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# Quebec Women and Legislative Representation



*Manon Tremblay*

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# Quebec Women and Legislative Representation

TRANSLATED BY KÄTHE ROTH



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# Foreword

*Sylvia Bashevkin*

During the early 1980s, in the course of post-doctoral research on women's party participation, I was struck by the intriguing variations that distinguished Quebec from the rest of Canada. Not only did patterns of suffragist activism and dates of provincial enfranchisement differ significantly, but the religious traditions, colonial history, and party organizations that mattered most diverged at both the provincial and federal levels. This variation formed the basis for my decision to focus attention on the rest of Canada in the study that became *Toeing the Lines*, first published in 1985 (Bashevkin 1993). Although introducing Quebec as a comparator in the final chapter of that book proved controversial, given the norms of Canadian political science at the time, I remained optimistic that scholars deeply immersed in the Quebec context would develop far more meaningful analyses than I could provide.

Fortunately for all of us, Manon Tremblay has dedicated two decades of her highly productive academic career to charting the parameters of women's engagement in Quebec politics. She has not just probed the history of women's electoral and legislative involvement at provincial and federal levels, but also adroitly situated that research in a rich comparative context. Published in 2005 under the title *Québécoises et représentation parlementaire*, the study translated here as *Quebec Women and Legislative Representation* fills a crucial gap in the Canadian and international literatures in English on women and politics. Simply stated, this volume presents the welcome voice of a well-informed Quebec scholar who sheds invaluable light on women's political history and contemporary participation in *la belle province*.

It is difficult to summarize in brief the core contributions of this book. On one level, Tremblay's study is fascinating because it dispels long-standing assumptions that Quebec women were more politically passive or, to use the jargon of social science research, less agentic than their counterparts elsewhere. Chapter 1 demonstrates that, as in other parts of Canada, propertied women in Quebec voted long before the franchise was formally extended to

them – probably as early as 1809. Tremblay traces subsequent debates over the rights of women in Quebec to vote and to hold public office; these deliberations were sustained, vigorous, and lively, and her account captures the flavour of argumentation both in favour of and opposed to reform.

Chapter 2 tackles the obvious academic and real-world conundrum – namely, why the extension of formal rights during the last century resulted in the arrival of relatively few women in Quebec's National Assembly, House of Commons, and Senate of Canada seats. Tremblay guides readers through an extensive comparative literature on political party recruitment as well as electoral systems, showing the extent to which selection processes within parties directly shape appointments to the Senate as well as the choices available to voters in parliamentary elections. She examines closely the international literature on left-leaning parties and competitive parties with reference to Quebec, tracing the extent to which progressive (as opposed to conservative) and opposition (as compared with governing) organizations were more open to female participants. In her view, the willingness of parties to nominate women in winnable seats under single-member plurality rules, or to place women in promising slots on party lists under proportionality rules, is a critical first link in the representation chain. In concise, well-argued terms, Tremblay weaves her claim that party decisions matter a great deal to the presence versus absence of women in public decision-making positions.

It is in this section of the book that the author identifies a set of significant questions for future researchers. First, how do media representations of political women shape not only public perceptions but also the self-presentations of those same politicians? Professor Tremblay poses this challenge as follows: "What empowerment strategies do women in Quebec politics use to handle the media, notably during election campaigns? The current state of knowledge in Quebec offers no answer to this question."

Since 2007, Pauline Marois' role as Parti québécois leader has provided a critical opportunity to ask how journalists presented the first female leader of a major party in the National Assembly and how that leader projected herself to reporters. Have stories about Marois' parliamentary interventions as well as her behaviour in election debates and media scrums framed her in ways that parallel the framing of Kim Campbell as federal Progressive Conservative leader – that is, as a masculinized and hence unsettling woman whose willingness to interrupt others or use aggressive body language was often exaggerated in press accounts? Or were Marois' experiences with the media more similar to those of Audrey McLaughlin, a federal New Democratic Party leader frequently viewed as overly consensus oriented and largely dismissed by pundits as an ineffective politician they could conveniently ignore?



Second, what reforms are worth pursuing to encourage the election of more Quebec women, both to the National Assembly and the House of Commons? Will those representatives feel linked to female citizens in the general population, in the sense of believing they hold an obligation to speak for women as a group? Tremblay devotes particular attention to a bill presented in 2004 in the National Assembly, known as the Bill to Replace the Elections Act, which proposed a mixed electoral system with some first-past-the-post and some proportional seats, as well as financial incentives for parties that fielded more women candidates. Her discussion of this legislation acknowledges the challenges facing at-large or list representatives, who do not hold seats in geographically determined districts and are therefore disadvantaged by the land-based assumptions about representation that prevail in North America. Tremblay entreats readers to think about how other Westminster-style systems including New Zealand and Australia have introduced changes to single-member plurality arrangements and still maintained political legitimacy. It is also worth bearing in mind that British voting rules provide for proportionality in elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the London Assembly, and the European Parliament – meaning the parent Westminster system has permitted far greater flexibility in ideas about representation than has its Canadian offspring.

To pose the obvious question that follows from Tremblay's research, what are the origins of this rigidity? How is it that a courageous widow (apparently the grandmother of Patriot leader Louis-Joseph Papineau) could state aloud her political preference in the 1809 Quebec elections, but, two hundred years later, the voices of women across Canada seem quite muted? This book opens the door for readers to pursue a third and, arguably, highly critical avenue for research, which concerns the dynamics of social protest. To what extent can we attribute the relatively high levels of numerical representation Tremblay finds in a series of recent Quebec National Assemblies (as compared with provincial legislatures elsewhere in Canada) to sustained feminism movement pressure on major political parties operating at that level? How is it that so many women MPs in Canada have, since 1972, come from Quebec urban areas, notably Montreal?

Tremblay's study does an admirable job of marking out the impressive terrain she has explored, not only for historians and social scientists, but also for interested members of the public. In this book, she presents us with the valuable fruits of her research and throws down the gauntlet for others to follow. *Merçi, Manon!*

# Preface and Acknowledgments

In April 2004, perhaps because I was at a bit of a loss following a number of very intense months of teaching and research, I decided that the time had come to catch up on the state of knowledge regarding the situation of women in Quebec's spaces of legislative representation. This need to put the cards on the table was reflected in my desire to establish the point I had reached in my own thought concerning this issue, which has been part of my life for twenty years. The pause to mull things over was even more important because there was no reference work on this theme for Quebec, whereas for English Canada, books such as Heather MacIvor's *Women and Politics in Canada* (1996) had been published. *Quebec Women and Legislative Representation* has a narrower focus than does MacIvor's work; for example, it does not cover the vast area of public policy. Starting from the observation that English Canada sometimes develops rather curious analyses of Quebec politics, it sets out to propose a reading more sensitive to the specific context of Quebec and the relationships that Quebec women have with its legislative assemblies.

This book would never have seen the light of day without the contributions of many people. First, I would like to thank all the Quebec women involved in provincial and federal politics who, over many years, have agreed to answer my questions, either by allowing me to interview them or by filling out my questionnaires. I know that their time is very valuable, and I am all the more grateful for their generosity.

A very special thank-you goes to MNA Louise Harel, who agreed, in the autumn of 2004, to write the Preface to the French-language version of this book. For me, it was a great honour. Harel embodies the descriptive representation of Quebec women in legislative arenas over time, as she entered the National Assembly at a juncture when their presence was as rare as oxygen at high altitude. She is also the Quebec woman who has won the greatest number of elections and accumulated the most years sitting in one of the three forums of the province's legislative representation. What is more, she has spoken and acted many times regarding policy to improve the collective

experience of Quebec women – or, to use the jargon in the field, she has represented them in a substantive perspective. As if this weren't enough, her agreement to write the Preface offered me a ticket to travel to the past, as I reread the first interview that she granted me in the late 1980s for my doctoral dissertation, which reminded me of the very strong impression she made on me then – an impression that has lasted. For all of this, my gratitude is infinite.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has long contributed to my work, agreeing to grant funding for my research in competition after competition, for which I express my humble gratitude. I thank my employer, the University of Ottawa, and more particularly the Faculty of Social Sciences, which, since 1992, has offered me a climate that could not be more propitious (it is, in fact, almost an oasis) to conducting my research. The most obvious example lies in the creation, in 2000, of the Centre for Research on Women and Politics, of which I am director. The centre is a site of reflection, exchange, and creativity, a privileged path to the very competitive international market of research on women and politics. Caroline Andrew played a key role in the creation of the centre, and I am grateful to her.

I would like to thank the Presses de l'Université Laval, and especially Léo Jacques, for publishing the original version of this book, *Québécoises et représentation parlementaire*. In 1995, the press showed its confidence in me by publishing my first book, written with Réjean Pelletier, *Que font-elles en politique?* Ten years later, it was still willing to publish my work; I interpret this as a true partnership, to which I tip my hat.

The English-language version of this book would not have been possible without the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada. I am aware that many high-quality manuscripts are submitted to these organizations, and I am all the more honoured that they devoted some of their limited financial resources to the translation of *Québécoises*. UBC Press is one of the best publishing houses in English Canada, and I am extremely grateful to have a work in its catalogue. I would like to thank Emily Andrew, Darcy Cullen, and Ann Macklem, who diligently and professionally shepherded my manuscript at UBC Press. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers, whose work is essential, though thankless and time consuming. Finally, my warmest thanks go to Käthe Roth, who translated *Québécoises* into English. This book benefited greatly from her keen comprehension and intelligent writing.

I cannot end without mentioning the tireless support of my parents for my academic career. My special thoughts go to my father. As I enter my fifth decade of life, he still impresses me as much as he did when I was a child: this man is a magician, who knows how to transform raw material into a complete work. Papa, I hope that this book lives up to your example.



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# Quebec Women and Legislative Representation



# Introduction

This book deals with the question – or, rather, the current problem – of the minority presence of women in Quebec’s spaces of legislative representation, the National Assembly, the House of Commons, and the Senate. This problem is more accentuated in Ottawa than in Quebec City: in early 2005, women occupied forty seats in the National Assembly, for a feminization rate of 32 percent, whereas they represented twenty of Quebec’s seventy-five ridings in Ottawa, or 26.7 percent of the Quebec delegation in the federal legislature. In addition, the proportion of Quebec women in the House of Commons fell from 1984 to 1997, whereas at worst it stagnated in the National Assembly between 1989 and 1998. In general, it must be recognized that Quebec has outperformed Canada in this regard (still counting). In the last three elections, the proportion of women within the Quebec delegation to Parliament has been higher than that of women among MPs overall: after the 1997 vote, 24 percent of the 75 Quebec seats in the House of Commons were filled by women, as opposed to 20.6 percent of all the 301 House of Commons seats at the time; the corresponding proportions were 24 versus 20.6 percent following the 2000 election and 26.7 versus 21.1 percent following the 2004 election. What is more, Canada has tumbled in the world ranking of feminization of legislatures: in January 1998, it stood at sixteenth place on the list kept by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the proportion of women within lower or single houses of some 180 national legislatures; by the end of 2004, it was in thirty-first place.

This book is based on one of the most complex notions in political science, that of representation.<sup>1</sup> From the Latin *representare*, the word “representation” has a broad range of interpretations. Essentially, it means making an entity (a person, idea, emotion, or object) present that otherwise would not be present through an intermediary (animate or not; Pitkin 1967, 8-9). For example, under certain conditions, a sample reveals the opinions and behaviours of a population; certain operas embody passionate love; a flag distills the essence of a country. In a representative democracy, legislatures constitute

privileged theatres of representation: legislative assemblies are composed of representatives designated by the population via an election. Under this definition, the complexity of representation is revealed through a myriad of models, interpretations, referents, and roles.

This complexity is also expressed by the various faces that representation has had: having followed the warp and weft of history, it is manifested today in forms that do not much resemble the practices of Ancient Greece, often idealized as the cradle of democracy. Three models serve as examples of this historical distortion: the “from one to one” model, under which each citizen represents herself or himself; the “from many to one” model, under which the population designates several people to represent it; and the “from many to many” model, which focuses on taking diversities into account and including them in governance as well as participatory democracy. The second model, “from many to one,” is prevalent in Quebec today, although the third model is gaining more proponents. For example, some groups, including the Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie and the Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle, are demanding that the voting system be reformed to make the National Assembly a better reflection of the diversity of Quebec society.

The now classic work by Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (1967), is still widely respected by those who have conducted more recent theoretical and empirical research on women in politics (Carroll 2001; Childs 2004; Lovenduski 2005; Phillips 1995; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002a). So masterful was the analysis in Pitkin’s rigorous and convincing exploration of the theoretical space of representation that her book is now regarded as a sort of incubator for subsequent writings (Judge 1999, 1). Pitkin (1967) distinguishes two main aspects of representation: one relative to presence; the other to actions. The former, called descriptive representation, has two orientations: symbolic representation and mirror representation. Symbolic representation is intended to embody an abstraction (such as an idea, emotion, or even a psychic entity). The lieutenant governor, for instance, transcends day-to-day politics (that of parties and governments that succeed each other at the head of the state) to symbolize Quebec – its unity in space, its continuity in time, and its membership in the Canadian whole. The presence of a single woman or a small number of women in legislatures symbolizes one aspect of political citizenship: the right of each citizen to run for and be elected to office. The symbolic conception of representation gives meaning to the presence of a single woman – Marie-Claire Kirkland-Casgrain, who was followed by Lise Bacon – in the Quebec legislature and provides an interpretation of the first three Quebec women elected to the House of Commons, in 1972.

Mirror representation, also called “microcosmic,” is the other form of descriptive representation. It is often associated with John Adams, a founding



father of the United States, and with American anti-federalists such as Samuel Chase and Melancton Smith. According to this reading, an assembly is representative if its composition reflects various socio-demographic, ideological, and identity groups in about the same proportions as they exist in society (Farrell 2001, 11-12; McLean 1991). The representativeness of a body thus resides in its capacity to reflect the whole (the population) – to constitute a reduced model of society, a microcosm: a representative legislative assembly “should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason and act like them” (Adams, quoted in Pitkin 1967, 60). The Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing called for mirror representation, pointing out that women had attained one-quarter of the objective of electoral representation proportional to their demographic weight (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform 1991, 94).

Mirror representation has a number of strengths, starting with that of fairness: in a regime of equality between female and male citizens, it seems fair that decision-making bodies be as open as possible to seating women as well as men. The criterion of fairness is met simply by presence without requiring anything in terms of actions. A second strength, of course, consists of offering political role models to girls and women but also to men. Furthermore, mirror representation may act as an incentive to mobilize certain social movements that, having seen none or too few of their kind sitting in the legislature, would simply snub the terrain of electoral politics (for example, too few female representatives might provoke the women’s movement to mobilize). Finally, mirror representation also helps to gild the brand of political institutions that have trouble with legitimacy, a problem engendered at least in part by the identity gap between the people and the individuals who represent them.

However, mirror representation also involves a number of difficulties. A first consists of understanding the traits on which it is based: why should sex or region be relevant to representation and not, for instance, left-handedness? A second has to do with the fact that the population is constantly changing, which presents a problem with representing it in a legislative assembly that is, by nature, fixed. A third – noted by Pitkin (1967, 89) – is that there is no guarantee that a person with a given socio-demographic profile will be willing to improve the collective experiences of those like her or him; in fact, a number of empirical studies reveal such a breach (for example, Gotell and Brodie 1991; Tremblay 1993; Trimble 1993). Lastly, no structure of accountability may exist between the elected individuals and the electorate. As Pitkin (1967, 90) writes, “A man [sic] can only be held to account for what he has done, not for what he is.” In effect, why would a particular socio-demographic trait engender a sense of responsibility toward one’s own kind (for example, will a woman represent women’s interests simply because she is female)? In the final analysis, the

main limitation of the microcosmic conception has to do with its lack of realism: the composition of legislative assemblies simply does not reflect that of the societies they are mandated to represent (Docherty 2005, 22, 26-46).

Pitkin (1967, 63, 112-14) therefore concludes not only that positing representation strictly in descriptive terms is not enough, but that the essence of representation does not reside there; a more global conception also involves opinions and actions. The substantive conception of representation places more emphasis on what the elected person thinks and does than on who that person is; her or his opinions and actions "must correspond to or be in accord with the wishes, or needs, or interests, of those for whom he [sic] acts, that he must put himself in their place, take their part, act as they would act" (Pitkin 1967, 114). Whereas descriptive representation proceeds somewhat by default (because there are women in the legislature, the female population will be represented), the substantive variant requires deliberate action: a legislator substantively represents women if she speaks and acts on behalf of their needs, demands, and interests. As S. Laurel Weldon (2002) notes, substantive representation of women may be deployed in a number of forums: legislative spaces, of course, but also (para)governmental structures devoted to women and the women's movement.

