Latin American women who contributed to economics and recontextualize and reiterate their contribution. This is part of a collective project on the history of Latin American economic thought (fostered through ALAHPE) and a history of thought in countries from the Global South (a collective project with Alexander Reichart, Sattwick Dey Biswas, and Fabio Masini) to obtain an overall picture of women economists around the world.

1. Women in Economics in Latin America and the Scarcity of Sources

When we examine the literature in the history of economic thought, we observe an absence of Latin American women, which attests to a two-fold discrimination: first for being Latin Americans, and second for being women. But also, in the limited Latin

[4] The aim is to deconstruct androcentric biases based on a fundamental task: improve the visibility of women as an epistemological subject and as an object of study in the discipline (Agenjo 2021).

American historiography of economic thought, women economists are totally absent, as in the seminal studies of Aguirre (2017 [1958]), Pazos (1983), and Popescu (1986), and more recently, in Balcázar Daza and Martínez (2022) and Luc (2021). There is absolutely no study of women economists or inclusion of women's writings on economics in these books. There is only one woman, Maria da Conceição Tavares, in *Trayectorias de los grandes economistas latinoamericanos del siglo XX* by Rougier and Odisio (2022). This is certainly proof that our community of historians of economics needs to react, to produce a book titled (with the feminine article in Spanish) *Las grandes economistas latinoamericanas*. Hopefully this will be published soon.

Recently, Latin American historians of economics have been contributing to the development of a historiography of Latin American women economists. This is shown by the sessions organized during the last two ALAHPE conferences, in Montevideo in 2020 and Medellin in 2022, and in the YSI Workshop organized during ALAHPE Curitiba in 2019, on "The Gender of Economists and Economics in Latin America".[5] These articles were or will soon be published in journals and books on the history of economic thought (such as the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Women's Economic Thought* by Bankovsky et al.) and in other economics journals in Latin America.

Some questions on which I am working myself are: What kind of careers do women have that are publicly recognized and renowned? Which women were able to gain access to these powerful positions and what role did they play? How do class, gender, race, and ethnicity affect this participation? Has this participation amounted to policies advancing women's rights? What has been the cost for these women of their involvement in politics and exposure in the public sphere?

The question of the benefits associated to an economics degree has been studied mainly for economists in politics (Montecinos 1993; 2012) and in academia (Kahn and Ginther 2017; Forget 1995; 2011; Dimand 1995). None of them focused on women economists serving as ministers of the economy, nor did the literature focus on women in Venezuela in this period (Delgado 2015; Rakowski and Espina 2010; Friedman 1998; 2000). These latter works are oriented towards women in politics and the women's movement in Venezuela.[6]

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[5] In the Latin American Women Economists session of ALAHPE Montevideo, we had contributions on "Mujeres en la investigación en Economía en Uruguay" by Verónica Amarante, Marisa Bucheli, and María Inés Moraes; "Climbing the Obelisk. The Trajectories of Five Women Economists in Colombia, c. 1950–1970" by Andrés Guiot-Isaac and Camila Orozco Espinel; "Zélia Cardoso de Melo: a Mulher que Confiscou a Poupança" by Andrea Felippe Cabello; "Ciclo, estructura y política económica. La primera etapa del pensamiento económico de Rosa Cusminsky" by Mariano Arana; "Maria da Conceição Tavares al campo de la economía política internacional" by Carla Curty and "Feminine reflections on Latin American ECLAC economic thought. Dialogues with Maria da Conceição Tavares" by Virginia Laura Fernández.

[6] I thank Gioconda Espina for referring me to the research on women and economics by two Venezuelan economists: Adicea Castillo (now retired from academia), who offered a course on the subject at the Universidad Central de

Curiously, the first women who were ministers in Venezuela had studied economics. I thus wonder if there is a link between being an economist and becoming a minister — if studying economics allows women access to public, political, and powerful spheres, as studied by Montecinos (1994) and Fourcade et al. (2015). To fully answer these questions, we will need a systematic analysis of the training and careers of Latin American economists. As a first step, I am basing my research on studies that compared the education of economists in different countries (Lora and Nopo 2009; Ahumada and Butler 2009; Colander and Nopo 2007; Robles et al. 2008; Sarmiento and Silva 2008, Montecinos and Markoff 2009).

I am interested in working on untold stories, shedding some light on the first women economists who participated in the social reproduction and professionalization of economics in Venezuela through their work at the economic ministries in the late 1960s. The goals are to understand what being an economist implies for a Latin American woman, and to learn more about what these women have in common in order to reaffirm their neglected contributions. Other goals are, first, to show that contextual variants are important for understanding the contribution of economists (McCloskey 1985; among others); second, to delve into comparative research on the discipline of economics since it remains "virgin terrain"; and third, to examine the interaction of economists' ideas with their professional lives and sociopolitical context — to find commonalities and differences, periods of change or inertia, national conditions and international connections (Montecinos et al. 2012).

