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Making the invisible visible : the position of indigenous women in Mexico. A general overview of the challenges ahead

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MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE:

THE POSITION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN MEXICO

A General Overview of the Challenges Ahead

Barbara Ortiz

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE:

THE POSITION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN MEXICO

A General Overview of the Challenges Ahead

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ix

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xi

I. INTRODUCTION 1

A. Making the Invisible Visible 4

B. Methodology 8

C. Mexican Anthropology: Where Are the Women? 11

D. Definition of Indigenous Peoples 14

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 17

A. Towards a Feminist Anthropology 18

B. Addressing Male Bias in Anthropology 22

C. Postcolonial Feminism 24

About Saving Women 26

D. Analysis of Anthropological Works 28

1. Millán – *El cuerpo de la nube. Jerarquía y simbolismo ritual en la cosmovisión de un pueblo huave* 29

2. Olavarría – *El cuerpo flor. Etnografía de una noción yoeme* 31

3. Monaghan – *The Covenants with Earth and Rain: Exchange, Sacrifice, and Revelation in Mixtec Sociality* 32

4. Dehouve – *La ofrenda sacrificial entre los tlapanecos de Guerrero* 34

E. Feminist Anthropology in Mexico 35

F. Conclusion 37

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT 38

A. First Wave: A Feminism of Equal Rights 39

1. First Feminist Wave in the West 39

2. Early and First Wave Feminism in Mexico 41

B. Second Wave: A Feminism of Women's Liberation 44

1. Theoretical Base 44

2. Second Wave Activism in the West 46

3. Historical Feminism in Mexico 47

C. Third Wave: Against Universal Womanhood 48

1. Postcolonial and Postmodern Critiques 48

2. The United Nations and Women 49

3. Popular and Civil Feminism in Mexico 50

4. Indigenous Feminism in Mexico 51

D. Conclusion 57

IV. WOMEN AND HEALTH CARE IN MEXICO: THE NEED FOR EDUCATION, PREVENTION, AND AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH 59
A. General Health Care Situation in Mexico 63
B. Reproductive Health: The Right to Decide and the Importance of Education in Preventing Health Risks for Women 66
1. Family Planning and Contraception 67
2. Teenage Pregnancies and Early Marriage: Limiting Emancipation 71
3. Abortion: A Taboo Topic 74
4. Forced Sterilization of Indigenous Peoples 77
5. Women's Cancers: Another Example of the Lack of Information 79
6. The Need for Sexual Education and Prevention 80
C. Maternal Health: Illustrating the Need for an Intercultural Approach to Health Care in Mexico 81
1. Maternal Mortality in Indigenous Regions: Indicator of a Larger Problem 81
2. Health in an Intercultural Context 83
3. A Role for Traditional Medicine: The '*Parteras*' and the Humanization of Delivery 88
D. Conclusion 94
V. FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: CONQUERING SPACES 98
A. National Policy on Female Political Participation 101
1. Mexican Gender Quota: The Gap Between Candidacy and Election 103
2. The Use of *'Juanitas'*: Getting Around Gender Quota 104
3. Other Government Initiatives Regarding Female Political Participation 107
B. Female Voters 109
C. Eligible Women 111
1. National Level 111
2. State Level 121
3. Municipal Level 124
D. Indigenous Women and Politics: Between Tradition and Modernity 127
1. The Trap of Tradition? '*Usos y Costumbres*' in Indigenous Municipalities 128
2. Working with the Available Data: The Case of Oaxaca 130
3. Structural Obstacles for Indigenous Women in Politics 134
4. Cultural Obstacles: "Tú cállate, tú eres mujer, no sabes nada." 136
5. Changing Times: Defying Traditions and Social Structures 142
6. Are Indigenous Women Not Participating? 144
7. Movement of Indigenous Women: Activism and Leadership 149
E. Conclusions 154

VI. THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN MEXICAN MEDIA: FIGHTING STEREOTYPES 158
A. Female Gender in Mexican Media: A General Overview 162
1. Women Working in Mexican Media: The Struggle for Equality 163
2. Women in Mexican Media Content: The Female Body at the Service of Men 169
B. The Representation of Indigenous Women in Mexican Visual Culture: Historical Context 174
1. *La India Bonita*: The Creation of a Stereotype 178
2. Consolidation of a Stereotype 181
C. Making the Invisible Visible: Indigenous Women in Mexican Media 187
1. Television As a Role Model 188
2. Absence of Indigenous Women on Mexican Television 189
3. Influence of Television on the Indigenous Self-Esteem 194
D. Conclusion 197
VII. EDUCATION IN MEXICO: BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE, OR REPRODUCING INEQUALITY? 200
A. Types of Education in Mexico 206
1. Schooling Level 207
2. Modalities of Education 208
B. General Problems in Mexican Education 213
1. Dominance of the Teachers' Unions 213
2. Unequal Distribution of Education Resources 214
3. Poor Infrastructure and Lack of Educational Material 214
4. Professionalization of Mexican Teachers 215
5. Efforts to Evaluate Mexican Education 216
C. Education in Rural and Indigenous Regions: The Need to Adapt to Varying Teaching Contexts 219
1. History of Rural and Indigenous Education: In Pursuit of a Homogenized Mexican Nation 219
2. Obstacles for Rural Education 221
3. Current Situation of Indigenous or Bilingual Education 222
4. Racism and Discrimination of Indigenous Children 226
D. Gender Policies in Mexican Education: More Than Good Intentions? 229
1. Legal Context 229
2. Equal Access to Education 230
3. Gender in Mexican Textbooks 231
4. And in Practice 232
5. Indigenous Girls in Mexican Education 234
E. Conclusion 238
"We Are Educated, But Now What?" 240

VII. General Conclusion 243
A. Making the Invisible Visible 243
Addressing the Male Bias 243
Women and Health Care in Mexico: The Need for Education, Prevention, and an Intercultural Approach 245
Female Political Participation: Conquering Spaces 246
The Image of Women in Mexican Media: Fighting Stereotypes 247
Education in Mexico: Bringing About Change, or Reproducing Inequality? 249
B. For Future Research 252
Gender Based Violence 252
Migration: Shifts and Evolutions in Gender Relations 254
Domestic Work 255
Discrimination of Indigenous Women Within the Mexican Justice System 255
C. Final Remarks 256
Prevailing Machismo 256
Racism and Interiorized Discrimination 256
Institutionalized Discrimination 257
The Need for Reliable Official Statistics 258
Agency of Indigenous Women 259
Valorization of Indigenous Knowledge 260
Towards a Socially Engaged Discipline 261
Bibliography 264
Audiovisual Material 293
Interviews 294
English Summary 295
Nederlandse Samenvatting 299
Propositions 304
Curriculum Vitae 306

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Percentage of women between 15 and 49 years by use and knowledge of contraceptive methods, Mexico, 2009 68

Figure 2: Percentage of women between 15 and 49 years, living in a union, and using contraceptive methods, per federal entity, Mexico, 2009 70

Figure 3: Percentage of women between 15 and 49 years according to their use of contraceptives during their first sexual relation, per age group, Mexico, 2009 70

Figure 4: Estimated annual number of unsafe abortions per 1000 women aged 15–44 years, by sub regions, 2008 76

Figure 5: Percentage of pregnancies according to the type of delivery for each federative entity, Mexico (Last pregnancy occurred between 2004 and 2009) 92

Figure 6a: Members of the federal Chamber of Deputies, by sex, Mexico, 1997-2015 118

Figure 6b: Members of the federal Chamber of Deputies, by sex, Mexico, 1997-2015 118

Figure 7a: Senators, by sex, Mexico, 1994-2015 119

Figure 7b: Senators, by sex, Mexico, 1994-2015 119

Figure 8: Gender quota in electoral state legislations, and proportion of female and male deputies in the state congresses, Mexico, 2012 and 2014 123

Figure 9: Presence of women and men in the political structures, Mexico (2011, 2012, 2014) 126

Figure 10: Women elected as counselor in the municipalities following the '*usos y costumbres*' for the period 2011-2013, Oaxaca, Mexico 133

Figure 11: Screenshots of the ForoTV weather forecast with Mayte Carranco, October 23 – November 1, 2012 165

Figure 12: María Bibiana Uribe, *El Universal*, September 15, 1921 179

Figure 13: María Bibiana Uribe "La India Bonita". Cover of *El Universal Ilustrado*, August 17, 1921 179

Figure 14: Jesús Helguera, *Carreta tehuana* 183

Figure 15: Jesús Helguera, *Cuquita y la fuente*, Oil on canvas, 1953 183

Figure 16: Jesús Helguera, *La michoacana*, Oil on canvas 184

Figure 17: *María Candelaria* (MX, 1943), screenshot with Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz 185

Figure 18: *La Jornada*, 15th of January 2012 193

Figure 19: Equivalence of the National Educational System with the International Standard Classification of Education 206

Figure 20: General scheme of the Mexican national educational system. Educational school services 209

Figure 21: Percentage of students in preschool education per educational service, Mexico, 2013 212

Figure 22: Percentage of students in primary education per educational service, Mexico, 2013 212

Figure 23: Percentage of students in secondary education per educational service, Mexico, 2013 212

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since colonization, indigenous peoples around the world have been oppressed, their ways of life and their traditions are endangered. Nevertheless, in many countries indigenous peoples have been able to maintain their cultural identity. In the 20th century, in the context of the introduction of international human rights standards, indigenous peoples urged to adopt specific rights that would end the ongoing oppression of indigenous peoples and would protect their tangible and intangible heritage.

The rights of indigenous peoples have been on the international agenda for more than fifty years. In 1957, the International Labor Organization (ILO) first attempted to elaborate an international instrument with the *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention*[1]. However, this convention was criticized for its integrationist approach, and was replaced, in 1989, by a new *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*[2]. This legally binding international instrument aims to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples at all levels of decision-making, and addresses issues such as land rights, access to natural resources, employment, health, and education, among others. Even though the ILO convention has only been ratified by 22 countries, it has been influential for national and international policies (ILO, 2015).

The United Nations (UN) also included indigenous peoples' rights in several declarations, for example in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1966), and in the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992), but these treaties mainly addressed individual rights. In 1982, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) set up a Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). This group took on the task to develop an international instrument to protect indigenous rights. Finally, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in 2007 (UNDRIP). While this treaty is a non-binding instrument, it sets a benchmark for states. It includes 46 articles both on individual and collective rights, regarding most aspects of life: fundamental human rights, life and security, culture, religion, education, media, employment, political representation and participation, health, resources, land rights, etcetera (UN, 2007). In 2007, the UNDRIP was approved by 145 states (eleven abstained, and four states opposed), but since then,

[1] ILO Convention No. 107.
[2] ILO Convention No. 169. ILO Convention No. 107 remains in force for 18 countries (ILO, 2015).

all of the opposing states have validated the declaration, resulting in a declaration that is almost universally endorsed.

The UNDRIP particularly addresses states, and urges them to take measures to improve the situation of indigenous peoples. Article 21 stresses the need for initiatives to ensure the economic and social development of indigenous peoples.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007).

Article 21

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 22

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.

2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

Article 21 and 22 of the UNDRIP point to another important issue: the need to give particular attention to the situation of indigenous women. That will be the focus of the present research.

Indigenous peoples are often living in situations of marginalization and poverty. Furthermore, they are subject to discrimination and racism in a society where they are an oppressed minority. But the most vulnerable are indigenous women. Indigenous women are faced with multiple discrimination: they suffer from ethnic discrimination because of being indigenous, as women they are faced with gender based discrimination, and they suffer from economic discrimination and the stigmas of poverty (Herrera et al., 2014: 14).

Based on the demands in the UNDRIP, this present research aims to provide an overview of certain challenges indigenous women are still confronted with, focusing on the case of Mexico.

The call for specific actions for indigenous women was included in the UNDRIP and in the *Outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples*[3] of 2014. In addition, the UN Commission on the Status of Women adopted two specific resolutions on indigenous women: *Indigenous women: beyond the ten-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (2005)[4], and *Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication*[5] (2012), which both urge for the adoption of measures to ensure the empowerment of indigenous women and protection of indigenous women's rights.

However, despite featuring on the international agenda, many problems still persist for indigenous women. It has been particularly difficult to go from theory to practice. Efforts and good intentions at international level have not always met with a response at national level, and it turned out to be even harder to implement national regulations on gender and indigenous topics at local level.

The latter is particularly true for Mexico. At an international level, Mexico has been involved in the development of these different instruments, showing a certain commitment to improve the situation of indigenous women. Yet at a national level, many issues regarding the rights of indigenous peoples and indigenous women still remain unchanged. Very basic needs are still not met by the Mexican government, and indigenous peoples are still facing severe discrimination within Mexican society.

It has to be noted that very few indigenous women were involved in the elaboration of the UNDRIP; this becomes obvious when looking at the declaration. The attention given to women in the UNDRIP

[3] Resolution A/RES/69/2
[4] Resolution E/CN.6/2005/L.10
[5] Resolution E/CN.6/2012/L.6

is very general but also minimal, and the actions to be taken remain quite vague[6]. No reference is made to the issues indigenous women are faced with. This illustrates the lack of importance given to indigenous women, both by the non-indigenous and indigenous negotiating partners. The absence of attention for women's issues does not necessarily stem from unwillingness, but can also be the result of lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the role women play in society and in the development of communities. Anyway, it illustrates the subordinated position women still have in society in general. The limited and vague agreements on indigenous women's rights allowed states to easily put aside their commitments and limit their actions.

Thus, documents such as the UNDRIP do not clearly identify the areas where indigenous women's rights are still not guaranteed. This research wants to contribute to the visibility of indigenous women and to the identification of some of the fields where more action is needed.

A. Making the Invisible Visible

This research will analyze the position of Mexican women, and more particularly indigenous women, regarding four specific topics: health care, political participation, media, and education. A wide range of subjects could have been chosen, but for the purpose of this work a selection had to be made. These four topics were selected because of the major influence they have on the situation of women within society. The analysis of these subjects gives an image of the level of emancipation Mexican women have been able to reach. Furthermore, these subjects are all relevant, not only for women, but for their communities as a whole.

This work wants to show general trends in the situation of Mexican women, especially of indigenous women, and possible directions for further research. Therefore, the scope will be general and not focus on one specific region or indigenous community. This choice was deliberate. It is important to show that certain issues are recurrent for indigenous women in different contexts. But, it is equally important to realize that the situation of an individual depends on many factors, thus the situations that will be described, are not necessarily true for every Mexican. When presenting an overview of the position of indigenous women, it is crucial to realize that 'the indigenous woman' essentially does not exist, just as 'the Mexican woman' and 'the woman' in general do not exist. These are constructed categories. All women are different and unique; they have different needs, different

[6] This has also been observed by Carlos García Medina, and not only in international legislation, but also in the Mexican Constitution and in Mexican local state legislations (García Medina, 2010).

ideas, different possibilities, different lives, etcetera. Their situation depends on many factors, taking into account the broad context they are living in. It is therefore impossible to present the situation of 'the indigenous woman' in Mexico in great detail. Specific research is necessary to understand all needs and wishes of women in specific contexts. Each study will require other focus points; in certain communities, women will be vigorous political actors, for example, while in others they may be totally excluded from political participation. Therefore, general trends will be discussed in this work, inviting every scholar to question his or her specific research material.

Furthermore, the problems women face can be the same for indigenous and non-indigenous women. Many of these problems are not unique to indigenous women. Urban high-class women can also be subjected to domestic violence, and non-indigenous women in rural communities can experience the same difficulties to access health care services. Yet for indigenous women, there is an additional dimension: their discrimination as individuals belonging to indigenous peoples.

Across the different chapters in this study, several topics will be discussed. First, the theoretical framework will be explained. This research is situated at the intersection of two paradigms: the indigenous paradigm and the feminist paradigm. As the indigenous paradigm is still in a developing stage, the focus will be on the concepts of feminist theory and feminist anthropology. Within these theories, special attention will be given to the criticism of the persisting male bias, and postcolonial criticism of the Western bias within the anthropological discipline.

A historical overview of the evolution of the feminist movement will be given in order to be able to place this research in its historical context. We will briefly look at the development of feminism in Europe and the United States of America. Then, we will turn more specifically to the evolution of the feminist movement in Mexico.

After defining the theoretical and historical frame of this research, four main topics will be addressed: health care, political participation, media, and education. Every chapter will analyze the general position of women in its context. Subsequently, the focus will turn to the situation of indigenous women.

First, we will look at one of the most basic problems for women, and especially indigenous women, namely the access to qualitative and adequate health care. In Mexico, even this basic need is not always met, and women in rural areas are the most vulnerable group in this regard. Some of the health risks Mexican women are confronted with will be identified, specifically the basic health risks related to reproduction and maternity. Regarding reproductive health, topics such as family planning and contraception, the risks concerning teenage pregnancies and early marriages, abortion, and

forced sterilization will be discussed. Here the importance of prevention and education will be stressed. Then the focus will turn to maternal health. The high percentages of maternal deaths in indigenous communities point to a larger issue: the need for an intercultural approach to health care in Mexico. Some of the difficulties of indigenous peoples visiting allopath doctors will be broached, and possible initiatives to improve health care for indigenous communities will be discussed. In this analysis, we will also consider the role of traditional medicine within the institutionalized Mexican health care system.

Next, the political participation of women in Mexico will be analyzed. Political participation is one of the indicators most often used to measure the level of female emancipation in society. It comprises both the right to vote, as well as the possibility to be elected and carry out a political mandate. In Mexico, universal suffrage at a national level was obtained in 1953. But, the question has to be asked whether Mexican women are participating in political life at the same level as men? Are they equally participating in local, state, and national decision-making processes? This chapter will first look at the national policy regarding female political participation, focusing on the use of gender quota, to be followed by an assessment of the participation of women at three different political levels: national, state, and municipal levels.

Political participation of women in rural and indigenous communities will receive special attention. Do these women experience limitations as a result of patriarchal social structures or can they participate in political processes? Do they have a voice and a vote in the local communities? Do they have access to all other political levels? In which spaces and to what extent can they participate? To understand the particular situation of indigenous women, the indigenous political context, and structural and cultural obstacles to participation of indigenous women will be explained. The situation in the state of Oaxaca serves to illustrate the position of indigenous women in the Mexican political landscape. Special attention will be given to the changes occurring in indigenous communities, to alternative forms and spaces of participation, and initiatives indigenous women are taking to secure a voice in political decision-making processes.

Following healthcare and political participation, the image of women in Mexican media will be analyzed. In this research, the focus will mainly be on visual media, and on television in particular, being the most accessible medium for a wide audience and therefore the medium with the most significant impact (CONACULTA, 2010). Media have an important role in the manifestation and transmission of cultural values, ideology, and identity. Media also have an influence on the codification of gender, race, and class within society (Abercrombie, 1996; Beard, 2003: 87). The way women are portrayed in the media can illustrate how women are perceived, and what effects this

might have on their place in Mexican society. First, we will look at women working in Mexican media. Are both genders equally represented in the media industry? Are women and men working in the media treated equally, and do they get the same career opportunities? Are women reaching decision-making levels in media concerns? Secondly, we will turn to the way women are portrayed in media content. What image is shown of women, and how are gender relations portrayed, both in fiction and non-fiction content? This image will have an impact on the way women are perceived in Mexican society.

It is also important to focus on the image of indigenous women in Mexican media. The media seem to enforce existing discrimination and racism against the indigenous population. To contextualize the existing image of indigenous women, an overview will be given of the evolution of this image in Mexican visual culture. Next, the current image of indigenous women in Mexican media will be analyzed. The image of indigenous women does not only influence the perception of this group within Mexican society, it can also impact their own social and economic development. Thus we will question the influence of how indigenous women are portrayed on their self-image and self-esteem.

The last chapter will look at Mexican education. Education forms children intellectually, but also socially. Through education, among others, children learn about gender roles and gender relations. It is therefore important to analyze how gender is approached and treated in Mexican education, especially in rural and indigenous communities. Such analysis will lead to a better understanding of the way gender relations in Mexico are defined, but also how they are perpetuated and could be improved. First, a general overview will be given of the structure of Mexican official education. Then the main problems of the Mexican educational system will be identified. Next, the focus will lie on indigenous education and specific problems of Mexican education in a rural and indigenous context. Lastly, we will look at gender within Mexican education and the situation of indigenous girls. Does education improve the situation of indigenous girls in Mexico? Which opportunities does education offer these girls? Do they get the same educational opportunities as boys? Is education adapted to their needs?

B. Methodology

It has to be pointed out that the different subjects in this overview deserve a more in-depth analysis and could be topics for larger and more detailed studies. This research is intended to give a general overview of the main challenges indigenous women encounter. Furthermore, the topics imply specific analytical contexts and distinctive theoretical frameworks, derived from various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, medical anthropology, political sciences, communication, gender studies, etcetera. It is impossible to discuss all these frameworks in detail due to the variety of subjects in this work. Furthermore, this research also discusses very practical and basic issues of quotidian experience that go beyond the theoretical scope. Consequently, the theoretical analysis presented here should not be considered exhaustive, it only serves as a guideline for reflection. For an in-depth theoretical analysis, the reader will be referred to existing literature on the various topics.

This research required extensive literature study. Literature on Mexican topics is limited in Belgium; fortunately, however, the library of the Center for Mexican Studies of the University of Antwerp turned out to have an extensive collection of publications of the main Mexican research institutions, including major works on Mexican social sciences. In addition to the information obtained through literature study, official government documents from international institutions, such as the United Nations, as well as from Mexican federal and state governments, such as specific legislation and policy documents, were consulted. Current evolutions regarding public policy and reforms were monitored by means of Mexican online newspapers. Other visual media such as art, advertisements, and television shows, including *telenovelas*, were also consulted online. For the chapter on education, official educational material of the Mexican Ministry of Education was analyzed, in particular textbooks. The approach to all of these sources was qualitative and not quantitative; the goal was to get a general idea of the issues Mexican women, specifically indigenous women, are facing, and the way these issues are currently addressed.

Official statistical data were used subject to availability. The Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía presents statistical data on a variety of subjects, however, many of these statistics are only based on official estimates, others are incomplete, and for some no gendered data are available (in these cases no distinction can be made between the data concerning women or men). Furthermore, different institutions sometimes present different results on the same subject, which even occurs within the same official institution. The lack of statistical data is not only a concern for research. More importantly, it shows that the Mexican government has no data on several crucial issues (e.g.

number of maternal deaths). Without information, it is virtually impossible to understand the extent of the problems, and consequently to develop adequate policies to address the situation.

This research was complemented by fieldwork in Mexico. Due to the limited time available, this fieldwork consisted of various short stays, primarily located in Mexico City, and in the state of Oaxaca, although other places were briefly visited too (e.g. the town of Cuetzalan del Progreso in the state of Puebla). The main goal of the fieldwork was to conduct various in-depth interviews to supplement research. No surveys were used because they tend to fracture experiences; as the questions are formulated and coded in advance, women's individual experiences and understandings may get lost. In general, within Women's Studies, qualitative methods, such as semi-structured and unstructured interviews, are preferred. This enables to ask in-depth questions, and to include unexpected topics emerging during conversation, thus reaching a broader understanding (Maynard, 2005: 31). Although not all interviewees are quoted literally in this work, their contributions and insights helped to contextualize and better understand certain situations.

First, I spoke with Dr. Soledad González Montes, from the Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de la Mujer (PIEM) of the Colegio de México. Dr. González is a renowned scholar in the field of Mexican women's studies. She carried out research on various topics that will be discussed here. I also met with Dr. Jeanett Reynoso Noverón from the Centro de Lingüística Hispánica of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Dr. Reynoso conducted many interviews of both indigenous and non-indigenous persons for her own linguistic research. During her work she often stumbled upon personal stories illustrating the situation of women in Mexico. As a result, she has taken a special interest in the topic of gender issues. The input of these two scholars was particularly important to understand the difficult position of studies on women within Mexican academia. To have more background information on the education system in Mexico, Graciela Pinet Cabrera was interviewed, a recently retired teacher who worked both in private and in public elementary schools in the state of Mexico.

