

"From Marginalization to Empowerment. American and Peruvian Women in the International Arena",

by Ambassador Liliana de Olarte de Torres-Muga

Distinguished Ladies of the American Literary Club:

Distinguished members of the American Embassy:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very happy to participate in this seminar of the American Women's Literary Club. Professor Rosa Garibaldi de Mendoza has provided an important insight about Diplomacy in Peru and the United States. I am sure the same will stand for Professor Maria Cecilia Rozas, who will be the next speaker.

I have been assigned to talk about the following subject: "From Marginalization to Empowerment; American and Peruvian Women in the International Arena."

It is a fact that in the middle ages and well into the second millennium, women used to be considered as property of their father, husband, brother or of the person they were working for. The first edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, printed in 1771, defines women as follows: "Female of man." Just those three words. Nothing more.

This gives us an idea of the situation of complete submission affecting women until relatively recent times. Women were expected to only work at home and give birth to as many boys as possible, future warriors. In other words, women lacked the most basic rights. There was a total marginalization of women.

The independence of Peru was proclaimed more than forty years after the Continental Congress adopted in Philadelphia the Declaration of Independence.

Thus, women in the United States began to achieve equal gender rights long before Peru. It is pertinent to note that the independence of the United States was one of the factors that influenced revolutionary movements for the emancipation of Peru.

Thanks in part to the industrial revolution, in the 19th century, American women started working in factories and also held clerical jobs, always under masculine supervision. In the years, or decades following Peru's independence, women remained relegated, working mainly in agricultural fields and as domestic servants, with limited access to formal education.

In Peru, the United States and other countries, many female voices were raised in the 19th century, demanding similar rights to those which belonged exclusively to men. Among American activist women, and these were many, I will mention the New Yorker Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was a leading figure of the early female's movement, until her demise, in 1902.

When I was a high school student, I learned that during her wedding celebration, Elizabeth requested the Minister that the expression "I promise to obey my husband" be removed from the wedding vows. Despite this act of "rebellion", Elizabeth and her husband Henry enjoyed a long, happy marriage, and had seven children and seven grandchildren.

In Peru, I will mention Mercedes Cabello, Clorinda Matto and Teresa González de Fanning. The three of them, among others of the same gender, worked hard on behalf of women's rights. I should also mention Flora Tristán, daughter of a Peruvian father and a French mother, who was a world pioneer for women's liberation movements. She was the grandmother of artist Paul Gauguin.

After the First World War, many women in the United States had increased their working experience, performing jobs of the men who went to war. That was a determining factor for the adoption in 1920, two years after the war was over, of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting American women the right to vote.

A draft for the Amendment had been almost completed since late 19th century. The above mentioned Elizabeth Stanton, who died 18 years before the approval, was among the drafters.

Now an anecdote: The Amendment had to be passed through the Federal Congress and adopted by the States Legislatures. The Tennessee Assembly narrowly approved the Nineteenth Amendment, thanks to the decisive affirmative vote of one of its members. The latter was known as an opponent to the Amendment. Asked why he had changed his mind, the young 23 year old legislator replied: "My mother asked me to vote in favor and a good boy always does what his mother asks him". He was Harry Burn.

Women's suffrage in Peru was adopted in 1955, that is, 35 years after the U.S.A. Actually, we Peruvians were late in Latin America, because by 1955 only two countries were behind Peru: Colombia, where women gained the right to vote in 1957, and Paraguay in 1961.

It should be noted that one of the most ardent promoters for women's suffrage in Peru was a lady diplomat, then in her early 30s, Carmela Aguilar. Further on I will give more details about Carmela.

It is no coincidence that having the right to vote in the U.S. and Peru, women in both countries were gradually able to access positions of international influence within their respective governments. Peruvian and American women were thus progressively incorporated into the diplomatic services of their countries.

In 1922, Lucile Atcherson was the first female to join the American Foreign Service, thus opening the doors for future women generations.