The inclusion of women in the history of economics in Venezuela challenges traditional historiographical narratives and requires new methodologies and different sources (mainly personal archives and interviews). In Forget's words: "Some of the most interesting life writing in economics exists in the form of transcribed interviews" (Forget 2002, 235). I have drawn on the following sources by or about Venezuelan women: transcribed interviews, newspaper articles, unpublished works, biographies, CVs, personal diaries, journals, family archives, El Archivo General de la Nación (Venezuela), journal articles, Archives Universidad Central de Venezuela, and Archives Ministerio de Fomento.[7] Literature on Venezuelan women economists is rare. It seems that their writing has been omitted from mainstream historical

Venezuela, as well as Nora Castañeda who founded the Banco de la Mujer (now defunct).

[7] Sadly, when writing this article in 2023–2024, Venezuela, my country of birth, was submerged in a deep political crisis. I could not have access to some archives and authors who I wished to interview. There are some limitations to conduct research on Venezuelan women economists. As confirmed by Gioconda Espina and Elisabeth Jay Friedman, no written histories on Venezuelan women economists exist, and few official documents survive. I will add more elements in my future research as far as the conditions allow it. This is part of a larger and collective project on women economists in Latin America.

accounts.[8] Some articles on the lack of recognition of women's participation in science and economics can be found in the *Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer del Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* de la UCV. Many of the references used concern women entering universities as well as articles and books on Venezuelan women in politics, literature, and education. Other references focus on Venezuelan women in diplomacy.

2. The Major Battles of Venezuelan Women: From the Right to Vote to the Ministries

The narrative of this story starts after the Second World War and the debate regarding Venezuelan women's suffrage in 1945. I focus on the peculiarities of Venezuela, which transitioned in 1958 to a stable democratic regime, compared to other countries of the region that were often moving in the opposite direction. I study the political economy of democracy in the 1960s–70s that led to the first female Ministers of Economy in Venezuela — Aura Celina Casanova in 1968, followed by Haydee Castillo de López in 1969.

This article is not about the life, careers, and contributions of these two Venezuelan women but about some features they have in common. As we will see, both were middle-class, had a high level of education, studied economics, traveled abroad often, spoke several foreign languages, were political activists, belonged to a political party, and were supported by powerful people in powerful spheres (such as ministers, presidents, and other government officials). Such aspects can also be found in other women economists who were able to become influential.

The first generation of women to hold public office and engage prominently in political activism in Venezuela began on 30 December 1935, thirteen days after the death of Juan Vicente Gómez (dictator since 1908). Women in Caracas had mobilized and met for discussions at the home of a crucial Venezuelan journalist and writer, Ada Pérez Guevara (1905–1999), because of her ability to bring Venezuelan women from different political parties together. This group of women addressed the new president, General Eleazar López Contreras (30 December 1935), in a document entitled: "Message from Venezuelan Women" ("Mensaje de las Mujeres venezolanas al General Eleazar López Contreras").[9] In this document, these women fought in favour of their rights and better conditions for children. Until that time, women did not have any civil rights.

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[8] See *How to Suppress Women Writings* by Joanna Russ (1983).

[9] In the words of Ada Pérez Guevara: "In no case can true and integral democracy be achieved until political equality is not decided between Venezuelan men and women, different by sex, but similar, because we are all human. If this does not happen, democracy will be unstable, elusive, intangible" (December 30, 1935). See also her other writings: "Lo que deben saber las futuras madres venezolanas" (1936) and "Sufragio femenino. Aspectos venezolanos" (1944).

The "Message from Venezuelan Women" was the first political document written by women and officially sent to the government in the history of Venezuela.

Among these Venezuelan women, one of them stands out as a pioneer champion of the rights of women and children: Mercedes Carvajal de Arocha (1902–1994). Under the pseudonym of Lucila Palacios, she was one of the most outstanding literary writers of the twentieth century. Carvajal de Arocha was a politician, a writer, and a defender of children's and women's rights. She was also a storyteller, playwright, poet, diplomat, and above all, a revolutionary. She was born in the Port of Spain, Trinidad, as her parents, who were Venezuelans from Ciudad Bolívar, moved to that island fleeing the political climate that was plaguing the country. At the age of fifteen she published her first poems in the magazine *Alondras*. In Caracas, she had the opportunity to publish her novel *El Corcel de las Crines Albas*, in addition to becoming a columnist for the very influential newspaper *El Universal*. Mercedes Carvajal de Arocha, alias Lucila Palacios, was one of several constituents who achieved universal suffrage for women in 1946.