As a next step, organizations currently working with indigenous women were approached and interviewed. The four organizations contacted are located in the city of Oaxaca. The Casa de la Mujer "Rosario Castellanos", an NGO actively engaged in gender equality in the state of Oaxaca, gives special attention to the situation of indigenous women and girls. The NGO Nueve Lunas gives professional trainings to traditional midwives in an intercultural context, and advocates for the humanization of delivery. Ser Mixe is a mixed indigenous organization by and for Mixe people, which includes gender issues within the scope of their activities. Finally, the Instituto de la Mujer Oaxaqueña is the governmental institution of the state of Oaxaca working on gender equality

policies. The experience of all these organizations in working with indigenous women in the field contributed to understanding the issues indigenous women are facing in their daily lives. In the context of their work these organizations meet women from different indigenous peoples in Oaxaca, women living in different situations and with different needs. They can thus give a general and nuanced perspective on the situation of indigenous women.

Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with indigenous women and girls. First three adult indigenous women were interviewed: Judith Bautista Pérez (Zapotec), Zaira Alhelí Hipólito López (Zapotec), and Flor Julián Santiago (Mixtec). They were all in their thirties, from Oaxaca, with higher education degrees, and each actively working for the emancipation of indigenous women from different positions (government, indigenous movement, and health care). For these interviews, the choice of indigenous women with a higher education level was deliberate. I wanted to interview women familiar with indigenous cultures from within, as well as feminist theory and academia. They can share particular insights about the situation of indigenous women, based on their experiences in both cultural contexts. At the same time, it was important for this research to give a voice to indigenous women, and to show their agency potential, to show they have the necessary knowledge, academic background, and motivation to speak up for themselves and to conquer new spaces.

Next, I interviewed a number of young indigenous girls between 16 and 21 years old. In the Casa de la Mujer "Rosario Castellanos" in Oaxaca, Adriana Márquez Altamirano was interviewed. This young Zapotec woman from the district of Ejutla, Oaxaca, was 20 years old when I interviewed her. She had been a bursar of the Casa de la Mujer during her two last years of higher secondary school.

In addition, I had the opportunity to stay a week at the Casa del Estudiante Triqui. This NGO, located near the city of Oaxaca and founded and supported by Belgians, provides housing to Triqui girls and boys to give them the opportunity to follow higher secondary education away from their turbulent home towns. During my stay, I had informal conversations with the students, in particular girls, on various subjects such as life in their communities, experiences in non-indigenous secondary school, views on love and marriage, and dreams and expectations for the future[7]. Through these candid conversations, I gained insight into issues indigenous girls are facing on a daily basis, the difficulties they have to overcome at school and in Mexican society as a whole. But, it also showed me these girls' spirit and motivation to advance in life, without losing the respect for their indigenous traditions and heritage.

[7] Most of the students I spoke with in the Casa del Estudiante Triqui were minors. To protect their privacy, pseudonyms will be used when referring to their testimonies.

Finally, all of these sources complemented my personal experiences visiting Mexico every year since I was a child, and having informal conversations with my Mexican family and friends on an infinite number of subjects. While this knowledge had to be supplemented with knowledge on indigenous cultures, my personal involvement with Mexican society offered the advantage of having a certain level of understanding of Mexican non-indigenous culture and mentality, and the position of women within this society.

It has to be noted that this research tries to do justice to indigenous women's voices, however, this has proven to be a challenge. Several indigenous women were interviewed, but other sources by indigenous women are limited. This does not mean indigenous women are not speaking up, it rather shows indigenous women get little opportunities and limited spaces to voice their points of view. Consequently, as a researcher, one is in constant danger of doing exactly that what one is questioning, i.e. of reproducing the marginality and thus the stereotypes one wants to deconstruct. This is very unsatisfactory for the author, but at the same time, it confirms the problems that still exist in the representation of indigenous women.

C. Mexican Anthropology: Where Are the Women?

In a number of cases, anthropology (including archaeology and history) has wanted to stand up for indigenous rights, and criticized the ineffectiveness of national and international institutions. However, anthropology has been anything but a good student itself. In general, traditionalistic anthropology remains dominated by Western scholars, most often by white, male, middle-, or high-class Western scholars, who keep treating the indigenous persons they study as passive and subordinated *objects*: the 'Others', the former 'savages', which have no voice and can only be understood through the interpretation of the anthropologist. Furthermore, the masculine predominance has led to a male bias in anthropology. There are important exceptions and cases of influential female anthropologists (see below II.A), but they cannot be considered mainstream (yet). In many anthropological works on Mexico, we still find that women are almost invisible. There is rarely any attention for the specific point of view of women in the communities, which might be due to the choice of conversation partners. When the anthropologist arrives in a community, men, who are in charge, will take up the role of spokesman, and will thus be the most accessible persons to interview. Women are often less easy to approach for male researchers, as, for example, women in some communities are prohibited from talking to strange men, or feel ill at ease doing so. As a consequence, often mostly male subjects are interviewed. Thus, studies on indigenous communities

tend to reflect first and foremost the view of the men in the community. Problems arise when the researcher interprets these male views as the generally accepted point of view of the entire community, and validates them without critique, from a position of cultural relativism. The question is rarely asked whether women – the other half of the community – feel the same way about the discussed issues. The majority of anthropologists working on Mexico fail to include a gender perspective in their work, and a male bias continues to dominate the discipline.

In Mexican anthropology, women are frequently presented as passive figurants. Where women are mentioned, it is usually to refer to their role as wife and mother only, and to discuss marriage or birth giving traditions. Many researchers describe women as merely taking care of the kitchen, household, and children. Their participation in daily community life, in rituals and social activities is often ignored. The roles women perform are not considered to be valuable, but rather an extension of their 'natural' caring tasks. Researchers tend to have a Western patriarchal perspective on the division of labor and the importance of household chores. In their description of women's roles, they often do not value the work of indigenous women. With their Western bias and preconceptions, for example, they do not consider cooking to be important. However, in indigenous communities, cooking the food for celebrations is one of the most important tasks. There will be no celebration if there is no adequate food for all the guests. Being the host of a celebration is a gigantic task that demands extensive organization and planning for months in advance[8]. The food preparation for offerings is also a very important task women have to perform. This specific food has to comply with strict rules. These tasks are not secondary, they are complementary to those of men, and essential within the community. Nevertheless, anthropologists are often not showing this type of information. When looking at rituals in general, they rarely discuss the role, experience, and perspective of women. Another example of a female role that is undervalued, among many others, is the role of women as cultural agents. Women play a crucial role in the upbringing and education of the next generation, and in the cultural transfer of social conventions and traditions. However, Western (male) anthropologists often do not realize the value of these tasks within the community.

Studies carried out by teams of both male and female researchers have experienced they obtain different, but also complementary information, after speaking respectively to male and female local experts (for example Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez[9], personal communication; Moore, 1988: 1). When researchers do not include women's voices in their research, they are not excluding a minority, they

[8] For a study on the importance of the kitchen in Mexican communities, see: M. E. CHRISTIE (2008), *Kitchenspace. Women, Fiestas, and Everyday life in Central Mexico*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

[9] Dr. Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez, professor emeritus of the department of anthropology (Historia de América II) at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, carried out extensive fieldwork in Mayan communities. He discussed this issue during one of his classes on Mexican and Central American ethnography.

are in fact excluding half of the community. This might be possible for very specific research focused on men, but not when studying a community as a whole. Furthermore, gender relations are essential to understand social relations and power structures within the community. Including the female point of view is thus important as it allows the researcher to deliver more complete, and therefore more accurate, research results.

An important step towards the inclusion of women in research is to become gender sensitive, and not to take gender for granted. Including a gender perspective is not only necessary in studies on topics obviously related to women; all anthropological research should give attention to gender. In certain specialized research areas, including gender might not seem very relevant; however, in the vast majority of anthropological research, gendered questions can be asked. Gender should be one of the standard indicators for researchers to take into account. Including a gender perspective can lead to new and more complete understandings of the studied society as a whole, and will result in more inclusive research.

Including a general gender perspective is essential, but the anthropologist should take it one step further. Women are not only invisible within the discipline: when looking at the reality of indigenous communities, it becomes obvious that indigenous women are facing many challenges in society at large. Although the Mexican government has taken initiatives to improve the situation of women, both in urban and rural contexts, indigenous women are still suffering from unequal access to a number of basic services. In addition, indigenous women experience multiple discrimination: because they are women, because they are indigenous, and often, because of the stigma of poverty. Anthropologists and other scholars have a social responsibility here. They have the opportunity and moral obligation to engage not only on an academic, but also on a social level, in order to improve the visibility of indigenous women, and bring the problems of these women to the attention of a larger audience. They can raise awareness within the academic world and in politics, and they can offer their support in denouncing deplorable situations. Certain anthropologists take up their social responsibility, for example regarding access of indigenous communities to natural resources. Such a social commitment is also needed for the situation of indigenous women. In general, social scientists should strive to develop an inclusive and socially engaged discipline.

D. Definition of Indigenous Peoples

When is a person, male or female, considered to be indigenous? There has been debate on the adoption of a definition of the concept of 'indigenous peoples'. In 1986, José R. Martínez Cobo, Special Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, presented the elaborate *Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*, in which he proposed a working definition:

> "Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (UN, 1986)."

Article 1 of the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention* (No. 169) of the ILO does not include a definition, but gives a general description of the peoples to whom the convention applies:

> "1. This Convention applies to:
> (a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
>
> (b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.
>
> 2. Self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply (ILO, 1989: Art. 1)."

After further debate on a possible definition, Erica-Irene A. Daes, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, recommended in 1996 to abandon the idea of a fixed definition. Based on the findings of the UN and the ILO, she identified certain key elements that characterize indigenous peoples. These different elements can vary depending on the context, but they can serve as guidelines:

> "(a) Priority in time, with respect to the occupation and use of a specific territory;
>
> (b) The voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness, which may include the aspects of language, social organization, religion and spiritual values, modes of production, laws and institutions;
>
> (c) Self-identification, as well as recognition by other groups, or by State authorities, as a distinct collectivity; and
>
> (d) An experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination, whether or not these conditions persist (UN, 1996b)."

Finally, in 1997 the Working Group on Indigenous Populations followed the recommendations of Daes, opposing a formal and universal definition that would be adopted by the UN Member States. The Working Group considered that a definition was neither necessary nor desirable, as it would be impossible to capture the diversity of cultures and living contexts of indigenous peoples worldwide. Thus, self-identification was considered the most fundamental criterion to define whether a person is indigenous (UN, 1996a & 1997a).

In the case of Mexico, Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution indicates similar elements to identify indigenous peoples:

> "Article 2. The Mexican Nation is one and indivisible.
>
> The Nation has a multicultural composition, originally based on its **indigenous peoples**, who are **those descending from the populations that originally inhabited the country's current territory at the start of colonization, and who retain their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, or some of them.**
>
> **The fundamental criteria to determine to whom the provisions on indigenous peoples apply, shall be the self-identification of their indigenous identity.**

> Indigenous communities are those that constitute a cultural, economic, and social unit, settled in a territory, and that recognize their own authorities according to their uses and customs.
>
> Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination shall be exercised within a framework of constitutional autonomy, safeguarding national unity. The recognition of indigenous peoples and communities will be comprised in the state constitutions and laws, that will include the general principles established in the previous paragraphs of this article, as well as ethnolinguistic and land settlement criteria (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[10]."

The historical priority of indigenous peoples and the conservation of cultural distinctiveness are seen as characteristic elements. But Mexico also considers self-identification as the main indicator to define whether a person is indigenous or not.

Self-identification is a valuable concept because it gives every individual the right to make a personal decision, and prevents people from being excluded or included against their will. However, it can also raise certain questions. In Mexico, for example, centuries of racism and discrimination caused many indigenous persons to be ashamed of their indigenous background, preferring not to be identified as indigenous. For self-identification to be an optimal indicator, people have to be able to be proud of their heritage and identify themselves as indigenous without fear or shame. This is not yet the case in Mexico.

[10] Original:
"Artículo 2o. La Nación Mexicana es única e indivisible.

La Nación tiene una composición pluricultural sustentada originalmente en sus pueblos indígenas que son aquellos que descienden de poblaciones que habitaban en el territorio actual del país al iniciarse la colonización y que conservan sus propias instituciones sociales, económicas, culturales y políticas, o parte de ellas.

La conciencia de su identidad indígena deberá ser criterio fundamental para determinar a quiénes se aplican las disposiciones sobre pueblos indígenas.

Son comunidades integrantes de un pueblo indígena, aquellas que formen una unidad social, económica y cultural, asentadas en un territorio y que reconocen autoridades propias de acuerdo con sus usos y costumbres.

El derecho de los pueblos indígenas a la libre determinación se ejercerá en un marco constitucional de autonomía que asegure la unidad nacional. El reconocimiento de los pueblos y comunidades indígenas se hará en las constituciones y leyes de las entidades federativas, las que deberán tomar en cuenta, además de los principios generales establecidos en los párrafos anteriores de este artículo, criterios etnolingüísticos y de asentamiento físico (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is situated at the intersection of two paradigms: on the one hand the indigenous paradigm, and on the other hand, the feminist paradigm.

The increased attention for indigenous peoples at an international level, and the adoption of the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* have led to the first tentative explorations towards an indigenous paradigm in academia. However, a complete theoretical framework on how to include an indigenous point of view in research is only starting to be developed. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) is one of the first reference works on this topic. Other scholars that have been working towards an indigenous paradigm are, for example, Bagele Chilisa, Michael A. Hart, Margaret E. Kovach, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Shawn Wilson[11]. More theoretical research is necessary to have a more developed theoretical framework.

Therefore, this study turns to a second paradigm which is feminism. Feminist theory has many parallels with the indigenous paradigm. Among others, it also questions the representation and participation of a subordinated group – in this case women – dominated by a group seen as the 'norm' within society – men. Feminist theory has been one of the first to criticize this societal 'norm'. It has been ground breaking in this regard and has led the way for other critical approaches to academia.

Feminist theory originated from the ideology of the feminist movement, which is based on the observation that in society women have been worldwide subordinated to men. Feminist theory transposed this reality to academia, stating that in research women have also been subordinated to men. Feminist theory wants to analyze gender inequalities in different fields, and therefore points to the need to include a gender perspective in all research areas. Although women have been the main focus group of feminism, it has to be noted that feminist theory is not about women alone. Feminist theory aims at studying gender relations, including both women and men, as they are both part of the social structure of society. It is believed that gender equality can only be reached if women and men are both involved as equal partners.

[11] E.g.: B. CHILISA (2011), *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications; M. HART (2010), "Indigenous Worldviews, Knowledge, and Research: The Development of an Indigenous Research Paradigm", in: *Journal of Indigenous Voices in Social Work*, 1: 1, p. 1-16; M. E. KOVACH (2009), *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; R. KUOKKANEN (2000), "Towards an "Indigenous Paradigm" from a Sami Perspective", in: *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, XX: 2, p. 411-436; S. WILSON (2009), *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Anthropology was one of the first disciplines to question gender roles, and thus contributed to the development of feminist theory. Henrietta Moore defines feminist anthropology as: “the study of gender, of the interrelations between women and men, and of the role of gender in structuring human societies, their histories, ideologies, economic systems and political structures (Moore, 1988: 6)”.

Within feminist theory, one of the main criticisms on anthropology to be addressed in this study, is the presence of a continuing male bias in anthropology. Another important framework is the criticism of postcolonial feminists against the Western colonial bias in research. This last element has to be considered to define the position of the researcher in this study.

A. Towards a Feminist Anthropology

One of the focuses of nineteenth century anthropology was the understanding of the social organization of communities, through concepts such as family and kinship. The relation between sexes was part of this research, and thus, in the period between 1880 and 1920, anthropologists determined their first theories on gender divisions. They followed the generally accepted idea that sex and gender were one and the same category. Biological essentialists believed that the social roles of men and women were determined by their biological characteristics. Women were mentally and physically seen as the weak sex, and they were attributed a passive role. Gender roles and the position of women were taken for granted, and consequently needed no explanation (Moore, 1988: 1; Visweswaran, 1997: 598).

However, at the beginning of the 20th century, female ethnographers started to collect data on women, and found opposite results regarding gender positions in the studied communities. These findings stimulated the first feminist critique in anthropology (Moore, 1988: 1). Among the first were Elsie Clews Parsons (1875-1941), Matilda Coxe Stevenson (1849-1915), and Alice Fletcher (1838-1932), of which the two latter engaged in ethnography sympathizing with their anthropologist husbands. Elsie Clews Parsons played an important role for later feminist ethnography, as she was one of the first to attribute the oppression of women to the seemingly universal patriarchal social structures (Visweswaran, 1997: 597-601).

In the 1920s and 30s, Margaret Mead was the first to point out, through the use of ethnography, that gender is a social construction, and that the categories of woman and man are not universal (Mead, 1928, 1935, & 1949). She concluded that there is a distinction between sex, that is biologically

determined, and gender, that is socio-culturally defined. These were important findings for the development of feminist theory (Visweswaran, 1997: 601; Zimbalist Rosaldo, 1974: 18).

In the 1930s and 1940s, following the work of Mead, the number of ethnographies on women increased. The authors of these works used a large diversity of writing forms, such as life histories, travel narratives, etcetera, often to disguise the fact that they were female anthropologist (Visweswaran, 1997: 602).

At the beginning of the 1970s, influenced by the feminist movement, the first courses on the anthropology of women were taught at universities in the United States of America. This resulted in the emergence of an active feminist anthropology. The works of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan inspired the first influential collections of essays on feminist anthropology (Visweswaran, 1997: 605). The most important works in this period were *Women, Culture and Society*, by Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (1974), with Sherry Ortner's famous essay "Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?", and *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, by Rayna Rapp Reiter (1975), with the essay of Sally Slocum "Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology".

In Mexico, the writer Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) was one of the first intellectuals to support feminism. Her ideas, together with the ideology of de Beauvoir and the other emerging feminist theorists, inspired Mexican academia. They would influence the work of national scholars such as anthropologists Lourdes Arizpe, Marta Lamas, and Marcela Lagarde[12].

These feminist anthropologists opposed the male bias in anthropology, and encouraged an anthropology about women, written by women. They stated that women suffered from universal subordination, and that a universal sisterhood united all women around the world (Aggarwal, 2000: 17).

In the 1980s, third wave and postcolonial feminists strongly criticized the assumption of a universal category of 'woman'. They questioned whether the concept 'woman' always had the same implications. Anthropological studies showed that this was not the case; biological characteristics were not enough to define social relations. The concepts of 'woman', and also of 'man', turned out to be culturally and historically specific (Moore, 1988: 7).

[12] For example: L. ARIZPE (1975), *Indígenas en la ciudad de México. El caso de las 'Marías'*, Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública; M. LAMAS (1987), "La antropología feminista y la categoría 'género'", in: *Nueva Antropología*, 30, Mexico, p. 173-198; M. LAGARDE (1993), *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas*, Mexico: UNAM.

As in other fields of research, female anthropologists had a hard time finding their place in academia. In the 1980s, James Clifford explained the lack of feminist contributions in the influential anthropological compilation *Writing Culture* (1986), by stating that feminism had not produced much "theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986: 20). According to Lila Abu-Lughod, feminists did make important contributions to anthropology. They were, however, mainly concerned about the active representation of women and the visibility of gender politics. As a result they were less concerned about the form of their contributions. Abu-Lughod shows that the first female anthropologists did write ethnographic contributions, but that they were often using alternative writing forms, such as personal narratives, life stories, (auto)biographies, memoirs, or novels[13]. There were also contributions by wives of anthropologists. While often being very good observers, the majority lacked academic training, and tended to write popular works for a larger audience. The works of several early feminist anthropologists were considered 'unprofessional' because of the use of alternative writing forms (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 16-18). In reaction to *Writing Culture*, the compilation *Women Writing Culture*, by Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon (1995)[14], showed that alternative writing forms could be equally valuable, and that they could be combined with theoretical contributions (Aggarwal, 2000: 23-24).

In the last decades, anthropologists such as Marilyn Strathern (1987), Henrietta Moore (1988), Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Kamala Visweswaran (1997), and Ravina Aggarwal (2000), among others, have written about the methods, the need for, and the accomplishments of feminist anthropology. In Mexico, this was addressed by authors such as Eli Bartra (1998, 1999, and 2000), and Martha Patricia Castañeda Salgado (2006). Bartra pointed out that feminist theory has seen some advancement in Mexican anthropology, but that in parallel to the situation of women in society, studies on women are generally speaking still ignored:

> "In a certain way, women studies share the situation of women in society: they are basically ignored and despised, but at times they are flirted with and "conquered" (for different purposes, often of clientelistic nature). On other occasions, they are taken into account with a paternalistic attitude, but most of the time the tendency is to marginalize them (Bartra, 1999: 231-232)[15]."

[13] One example is Laura Bohannon's ethnographic novel on the Tiv of Nigeria, written under the pseudonym Eleonore Smith Bowen: E. S., BOWEN (1954), *Return to Laughter*, London: Victor Gollancz.
[14] R. BEHAR and D. GORDON (1995), *Women Writing Culture*, University of California Press.
[15] Original: "Los estudios de la mujer comparten, en cierta manera, la situación en que viven las mujeres en la sociedad: son básicamente ignorados y menospreciados, pero por momentos se coquetea con ellos y son "conquistados" (para distintos fines con frecuencia de tipo clientelar). Otras veces se les toma en cuenta con actitud paternalista, pero la mayoría del tiempo la tendencia es a marginarlos."

Furthermore, the relationship between feminism and anthropology has not always been obvious. Marilyn Strathern even described it as 'awkward' (Strathern, 1987). For feminists, anthropology has been important because it determined that the concepts of sex and gender are culturally defined by every society (Joyce, 2000: 22). But, feminism also revealed that, because of the patriarchal structures within anthropology, woman turned out to be 'the Other'. Anthropologists, on the other hand, challenged the universality of the concept 'women' used by the second wave feminists, asking which women they should be writing about, as every specific cultural context creates a different type of femininity (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 19-22).

Anthropology and feminism address two of the main systems of difference: gender and race. Both disciplines work on the dichotomy between the Self and the Other. However, they approach difference from an opposite angle. Anthropology has "the discourse of the Self", while studying the Other; feminism studies women, who have been the Other in relation to men (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 24). For Abu-Lughod, the added value of feminist theory for anthropology is:

> "An unsettling of the boundaries that have been central to its identity as a discipline of the self studying other (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 26)."

With the Self being partially the Other, feminist anthropology could transcend the Self/Other and object/subject divisions in traditional anthropology (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 25).

For Castañeda Salgado it is clear that feminist anthropology plays an important role in the deconstruction of traditional gender roles:

> "[...] that feminist anthropological research should provide knowledge committed to the identification of those facts of social and personal life that are capable of promoting real changes in the generic organization of the world, the relative positions of the gendered individuals, the patriarchal order, the dismantling of the powers of domination that subordinate women and the feminine, and in particular, that it would be knowledge favorable to its own redefinition, as well as to the modification of the conditions of women and men (Castañeda Salgado, 2006: 44)[16]."

[16] Original: "[…] que la investigación antropológica feminista aporte conocimientos comprometidos con la identificación de aquellos hechos de la vida social y personal susceptibles de potenciar cambios reales en la organización genérica del mundo, en las posiciones relativas de los individuos generizados, en el orden patriarcal, en el desmontaje de los poderes de dominación que subordinan a las mujeres y a lo femenino y, en particular, que sean conocimientos favorables a la redefinición de sí mismas, así como a la modificación de las condiciones de género de ellas y de los hombres."

B. Addressing Male Bias in Anthropology

Within feminist anthropology, many debates have taken place, for example about the universality of the categories of woman and man and of female subordination (Mead, 1935 & 1949), about the dichotomies male and female versus culture and nature (Ortner, 1974), and about the gendered division between domestic and public space (Zimbalist Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974).

Since the 1970s, the male bias in the discipline has been one of the main criticisms of feminism regarding anthropology. Anthropology was developed by white Western males, and the discipline still carries some of that heritage. Sally Slocum stated:

> "The perspective of women is, in many ways, equally foreign to an anthropology that has been developed and pursued primarily by males. There is a strong male bias in the questions asked, and the interpretations given. This bias has hindered the full development of our discipline as "the study of the human animal" (Slocum, 1975: 37)."

Anthropological research has to deal with male bias on several levels. In the first place, the anthropologist often has certain assumptions on the male-female relations of the studied society. These assumptions will influence interpretations. Secondly, in many societies women are subordinate to men, and men will present women as such to the researcher. Finally, researchers from Western cultures tend to transpose the asymmetrical relations they see between sexes in foreign cultures to the hierarchical structures they are familiar with in Western society (Moore, 1988: 2). Moreover, the majority of the anthropologists have been men.