Seven ladies belonged to Peru's Diplomatic Service, when in 1955 women's suffrage became effective: 2 First Secretaries; 3 Second Secretaries; and 2 Third Secretaries. One of them had served overseas. The other six only in Lima, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The lady diplomat who had worked abroad as Second Secretary, was the aforementioned Carmela Aguilar, who in her Memoirs relates that, being the only woman diplomat, she felt being discriminated by her male colleagues. Upon returning to Lima in 1954, Carmela worked hard, as stated above, seeking approval for women's suffrage in Peru.

In addition to those seven ladies in Peru's Foreign Service, in 1955 there were 220 men in active service. Therefore, in that year almost 97% of Peruvian Diplomats were men. Now, in 2012, there are 653 Peruvian career diplomats in service, of which 76.72 % are men, and 23.28% are women. That means that the gap is narrowing between both genders. The marginalization is being reduced. But there are now only 10 Peruvian women as career Ambassadors, vis-à-vis 85 men. So, 10.5% of Peruvian

Ambassadors are women. The rate of promotion for women diplomats aspiring to become Ambassador is quite slow.

All Peruvian career diplomats emerge from the Diplomatic Academy. So the idea is to attract more women to the latter. The Academy started to function in 1956, having had 2 breaks, in the early 60s and early 90s.

It is relevant to mention that the U.S. Foreign Service Institute (FSI) was established in 1947, although in previous years prospective American diplomats were taught in specialized training centers. Its current Director is a lady diplomat, Dr. Ruth A. Whiteside. Many thousands of American Diplomats have graduated at the FSI and so far, over 850 at our Academy.

Since May 2011, Peru's Diplomatic Academy bears the illustrious name of Ambassador Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, a well deserved homage to our front-runner diplomat, twice United Nations Secretary-General, former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The property is known as Casa Embajador Igor Velázquez Rodríguez, in memory of a distinguished and generous diplomat, who in 2004 donated this house to the Academy.

The first American female appointed at the Ambassadorial level was Helen Moore Anderson, named Ambassador to Denmark in 1949. In Peru Carmela Aguilar was the first woman to reach the rank of Ambassador. This happened in 1973, that is, 24 years after the appointment of Miss Anderson at that level.

Carmela Aguilar was also the first Peruvian woman diplomat appointed as Ambassador to a foreign country, namely Portugal. She passed away two months ago, well in her 90s. At her funeral, Carmela received a warm tribute for her important work as a diplomat and also for her valuable contribution towards the rights of women.

So far three women have held the position of Secretary of State: Madelaine Albright was appointed in 1996; Condoleezza Rice in 2005; and the incumbent, Hillary Rodham Clinton, in January 2009. In Peru, only men have served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, although one third of members of the current Peruvian Cabinet are women. The percentage of women in Peruvian Congress is also relevant, but it could be greater.

I must also say that, despite the fact that women account for less than 25% of Peru's Diplomatic Service, many Departments at the Foreign Ministry are led by females. Likewise, 80% of Peruvian career women Ambassadors are now posted abroad in that capacity.

I myself was appointed Ambassador to Ukraine, in 2005. I remember that one of my guests to our official independence celebration on July 28th, congratulated my husband thinking that he was the Head of Mission and practically ignored me... In many countries, especially in newly independent States, there is a belief that only men can be Ambassadors... The same could have happened to my female counterparts from Canada, Malaysia, Vietnam and Israel.

The first Peruvian Cabinet member was Mercedes Cabanillas, appointed Minister of Education in 1996. In the U.S.A. Frances Perkins was the first woman in the American Cabinet. As Secretary of Labor she was an original member of Franklin Roosevelt's Administration and remained in office for his entire presidency.

Summing it up, we conclude that both in the U.S.A. and in Peru, marginalization of women in international affairs and other fields is declining and women's empowerment is increasing. But the gap could be reduced. As far as Peru is concerned, this requires giving women greater access to education and implementing meritocracy, both of which are objectives of our Government.

Last, but not least, may I remind you that a very capable career diplomat is currently the U.S. Ambassador to Peru: Mrs. Rose Likins. She is the first woman U.S. Ambassador in Peru. I should also note that after more than 160 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, all the Ambassadors of Peru in U.S.A. have been men.

Thank you very much for your kind attention. Maria Cecilia is next, so now the floor is hers.

Muchas gracias.