Although it meets expectations generally associated with political representation (a person who speaks and acts on behalf of a third party), substantive representation raises a number of questions. First, what does it mean to speak and act on behalf of the needs, demands, and interests of other people? Does presenting a motion in the legislature suffice as speaking, and does acting mean forcing the transformation of public policies? More difficult yet, do, for instance, speaking and acting in order to broaden the public child-care system and guarantee access to it at a low cost respond to the needs, demands, and interests of women without children, or of those who stay home to raise their children? Second, to what do these needs, demands, and interests correspond (notably, are they synonymous with feminist claims), and who defines them (the elected person and/or those who are represented and/or the women's movement and/or others)? Third, how can these needs, demands, and interests be discerned: by occasional consultations (for example, those held by women representatives when they have a riding office), by surveys, by empathy, or another way? Fourth, what margin of manoeuvre does a woman have to realize her representation role in a legislative context firmly framed by party discipline? Fifth, what accountability structure is involved in substantive representation? Formally none – a female representative is not elected deliberately to speak and act on behalf of women, even those who live in her electoral riding. The party embodies the main agent of accountability to which elected representatives

must report, and a proportional voting system may even accentuate this subordination (Barker and Levine 2000; Tremblay 2005).

Much research has linked descriptive representation (in its symbolic and microcosmic expression) and substantive representation of women. For example, Wayne Brown (1999) associates symbolic and substantive representation when he mentions that Agnes Macphail, the first woman elected to the House of Commons, worked to obtain equality for women. A panoply of works establishes a relationship between the proportion of women in legislative assemblies and public decisions favourable to them (among others, Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Gelb 2002; Saint-Germain 1989; Sue Thomas 1991). Even Pitkin (1967, 63-64) recognizes some continuity between "who represents" and "who is represented." The notion of "critical mass" supplies the conceptual framework that ties substantive and microcosmic representation of women: present in large numbers, female politicians can talk and act better in favour of women's needs, demands, and interests. Not only does such reasoning fall short for its essentialism and betray a certain naïveté (an explanation of institutional behaviours solely in light of numbers proves not very satisfactory), but it does not stand up to the many contrary examples. I shall mention just one, recent and very explicit. In British Columbia, a citizens' assembly formed to suggest that a new voting system replace the first-past-the-post system used to designate members of the province's legislature. The group consisted of an equal number of women and men, yet not only was its recommended voting system (the single transferable vote) not convincing for its ability to encourage the election of women, but descriptive representation by women in the BC Legislative Assembly was not one of the three values that framed its reflections and work (British Columbia, Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform 2004, 2).<sup>2</sup>

This is why Jane Mansbridge (1999) stresses that descriptive representation cannot be limited to resemblance between bodies but must also take root in shared experiences. For instance, without being a black woman, a female Quebec representative from the majority ethnic background may contribute to providing substantive representation of black women since she shares certain experiences with them (for example, with regard to discrimination or violence).<sup>3</sup> The recent study by Sarah Childs (2004, 108-23, 200-1) conducted among female Labour representatives elected for the first time in 1997 supports this reasoning in the field: according to these novices, the bulk of them white, most of the women from minority ethnic communities (notably Asians) who contacted them expressed concerns linked to the female condition. Thus, due to shared experiences, women politicians who do not perfectly resemble other women may nonetheless represent them; ideally, however, the representation of women should tend toward the "from many to many" model: women politicians in sufficient numbers and of sufficient

diversity should encourage substantive representation of women that takes account of their diversities.

The notion of “shared experiences,” which compensates for the criteria of resemblance of bodies and critical mass to fortify the sometimes rickety relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of women, also opens the path to a fourth interpretation: surrogate representation. Conceptualized mainly by Mansbridge (2003, 522), this reading posits “representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral relationship – that is, a representative in another district.” For an elected person, surrogate representation consists of recognizing a responsibility to speak for people, most often from minority groups and interests, who may be located both within and outside her riding, or even her country. For example, when a woman representative introduces a motion to denounce rape as an inter-racial war crime in Africa, this is surrogate representation on an international scale. If her colleague introduces a motion to emphasize the absence of a Canada-wide public daycare network, her surrogate representation is at the national level. This raises the question of why a person mandated to represent a specific part of a territory, an attribute on which her legitimacy in decision-making bodies is based, would broaden her mandate to other entities situated beyond her riding. The answer, Mansbridge (2003) believes, is because of her sense of belonging to a community and sharing its experiences, a sense that also inspires and structures her identity. This feeling of having to stand for a cause, inseparable from an ideological consciousness-raising, will be even stronger for a person who finds herself in a minority position within an institution and who shares experiences with those similar to her that, essentially, are foreign to the majority. The individual women who occupy a minority of legislative seats are privileged in comparison to women as a whole, but all share certain experiences that men are unlikely to encounter at the same level, such as sexual violence. Although feminism offers the ideological focus for deciphering facts and interpreting them in political terms, it does not necessarily colour surrogate representation; when it does, the degree of intensity varies, notably because female politicians express a wide variety of discourses with regard to women (Tremblay 1998b; Tremblay and Pelletier 2003). Surrogate representation calls upon symbolic, mirror, and substantive representation: it is because “one of their own” sits in the legislature that women invest her with the mandate to speak for them, a delegation that is justified because she will colour her representation activity in light of the fact that she resembles them and thus shares experiences with them. This is what Melissa Williams (1998) means by the notion of “trust.”

Surrogate representation offers a number of advantages: it contributes to more diversified legislatures on the levels of both presence and ideas; it fulfills a symbolic function by creating role models; and it enhances the legitimacy of political institutions, especially among groups and interests

traditionally excluded from representation. It encourages public involvement in political participation by highlighting the connections between civil society (that is, social movements and interest groups) and formal political actors. Nevertheless, it may prove disappointing, because even if a person says that she feels responsible for representing a cause, this does not mean that she will move from words to action; in this case, representation does not go beyond the step of discourse. Surrogate representation does not involve any structure of accountability between the person elected and the groups or interests that she says she feels responsible to represent: women in politics may recognize that they have a responsibility to represent women, but nothing forces them to take actions or to justify their inaction, even if people sometimes appeal to such an obligation (Vickers 1997).

In short, at least three readings can be used to interpret today's dominant "from many to one" model of political representation in Quebec and Canada: descriptive representation (which involves symbolic and mirror representation), substantive representation, and surrogate representation. These readings bear on the process of delegation that allows the transition from "many" to "one" – a process that may involve symbols, a microcosmic presence, activities, or an ideological proximity, which do not exist independently of each other but are complementary. For example, working for the equality of all Canadian women, Agnes Macphail enhanced her symbolic presence in the House of Commons with a substantive and ideological (or surrogate) dimension. Although these types of representation are theoretically of equivalent value, the empirical situations that they describe are not: symbolic and microcosmic readings underline the exclusion of women from representation, whereas surrogate representation and, especially, substantive representation refer to the importance of solidarity and action.

However, representation is not simply a construct of the mind; to reach its primary goal, making present what is not, necessitates the cooperation of empirical structures. In Quebec and Canada, representation in practice may be compared to a game of chess: the sixty-four squares on the chessboard stand in for ridings; the two players embody the political parties; the thirty-two pieces symbolize legislative representatives, the autonomy of whom depends on the global strategy of the players; and finally, a chronometer keeps watch on the players, the symbol of the institutionalization of their activity. In other words, the territory, political parties, connections between the individual who represents and those who are represented, and institutions constitute the main empirical structures that organize representation in practice.

Territory is seen as intrinsic to representation. First, it determines the capacity to vote and to run for office. In Canada, territory is a major determinant of citizenship. For example, in the vast majority of cases, being born in Canada leads to Canadian citizenship. Individuals may also apply for

citizenship after a determined period of residency in Canada. Section 3 of the Canada Elections Act states, "Every person who is a Canadian citizen and is 18 years of age or older on polling day is qualified as an elector." To vote in elections for the National Assembly of Quebec, a person must be a Canadian citizen of eighteen years or more and must have resided in Quebec for six months (and not be under curatorship). Second, representation based on territory postulates that the various interests of citizens correspond to their site of residency, thus implying that these interests do not arise from identity referents such as gender, sexual orientation, or handicap (Sawer 1999). Of course, representation based on identities necessarily engenders exclusions, if only because a practically infinite number of identities exist, and choices must be made, which, as it happens, may lead to conflicts. However, in the context of societies that are increasingly diversified and populations that are increasingly mobile, there is no reason to believe that the people's interests are found where they reside or, when they do, that they can be reduced to this alone – an equation that John Stuart Mill (1806-73) was already calling into question in the mid-nineteenth century in his defence of proportional representation: "But I can not see why the feelings and interests which arrange mankind according to localities should be the only one thought worthy of being represented; or why people who have other feelings and interests, which they value more than they do their geographical ones, should be restricted to these as the sole principle of their political classification" (Mill 1862, 167).

Third, management of the territory for electoral purposes conveys a particular conception of representation that is evidenced by the voting system. For example, the microcosmic conception will be better served by a proportional voting system that involves (relatively) large electoral districts provided with a number of representatives.

The political parties form a second structure that intervenes in the implementation of representation. Emerging in the late nineteenth century, mainly as a response to the broadening of the electorate, parties model representation in many ways: they contribute to the political socialization of the population, they incorporate the diversity of ideas and currents of opinion within a political community, they help to legitimize political governance, and, above all, they recruit political personnel and train the leadership elite. In this role, because they are the principal actors in the selection and election of representatives, the parties play a decisive function in the capacity of representation in practice to satisfy the diverse readings of representation. For example, a microcosmic conception cannot become reality if the parties turn up their noses at candidacies from minority cultural backgrounds or do not select sufficient numbers of female candidates. Once the test of the election is passed, the parties firmly supervise the speech and gestures of

their respective legislative flocks, a discipline that not only makes representatives into symbols and guardians of the party rather than of the population, but also helps to limit the capacity of representatives to substantively represent women.

Representation in practice also occurs through the connections between the person who represents and the people who benefit from representation, or, in other words, the former's degree of autonomy with regard to the latter. Essentially, these relationships are of three types: the *trustee*, the *delegate*, and the *politico* (Docherty 2005, 12-15). Trustee representatives enjoy full independence from what the people whom they represent think and want. Because they know best where their constituents' interests lie, they do not have to ask about their preferences or give them an accounting; they represent according to their own judgment, fully autonomously. Delegate representatives take the pulse of the people whom they represent and act exactly according to their will. Unlike trustees, delegates have little margin for manoeuvre in the interpretation of their role; they are inserted in a dual structure of accountability – to their party and to their electorate. Finally, politico representatives are midway between trustees and delegates: they play their role inspired by the desires of their electorate, but they also use their own independent judgment depending on the situation and the relationships of force in place. Politicos are neither paternalistic (trustee) nor servile (delegate) toward their electorate; rather, they practise a nuanced representation in which they are sensitive to the needs, demands, and interests of their electorate, of course, but are also capable of independent and complex reasoning. Of these three types, the politico probably corresponds most closely to the role of actual representatives.

Finally, representation is expressed in institutions, especially political institutions. *Quebec Women and Legislative Representation* targets the legislative institutions of Quebec: the National Assembly, the House of Commons, and the Senate (in the federal Parliament, only the seats reserved for Quebec representation). Stein Rokkan (1970, 79-82) maintains that groups wishing to have access to the legislative system must cross four thresholds: legitimization, inclusion, representation, and executive power. Legitimization refers to civil rights, the freedom of association and of expression, which are posed as a sort of prerequisite for legislative representation. In their absence, entities aspiring to be represented cannot hope to make themselves heard (for example, through petitions and demonstrations) or have their demands included on the political agenda. Inclusion concerns formal recognition – that is, by the state – of the two key principles opening the doors of legislative representation to groups that have historically been deprived: the rights to vote and to run for election. The thresholds of representation and executive power are measured by presence, and in what numbers, within legislative

assemblies and executive circles; they point out the obstacles, formal and informal, to this presence and whether these obstacles fade (or last) over time. Executive power is posed as the final threshold because gaining access to it is more difficult than accessing the legislative arena. Symbolic representation (for instance, the year in which the first woman becomes a representative or minister) and microcosmic representation (for instance, the proportion of women in legislative assemblies or Cabinet) sit comfortably on the sill of these two thresholds. Although Rokkan's (1970) model does not take account of substantive representation of women or of surrogate representation, this book is influenced to a certain extent by his reflection.

The goal of *Quebec Women and Legislative Representation* is to take stock of the state of knowledge regarding representation by Quebec women within the National Assembly, the House of Commons, and the Senate.<sup>4</sup> An original aspect of this book is that it takes women senators, a group largely overlooked by research, into account. Theoretically, it privileges the "from many to one" model, although it calls upon the "from many to many" model from time to time. It embraces, with varying degrees of passion, the four readings of representation and keeps in its sights the structures that model representation in practice. The book has four chapters: Chapter 1 looks at the history of the rights to vote and run for office; Chapter 2 discusses the persistent gap between the slight majority proportion of women in the population and their minority presence in Quebec's spaces of legislative representation; Chapter 3 features an exploration of the identity and ideas of female representatives and senators from Quebec; and Chapter 4 examines what steps might be undertaken so that Quebec women will have greater access to legislative representation.



# 1

## The Rights to Vote and to Eligibility: Full Access to Citizenship for Quebec Women?

The right to participate in choosing members of the legislature is a pillar of representative democracy. In Canada and Quebec, suffrage has made a transition from a rationale for exclusion to an imperative of inclusion: at one time, only a small minority of individuals could vote (property owners, for example), whereas today attempts are made to expand this right as widely as possible (for example, in 2002, individuals serving a prison sentence of more than two years in a federal penitentiary recovered their right to vote, and the possibility of lowering the voting age to sixteen arises periodically). Quebec women were hit particularly hard by this denial of political citizenship, as they gained access to the rights to elect and be elected only in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Stein Rokkan's (1970) model, the rights to vote and run for office met the criteria for the first three thresholds that social groups desiring to accede to legislative representation must cross: legitimization, inclusion, and representation. Legitimization occurred when suffragist struggles made use of the rights of association and expression with the goal of putting certain issues on the political agenda – in this case, the rights to vote and run for office. Inclusion occurred when the state and civil society formally recognized that women had the right to participate in choosing members of the legislature and even to run for public office themselves. Representation involved formal access to the spaces of legislative representation – access that, in the Canadian and Quebec political systems, entails the right to run for office. In this chapter, I discuss some aspects of struggles by Quebec women to obtain these rights in Quebec. The first section is devoted to events; the second examines ideas.

### **The Rights to Vote and to Run for Office: The Events**

This section follows chronological order, addressing first the federal scene, then the provincial one. It is complemented by Appendix 1, which presents a chronology of the main events that marked Quebec women's march toward political citizenship and representation in the legislature.

### **On the Federal Scene**

Before the British North America Act (BNA) created the confederation of Canada, a number of British statutes governed administration of the colony situated north of the forty-ninth parallel. The Constitutional Act, 1791, broke the Province of Quebec, as created by the Quebec Act of 1774, into two separate provinces: Lower Canada and Upper Canada. Each of these independent political entities had a lieutenant governor, an executive council, a legislative council (of members appointed by London), and a house of assembly, which was elected by suffrage on the basis of property ownership – an assembly, it must be said, whose powers were more on the level of consultation than that of decision making. Under the terms of the Constitutional Act, “individuals” with the capacity of “electors” had to meet criteria of age and property ownership (urban tenants paying a determined rent could also vote). Sex was not a criterion for exclusion from suffrage, and this omission was interpreted generously – that is, as conferring the capacity to vote: as long as they met the stated criteria, women could participate in choosing Assembly members. And a number did so – mainly widows, but also single women and married women with a separation as to property, on condition that they were taxpayers.

Laurent-Olivier David (1896, 28, our translation) recounts that, in the 1809 election, a widow (in fact, the grandmother of Louis-Joseph Papineau) voted by naming her chosen candidate out loud, as was the electoral practice at the time: “For my son, Mr. Joseph Papineau, as I believe that he is a good and faithful subject.” The women who accompanied Mrs. Papineau also seem to have exercised their right to vote (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997, 62). This is apparently the earliest evidence of women participating in legislative elections, although some may have voted in previous elections without historiography having recorded it. The elections of 1820 also provided some women in the riding of Bedford and in Trois-Rivières with an opportunity to vote (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997, 61-62; Cleverdon 1950, 215; Fournier 1983). Catherine Cleverdon (1950, 215) reports that, in Trois-Rivières, a man who had transferred property to his wife’s name suffered two humiliations on election day: first, he was refused the right to vote, and then he had to go and find his wife so that she could vote, as she was the only one in the family authorized to do so. Two observations emerge regarding women’s suffrage before the mid-nineteenth century. First, as long as they met certain property ownership criteria, women could vote on an equal basis with men to elect the members of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada. In other words, suffrage on the basis of property ownership did not deliberately exclude women, though one might suspect that they were less likely than their male counterparts to benefit from this right since they were less likely to be property owners. Second, although women did

indeed vote in Lower Canada, they did not do so in large numbers. According to Nathalie Picard (1993), they composed about 3 percent of all voters in Montreal district elections held between 1791 and 1849. Nor did they vote in large numbers in other areas of the country (they seem to have been most active in Montreal [Picard 1993]).