In practice, this leads to an underrepresentation of women in anthropological research. When women are mentioned in anthropology, it is in the context of kinship studies, or in their traditional role as caregiver, cooking food and looking after small children. Anthropology has treated women as subordinated members of society. Their role is considered to be passive, and their tasks secondary. Thus, anthropology tends to give no voice to women, and to present the opinions of male local experts as the view of the entire community.

Rayna Rapp Reiter argued in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*:

> "A great deal of information on women exists, but it frequently comes from questions asked of men about their wives, daughters, and sisters, rather than from the women themselves. Men's information is too often presented as a group's reality, rather than as only part of a cultural whole. Too often women and their roles are glossed over, under-analyzed, or absent from all but the edges of the description (Reiter, 1975: 12)."

Reiter continued:

> "We think that men control the significant information in other cultures, as we are taught to believe they do in ours. We search them out and tend to pay little attention to the women. Believing that men are easier to talk to, more involved in the crucial cultural spheres, we fulfil our own prophecies in finding them to be better informants in the field (Reiter, 1975: 12)."

By ignoring women, anthropologists are in fact ignoring half of the studied community, rendering their analysis incomplete. Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, Barbara Sykes, and Elizabeth Weatherford pointed out how the roles of women and men cannot be understood separately, and how an incorrect image of the place of women in society implies that our views on men are incorrect too:

> "Androcentrism and sexism lead to the misinterpretation and distortion of the status and roles of women in non-Western cultures. But if the status and roles of women are misinterpreted and distorted, so inevitably must be those of men. Since the relationships of women and men interlock, the distortion of the roles of men and women leads to a distortion of the total social system (Rohrlich-Leavitt et al., 1975: 124)."

Furthermore, the bias results in an undervaluation of the tasks women perform. Male activities are universally considered as important, and cultural systems attribute them authority and value. Taking care of the household, kitchen, and children is seen as part of the 'natural' gender roles and is given no importance. As a result, the implications these tasks may have within the studied community are denied. In addition, the other social roles women might be playing, sometimes informal and less known to Western society, are ignored (Zimbalist Rosaldo, 1974:19).

Reiter pointed out:

> "What women do is perceived as household work and what they talk about is called gossip, while men's work is viewed as the economic base of society and their information is seen as important social communication (Reiter, 1975: 12)."

Sally Slocum stated:

> "Such is the prestige of males in our society that a woman, in anthropology or any other profession, can only gain respect or be attended to if she deals with questions deemed important by men (Slocum, 1975: 49)."

Thus, by means of the male bias, anthropologists have been perpetuating the subordination of women in the discipline. One of the aims of this study is to point out that the male bias denounced by feminist anthropologists in the 1970s, still persists in present-day anthropology.

C. Postcolonial Feminism

For the methodology of this research we should also consider the recommendations of postcolonial feminism.

Postcolonial theory emerged in the context of growing internationalization and globalization. Non-Western intellectuals were schooled in the Western tradition of the European and Anglo-Saxon universities. These scholars were confronted with a very Western-centred academia and started criticizing the existing imperialistic and colonial discourse. They launched new debates and offered alternative perspectives on a wide range of issues which had been taken for granted until then. Postcolonial theorists, such as Franz Fanon (1952), Albert Memmi (1957), Edward Said (1978), and Homi Bhabha (1983; 1994) highlighted the effects of the process of colonization and decolonization on societies all over the world, and the continuing oppression of the formerly colonized regions by the First World.

Non-Western feminists adopted this same discourse, criticizing the dominance of Western feminism. They developed a postcolonial feminist theory focusing on problems related to gender and race in formerly colonised regions. They gave attention to issues such as cultural identity, nationalism, and female representation, all within the context of the newly emerging nation states.

One of their main complaints is the colonisation of Third World women by Western feminism:

> "Postcolonial feminism explores women's racialized and sexualised otherness by locating their marginality and oppression within a three-tiered structure of discrimination maintained by colonial and neo-colonial indigenous patriarchies and the academic and cultural hegemony of western feminism. The collusion of nationalist and colonial patriarchies over the woman question has subjected women to a cultural, racial and gendered colonisation that has negated their right to equal citizenship. […] Nationalist and imperialist modes of control favour the restriction of women and the confinement of their spheres of influence (Mehta, 2000: 395)."

Thus, in addition to a male bias, anthropology tends to suffer from a Western bias. Most anthropologists were trained in a Western context, and they bring their Western points of view to their field of research. They transpose their ideas on social structures and gender relations to their research, and impose their views as the only correct interpretation. Western academia seems to be the only valid source of knowledge. The voices of the studied communities are rarely heard, and if they are, it is mostly through the voice of the Western researcher. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pointed this out in the renowned essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Spivak questions the representation of what she calls the 'subaltern'. She argues that Western voices have been speaking for non-Western actors, denying them the right to speak for themselves (Spivak, 1988). For women, this oppression has been even worse. Spivak pointed out that if the subaltern has no voice in dominating Western culture, the female subaltern has even less possibilities to be heard:

> "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988: 82-83)."

In research it is thus important to make sure women are heard.

In her influential essay "Under Western Eyes", Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes how Western feminism has dominated feminism worldwide. Western feminism reduced the notion of gender to a supposedly universally and cross-culturally applicable category. It has imposed its own discourse on

the Third World, and has thus created an image of 'the third world woman'. This image, however, denies the specific complexities of the position of women in the Third World. It ignores the fact that women all over the world organize and react against their oppression. Since their situation is time, place, and culture specific, their reactions and fights are therefore also context specific (Mohanty, 1984: 334-352).

Furthermore, Margot Badran and Miriam Cook pointed out that feminist activism in postcolonial regions can differ from Western movements. It can adopt many forms, both visible and invisible. Some actions may also occur at a more discrete level (Mehta, 2000: 396). In India, for example, the feminist movement focused its action on specific areas, such as political representation, domestic and gender-based violence, and cultural traditions with a misogynistic character (such as the self-immolation of widows at their late husband's cremation) (Kurian, 2004: 67).

These findings have to be taken into account in this research. To address the Western bias, it is important in the first place to be conscious about it. Researchers have to be aware of their possible Western bias, and keep questioning themselves. In addition, Western academia has to open up and start acknowledging it is not the only source of knowledge.

About Saving Women

Anthropologists are interested in different cultures, but the persisting Western bias of anthropologists still makes them perceive the studied culture as 'the Other'. This Other is too often considered to be a helpless Other, a victim of modernization, an Other in need of saving. Implicitly, it is believed that the research of the anthropologist can save the community. Only through the intervention of the anthropologist, traditions can be saved from disappearance.

Lila Abu-Lughod addressed this topic in her article "Do Muslim women really need saving?" (2002). Abu-Lughod describes how after September 11, 2001, a discourse was adopted in the U.S.A. that legitimized the war on terrorism, and above all put forward that the West had to save Afghan women from oppression, mostly symbolized by the use of the burqa. In her article, Abu-Lughod questions specifically whether Muslim women really need saving, but her observations apply to all situations where Western scholars or activists are willing to 'save' women, and people in general:

> "We need to be vigilant about the rhetoric of saving people because of what it implies about our attitudes. Again, when I talk about accepting difference, I am not implying that we should resign ourselves to being cultural relativists who respect whatever goes on elsewhere as "just their culture". [...] What I am advocating is the hard work involved in recognizing and respecting differences – precisely as products

> of different histories, as expressions of different circumstances, and as manifestations of differently structured desires. We may want justice for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we envision as best (Abu- Lughod, 2002: 787-788)?"

People of non-Western cultures can have other desires or other priorities. These differences are to be respected. When working with Mexican women, it is important to try to understand their context-specific situation and their needs, instead of imposing a Western-biased model on them.

Abu-Lughod continues:

> "It is deeply problematic to construct the Afghan woman as someone in need of saving. When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her *to* something. What violences are entailed in this transformation, and what presumptions are being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her? Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 789, emphasis in original)."

Western scholars and activists too often assume patriarchal and even 'neocolonial' attitudes when working with non-Western women. Treating women like children – on the pretext of 'we know what's best for you' –, and imposing values on them that are not their own, will not help women in their process of empowerment. Abu-Lughod advocates for an approach based on equality:

> "Can we use a more egalitarian language of alliances, coalitions, and solidarity, instead of salvation (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 789)?"

When doing fieldwork or engaging in women's issues, it is important to position oneself on an equal level with the studied women. Women in the communities are valuable sources of knowledge. The anthropologist is there to learn, not to teach. The knowledge of the anthropologist can support women in their actions towards empowerment, but this knowledge has to be placed at their service, instead of forcing Western ideas and paradigms upon them. These women do not need saving. The anthropologist can only aspire to offer a platform to bring their knowledge to others who have no direct access to it.

D. Analysis of Anthropological Works

Anthropological works on Mexico are available in a large number of Mexican research institutions, as well as in numerous foreign universities. It is difficult to calculate how many studies have been devoted to women specifically; the general impression, however, is that women are dramatically underrepresented in this research. For a rough estimate, the work *Las regiones indígenas en el espejo bibliográfico*, can be analyzed (Barabas et al., 2002-2005). This work, consisting of three volumes and published by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), gives an overview of ethnographic works on indigenous regions and communities in Mexico.

The bibliography mentions around 487 titles of ethnographic research on Mexico, published between the 1970s and 2002. Of these 487 works, only 15 titles refer explicitly to women. This corresponds to merely 3% of the publications in this bibliography. A few other works talk about family and kinship, and could thus also treat the situation of women. But even including these last works, only 5% of titles would suggest a gendered approach.

It has to be pointed out that this quick analysis is solely based on the titles of these publications, and does not say anything about the content of the works, neither negatively nor positively. And although the situation does not seem to have changed significantly, this bibliography does not cover publications from the last decade. This estimate can only give a general idea of the lack of attention women are given in Mexican anthropology. Furthermore, it is not imperative to have many studies specifically on women. More important is to add a gendered approach and a gendered analysis to all anthropological studies.

When looking at the contents of anthropological publications about Mexico, the first impression that women are mostly invisible in research is confirmed. To illustrate this, four anthropological works will be analyzed here more closely.

These works have been chosen for different reasons. There are two publications by Mexican authors, one by a French author, and one by an author from the U.S.A.. Two works are written by women, two by men. There are two studies that look at two different indigenous peoples in the state of Oaxaca; the other two publications focus on Sonora and Guerrero respectively. The oldest work is from 1995; there are two publications from 2007, and one from 2009. As the majority of these studies excel in the quality of the overall research, this analysis is neither questioning in any way the value of these publications, nor the capacities of the individual researchers. Moreover, the majority of these publications even address women. Yet, the element that will be pointed out is that they lack

a thorough gendered approach with an in-depth analysis of gendered situations. The significance of these works would have been enhanced if such information had been included.

In addressing the male bias, it is not enough to just include women. Henrietta Moore already stated that fundamental changes also have to be made at the theoretical and analytical level:

> "Simply 'adding' women to traditional anthropology would not resolve the problem of women's analytical 'invisibility': it would not make the issue of male bias go away (Moore, 1988: 2-3)."

1. Millán – *El cuerpo de la nube. Jerarquía y simbolismo ritual en la cosmovisión de un pueblo huave*

The first work that will be examined is *El cuerpo de la nube. Jerarquía y simbolismo ritual en la cosmovisión de un pueblo huave* by Mexican anthropologist Saúl Millán (2007). This research was widely acclaimed, and already won the INAH prize 'Fray Bernardino de Sahagún' in ethnology and social anthropology for the best doctoral thesis in 2005. Millán studied the Huave people of the Southeastern coast of Oaxaca. In his research, he is very careful to offer a complete view of Huave culture – something, he claims, that has not always been done in Mexican anthropology – to illustrate the national cultural diversity, and to break the homogeneous image that has been created of indigenous communities:

> "Throughout this ethnographic research, I have tried to interpret Huave categories in the different contexts affecting their significance, suggesting that their meanings are tied to areas as diverse as kinship and ritual, economy and cosmogony, mythology and social hierarchy. When general institutions are examined based on this method, they tend to reveal a complexity and variation that has not always been present in Mexican anthropology, which has almost always been willing to apply uniform formulas to realities which ethnography discovers each time to be more diverse and complex. The homogeneous view that Mexican ethnography projected on indigenous cultures for so many decades, has not only ended up confusing them with traditional and peasant societies, but also defining the coordinates of a debate that should be located elsewhere (Millán, 2007: 37)[17]."

[17] Original: "A lo largo de la investigación etnográfica, he intentado interpretar las categorías huaves en los diferentes contextos que afectan su significación, proponiendo que sus sentidos se encuentran vinculados en ámbitos tan distintos como el parentesco y el ritual, la economía y la cosmogonía, la mitología y la jerarquía social. Cuando instituciones generales se examinan a través de este método, suelen revelar una complejidad y una variación que no siempre ha estado presente en el horizonte de la antropología mexicana, la cual ha estado casi siempre dispuesta a aplicar fórmulas uniformes a realidades que la etnografía descubre cada vez

Millán manages to include a certain level of gender perspective to his work. He explains, for example, how in Huave communities there is a gendered division of labor: most men are fishermen, while the women sell their catch on the market. Formerly, this used to create a gendered division of space: women were not allowed to come near the coastal lagoons, while men were not allowed on the market place. This specific division in which men are producers and women are merchants means there is also a division in time use. Men go out to fish during the night, while women go to the market during the day (Millán, 2007: 76). Millán also presents ritual activities, for example during the Holy Week celebrations, in which women play an important role (Millán, 2007: 145-147, 155, 187).

He regularly mentions women, but often in a descriptive context, without explaining any social consequences. As an example, on numerous occasions Millán speaks about the hierarchy of certain *cargos* and the organization of the *mayordomías*. He explicitly describes the possible *cargos* a man can take, but it remains unclear what position women have in this hierarchy. Yet, this knowledge is important to understand the social structure within the communities (Millán, 2007: 65, 80-83, 89-90, 105, 176-177).

A very common problem of idiomatic nature – and one that is not limited to anthropology –, is the use of the word 'men' ('*hombres*'). Millán uses this term without defining whether he is referring to the male members of the community, or using it as a generic term for the community as a whole (Millán, 2007: 106-107, 135, 178-179, 228, 232).

In another example, Millán remarks that marriage is an important step in the social independency of an individual:

> "The mark of matrimony has a direct impact on the social constitution of the individual, not only in the sense of allowing access to community life through the *cargos* and the public service, but also in giving men the right of speech and judgment (Millán, 2007: 115)[18]."

However, his account focuses on men; women are only mentioned as passive subjects in the marriage process. Millán does not explain how marriage impacts women's social positioning.

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más diversas y complejas. La visión homogénea que la etnografía mexicana ha proyectado sobre las culturas indígenas durante tantas décadas, no sólo ha terminado por confundirlas con sociedades tradicionales y campesinas, sino también por definir las coordenadas de un debate que es necesario ubicar en otra parte."

[18] Original: "La marca del matrimonio tiene una incidencia directa en la constitución social del individuo, no sólo en el sentido de autorizar el ingreso a la vida comunitaria por la vía de los cargos y las funciones públicas, sino también en el de conferir a los hombres el derecho a la palabra y al juicio."

The same is true when he describes inheritance rules. When a father dies in a Huave community, the inheritance of the paternal farm land goes to his son (Millán, 2007: 119). Millán does not stress the fact that women do not inherit, even though this can have important implications in terms of landownership rights, and the gendered access to resources.

Although Millán delivers a fascinating study on the Huave people – the value of his work cannot be denied –, by adding a more thorough gendered analysis this research would have come closer to his initial goal: to give a truly complete image of the life of Huave people.

In general, Millán could have given more attention to current social issues indigenous peoples are faced with. Millán cites Marcel Mauss, who stated in 1967[19] in his *Manual of Ethnography* that "ethnographic studies too often look like caricatures (Mauss, 2007: 11-12)", because the specialists only focus on the parts they are interested in, such as myths, religion, etcetera. This results in monographs that harm reality, because they are not showing the entire reality (Millán, 2007: 27). Millán's work is definitely not a caricature, but he could have taken his research just one step further, to provide insights which reflect more closely the 'reality' of indigenous communities.

2. Olavarría – *El cuerpo flor. Etnografía de una noción yoeme*

A second work that will be looked at is *El cuerpo flor. Etnografía de una noción yoeme*, by Mexican anthropologists María Eugenia Olavarría, Cristina Aguilar, and Érica Merino (2009). The study received an honorable mention in the research category of the INAH prize 'Fray Bernardino de Sahagún' in ethnology and social anthropology of 2010.

This work discusses the Yoeme people (traditionally known as Yaqui), living on the Northwest coast of Mexico, in the state of Sonora. It focuses on the concept of the body, and on the role of traditional *curanderas* and *parteras* (medicine women & midwives). The authors also interview female *curanderas* on the concept of the body, giving these indigenous women a voice.

The authors give attention to the perception of women within Yoeme culture. They describe, for example, how the difference between male and female already starts at conception. In the womb male and female are believed to develop in different ways, men being already formed at conception, while women still have to develop. The mother carries the fetus, but the father makes him (Olavarría et al., 2009: 35-36). It is also believed that there are physical differences between men and women: men have one rib less, as God made Eve out of Adam's rib, and men's skeleton is stronger than women's (Olavarría et al., 2009: 40-41).

[19] Originally written in 1926.

In another example, the authors show that Yoeme woman has to be subordinated to man in marriage. During the wedding she is reminded that she will have to accept harsh conditions, such as a lack of money or food, without complaining. So when the husband comes home without money, she will have to accept it because it was her vow (Olavarría et al., 2009: 46).

This research is very interesting, but in the end the question remains: what consequences do these ideas about body and identity have in Yoeme society? The authors focus on concepts, on the perception of people, but they could have explained more what the concrete effects are on gender relations, and on the situation of women in Yoeme society. In the specific case of the *curanderas*, the question can be asked what the social implications are of living in a world of traditions as well as a world with modern medicine. How does this affect the lives of these women on a daily base? The authors present an excellent work. But they could have gone further in their analysis to show the reality of indigenous communities, especially in a region with very harsh life conditions, such as Sonora.

3. Monaghan – *The Covenants with Earth and Rain: Exchange, Sacrifice, and Revelation in Mixtec Sociality*

The next work that will be analyzed is *The covenants with earth and rain: exchange, sacrifice, and revelation in Mixtec sociality* by the U.S.A. anthropologist John Monaghan (1995). This extensive work focuses on the Mixtec community of Santiago Nuyoo, in the Mixteca Alta region of Oaxaca. Monaghan discusses, among other things, marriage, kinship, cosmology, ritual, and gift exchange within Mixtec society.

The original aim of the author was to study social and cultural change in an indigenous community, but he decided that before he could make such statements he needed to get to know the community (Monaghan, 1995: xi). This starting point was positive. It would mean the author would be placing the studied community in the context of contemporary Mexico and the daily reality this implies, instead of getting stuck, as many anthropologists, in an 'indigenous bubble' where time has seemingly stopped.

Concerning his sources, Monaghan states that he got his information from the inhabitants of Santiago Nuyoo (Monaghan, 1995: xiii-xiv). But further on, it remains unclear what his concrete sources were. He does say he spoke both to women and men (Monaghan, 1995: 42), and in his work he has indeed attention for both sexes. This can be seen in subtitles such as "males and females in the household" (Monaghan, 1995: 55), or "cargo as a gendered activity" (Monaghan, 1995: 172). Monaghan describes the daily household and cooking activities of women, and talks about the division of labor. According to Monaghan, Nuyootecos say a household needs a man and a woman to

function correctly; at “a basic level” they are complementary. Husband and wife also stand together in relation to the community. For example, during the fiestas related to the life cycle, men and women work together, having each their specific tasks (Monaghan, 1995: 55-56).

Monaghan starts off well, but then he loses himself in cultural relativism. There is a social and economic dependence between men and women of Nuyoo. Monaghan acknowledges that couples can have fights and violence can occur, but most marriages are stable because, according to Monaghan, they are not prepared for a life on themselves. Couples stay together because they believe that is what they should do. Furthermore, the options for single women are limited. This makes that women with violent partners even prefer not to leave:

> “Women who leave their husbands usually decide to return because “that is their true household” and because the options open to a single woman are so restricted that remaining with her husband, even if he abuses her, appears more attractive than living alone (Monaghan, 1995: 57).”

Monaghan sees this as something normal. He does not question the situation of single women. He talks about the marriage bond that won’t be broken, but he gives no more attention to the domestic violence. For him this is just the way things happen. However, domestic violence is a serious problem within indigenous communities. It is a situation that cannot be accepted under any cultural context, and it is something Monaghan should have denounced.

Monaghan states further on:

> “For good reason people consider it a woman’s moral duty to bear children, and infertility is sometimes cited as a reason for divorce (Monhagan, 1995: 67).”

What does Monaghan mean with this phrase and with ‘for good reason’? He seems to support the fact that woman would have a moral duty that demands them to bear children.

The author also describes:

> “The married couple even serves as a single legal person, since the only instance in which a woman may attend a town meeting is when she goes as proxy for an absent husband (Monhagan, 1995: 71).”

Monaghan does not comment on the fact that women do not seem to have political nor legal rights. He treats the subject as if this situation does not imply social issues.

When talking about marriage age, Monaghan states that it is not surprising that people of Nuyoo marry at such a young age (10-11 years). A young girl will adapt more easily to a new household than an older girl (Monaghan, 1995: 75). For people working on gender issues who realize the impact early marriage has on a girl, especially concerning her education and health, it is shocking to see how Monaghan seems to understand and approve of underage girls getting married, because 'it is easier'. Monaghan loses himself in cultural relativism, while he could have denounced this situation.

In addition to his recurrent cultural relativism, Monaghan describes women as having a very negative image within Mixtec worldview and society. This depiction has been strongly criticized by Mixtec researcher and activist Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez. According to her, the negative image of women put forward by Monaghan is not representative of Mixtec culture. It is rather the result of misinterpretations of terminology, of the machismo that has become part of contemporary social relations and that has surfaced in Monaghan's conversations with men, and of a male bias within Monaghan's research (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, 2011: 237-241).

In his work, Monaghan includes women and describes their position within the Mixtec community. He explains certain concepts, but he always comes to accept the subordination of women as a status quo, as a condition that needs no questioning. Monaghan justifies it by pointing at the local customs and traditions, and at the symbolic worldview; he seems to be saying: 'this is the ways it is', based on a 'cultural logic' as put forward by Fisher (Fisher, 1999). In the end, not much remains of his initial attitude. He does not explain the social consequences this subordination has for women in the day to day reality, and he does not denounce problematic situations.

4. Dehouve – *La ofrenda sacrificial entre los tlapanecos de Guerrero*

A last study that will be analyzed is *La ofrenda sacrificial entre los tlapanecos de Guerrero* (2007) by the French anthropologist, Danièle Dehouve. Dehouve's work focuses on the ritual deposits or offerings of the Tlapanec people of Guerrero. This study is very detailed, and offers a lot of valuable information on the system of *ofrendas contadas*, or offerings with a specifically counted amount of elements. However, there is scarcely any gendered information. Dehouve describes the political and religious *cargo* system in these communities, but does not speak about the gendered division in these *cargos* (Dehouve, 2007: 41-42). She also explains all the preparations that need to be made for the offerings. She makes clear these tasks are performed by men: "Preparing the offerings keeps men busy for long hours in the community building (Dehouve, 2007: 56)[20]." But she does not clarify what the role of women is, or why they do not participate in this aspect of ritual life.

[20] Original: "La preparación de las ofrendas ocupa a los hombres durante largas horas en el edificio comunal."

Dehouve also tends to use the term 'hombres' (Dehouve, 2007: 211, 2018). But it is not always clear when she is explicitly referring to the men, and when she is using a generic term to speak about all the people of the community, including men and women. To be able to understand the social structures and hierarchies within the Tlapanec community, it is important to know exactly what is meant.

Furthermore, Guerrero is one of the poorest states in Mexico, and one that has been suffering under constant conflicts, both due to the drugs traffic and to numerous land disputes. However, Dehouve does not comment the difficult social situation indigenous peoples are facing in Guerrrero. She limits herself to the ritual life of Tlapanecos, and does not expand to the social context in which these rituals are taking place.