In 1947, Carvajal de Arocha was named chair of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) — now known as the National Electoral Council — thus becoming the first woman to hold such an important and politically sensitive public office, requiring a high level of confidence. After the overthrow of novelist and first elected president Rómulo Gallegos (on 24 November 1948), she was imprisoned and persecuted until the return to democracy in 1958. She was ideologically identified with the so-called Generation of 1928. She was part of the "Women's Movement" of the Venezuelan Revolutionary Organization (ORVE 1936) and advocated for the civil and political rights of Venezuelan women, collaborating with a group of women on the publication of a pamphlet that appeared under the title "Women Before the Law" ("Mujeres ante la Ley").

As a result of the "Message from Venezuelan Women", the consequential women's movement of the thirties and forties created the "Venezuelan Association of Women" (Asociación Venezolana de Mujeres or AVM) and the "Asociación Cultural Femenina" (ACF), with the same urgent goals of improving the conditions of working mothers.[10] Some political rights for Venezuelan women were gained in 1942, when they were first granted citizenship, and later expanded in 1946, when they obtained the right to vote. The active public organization of women was very new. Delgado notes that "women build their own organizations for the defense of their vindications, of their rights, even when they do not yet assume the feminist denomination, these collectives are the pioneers of Venezuelan feminism" (Delgado 2015, 107).

[10] The ACF was much better known than the AVM, because it was made up of journalists, writers, left-wing activists, and trade unionists. See Rakowski and Espina (2010) and Friedman (2000). About women movements in Venezuela, see also De Leonardi (1983).

On 18 October 1945, a civic-military movement took place that overthrew President Isaías Medina in the October Revolution, followed by the installation of the Revolutionary Government Junta, presided over by Rómulo Betancourt. During this period, the Electoral Statute of 15 March 1946 was approved, which granted (i) suffrage to women without any restriction, (ii) the right to vote for illiterate people, and (iii) a reduction of the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen. With this legislation, the elections of the National Constituent Assembly took place on 27 October of the same year and the first six women members of parliament were elected in the first election of 1946. As soon as women could vote, they elected their first MPs. That constituent assembly drafted the 1947 constitution that enshrined women's suffrage as a constitutional right.[11]

The mobilization for women's and children's rights also took place in other countries in Latin America. In 1929 Ecuador became the first country in the region to sanction women's right to vote. It was followed by Brazil and Uruguay in 1932; El Salvador, 1939; Dominican Republic, 1942; Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Panama in 1945; Argentina and Venezuela, 1947; Chile, 1949; Bolivia, 1952; Mexico, 1953; Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru in 1955; Colombia, 1957; and, finally, Paraguay in 1961.

Nevertheless, a bleak period for Venezuelan women occurred between 1948 and 1958. This extraordinary period of advancement in women's rights, participation in debates, and conquering of political spaces for women ended sharply on 24 November 1948, with the overthrow of democratic President Rómulo Gallegos.[12] Then began a dictatorial period for almost a decade, with two military juntas and the regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, in which the rights of Venezuelan women did not only halt, but even regressed. Women and children had to wait until the advent of civil democracy in 1958 to obtain another period of great social progress for the country, which included, at its heart, the role of women in society.[13]

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[11] "In the course of the history of Venezuela, women of different political groupings were united in concrete and conjunctural fights against a common enemy, as in the case of the fight against the dictatorships of Gómez and Pérez Jiménez and, in the case of democratic governments, struggles related to women's own agendas (the right to vote, divorce, the decriminalization of abortion, etc.)" (Blanco 2007, 1).

[12] "During the fifties many women participated in the clandestine struggle against the dictatorship and, post-1958, in the growth of political parties and the new democracy. In the mid-sixties and during the seventies, new feminist and activist groups joined women's professional associations, middle- and working-class women's community service and religious groups (e.g., *Círculos Femeninos Populares* [CFP; Popular Women's Circles], originally a Christian based organization), and women's offices or secretariats in labor unions and political parties. Previously, there were few, if any, experiences of collaboration among women of different classes or political tendencies, apart from during the clandestine struggle against Pérez Jiménez" (Rakowski and Espina 2010, 257).

[13] "Since at least 1936, primarily educated and politically active women have organized to promote women's rights and to struggle against repressive governments. Despite their importance to the overthrow of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958, under democratic rule women encountered little political support for advancing women's rights (see Friedman 2000)" (Rakowski and Espina 2010, 256).

3. Education of Venezuelan Women During the Fourth Republic of 1958

The ideal of the political party (the center-left Acción Democrática, Democratic Action Party, or AD) that came to power in 1958 was to promote modernization and liberal democracy. The aim of this fourth republic was to guarantee political freedom, in order to allow political parties to function again. At the heart of the program of the first democratic presidents was the idea of democratization, expressed as equality of opportunity to overcome socioeconomic inequalities. The democratization of education was proclaimed as the best means to achieve these goals. According to Alcalde (1983), the Venezuelan liberal democracy adopted the theory of development proposed by the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL), where education was seen as an investment, an idea linked to the theory of human capital. Investment in education in Venezuela was one of the highest in Latin America during the period from 1960 (3.7% of the GNP) to 1990 (4.1% of the GNP). Venezuela surpassed the USA and Canada with regards to the percentage of its GNP invested in education (Gonzalez 1994; Chaney 1979).