The fact that women were voting in Lower Canada generated some resistance. For instance, the results of the 1828 election in the upper town of Quebec City were contested because widows' votes had not been counted (Bradbury 1990). Between 1828 and 1830, petitions were circulated demanding the nullification of election results in which women had taken part (Cleverdon 1950, 215-16; Fournier 1983). The opposite opinion, however, was also expressed through petitions. Yolande Cohen (1997b, 537, our translation) reports that a petition was submitted to the Lower Canada House of Assembly, the gist of which placed the right to vote beyond the criterion of sex to be situated in property ownership: "The right to vote is a natural right among neither men nor women; it is granted by law ... Property ownership and not individuals is the basis of representation in the English government." Nevertheless, in 1834, during a revision of the electoral statute, an amendment explicitly forbidding women's suffrage received royal sanction. One rationale put forward to explain this move by the Patriot government was that women favoured candidates representing the British authority. According to Picard (1993), however, this hypothesis is doubtful for two reasons. First, if women had voted for the colonial power, it would have objected to the termination of their right to vote, which it did not do. Second, the majority of female voters opted for the Patriot Party. In any case, for reasons unconnected with the principle of women's suffrage, the colonial authorities in London abolished this restrictive measure in 1836. Women (including many widows, according to Appendix 3 in Picard 1992) continued to avail themselves of the franchise, at least in the district of Montreal, until 1849, when a ban on female suffrage came like a bolt from the blue. The reformist Baldwin-La Fontaine "Great Ministry" adopted the following legislative measure: "May it be proclaimed and decreed that no woman shall have the right to vote at any election, be it for a county or riding, or for any of the aforesaid towns and cities" (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997, 64). It could not have been stated more clearly!

What lay behind the withdrawal of women's suffrage in Canada (united after 1840)? Domestic politics and international events offer some possible explanations. But first, it is important to take a closer look at the climate within which these events occurred. The Victorian era, still in its early days, entailed separation of the sexes, with women consigned to the private sphere; such compartmentalization both reinforced the rise of an urban, professional middle class and helped to construct its identity. It was also a period of great

societal transformations, such as industrialization and urbanization. In Canadian history, this epoch was extremely tense with regard to relationships between French Canadians and the British power: the latter was pushing forward its assimilationist plans, which culminated in the Act of Union. At the same time, ultramontanist was emerging, propelled by the zeal of the bishop of Montreal, Monsignor Bourget. An extremely conservative doctrine, ultramontanist advocated a melding of church and state – more precisely, subjugation of the latter to the former – and valued tradition, hierarchy, and obedience to authority, all of which fit poorly with modern freedoms. Ultramontanist held sway at a time when some intellectuals were occupied with defining the nationality of francophones in North America. Étienne Parent was laying the foundations of a traditional and mainly cultural French Canadian nationalism, as well expressed in the motto “Our institutions, our language, our laws” (Lamonde 2000, 283-321, our translation). Inspired by ultramontanist, this nationalism included a concept of social roles involving strict segregation of the sexes, with women and families acting as the bedrock upon which protection and perpetuation of French Canadian society was to be built. As will be discussed below, this conception not only defined women as private beings but strongly rejected their participation in the public and political spheres. French Canadian nationalism, which imprisoned women in the private space, excluded by definition their involvement in public life. In fact, during the 1918 debate on the right of Canadian women to vote federally, a member of Parliament inquired whether Quebec “wants to stand to one side and put her women behind the screen as if they must be placed, like the Turkish women, in a sort of harem, lest they be looked upon” (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 652).

On the international scene, the 1830s may have seen a broadening of men’s suffrage in the parent country, but women lost the vote in 1832. An era of revolutions began in 1848, and demands by peoples to control their destiny began to swell: the *Communist Manifesto* was published, and Europe became the theatre for democratic revolutionary movements – in Germany, of course, but mainly in France, where the franchise was a major issue. Yet, the citizenship rights that emerged from these movements involved only men, despite calls (though in the minority) for the inclusion of women. Similar demands were heard in Lower Canada, which, being closer to home, may have seemed more threatening. In July 1848 in Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Stanton read aloud the Declaration of Sentiments, voicing the audacity of American women who, in their outrageous proposal for women’s suffrage, dared to paraphrase part of the Declaration of Independence (as Olympe de Gouges had done in 1791 with the *Déclaration des droits de l’Homme* [sic] and who, not having rights linked to citizenship, nevertheless made the supreme sacrifice). Thanks to press coverage, the intellectual, religious, and political elites knew what was being plotted in the Old World and in “Uncle

Sam's country," and what disorder was being created by demands for democracy. Was it to fortify the definition of French Canadian nationality, whose members had become a minority under the government of the Canadas, that women's right to vote was withdrawn, as if the goal were to limit the range of democratic movements in Canada? Or was excluding women from public life actually an attempt to affirm democracy? These questions are worth exploring in greater depth.

However, the elites did not balk at copying practices from elsewhere. Although it created a new political community, the British North America Act of 1867 changed nothing with regard to women's rights to vote and run for office (the previous year, the Civil Code, which codified the legal infantilization of married women, had been adopted). In fact, article 41 of the BNAA buttressed the principle of excluding women from political citizenship: "Until the Parliament of Canada otherwise provides ... Persons qualified by the Law of the Province of Canada to vote, every Male British Subject, aged Twenty-one Years or upwards, being a Householder, shall have a Vote."

When they joined Confederation, New Brunswick, the two provinces of Canada, and Nova Scotia had all explicitly excluded women from voting to choose members of their legislatures (in 1843, 1849, and 1851, respectively). Since provincial laws in force at the time of Confederation controlled the federal franchise, the various legislative assemblies that assumed the governance of Canada were thus composed solely of men and according to their electoral preferences.

The question of women's suffrage in federal elections was the subject of two in-depth House of Commons debates, one in 1885 and the other in 1918.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned above, the BNAA provided that the laws in force in the various provinces at the time of Confederation would remain valid until Parliament ruled otherwise. Who could vote federally thus fell under provincial responsibility until 1885, when the Conservatives, then in power, passed the Electoral Franchise Act, giving the Canadian government control over federal suffrage. In 1898, under the decentralizing government of Wilfrid Laurier, federal suffrage reverted to provincial control; in 1920, it returned, once and for all, to the jurisdiction of Ottawa. This back-and-forth between levels of government regarding federal election management, especially the definition of eligibility criteria and the compilation of electoral lists, was used as a pretext to justify both granting and refusing women the vote, in both 1885 and 1918. Both these debates raised the very principle of women's suffrage; in addition, both dealt with the issue of how the civil status of women affected their capacity to vote, a concern that led to the granting of limited female suffrage in 1917.

The 1885 debate provided an opportunity for numerous exchanges on the meaning of representation and, notably, on whether representation based on property ownership must take a woman's marital status into account

(such questions were not raised, of course, about men). The electoral franchise bill that Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, at the head of a Conservative government, presented to the House of Commons in 1885 included a section that granted the franchise to unmarried female property owners – for the most part, single women and widows. This limited suffrage for women already existed in Canada – for example, in Ontario municipal elections. In the end, Macdonald withdrew his proposal. One view is that it had been a strategy designed to increase his popularity and build political capital, and that he had never really intended to grant suffrage to women (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997, 66). This hypothesis is supported by a number of factors. First, Macdonald did indeed include female suffrage in his electoral franchise bill, but at the same time he allowed an MP from his party to present an amendment striking this section from the bill (the amendment concerned only the province of Quebec). Second, unlike the other sections of the bill, that regarding women's suffrage was not subject to party discipline. At the time, the Macdonald government enjoyed a large majority in the House of Commons, and had the prime minister not decided to make an exception of the female franchise section, it would probably have been adopted without much difficulty. As things played out, Macdonald easily assumed the role of the progressive democrat who was trying to give women the vote but who, having taken every measure at his disposal, had to beat a retreat in the face of resistance manifested by his House of Commons colleagues. Finally, Macdonald had addressed the question of women's suffrage during the electoral campaign of 1882 – that is, at the time when the first suffragist demands were beginning to be heard in English Canada (particularly in Toronto). For the Tory forces, the bill afforded a way to gain the support of electors who, for various reasons, might be in favour of women's suffrage.

In 1917, Ottawa granted the federal vote to certain women: those who were members of the Armed Forces (notably some two thousand military nurses, known as the Bluebirds) received the franchise under the Military Voters Act; those who were relatives (mothers, wives, and sisters) of soldiers serving under the Canadian and British flags did so under the War-time Elections Act (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997, 63; Courtney 2004, 115; Parliament of Canada n.d.g.). The latter category, which swelled the electoral lists by about half a million, was not without its opponents. First, its existence was the result of barely veiled partisan manipulations; furthermore, Ottawa's intention of influencing relatives of military conscripts to accept their obligatory enlistment was quite obvious (Cohen 1997b; Lévesque 1994). Second, although the War-time Elections Act conferred the franchise on close relatives of soldiers, it withheld it from other women who would have benefited from this right under the electoral legislation of their respective provinces, from women belonging to groups that opposed the Union

government, and from British subjects naturalized after 1902 and speaking a language of an enemy country (Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997, 67-68; Courtney 2004, 115).<sup>2</sup> Finally, the War-time Elections Act made women eligible to vote not on the basis of their own capacities, but on their relationship with a man – a soldier dispatched to the front. Visiting a humiliating status upon women, this was essentially the attribution of a vote by proxy and, for the male members of the family, the recognition of a multiple vote. Observing that women in other countries had gained the franchise by dint of their merit and the dignity of their social function, the co-president of the Provincial Franchise Committee, Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, highlighted the negative example of the Canadian situation:

If these high motives are used to determine the concession of political rights to women, how can Canadian women not be humiliated when they think of the reasons that recently led to women's suffrage in the federal elections? Here the personal value of the woman is forgotten: her tireless devotion to the family and the homeland count for nothing; she supports humanitarian works – no matter; she is the one who calms the growing wrath of the suffering classes and maintains social peace through her self-denial – no matter these virtues, on which the nation's greatness is built. The legislature closes its eyes to these womanly qualities, and in granting her the right to vote it is not at all interested in recognizing her merit, it sees in her only a value to borrow on, the influence that she has on her entourage; women will vote because of their connection to soldiers on the front, such that suffrage is less a privilege conceded to them than a right granted to soldiers to vote several times via their female relatives. (Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 163-64, our translation)

In the 1918 debate, the effect of women's marital situation on their capacity to vote federally had to be understood in the context of the war and the "foreigner": If a Canadian British subject married a man from an enemy country who was not yet naturalized as a British subject, did she forfeit the right to vote federally? Worse, a preliminary version of the bill sponsored by Prime Minister Robert Borden would have created an inequality between spouses that favoured women: to become eligible to vote in a riding, women were required to reside there for three months; for their husbands, the corresponding period was one year. MP Jacques Bureau (Trois-Rivières and Saint-Maurice, Liberal) objected loudly to such a measure since, he said, "I do not want to see a woman vote when the master of the house has not that right. I think her title to vote should be subject to her husband having the right to vote" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 99). This resistance did not kill the bill (Bill 5) granting women the franchise, and it became law on 24 May 1918.<sup>3</sup> The Borden Unionist government broadened federal suffrage

to women less in recognition of their war effort participation (participation that, moreover, revealed the lack of a boundary between private and public life due to the simple fact that women were practising trades defined as masculine) than to underline their roles in post-war Canadian society (Cohen 1997b). According to Borden, with the right to vote, “the influence of women exercised in this way will be a good influence in public life” (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 89). It is worth mentioning that this argument, which emphasizes women’s contribution to the war effort and reconstruction, was also advanced during the 1940 Legislative Council debate on the right of women to vote in Quebec provincial elections (Quebec 1940, 21).<sup>4</sup>

The other aspect of women’s political citizenship, the right to run for federal office, gave rise to little tumult – the issue did not even appear in the index of House of Commons debates for the years 1919 and 1920. Nevertheless, two statutes were required to grant this right to women, one to confer it on a temporary basis, the other to confirm it as a permanent parameter of electoral regulations. The Dominion By-Elections Act of 1919 (s. 69) stipulated, “Except as in this Act otherwise provided, any British subject, male or female, who is of the full age of twenty-one years, may be a candidate at a Dominion election.” Section 38 of An Act Respecting the Election of Members of the House of Commons and the Electoral Franchise (1920) reproduced this section in its entirety, thus making permanent the right of women to run for federal office.

Canadian women now had two fundamental rights of political citizenship: the capacity to vote and to run for federal office. And yet, this gain was not acquired by consensus, as evidenced by the legislative manoeuvre of a Quebec senator, Laurent-Olivier David: on 9 May 1922, he presented a motion to withdraw the federal franchise from single women under thirty years of age. Justifying his initiative through a conception of social relations between the sexes in which the primary role of the woman was maternal and domestic, he referred to the wisdom of British parliamentarians who, in 1918, opened the doors to women’s suffrage on condition that they be thirty or older. Senator David deemed this restriction reasonable because women below age thirty “are not in the condition enabling them to give what the great English parliamentarians called an intelligent and independent vote” (Canada 1922, 153). Worse, their votes would cancel out those of men “who, in the colleges and universities, have acquired political knowledge, who have ... continued to learn what enables them to give an intelligent vote. And generally almost all young men between 21 and 30 years of age read political papers and frequent the clubs and assemblies where political issues are discussed” (Canada 1922, 153).

What a lovely example of sexist and classist reasoning! The honourable senator persuaded eighteen of his colleagues to support his point of view;



however, their numbers were insufficient to prevent the rejection of his motion (thirty-three senators voted against it).

In the early 1920s, Canadian women could thus vote and run for office federally, rights that they exercised for the first time in 1921. However, not all areas of parliamentary representation were open to them. Soon, another battle was engaged on the terrain of their political citizenship, this one concerning their right to sit in the Senate. This was the well-known Persons Case, depicted for posterity on the new fifty-dollar bills – a fine example of symbolic representation!

The dust from the suffragist battles had barely settled when, in 1919, Prime Minister Borden, the very same who had sponsored the expansion to women of the rights to vote and run for federal office, was once again solicited, this time to enable Canadian women to sit in the Senate.<sup>5</sup> Two years later, his successor as prime minister, Arthur Meighen, was also pressured: the Montreal Women's Club asked him to appoint Judge Emily Murphy to the Senate to represent the province of Alberta. Meighen was defeated in the 1921 election, and the new prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, was subjected to the same pressure. Like his predecessors, he favoured opening the Senate to women, going so far as to state that, if necessary, he would amend the British North America Act. By 1928, however, King still had not shifted from words to action. Judge Murphy decided to move ahead on her own. Citing section 60 of the Supreme Court Act, which provided that five people acting together might ask for clarification of a constitutional issue via the federal Cabinet, she requested an interpretation of whether the word "person" used in section 24 of the BNAA concerned women. This section sets out that the governor general may, from time to time, summon "persons" with the desired qualifications to sit in the Senate.<sup>6</sup> Yet, just as the Constitutional Act, 1791, did not specify the sex of "persons" authorized to vote in Lower Canada elections, the BNAA did not indicate whether "persons" sitting in the Senate had to be men – or if they could be women. Judge Murphy (1868-1933) acted with four other Albertan women: Nellie McClung (1873-1951, author and journalist, suffragist, and militant within the temperance movement, member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from 1921 to 1925), Louise McKinney (1868-1931, also a militant in the temperance movement who sat in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta from 1917 to 1921), Henrietta Muir Edwards (1849-1931, a jurist and suffragist who founded what was to become the Young Women's Christian Association in Montreal in 1875), and Irene Parlby (1868-1965, suffragist, member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and minister from 1921 to 1935) (Library and Archives Canada n.d.). In April 1928, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down its ruling: unanimously, the justices concluded that, in 1867, the legislature had not intended to open the doors of the Senate to women

and that, as a consequence, they were not persons in the sense of the BNAA. At the time, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was the highest court in constitutional matters. An appeal of the Supreme Court's ruling was therefore instituted with the committee, which reversed the ruling in October 1929: women were indeed persons under the law, and they could sit in the Upper House of the Parliament of Canada. Cairine Reay Wilson had the honour of being the first woman to cross the threshold of the Senate, in February 1930 (on Cairine R. Wilson, see Iacovetta 1989). This first is significant in the light of a symbolic conception of representation.

Notwithstanding their province of residence, Canadian women now had the rights to vote and run for office in federal elections, and the capacity to sit in the Senate. However, unlike their sisters in other provinces, Quebec women could neither vote nor run for office in provincial elections – a ban that persisted until 1940.

### **On the Quebec Provincial Scene**

After women acquired the rights to vote and run for office in federal elections, how was the issue of women's suffrage addressed in Quebec? The answer to this question can be explored on two levels: the political rights of women and the forces at work within civil society. When it came to political rights, the situation of Quebec women was paradoxical, to say the least: they could vote and run for office federally but not provincially. What is more, in 1922, they were the only Canadian women who could not vote to choose the members of their own legislative assembly.<sup>7</sup> It is quite interesting to note that this gap between Quebec and other Canadian provinces equates to that between a country under Catholic dominance and one under Protestant dominance. Indeed, nations under strong Catholic influence, such as France and Italy, were notable for their lack of haste in handing women the keys to their political citizenship as embodied in the franchise and the right to run for office, whereas a number of Protestant-dominated countries, such as Australia, the United States, and New Zealand, were more forward-looking. Studies have shown that Catholicism exerted a negative influence on the political participation of women (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Norris 1997a; Paxton 1997; Rule 1987). The Quebec case supports this observation, as will be discussed below. Cohen (1997a, 1997b) suggests that this reading be refined by inscribing it within the broader web of construction of the welfare state. In large part, the welfare state involves management of social services: while the perspective of English Canada, concerned with individual rights, consisted of finding support in a broad lay associative movement and conferring social service management to a professionalized state, Quebec, drawn to a collectivist approach, turned toward the private sector by calling upon the church and charity associations. In addition, "[in English Canada], the new welfare state recognized the maternal social

function as being a basis for citizenship, [whereas in Quebec] this function was excluded and made a private activity" (Cohen 1997b, 539, our translation). This offers a partial explanation for the different times at which women in English-speaking provinces and in Quebec acquired the right to vote.