During a personal contact, Dr. Dehouve told me the Tlapanec world was a world of men. According to her experience women in these communities have nothing to say and are treated as inferior (Dehouve, 2009). Dehouve is thus aware of the situation of women, but it would be good to have this information included in her work. Even if Tlapanec rituals are mostly led by men, it would be important to point out why this is the case, and what this implies for the women of the community.

E. Feminist Anthropology in Mexico

The underrepresentation of women in Mexican anthropology was also confirmed by Dr. Soledad González Montes, professor of the Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de la Mujer (PIEM) at the Centro de Estudios Sociológicos of the Colegio de México, during a personal meeting. Dr. González stated that research on women is still seen as subordinate within Mexican academia. During the last twenty years, the number of Mexican female anthropologists working on indigenous women from a gender perspective has slowly increased. However, they are still a very small group, and studying gender issues is rather a specialization within anthropology. A gendered perspective is not systematically included in other anthropological works. This is, in the words of Dr. González, a 'resounding failure' of Mexican academia.

Moreover, Dr. González has experienced an active resistance of both male and female colleagues against the inclusion of gender in anthropological research. She has been in forums where gendered research is even greeted with derision by male and female colleagues. Some female anthropologists make clear they are no feminists, and they are proud not to be. Years ago, there was an important

meeting on the topic of family and kinship in Mexico[21]. The researchers were discussing intergenerational and gender relations within the family, and the importance to include power relations between generations and genders to come to complete and thorough studies. However, during this meeting, one of the older female anthropologists, a woman that was considered a leading figure in Mexican anthropology, stated that these comments about women and gender issues were more of a concern for the First World, that in the Mexican context it felt forced, and that there was no reason to include a gender perspective in the Mexican research context. In the case of the care for older people in indigenous communities, she believed they had different kinds of mechanisms of solidarity that did not exist in the First World, and thus these First World issues were irrelevant. The studies of various scholars pointing to the importance of gendered power relations within indigenous societies, gendered inheritance systems, gendered divisions of labor, etcetera, were publicly disqualified by a highly respected scholar. This only enforced the resistance from other researchers. The publication with the contributions of this meeting presents interesting material about the history and anthropology of the family, but the number of articles on women is limited. From then on, it has been rare to see a gendered perspective included in Mexican studies on the family, excluding thus important topics such as domestic violence. According to Dr. González, this resistance is due to a lack of knowledge and ignorance of the important contributions feminism has made to the discipline. She feels that in European and North American universities, even those who are not interested in the subject acknowledge it to be important to include at least a vision of the differences between women and men. In Mexico, this conscience is not present, and according to Dr. González, since the symposium of 1998, the attitudes have hardly changed within Mexican academia (González Montes, 2011).

[21] Symposium "*Familia y parentesco en México: Unas miradas antropológicas*", organized the 11th and 12th of February 1998 at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City.

F. Conclusion

In this research, the indigenous and feminist paradigms go hand in hand. The previous analysis does not pretend to be exhaustive. However, it illustrates that, although women can be included in anthropological works in different ways, in many cases a thorough gendered analysis is missing. Even though there are female researchers and authors active in the discipline, most often women are invisible in Mexican anthropological research. Some improvements have been made, but the basic claim of the 1970s feminist anthropologists against male bias can still be maintained.

Based on feminist theory and feminist anthropology, current study wants to point at this male bias in the discipline, and at the need to include women in research, on an equal footing. If anthropology pretends to study 'the human species', it is essential to analyze both the situation of women and men. Only then a complete and accurate image can be given of the studied communities. From a methodological point of view, postcolonial criticism has to be taken into account to prevent a Western bias and a neocolonial approach. Indigenous women are currently invisible in Mexican society. It is important to make them visible and give them a voice in anthropological research.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Every society treats gender and gender differences in a culturally specific way. Moreover, social relations and structures everywhere evolve over time, creating new variations. It is striking, though, that men have always had a leading position in the majority of cultures, while women have been to a lesser or greater degree subordinated. It was not until the 19th century that groups of women openly and systematically started defying the existing social gender division, and resisting oppression.

To better understand the present position of women in Mexican society, and in particular of indigenous women, it is important to look at certain historical evolutions, and to place current research in the context of feminism, including indigenous feminism.

The history of feminism can be divided in different phases. Usually, the concept of 'waves' is used to indicate the different periods, however, it is important to realize that this term should be used with caution. Different types of activism existed and still exist simultaneously, and others overlap (McPherson, 2000: 210). The division in waves is therefore only used to indicate general trends.

As there are specialized studies discussing feminist history in detail, the goal here is not to give a complete overview, but rather to point to certain trends that are relevant for this work. A brief overview will be given of the history of the feminist movement in the West, looking at general evolutions in Europe, in particular the United Kingdom, and in the United States of America, both precursors regarding women's rights. In Mexico, feminism developed almost in parallel with the movement in Europe and the U.S.A., but showed certain particularities worth explaining to understand the current situation of women in Mexico.

In colonial times, some individual actions of female resistance can be noted in Mexico. In the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, there was a first wave of feminist initiatives of Mexican women who openly started striving for the improvement of their rights. In her work *Contra viento y marea: el movimiento feminista en México hasta 1940* (2002), Anna Macías writes extensively about the first period of the feminist struggle, starting around the time of the Mexican Independence. It shows the long tradition of Mexican feminism, but also that feminism has often been used for political purposes rather than for the real improvement of the position of women. Macias' very complete study is one of the few on that period, therefore the following overview will be based primarily on this reference work.

The first feminist wave was followed by a second, and a third wave. The overview of second and third wave feminism presented here is primarily based on the work *Cuatro vertientes del feminismo en México. Diversidad de rutas y cruce de caminos*, by Gisela Espinosa Damián (2009). More studies on this period are available, but the work by Espinosa has been one of the most exhaustive studies recently published on the subject. In her work she divides Mexican feminism in four main currents: historical feminism (ca. 1960-1980), popular feminism (ca. 1980-1988), civil feminism (starting ca. 1980), and indigenous feminism (starting ca. 1990). These different currents were always the result of a specific political climate with its specific social changes. Espinosa points out that there are also many smaller currents, such as lesbian feminism, academic feminism, feminism that originated in political parties, Catholic Church, mass media, public administration, business world, etcetera. Unfortunately, the great diversity of currents had a negative effect on the feminist movement; instead of forming a united front, many groups were excluded.

Other publications about the evolution of Mexican feminism are for example, *Feminismo en México, ayer y hoy*, by Eli Bartra, Anna Fernández Poncela, and Ana Lau (2000); *Feminismo en México. Revisión histórico-crítica del siglo que termina*, by Griselda Gutiérrez Castañeda (2002); *Cartografías del feminismo mexicano 1970-2000*, by Nora Nínive García, Margara Millán, and Cynthia Pech (2007); and *Voces a las mujeres: antología del pensamiento feminista mexicano 1873-1953*, by Julia Tuñón (2011). These are all compilations of articles on a wide variety of topics by various Mexican scholars[22].

A. First Wave: A Feminism of Equal Rights

1. First Feminist Wave in the West

Throughout history there have been individual actions of female resistance against dominant patriarchal structures, yet only during the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century, women openly started to oppose their inferior status. In Europe and the United States of America, social changes had an important influence on the emergence of a feminist movement. Due to the industrialization process, women started to participate in extra-domestic labor, mainly in factories. As a result, the differences between women and men became evident. Women, for example, earned less than men despite having equally heavy and dangerous jobs. In addition, they were excluded from the political decision-making process; men were allowed to dominate public life, women were

[22] For more information on the feminist movement in Latin America in general, see for example: S. CHANT and N. CRASKE (2007); E. MAIER, and N. LEBON (2010), *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, New Brunswick et al.: Rutgers University Press/ El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

confined to the private sphere (Sanders, 2004: 18). During this period, considered the first wave of feminist activity or pre-feminism, women mainly fought for political participation, and particularly for female suffrage.

Some women started to write about the social position of women, for example Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), and Jane Addams (1860-1935) (Holmes, 2007: 4).

In the West, the United Kingdom and the United States of America were home to the first suffragette movements. U.S.A. activism began around 1848, with the Seneca Falls Convention. This convention opposed the discrimination of women. In the United Kingdom, the first women's rights movements appeared in the 1850s. The suffragette movement became strongly militant, organizing public demonstrations and hunger strikes, with famous members such as Emily Davison (1872-1913), Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), and Frances Parker (1875-1924).

Women of color also had feminist pioneers in this period. Most famous was the women's rights activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth, Afro-American and born in slavery, who gave the speech "Ain't I a woman?" at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851. She was one of the first activists to urge for a non-racist approach in feminism (Essed, 2005: 2).

Not everyone sympathized with the women's movement. Numerous anti-suffragette movements, including both men and women, strongly opposed the female vote (Sanders, 2004: 27). They believed there was no reason for women to participate in politics. Women who did, would be betraying family values and destroy their homes. Politics would consume their lives, they would forget to look after their children and their husband, and neglect their household chores. Not to mention that they could vote in opposition to their husband, which was to be avoided at all cost. Dramatic anti-suffragette pamphlets showed crying families abandoned by their voting mothers. Later in this work we will also see how similar arguments are used by opponents of political participation of indigenous women.

Globally, New Zealand was the first country to accept female voting rights in 1893. In Europe, World War I tempered suffragette activism, but on a political level the movement gained strength. During the war, women were summoned to work in areas traditionally reserved for men, such as military factories making ammunition and repairing airplanes. Women showed they could be equally important in the labor market, which supported their claim for equal political rights. In 1928, the *Equal Franchise Act* gave women in the United Kingdom universal suffrage at the age of twenty-one, just like men. In the United States of America, the legal implementation of the feminist demands developed differently compared to the United Kingdom as decisions could be taken at state level,

independently of the reforms made by the federal government. Thus, individual states had already been granting full or partial suffrage to women throughout the 19th and early 20th century[23]. Ultimately, women obtained the right to vote on a federal level with the implementation of the *Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution* of 1920 (Sanders, 2004: 24, 27; McPherson, 2000: 208-209).

Overall, first wave feminists focused mainly on white middle class women, the lower classes were rarely involved. Furthermore, this first wave was characterized by personal activism. Feminist theory was as good as unavailable; the movement was mainly politically driven. The participants were mostly individuals campaigning for a particular cause. Despite the existence of women's associations, there was no fight for general changes in society, a goal which would only be aspired by the second wave feminists. Nevertheless, their actions brought the female issue to the general public's attention, and managed to bring about political changes that marked a milestone in women's history (Sanders, 2004: 27-28).

2. Early and First Wave Feminism in Mexico

Mexican history has known famous women who are symbols of early female resistance. One of the most important figures is undoubtedly the autodidact poet and writer, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648/51-1695), a religious of the Saint Jerome Convent of Mexico City who through self-teaching, and notwithstanding the opposition and prohibitions, dedicated her entire life to study. Through her writings Sor Juana fought for equal treatment of men and women in colonial Mexico, and for the education of girls. Nowadays, Sor Juana is considered one of the first Mexican feminists, and she is recognized as one of the great female figures of national history. In 17th century Mexico, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was however an exception; with her extraordinary perception of gender relations she was far ahead of her time.

During the War for Independence (1810-1821) Mexico freed itself from colonial Spanish rule. Some women actively participated in the struggles; a few even achieved fame on the side of the insurgents. Most notable were Josefa '*la corregidora*' Ortiz de Domínguez (1773-1829), Gertrudis Bocanegra (1765-1818), and Leona Vicario (1789-1842), who became national heroes[24]. Despite their involvement in the struggle for independence, women were excluded from citizenship in the Mexican Constitution of 1824. This exclusion was not questioned and considered as something very natural.

[23] The state of Wyoming was the first state to grant female suffrage in 1869.

[24] On women during Mexican Independence War, see for example: S. ALANIZ (2009), *Mujeres por la independencia, 1810-1821*, Mexico: Editorial Lectorum; D. BUGEDA and J. M. RAMÍREZ VÉLEZ (2010), *Mujeres insurgentes*, Mexico: Senado de la República LXI Legislatura, Siglo Veintiuno Editores; G. MOLINA ENRÍQUEZ and C. LUGO HUBP (2009), *Mujeres en la historia, historias de mujeres. Una revisión de la historia de México a través de la participación de las mujeres. Época antigua-México 1950*, Mexico: Ediciones Salsipuedes.

But, compared to other legislations of that time, Mexican laws regarding the rights of women were very similar to those of other Western countries (Arrom, 1981: 496-498).

A few liberals supported female education, but because of the political struggles in the first years after the Independence, little changed in this period. Besides a few initiatives of religious orders, female education was not formally organized by the Mexican state. It would not be until 1869 that the first secondary school for girls would open in Mexico City. The following years, similar schools were set up in the province (Macías, 2002: 26).

In the years before the Mexican Revolution, middle class women, mostly teachers, journalists, and writers, participated in ongoing political debates, and published feminist and politically inspired magazines, such as *La Mujer Mexicana* (1904-1908) and *La Mujer Moderna* (Lau, 1995). Their main topics of interest were female education, a single sexual moral, legal equality, and equal wages.

During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), women again took part in action[25]. Famous figures were for example Carmen Serdán Alatriste[26] (1875-1948), Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza[27] (1875-1942), Dolores Jiménez y Muro[28] (1848-1925), and Hermila Galindo de Topete[29] (1896-1954). Middle class women participated in the Revolution in different ways: they donated funds, clandestinely bought arms and ammunition, and transmitted information to the revolutionaries. Women of the lower classes had virtually no other choice but to take part in the action. Soldiers were often accompanied by women who cooked, washed their clothes, and took care of the injured soldiers: the

[25] For more on women during the Mexican Revolution: B. HERNÁNDEZ Y LAZO and R. RINCÓN HUAROTA (eds.) (1992), *Las mujeres en la Revolución Mexicana. Biografías de mujeres revolucionarias*, Mexico: INHERM; A. LAU JAIVEN (1995), "Las mujeres en la revolución mexicana. Un punto de vista historiográfico", in: *Secuencia. Nueva Epoca*, 33, p. 85-103; A. LAU JAIVEN (2011), "Mujeres, feminismo y sufragio en los años veinte", in: LAU JAIVEN A. and ESPINOSA DAMIÁN G. (eds.) (2011), *Un fantasma recorre el siglo. Luchas feministas en México 1910-2010*, Mexico: UAM-Xochimilco, p. 59-94.

[26] Carmen Serdán Alatriste would have fired the first shot of the Revolution.

[27] Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza was a teacher, journalist, feminist, and one of Mexico's first suffragists. She actively participated during the Revolution, by developing the Plan de Ayala, among others. She also launched numerous feminist and political magazines. For more on Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza: A. LAU JAIVEN (2005), "La participación de las mujeres en la Revolución Mexicana: Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza (1875-1942)", in: *Diálogos Revista Electrónica de Historia*, 5: 1-2, 2005, p. 1-32.

[28] Dolores Jiménez y Muro was a teacher, poet, social activist, and journalist. She was one of the editors of the feminist magazine *La Mujer Mexicana*, and one of the presidents of the women's club *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*. She developed several proposals for far-reaching social reforms for the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata. In 1911, she was one of the principal authors of the political and social Plan de Tacubaya, and of the prologue of the Plan de Ayala.

[29] Hermila Galindo de Topete founded the feminist magazine *La Mujer Moderna*. She was sent by Carranza to participate in the feminist congress of 1916 in Yucatan, and organized several revolutionary clubs in various states. In 1952, after a few earlier failed attempts, she became the first elected woman in the Mexican federal Congress.

renowned *soldaderas*[30]. Although men and women fought side by side, female participation during the Revolution had little effect on the feminist cause.

Women only started to ask for female suffrage from the Mexican Revolution on. It can be noted that this is later than in the United Kingdom and the United States. One of the reasons was that effective suffrage in itself had not been possible during the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915), neither for women, nor for men. The Mexican Revolution that followed his rule, was politically a highly unstable period, leaving little space for a feminist movement (Macías, 2002: 183-184).

The feminist movement in Western Europe and the United States of America was supported by men, mostly from progressive and liberal groups. In Mexico however, male allies of the female cause were almost non-existent. The feminist movement received very little governmental support, and the same was true for the press: the influential newspaper *Excélsior* for example, opposed feminism. After the Revolution certain voices argued for female participation in politics, but the general opinion opposed to this idea. Following the arguments used in other Western countries, it was believed that women should not participate in politics because they would neglect their domestic responsibilities, and thus destroy their homes. They were furthermore considered too emotional and irrational to vote properly. The aspect that was most feared in revolutionary circles was the strong influence of the Catholic Church on women, because their loyalty to this colonial institution could jeopardize the Revolution. Between 1870 and 1940, there was some support for female education, but always with the ultimate goal of limiting the power of the Church, which had until then monopolized education. The supporters of the feminist movement never wanted to change the patriarchal social structures. The main goal for women was still to become good housewives (Macías, 2002: 15, 184-185).

A few revolutionary leaders, such as two governors of Yucatán, general Salvador Alvarado (1915-1918) and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-1924), supported the feminists and took measures in favor of women. The state of Yucatán, one of the places in Mexico where the political support for the Revolution was the strongest, became the ideal place to test some of the most radical ideas of social reform. But, these supporters of the female cause turned out to be too radical for the feminists of that period, and Alvarado and Carrillo were principally using the feminist debate to advance their own political agenda. Overall, they had a limited effect on the Mexican feminist movement (Macías, 2002: 77, 188).

[30] The *soldaderas* appeal to the imagination as an example of female heroism. Recently, several studies have been dedicated to the subject, for example: T. A., LINHARD (2005), *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press; E., SALAS (2006), *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military : Myth and History*, Austin: University of Texas Press; E., PONIATOWSKA (2007), *Las soldaderas*, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

First wave Mexican feminism encountered several other problems, in the first place the *machismo* that characterized Mexican society. But there was also opposition of the Catholic Church; although the Catholic Church was in conflict with the Mexican national state, it was still highly influential and it strongly opposed the feminist movement. Internally, the disagreements within the movement itself slowed it down. And finally, many women had to combine their activism with a job and with their domestic work, limiting their availability (Macías, 2002: 14-15).

In this period, the feminist movement was concentrated in specific regions of the Republic, such as Yucatan, and larger cities, such as Mexico City and Guadalajara; it excluded indigenous women and women of the lower classes. Nevertheless, many initiatives were taken during this first wave of Mexican feminism. Numerous women organizations were founded, several congresses were organized, and there were many exchanges at an ideological level. Although the movement was not inclusive and its results were limited, Mexican feminists were already very active in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, in parallel with the development of the feminist movement in Western countries, but with its own specificities.

Due to the persistent opposition, Mexican women would have to wait until 1958 to vote for the first time for presidential elections and thus attain full political rights (Macías, 2002: 180-181).

B. Second Wave: A Feminism of Women's Liberation

A second feminist wave started in the 1960s. In this period, women pleaded for political as well as social and cultural equality. They opposed gender based discrimination in education, employment, and the domestic sphere, among others. There was a shift from a feminism of equal rights, to a feminism of women's liberation. The movement, predominantly focused on action, became an ideological and theoretically based movement.

1. Theoretical Base

The first works to inspire and influence the second wave feminists were *The Second Sex* (1949, first English translation in 1952), written by French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), by U.S.A. writer Betty Friedan. In these renowned works, the authors developed a theoretically founded critique against the subordinated position of women, and they argued in favor of far-reaching social and ideological changes.

Following Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist claim that 'existence precedes essence' – thus, that things and persons first exist, and only later get a meaning – Simone de Beauvoir stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (Beauvoir, 1972: 295)". De Beauvoir was one of the first to put forward that it is not biology that defines what a women is, but society. In male-dominated cultures women are defined in relation to men, and they are seen as 'the Other'. For de Beauvoir, this social construction of woman as 'the Other' is fundamental to women's oppression (Beauvoir, 1972).

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan criticized the idea that women need to take care of their children and their household to find fulfilment. Like de Beauvoir, she pleaded for a general awareness-raising regarding the oppression of women (Friedan, 1972).

Inspired by de Beauvoir and Friedan, various authors in the late 1960s and 1970s started publishing feminist theoretical works, among others Kate Millett, Eva Figes, Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer, and Robin Morgan[31]. Kate Millett proposed a broadening of the term 'patriarchy'. Traditionally, patriarchy referred to the dominant position of an elder male figure within a traditional kinship structure. Millett extended this definition to an institutionalized system of oppression of all women by all men. She also pointed out that the existing oppression is primarily maintained through ideological control (Millet, 1969). Most of these writers tried to situate the oppression in a social and economic context, and in a historical and cultural perspective. They erased undeniable differences, but their goal was to show the universality of patriarchal oppression (Thornham, 2004: 36-38).

Following the growing interest in the theoretical debate regarding the position of women, feminist ideology was slowly adopted by scholars in different fields of academia, such as sociology, anthropology, literature, history, etcetera. These scholars recognized that research had suffered from a very strong male bias; most research focused on male activities, making women invisible. Furthermore, the majority of researchers were male themselves and approached the studied subjects from a male perspective. In the 1970s, universities started offering specific courses and creating departments for Women Studies. In these departments feminist theories could be developed and the existing male bias was tackled.

[31] For example: K. MILLETT (1969), *Sexual Politics*, New York: Doubleday; E. FIGES (1970), *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*, London: Macmillan; S. FIRESTONE (1970), *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, New York: Morrow; G. GREER (1970), *The Female Eunuch*, London: MacGibbon & Kee; R. MORGAN (1970), *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, New York: Random House.

2. Second Wave Activism in the West

Second wave feminism was not only about theory. The 1960s and 1970s were politically and ideologically turbulent decades. The never-ending Vietnam War brought about demonstrations for peace. Cultural movements, such as the hippie movement, were very popular. The younger generations opposed conformity and conservative society, and many protest groups were created for freedom and equality. In 1968, the activism also resulted in numerous student revolts in countries all over the world. The spirit of liberation and the theories on class and capitalism also influenced the ideas of young women on gender (Bradley, 2008: 33-35). In many countries, feminist activist groups were founded.

The demands of second-wave feminism differed from those of first-wave activists. The main goals were now centered on sexual freedom for women and the right to control their own bodies, including, among others, the legalization of birth control and abortion, and the creation of legal instruments against domestic violence and sexual assault. In the economic sphere, the claim of 'equal pay for equal work' remained, but this was extended to the recognition of traditional female activities, asking thus for 'equal pay for work of equal value'. On a domestic level, feminists called for increased male participation in household chores and childcare (McPherson, 2000: 209).

At international level, the United Nations declared 1975 'International Women's Year', and organized the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City. In 1979, the General Assembly of the UN adopted the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) (UN, 1979). The decade from 1975 to 1985 was named 'International Women's Decade'. This international acknowledgement of the precarious position of women fostered a growing consciousness among women, and influenced feminist movements around the world (Kurian, 2004: 71). It also stimulated worldwide research on women (Chant & Craske, 2007: 42-43). Three other world conferences on women would follow, in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995).

Second wave feminism tried to unite women and create one 'sisterhood'. However, there were many theoretical differences and conflicts, and some groups, such as working class women and Black Feminists, were excluded. Much of the movement's political strength dwindled because of these internal differences (Thornham, 2004: 41-42).

3. Historical Feminism in Mexico

After obtaining equal political rights in 1958, a second feminist wave also started in Mexico. The writer Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) was one of the first Mexican intellectuals to actively support the feminist cause. Her poetry and literary work were explicitly feminist, but the discourse she gave on the 15th of February 1971 at the Museo Nacional de Antropología on International Women's Day, was particularly important as it was one of the first times that, the subordination of Mexican women was publicly denounced at a national level (Castellanos, 1995: 22).

Mexican feminism emerged in the context of the social movements of 1968. It was influenced by events in other parts of the world, such as the French protests in May 1968, the Cuban revolution, the hippie movement, the feminist movement in the U.S.A., etcetera, but also by the Mexican social movement. Nevertheless, so-called historical feminism only had a limited group of participants, defined by their social, cultural, and political position. It mostly consisted of middle class women from university milieus and left-wing democrats, who seem to have had very little connections with other social movements of that period (González, 2001; Lamas, 1994; Lau, 1987 & 2000; Espinosa Damián, 2009: 58-60).