Women's rights and educational opportunities were opened up by the democratization of Venezuela, known at the time as Latin America's "most stable democracy" (Ellner 2003; Hellinger 2003).[14] Rates of enrollment in higher education in Latin America, as in almost all regions of the world, began to dramatically increase from 1960 onwards (García 1996). But Latin America reached the model of "massive access" to higher education only in the 1980s. "Massive access" meant that between 15% and 35% of the 20–24 age group of the population was enrolled in higher education. Some pictures of the first days after the new campus of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB) was inaugurated, in 1965, show the presence of women in the Faculty of Engineering (archives of UCAB, 1965).

Archives about women in secondary and higher education in Venezuela at the UCAB reveal that, just as specific clothing was required for men, half a century ago the UCAB also had a rule for women: *ucabistas* (students from UCAB) had to wear knee-lengths to attend classes, since the donning of trousers was prohibited in the 1960s. These were the same dress codes used at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, as shown in the photos of women with short hairstyles and pompadours, as well as the pointed heels and pearls that hung from their necks.[15]

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[14] Even if Venezuela was often taken as an example of stability and democracy, some works relativize this affirmation: "This forty-year-old democracy once considered a model of political development for other Latin American countries, contains serious structural flaws" (Friedman 1998, 89).

[15] I thank Gioconda Espino for this testimony: "I was a student leader of the Renovación de la UCV in 1969 and I can attest that until then female students wore skirts and even nylon stockings and men wore a 'paltó' or jacket. Ties were only obligatory for professors. And that was when universities had just abandoned the armed struggle and we were in the

This period brought more opportunities for educated Venezuelan women. The accelerated processes of democratization and modernization of the 1960s brought new openings for women to go beyond their traditional female roles as mothers, nuns and, at best, schoolteachers. Historiographical accounts of women and family organization in the sixties concur, pointing out this was a period of transformations in gender relations that led to a modernization of daily life, thanks to education.[16]

These changes in the 1960s were not necessarily a direct consequence of women's political movements, as was the case in other countries, but a result of the complete transformation of Venezuelan society. As shown in **Table 1**, the level of education nearly quintupled between 1950 and 1975. The expectation of a high level of education in a society tends to reduce gender differences. In the words of Kirkwood (1982), "the invisibility of gender is particularly striking in a country where women enjoy high levels of education and where a ready supply of domestic help frees middleclass women to pursue careers in a variety of professions and activities." In the case of Venezuela, investment in education represented an opportunity for women's emancipation. The Venezuelan case is similar to what happened in other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, where the gains made by women were subsidiaries to a general expansion of educational opportunities and socioeconomic shifts, rather than gender-specific educational policies (Bustillo 1993).

Table 1. Highest enrollment rates in higher education of the population in the age group of 20–24 in Latin America, 1950–1994

Country	1950	1975	1994
Argentina	5.2	25.3	38.9
Colombia	1.0	8.0	17.6
México	1.5	9.0	13.8
Venezuela	1.7	19.5	31.4
Latin América	1.9	11.7	20.7

García (1996, p. 77).

Table 1: Education during the 'Fourth Republic' in different Latin American countries, 1958–1998. Source Pinilla and Muñoz (2005, 302).

An important question concerns the fertility rate and the age at which Venezuelans started having children. During the intense period of modernization alluded to above,

school of poets and artists. Your two ministers studied in skirts and stockings, like me, and at the same UCV" (personal correspondence).

[16] "In 1966, the Venezuelan Family Planning Association (AVPF) was formed with the mission of helping to reinforce and protect families, and with the concept of family planning as the tool to achieve this aim (Bidegain and Diaz, 1988). The family planning program was established, therefore, with the purpose of reducing uncontrolled, involuntary procreation, maternal and infant mortality and induced abortion and this, through the use of contraceptive methods devoted to preventing unwanted pregnancies (Pereira and Freitez, 1994)" (Freitez 2009).

Table 2. Enrollment in different levels of education by gender in Venezuela, 1950–1981

Year	Elementary school			High school			Higher education		
	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)
1950	1,755,097	52.9	47.1	100,911	61.3	38.7	31,635	81.8	18.2
1961	2,503,874	52.5	47.5	279,456	58.0	42.0	48,125	79.3	20.6
1971	3,981,047	50.1	49.9	1,117,820	50.4	49.6	140,820	67.9	32.1
1981	6,232,165	50.7	49.3	2,811,728	48.4	51.5	530,627	55.9	44.1

Valecillos (1993, p.171).