The forces within civil society did not do battle on a level playing field: the suffragists mobilized very discreetly, but the anti-suffragist forces shouted from the rooftops.<sup>8</sup> Having succeeded on the federal front, the Montreal Suffrage Association, based mainly in the Anglo-Protestant middle class and therefore perhaps less sensitive to problems most closely associated with the French-speaking majority in the province, disbanded in 1919, although some members would have hoped to mobilize on the issue of provincial suffrage (Darsigny 1990; Lamoureux 1989, 40). This did not mean that suffragism was dead: in the early 1920s, several initiatives were undertaken in Quebec. Between 1919 and 1922, the Montreal Women's Club took up the cause (Casgrain 1972, 50). In 1920, the Liberal MLA for Jacques-Cartier, Joseph-Séraphin-Aimé Ashby, presented a resolution to the Legislative Assembly of Quebec proposing that the government study the possibility of granting women provincial suffrage (Cleverdon 1950, 227-28). This resolution was a dead letter. In 1921, the Catholic Women's League took a clear position favouring the right of Quebec women to vote provincially (Trifiro 1976, 23). In the same year, the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, a pioneering women's organization in Quebec, began to offer civic instruction courses at Université Laval à Montréal, which it maintained until 1926 (on the federation, see Lavigne, Pinard, and Stoddart 1977). Yolande Cohen and Chantal Maillé (1999) hypothesize that these classes had two objectives: to prepare Quebec women to exercise their newly acquired federal franchise, of course, and to counter the prejudice according to which women were incompetent in political matters. In late 1921, the federation made women's acquisition of the Quebec provincial vote its goal; it relegated action on this demand to its Provincial Franchise Committee for Women's Suffrage, although it did not abandon it completely.

Several authors (Cohen and Maillé 1999; Saint-Jean, reproduced in Lamoureux 1989, 167-76; Trifiro 1976, 36) posit that the federation's decision to demand the provincial vote for Quebec women and the subsequent emergence of the Provincial Franchise Committee were based on an awareness of the manifest inequity between the political rights of Quebec women and those of other Canadian women. As mentioned above, in 1922, women in Quebec became the only ones in Canada who could not vote provincially; the other hold-out province, Prince Edward Island, joined its more progressive fellow provinces in that year. But even more incongruous were the inequities in the political rights of Quebec women by jurisdictional level. For instance, they could not vote in their province's fifteenth legislative election, held 23 June 1919, but two years later, like other Canadian women, for the

first time they exercised their right to elect the members of Parliament. This disparity poses the question of legitimization – what justification could there be for a situation in which a single segment of the population had the duty to vote for one level of government but could not do so for another? – or, according to the clerical rationale, “It is a sacred duty for women to vote in federal elections, but it is demeaning to them to give them the same right in provincial elections” (Socius, quoted in Dupont 1972, 417, our translation). The participation of Quebec women in federal elections was rationalized by the need to contain the “perverse effects” of the vote of Anglo-Saxon Canadian women in other provinces, whereas in Quebec, suffrage was presented as a masculine preserve (Dupont 1972; Maillé 1990a, 36-37, 39).

Elsewhere, anti-suffragist forces had gained momentum. The federation’s decision to become involved in the struggle for female suffrage was part of a broader debate, generated and fostered by granting Canadian women (and thus Quebec women) the rights to vote and run for office in federal elections. In effect, the federal government’s decision literally unleashed certain political stars of anti-suffragism, the most famous of whom was Henri Bourassa. He was the figurehead of the opposition to Quebec women’s rights to vote and run for provincial office – an opposition with an essentialist and ultra-montane flavour that was in line with the French Canadian nationalism of the day and that did not shy away from adopting an apocalyptic tone. (Bourassa’s thought will be examined in greater depth below.) Bourassa was not acting alone: he had popular resistance behind him, as well as a certain intellectual and political elite (the premier at the time, Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, was profoundly opposed to women’s suffrage [Dupont 1972; Trifiro 1978]), and, especially, a clerical elite.<sup>9</sup> The fact that members of this elite attended the same colleges and acquired a similar philosophical education explains in part why they closed ranks in their opposition to women’s suffrage (Dupont 1972). In 1922, Henri Bourassa was offered the opportunity to serve the Catholic Church by playing a leading role in blocking women’s suffrage movements in the province of Quebec.

In January 1922, the Provincial Franchise Committee was created by the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste* following its decision to demand the Quebec provincial franchise for women – a demand shared with other groups, including the *Conseil local des femmes de Montréal*, the *Montreal Women’s Club*, and the *Club libéral des femmes de Montréal* (Darsigny 1990). The committee provided an institutional solution to certain delicate issues, notably not compromising the federation (a militant organization of Catholic women focused on social restoration and drawing on maternalism; Hébert 1999) and its president, Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie (a fervent Christian), in relation to a clergy strongly opposed to women’s suffrage in Quebec. The Provincial Franchise Committee had two leaders, with Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie holding the francophone presidency and Mrs. Walter Lyman the

anglophone presidency; Idola Saint-Jean was the secretary.<sup>10</sup> Despite its fundamental aim of obtaining provincial suffrage for women in Quebec, the committee presented itself as a non-political organization that encouraged education, thus positioning itself in line with the strategy adopted by the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste with its civic instruction courses: the idea was to convince the public and politicians that Quebec women were demanding the provincial franchise not to change their social roles but to contribute to improving society (Casgrain 1972, 51).

The committee expressed this message forcefully during its first interaction with Quebec legislative authorities. In February 1922, a delegation of about four hundred women from Montreal, including Thérèse Casgrain (née Forget), Carrie Derrick, Lady Drummond, Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, and Idola Saint-Jean, went to Quebec City to meet with Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, the new Liberal premier, elected in July 1920, who presented himself as favouring women's suffrage (Cleverdon 1950, 229). Henry Miles pleaded the suffragist case by presenting a draft bill on the issue (an initiative that was to have tragic consequences for its author), and a number of the women spoke, including Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie.<sup>11</sup> Premier Taschereau heard the delegation, which he hosted in the Assembly restaurant, and then put his cards on the table. Casgrain (1972, 52) reported his words as follows: "If the women of Quebec ever get the right to vote, they will not have got it from me." (Taschereau remained in power until 1936, and his successor Maurice Duplessis proved no more sympathetic to the cause of women's suffrage.) It must also be said that the Catholic Church, whose social doctrine inspired many politicians of the time, had stolen a march on the delegation. In a pastoral letter published in July 1920, the archbishop of Quebec City, Cardinal Bégin, stated that feminism was a threat to the family, echoing a series of articles on feminism and suffrage written by Henri Bourassa and published in the newspaper *Le Devoir* during 1913 and 1918. Less than two years later, in January 1922, a confidential letter sent by the Quebec episcopate to Premier Taschereau expressed the episcopate's firm opposition to the idea of Quebec women voting provincially, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that they had just exercised this right in the federal election of 1921. According to the clerics, women's suffrage went against natural law and the interests of society (Trifiro 1976, 51). The church used its privileged contacts with the political class as well as a number of strategies to publicize its stance: it expressed its opinion in newspapers (such as *Le Devoir*, whose editor, Henri Bourassa, it could count on for tireless devotion and loyalty); it created the Comité de propagande contre le suffrage, which invited women exiting their churches to sign petitions telling the political authorities that they did not desire the provincial franchise; and it made its presence discreetly felt in the Legislative Assembly when the first delegation of suffragists arrived, in February 1922 (Trifiro 1976, 36-41).

The Catholic Church dealt its coup de grâce to the suffragists by attacking one of their figureheads, Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie. To do so, it turned to its faithful servant, Henri Bourassa. A suffragist, but also deeply Christian, Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie was put in a highly embarrassing situation by the Quebec clergy's firm opposition to women's suffrage; unable to reconcile her religion and her suffragism, she bowed to the former. She therefore decided to solicit a pontifical directive with regard to women's suffrage, and so she travelled to Rome to attend the International Congress of Catholic Women's Leagues. Four task forces were working there, including one on training women in their civic duties. This task force recognized that divine law did not forbid women's suffrage, that they already voted in certain countries, and that they could contribute a particular expertise on certain social themes; in light of the added desire to limit communist influence in Europe, the task force gave its approval to women's suffrage. It did, however, append a caveat to its statement: all new initiatives with regard to the vote for women had to be approved by the local episcopate. This reservation was added at the last minute and in solemn session by Cardinal Merry del Val, papal representative to the Congress of Catholic Women's Leagues and an old friend of Henri Bourassa – who, no doubt by chance, found himself in Rome at the time of the congress. Trifiro (1976, 81, our translation) advances the following interpretation of this situation:

It is plausible that Bourassa used his influence in this regard and that he was the author of the third resolution that was intended to stop the movement in favour of the women's vote in Quebec. But we can go further with this hypothesis: had the editor of *Le Devoir* received a mandate from certain religious authorities in Quebec? We know how great his influence was on social, political, and religious life in French Canada. Bourassa had played, and in the 1920s continued to play, an incontestable and uncontested dominant role. A very committed layman, he conveyed the ultramontane ideas of the late nineteenth century and believed in the authority of church over state. In Rome, he might therefore have been the spokesman for the Quebec episcopate.

Whether Henri Bourassa actually did play this role in the affair, the upshot was that the Catholic clergy had a new arrow in its quiver: endowed with the authority to ratify any broadening of women's suffrage, it was in a strong position to quash Quebec women's right to vote – using the weak pretext of the threat posed by communism (Dumont and Toupin 2003, 176; Hébert 1999). For her part, Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, stymied by this dead end, left the presidency of the Provincial Franchise Committee. Suffragist activity on the Quebec provincial scene went into hibernation until 1927.

Table 1.1

**Bills introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Quebec to grant provincial female suffrage**

Year	Sponsor	Party	Result
1927	Victor Marchand	Liberal	Rejected: 51/13
1928	William Tremblay	Labour	Rejected: 39/11
1929	William Tremblay	Labour	Rejected: 50/16
1930	Irenée Vautrin	Liberal	Rejected: 44/24
1931	Irenée Vautrin	Liberal	Rejected: 47/21
1932	Anatole Plante	Liberal	Rejected: 52/23
1933	Anatole Plante	Liberal	Rejected: 53/20
1934	Gaspard Fauteux	Liberal	Rejected: 52/25
1935	Edgar Rochette	Liberal	Rejected: 43/19
1936	Frederick Arthur Monk	Action Libérale nationale	Rejected: 43/24
1938	Grégoire Bélanger	Union nationale	Rejected: 48/16
1939	Pierre-Auguste Lafleur	Union nationale	Rejected in committee
1940	Joseph-Adélar Godbout	Liberal	Adopted: 67/9

Sources: Assemblée nationale du Québec (2008); Casgrain (1972, 86-95); Cleverdon (1950, 233-58); Quebec (1927-40).

In that year, a series of events in both the legislative arena and civil society revived the struggle. Early in the year, the MLA for Jacques-Cartier, Liberal Victor Marchand, presented a bill to the Legislative Assembly, the purpose of which was to recognize the right of women to vote in provincial elections. A few suffragists went to Quebec City to plead their cause, a scene that Casgrain (1972, 55) describes as resembling a court appearance: “Before our peers ... we – mothers, wives, and sisters – played the role of defendants before a tribunal composed entirely of men.” The “accused” were to be refused their rights: the bill was defeated. However, unlike the 1922 initiative by MLA Miles, which saw no follow-up, the one by MLA Marchand created a domino effect. Year after year (except in 1937), the Legislative Assembly was required to consider bills on women’s suffrage, until Quebec women finally prevailed in 1940. As Table 1.1 indicates, Marchand’s initiative was followed by twelve more bills presented in the Quebec Assembly. Almost all of them were proposed by MLAs who were members of the party in power at the time (the exceptions were those presented by MLAs Frederick Arthur Monk and William Tremblay). This meant that the visceral opposition of Premiers Taschereau and Duplessis to women’s suffrage did not necessarily represent the views of their faithful parliamentary servants, as Taschereau himself acknowledged (Dupont 1972; Trifiro 1976, 37-38); thus, the leaders’ opposition did not in itself constitute sufficient evidence that Liberal and



Unionist MLAs shared an anti-suffragist sentiment from 1927 to 1940. Some did believe in and support the suffragist cause, but they formed a minority in the Assembly. Indeed, regardless of whether they were subject to party discipline, all of the bills were defeated by robust majorities of between 64 and 80 percent of the MLAs who took part in the vote. Only in the 1936 bill, in fact, did Premier Taschereau subject the vote to party discipline – a change that Casgrain (1972, 86) attributes to advances made by the suffragist cause – although this did not really increase the proportion of anti-suffragist votes in the Assembly.

In civil society, Idola Saint-Jean resigned from the Provincial Franchise Committee in 1927 and founded the Canadian Alliance for Women's Suffrage in Quebec. A number of authors have tried to make sense of her decision to leave the committee. Cleverdon (1950, 231) explains that Saint-Jean was disappointed by her inability to move up from secretary to the francophone presidency of the organization. According to Casgrain (1972, 54), Saint-Jean was infuriated by the committee's inaction with regard to suffragist struggles; this interpretation arises from a 1937-38 article published by Saint-Jean herself, in which she also mentioned her desire to anchor her suffragist pursuits in a francophone and working-class milieu: "In 1927, a large delegation of women, many of them workers, came to me and asked me to reorganize the Provincial Franchise Committee." (Saint-Jean, quoted in Lamoureux 1989, 171, our translation; see also Casgrain 1972, 54). This indicates that although most of the spokespeople for suffragism belonged to the middle class, whose liberal values they brought with them, the right to vote in the province's elections was also important to working-class women.

The Canadian Alliance for Women's Suffrage in Quebec and the Provincial Franchise Committee (which, in 1929, adopted a more ambitious name, the League for Women's Rights) led the suffragist fight in tandem between 1927 and 1940. Obtaining Quebec women's provincial suffrage was a major issue for the alliance and the league, of course, but their programs had broader horizons: actively involved in the first wave of the women's movement, they pursued objectives linked to legal, social, family, economic, and political emancipation for Quebec women. For example, the alliance and Idola Saint-Jean advocated for married women to have their own bank accounts, while the league and Thérèse Casgrain fought for women's work to be subject to a minimum wage. When the impasse regarding women's access to the Canadian Senate (the Persons Case) was resolved, Casgrain took advantage of the event to demand the appointment of a woman to the Legislative Council of Quebec – to no avail (Cleverdon 1950, 235-36).<sup>12</sup>

Although they participated in a common movement of social reform and were united in their desire to obtain women's suffrage, Saint-Jean and Casgrain had very different life experiences, ideologies, and strategies (on Idola



Saint-Jean, see Jean 1981; Lamoureux 1989, 67-88; 1991; on Thérèse Casgrain, see Wayne Brown 2002; Caron and Archambault 1993; Casgrain 1972). For example, the former was single and had no children, whereas the latter, born into the Quebec middle class of the early twentieth century, was married and had four children, a marital status that she interpreted as an asset to the suffragist cause: "As a mother of four children, I also deprived certain anti-feminists of their favourite arguments – that those who were demanding the right to vote were almost all old harpies without children and devoid of femininity" (Casgrain 1972, 56). This was a thinly veiled jab at Saint-Jean, who embodied radical feminism; Casgrain was more in line with reformist liberal thinking, although this did not prevent her from climbing to the top ranks of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in the early 1950s (Trofimenkoff 1989). Unsurprisingly, the ideological distance between the two women was conveyed in a difference of opinion regarding which action strategies should be used in suffragist struggles – a reformist approach or a more radical and critical one. Casgrain recounts an event that captures this split between suffragists.<sup>13</sup> On the occasion of Premier Taschereau's sixty-third birthday, in 1930,

The members of the League for Women's Rights placed on the premier's desk a bouquet of sixty-three red roses. While offering flowers that still have thorns made an ironic point, they also manifested their breadth of views. However, the members of the [Canadian] Alliance for Women's Suffrage in Quebec refused to participate in this symbolic gesture, declaring that they had no intention of being cordial to someone who was obviously the enemy of the weaker sex in the political arena, while bragging that he was liberal. For our part, we thought that it is always difficult to catch a fly with vinegar. (Casgrain 1972, 68)

Writing about Idola Saint-Jean, Diane Lamoureux (1991, 45, our translation) remarked, "The social relations of sex seemed antagonistic to her and so she refused to play the charm card, greatly preferring the relations of strength." On the other hand, Thérèse Casgrain used charm as a tool, and she pushed it to the point of making Premier Taschereau, obstinately opposed to women's suffrage in Quebec, the godfather of her younger daughter (Casgrain 1972, 56-57).