Different types of organizations were founded in the 1970s[32]. Feminists became aware that the problems they were facing were not only personal, but reflected a social state of being, and thus political action was needed. But, internal conflicts and leadership problems prevented the organizations from moving on. According to Marta Lamas, one of the main problems of the Mexican feminist movement of the 1970s was that the participants themselves, mostly educated urban middle-class women, did not need the movement to improve their situation: their involvement was rather a matter of conviction and not necessity (Lamas, 1994: 147). Furthermore, the goals of historical feminism were limited; they mainly fought for voluntary motherhood and the right to abort, and for the condemnation of violence against women (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 74).

[32] On these organizations, see for example: ESPINOSA (2009: 61-64), GONZÁLEZ (2001: 85-168), and LAU (1987: 75-138).

C. Third Wave: Against Universal Womanhood

Already during the second wave, the generally accepted definition of femininity, and the supposed universality of the position of women were increasingly challenged. Anthropological research had shown that there are no universal dichotomies between men and women; social structures and gender relations differ depending on the historical and cultural context (Joyce, 2000: 23).

1. Postcolonial and Postmodern Critiques

In the 1980s and 1990s, following postcolonial theorists such as Franz Fanon (1952), Albert Memmi (1957), Edward Said (1978), and Homi Bhabha (1983; 1994), feminist movements in non-western countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, started criticizing the Western white middle-class bias in feminism. They claimed that the prevalent definition of what a women is and what she needs, did not apply to women all over the world. Furthermore, white feminism had constructed an image of the 'Third World woman' that did not correspond to reality, and was experienced as a new form of suppression. They rejected the typically Western points of view, and started asking new pertinent questions about the relation between gender and imperialism, colonialism, and race. This gave this new feminist strand the name of postcolonial feminism. Feminists from cultural minorities in Western societies also started to challenge the class-based analyses which excluded them (McPherson, 2000: 209). Indigenous and First Nation feminists took a stand in the theoretical discourse, and showed that they had specific needs. Among the main postcolonial feminist authors are Chandra Talpade Mohanty, with her essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), and Trinh T. Minh-ha with her work *Woman, Native, Other. Writing postcoloniality and feminism* (1989). In the context of this work, postcolonial theory offers important points of view that are discussed in the theoretical chapter.

The realization that there was no 'universal womanhood' led to a third feminist wave: postmodern feminism. Modernism always considered that societies were structured, and therefore could be analyzed, whereas postmodernism rejected the grand theories and metanarratives. According to postmodernist theorists, social science could merely aspire to describe particular social processes within their specific context (Bradley, 2008: 64).

Third wave feminism was mainly influenced by postmodern and post-structuralist theorists, such as Jacques Derrida (deconstructivism), and Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis). The work of Michel Foucault was especially important, because of his emphasis on the material body, and the discourses of power. He pointed out how theorists built dominant discourses, and thus created fixed identities.

Victorian psychologists created, for example, the image of 'the hysterical woman'. This discourse influenced the way people thought about the capacities of women, and about gender relations. Following these ideas, postmodern feminist theorists focused on how the categories of 'man' and 'woman' are culturally constructed through discourse (Bradley, 2008: 64-66; Maynard, 2005: 34).

Other minority groups also opposed the universality of given concepts, and adopted the discourse approach. Lesbian feminists, such as Judith Butler[33], drew on the works of Foucault and Lacan to develop a 'queer' theory. Butler claims that the social construction of gender can also differ within the same cultural society. According to Butler, gender is not connected to anatomy, therefore there can be more than two genders (Maynard, 2005: 34).

Thus, contrary to second wave feminists, one of the characteristics of third wave feminism is the acceptance of variety within feminism. Visweswaran puts it this way:

> "If second wave feminists saw women as fundamentally equal in their subordination, third wave feminists insist on the inequality of women's subordination based upon the particular location of different communities in racial/class formations or heterosexual economies (Visweswaran, 1997: 596)."

This opening up of the movement paved the way for alternative forms of feminism, such as indigenous feminism.

2. The United Nations and Women

At an international policy level, the 1985 *World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace* in Nairobi (the Third World Conference on Women), has been seen as the birth of global feminism. The conference acknowledged that the goals of the 1975 Second World Conference on Women in Mexico City had not been reached. The participating governments declared that there was a need to see all issues as women's issues too (UN, 2000a).

In 1995, the United Nations organized the *Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace* in Beijing. The conference had a large number of participants, including more than 2.100 NGOs form around the world and representatives of 189 governments (UN, 1997b). The meeting encouraged the empowerment and participation of women in the decision-making process at a global level (Bradley, 2008: 201). Among the main issues discussed were the advancement and empowerment of women in relation to women's human rights, women and

[33] For example: J. BUTLER (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York & London: Routledge.

poverty, women and decision-making, the girl-child, and violence against women. The conference participants stressed that the advancement of women is indispensable for the development of any society as a whole. The gender perspective is highly necessary in the search for sustainable development. The 1995 Beijing Conference resulted in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration wanted to ensure that the gender perspective was implemented in national, regional, and international programs and policy making. The Platform went beyond the 1985 Nairobi Conference, declaring that women's rights were human rights. The participants committed to take action in order for these rights to be guaranteed. (UN, 2011a).

In the year 2000, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. This resolution "urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict (UN, 2000b; art.1)".

The United Nations has given special attention to the eradication of violence against women. In 1993, the General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (UN, 1993). In 2007, the theme of the International Women's Day was "Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls". In 2008, the Secretary-General's Global Campaign was launched, entitled: "UNiTE to End Violence Against Women"[34]. In 2014, UN Women initiated the HeForShe campaign, a solidarity campaign to include men in the fight for gender equality[35].

All of these actions reveal an international political will to address gender inequality at the highest levels. However, they had varying results at a national level. The commitment at international level often lost its impetus when reaching national and local policy makers, which, as we will see throughout this study, has certainly been true for Mexico.

3. Popular and Civil Feminism in Mexico

After the 1960s, Mexico suffered from an economic and social depression: the GNP dropped, the population was growing, there was an urgent need for the attribution of land, unemployment rates were going up rapidly, and public resources were lacking. As a result, new left-wing, social, political, and union movements became active. In the context of these popular movements, new women's organizations emerged, influenced by feminist ideology and new left-wing discourse. Women active in the popular movements began to realize that their grieves were not solely related to class, but also to gender, and that the needs of women were no priority for their mixed unions and popular

[34] For more information: http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/index.shtml
[35] For more information: http://heforshe.org/; http://www.unwomen.org/

associations (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 94). Thus, based on the existing leftist structures and political networks, organizations were created of female factory workers, female farmers, and urban women.

The earthquake of September 1985 gave a new impulse to popular feminism, especially in Mexico City[36]. A large number of new popular organizations were founded to support the victims, among others a seamstresses' union that would come up for these workers' rights. National actions for female farmers turned out to be difficult to realize, but initiatives were taken at a local level, mainly under impulse of NGOs, academic groups, and social policy programs such as *Progresa* and *Oportunidades*. In an urban context, local neighborhood and resident associations played an important role in the emancipation of women, as they gave housewives the opportunity to participate as full citizens in the public space (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 108, 114-117, 129).

At the beginning of the 1980s, there were only a few civil organizations associated with the popular movements in Mexico, but their role as support groups was very important and highly valued. Women's organizations active within civil feminism had performed community and educational work, and from this experience they developed specific methodologies. NGOs often imposed their feminist views on women's organizations, but the civil feminists wanted to create their own discourse based on a dialogue with women (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 153-154, 159-165, 173).

Thus, a large variety of women's organizations were created in the different spheres of Mexican society. Both popular and civil feminists were able to participate at regional and international meetings. Although it was difficult to organize at these levels, it gave these women visibility and brought them in contact with women in similar situations with whom they could exchange experiences.

4. Indigenous Feminism in Mexico

In the evolution of Mexican feminism, indigenous women were also able to conquer spaces and to speak up about their specific needs. Two important events stimulated the emergence of a female indigenous movement: the movement of *500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular* in 1992 – a movement that rose from the *Encuentro de Dos Mundos: 1492-1992* –, and the uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in 1994. These events found their origin in the peasant and popular revolts after 1968 in the context of the political and economic crisis.

[36] For more information on the earthquake of 1985: M. T. CAMARILLO (ed.) (1987), *Memoria periodística del terremoto (19 de septiembre - 10 de octubre 1985)*, Mexico: UNAM; M. FERNÁNDEZ (1990), *Ciudad rota: la ciudad de México después del sismo*, Mexico: UNAM; G. LOAEZA et al. (2005), *Terremoto. Ausentes/Presentes, 20 años después*, Mexico: Planeta.

The Mexican government reduced the structural resources for agriculture, and privatized companies supporting rural farmers. The 1994 *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) forced Mexican farmers to face unequal competition with U.S.A. farmers who had access to considerably more resources. At a social level, the government chose for assistance policies. These policies did not resolve the situations of poverty for rural and indigenous peoples. They emphasized the inequalities, and showed how discrimination based on class and race had become natural in Mexico. The general discontent resulted in a struggle of the peasant and popular movement against the existing political structures, and against the omnipresent clientelism and paternalism (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 86-87).

The uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional on the 1st of January 1994 was a turning point for the indigenous movement. The main demands of the Mexican indigenous movement were the observance of constitutional rights and of their specific indigenous rights, and free determination and autonomy of indigenous peoples.

Together with the Zapatista uprising, a movement of indigenous women emerged. These women supported the claim of autonomy based on ethnicity and culture of the Zapatista movement, but in addition, they opposed the subordination and discrimination they experienced as women. However, the development of the indigenous feminist movement was not the result of the Zapatista uprising, because it started earlier. It was rooted in the rural struggles of popular feminism. The indigenous feminist movement was also influenced by the ideas of historical and civil feminism. But, none of these feminist groups included a specific ethnic component in their claims; therefore, there was a need for a movement addressing both ethnicity and gender (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 232-233). An organization already active for women before the Zapatista uprising is, for example, Ser Mixe (Servicios del pueblo Mixe). This mixed indigenous organization was created in 1988 in Oaxaca for *Ayuuk* peoples (Mixe), first offering programs concerning alimentation and nutrition, and later also on children's health, reproductive health, the environment, savings and credit. In addition, Ser Mixe started to support the group Xaam të'ëxy, created in 1983 by Mixe women of the community of Santa María Tlahuitoltepec. This group was one of the first indigenous women's organizations in the region (Robles, personal communication, 2011). The rise of an indigenous feminist movement was thus not only linked to the political climate, but also the result of an ongoing evolution and of the agency of indigenous women themselves.

Already on the 8th of March 1993, nine months before the uprising, the EZLN had accepted the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* (see infra). This law was a unifying factor for indigenous women all over Mexico. Indigenous women demanded rights equal to men at all levels of society, politically, economically, as well as socially, including regulations against gender based violence.

Revolutionary Law of Women (EZLN, 1993)[37].

In their just struggle for the liberation of our people, the EZLN incorporates women in the revolutionary struggle regardless of race, creed, color or political affiliation, with the only requirement to endorse the demands of the exploited people and their commitment to comply and enforce the laws and regulations of the revolution. Moreover, taking into account the situation of working women in Mexico, their just demands for equality and justice are incorporated in the following Revolutionary Law of Women:

First.- Women, regardless of race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in the place and to an extent determined by their willingness and ability.

Second.- Women have the right to work and receive a fair wage.

Third.- Women have the right to decide the number of children they want and will care for.

Fourth.- Women have the right to participate in the affairs of the community and take up a *cargo* if they are freely and democratically elected.

Fifth.- Women and their children are entitled to PRIMARY CARE regarding their health and nutrition.

Sixth.- Women have the right to education.

[37] Original:
Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres (EZLN, 1993)

En su justa lucha por la liberación de nuestro pueblo, el EZLN incorpora a las mujeres en la lucha revolucionaria sin importar su raza, credo, color o filiación política, con el único requisito de hacer suyas las demandas del pueblo explotado y su compromiso a cumplir y hacer cumplir las leyes y reglamentos de la revolución. Además, tomando en cuenta la situación de la mujer trabajadora en México, se incorporan sus justas demandas de igualdad y justicia en la siguiente LEY REVOLUCIONARIA DE MUJERES:

Primero.- Las mujeres, sin importar su raza, credo, color o filiación política, tienen derecho a participar en la lucha revolucionaria en el lugar y grado que su voluntad y capacidad determinen.
Segundo.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a trabajar y recibir un salario justo.
Tercero.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a decidir el número de hijos que pueden tener y cuidar.
Cuarto.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a participar en los asuntos de la comunidad y tener cargo si son elegidas libre y democráticamente.
Quinto.- Las mujeres y sus hijos tienen derecho a ATENCION PRIMARIA en su salud y alimentación.
Sexto.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a la educación.
Séptimo.- Las mujeres tienen derecho a elegir su pareja y a no ser obligadas por la fuerza a contraer matrimonio.
Octavo.- Ninguna mujer podrá ser golpeada o maltratada físicamente ni por familiares ni por extraños. Los delitos de intento de violación o violación serán castigados severamente.
Noveno.- Las mujeres podrán ocupar cargos de dirección en la organización y tener grados militares en las fuerzas armadas revolucionarias.
Décimo.- Las mujeres tendrán todos los derechos y obligaciones que señalan las leyes y reglamentos revolucionarios.

Seventh.- Women have the right to choose their partner and not be compelled by force to marry.

Eighth.- No woman shall be beaten or physically abused neither by family members nor strangers. Crimes of rape or attempted rape will be severely punished.

Ninth.- Women may hold positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.

Tenth.- Women will have all the rights and obligations contained in the revolutionary laws and regulations.

After the Zapatista uprising of January 1994, indigenous women organized an increasing number of meetings, both at a local, regional, and national level. In addition, they created networks of indigenous women. In Oaxaca for example, Ser Mixe developed a network of Mixe women (Red de Mujeres Mixes). Throughout the country, indigenous women organized and used the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* as a reference for their actions. The creation of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (Conami) in 1997, which united indigenous women's associations from fourteen Mexican states, was an important achievement (Robles, personal communication, 2011; Espinosa Damián, 2009: 255-258; Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 127-129).

The activism of Zapatista women inspired other indigenous women throughout the country to participate in social movements and demand equal rights. But it also has to be pointed out that many of the participants in these meetings were women with several years of experience in local and regional cooperatives and organizations; these indigenous women were not beginners in this field, they had been engaged for a long time but were now offered new platforms where they could reinforce and improve their network. Through the different meetings and initiatives women got more opportunities to share their experiences at different levels (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 143).

The indigenous feminists developed their own discourse, and criticized both modernity and tradition, as both worlds enabled their subordination. They fought for the autonomy of their communities, but extended their fight to their individual and personal autonomy, and to the autonomy of their bodies (Espinosa Damián, 2009: 233-234). Following the impetus of the Zapatista rebellion, they were able to conquer a variety of formal and informal channels to successfully spread their message. Women did not only take up arms within the EZLN, they also put up actions within their communities.

Yet the position of indigenous feminists has been a difficult one. First, the indigenous women's movement encountered resistance within the mixed indigenous movement. Female indigenous

activists, such as Martha Sánchez (Amuzga of Guerrero), Sofía Robles (Mixe of Oaxaca)[38], Cándida Jiménez (Mixe of Oaxaca), and Margarita Gutiérrez (Hñahñu of Hidalgo), recall their difficulties to actively participate and have a voice within their indigenous organizations. They experienced gender discrimination from their male comrades. Furthermore, these women were seen as traitors for exposing 'private' gender problems in their communities. As the women also approached the traditional normative system of '*usos y costumbres*' from a critical point of view, their male companions experienced this as betrayal, and accused them of weakening the movement (Sánchez Néstor, 2003: 305; Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 131).

In a press release of the 26th of January 1994, *Subcomandante* Marcos illustrates the internal struggles women had to face to get the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* accepted:

> "That is the truth: the first EZLN uprising was in March 1993 and it was led by the Zapatista women (Subcomandante Marcos, 1994)[39]."

Furthermore, indigenous feminists have also experienced conflicts with non-indigenous feminists. Although indigenous feminists are fighting for equality too, their demands are not entirely the same. Their struggle is always within the context of their claims for collective cultural rights. They look for a feminism that works within their own traditional context. The non-indigenous feminists on the other hand, have often acted in a very paternalistic way, trying to impose their views on gender relations, and forcing indigenous women to question their traditions. They do not seem to understand indigenous women live in a different cultural context and not necessarily share the same views and priorities. The strongest conflicts are in relation to sexuality and reproductive rights. For example, the decriminalization of abortion is an important topic for non-indigenous feminists, but for indigenous feminists abortion is a topic that is not up for discussion (Rovira, 1999: 29). In this context, Western feminism has shown its Western bias. Indigenous women should be able to define their own priorities without being forced into certain directions. It is part of the autonomy they demand. There is no need for cultural relativism either, but an equal relationship is necessary between the different strands of feminism in which there is an exchange of ideas and not an imposition of opinions.

The criticism voiced by indigenous women against a number of harmful traditions, has been used by opponents to impeach the indigenous movement. The subordinate position of indigenous women is seen as proof that indigenous communities are unwilling to adapt, and are stubbornly stuck in rigid and conservative traditions.

[38] Sofía Robles is of Zapotec origin. However, since she married a Mixe she has primarily been active in the Mixe movement.
[39] Original: "Esa es la verdad: el primer alzamiento del EZLN fue en marzo de 1993 y lo encabezaron las mujeres zapatistas."

It is true that it has been difficult for indigenous women to conquer spaces. In 2001, indigenous peoples organized the *Marcha del Color de la Tierra* to support the *Ley de la Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* on indigenous rights and culture (known as the *Ley Cocopa*). At the simultaneously held second *Congreso Nacional Indígena*, women experienced resistance from the male indigenous leaders in the organization of a Women's Table. The Zapatista *comandanta* Esther criticized this resistance in her renowned speech at the National Congress on the 28th of March 2001. Her speech was revolutionary in the sense that she, an indigenous person and woman, spoke on behalf of the EZLN at the Mexican National Congress. The text also proved the high level of analysis indigenous women were capable of. In her speech, *comandanta* Esther refuted the allegations both of non-indigenous critics and critics within the indigenous movement. She was very critical, both of the sexism of traditional indigenous culture and racism in Mexican society. Feminists had objected that the *Ley Cocopa* marginalized indigenous women; they worried women would be suppressed if the traditional '*usos y costumbres'* were implemented. *Comandanta* Esther, however, supported the law, and stated it was the current situation that was marginalizing women, and that the law would make it possible for women to take matters in their own hands. She, as many other female indigenous activists before her, stated that indigenous women knew which uses and customs were good and which ones were bad. In her speech she thus criticized the paternalistic treatment of indigenous women. She also emphasized that the struggles of indigenous feminists and the fight of the indigenous movement are not mutually exclusive (EZLN, 2001).

Indigenous women are questioning both modernity and tradition. They refuse to believe they have to change through modernity or remain the same because of tradition. One of their statements is: "You can remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same[40]" (Hernández Castillo, 2001: 212). For Aída Hernández Castillo, indigenous feminism is a bridge between the indigenous movement that does not recognize its own sexist posture, and the feminist movement that does not recognize its ethnocentric approach (Hernández Castillo, 2001: 207).

Unfortunately, the *Ley Cocopa* was not approved by Congress. This caused tension within the indigenous movement in general, and resulted in the weakening of the movement. The women's movement also lost some of its strength, but it continued to bring women from different organizations together, for example in the *Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América* (2002), creating local groups such as the Coordinadora Guerrerense de Mujeres Indígenas (2004) or the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca (2011). The initiatives have been diverse, with varying impact. But, it is an important achievement that all indigenous women's organizations have adopted

[40] Original: "Se puede permanecer cambiando y cambiar permaneciendo."

a certain degree of gender perspective in their discourses and actions, and that they have gained a lot of experience.

D. Conclusion

Mexican feminism developed in parallel with the feminist movement in Europe and the rest of North America, but it also had its own specific characteristics. Early on there were people in Mexico with very advanced ideas regarding women's rights. Feminists first claimed educational rights, then social rights. The demand for political rights came later, and it would take much longer to obtain them.

During the first feminist wave, the evolution of the feminist movement differed from one region to the other. The movement developed most in Yucatan, and in the larger cities, such as Mexico City and Guadalajara. Other parts of the Republic were much less influenced by the emerging feminism. First wave feminism was also primarily a movement of middle class women; indigenous women and women of the lower classes were excluded.

In general, there was a lot of opposition to the feminist movement, from the Catholic Church, the government, and public opinion. In addition, the movement was slowed down because of recurrent internal disagreements. Finally, the feminists were limited in their actions because they had to combine their activism with their day job and with their domestic tasks.

Nevertheless, numerous initiatives were taken by first wave feminists, women associations were founded and several conferences were organized. The movement was not inclusive, and its results were limited, but these initiatives show that Mexican feminists were already very active in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Second and third wave Mexican feminism developed gradually, often pushed forward by specific events, such as the social movement of 1968, the earthquake of September 1985, and the uprising of the EZLN in 1994. These different contexts resulted in different main currents within Mexican feminism: historical, popular, civil, and indigenous feminism.

Mexican feminism has been active at different levels, but it has always struggled to be taken seriously, striving to convince all actors of the importance of its message. The persisting machismo in Mexican society has been an important obstacle, as well as the lack of governmental support, but also the resistance of the different mixed movements that accused feminists of dividing the general

social movement. Finally, internal debates and conflicts between the different feminist currents resulted in fragmented actions which ultimately weakened the movement.

For many years, Mexican feminism has been a struggle led by mestizo, middle class women. Only during the last decades, attention shifted to indigenous women because of their own interventions. It is important to point out that indigenous women had already started to organize themselves before the Zapatista uprising. They were partially influenced by the feminist movement, but they developed their own independent program, with their own priorities. This illustrates the agency of indigenous women. It also shows how indigenous women do not need 'saving' by other feminists. They have been very capable of organizing themselves, of developing a critical discourse in which they are not afraid to question their own culture, and of planning concrete actions.

For indigenous women, it has been a very important emancipation process. They have gained extensive experience and have taken own initiatives within different types of organizations, both at national and international level. Today, this experience allows them to speak up and to have a clear view of what they need to do to improve their own situation and that of their communities. But, as we will see further on, more spaces in mainstream Mexican society still need to open up for them to be heard at all levels of social, economic, political, cultural, and academic life.

IV. Women and Health Care in Mexico: The Need for Education, Prevention, and an Intercultural Approach

Of all Mexicans, approximately one out of ten persons is indigenous[41] (INEGI, 2010). Currently, they are the most vulnerable population group in Mexico, with the lowest socio-economic level of development. They suffer from poverty and have limited access to public services and education. The lack of adapted medical health care, especially in rural and indigenous regions, is one of the most basic issues Mexican indigenous peoples are facing. This problem affects entire communities, however, women and children are particularly vulnerable. The levels of malnutrition, infant mortality, and maternal mortality are considerably higher in indigenous than in non-indigenous communities.

This chapter will focus on some of the health risks Mexican women are confronted with, and more particularly the health risks related to reproduction and maternity. Even for these natural processes, the available medical care in Mexico does not always seem to be adequate. All Mexican women, both indigenous and non-indigenous, can encounter the problems described here. However, the risks women face vary, depending on their economic possibilities and depending on their geographical location. Women in rural communities are disadvantaged, but indigenous women are even more vulnerable. We will look at certain factors impeding access of indigenous women to adequate health care. The main questions that will be asked here are: which basic health risks are indigenous women facing, and what needs to be improved in Mexican health care to offer an adequate service to indigenous communities, and thus reduce their health risks?

Article 24 of the UNDRIP indicates that an approach to health care for indigenous peoples should be twofold. On the one hand indigenous peoples should have the right to maintain their traditional medicine and health practices, on the other hand they should have equal access to all social and health care services, without being the subject of discrimination:

> "Article 24
>
> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

[41] Based on self-ascription.

2. Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right (UN, 2007)."

The Mexican Constitution obliges authorities to guarantee access of indigenous peoples to the national health care system. It also states that traditional medicine should be used when advantageous.

"Article 2. The Mexican Nation is one and indivisible.

[…]

B. To promote equal opportunities for indigenous peoples and eliminate any discriminatory practice, the Federation, States, and Municipalities, will establish the institutions and determine the necessary policies to ensure the observance of the rights of indigenous peoples and the integral development of their peoples and communities, which should be designed and operated together with them.

To eliminate the shortcomings and lags that affect indigenous peoples and communities, these authorities have the obligation to:

[…]

III. Ensure effective access to health services by expanding the coverage of the national system, also making proper use of traditional medicine, and support nutrition among indigenous peoples through food programs, especially for children (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[42]."