Table 2: Education during the 'Fourth Republic' by gender in Venezuela, 1958–1998. Source Pinilla and Muñoz (2005, 303).

Venezuelan women restricted their fertility, increasingly deciding to have children when they were older and having fewer children; they also played more diverse roles, studying for longer at university and finding paid employment. A major demographic change was the fall in the birth rate: it dropped from forty-five per thousand in the 1960s to twenty-eight per thousand in the 1980s. The decline in fertility rates in Venezuela was different from what happened in industrial societies, where women over thirty-five were the first to restrict their reproductive behaviour. In Venezuela, women between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were the group who most significantly restricted their fertility—this is important because it coincides with university attendance. This drop in the fertility rate was not due to public policies of birth control, which slowly began in the 1970s (abortion is still currently illegal in Venezuela but contraception was popular from the seventies onwards). Rather, women's reproductive behavior was strongly influenced by the new expectations and needs created by the combined effect of urbanization, democratization, and general access to education.

After attending university, how far did Latin American women go in their professional careers? As shown in the **Tables 1** and **2**, at the end of the 1960s urban and middle-class women massively enrolled in higher academic education. As observed in other countries of the region, many of these women occupied positions as civil servants, working mainly for public institutions and some in private sector roles. Depending on the politics and desires of the various presidents and political parties, these women had varying degrees of opportunity to attain politically powerful positions.[17]

[17] "Although the Constitution of 1961 prohibited sex discrimination, most laws continued to relegate women to second-class citizenship and gave fathers and husbands almost complete control over women. Nonetheless, professional women, political party militants, and community activists from poor neighborhoods fought for social change and class equality. In the sixties the first feminist and women's support groups emerged in universities and low-income neighborhoods. Since 1974 there also have been diverse women's state entities: advisory committees, ministerial offices, a women's council, and since 2000 a national institute" (Rakowski and Espina 2010, 256).

At an international level, the decade of the sixties constituted a period of rebirth and momentum for the women's movement. Feminism, especially in the main capitalist countries, became a mass movement, which together with the student and pacifist movements filled the streets of the main cities with massive demonstrations. Feminist thought was partly inspired, especially in Europe, by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In this context, under the influence of the feminist movement and the Socialist Camp, the United Nations Declaration on the "Elimination of Discrimination against Women" was drafted in 1967. These were the same years in which two Venezuelan presidents decided to appoint two women as Ministers of the Economy.[18]

4. From Academia to Public Ministries: Aura Celina Casanova and Haydée Castillo

Opportunities to receive advanced training abroad were not common for Venezuelans prior to the 1980s, especially for women. Some received financial support from national and regional bodies to specialize abroad (Haydée Castillo studied agricultural economics in Wisconsin, USA, in 1961), while others used family funds to diversify their education (like Aura Casanova, who studied Social and Economic Sciences at the Escuela Normal Superior de Bogotá, Colombia, in 1965).

Alexandra Kollontai was one of the first women to be named as minister, acceding to the position of Minister of Social Affairs, in Russia, in 1917. But women in ministerial positions remained infrequent for much longer. In Latin America, the first appointment came only in 1944, when Ecuador had its first woman minister: Nela Martínez (1912–2004), Minister of the Interior. In 1952, the Chilean president named Adriana Olguín as Minister of Justice. In Colombia, Josefina Valencia de Hubach (1913–1991) held the position of Minister of Education between 1956 and 1957. South Korea also had a women minister relatively early: Yim Yong-shi, Minister of Trade and Industry in 1948. In Brazil, Sandra Martins Cavalranti (1913–1991) was appointed Secretary of State for Social Security between 1962 and 1964 (Annesley et al. 2019). These women were pioneers as minister in various cabinets, but none of them were economic ministers.

In Venezuela, the Ministerio de Fomento (Ministry of Economics, Development and Public Works) is the body responsible for promoting the coordination and planning of executive management for the promotion of national development. Usually, when women were named ministers, they were chosen to lead the health, interior, culture, or education ministries. During the 1960s, the presence of women in government diversified into new sectors, though it remained modest (only seven appointments were registered

[18] For Women Ministers in the Latin American region, see Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2005; 2009); on Women in Presidential Cabinets, see Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2016) and Taylor-Robinson et al. (2018).

between 1960 and 1969). At that time, the first women ministers were appointed in the areas of infrastructure (Colombia in 1961) and economy (Venezuela in 1968 and 1969). Throughout the 1970s, the appointment of women as ministers of state tripled compared to the previous decade (Luna et al. 2008, 9). Venezuela was definitively an exception, with the case of two women becoming ministers of the economy: Aura Celina Casanova (1968–1969) and Haydee Castillo de López (1969–1971). My goal is to go beyond the individual presentation of the trajectories and contributions of these ministers and look for the general trends that connect these two women, who I will now briefly present.