In addition to the alliance and the league, other groups also had an interest in suffragism in Quebec between 1927 and 1940, including the Suffrage Committee of the Montreal Women's Club. In 1929, the committee organized a vigorous pro-suffrage advertising campaign in Montreal and Quebec City. A means of communication uncommon at the time was used: "sandwich-women" (Casgrain 1972, 57; Cleverdon 1950, 234). This was probably the

most spectacular demonstration of its kind – that is, the one that most evoked certain tactics used by American and British suffragettes. It received financial support from the American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt.

In the 1930s, just under ten bills advocating the provincial vote for women were defeated in the Quebec Legislative Assembly. These successive setbacks might give the impression that the suffragist forces were too weak, completely inactive, and overwhelmed by events. Some examples will suffice to support the contrary hypothesis: suffragists were ensuring that the question of women's rights did not fall into oblivion at the bottom of the political agenda. First, each time a women's suffrage bill was presented to the Assembly (except in 1937, when no bill was presented), a suffragist delegation went to Quebec City to witness the debates leading to its defeat (Lamoureux 1989, 50). It was fortunate, in those times of stinginess regarding women's political citizenship, that the galleries of the Legislative Assembly were not barred to them. In the opinion of Casgrain (1972, 55), these defeats, although regrettable, nevertheless constituted "a means of obtaining excellent publicity and bringing public opinion to our side." Second, in the federal election of 1930, Idola Saint-Jean sought suffrage by running as an independent candidate in the Montreal riding of Saint-Denis. Although she had no real hope of winning (she obtained 1,732 votes, or 3.9 percent of the valid ballots), her objective was to place the issue of women's political status on the public agenda (Cleverdon 1950, 237).<sup>14</sup>

However, the suffragists knew that, to attain their goals, they had to broaden their base of support by making gains in rural areas, a stronghold ruled with an iron fist by the clergy. In the early 1930s – and this is a third example – the League for Women's Rights undertook an information and education campaign, in newspapers and on radio, designed to rally rural women to the suffragist cause; the campaign intensified in 1937 and prepared the way for the final sprint that was to lead to women's acquisition of the rights to vote and run for office in 1940. A fourth proof that Quebec women's suffrage proponents had not thrown in the towel was that, in 1935, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of George V's accession to the throne, a petition with some ten thousand signatures was sent to His Majesty, asking him to consider the shabby political situation of women in this part of his kingdom. Even though the king could do little to intervene, this symbolically powerful initiative kept in the public eye the fact that women still could not participate in choosing Quebec's Assembly members. In the same year, the Canadian Alliance formally asked Premier Taschereau to reveal his position on women's suffrage and his intentions if he were elected. A final example: in 1936, seeing that the electoral reform planned by the new premier, Maurice Duplessis, would not meet suffragist demands, Thérèse Casgrain and several other militant women pleaded their cause to a parliamentary commission, though to no avail (Casgrain 1972, 86-87). Two years later, lawyer Elizabeth Monk,

of the League for Women's Rights, presented a brief to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations (reproduced in part in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 187-94). Her argument drew a connection between Quebec's poor economic situation and the fact that women did not vote provincially, and she asked for Ottawa's assistance – a prospect that certainly gained her no favour with Premier Duplessis! But this was no matter, as the Liberal Party was now rolling out the red carpet for the suffragist cause.

The Liberal Party of Quebec asked a delegation of forty suffragists to attend its congress in June 1938, and it placed the issue of women's suffrage on its electoral platform. Cleverdon (1950, 253) notes that this change of heart was due to several factors, including Casgrain's artful guidance and personal influence.<sup>15</sup> Casgrain emphasized the contribution of the influential federal minister of justice, Quebecer Ernest Lapointe, who, though virulently opposed to women's suffrage in 1918 when he represented Quebec in Ottawa, had since been converted to the cause; she added that perhaps the Liberal Party had embraced suffragism because it had no imminent prospect of returning to power (Casgrain 1972, 83). Nonetheless, the Liberals did return to office the next year, following an early election, and Premier Joseph-Adéland Godbout seemed reluctant to mention women's suffrage in his Throne Speech, especially because he had always voted against bills designed to broaden it (Rumilly 1968, 125) – a flip-flop in which the Union nationale opposition revelled. Seeing this hesitation, the suffragists swung into action to lobby the Liberal Party. In the end, Godbout honoured his party's commitment: the legislative agenda that he presented to the Assembly in February 1940 included access for women to the right of suffrage. This proposal met with some resistance, notably by the Catholic Church, which, through a letter signed by Cardinal Rodrigue Villeneuve and published in the 1 March edition of *La Semaine religieuse de Québec*, clearly expressed its disagreement. The missive succinctly listed a number of objections:

We are not in favour of female political suffrage:

- 1 Because it goes against family unity and hierarchy
- 2 Because exercising it exposes women to all the passions and adventures of electoralism
- 3 Because, in fact, it appears to us that the great majority of women in the province do not want it
- 4 Because social, economic, hygienic, and other reforms that are advanced to advocate women's right to suffrage may also be just as easily obtained through the influence of women's organizations beyond the political sphere.

We believe that we are expressing here the common sentiment of the Bishops of the province. (Quoted in Casgrain 1972, 92)

To extricate himself, as Casgrain (1972, 93) relates, Premier Godbout, a practising Catholic, held out to Cardinal Villeneuve the prospect of his resignation, in which case he would be replaced by the senior member of the Executive Council of Quebec, the Honourable Téléphore-Damien Bouchard, a notorious anti-cleric. The church's opposition quickly faded. Robert Rumilly (1968, 125) also credits Casgrain with converting Godbout to suffragism. On 9 April 1940, he presented a bill to the Assembly modifying the electoral statute of 1936 in order to grant women the rights to vote and run for office in provincial elections. The bill received royal assent on 25 April. This victory ended nearly two decades of mobilization supporting these rights for women.

In short, the struggle for Quebec women's suffrage in federal and provincial elections was marked by paradoxes, both in time and in legislative space. It was paradoxical in time because, in terms of suffrage, women were initially ahead of their times, then behind them. Some women living in Lower Canada between 1791 and 1849 qualified for suffrage on the basis of property ownership, a right that no other Western government had yet granted to women (although it was gained by default). And yet, Quebec women recovered this right relatively late, freed of its property ownership restrictions, in 1940. In the legislative space, Quebec women could vote and run for office in federal elections as of the late 1910s, but in Quebec, unlike in other provinces, they were not allowed to run for provincial office until 1940. This gap may have contributed to a powerful ideological apparatus.

### **The Rights to Vote and to Run for Office: The Ideas**

The ideas that drove the debates concerning Quebec women's suffrage, in both the federal and provincial arenas, can be grouped into five discourses, or sets of rationales – of the specificity of the sexes, of modern democracy, of substantive representation of women, of constitutional jurisdictions, and of suffrage in practice.<sup>16</sup> These discourses are not mutually exclusive, because ideas are not like airplanes that travel in corridors to avoid collisions; on the contrary, they collide in order to enrich each other. For example, the argument that the right to vote would allow women to improve their living conditions and those of their families overlaps with the discourses of specificity of the sexes and substantive representation. The claim that the construction of the federal electoral lists could not be left to the provinces, because this would create an imbalance in representation, encompasses the discourse of modern democracy and that on constitutional jurisdictions. The analysis below is based essentially on interventions made by a certain intellectual, political, and clerical elite (including Henri Bourassa, Thérèse Casgrain, Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, Idola Saint-Jean, Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, and members of Parliament and of the Quebec Legislative Assembly) who participated in debates regarding the appropriateness of Quebec

women voting provincially. A history of popular ideas about women's suffrage remains to be written.

### **The Discourse of Specificity of the Sexes**

This discourse constituted the background against which debates regarding the female franchise took place. On the ideological level, it is based on maternalist feminism (or maternalism: Hébert 1999). In Quebec, it was also combined with French Canadian nationalism. Embedded within the sweeping movements of reform and social feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the doctrine of maternalism defines women first and foremost as mothers and uses this maternal identity as a basis for justifying their integration into society as a whole; as mothers, real or potential, women develop qualities and skills with which they may benefit the community, notably with regard to education, health care, and public welfare. Women are mothers of families but also of society; they perform mothering that is both private and public. Taking the podium in the 1918 debate, physician and MP Joseph Edmond Lesage (Hochelaga, Liberal) described this primarily maternal identity, one that women did not abandon even when they occupied public office:

I think you will admit [that women] were elected by the people as mothers, not as politicians, in order that they might come in closer contact with the children in the schools. I understand that in that sphere they were very useful following up the work which they had begun at home. In all ages we have found women in hospitals as nurses; we find them in this war taking care of the wounded soldiers at the front, but always as women, not as politicians. It was within their sphere to follow these different occupations and to perform work appropriate to women. (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 671-72)

Of functionalist inspiration, maternalism thus endorsed the idea of separate spheres for women and men but threw into question the cloistering of women exclusively within the sphere of the family. Maternity, far from being a limitation, was presented as a springboard to project women into the public space, including the political arena, so that they could spread their beneficial qualities. Thus, during the 1885 and 1918 debates, MPs claimed that women's suffrage would encourage transparency of candidates, whose character women "would closely scan" before giving them their vote (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1396). Furthermore, women's participation in elections would lead to a higher turnout among men because women "will bring their husbands along with them"; in addition, "it would have another good effect, because instead of having their husbands at the polls and allowing them to get into quarrels and fights ... they will take them

home with them, and so prevent their getting into these disputes" (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1398). Similarly, MP William Pate Mulock (York North, Liberal) held that women's suffrage would instigate a levelling process between the sexes, since women, "even if they do lose, to some extent, their refinement, they would transfer it to those less refined. Thus we would have an elevation of the characters of the sterner sex, and finally, all would be nearly on the same plane" (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1427). Women's suffrage, others said, would result in discussions that were more reasonable and less coloured by political partisanship (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1417, 1442; 1918, 659, 663, 667). During the 1885 debate, some MPs even envisaged that with women sitting in the House of Commons, debates would be shorter and not go as late into the night (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1397, 1413). Interestingly, this type of argument still circulates today to support an increase in the number of women in legislatures.

Similar reasoning was being heard in Quebec, where Premier Godbout presented his legislative initiative on women's suffrage in resolutely maternalist terms:

Our society needs women. They are a factor in order and stability that we cannot value too highly. Even without the right to vote, they provide this factor. The right for women to discuss public issues, to represent a riding in the Legislative Assembly, to make their opinion known on public issues – all of this can only increase their interest in problems of the day and in public affairs. I am certain that women will contribute a generous patriotism, a breadth of views at least equal to, and a longer vision of the future than men.

And it is to ensure that our institutions have this factor of stability and order that I ask for the women of my province to have the rights to vote and run for office. There are many issues that women understand better than us; they are the keepers of the home, the educators of future generations. They are more likely than we are to examine the future. The particular intuition that Providence has given them enables them to see the very dangers that are far from our decisions. I do not see why we would deprive society of these real advantages any longer. (Quebec 1940, 3-4, our translation)

As political life would be enhanced by the participation of women in elections, societal life could only benefit. Godbout concluded his speech, "I ask that we remove all obstacles to the beneficial influence of women in our society" (Quebec 1940, 4, our translation).

Women thus seemed to be invested with a mission to save society. With regard to morality, one MP argued, "One good woman can do ... double the number of men" (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1411). During the 1918

debate, an MP from the West, where women already had the provincial franchise, observed that women's access to the vote "has been the means of clearing up some of these cesspools of iniquity. I may refer, in the first place, to the almost entire removal of the liquor traffic from Canada. This movement started in a province where the women had the franchise; to the female electorate of the western provinces must go the main credit for this reform" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 673).

Idola Saint-Jean subscribed to this line of thought, seeing the adoption of egalitarian and progressive social policies as a consequence of the female suffrage already sanctioned in the Western provinces at the time of the 1918 debate (Dumont and Toupin 2003, 182-87). In short, in order to fully achieve the mission of social restoration inherent in their mandate of public mothering, women had to have the vote:

Another hon. Gentleman spoke of the birth rate decreasing. I do not think we have any cause for worry in regard to it. That is mainly a work of nature. We have reason to worry a little as to whether a child is well born or not, and whether it is surrounded with a suitable environment after it is born. If it is not the work of the mother to study out and suggest legislation, and even to enact legislation, in this case whose work can it be? Surely we can trust that to the mothers. Consequently, to make that work effective, the women must be given the franchise. (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 674)

And so, things came full circle: mothers improved public life by disseminating their feminine and maternal qualities – a public life that, thus enhanced, helped to make better mothers and strengthen families. With the new skills acquired from their incursion into the public space, women became more seasoned keepers of the home, since they were more aware of the new dangers lying in wait for them. Premier Godbout used this reasoning when he defended his female suffrage bill in a plenary committee of the Assembly in response to an objection by the leader of the Opposition, Maurice Duplessis: "The leader of the Opposition says that women are the guardians of the home. Yes, very well. That is what we consider them, and it is for this reason that we want to place in their hands a new means of protecting and defending their home. The line of defence of the home is no longer within the four walls of a house, but in the legislation being written, notably the education bill. The line of defence of the home has moved" (Quebec 1940, 9, our translation).

Quebecers' contributions to the debates on women's suffrage, at both the federal and provincial levels, frequently involved maternalism and French Canadian nationalism. Inspired by classic liberalism, French Canadian nationalism rested on several pillars: the past and tradition (rather than

envisaging the future), rural life (valued to the detriment of urban life), a non-interventionist state (the contrary being associated with the federal state), and the French language and Catholic faith (as bulwarks against English and Protestantism) (on ideologies in Quebec, see Monière 1978; Roy 1993). On the cultural level, nationalism was characterized by turning inward, a retreat encouraged by a very conservative and hegemonic Catholic Church that held in its iron grip a homogeneous and little educated French Canadian society. Defending social roles according to strict segregation of the sexes, it conferred upon women and families the responsibility for protecting and perpetuating French Canadian society. Although the suffragists and their adversaries agreed on the primacy of the maternal role of French Canadian women, their opinions diverged on how permeable the boundaries between private and public were for women. Suffragists maintained that women's maternal quality justified their involvement in society in order to contribute to its improvement and to perpetuate French culture in Canada, whereas adversaries used it to justify the contrary position, in the name of preserving it in time and space. As the alterity of women was commonly admitted, it followed for some that they should vote, and for others that they should not. By gaining access to the public sphere, the suffragists argued, women would put their shoulder to the wheel for the future of the French Canadian "race" in North America; this social engagement, replied the other side, might alter what precisely constituted the specificity of French Canadian women compared to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, precipitating the loss of "our institutions, our language, our laws." An analysis of the thought of two prominent proponents of these perspectives, Henri Bourassa and Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, will reveal the areas of agreement and the stumbling blocks.

A grandson of Louis-Joseph Papineau and founder of *Le Devoir*, Henri Bourassa (1868-1952) was also a politician; between 1896 and 1935, he was elected several times to the House of Commons and the Quebec Legislative Assembly. Initially a supporter of Wilfrid Laurier, Bourassa distanced himself from Laurier at the turn of the century and became a spokesman for Canadian nationalism (that is, a Canada enjoying greater autonomy within the British Empire) and French Canadian nationalism (under which francophones would become a full part of the Canadian whole). He was a fervent Catholic, and his political positions, notably with regard to women's suffrage, can be understood in the light of the ultramontanist of the nineteenth century. As proof, we may consider three articles, famous for their virulence, that he published on 28 and 30 March and 1 April 1918 in *Le Devoir*, at a time when conscription riots were raging in Quebec. This brief analysis will also give a better idea of the forces of resistance against which the suffragists had to act in the early 1920s.



Bourassa's anti-suffragism can be summarized in the idea that there is an order of the world that man cannot change. As he explained in *Le Devoir*, "Parliament, an old English jurist said, can do everything except change a woman into a man, or a man into a woman. Yet, it is precisely this impossible task that the proponents of female suffrage have undertaken to perform" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 197, our translation). This order, defined by nature, engenders social roles and functions specific to each sex. Bourassa invoked nature to explain the social order: "The difference between the sexes leads to a difference in sexual functions; and the difference in sexual functions creates a difference in social functions ... The main function of woman is, and will remain – whatever the suffragists say or do or do not do – maternity, holy and fecund maternity, which truly makes woman equal to man and, in many views, his superior. Yet, maternity necessarily excludes some weighty responsibilities – military service, for example – and public positions" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 197, our translation).

But what happened to women who did not know the joys of maternity? Could they contribute to society in other ways – for example, by voting? No, Bourassa declared, because they were "exceptions, monsters, which confirm the rule of nature" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 198, our translation).

In its orchestration of the social order, nature could count on the co-operation of a faithful servant: Christianity. Bourassa felt that democracy and, especially, feminism – the main vehicles of female suffrage – were threats to the social structure resulting from the collaboration between nature and the Christian (notably Catholic) church:

As soon as one sees the electoral and democratic system as the ideal state of a society, and the individual human being as the pivot and the purpose of social order – on the day when one splits from the traditional concept, fortified by Christianity, of the family as the social cell, the hierarchy of authority, the subordination of rights to duty and privilege to function – one logically arrives at the Protestant, rationalist, and individualist conception of which feminism is but one manifestation. (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 195, our translation)

Moreover, the very title of the article quoted above, "Helplessness of Minds – Triumph of Democracy" (our translation), was a thinly veiled attack on the latter – a democracy that, two decades earlier, Bourassa had invoked to justify his resignation from Parliament to protest Canada's participation in the Boer War without consultation with the people's representatives.