[42] Original:
"Artículo 2o. La Nación Mexicana es única e indivisible.
[...]
B. La Federación, los Estados y los Municipios, para promover la igualdad de oportunidades de los indígenas y eliminar cualquier práctica discriminatoria, establecerán las instituciones y determinarán las políticas necesarias para garantizar la vigencia de los derechos de los indígenas y el desarrollo integral de sus pueblos y comunidades, las cuales deberán ser diseñadas y operadas conjuntamente con ellos.
Para abatir las carencias y rezagos que afectan a los pueblos y comunidades indígenas, dichas autoridades, tienen la obligación de:
[...]
III. Asegurar el acceso efectivo a los servicios de salud mediante la ampliación de la cobertura del sistema nacional, aprovechando debidamente la medicina tradicional, así como apoyar la nutrición de los indígenas mediante programas de alimentación, en especial para la población infantil (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

Many government programs have been developed to improve health care in indigenous communities, however, progress is slow. According to Soledad González Montes, this is partly due to a lack of information on the condition of indigenous peoples. Some specific studies have been made, but there is a pressing need for up-to-date and accurate data. The data collected by health surveys give a certain idea of the problems faced by health care services. However, little is known about the real needs of the potential users of these services (González Montes, 2003: 3, 8).

The impact of culture on health care is one of the elements that has not received due attention, and is often even ignored by medical practitioners in Mexico. Cultural traditions, religious beliefs, including taboos, can influence the patients' experience of illness and health care. To address the health situation of indigenous peoples, it is essential to understand their perspective on health, illness, and medicine.

Here could lie a role for anthropologists, advocates, and indigenous experts. They have the ability to approach indigenous communities from a cultural perspective. They are in a privileged position, between the indigenous community and the occidental way of thinking. Their understanding of indigenous cultures makes it possible for them to be a link between the two cultures. Anthropologists could bring them together, and improve their mutual understanding. Thus, the anthropologist would transcend the theoretical level of his field of study, and commit on a social level. It would be best if anthropologists and advocates team up with indigenous experts and – in general – if indigenous experts, indigenous researchers, and indigenous students (female and male) take over the discipline of anthropology in a reconstruction of their own cultural history and an analysis of the socio-economic and political issues in their communities.

In their research, anthropologists do not always consider concepts of body and illness. This is often seen as something specific for medical anthropology. When discussed, it is looked at from a descriptive perspective. The anthropologist can, for example, explain the dual concept of 'hot' and 'cold' in Mesoamerican cultures[43] (e.g. Monaghan, 1995; Olavarría, 2009). But the question is rarely

[43] According to this concept, everything that surrounds us has a 'hot', 'neutral', or 'cold' characteristic. A person needs to preserve the balance between the elements. A disruption of this balance can lead to disease. Therefore, in specific circumstances certain types of food should, for example, be avoided. For more discussions on the hot and cold dichotomy and on its origins see among others: J. M. CHEVALIER and A. SÁNCHEZ BAIN (2003), *The Hot and the Cold: Ills of Humans and Maize in Native Mexico*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; G. M. FOSTER (1953), "Relationships between Spanish and Spanish-American Folk Medicine", in: *Journal of American Folklore*, 66, p. 201-217; A. LÓPEZ AUSTIN (1980), *Cuerpo humano e ideología: las concepciones de los antiguos nahuas*, Mexico: UNAM; B. R. ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO (1980), "Las yerbas de Tláloc", in: *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 14, p. 287-314; B. R. ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO (1986), "Aztec Sources of Some Mexican Folk Medicine", in: STEINER, R.P. (ed.) *Folk Medicine. The Art and the Science*, Washington, D.C.: American Chemical Society, p. 1-22; B. R. ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO (1989), *Syncretism in Mexican and Mexican-American Folk Medicine*,

asked what the relation is between traditional concepts and allopath medicine. How do Western and Mesoamerican concepts of health interact in the lives of indigenous peoples? What influence do the traditional beliefs have when visiting an allopath doctor? Anthropologists tend to focus on the traditional medicine, and rarely discuss situations in which indigenous peoples go to allopath doctors. Very little discussions can be found about the problems indigenous peoples experience within the Mexican occidental health care system, or about the lack of access to medical services.

A brief overview will first be given of the general situation of health care in Mexico. Then we will turn to specific health issues women are faced with. First, the focus will lie on reproductive health, including family planning, the use of contraceptives, the medical and emancipatory consequences of teenage pregnancies and early marriages, abortion, and forced sterilizations. For each topic the current situation of Mexican women will be analyzed, with specific attention for indigenous women. Subsequently, we will look more closely at maternal health. In this context, the high levels of maternal mortality within indigenous communities are an indicator for a larger problem. Therefore, the importance of an intercultural approach to health care will be discussed. Attention will be given to the difficulties indigenous peoples are confronted with within occidental medicine, and to the role traditional medicine could be playing to improve the medical care offered to indigenous communities. To illustrate this, the role of traditional midwives or *parteras* will be explained, as well as the need for a humanization of delivery in Mexico.

The available data on health care in Mexico, and especially health care studies with a gendered or cultural perspective, are very limited. The information for this chapter was obtained by analyzing specialized literature. Soledad González Montes, Roberto Campos Navarro, and Sheila Cosminksy are among the few scholars that have more recently been working on health care in Mexican indigenous communities. This information was complemented with survey results and statistics from official institutions, such as the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, and the Consejo Nacional de Población. However, the available statistics are again very limited.

In addition, two interviews were conducted with experts working in the medical field. The first interview was with an indigenous woman. Flor Julián Santiago is Mixtec, from San Antonio Huitepec in the state of Oaxaca. She studied medicine, and has an additional masters' degree in medical sciences. Flor Julián has worked with indigenous communities with Doctors Without Borders, mostly in Oaxaca and Chiapas. She also has family members who are traditional healers. Although she has

College Park: University of Maryland; I. SIGNORINI (1989), "Sobre algunos aspectos sincréticos de la medicina popular Mexicana", in: *L'Uomo*, 2:1, p. 125-144.

been trained as an allopath physician, both during her studies and when dealing with patients, she has given specific attention to the cultural component in health care. The expertise and points of view of Flor Julián are important for this research, because she has experienced firsthand which problems indigenous communities are still facing regarding health care. Furthermore, she understands, both from a personal and professional perspective, the relation between allopath and traditional medicine. To gain more insight in the specific topic of maternal health, a second interview was conducted with Araceli Gil. Araceli Gil is a midwife, and director of the civil organization Nueve Lunas, based in Oaxaca. Nueve Lunas offers professional midwife trainings with an intercultural approach. For many years, Araceli Gil has also been advocating the humanization of delivery in Mexico[44]. Her experience with indigenous and professional midwifery is very valuable for a better understanding of the specific situation of indigenous women. It fosters reflection on a health care system that would work in an intercultural context.

A. General Health Care Situation in Mexico

The health situation in Mexico has improved during the last decades. Life expectancy increased significantly, from 48 years in 1950 to 74.5 years in 2013, and child mortality was also reduced by almost two thirds between 1990 and 2011. Vaccination blocked infectious diseases, and there are fewer problems related to malnutrition. Better life conditions in general, as well as an improvement of the national health care system contributed to this progress (FUNSALUD, 2006; CONAPO, 2013).

Although significant efforts have been made, there are still serious shortcomings at different levels, such as the lack of resources for health care services. In the year 2000, Mexico only dedicated 5.1% of its GDP to health (OECD, 2011). In comparison, other Latin-American countries with similar levels of development, such as Argentina and Uruguay, spent more than 8% of their GDP on health care[45] (FUNSALUD, 2006: 22). By 2012, 6.2% of Mexico's GDP was spent on health care[46]. Although this meant an increase since the year 2000, it is not enough to offer satisfactory health care services to the entire Mexican population. Moreover, only 50.6% of health costs were financed by public funds in 2012 (OECD, 2014).

[44] For more information on the civil organization Nueve Lunas: www.nuevelunas.org.mx
[45] For further comparison: In the year 2000, Belgium spent 8.1% of its GDP on health care, the Netherlands 8%. In 2009, Belgium spent 10.9% and the Netherlands 12% (OECD, 2011).
[46] Remark: The exact percentages mentioned by the OECD and the WHO may vary, but the overall trend remains the same.

Furthermore, resources are not equally distributed across the country. The richer northern states (e.g. Coahuila, Baja California Sur, Nuevo León) have more and better health care services compared to the less affluent southern states (e.g. Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero). Specialized and high level modern hospitals are concentrated in more wealthy urban areas, and just over 50% of the infrastructure is located in Mexico City. The poorer regions, in particular rural areas and low-income urban places, with a high amount of uninsured people, have less doctors and hospital beds available (OECD, 2005: 78-79). Especially indigenous peoples have limited access to both medical staff and medical infrastructure. Indigenous communities are still exposed to diseases such as diarrhea or respiratory infections, which could be treated and prevented very easily and at low cost (FUNSALUD, 2006: 26; Julián, personal communication, 2012). In many indigenous communities maternal health is also at risk due to a lack of prenatal attention and support during the delivery. This issue will be discussed in detail further on.

As the number of health care centers in rural areas is limited, people often have to travel a considerable distance to get medical attention. For example in July 2011, on the bus traveling from the city of Puebla to the indigenous town of Cuetzalan del Progreso (Sierra Norte, state of Puebla), I met a woman of about 65 years old. She was bilingual (Nahuatl-Spanish) and lived in a neighboring village of Cuetzalan. She did not often go to Puebla, but now she had been there for some medical exams. In January 2011, a new hospital had been inaugurated in Cuetzalan, but by July the hospital was still not fully functional, only attending emergencies and offering external consults. There were also failures in the supply of electricity, potable water, and material in general. The nearest hospital for her specialized exams was in the city of Puebla. So she had to travel eight hours by bus to go back and forth to Puebla, with a total bus fare of 308 Mexican pesos[47]. For many people public transport is too expensive, and thus they have no means to get to the nearest health care center. If one considers that the level of marginality is often linked to the health situation, it is contradictory that so few resources are made available for the people who would benefit most from better health care (Name unknown, personal communication, 2011; Municipios Puebla, 2011; OECD, 2005: 78-79).

Mexico has both a public and a private medical care system. The public health care sector is organized by the Secretaría de Salud (Health Secretary). The private sector is generally considered to be of better quality, but lacks any form of control. Health care costs can vary, but usually private medical practices and private hospitals are much more expensive, primarily because social security does not intervene. For public sector medical care, patients can affiliate with one of the national health insurance institutions, such as the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS), the Instituto de

[47] In 2011, the daily minimum wage in the state of Puebla was 56.70 Mexican pesos (CONASAMI, 2011).

Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE), the Servicios Estatales de Salud (SESA), or the Seguro Popular de Salud[48]. Each institution has its own network of hospitals and health care centers across the country. The IMSS is meant for salaried workers of the formal economy, the ISSSTE for government employees. The Seguro Popular de Salud was created in 2003 by the Secretaría de Salud as part of the new System of Social Protection in Health (*Sistema de Protección Social en Salud*). The goal was to make health insurance available for Mexicans that did not have any insurance yet, especially those in rural areas where other insurance institutions are less represented (FUNSALUD, 2006: 23). However, more than 50% of Mexicans still lacked health insurance by 2011 (SINAIS, 2011). Furthermore, the health insurance institutions most available for the poorer population groups, the Secretaría de Salud and IMSS-Oportunidades[49], receive the lowest resources from the government (González Montes, 2003: 7).

Although the Mexican government has been increasing the number of health care centers and ambulatory health services, there is also the issue of the quality of the services offered. The quality of Mexican health care varies considerably. Some places offer high level health services that can compete with the best in the world, but there are also many centers unable to meet a minimum standard in health care. In some cases trained doctors and nurses are available, but they lack the necessary material and infrastructure. It can on the other hand also be a problem of inexperienced or unqualified medical staff. Several medical schools are not certified, and thus not all medical practitioners have the desired level of preparation. Not even all hospitals are certified, either in the private or public sector (OECD, 2005: 89, 103-106; FUNSALUD, 2006: 25).

The Mexican government is trying to change this situation, amidst a growing consideration for the rights of patients and for the improvement of medical attention (OECD, 2005: 98). But a lot remains to be done, especially in low-income areas. Besides, establishing an appropriate health care policy is further hampered by a lack of reliable data and health statistics. To give an example, maternal and infant mortality is not systematically recorded, making it impossible to get a clear idea about the extent of the problem (FUNSALUD, 2006: 28).

Access to medical care, both physically and financially, and quality of health services remain major challenges. The problems regarding Mexican health care are most critical in rural areas, including indigenous communities. The lack of medical attention affects everybody in these communities, however, women and young children are especially vulnerable.

[48] Employees of the Mexican army and of the national petroleum company PEMEX can get insured at the Instituto de Seguridad Social para las Fuerzas Armadas Mexicanas (ISSFAM) and at the Servicios Médicos de Petróleos Mexicanos respectively.
[49] Until 2002 called IMSS-Solidaridad.

B. Reproductive Health: The Right to Decide and the Importance of Education in Preventing Health Risks for Women

In addition to general health issues such as infections, diseases, or fractures, at a certain time in their life most women are confronted with specific conditions related to sexual reproduction and child bearing. Although pregnancy and delivery are natural processes, they engender some health risks that can turn bad if the mother does not receive appropriate care. Since the 1994 United Nations *International Conference on Population and Development* (ICPD) in Cairo, reproductive health has increasingly been recognized as an important issue worldwide (UNFPA, 2011).

There have been two different perspectives to address the subject of reproductive health. The first one was developed during the 1994 ICPD in Cairo. Based on feminist theory, it considers reproductive and sexual rights to be human rights. Obtaining these rights is part of the empowerment of women in the process towards gender equality. The second only looks at reproductive health from the perspective of family planning and sexual health. This limiting viewpoint mainly aims at reducing fertility rates among poor segments of the population in an attempt to tackle poverty. Since the 1994 ICPD, Mexican government has introduced the concept of reproductive health in health care programs. However, Mexican health care services often still fall back on the restrictive perspective. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a more general approach to reproductive health in Mexico (González Montes, 2003: 5-7).

Moreover, an important discrepancy can be noted between the institutional discourse on reproductive and sexual health, and the real practices in Mexico. Awareness of the importance of a broad approach to reproductive health and the adoption of a gender perspective, seem to vary depending on the hierarchical level of the health care services. At an institutional level, these concepts are accepted and regarded as important. The lower levels, and thus the people working in the field, however, are less acquainted with these concepts and with the consequences this has on their work (González Montes, 2003: 7-9). As rural and indigenous communities are most vulnerable, medical practitioners working in these areas should be particularly vigilant and well prepared to address issues regarding reproductive health.

In what follows, central topics related to the reproductive health of women, such as family planning and contraception, teenage pregnancies, abortion, and forced sterilization will be discussed, to illustrate some of the main health risks Mexican women are exposed to. These risks can be faced by women in different socio-economic contexts, however, the problems are significantly more acute for women in marginalized positions, and in particular for women in indigenous regions.

1. Family Planning and Contraception

As a result of the General Population Law of 1974 (*Ley General de Población*), and of the modification of Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution, the Mexican government has been organizing campaigns in favor of family planning since the 1970s (INEGI, 2009b: 34). Family planning gives individuals and couples the opportunity to decide how many children to have, and when to have them. This can be done through the use of contraceptive methods, or conversely by the treatment of infertility (WHO, 2011a). The World Health Organization (WHO) stresses the importance of family planning in the lives of women: "A woman's ability to space and limit her pregnancies has a direct impact on her health and well-being as well as on the outcome of each pregnancy (WHO, 2011a)." Consciously spacing and planning pregnancies can reduce health risks in general. Young women can limit early childbearing, and the related health risks for themselves and their babies. Consequently maternal and infant mortality can be reduced. Preventing adolescent pregnancies can also have a positive impact on the future perspectives of young women, as they would be able to continue their education. The reduction of unwanted pregnancies also lowers the rates of unsafe abortions. Moreover, family planning empowers people by enabling them to make their own conscious choices, and to gain control over their social and economic development (WHO, 2011a).

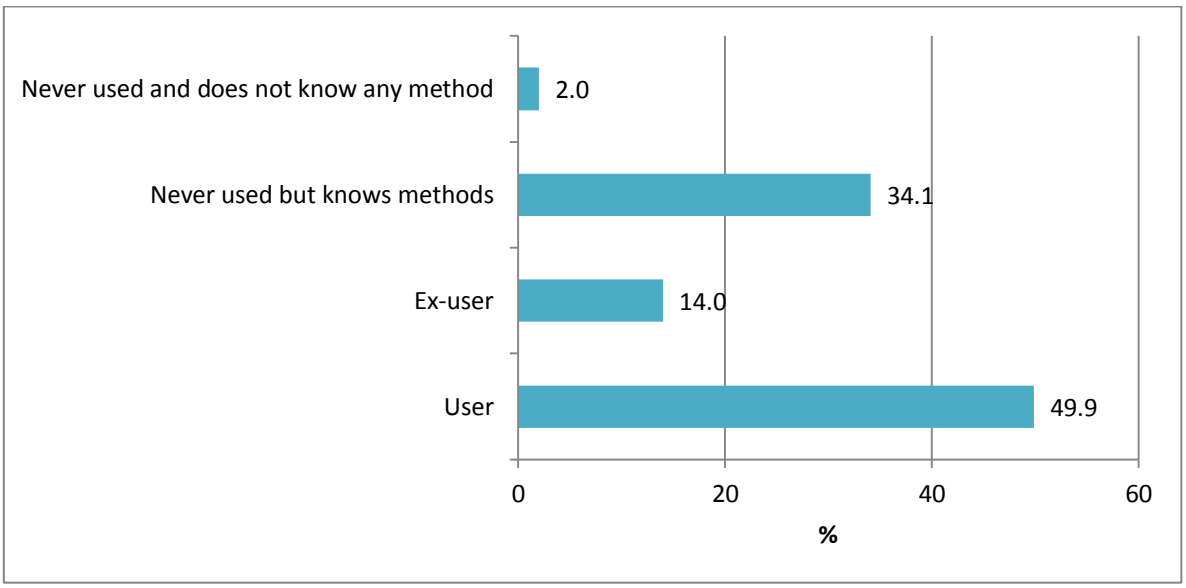
Family planning campaigns have shown results in Mexico. In 1974, Mexican women had an average of 6.11 children. In 1999, the fecundity rate was down to 2.48 children per woman, and in 2013, women had an average of 2.2 children (CONAPO, 1999: 29; CONAPO, 2013). Although the national average is low, there are differences in the number of children, depending on socio-economic factors. Generally speaking, Mexican women living in urban regions have less children than those living in rural areas. The educational level of the mother also has an influence. Mexican women without completed primary education have approximately four times more children than women with higher education. On average, indigenous women have more children than non-indigenous women. Not surprisingly, Chiapas and Guerrero, two states with the lowest socio-economic level and with high percentages of indigenous population, rank among the highest fecundity rates of the country (INEGI, 2009b: 39-40). It is important to consider these variables in light of family planning policies. Campaigns should first target the most vulnerable groups: in Mexico these are indigenous women, with low education, living in rural areas.

As mentioned before, since the 1970s, the Mexican government has been organizing campaigns in favor of family planning and to promote the use of contraceptives. However, the actual use of contraceptives is still not that common (INEGI, 2009b: 34).

In the 2009 national demographic survey (*Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica*), a distinction was made between women who have a certain knowledge of contraceptive methods and those who actually use them. The results showed that 98% of women at reproductive age (15-49 years) knew or "ever heard the mention of" at least one contraceptive method. This would mean almost all Mexican women know how to prevent pregnancies. In practice, however, it is not because a woman ever heard about such a method that she has a good knowledge about the correct use. It is also imperative to notice that in 2009, in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca respectively, 12.6% and 6.7% of women between 15 and 49 years had never heard about any contraceptive method (INEGI, 2009b: 34).

When looking at the actual use of contraceptives, in 2009 only 49.9% of Mexican women between 15 and 49 years reported using contraceptives. Just over 34% claimed to know contraceptive methods but never to use any, and 2% of women did not know any contraceptive method (see figure 1) (INEGI, 2009b: 34).

Figure 1: Percentage of women between 15 and 49 years by use and knowledge of contraceptive methods, Mexico, 2009 (INEGI, 2009b: 34).



Remark: Although the women using them might consider them as such, remedies that have not proven to prevent pregnancies, such as teas, were not included as contraceptive methods in these results (INEGI, 2009b: 34).

For people living in a stable union, contraceptives are mostly used to limit the number of children or plan pregnancies. In 2009, an average of 72.5% of Mexican women living in a couple reported using contraceptive methods. In the states with the best scores, almost 80% of women in a union used contraceptives (Sonora: 79.9%; Sinaloa: 79.8%; Federal District: 79.6%; Nuevo León: 79.2%). However, the lowest state averages were less positive, and could primarily be found in states with a lower socio-economic profile (Chiapas: 54.9%; Guerrero: 61.4%; Michoacán: 63.2%; Oaxaca: 63.4%) (see figure 2) (INEGI, 2009b: 35).

When looking at the different generations, an increase in the use of contraceptives is noticeable. The older generations report less use of contraceptives the first time they had intercourse (see figure 3). In 2009, 38.2% of girls between fifteen and nineteen years of age reported having used contraception during their first sexual relation; in the age group between 45 and 49 years only 9.2% of the women did (INEGI, 2009b: 37). In recent years, more improvements can be seen. In 2012, 66.6% girls between twelve and nineteen years had used contraceptive methods during their first sexual relation. Of the boys in that same age group, 85.3% reported having used contraception during their first sexual relations (INSP, 2012: 74-75).

Figure 2: Percentage of women between 15 and 49 years, living in a union, and using contraceptive methods, per federal entity, Mexico, 2009 (INEGI, 2009b: 35).

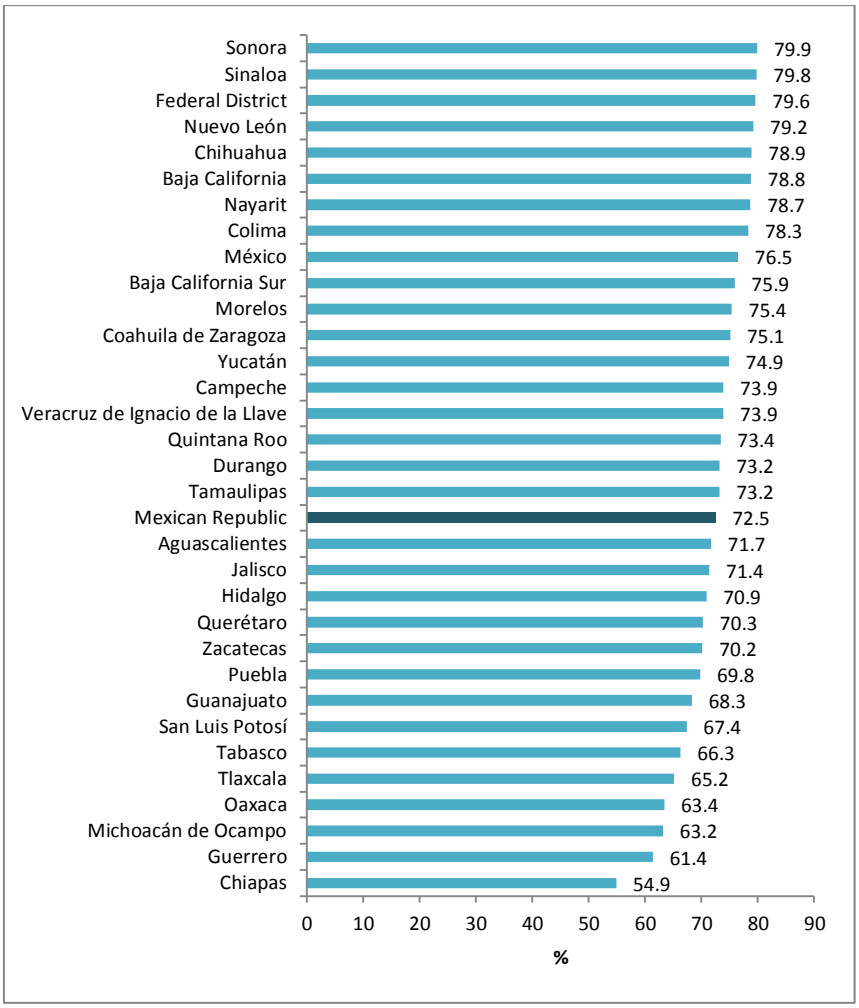
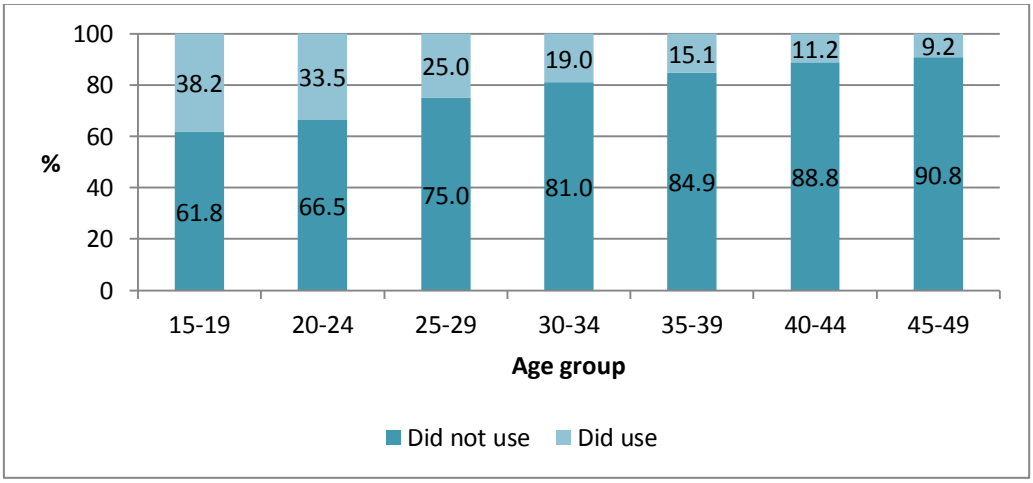


Figure 3: Percentage of women between 15 and 49 years according to their use of contraceptives during their first sexual relation, per age group, Mexico, 2009 (INEGI, 2009b: 37).