Aura Celina Casanova: The First Woman Minister of the Economy

I am not the first to ask who Aura Celina Casanova was. In an interview published in 1977, I found this question: "Who is this woman with short hair, a shy look? Calm-voiced and who has so much power?" (Casanova, interview 1977). Born in Táchira in 1924, she went on to become a Venezuelan educator, politician, and economist—the first woman in Venezuela to be appointed to an executive cabinet, and the first woman minister. She was the Economic Minister of Venezuela in 1968–1969,[19] during Raúl Leoni's government (his political party was Acción Democrática) and she considered herself as center-left (Casanova, interview 1977). President Raúl Leoni explicitly announced the appointment of the first woman in his government cabinet as a progressive decision, on 25 April 1968. I did not verify all the women ministers in the world, but as far as I could ascertain, Casanova appears to be the first woman economic minister in history.

Casanova obtained a degree in Social and Economic Sciences from the Escuela Normal Superior de Bogotá in 1965 — traveling to and living in Colombia. She then studied Economics at the Central University of Venezuela and graduated in 1968. She was also a professor at the Pedagogical Institute of Caracas (IPC) and a Member of the Academic Vice-Rectorate of Simón Rodríguez University (USR) from 1979 to 1981.

She was the President of Banco Industrial de Venezuela (BIV) from 1970 to 1976, and headed the state's Industrial Bank (the bank in charge of investment for mid-to-long-term development in the country). Some of her most important publications include: "Estudio sobre la industria automotriz venezolana y sus perspectivas de desarrollo" (Study on the Venezuelan automotive industry and its development prospects, 1969), which was commissioned by the Venezuelan Development Corporation (CVF) from their private consulting firm; and "Los Servicios Educativos en Venezuela" in *Revista de Economía Latinoamericana* (1974).

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[19] *Ministra de fomento*, which can also be translated in English as economic development minister or minister of public works. This ministry later became, in Venezuela and other countries, the ministry of the economy (*Ministerio de Economía*).

The central part of her program as minister was the design of reforms of the financial system for the country's economic development through state investment, benefiting from high oil prices during her term. Her role was not so much to decide the level of public spending as much as through which channels it should occur. She favored the development of the automotive industry, and was considered an "expert" (*técnica*), but also a mediator between the business world and politicians (Coronil and Skurski 1982). She confessed in an interview that "the AD party helped me a lot, that party represented the majority expression of the poor country. I felt a desire for redemption from the misery of others" (Casanova, interview 1977).

Haydee Castillo de López: The Second Woman Minister of the Economy

Haydee Castillo de López (1934–2020) was an economist who graduated from the Central University of Venezuela in 1956. She obtained a master's degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Wisconsin in 1961, traveling and living in the US. She was fluent in English and French. In 1969, during the presidency of Christian Democrat Rafael Caldera, she was appointed Minister of the Economy (*Fomento*, Public Works) until 1971. During his first presidential mandate in 1969, Rafael Caldera created the Ministry for Women's Development, which was replaced five years later by the Ministry of the Family. Haydee Castillo was the second Venezuelan woman Minister of the Economy. She had high responsibility in the executive branch and public finances after Aura Celina Casanova. She was named chair of the Federation of Association of Economists of Venezuela (1972–1974). She enjoyed legitimacy among the economists and politicians of her time.

She also occupied important positions in finance as the Director of the National Securities Commission (1973–1976). She played an important political role in the parliament as an active member of the Congress of the Republic for over fifteen years (1979–1994). She was vice-chair of the Finance Committee of Deputies (1979–82), first vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies (1982–84), chair of the Foreign Policy Committee of Deputies (1989–1990), director of the Parliamentary Fraction of the Social Christian Party COPEI (1992–1994),[20] senator to the Republican Congress (1994–1999), chair of the Senate Foreign Policy Committee (1994–1996), first vice-president of the Senate (1996–1998), chair of the Senate Economic Committee (1999), and member of the Executive Committee of the World Inter-Parliamentary Union (1992–1996).

[20] COPEI was a traditional party in Venezuela that was not necessarily linked to the Catholic church: "the Catholic Church is notably weaker in Venezuela than in many other Latin American countries" (Ciccariello 2013, 128). On the Pacto de Punto Fijo and Venezuelan Party Systems, see Lupu (2016).

She was a member of the National Academy of Economic Sciences, vice-president of the Academy (2001–2003), professor of Economics at the School of Electrical Engineering at the Faculty of Engineering of the UCV, and professor of Economics at the Schools of Law and Political Studies at the Faculty of Law of the UCV.

