In many ways the *machista*, often misogynist, attitudes in the work of José Nakens illustrate those same attitudes in a number of republican men during the Restoration whose anxieties were piqued especially with Spain’s humiliating defeat to the United States in 1898. Relatively new research demonstrates that some elite and educated women were present alongside their republican brothers in political groups, clubs, and activities since the middle of the nineteenth century; however, a gendered language that cut down women and publicized stereotypes of the sexes persisted during the Restoration.¹ This book gives pride of place to the importance of symbols and representation in the construction of collective identities and how these are manipulated for political purposes. This chapter will focus on the gendered language of republican anticlericalism, which was an instrument designed to unify men in the attack against the Catholic Church and clergy, and in the quest for a Second Spanish Republic. That the gendered language of anticlerical nationalism was replete with pornographic, homoerotic, comic, and misogynist undercurrents suggests this discourse was limited and divisive.

This chapter illustrates that the anticlerical-nationalist message of radical republicanism was gendered because republicans, certainly radical republicans such as Nakens, Lerroux, and Blasco Ibáñez, understood the clergy to be the single most significant threat to the ideal patriarchal family. José Alvarez Junco’s biography of Lerroux pointed to the importance of gendered language, specifically Lerroux’s manliness, in cultivating his image as a mover, a shaker, and a leader.² For Lerroux, generating support was not the only reason for gendered
language; it also built upon gendered understandings of women, men, and priests to potentially unite disparate groups of Spaniards. Nakens demonstrated that languages of nationalism need not be exclusively sober and serious. Sexual jokes and reveling in misogyny were important avenues by which some Restoration republican males bonded and worked to exclude women from leadership positions of their movement.

Anticlericalism was not just a central plank in republican ideology, but also the most desirable and natural discourse in the criticism of what republicans considered premodern and irrational relations between men and women, state and society, and the public and private spheres. Anticlericalism featured a gendered component for both practical and ideological reasons: not only had the Church held tremendous influence over education, finances, and law, but also its views of celibacy, sexuality, marriage, and masculine and feminine ideals were anathema to republicans. Over the course of the Restoration, the republican press created and promulgated a discourse on sexual anxiety, arguing that as Spain continued to languish, so too did the power and virility of Spanish men. For this reason, the republicans were consumed with curbing the religiosity of Catholic women who were supposedly under their priests’ thumbs. This was particularly crucial because of their belief that Catholic women colluded with priests in order to turn Spanish children against Liberalism, and specifically, Republicanism.

The central organizing principle of radical republican anticlericalism was the belief that the clergy, above all else, represented the most significant obstacle to the sudden and no less magical resolution of the Spanish national problem. With Spain’s humiliating defeat in the Spanish-American War, the republicans had ample proof their nightmare of an emasculated Spain run by priests controlling their sexual resources (women) had become a reality. The once proud nation that dominated one of the largest empires the world had ever seen under Philip II was exposed as decrepit and dysfunctional when parvenu America stripped Spain off Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands. Spain was ill; Spanish men watched as the Church and clergy threatened and undermined home and family, the building blocks of the nation.

The republicans’ search for explanations and solutions was shaped by anticlericalism and gender ideology, which linked women and the clergy as potent enemies not only of the rationalization of human relations but also the republican family ideal and the forward progress of