Among all contraceptive methods, the condom is most accessible for everybody, and most often used. Unlike pills or injections, no prescription nor medical intervention is required. When used correctly and consistently, condoms have an effectiveness of 98% to prevent pregnancy. Additionally, it protects against sexually transmitted diseases, and can reduce the risk of an HIV infection by 80% (INEGI, 2009c: 100; WHO, 2011a).

In the year 2000 national health survey (*Encuesta Nacional de Salud 2000*), the Centro Nacional para la Prevención y el Control del VIH/SIDA (CENSIDA) investigated the use of condoms among Mexican youths between the age of 15 en 24 years. The age group from 15 to 19 years of age was asked what they or their partner had done or used to prevent pregnancy or disease the first time or whenever they had sexual relations[50]. The group between the age of 20 and 24 was asked what they or their partner were currently doing to prevent pregnancy[51]. In the survey, 47.8% of men between 15 and 19 years indicated to use condoms. On the other hand, only 15.1% of the women of the same age group said to use a condom. In the age group between 20 and 24 merely 9.8% of male and 6.4% of female participants indicated to use a condom during sexual relations (INEGI, 2009c: 100; Secretaría de Salud, 2000).

In the 2012 survey on health and nutrition (*Enquesta Nacional de Salud y Nutrición – ENSANUT 2012*), 90% of the adolescents between 12 and 19 years indicated to know contraceptive methods. In this survey, 80.6% of the boys and 61.7% of the girls between twelve and nineteen years reported to have used a condom the first time they had sexual intercourse (INSP, 2012: 73, 75).

In general, all these figures are low, bearing in mind that the statistical number of people claiming to have used contraception is probably higher than the actual amount of people really having used it. Considering that this topic is intimate and often taboo, respondents may have been inclined to answer what they think is socially accepted.

2. Teenage Pregnancies and Early Marriage: Limiting Emancipation

During the last decades, sexual education has gradually entered the curriculum of Mexican primary education. However, it seems that not all young people are equally well informed about sexual relations and the possible consequences. Mexico has an important number of teenage pregnancies. As many as 13% of women that gave birth in 2013 were 18 years or younger. In absolute numbers, Mexico, Chiapas, and Veracruz were the states with most teenage pregnancies. These are also the states with the highest number of births in general. The number of teenage pregnancies starts to

[50] Original question: "La primera vez o esa vez que tuviste relaciones sexuales, ¿qué hicieron o usaron tú y tu pareja para evitar un embarazo o una enfermedad?" (Secretaría de Salud, 2000: question 5.4).
[51] Original question: "¿Qué están haciendo tú o tu pareja para no tener hijos? (Secretaría de Salud, 2000: question 5.22).

increase from the age of 14 years, but there are also reports of girls as young as 10 years of age giving birth. In 2013, over 8% of Mexican teenage mothers were between 10 and 14 years old. Again the states of Mexico and Chiapas were home to most of these girls (INEGI, 2013e).

Teenage pregnancies can be the undesired consequence of unprotected sexual relations. But in Mexico, teenage pregnancies can also be the result of very early marriage. In 2012, the average marriage age for Mexican women was 26.6 years. Men were on average 29.4 years at the time of their first marriage. In Guerrero, the state with the lowest average, women got married at about 23.5 years. In the Federal District they were on average 29.8 years old (INEGI, 2012a). However, women in rural areas and indigenous communities tend to get married earlier than girls in urban areas. The Mexican Civil Code defines that the minimum legal age for men to get married is sixteen years; women are allowed to marry as young as fourteen years old (Cámara de Diputados, 2013a: Art. 148). But in some regions with a lower socio-economic profile, girls as young as twelve years of age are getting married. According to official statistics, as many as 13.8% of Mexican women getting married in 2012 were eighteen years or younger; 0.4% of girls are younger than fifteen years old when they got married. Most girls marrying at eighteen years or younger were from Guerrero (31.9% of women getting married in that state), Chiapas (23.6% of women getting married), and Oaxaca (20.9% of women getting married). But all states, except Aguascalientes, Quintana Roo, and Campeche, recorded marriages of girls under fifteen years of age. In absolute numbers, the states of Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Mexico had most marriages of girls under fifteen years, with Guerrero and Oaxaca standing out, showing 2.8% and 1.2% of marriages with girls under fifteen years of age respectively. In 2012, there were 246 Mexican girls getting married under the age of fourteen (0.04%), basically not meeting the legal marriage age. The state of Guerrero has most of these early marriages. Fifteen out of the twenty Mexican girls marrying at twelve years old in 2012 were from Guerrero (Based on INEGI, 2012b).

Comparing these statistics to the marriage age of boys, it can be noted that although boys can also marry very young, their numbers are lower. At a national level, 0.01% of boys married under the age of fifteen. In 2012, 71 boys were under fifteen, compared to 2,111 girls. Of the boys, 0.06% was under sixteen and had thus not reached the legal age to get married. Guerrero, Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Mexico are the states where boys got married under the legal marriage age (INEGI, 2012c).

It has to be stressed that the numbers given here come from official statistics. It is hard to determine how accurate they are. In Mexico, the religious wedding is considered more important than the civil marriage. Especially in rural areas, often couples do not register their marriage in the national register. Thus, not all marriages are reported to the national authorities. Furthermore, there is no

certainty that the declared age of the marriage partners was correct. For one, not everybody in rural regions knows his or her exact age. Moreover, an incorrect age can be reported to avoid legal issues. It is therefore not clear what percentage of underage marriages is registered in statistical data, but it is probable that many more girls and boys are getting married at very tender ages.

Early marriage tends to have a negative influence on the emancipation of women. After marriage the girls start having children quite soon. Teenage pregnancies may be common in their community, and considered as nothing out of the ordinary by their environment. Yet teenage pregnancies entail an important health risk for the young mother and her unborn child. According to the World Health Organization, in Latin America maternal death rates are four times higher among teenage mothers under 16 years than among mothers in their twenties. Teenage mothers are significantly more susceptible to miscarriages, anemia, complications during delivery, postpartum hemorrhages, postpartum depression, and obstetric fistula, among others. The risks of stillbirths is 50% higher among mothers under 20 years than among mothers between 20 and 29 years. Babies of adolescent mothers also have considerably higher chances of preterm birth, low birth weight, or asphyxia (WHO, 2015). From a health perspective, teenage pregnancies can thus have very negative consequences both for the young girls and their babies. On a personal development level, teenage mothers are most likely to drop out of school as a result of their motherhood. They do not finish high school and are therefore unlikely to pursue further education. A low education level means only minimum wage jobs will be accessible (Riquer & Tepichín, 2001). Education is crucial for the empowerment of women; it provides an opportunity to build a better economic future for themselves and for their family, and maybe leave poverty behind. Targeted campaigns would be needed to encourage girls to finish at least high school before getting married. These campaigns should not only be directed at girls and boys, but also at their parents, and at their communities in general. Furthermore, as the Mexican state accepts marriages at a very young age, it would be an important sign of commitment of the authorities to raise the legal marriage age. However, it has to be stressed that this would only improve the legal framework. As mentioned before, in Mexico the church marriage is considered more important, while civil marriage has almost no standing. Especially in rural areas, couples very often do not register their union in the national register. Consequently, amending legislation would have a limited effect. But, there is an important role to play for the Church in this matter. The Church should encourage young girls to finish high school before getting married. This would help protect women against the health risks they face, and it would support the general emancipation of women.

Forced Marriages and the Sale of Indigenous Girls

Another issue that has to be mentioned here is the persistence of forced marriages and the sale of teenage girls in certain indigenous communities. There are reports of indigenous girls between 14 and 20 years of age being sold by their family for between 5,000 and 120,000 pesos (roughly between 300 and 7,000 euro) to get married or to do domestic work (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2013), or even worse, exchanged for a goat or pig, or sold into prostitution around the age of nine (Maldonado, 2012). More recently in March 2014, the press reported the case of Roxana Hernández Santiz, a fourteen year old Tzotzil girl of Chiapas who was imprisoned in her native village of San Juan Chamula because she had run away from the 18-year-old boy she was sold to. She would be liberated on condition that she paid back 15,000 pesos to the family of the boy – the sum they had paid for her plus interests – amounting to a total of 24,000 pesos, because she had broken the agreement her parents had made with the family by running away (Rosagel, 2014). These practices are often disguised as '*usos y costumbres'* and have taken place primarily in indigenous communities of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Veracruz, but also in other marginalized regions. As discussed here, early marriages leading to teenage pregnancies entail health risks for young girls. But in addition, such practices show a persisting violence against indigenous girls and women. Women's rights organizations, including indigenous women's organizations, have urged the state to take action against these practices. They are a violation of Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution which states that the '*usos y costumbres'* have to respect both human rights and the dignity and integrity of women (Reyes Díaz, 2014; Rosagel, 2014). The state, however, does not dare to intervene in these supposedly internal community matters. For the federal and state authorities it is more important not to oppose the '*usos y costumbres*' and thus avoid possible conflicts with the communities, than to protect its female citizens, even though indigenous women's organizations themselves are clearly opposed to this practice. President Peña Nieto pledged to integrate a transversal gender approach in every policy domain, however, concrete measures have not been taken against this child and women trafficking (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2013).

3. Abortion: A Taboo Topic

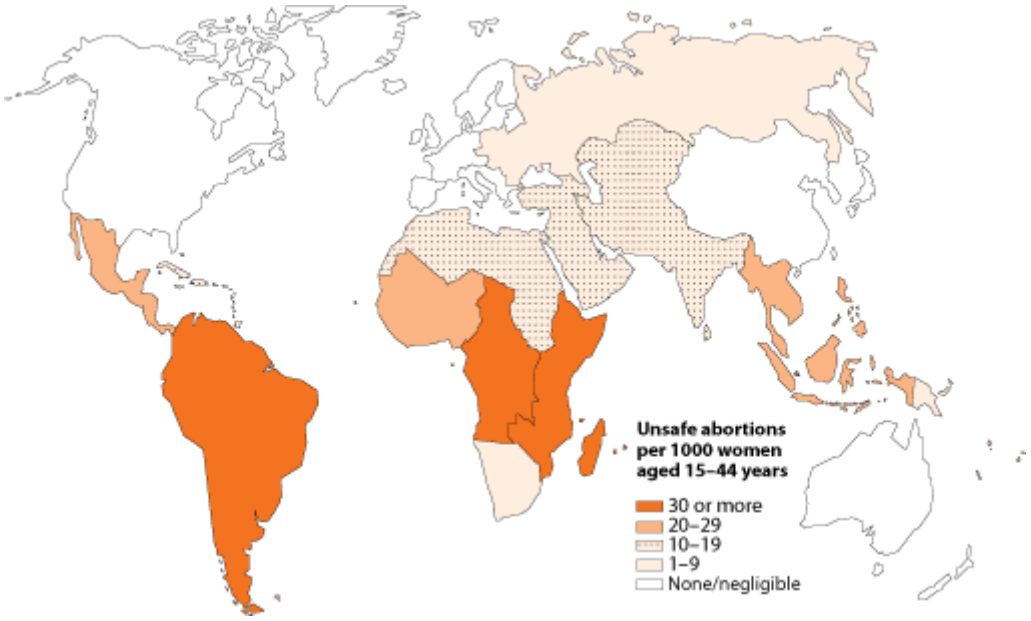
Whenever prevention and protection have failed, an undesired pregnancy can be terminated through abortion. Currently, abortion is still a taboo topic in Mexico. Yet Mexican feminists were already fighting for the right to decide over their own bodies and the legalization of abortion in the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, the government recognized abortion in certain specific cases, for example after rape. Subsequently, changes of the law in favor of abortion were accepted in several states.

But, there is a lot of conservatism in Mexico. Although Mexico is a secular state, the Church has great power over society. Regarding abortion, the Mexican Church has been one of the main and fiercest opponents, as illustrated by bishops personally participating in protest marches. Even the PAN and PRI parties are strongly influenced by the Catholic Church and pursue conservative family values. As a result, there has been a retrogression in Mexican abortion laws in recent years. Currently, abortion is penalized in 17 out of 32 states. Numerous states started procedures to restrict their abortion laws even more[52]. Women have already been sentenced for having an abortion. With the anti-abortion policies, the state is in fact claiming control over the bodies of Mexican women. In 2014, only women in the Federal District were free to choose for abortion without conditions within the twelve first weeks of the pregnancy (Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida, 2014).

The argument of the conservative side against abortion is that they want to protect the life of any living creature, and condemn the murder of the innocent unborn child. This could be a valid argument if abortion was only about the life of the fetus. However, this argument does not take into consideration the pregnant woman. Although abortion does imply ending the life of a living organism, it can also be necessary for the health and wellbeing of the mother. Teenage pregnancies, for example, have high health risks because of the girls' young age. Therefore, girls should have the right to decide to terminate an undesired pregnancy. This would not only protect their health, but also give them the opportunity to complete their education and have more opportunities in life. Furthermore, the legalization of abortion could limit the number of clandestine abortions. The WHO estimates that in 2008 around 21.6 million unsafe abortions took place worldwide, most of them in developing countries (WHO, 2011b). The WHO map shows Mexico has a high number of unsafe abortions (see figure 4). The WHO estimates Mexico has 20 to 29 unsafe abortions for every 1000 women aged from 15 to 44 years (WHO, 2008: 20). These abortions are often performed without any medical knowledge and in dubious hygienic conditions. If abortions are not performed by trained medical staff, they can result in complications, infertility, or even in the death of the mother. Legalizing abortion makes it possible for women, who choose to terminate their pregnancy, to go to a doctor in a recognized medical facility and get appropriate care.

[52] On the reforms of the state abortion laws in Mexico see: GRUPO DE INFORMACIÓN EN REPRODUCCIÓN ELEGIDA (2013), *Iniciativas para proteger la vida desde la concepción/fecundación 2008-2013* https://www.gire.org.mx/images/stories/ley/Iniciativas_ProteccionVida_120413.pdf

Figure 4: Estimated annual number of unsafe abortions per 1000 women aged 15–44 years, by sub regions, 2008 (WHO, 2008: 20).



The belief in traditional conservative family values is still strong and widespread in all layers of Mexican society. Even on major television news programs conservative ideals are openly defended. For example, *Matutino Express* is a news program of the Televisa ForoTV channel; it brings the news, but in an informal way[53]. On July 21, 2011, the program announced a new short film about abortion, *Una mancha en el papel*[54]. This film talks about the feelings of a boy whose girlfriend aborted their baby. The boy has doubts about the abortion. The main news presenter, Esteban Arce, reacted very strongly to this movie. He thought it was excellent to show the boy's point of view and continued: "You can talk about rights, about decision-making, you can argue with laws, with some legislator, and that it is allowed during the two first weeks, but in essence it is ending a life. Life starts at the moment of conception and all you do later, you can disguise it as a decision, but it is a murder (E. Arce in Televisa, 2011a)." The presenter can of course have his own opinion on this matter. However, it is remarkable, and also upsetting, that such a public figure can proclaim his opinion as being the only right one, and impose it on his viewers. The role of a news presenter is to inform the public in an objective way, not to impose his own points of view. This example illustrates how strongly opinions on abortion are in Mexico.

[53] Televisa defines the program as follows: "Matutino Express es un concepto informativo con una visión diferente de cómo enfrentar la noticia, sin perder la seriedad pero con un toque que le arranca una sonrisa al auditorio (Televisa, 2011b)." (Translation: "Matutino Express is an information concept with a different view on how to address the news, without losing seriousness, but with a touch that makes the audience smile.")
[54] Laura Gómez Aurioles, 2011.

It has to be noted that in indigenous contexts, women have not been in favor of abortion either (Espinosa, 2009: 277). They are however especially vulnerable for teenage pregnancies, undesired pregnancies, and unsafe abortions. Alternative actions need thus to be developed, and this together with indigenous women, to find a compromise between their needs, their point of view, and the protection of their sexual health.

In my opinion, good sexual education and awareness-raising actions are essential to avoid abortions in general. And this is still an important problem in Mexico. The Secretaría de Salud started campaigns to promote the use of contraceptives by means of radio advertisements, posters at bus stops, and even billboards in large cities. However, as mentioned before, the use of contraceptives is still not widespread, and probably due to conservative influence, the anti-abortion policies are seen separate from sexual prevention.

4. Forced Sterilization of Indigenous Peoples

The government has to intensify campaigns encouraging couples to consider family planning. However, it is important that family planning remains a right and not an obligation forced upon people. In Mexico, there are reports of forced sterilizations of indigenous women and men by federal and state public health personnel.

Indigenous peoples have been threatened with the loss of government support if they did not accept to get sterilized. *Na savi* women (Mixtec) of the state of Guerrero, for example, had to accept a monthly contraceptive injection if they did not want to lose the support of the *Oportunidades* program. Others have been misinformed or deceived, and only found out later that they had been sterilized. Indigenous monolingual people, without knowledge of Spanish, and illiterate people, have been forced to sign consent forms they did not understand, to undergo sterilization. In 2002, a Chinantec woman in the state of Oaxaca was told she was getting a smear to detect cervical cancer. When she developed an infection and went to a private clinic, she learned that an intrauterine device had been placed without her consent. There have been testimonies of indigenous women receiving aid from government programs, such as *Progresa* and *Procampo*, being forced to take pills – supposedly vitamins – in front of the staff in charge of distributing aid. If they refused to take the pills, they would not get aid. Later, these vitamins turned out to be contraceptives. There have also been reports of aid staff promising 50 pesos to men who would accept a vasectomy[55], or reportedly promising to build a school or a hospital in the community to convince them. Despite several complaints, there have been no sanctions, neither against the public health staff who performed the

[55] This is approximately just under 3 euro, but in 2004, this was more than the minimum daily wage of 43.29 pesos (approximately 2.5 euro) (Comisión Nacional de los Salarios Mínimos, 2015).

sterilizations, nor against the officials who gave to order. Many of them are still working in the public health service (Magally, 2002; Proceso, 2006; Nolasco Ramírez, 2014).

These sterilizations have mainly taken place in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Veracruz. Forced sterilization is a severe violation of human rights. Furthermore, it is against Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution, that guarantees the right to decide freely, responsibly, and informed on the number and spacing of children (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 4). At international level, the sterilization of population groups is even associated with genocide (UN, 1948: Art. 2).

In 2002, following reports of forced sterilization in the period between 1990 and 2001, the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos – CNDH) wrote a recommendation to the Mexican government to address this practice (Recomendación General No. 4). The government promised to analyze the problem (Magally, 2002). When questioned by the International Labor Organization in 2004, the Mexican government denied the sterilization practices, but then in 2005, recognized the existence of forced sterilization in a report addressed to the Commission for Racial Discrimination of the UN. Yet the government has always denied this was a deliberate policy, and has claimed to be addressing the problem. What actions have been taken remains unclear (Proceso, 2006).

In 2014, Yesenia Nolasco Ramírez, federal deputy for the PRD, presented a proposition to the chamber of deputies in which she asked to make public the cases of forced sterilization of indigenous peoples known by the Health Secretary and the National Human Rights Commission (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos – CNDH), to sanction the involved civil servants, to dismiss the involved SEDESOL delegates, and to dismiss all medical staff involved (Nolasco Ramírez, 2014). However, this proposal was discarded by the Commission for Indigenous Affairs and by the chamber of deputies, among others, because there was insufficient evidence that these practices were still ongoing (Cámara de Diputados, 2014b).

More research is needed to be able to determine whether the reproductive rights of indigenous women in Mexico are respected. Anthropologists, advocates, and indigenous experts could report on these situations. In addition, this illustrates the need for adequate sexual education and information for indigenous peoples, which would, for example, help them to protect themselves from abuse and deception. Finally, there is an urgent need for national and local health policies that are not in contradiction with human rights. Local health staff and officials also need to receive training and be sensitized in this regard. The national government should not hide behind local actors; it should address the severe violation of human rights and of the Constitution as a priority.

5. Women's Cancers: Another Example of the Lack of Information

A brief last comment discusses the two most lethal cancers for Mexican women.

a) Cervical Uterine Cancer

Cervical uterine cancer is an important health issue in Mexico. It is the second most deadly cancer for Mexican women (12.1%), after breast cancer (13.8%). In 2007, an average of 14.3 out of 100,000 women over 25 years died of cervical uterine cancer in Mexico. In this case too, it is a condition more present in population groups with a low socio-economic background. The highest mortality rates for this cancer can be found in Chiapas (21.8), Oaxaca and Veracruz (21.6), and Campeche (21.2) (INEGI, 2009c: 64). One of the ways to detect cervical uterine cancer is the Papanicolaou stain (also known as Pap stain or cervical cytology). However, a lack of screening and awareness makes early detection and prevention in the less developed regions difficult (INEGI, 2009c: 87). Campaigns are being launched, but this issue should definitely be included in sexual education classes at school. At this moment the SEP 6th grade natural sciences text book only includes minimal information (literally one sentence) on the papilloma virus (SEP, 2011: 41). As women and girls in rural regions are especially vulnerable, special attention should be given to them.

b) Breast Cancer

Of all cancers, breast cancer ranks first among mortality causes for Mexican women. In 2007, an average of 16.4 out of 100,000 women over 25 years did not survive breast cancer. In this case, the highest averages can be found in states with high level health care. The poor states show a low average of women dying of breast cancer (INEGI, 2009c: 65). It is not clear why the situation is so different compared to cervical uterine cancer. It could be due to a lack of screening for breast cancer. Women in these regions might die from breast cancer without knowing the real cause of their death. It is also possible that their way of life protects against breast cancer. Some factors limit the chances of having breast cancer, for example having had children, having had a first child before 30 years of age, having breast fed children, or not having used the pill too young or for long periods (WHO, 2014). Women with low socio-economic backgrounds have on average more children than women in higher social classes; they are on average younger when they have their first child; they breast feed their children for long periods; and they use less contraceptive pills. These factors could to some extent explain the lower prevalence of breast cancer in indigenous communities.

It must be pointed out that in an educational context, the screening of breast cancer is not discussed as such in the SEP 6th grade natural sciences text book. It is treated in a section called '*Un dato interesante*' ('An interesting fact') (SEP, 2011: 33). A better approach might be necessary to address the main mortality cause of Mexican women.