Bourassa's real enemy, however, was feminism. He described feminists as "women who want to free themselves from the marital 'yoke' and the responsibilities of motherhood, liars, and practitioners of free love, abortion,

and systematic sterilization" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 199, our translation). Bourassa predicted that feminism, a foreign product related to Protestantism and socialism, would have harmful effects on the (natural and Christian) world order. He went so far as to see feminism as a vehicle for female transgenderism: "As a corollary, last year and the year before, the law from suffrage to acts of war, Parliament has opened the door to two consequences fraught with peril ... the introduction of feminism in its most poisonous form; the woman-elect, who will soon engender the woman-*canvasser*, the woman-*float*, the woman-*pimp* of elections, then the woman legislator, woman senators, woman lawyer, and finally, to put it in one word, the womanman, the hybrid, repugnant monster that will kill the woman-mother and the womanwoman" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 195, emphasis in original, our translation).

What is more, the right for women to vote in Legislative Assembly elections would result in a war between the sexes: "And unless I am mistaken, war – bitter, violent, and generalized – will break out between the two sexes ... From two partners, feminism thus tends to make two rivals. The fertile union of man and woman, desired by God, sanctified by Christ, not only in marriage but also under the moral governance of society, will be succeeded by a wild struggle between the two sexes coalesced against each other" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 199-200, our translation).

Ultimately, feminism would lead to "the moral decline of women and disintegration of the social order" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 200, our translation). In his 1 April article, Bourassa went one step further: "These women of Quebec ... do not want to become *public* women – not because they are less 'advanced' than the epileptic suffragettes of England and Ontario, but because they want to preserve their moral superiority and not deprive themselves of the lofty situation in which French and Christian civilization has placed them, and also their glorious fertility!" (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 205, emphasis in original, our translation).

Here, two related arguments were placed side by side to object to women's suffrage in Quebec: the ideology of preservation of the French Canadian "race" and the specificity of Quebec within the Canadian whole. In addition, the "moral superiority" of Quebec women was inscribed within private space and their maternal function. In the same breath, Bourassa brushed aside the suffragists' argument that women would improve political governance; they simply did not have the necessary mental faculties:

There is nothing less certain than that women, as voters or candidates, would improve the general tone of politics. Woman's morality, superior to man's in private life, when she is supported by maternity, is neither stronger nor surer than a man's when it comes to public affairs. The woman's greater

emotionality, the tyrannical grip that her instinctive sympathies and antipathies have on her mind, the hypnosis that the objective, real or imagined, of her passion exerts on all of her faculties ... less variable than one might think, unique, in any case, as long as the obsession lasts, and finally her extraordinary intuition for details – all valuable faculties in the spheres where the woman is at home – make her, on the contrary, less capable than a man, no matter how infirm, of envisaging situations in their entirety, subordinating the particular to the general, classifying questions and ordering them by priority; and all of this is required above all by the science of governing societies. (Bourassa, quoted in Jean 1974, 202, emphasis in original, our translation)

Susan Trofimenkoff (1977) hypothesizes that Bourassa was writing less about women's suffrage than about the image of "Woman" and that the corollary of this imaginary construction was a particular conception of the strong and virile man. According to Trofimenkoff, female suffrage threatened to destroy this image, which explains the frenzy of Bourassa and his acolytes.<sup>17</sup> For, in fact, although he was the leader of the anti-suffragist movement, Bourassa was not alone in this school. A reading of the House of Commons debate on 11 April 1918, soon after Bourassa's three articles on the women's vote were published, would lead one to believe that they were a source of inspiration for Quebec MPs, once again showing Bourassa's influence in the province during the early twentieth century. In addition, the words of the Quebec MPs reinforce Trofimenkoff's (1977) reading that the image of woman they conveyed was completely in relation to man. For example, MP Arthur Trahan (Nicolet, Liberal) binds woman to a trilogy of roles defined by her relationship with man: "the true woman, wife, mother, queen of the household" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 650). He was perhaps echoing his colleague MP Lucien Turcotte Pacaud (Mégantic, Liberal), who, earlier that day, had revealed to the House the light in which Quebec envisaged women: "We do not consider that woman's mission has changed; her kingdom is still her home. We are more concerned about placing a wedding ring on her finger than putting a ballot in her hand" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 645). For his part, MP Jean-Joseph Denis (Joliette, Liberal) remembered from his political philosophy courses that "the highest philosophy of antiquity has not conceived any other function for woman than that of companion to man," taking as proof that "the physiology of woman, the anatomy of woman, reveals that she is in this world for the purpose of love and motherhood" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 642).

The 1918 debate offered the Quebec MPs, some of whose communication skills rivalled Bourassa's, with an opportunity to voice a panegyric of French Canadian women – a panegyric that, drawing on maternalism and

nationalism, featured several whiffs of Victorianism.<sup>18</sup> For instance, in the province of Quebec, woman was “queen of the hearth.”<sup>19</sup> The suffrage that some wished to impose on her was “contrary [to her] character and temperament”; because “her nerves would suffer undue influences,” suffrage was a duty “certainly too arduous for her character, her habits, and the delicacy of her temperament.” Her “natural sphere,” “the ideal place where woman must remain, is the conjugal home. Is she not in truth the angel of the household that she helped to found and of which she is the most beautiful ornament?” This assignment of woman exclusively to the conjugal home, where she is “the object of the admiration, respect, and affection” of her entire family, flows from the principle that, “in this world, there is one place for man and one place for woman,” a principle couched in “the Holy Scriptures, theology, ancient philosophy, Christian philosophy, history, anatomy, physiology, political economics, and female psychology.” Her role within the family, “which is assigned to her by Providence,” consists of seeing to “the accomplishment of the duties of her sex, duties well defined by the immutable laws of nature.” It was to “dedicate [woman] more magnificently to the eminent role that is assigned to her by nature and that she alone may fulfil,” “to preserve her where she is the most useful and where she will render the greatest service to the family and the country,” and “to preserve in all its integrity her moral power, which up to now has made all the charm of our civilization” that the right to suffrage for French Canadian women had to be resisted. Clearly, “this is so for the future of the nation, the dignity of woman, family life, and the interest of the country.” Granting women the franchise would lead to distressing consequences, both for them and for their families – and thus for all of society. For instance, female suffrage would “abase woman,” bringing her down from the “throne that she occupies as queen of the hearth, where natural law has placed her to fulfil a divine mission,” and throwing her “into the miasmas of politics.” Once reduced to the level of men, she would have to do as they did, “forced to earn her daily bread with the sweat of her brow.” Yet, woman did not see that “at this time she is vastly superior to man and she would abdicate this superiority in becoming his equal ... It is enough to glance at our legislation in civil and criminal matters to be convinced that our laws give her a revered position in society.” Wishing to exercise her right to vote in an enlightened way, woman would be even more abased in attending “public meetings where [she would] sometimes hear the crude words and insults that are too often exchanged between adversaries on these occasions,” language that would sit poorly with her “dignity” and “grandeur.” Having “come down in the world,” woman would “see the respect that man should have for [her] diminished” and even “the courtesy that exists in relations between men and women disappear.” In other words, to “grant woman the same rights as her husband

would be to work to divide the family and make her husband upset with her"; female suffrage would contribute "to the rupture of family ties and destruction of paternal authority." In short, it was "immoral, and ... would necessarily lead to regrettable and irreparable disasters."

Even in 1940, during the Quebec Legislative Council debate on female suffrage, maternalism and nationalism were combined to express some of the objections to the provincial female franchise: "It is damaging to sabotage customs and traditions, especially when the majority of people are opposed to it. They invoke the argument of similarity with other provinces, as if, for some, progress consists of aping what others are doing. Quebec has its traditions and customs, and they are its strength and its grandeur. If this bill is adopted, woman will be like a planet that has left its orbit" (Quebec 1940, 22, our translation).

As we shall see, the suffragists got busy demonstrating that, if women voted in Quebec elections, neither the order (natural and Catholic) of the world nor their roles and functions within the French Canadian family would be thrown into question.

Born the same year as Confederation and deceased as the Second World War was drawing to a close, Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie grew up and lived within the Montreal middle class. As a budding jurist, she nourished her intellect in the libraries of her father (Sir Alexandre Lacoste) and husband (Henri Gérin-Lajoie), both lawyers, and she published, in 1902, *Traité de droit usuel*, a popularization of civil and constitutional law on the condition of women. This essay led to her involvement in the foundation of the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1907 and to her mandate as its president from 1912 to 1933 (Cohen and Maillé 1999, 41). It was in this role that she joined the first suffragist delegation that went to Quebec City in 1922 to meet with Premier Taschereau. She was one of the speakers. From the start, she tried to reassure her audience: in demanding the provincial vote, women were not trying to turn their back on their families or their roles within them, as every woman wanted to accomplish this most important mission:

We are coming today to demand the exercise of public rights for women. Does it mean that we want to remove the woman from her home and her family? To interpret our approach this way would be to misunderstand our ideas. Most of us are mothers of families concerned with being vigilant guardians of the home; it makes us happy to live there surrounded by the affection of our families; our concern is to constantly spend our energy for the welfare of those entrusted to our care. And it is to completing this primordial task that every woman aspires (Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, quoted in Dumont and Toupin, 2003, 167, our translation).

She then explained that, first and foremost, this familial definition of women's social role justified allowing them to vote, brushing aside as she went other rationales developed in favour of female suffrage:

It may seem unexpected to you, sirs, that I am citing the woman's role in the family to demand her political rights, as so many others have asked for these rights only because of the participation that woman contributes to the economic development of a country, just as champions of female suffrage have seen in her ascent to public life only the consequence of her similarity with men ... The reason that militates most in favour of suffrage for woman is based on the special and distinctive character of her social function, and it is more in the name of difference from than resemblance to man that she must enjoy electoral franchise.<sup>20</sup> (Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 168, our translation)

As they were, above all, beings of the family, women had a social function that distinguished them from men and justified their participation in public affairs. But how would this transition from the private family space to the public sphere of politics be accomplished? Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie saw in the right to vote the bridge linking the two shores: "The government must intervene to create an organization designed to channel female activities and coordinate them with a view to service to the homeland. Tell me if this official organization ... is something in our democratic systems other than political suffrage and, in our case, female suffrage" (Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 168-69, our translation).

Having described this transition from family to the political community, the advocate of female suffrage went on to explain the mechanism by which women's activities would serve the homeland. This connection was social reform – a project of social renewal that, although it was deployed in the public space, required the cooperation of women, who were, all things considered, better equipped than men to plan and execute it:

Women perform a function of capital importance in a nation. Is it an exaggeration to say that their role is, in a way, more vital than men's and has more profound repercussions for generations to come? ... It is women who give life, at the price of what sacrifices, it is they who raise children and shape the soul of peoples ... Woman, sir, is the mother who knows, who divines the needs of the family, she is the sister of charity who plumbs the depths of human misery. In this order of things, she has unparalleled experience, and her practical knowledge makes her indispensable to the resolution of our deepest national issues and our most agonizing problems: the dropping birth rate, infant mortality, tuberculosis, and the other scourges that I dare not name here, which contaminate the race and alarm our medical

authorities. Without her, without woman, without her active collaboration, without the assistance of her goodwill, what influence can we hope to have on the renewal of the race and the restoration of society? Hygiene, education, social legislation, public welfare, already included in political programs, impose upon woman the obligation to raise her eyes toward the spheres of public life. (Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 170, our translation)

She ended with this authoritative argument: "In granting us [the right to vote], far from bringing woman down and pulling her away from her providential mission, you cause her to take a searching and discriminating look at her *civic duty*, and you provide her with the means to accomplish it more perfectly" (Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 170, emphasis added, our translation). In short, having at their disposal the assets inherent in their primary responsibility to the family, women, armed with the franchise, could intervene with regard to social reform and thus honour their civic duty. The problem was that, at the time, any social restoration movement was associated with communism, for which Duplessis was to reserve strong medicine several years later.

Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie made this argument before Louis-Alexandre Tasche-reau. In the preceding year, 1921, he had made a speech to the congress of the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste that not only left no doubt about his anti-suffragist position but solidified the link between maternalism and French Canadian nationalism:

Should I not simply limit myself to asking you, ladies, to continue these traditions in the future – these traditions that were your mothers', that you have so carefully gathered in and conserved, and without which French Canada would be but a memory of the past. It is the French Canadian woman to whom we owe what is the best about us and for whom our neighbour envies us the most: the family, large, strong, attached to the soil, faithful to its language and faith, and proudly preserving the worship of forebears, the love of the old mother country ...

Ladies, you are queens in your homes; make it so that the families of tomorrow resemble those of yesterday; make it so that your kingdom will be abundantly populated, happy, and united, and have faith in our national destiny: a nation in which this family spirit rules will only live, prosper, and grow ...

I have no hesitation in proclaiming the true mission of woman in shaping our national future: to preserve in our race what is its strength, to perpetuate the French Canadian miracle, is to remain faithful to ancestral traditions, to woman's title as queen of the home, to her charitable and philanthropic work, to her labours of love and self-sacrifice. Incursions into the domain

up to now reserved for men will add nothing to the sublimeness and usefulness of this mission. Let her devote herself to it with all the ardour and devotion that only a woman's heart and soul can inspire, and this will be enough to ensure our destiny. Man will do his best to be worthy of her. (Taschereau, quoted in Jean 1974, 213, 216-17, our translation)

This long excerpt presents a number of themes dear to French Canadian nationalism – notably the ideology of preservation – themes used to negate the citizenship, even maternal, of women: the protection and perpetuation of French traditions; a large family, skilled at farmwork, with a queen at its centre; happiness in a simple, modest life; and the French and, of course, Catholic fact in North America. In short, it was within their private sphere and not outside of it, as guardians of the Christian faith, the language, and the traditions, that women could best contribute to the national future. And yet, women finally won out, forcing the anti-suffragists to see things in a new light. For example, though Maurice Duplessis always opposed women's suffrage, voicing fears during the 1940 Legislative Assembly debate that their participation in elections would increase government expenditures and encourage electoral fraud, in 1944 he nevertheless invited women to support him in his strategy of defensive nationalism in his confrontation with Ottawa: "On your vote, ladies, will depend the survival of our province" (Duplessis, quoted in Yanacopoulos 2003, 100, our translation).

Although it dominated the debates regarding the right of Quebec women to participate in elections, the discourse of specificity of the sexes was not the only source of inspiration; proponents of the values of modern democracy also tried to make themselves heard.

### **The Discourse of Modern Democracy**

This discourse addressed the issue of the female franchise through the prism of the great values of the Enlightenment and classic liberalism that had shaped modern democracy: separation of church and state, the notion of natural law, equality, fairness, representation, evolution and progress, competency, and merit. Intrinsically, the notion of equality evokes the idea of measurement – of referents and comparisons. To establish whether equality exists, one must measure an object against a standard. This standard is not neutral; it conveys conceptions of equality. With regard to women's rights, the measurement of equality may use men as a referent and seek to have women accede to men's status, or it may assess women as human beings whose life experiences are moulded by their gender and who are endowed with intrinsic rights. When he presented his bill on female suffrage to the Quebec Legislative Assembly, Premier Godbout subscribed to the former way of seeing equality:



In modern life, women have become the equals of men. This is a change that no one can deny. Today, women work to earn a living like men. They are bound to the same obligations. Having to suffer the same drawbacks of modern life as men do, they may also enjoy the same rights, and it is fair that they influence the political orientation as men do. This is why it seems to me that we can no longer deny women the right to vote, since they are not beyond the reach of politics or the public interests that politics must serve. (Quebec 1940, 7, our translation)

Because women have the same obligations, experiences, and difficulties as men, they must benefit from the same rights. Men thus embody the egalitarian referent to which women must conform, compare themselves, and have access. Their equality depends on their capacity to become men.

Two suffragists took the latter view, proposing that women were human beings with natural rights. For Thérèse Casgrain, "We are asking not for a favour from our opponents, but for a right. Since universal suffrage exists, why disenfranchise half of humankind to the profit of the other half?" (Casgrain, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 176-77, our translation). Similarly, Idola Saint-Jean wondered about the exclusion of women from a right claimed to be universal: "In a country in which the democratic system is in force, voting is the right that all citizens possess to express themselves on issues of public interest ... Can one speak of universal suffrage when an entire half of society is deprived of its right to vote?" (Saint-Jean, quoted in Lamonde and Corbo 1999, 376, our translation). This perspective was expressed in the legislative arena by MP James Armstrong (Middlesex South, Liberal) during the 1885 debate: "Some one has said that the franchise is a gift and not a right. I deny that. I hold it is an inherent right, which we have no power to withhold" (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1434).