One of her crucial roles was as vice-president of the Social Christian Party COPEI (1979–1999). She was decorated with the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Liberator, the Order of Merit in Work, and the Order of Andrés Bello. She also received international recognition from France (Ordre National du Mérite de la République Française), Italy (Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana), the UK, and Belgium (and Ordre de la Couronne du Royaume de Belgique).

She was a very prolific writer. Among her publications we find: *La integración latinoamericana* (1966); *El comercio exterior de Venezuela* (1968); *La mujer en la Venezuela de hoy* (1986); *La nacionalización del puerto de la Guaira* (1988); and her master's degree thesis from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, entitled *The general relation to agricultural marketing in Venezuela* (1961).

5. Some Observations from the Study of these Two Cases

The participation of women in the economics profession in Venezuela could be depicted as a tall, thin obelisk, meaning it is very difficult to access, as in the case of Colombia (Orozco and Guiot 2022) or other Latin American countries. However, in the case of Argentina (Gómez Molla 2017), explicit government actions (Valobra 2013) and various media discourses (Cosse 2010) showed the growing participation of women in public life during the late 1960s and 1970s.

These two ministers, Casanova and Castillo, shared some particular traits that were not common among the rest of the women population in Venezuela. First, they were both middle-class, had access to high levels of education, were able to travel and study abroad, and could speak foreign languages (specifically English and French). We find similar social and cultural capital in women economists in other countries who also occupied important positions in government — as shown for Colombia by Guiot and Orozco Espinel (2022), and for Italy and the US by Gomez Betancourt and Zacchia (2023).

A second common trait between the two ministers was their training in economics. Casanova and Castillo were exceptions in this period in which many women were enrolled at the universities, but not many in economics and sciences more generally. What made it possible for a few Venezuelan women to succeed professionally was their professional training and the opportunity to work, for example as economists or lawyers, in traditionally male-dominated domains, such as political parties and

government offices. Only some "very well educated" or "well-traveled" elite women could work as economists in 1960s–1970s in Venezuela.

The participation of women in the labor market in Venezuela was variable, depending on the type of employment, the sector of economic activity, and the city. There was a large difference in wages between men and women.[21] Added to this was the fact that women were the subject of widespread criticism that viewed work as a threat to motherhood, with which women were biologically identified. By the end of the 1960s in Venezuela, women's work outside the home was no longer considered exceptional, but work in positions of power in public institutions still was. As seen in the 1960s, the number of women pursuing higher education reached very high levels.

In the second half of the 1960s and first half of the 70s, several women's organizations worked in different areas (such as the Círculos Populares Femeninos), but without common objectives. These groups were able to be organized after 1975, the International Women's Year (Año Internacional de la Mujer), and were promoted in the 1980s, with the reform of the Civil Code. These two Venezuelan ministers lived through this change but were not protagonists. Their economic ideas were the general ones associated to the CEPAL developmental model.

A third common feature of Casanova and Castillo is the fact that they were both supported by their political parties. In Venezuela, political parties often presented gendered barriers to women's full incorporation. As expressed by Friedman (1998, 90), "Venezuelan parties are fundamentally discriminatory institutions that, while allowing the initial incorporation of certain class-based groups such as labor and peasants, have specifically marginalized women. This marginalization has been augmented by gender-biased channels of access to the state."

It is difficult to conclude what role political parties played for women's emancipation and professional careers – what effect women's involvement in political parties has had on women's rights more specifically – during this period in Venezuela. In the case of our two ministers, actively belonging to and participating in their respective political parties (Acción Democrática for Aura Casanova and Copei for Haydée Castillo), having friends and colleagues there, and belonging to key decision-making groups was crucial in shaping their professional opportunities as women during the early development of economics in Venezuela in the 1960s. In words once again of Friedman (1998, 120): "Many of the women who have achieved significant party positions are attached to highly placed men, either as family members or lovers, and are often known as *mujeres de* (women of) a particular man. This pattern reinforces the idea that legitimate leaders are men."

[21] "Even when women entered the same professions as men, men usually retained the leadership positions of the sectoral organizations" (Friedman 1998, 122). See also Jensen (2008).

The last feature that Castillo and Casanova shared is that they were supported by Venezuelan presidents. It is important to insist on the link between the will of politicians (in particular those who wield great power, such as presidents or governors) and women's access to positions of influence. If these individuals have gender awareness while holding a position of power, then the gendered division of labor is more evenly distributed. Montecinos (1994, 167) supports this when she writes: "democratic politics does not by itself guarantee progress towards gender equality. Political parties and traditional politicians challenge the autonomy and legitimacy of women's leadership and are reluctant to recognize that gender is indeed linked to power and social justice. Moreover, it cannot be taken for granted that welfare policies benefit women, as if citizens were not gendered." If we do not consider people's gender, it becomes more difficult to identify the root of the problems of inequalities. "Even under democratic conditions," Montecinos (1994, 168) continues, "traditionally 'gender-blind' conceptions of social stratification only perpetuate the inability of policy-makers to identify relevant sources of inequality and foster failure in altering the subordinate social position of women."