The separation of church and state is another value of modern democracy: the state may not fly a religious banner and must remain neutral to religions; the church must not interfere in public policy decisions.<sup>21</sup> Quebec women's early-twentieth-century struggles for suffrage put them to a difficult test: the Catholic episcopate did everything it could to block them from gaining this citizenship right. During the 1918 debate, however, one MP took a different view: he feared that female suffrage would contribute to "clerical interference in politics ... for women are more religious animals than men are and are more likely to be affected by either the priest or the minister" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 663). Given the barely veiled pressure exerted by the Catholic Church on the political class regarding women's suffrage, this was quite an audacious statement.

The notions of changing mentalities and progress also entered the world of ideas associated with women's suffrage. Those who rejected the spectacle

of women going to the polling booth said that the time had not yet come, that public opinion was not ready for such a measure, which a number of people called “revolutionary,” to be imported from the “Old World.” During the 1885 debate, MP Philippe Baby Casgrain (L’Islet, Liberal) put a rather original twist on this rationale, enhancing it with a spatial dimension: “I do not see any necessity whatever at the present moment, for our making an exception of the women of Canada to all the civilized women of the world” (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1395). By 1940, Quebec was the exception in North America with regard to female suffrage, but arguments were still voiced that the time was not yet ripe to give women the provincial vote. For instance, MLA Albiny Paquette (Labelle, Union nationale) stated, “I am against it because it seems to me that there is no urgent need to bring women into politics” (Quebec [1940] 1990, 4, our translation). Suffragists also turned to the notions of changing opinion and progress to plead their cause. Speaking in the Legislative Council, the Honourable Frank Carrel (Golfe, Liberal) defended the bill granting women the rights to vote and run in provincial elections:

This bill wipes away the humiliation felt by our population in observing that our women are just about the only class of women in our civilized society who do not yet benefit from the right of electoral franchise. It was, in truth, a humiliation for women to see that their husbands and brothers alone had the right to go to the polls to vote in favour of a candidate to represent them in the Assembly. This fact, when one thinks about it seriously, is enough, in my mind, to create a spirit of inferiority that is not worthy, in my opinion, of our times of progress and educational development. (Quebec 1940, 21, our translation)

Competency and merit were among the other values cited during debates on female suffrage. Opponents asserted that women did not have the necessary knowledge to form an opinion and cast an enlightened vote. Some, such as Olivar Asselin, went so far as to doubt their intelligence (Darsigny 1990). Suffragists responded that women had just as many talents as men, although the nature of these talents might differ.

Along with representation, the argument of merit was pre-eminent in debates on female suffrage. In fact, it was one of the considerations evoked by Prime Minister Borden to justify his 1918 bill to the House of Commons: “I conceive that women are entitled to the franchise on their merits” (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 89). Such merit became more meaningful against the background of the First World War. Although both suffragists and their adversaries recognized female participation in the war effort, they did not draw the same conclusions: those opposed to women’s suffrage proposed the ability to bear arms as a prerequisite for the right to vote,

whereas suffragists promoted a broader concept. During the 1918 debate, MP Rodolphe Lemieux (Gaspé, Liberal) explained to the House why he did not want women to go to the ballot box:

Women ... are unfitted for military service. Is it fair or is it just that women should be called upon to pronounce on a question of peace or war? Because I say, Mr. Chairman, if you give the women of this country the right to vote, you must be logical, you must be consequent with yourselves. If she has the right to vote, she is eligible. If she can be elected to this Parliament, then she will have the right to pass judgment on questions of peace or war, while she is labouring under a disability and is unfitted for military service (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 655).

A colleague contrasted this view with a richer and more complex vision in which service to one's country could expand beyond being a soldier: "Is any one justified in saying that these women are unfitted for military service? Does military service simply mean taking your position on the firing line? Hon. gentlemen on the other side have been telling us that there were men in their provinces who were engaged in agriculture and that that was a form of military service. I grant it. But is it not a form of military service to supply the men at the front with the munitions and the materials of war? Surely military service is not confined to pointing a gun?" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 662).

Military service, defined broadly or narrowly, conferred the right to vote. This connection was rarely questioned during the 1918 debate, and no MP had the audacity or originality of his predecessor MP Mulock (York North, Liberal), who saw a rationale for female suffrage in maternity: "My hon. friend from West Ontario, referring to the chivalrous age of the past, reminded us that one of the arguments against extending the franchise to women was the fact that they are unable to bear arms; but it seems to me that it is just as reasonable to say that as to say that men should not have the franchise because they are not able to bear children" (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1428).

Representation as a value was constantly raised in the debate on female suffrage. A complex notion, it was seen essentially as a space of encounter between civil society and political bodies, a sort of strategy of aggregation from the multiple (the population) to the single (the body of representatives), and it was associated with various ideas, including sovereignty of the people, consent, delegation, and majority rule. In its contemporary practice, representation challenges territory, evokes causes, involves activities, and is expressed through political parties and elections, among other things (Tremblay 2003b). In the past, it was intimately linked with property ownership, which showed through in the female suffrage debate.

The discussions regarding the vote for women were held mainly in the four decades stretching from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, a time when Canadian society was undergoing major transformations inherent in the rise of capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization, as well as immigration and other factors. It was therefore not surprising that, though Canadian women questioned the notion of representation, their thoughts on suffrage fell within the then dominant classic liberalism by privileging the Lockean approach to property ownership and its protection: property ownership conferred citizenship, which conferred a ballot (symbol of representation) in order to protect that property ownership. The electoral list was thus based on property ownership and was impermeable to other considerations, such as the sex or civil status of the property owner. Yet, two readings of representation based on property ownership opposed each other during debates on women's suffrage: in the first, the definition of the electoral list depended strictly on property ownership; in the second, other considerations (including sex) were added.

As mentioned above, Prime Minister Macdonald included in his 1885 bill on the electoral list a provision related to women's suffrage: he suggested that unmarried property-owning women (mainly single women and widows) could vote. In this, Macdonald offered an illustration of the second perspective, under which the electoral list was based on property ownership and sex, the latter factor being weighted in addition by the civil status of the property owner. His proposal generated a long debate during which proponents of the first perspective, which involved ignoring the attributes of the property owner to establish her or his capacity to vote, expressed themselves. I will therefore devote a few pages to presenting the broad outlines of the stances developed during this debate. The argument of Macdonald, the Conservative leader, will spearhead this analysis, not solely because he sponsored the proposal, but because he made himself the champion of women's right to vote – a role that he assumed without great conviction.

To justify his proposal, which was very *avant-garde* for the time – no other country had yet recognized the right of women to vote nationally (although Wyoming had granted them the franchise in 1869) – Macdonald used a series of arguments that went beyond considerations linked to representation to embrace other values associated with modern democracy. Invoking the inevitable evolution of societies toward the elimination of oppression, a perspective that thinly cloaked some magical thinking, he appealed to justice and equality of the sexes to defend a proposal from which only property-owning single women and widows would benefit:

With respect to female suffrage, I can only say that, personally, I am strongly convinced ... of the justice of giving women otherwise qualified the suffrage.

I am strongly of that opinion, and have been for a good many years, and I had hoped that Canada would have the honor of first placing woman in the position that she is certain eventually, after centuries of oppression, to obtain. It is merely a question of time all over the civilised world ... I had hoped that we in Canada would have had the great honor of leading in the cause of securing the complete emancipation of women, of completely establishing her equality as a human being and a member of society with man. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1388)

Then Macdonald decided to respond to certain objections made to his proposal – reservations that mainly concerned the exclusion of married women. He developed a rationale that was deployed on a number of fronts, starting with the epistemological premises of his opponents. There was nothing inconsistent or illogical, he argued, in granting women the right to vote on the basis of their marital ties, simply because this capacity depended not on logic, but on other considerations:

The argument has been used with some speciousness in the discussions on this measure that it is illogical, that we must give the vote to every woman if we give it to any. This matter of the franchise is not a matter of logic, but of expediency; and it does not at all follow that because we go a certain length we have to go the whole length. The argument was pressed so far in this House the other night that it was said: If you grant the privilege of electing, you must grant the privilege and right of being elected. That does not at all follow (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1388-89).

And, in fact, some countries did dissociate the rights to vote and to run for office, granting them to women at different times. In 1893, for example, New Zealand women were able to vote, but they had to wait until 1919 to aspire to political office. American women could run for office in the Senate or the House of Representatives very early, in 1788, but they could not vote for members of Congress until 1920.

Although Macdonald cited fairness to justify awarding suffrage only to women property owners who were free of the ties of marriage, this fairness was not at all universal and inclusive – in short, republican. In fact, it was almost a negative fairness – it tended to reduce injustice rather than broaden the range of what was fair: “There is then the argument of those who say that because the bill gives the right to vote to unmarried women and widows, we are causing an injustice to married women. If it is a question of fairness or unfairness, you commit an injustice in omitting all women, and if you admit a certain number, the injustice is not greater than when all married women and unmarried women were omitted” (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1389).

Having stated that the issue of female suffrage was beyond the laws of logic and the rules of universal fairness, and having evoked the principle of equality of the sexes in the name of their shared humanity, Macdonald fine-tuned his position: property ownership was what accorded women an equal footing with men, but only if they were living outside of marriage, which instituted a community of interests between the spouses. Two fundamental rationales of the female suffrage debate – that tax paying conferred the franchise upon women but that marriage justified their exclusion from it – were expressed as follows:

I am, however, in favor of giving ladies, married and unmarried, the franchise. But I am candid enough ... to admit that they do not stand on exactly the same footing. A woman who has no husband, and who is compelled to pay taxes on her property, and assume most of the responsibilities of men, she should have the right to vote for laws, and the most important of which, in any country, are for the protection of property. It seems very hard to argue that a lady who has a large property should not have a vote when her servants may have votes ... Then I must admit that married women stand in a different position on the family ground, which I do not think ought to prevail but which certainly separates the question of unmarried women from that with respect to those who are wives. They are supposed to have great community of interest with their husbands. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1389)

When she married, a woman changed her frame of reference to form a community of interests with her husband. In response to those who trumpeted the end of the family as the consequence of female suffrage, Macdonald maintained that the marital and domestic unit welded together by common interests had the resources to resist possible divergences in political opinion between wife and husband. In fact, although he declared himself personally in favour of suffrage that included married women, he believed that it would have to proceed by increments:

However, I am of the opinion of O'Connell that you should never refuse a step in advance, and I am strongly in favor of first conferring the franchise upon unmarried women and widows, and – speaking for myself personally – I would be quite satisfied to see the experiment tried, and tried for a very considerable period, of giving votes to unmarried women, who are free from domestic shackles, all domestic engagements, all supposed influence or preponderance from the opinions of husbands – to see that experiment tried for a considerable length of time, and allow the question of a further extension of the franchise to married women to depend on the success of the initiatory step. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1389)

However, Macdonald set out specific criteria for determining that this first step had proved satisfactory and that, as a consequence, the suffrage could be broadened to property-owning women who were married. This shift raised even more questions because, as Macdonald had stated earlier in his speech, single and married women did “not stand on exactly the same footing,” precisely because marriage dissociated a woman from the women with whom she had shared common ground (that is, from unmarried women who still enjoyed certain rights) as she turned toward a new identitary referent, her husband and the union that she would now form with him – or through him. Macdonald was not alone in thinking of women in terms of a reduced, marginalized political citizenship; MP Simon James Dawson (Algoma, Conservative) suggested not only that they should be granted the franchise, but that they should be given “a Parliament of their own ... Let them meet in that Parliament and debate ... They might give some advice to this Parliament [the Parliament of men] which might be very useful and instructive” (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1408).

Not all MPs who made speeches during the 1885 suffrage debate shared Prime Minister Macdonald’s views: some questioned parts of his reasoning. For instance, for MP Mulock (York North, Liberal), the issue of female suffrage had to avoid the sword of arbitrariness and be subjected to the laws of logic: if there was a principle, it must apply to all persons concerned, notwithstanding other considerations relative to their attributes, such as sex and marital status:

But if we take the Bill and ask the reason why the franchise is given to anyone, we find that the Bill is based on the idea that the rights [sic] to the franchise is a question of property qualification. Then it does not become a question of usage at all. If you grant that any person, male or female, possessing the necessary qualifications, is entitled to the franchise, if you seek to disfranchise anyone possessing that qualification, the burden of proof rests upon the person who seeks to disfranchise her. Ownership of property is the only grounds on which the franchise is given under this Bill, and therefore it will not do for them to deny that franchise, simply because the House has not affirmatively been convinced that females ought to have that franchise. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1428)

In fact, explained MP David Mills (Bothwell, Liberal), the argument that property ownership justified granting female suffrage was more convincing than the claim that marriage excluded women from the vote:

If women were not allowed to hold their separate estates, if the moment they married their rights of property merged into the rights of the husband, there would be some propriety in taking the ground which the hon. gentleman

[John A. Macdonald] has taken; but women have, under the law, I believe, of all the Provinces of this Dominion, the right to retain their separate estates and to control their own property in their own way. That being the case, if you give them the franchise because of their holding a certain amount of property, it is a most inconsistent and I should think a most inexpedient proceeding to say you will take from them that right the moment they get married, though they have the same control over their property as they had before, the same interest in their property as they had before, the same interest in their property, the same interest in the Government of the country, and in the maintenance of law and order. If, then, they once are possessed of the elective franchise, they ought to exercise that right after marriage as well as before. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1392)

In any case, MP James McMullen (North Wellington, Liberal) added, women could not be represented through their husbands, precisely because the principle of property ownership transcended the community of interests that marriage might represent:

It may be said that they are represented in the persons of their husbands. I do not think that is fair. So long as our law allows ladies to hold property independent of their husbands, it should give them the right to vote on that property. When a lady gets married, her husband cannot deprive her of her property without her own consent, and she should be permitted to represent that property; I think the one thing naturally follows the other, and it is unfair to say simply because she is married that she should not be permitted to represent the property she owns. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1396)

An argument often advanced to defend the men who opposed women's suffrage is that they were simply expressing the ideas of their times. The excerpts presented above must be seen with a certain nuance: of course, many men (and women) objected to female suffrage, but other voices, though in the minority, bore a progressive message in favour of it. However, as Sylvie d'Augerot-Arend (1987) notes, this may have concealed less noble interests – for example, those of men in the property-owning class who wanted to use “their” women to protect their material assets and privileges.

Other MPs pleaded in favour of suffrage for property-owning women notwithstanding their marital status, arguing that the prime minister's proposal amounted to “punishing women for marrying” or even to a lack of respect for mothers: “If we confer the franchise upon the unmarried portion of the sex, and ignore the married portion, it would be setting the unmarried ladies over the married ones. Now, what class of society is there which deserves a higher respect than the matrons?” (Canada, House of



Commons 1885, 1434, 1438). This reasoning is reminiscent of the maternalistic thought presented above.

Although representation as a central value in the franchise debate was addressed mainly from the standpoint of property, several interventions proposed a broader conception of property, that of “no taxation without representation” (d’Augerot-Arend 1987). For instance, MP William Henry Allison (Hants, Conservative) drew the attention of his honourable colleagues to the fact that the right to vote “is not strictly and entirely a property qualification; and, if the principle be admitted, to be consistent the woman must also have an income and rental qualification. For, if it be decided that female suffrage is right, I can see no reason why any lady who, by her pen, or her pencil, or her needle, or by any product of her hand or brain, can earn an income equal to that which qualifies a man to vote, I cannot see, I say, why she should not also be entitled to vote” (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1398-99).

If material and financial assets justified having the right to vote, this was also the case, argued MP McMullen (North Wellington, Liberal), for taxes levied on consumer goods, especially for women:

Men as a rule do not pay so much duty on the things they wear as the ladies do. The goods that ladies buy and wear are the very articles which are subjected to the heaviest taxes; and if we believe that taxation and representation should go hand in hand, we must believe that a person who is called upon to pay a heavy sum annually in the way of taxes, should be clothed with the power of voting for or against those who impose these taxes, and of expressing their opinion on the policy that so seriously affects them; the one naturally follows the other. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1395-96)

Idola Saint-Jean used the same logic, pushing it a bit further: “Women make a large contribution to paying the salaries of ministers and members of the provincial legislature. If one were to total up the taxes paid by the women of this province, one might be ashamed to impose so many obligations on them while refusing them all privileges” (Saint-Jean, quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 185, our translation). With their taxes, women remunerated the political class that then refused them the vote – the tool that, in a democracy, crystallizes the people’s consent to its government.

Representation was examined not only via the practical angle of material goods, income, and taxes, but also through the magnifying glass of women’s collective experiences.

### **The Discourse of Substantive Representation of Women**

As mentioned in the Introduction to this book, there are a number of forms of political representation, including substantive representation, which is

based less on the identity of the individuals elected than on their activities. In this discourse, elected persons assume their role of representation if, through their opinions and actions, they fulfill the needs, demands, and interests of the individuals whom they represent in the legislature; for these individuals, the activity of representation must transform their status and living conditions. Although the notion of substantive representation has inspired many contemporary works on the role of elected women in relation to their female fellow citizens, it has made a more innovative contribution to deciphering the debates on women's suffrage. It involves demanding the vote in order to improve women's civil, social, and political citizenship. This reasoning is clear in a poster produced by the League for Women's Rights, the text of which reads,

#### WHY?

WHY is our province the only one in Canada that refuses women the provincial vote? Are we less intelligent?

WHY are there no women on School Boards, the Bureau of Censorship, the Reasonable Salaries Board, etc.? BECAUSE you do not vote, Madam.