Even if the period of study is different, I arrive here at results similar to those of the CEPAL Women's Study (Gomez Betancourt and Orozco Espinel 2018). First, there are important differences in women's careers: they have less linear and more interdisciplinary trajectories than those of men. Casanova and Castillo started studying different careers, then traveled, and became eventually economists and ministers. Second, mixing economics and politics is a way for women to become more influential in public life: "In the mid 1990s women cabinet ministers were still far more likely to be occupying the 'softer' sociocultural portfolios than the four 'harder' and more prestigious ministerial positions, namely, defense, finance, home affairs, and foreign affairs" (Reynolds 1999, 564). For this to happen, we need institutions that can support policies by emancipated women. Krook (2009) and Krook and O'Brien (2012) defended the appointment of female cabinet ministers worldwide and explained the importance of commitment to advancing gender equality. In the words of Montecinos (1994, 168): "decentralization of public policies and the political activism of organized women are significant steps; yet it is only through major changes in social institutions that greater equality between the sexes will be achieved".

Third, networks are particularly important for women. In the case of Casanova and Castillo, their main networks were those coming from their political parties and some macroeconomist colleagues. These political and personal networks were fundamental in their careers to fight against gender discrimination. Currently, women in politics are still facing discrimination and even violence but their presence is less questioned than 20 or even 10 years ago. In other words, "relying on networks established in opposition to the dictatorship and the incorporation of new activists, women improved their strategy

of cross-party unification and used the national women's agency that they maintained in the executive branch. This strategy has led to significant legal reform as well as an increase in women's representation at the national level" (Friedman 1998, 129).

Fourth, a virtuous circle was created. The political decision of some presidents to appoint women ministers opened doors to new generations of women.[22] Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2005) found that "presidents from leftist parties and presidents who found themselves in more partisan political environments were likely to appoint more women to their cabinets." Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2009) likewise cite "international pressure, in other words, a diffusion effect, as having a powerful impact on women's presence in Latin American executives as well". Undoubtedly, the recovery of democratic processes in Venezuela after the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez contributed to creating an atmosphere conducive to greater participation by women in political spheres.

As we saw in the tables, in recent decades women have made great strides in showing their abilities through increased levels of education, participation in the labor market, and experience in national and local leadership. The decision to become mothers at a later age allowed them to reach higher levels of education and to enter the labor market more easily and for better paid positions. This had the effect of expanding their opportunities while also increasing the number of women eligible for positions of power.

6. Concluding Remarks

The presence of women in the ministries of the productive sectors happened significantly early in Venezuela, with the example of two women Ministers of Economy, Aura Celina Casanova (1968) and Haydée Castillo de López Acosta (1969). It was not until the 1980s in most Latin American countries and around the world that more women ministers attained positions of greater economic and political impact.[23]

There has been sustained and significant growth not only in the appointment of women ministers over the past two decades, but also in the number of women ministers in charge of influential or strategic portfolios. This growth, however, has been uneven. Not only are there significant variations in the presence of women ministers in different countries, but there is also a serious underrepresentation of indigenous and Afro-descendant women (Luna et al. 2008, 3).

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[22] "Argentina, Brazil and Mexico have historically had the lowest numbers of women ministers. This is partly because these countries did not appoint their Prime Minister until the 1980s" (Luna et al. 2008).

[23] Unfortunately, this process (of male presidents supporting women and naming them ministers) was interrupted when Hugo Rafael Chavez came to power. In Chavez's first government there were no women ministers. However, this was to change in his second government.

Even if the level of women enrollment in higher education and their role in society increased from the late 1950s in Venezuela, the appointment of these two women was highly uncommon, as were their individual trajectories. They seem to be exceptional rather than following what we know about women's status in Venezuela, even for educated women. Their advancements have had much more to do with their individual, fairly elite, educational and political trajectories than a common fate of women, even women professionals. Castillo de Lopez, in particular, was clearly an important politician within COPEI, and Casanova had important links within AD. Given what we know about Venezuelan democratic politics of their era, it seems to be the combination of their career as economists and the deep hold of their political parties that explain their advancement.

Finally, concerning Venezuelan presidents and women's representation in high office, political commitments among party politicians definitively helped women (whether they were economists or not) to occupy areas dominated by cis-male economists. We need to change structurally sexist stereotypes that are still present among economists, through childhood education and by supporting women to study economics, encouraging them to achieve the higher levels of education needed to hold influential positions. In addition to other reforms, as many critics have suggested, the social science discipline of economics will be strengthened if it is built on a broader segment of the population.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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