WHY are women who earn a living in our province paid less than their sisters in other provinces? BECAUSE you do not vote, Madam.

WHY do certain liberal professions close their doors to women obliged to work? BECAUSE you do not vote, Madam.

WHY does article 986 of the Civil Code list married women among "minors, the incapacitated ... lunatics or suffering a temporary aberration caused by disease, accident, drunkenness or other factor, or who, due to their feeble-mindedness, are incapable of giving valid consent"? BECAUSE you do not vote, Madam.

WHY does article 1292 of the Civil Code allow a husband to sell, convey, or mortgage the communal assets without his wife's consent? BECAUSE you do not vote, Madam.

DEMAND THE PROVINCIAL VOTE!

(Poster reproduced in Lamoureux 1989, 62, our translation)

Speaking about the starvation wages of teachers, J. Nicol, member of the Legislative Council for Bedford, suggested, "The women's vote may help the cause of education" (Quebec 1940, 19, our translation). To put it in Idola Saint-Jean's terms (quoted in Dumont and Toupin 2003, 184, our translation), "the weapon of the vote enables women to protect themselves" by ensuring their involvement in certain decision-making and professional arenas and improving their civil status and their incomes.

The precise mechanisms that conferred such emancipatory power to the vote remain obscure; it had to do with a capacity to influence, something like an interest group. This reasoning was based on the hypothesis that

women constituted a significant political bloc because they shared interests; in any case, they would stand up for themselves by voting in a uniform manner. The first part of this hypothesis – that women form a category subject to political representation based on shared interests – is one of the most controversial dilemmas in feminist theory (see, among others, Diamond and Hartsock 1981; Jónasdóttir 1988; Maillé 1997; Phillips 1995, 1-26; Sapiro 1981, 1984, 73-75; Sawyer 2002; Tremblay 1999, 23-46; Voet 1998, 100-12; Iris Young 1994). The second part, that electoral behaviour is inspired by sex and/or gender identity (gender gap), must be nuanced in a number of ways. For one thing, women do not vote in a bloc and in a manner polarized from that of men; for another, compared to other variables, sex does exert a significant influence on electoral behaviour, but it is secondary because it is weighted by other factors (Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau, and Nevitte 2002, 198; Cook and Wilcox 1991; Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau, and Nevitte 2003; Maillé and Tremblay 1998; Reingold and Foust 1998; Rhodebeck 1996; Tremblay and Pelletier 2001).

Nevertheless, in both past and present, the myth of a *single* female political actor, representation of whom is based on use of the vote and access to legislative space, persists. In recent Quebec history, during the 1980 referendum, the Regroupement des femmes québécoises suggested that women voters not check off “yes” or “no” but write the word “woman” on their ballot, because “Quebec’s ascent to political sovereignty will not in itself put an end to our dependence” (Yanacopoulos 2003, 89, our translation). The “Yvette” phenomenon is another instance of the myth of a female political actor.<sup>22</sup> For suffragists, the vote constituted a tool for breaking up the undervalued citizenship of women, who were presented as sharing a common fate. In addition, the prospect of access to legislative spaces generated much hope, if not certainty, in terms of positive repercussions for women: female legislators (posited to be unique) would represent women (also defined as a homogeneous group), an idea that has fed into a rich contemporary literature (see, among others, Rosenthal 2002b; Swers 2002a; Sue Thomas 1994; Tremblay 1992, 1996b, 1998b, 2003a; Tremblay and Pelletier 2003). Yet, although women’s suffrage militants did not demand the franchise so as to elect women to represent them, a few voices, lost in the legislative wilderness, spoke about such possibilities. This was the case for MP Mulock (York North, Liberal): “Class legislation is inseparable from all legislation, and the female class are entitled to legislative protection. We see what is the weakness of human nature by every representative feeling bound to consider the class that he is dependent upon and being less interested in the welfare of those to whom he owes no obligations. If pecuniary interests are entitled to special considerations here, how much more is the welfare of the great female portion of society entitled to be considered?” (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1429).

According to this reasoning, there is a class of men, associated with economic affairs, and a class of women, identified with social issues. By nature, individuals from one class not only feel an obligation to represent that class but do not feel responsible for representing other groups. Because the House of Commons was populated solely by men, only their interests were represented in it; as there were no women, what was important to them was not being represented. Maternalist thought was woven into this reasoning: access by women to legislative spaces was justified by their skills in social matters, which, moreover, could enrich political governance. It was the prospect of this asset that MP Louis Henry Davies (Queen's County, Liberal) held out to his colleagues:

There are men sent here to represent farming interests, even to represent commercial interests, and we are glad to have men here with a knowledge of military affairs; but there is a sphere beyond commerce, beyond military matters and beyond party politics, the social affairs of life that presents itself to the eye of woman. That element is not represented in this House, and those great social questions which are moving the minds of the masses of the people of the country and of the mother land, will never be thoroughly discussed, and will never rest on their proper basis, unless we have the counsel of women. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1420)

The idea of distinct spheres with their own jurisdictions was not limited to the discourse of substantive representation; it was also a driving force in the discourse of constitutional jurisdictions.

### **The Discourse of Constitutional Jurisdictions**

This discourse refers to language that is familiar in Canadian and Quebec politics: the sharing of jurisdictions among levels of government. It was the context for a certain push-and-pull between the provinces and Ottawa with regard to the definition of the list to be used for House of Commons elections. As mentioned above, in 1885 Prime Minister Macdonald presented a bill with a provision that the current federal government would compile the electoral lists for national elections, a task that the provinces had been performing since Confederation. In 1898, the scenario was reversed: the provinces recovered this jurisdiction, only to lose it definitively in 1920. Women's access to suffrage was the ball in this game of ping-pong. In suggesting, in 1885, that it retake control of the electoral list and grant the federal vote to single women and widows who were property owners, Ottawa would have granted suffrage to women in Quebec, a province hostile to such an initiative. The situation in 1918 can be understood through slightly different reasoning: in adopting, in May of that year, An Act to Confer the Electoral Franchise upon Women, Ottawa was broadening the federal electorate to

all women, but on condition that they could already vote in their respective province – thus easing some of the resistance from Quebec – expressed as follows:

We maintain that it is for the provincial governments, exclusively, to decide this question. To them belongs the privilege of preparing the voters' lists; and when the province of Quebec is ready to adopt such a radical change [female suffrage], she will not fail to take advantage of this privilege, which will put her on the same footing as the other provinces. For the time being, I do not hesitate to say that this Bill shows a very bad policy and constitutes an abuse of power, since it takes a prerogative away from the provinces and gives it to the central authority. (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 671)

And why would the provinces be better positioned than Ottawa to establish the electoral lists for federal elections? Because they knew better how to take the pulse of their respective populations' opinion: "Each provincial legislature is better informed than any other regarding the state of mind and the opinions of that province and it should be left to that Parliament to decide whether or not the women of that province shall vote" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 647). This "state of mind" and these "opinions" were embedded in cultural traditions: "If you glance at the map of the United States, it is certain that the Anglo-Saxon woman does want the vote. The French women do not desire to vote, because their education was not conducted along those lines, whereas the education of women in Anglo-Saxon countries was precisely along these very lines, and these women want the ballot" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 639). Such education flowed from the ideology of survival that sequestered women in the family sphere, where they would fulfill their mission of production (and reproduction) of the French Canadian race. It was out of "deference to that portion of the Province of Quebec," at least according to MP Charles-Joseph Coursol (Montreal East, Conservative), that women did not have the vote (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1389).

Not all Quebec MPs saw things in the same light. For example, despite his reservations about women's suffrage, MP Ernest Lapointe (Kamouraska, Liberal) supported it in order to prevent an imbalance in representation among the provinces. (Years afterward, having converted to the suffragist cause, he would use his influence to get the June 1938 Quebec Liberal Party congress to endorse the principle of women voting provincially.) In 1918, he remarked, "But, by all means, if women are to vote in some parts of the country they should vote in all other parts of the country as well. It is true that the fact that the women of some provinces could vote, while the women of other provinces would not, would materially affect the representation in this House, but the total number of women's votes by women in any province

on any big question, when numbers are computed, might have such an influence as to militate against any discrimination in the electoral law of the country" (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 97).

Lapointe was probably trying not to overemphasize Quebec's minority position within Confederation with regard to population, particularly when it came to the electorate. But because the population, not the electorate, determined the number of seats held by each province in the House of Commons, his argument was not very convincing (although it was pertinent for referendums). It must be said that the logic of those who, for practical reasons, objected to the female franchise was not always very convincing, either.

### **The Practical Discourse of Suffrage**

This last category encompasses arguments regarding the appropriateness of the female franchise, not only because women supposedly did not have the required assets – the capacity or the desire – but because it could not be justified. Those questioning female competence sometimes invoked the Bible and its precepts. During the 1885 debate, MP John Joseph Curran (Montreal Centre, Conservative) took this path, which led him to a curious conclusion:

If either of the hon. gentlemen had taken up, for instance, the child's catechism in the Catholic church, he would have found that one of the first duties of the wife is to obey ... Therefore, we have, both in the Protestant and Catholic churches, laid down, in the elementary books, that are supposed to be in the hands of everyone in this House and in this country, the doctrine that it is the wife's place to obey; and, consequently, we can hardly understand how she is going to obey when she marches to the poll and votes in an opposite direction to her husband; but, on the other hand, if she were to obey him, by voting in the same direction, we would be giving two votes to the husband instead of one. (Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1409)

Some pointed to women's lack of intelligence and education to justify keeping them on the margins of public life; others proposed that women who were allowed to vote be educated or at least pass a skills test beforehand. During the 1940 debate, Godbout replied to the reservation regarding women's intellectual capacities: "The women of our province in general are better educated than men, and as a consequence better prepared to judge our social problems" (Quebec 1940, 4, our translation). Yet others stated that women had the capacity to hold public office and to vote, although they advanced rather unconvincing proofs, such as that Queen Victoria – never closely associated with the suffragist cause – had ruled the British kingdom.

Certain advocates of excluding women from political citizenship claimed that the interested parties simply did not want the right to vote and that, in fact, this demand expressed the activism of a minority of women trying to impose its views on the majority, which was resistant to suffrage (Quebec 1940, 5). As a consequence, why “burden [them] with a responsibility which, I believe, they do not want” (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 656) – a responsibility disguised as a right, and a right that, moreover, they would not exercise? Those who defended such an argument certainly had a dry sense of humour; other MPs responded that, as women were already voting (first, municipally in the late nineteenth century, then provincially in the mid-1910s), permitting them to vote at other levels of government would only have been consistent. But Chantal Maillé (1990c) has shown that the claim regarding women’s lack of interest in voting was not based on reality: as soon as they were able to, Quebec women widely used their federal franchise. In addition, MPs reminded their colleagues that the female franchise would not be coercive: “If you give the franchise to any section of the Dominion, it does not follow that the women have to exercise the franchise ... We are giving something to them, which they can use if they like, and if they don’t like they can stop home. There is nothing compulsory about it” (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 667).

The idea that women had neither the capacity nor the desire to vote was bolstered by the notion that their access to suffrage was even less justified because, unlike workers, they did not live in a state of social subjugation: “The workingman fought for suffrage because he held an inferior position in the community; because he suffered ill-treatment at the hands of the wealthy classes. Have the women of Canada the same motives to impel them to desire such legislation as this? I answer, no” (Canada, House of Commons 1918, 651). Whereas workers had used their vote to improve their social and political status, women’s suffrage, where it existed, had not had such effects, argued MLA Ernest Poulin during the 1933 chapter of the suffragist struggle on the Quebec provincial scene (Casgrain 1972, 72).

Finally, arguments against the appropriateness of women voting included the fear of a domino effect. L.-A. Paquet magnificently summarized this parabola: “After being involved for some time in pushing the political cart, one is struck with the ambition to ride in it” (quoted in Trifiro 1976, 18, our translation). The fear, as a number of MPs noted bluntly, was that the right to suffrage would lead to the right to run for office, which would lead in its turn to the election of women into legislatures, even the advent of women ministers and a female Speaker of the House of Commons (see, for example, Canada, House of Commons 1885, 1438-39; 1918, 645). This was the very fear that had haunted Henri Bourassa.

To sum up, at least five groups of rationales structured the ideas that wove the fabric of debates on the right of women in Quebec to vote: the discourses

of specificity of the sexes, of modern democracy, of substantive representation of women, of constitutional jurisdictions, and of suffrage in practice. Together, they formed the ideological context within which suffragist demands were expressed.

### **Conclusion**

Today, Quebec women can vote and run for office both federally and provincially. Although this capacity flows from two relatively distinct series of events, it is analyzed in the light of a corpus of ideas relatively unaffected by this variable. In the whirlwind of the First World War, Ottawa granted suffrage to Canadian women (a right in effect for Quebec women in 1919); on the provincial scene, suffragists had to pry open the hands of governments hostile to women's political citizenship. Whereas the demand for women's suffrage in Quebec provincial elections kept a handful of people in thrall for almost two decades, the same right at the federal level generated very little protest (although certainly more in Toronto than in Montreal and more by English Quebec women in Montreal than by their French-speaking sisters). No fewer than thirteen bills dealing specifically with female suffrage were needed before Quebec women could participate in choosing members of their own legislative assembly, as opposed to only one bill in the House of Commons, in 1918.<sup>23</sup> The idea of subjecting suffrage to property ownership was found in federal debates but not in provincial ones (at least in 1940).

Examined through the perspective of ideas, these trajectories of events seem less polarized for each level of government; with a few exceptions, the proponents of female suffrage shared essentially the same rationales whether they were involved on the federal or the provincial level. For example, Prime Minister Borden and Premier Godbout promoted female suffrage seasoned with a maternalistic sauce. Both called upon values associated with modern democracy to justify their proposals that women obtain the vote. The idea that women might use their votes to fuel their movement toward emancipation was also found in the ideological space of female suffrage at the federal and provincial levels. In fact, with the exception of the discourse of constitutional jurisdictions, which was expressed only in the House of Commons, all discourses were heard in both Ottawa and Quebec City. Of course, their emphasis varied. For example, among Quebec MLAs, the specificity of sexes discourse, combined with that of maternalism, took a starring role, whereas the discourse of substantive representation played only a supporting part at best.

What lessons can be drawn from this analysis of the struggle of Quebec women to vote in federal and provincial elections? First, it illustrates how delicate the balance is, even today, between democracy and difference, or between the universal and the particular. The history of Western democracy



can be understood as an effort to push back the limits of exclusion and to tend toward including a greater number. This process clearly occurred in Canada: first, men with a certain amount of wealth had the right to vote, then men notwithstanding their assets, followed by women; finally, various exclusions based on ethnicity, religion, physical handicaps, and even incarceration fell (for an excellent synthesis of the evolution of the vote in Canada, see Chief Electoral Officer of Canada 1997). With regard to the female franchise, two aspects concerning the uneasy cohabitation of democracy and difference are worthy of attention. First, despite the fact that half the human species was banned from participating in government due to its sex, democracies still claimed to be democratic. Second, although some voices used equality as their argument to demand suffrage, the underlying current was women's difference: because they differed from men, women should represent themselves via the ballot – a suffrage that crystallized the equality of citizens, male and female, in their individuality and that offered women the tool to express their "difference" as a defined group through their maternal function and their desire for all of society to benefit from that quality. In short, juggling the values of equality and difference, the individual and the group, suffragists submitted universalism to the test of criticism.

A second lesson to be drawn from the suffragist struggles concerns the paradox of Canadian federalism and French Canadian nationalism when it came to women's rights – more specifically, the basis for justifying the political exclusion of women. A clear illustration of this was paragraph 1.(1)c) of An Act to Confer the Electoral Franchise upon Women, which limited federal female suffrage to Canadian women who had already gained this right in provincial elections, thus quelling some resistance from Quebec. In effect, one argument in the constitutional jurisdictions discourse against the right of women to vote federally went as follows: because female suffrage was a question of culture and education, which fell under provincial jurisdiction according to article 92 of the BNAA, it was up to the provinces to establish the conditions for the federal electoral list. Illustrious MPs from Quebec, such as Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons during the 1918 debate, expressed this rationale. It was as if the proponents of French Canadian nationalism knew how to exploit Canadian federalism, with its attendant sharing of powers between levels of government, to justify a model of society characterized by, among other things, the cloistering of women in the family space. This episode, which was not the last in Quebec history, revealed the ambiguity of the relationship among federalism, nationalism, and women's rights.

A third lesson invites us to read the evolution in women's political citizenship, and notably their demands on the terrain of representation, in terms of continuity. At least two arguments plead in favour of this approach. The first has it that several of the rationales proposed in support of female

suffrage are returning today to justify an increase in the number of women in legislatures, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. This is the case, for example, for the idea that a large number of women in politics would encourage the leadership to displace its priorities from economics to social issues. The second argument concerns women's minority position on the chessboard of representation. In the past, this marginalization concerned women's rights to elect and be elected; today, it involves their right to representation or, according to Rokkan's (1970) model, the proportion of seats that they occupy in legislative assemblies. Quebec women have had the rights to vote and run for office for a number of decades now, and yet they are still a minority in the spaces of legislative representation. In the next chapter, I will discuss why this is so.