6. The Need for Sexual Education and Prevention

Information on family planning seems to have reached most Mexican women. However, the question remains whether this information has been complete and adequate. Neither women nor men seem to have been entirely convinced of the importance of using contraception, be it to prevent pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases. The figures show that the problem is more prevalent in states with a low socio-economic profile; these are also the states with the highest concentrations of indigenous peoples. Limited access to contraceptives can be one of the reasons for the reduced use of contraceptive methods in rural areas. Cultural factors, including religious beliefs, and mentalities also influence the perception of contraceptives. An important obstacle in the promotion of contraceptives is the subordination of women in sexual matters. When asked why they do not use contraceptives, Mexican women often answer that their male partner does not want to use any; he finds it unpleasant or unnecessary. Another argument regularly brought up by men is that using contraceptives would allow their woman to be unfaithful without them noticing it. In this matter, women are submissive, and follow their partner's wishes. Thus, in fact, men control women's bodies. Yet with their submission, women are putting their own health seriously at risk. Empowering women, but also raising awareness of Mexican men, should thus receive special attention.

But most important in this matter is to improve sexual education and prevention, both for women and men. There is a clear lack of knowledge and awareness regarding reproductive health, and especially regarding related health risks. This lack of knowledge is largely due to deficient sexual education and insufficient prevention. During the last decade, Mexico has started to commit to improve sexual education. In 2008, in the context of the XVII International AIDS Conference, the Mexican government signed the Ministerial Declaration "*Preventing through Education*" (UNAIDS, 2008). The commitment of the Mexican government in this matter is essential. Not only does the government decide on the national education policy and the educational curriculum to be followed, the Secretaría de Educación Púbilca (SEP) is also responsible for the publication of the official primary education text books that are to be used as basic learning material in all Mexican primary schools[56]. The SEP distributes these books to both public and private, urban and rural schools. Students get the books at no cost. In theory this implies that all primary school pupils in Mexico, irrespective of social class or financial means, have access to the same basic learning material. Sexual education has gradually been included in the curriculum. The SEP natural science text books of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade of primary school, now include chapters on sexual education, personal hygiene, and

[56] Schools are obliged to use the SEP text books, but they can add complementary material of their choice.

sexuality[57]. However, this is a recent trend, and unfortunately the presence of sexual education in the text books does not guarantee adequate sexual education in all Mexican classrooms.

In the Mexican context, sexual education and adequate prevention is crucial to address health problems that especially affect women. It is very important to continuously educate adults and young people on the dangers of having unprotected sexual relations, on how to prevent unwanted pregnancies or diseases, and on the existing possibilities for family planning. This sexual education should be repeated regularly at school and it should also be adapted to the specific cultural context of indigenous peoples (e.g. given in their own language). Sexual education and prevention campaigns should result in well-informed and conscious citizens. As family planning empowers people, it will not only be beneficial in a health context, it will also have a positive impact on the socio-economic development of entire communities.

C. Maternal Health: Illustrating the Need for an Intercultural Approach to Health Care in Mexico

In addition to reproductive health risks, Mexican women also have to deal with risks related to maternal health. In the case of indigenous women the persisting problems illustrate the precarious health situation they are still facing.

1. Maternal Mortality in Indigenous Regions: Indicator of a Larger Problem

Pregnancy and delivery are natural processes that, in most cases, do not lead to any complications for mother nor child. However, in Mexico maternal mortality is still an important health problem. In 2007, an average of 57.6 women for every 100,000 live births, did not survive child bearing. Every day, three women died due to complications during or after pregnancy or delivery. Maternal mortality is a problem closely linked to situations of poverty, and lack of medical care. In Mexico, the highest maternal mortality rates can indeed be found in the poorest states, Chiapas and Guerrero (INEGI, 2009c: 70). In 2007, these two states had a maternal mortality rate of respectively 100.6 and 99.2 out of 100.000 live births. In comparison, in the rich northern state of Nuevo León, the maternal mortality rate in 2007 was 23.4 out of 100,000 live births (INEGI, 2009c: 70). In 2012, the numbers had slightly improved, with a national average of 42.3 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births. Guerrero became the state with the highest maternal mortality, with 75.9 mothers dying for every

[57] For example: SEP (2011), *Ciencias naturales. Cuarto grado*, Mexico: SEP, p. 11-15; SEP (2011), *Ciencias naturales. Quinto grado*, Mexico: SEP, p. 35-43; SEP (2011), *Ciencias naturales. Sexto grado*, Mexico: SEP, p. 35-43.

100,000 live births. In 2012, the prosperous state of Queretaro recorded the lowest mortality rate of 19.8 (INEGI, 2012d).

It must be stressed that existing statistical data on maternal mortality in Mexico are merely estimates. Exact data are unavailable as there is no systematic record of maternal mortality. For example, the research of Graciela Freyermuth (CIESAS-Sureste) in the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó in the Central Highlands of Chiapas, shows that in this community 90% of the deceased has no death certificate, and no doctor comes by to determine the cause of death. Moreover, women, who according to their family died in child birth, are often given another cause of death (González Montes, 2003: 9). This example illustrates that maternal mortality is still an invisible problem in Mexico. And unfortunately, addressing this issue seems not to be a priority for the authorities. Furthermore, the relatively high numbers of maternal mortality are an indicator of a larger problem related to maternal health: the need for more adequate medical support, education, and prevention.

Major maternal health problems occur in rural areas, where pregnant women do not receive sufficient medical attention. Not all women give birth in the presence of a doctor. This is more often the case in states with low socio-economic levels and high rates of indigenous population. In 2006, the national health and nutrition survey indicated that in Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Quintana Roo between 13% and 38% of women had not been attended by a doctor when delivering their child (INSP, 2006: 59). But, the latest national health and nutrition survey seems to indicate important improvements as it reports 99.6% of Mexican women giving birth between 2007 and 2012 were assisted by medical staff (INSP, 2012: 97). In fifteen states (Aguascalientes, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Coahuila, Mexico, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Zacatecas, and the Federal District) 100% of the deliveries would have been assisted by medical staff. Yucatán has the lowest scores, but still in 98.2% of the deliveries medical staff would have been present (INSP, 2012: 97-98). The improvements could partly be explained by a more detailed questioning. The survey of 2006 only counted the women attended by official doctors and nurses. It did not include women attended by a traditional midwife or *partera*. Since 2009, the official statistics of the INEGI include data on the presence of a *partera* during the delivery. For 2013, it can be observed that for example in Chiapas, only 44% of women were attended by a doctor or a nurse, but a *partera* assisted in another 40.7% of the deliveries, nearly doubling the number of attended deliveries in that state (INEGI, 2013d). This puts the improvements made into a different perspective. The inclusion of more extensive information gives a new and more complete image of the situation. It also shows the importance of the traditional *partera*. Her role will be discussed further on.

2. Health in an Intercultural Context

Health care for indigenous peoples has two components: access to health care services, and the respect for their traditional medicine and medical practices. Improving the number and the quality of medical resources in rural areas is certainly necessary. However, providing more health centers and medical staff will not resolve all problems. In addition to access to medical resources, cultural factors also play a key role in improving the health care for indigenous patients.

Graciela Freyermuth comments how in the Central Highlands of Chiapas women who have complications during pregnancy or delivery do not consider going to the existing health center as an option, often resulting in the death of the mother (González Montes, 2003: 9). Why not go to a doctor when one is available? Indigenous women can feel uncomfortable visiting a 'Western' allopath doctor. There are several factors that can generate this aversion towards these 'modern' doctors. First, indigenous women not only enter the unfamiliar environment of the health center, they often cannot directly communicate with the doctor and the nurses as they do not always speak Spanish, the language of the medical staff. The doctor is most often not from the same region as his patients, he is not indigenous, he is not familiar with the local culture, and cannot speak the local indigenous language. Furthermore, even if the patients speak Spanish, the medical vocabulary of the doctor will scare people with a limited level of education. In addition, due to years of discrimination and oppression, many indigenous persons feel inferior to the mestizo doctor, afraid to ask anything, and feeling they have to accept everything the doctor says. The doctor may reinforce this feeling by treating his indigenous patients as ignorant and dumb, a behavior that is not uncommon in Mexico.

Given the inequality in the relation and communication, and the experience of arrogant, condescending, or offensive attitudes, not in accordance with cultural traditional values, another important issue for indigenous women is chastity – interpreted by the dominant party as shame. Women can in the first place feel too uncomfortable to ask the strange doctor – who is an outsider, coming from a hostile dominant group – a question about intimate issues (Cosminsky, 2006: 27), let alone allowing him to have any physical contact. Particularly gynecological examinations are a difficult matter as the women have to undress, and be examined in their most intimate parts. The feeling of being uncomfortable, not being understood, and even being exposed to offensive behavior will only be reinforced if the doctor is a man. Having to undress and being placed in a very intimate position with a strange man, who cannot communicate with them and whom they might not understand, is not conducive to a relationship of trust that should exist between patient and doctor. Moreover, a husband can also object to his wife going to a male doctor. As Freyermuth testifies, depending on the sex of the doctor, pregnant women might decide to seek or not to seek medical attention (González Montes, 2003: 10). Flor Julián confirms this information. As a doctor, she

experienced how women in certain communities in the Highlands of Chiapas could only be examined in the presence of their husband. Furthermore, some of them refused to undress, even for a female doctor, thus Julián had the almost impossible task of examining these women fully dressed (Julián, personal communication, 2012). Cultural factors play thus an important role, as they can have an influence on the medical care for the pregnant woman, her health, and wellbeing.

For Araceli Gil, another problem is what she calls the 'psychosis' within the medical staff to be the first providers of medical care to pregnant indigenous women. Gil feels there is a certain reluctance to attend indigenous women because there are many eyes, both at a national and international level, looking at the matter of maternal health. As the aim is to attain the millennium goals, a maternal death has a very high public cost. As a result, the responsibility is passed on, and women with basic complaints are immediately referred to a higher level of specialized medical attention, causing a bottleneck in services intended for special cases. These services are usually not located in their own area and travelling implies a very high cost for these women. According to Gil, in these cases the medical staff is not reluctant because of potential communication problems. They are not afraid, because there is a hierarchy in which they have the power to decide. Gil says: "If only they were scared of culture…"; it would mean they understood the importance of the cultural context for their work. Unfortunately, at this moment, this is the last of their concerns. Communication is not conducted from a cultural perspective, nor in a local language (Gil, personal communication, 2011).

Another issue is the relationship between allopath and traditional medicine. The patients in indigenous communities and the medical staff are part of different cultures; they have other beliefs, traditions, customs, values, and ethics, and often speak another language. The doctors and nurses are mostly Spanish speaking mestizos brought up in an occidental cultural context. In Mexico, traditional indigenous culture is being regarded as inferior. It is treated with little respect, and indigenous peoples are racially discriminated. This is also the case in health care. Traditional indigenous medicine is often identified with quackery. Mexican allopath doctors do not respect traditional medicine nor local beliefs; they consider them to be partly superstition and certainly without any scientific basis (Sandstrom, 2001: 309). However, research has shown that traditional medicine includes very valuable knowledge, especially about local plants and culturally specific symptoms (Campos, 2006: 9). The lack of respect and understanding on the side of the allopath doctors complicates the relation between doctor and patient.

People in indigenous communities do go to allopath doctors when they feel traditional medicine cannot help them. Some people prefer allopath medicine because they consider it to be 'modern' and therefore better. But, curanderos themselves can also recommend patients to consult allopath

doctors for certain diseases. Sandstrom for example, reports on curanderos that encourage people to vaccinate their children in medical centers. Indigenous peoples do not necessarily see a contradiction between traditional and allopath medicine (Sandstrom, 2001: 309). However, the traditional medical practitioner is often the only available source of health care. Furthermore, negative experiences with allopath doctors discourage people to visit them, taking thus serious health risks.

Mexican government has made efforts to improve the access to health centers, but many regions still lack the necessary services. Western health centers cannot always offer the help indigenous peoples require, in particular for illnesses and diseases that are cultural in nature. In indigenous Mexican communities, for example, *mal de ojo*, *mal aire*, and *susto* or *espanto* are common. Physical discomfort or pain is in these cases believed to be caused by negative influences of envy, sorcery, bad vibes, or other perturbations of the natural and social order. For example, in the case of *susto* an individual is believed to have lost his soul after a frightening or traumatizing experience. To be cured, the general equilibrium has to be restored. This can be achieved by performing the proper ritual, for example a ritual cleansing of the patient, known as *limpia* (passing an egg and/or herbs over the body of the patient), and by offering goods such as food, mezcal, or other specific products, to the gods or saints. The patient may also receive a treatment with medicinal herbs[58]. Western doctors consider these illnesses to be folk superstition. Further research by medical specialists would be needed, but there are definitely similarities between these illnesses and certain psychological disorders known in Western psychology, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. In general, traditional medicine gives much more attention to the patients' psychological wellbeing than Western medicine, which is more focused on biological processes (Campos, 2006: 9-10, 14).

[58] On Mesoamerican concepts of illness and disease, see among many others: C. BELL (1992), "The Ritual Body", in: BELL, C., *Ritual Theory. Ritual Practice*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 94-117; L. CRANDON (1983), "Why Susto?", in: *Ethnology*, 22:2, p. 152-167; B. R. HUBER and A. R. SANDSTROM (eds.) (2001), *Mesoamerican Healers*, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 95-116; F. J. LIPP, (1988), "The Study of Disease in Relation to Culture: The Susto Complexe Among the Mixe of Oaxaca (Mexico)", in: *Dialectical Anthropology*, 12, p. 435-442.

An Intercultural Approach to Health Care

To improve the medical attention given to indigenous peoples, Dr. Roberto Campos Navarro[59], among others, advocates for an intercultural approach to health care in Mexico. Campos defines this intercultural health care as a relational exchange process between two or more cultures in a society that is otherwise economically, socially, and politically heterogeneous, such as is the case in Mexico (Campos, 2006: 6). Intercultural medicine is thus seen as "the practice and relational process established between health personnel and patients, where both belong to different cultures, and that requires a mutual understanding so that the results of the contact (consultation, intervention, counseling) are satisfactory for both parties (Duarte et al., 2004: 389)."

The state of Oaxaca, for example, has eighteen main indigenous peoples. Many of the communities live in a situation of marginalization. According to Dr. Campos, during the last years hundreds of rural hospitals and medical centers have been built on Oaxaca's territory. However, this does not mean that everybody goes to these centers. For Dr. Campos, the reason is lack of an intercultural approach to health (Campos, 2006:6).

Living in a multiethnic and multicultural society, Dr. Campos believes that it is essential for Mexican medical staff to receive intercultural training. Yet medicine students currently receive no such training, nor workshops in medical anthropology. Illness is seen as something purely biological, and the management of a health center is a financial and administrative affair; culture is not considered part of it (Campos, 2006: 6; Julián, personal communication, 2012).

Adopting an intercultural approach is not only an obligation for the medical institutions, but should be viewed as essential by all individuals working in the medical sector, as an obligation to offer the best possible service to the patients. The medical practitioner does not have to share the same beliefs or practices as the culture of his patient, but he has to know and respect them. Campos advocates that medical staff should, both at an individual, collective, as well as institutional level, learn as much as possible about the community they are going to work in (Campos, 2006: 8-9, 14).

For Campos, an intercultural approach to health care must not only include the relationship between patient and doctor, it is a process that must include everybody involved in health care, be it the ambulance driver, nurse, health care policy adviser, or even architect of the hospital. Presently, the local communities, for example, are not consulted when a new medical center is built.

[59] Dr. Campos Navarro is a medical doctor with a PhD in social anthropology. He is currently professor and research coordinator in the Department of History and Philosophy of Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine of the UNAM, Mexico City.

An intercultural approach to health should be introduced in all hospitals and health centers, both in the public and private sector, and especially in vulnerable areas. Specific adaptations can improve the medical care and make it able to reach more people. Campos gives some examples of such adaptations: providing sleeping accommodation for the family members who travelled along with the patient, instead of letting them sleep on the floor; providing local food for patients; using the *temazcal* or steam bath in post-partum treatments; offering hammocks in regions where these are more commonly used than beds; adapting the consultation hours to the rhythm of rural farm life (Campos, 2006: 15). Another concrete example mentioned by Campos is that of a doctor who worked in a Maya community of Campeche. He allowed women to deliver in a hammock, as they have always been accustomed to, and thus gained the respect and trust of the community (Campos, 2006: 5).

Certain indigenous peoples divide their surrounding world in classifications of 'hot' and 'cold' elements. As the natural equilibrium has to be preserved, too much exposure to 'hot' or 'cold' substances can trigger disease[60]. Pregnant women are considered to be in a very 'hot' state. Eating or drinking aliments considered to be too 'cold' can harm the mother or the unborn child. After delivery, women become very 'cold'. They have to drink and eat food, such as chicken broth, grilled meat, and vegetables that are considered to be 'hot', stimulating blood flow and ensuring good lactation. Cold food, such as sour fruit (lemons, oranges), avocado, 'cold' vegetables, or pork is prohibited (Cosminsky, 2006: 27-28; Katz, 1993: 100-103). More research is needed to understand which of these aspects of a culturally defined diet are useful. The hospital diet could be adapted to local customs. If the medical staff is aware of this custom, problems can be avoided and a relationship of trust can be built. A doctor who is aware that he is asking a mother to accept 'cold' food after delivery, can, for example, offer to combine it with a 'hot' item instead of firmly opposing the patients' request. The women will be much more willing to follow his advice if the equilibrium is maintained (Cosminsky, 2006: 28-29). Dr. Roberto Campos Navarro describes the experience of a nutritionist, who reprimanded Maya women who had just given birth and refused to drink the watermelon juice she gave them. The reason for this refusal was that Maya women consider this drink to be too 'cold'. Drinking it can make the still 'hot' uterus 'cold', and cause infertility (Campos, 2006: 5).

In indigenous communities the use of steam baths is considered to be good for personal hygiene, but also as a ritual cleansing. The ritual is psychologically and culturally important for the mother. Western doctors discourage the use of steam baths because it would weaken the mother and could

[60] The categories of 'hot' and 'cold' do not refer to Western ideas of temperature.

cause hemorrhages. However, little research has been done on the real effects (Cosminsky, 2006: 24). The same is true regarding the use of traditional medicinal herbs. Western doctors dismiss their use. However, some plants are known to be effective. Furthermore, patented medicines may be too expensive or inaccessible for people living in rural communities. Yet some of Western chemical medicines could be replaced by local medicinal herbs. The use of local medicinal plants in cases where this practice is a good alternative, would not only be less expensive for the patients, but would also bring patient and doctor closer together as the doctor would show interest and respect for the local traditions and life style. More research is needed to better understand the medicinal qualities of these herbs, and to determine which ones can be useful, do not harm patients, are suitable for rituals, or should be altogether avoided.

Campos also recommends to rely on traditional medicine practitioners when needed. Certain traditional practitioners could, for example, be given a place within institutionalized health centers. The main practitioners in indigenous medicine are the *curanderos* and *curanderas* or healers, and the *parteras*[61]. Currently, the value of these practitioners is not recognized outside their community, let alone by professional medicine. Working together with the traditional *parteras* could, for example, be an interesting cooperation.

3. A Role for Traditional Medicine: The '*Parteras*' and the Humanization of Delivery

The use of traditional medicine and health practices should not be romanticized. When confronted with serious health problems, it is important that the patient is attended by trained medical staff with the necessary medical infrastructure. There are however roles to play for traditional medicine One such example is traditional midwifery. The midwife or *partera* is a woman of the community who supports women during pregnancy, delivery, and in post-partum. She can also give massages, herbal treatments, and advice, and she performs the necessary rituals. Her presence and support can help relief the anxiety of the young mother-to-be. The rituals that accompany childbirth are part of the rites of passage within indigenous communities. For the mother, the delivery and postpartum are considered to be life crisis moments. The treatment for new mothers has physical as well as psychological, symbolical, and ritual dimensions. They help her to make the transition from pre-motherhood to motherhood, and to restore her position within the social structure of society.

The *partera* is usually trained by an older *partera* in her community, and knows all local customs and traditions. In many cases she has had a vision or dream in which she was called to become a *partera*. Although they are not trained doctors, experience allows *parteras* to develop a level of medical

[61] For more information on Mexican traditional practitioners of indigenous medicine see for example: B. R. HUBER and A. R. SANDSTROM (eds.) (2001), op. cit.. The introduction to this work includes an extensive bibliographic overview of the research on Mesoamerican healers.

knowledge – similar to that of professionally trained midwives – which qualifies them to accompany a mother during a standard delivery (Cosminsky, 2006: 22).

Like all traditional medicine, midwifery has suffered historic discrimination. Discrimination of *parteras*, however, is based on four elements. First, midwives suffer discrimination because they are indigenous, secondly because they are women. Midwives often live in poverty, and thus they have been discriminated because of their low economic status. Finally, in medical hierarchy, midwives are located in the lowest echelons, leading to discrimination by all other medical practitioners (Gil, personal communication, 2011).

In indigenous communities many changes are occurring and people also turn their back on certain traditions. Not all indigenous persons necessarily prefer traditional medicine. Some consider modern clinics and private doctors to be better than traditional healers. If affordable, people may prefer to go to the health center. When asked whether in the future she would consider going to a traditional *partera* or to an allopath doctor to give birth, a teenage Triqui girl answered:

> "The girls that do not study go to the *partera*. I already know better, I would go to the doctor. My sister had a problem while she was pregnant, and both she and her child could die. They went to the doctor and he could save both (Lucía, personal communication, 2012)."

Fernando, a Triqui university student, on the other hand says:

> "The doctors do not respect our knowledge. The wife of my cousin was pregnant, but the child was not correctly positioned. Our ladies have knowledge to turn the child. They touch it, I don't know how they do it, but they touch it and the child gets in the right position, and they do not need to cut the woman. Because that is what doctors do; they say there is no solution, and they cut the mother.
>
> Our ladies have knowledge, and they do not need to hurt the mothers. My cousin went with his wife to see a doctor and he said he would have to cut, and they told him that the Triqui have this knowledge to turn the child. He told them this was impossible. And they said: "You will see, doctor, we will bring him to you well positioned." And that is what happened, and there this doctor understood our traditions, and he was astonished. And now, when he has a doubt, he asks us. And we trust him more because he respects our knowledge (Fernando, personal communication, 2012)."

Fernando indicates he prefers traditional medicine. Yet, his testimony also shows how allopath doctors can gain the trust of the community by showing respect for traditional knowledge.

For Alejandra, another Triqui girl, the *partera* can be consulted for a normal pregnancy, but if there are any complications, one should go to the doctor (Alejandra, personal communication, 2012). Thus, these three testimonials show that the preferred type of health care often depends on personal experiences and points of view.

National aid programs, such as the *Oportunidades* program, encourage their beneficiaries to go to official doctors and recognized health centers in order to improve the health care of people living in rural communities. As a result, pregnant women in these programs will not have the opportunity to choose a traditional *partera* to support them (Gil, personal communication, 2011). The discrimination and the encouragement to go to allopath doctors makes indigenous women turn away from the *parteras*. Yet the *parteras* might have an important role in the humanization of the delivery process.

Lately, Western treatment of pregnancy and delivery has been increasingly criticized because of its impersonal and purely biological approach. Due to a growing demand for the humanization of child birth, some have turned to the more intimate practices used by traditional midwives.

In traditional midwifery the mother is the protagonist of the delivery. The midwife works in a specific cultural context, with certain beliefs and values. She works in an intimate setting, where delivery is seen as a sacred, special event. The experience of a 'Western' delivery in Mexico is very different. In Western medicine, maternity is treated as a pathology, and attention is given in the context of this pathology. Women have no say in the way they are treated. Decisions are made by the doctor, based on scientific eminence (Gil, personal communication, 2011). This is a generalized approach for indigenous and non-indigenous patients alike, be it in rural or urban areas, in private or public health care centers.

In 1985, the WHO formulated general recommendations on the humanization of delivery (WHO, 1985). The main focus of the delivery should be the physical and emotional well-being of the mother. According to Araceli Gil, these recommendations are not being followed in Mexico. For example, women often have no freedom of movement; they cannot choose the position of delivery nor who accompanies them. The supine position generally used in Western deliveries (lying on the back), is not optimal for child birth. The squatting position, used in traditional medicine seems to be much more effective as gravity helps the child descend with less effort from the mother. Already in the 1970s, the Uruguayan doctor Roberto Caldeyro-Barcia, then director of the Latin-American Center of

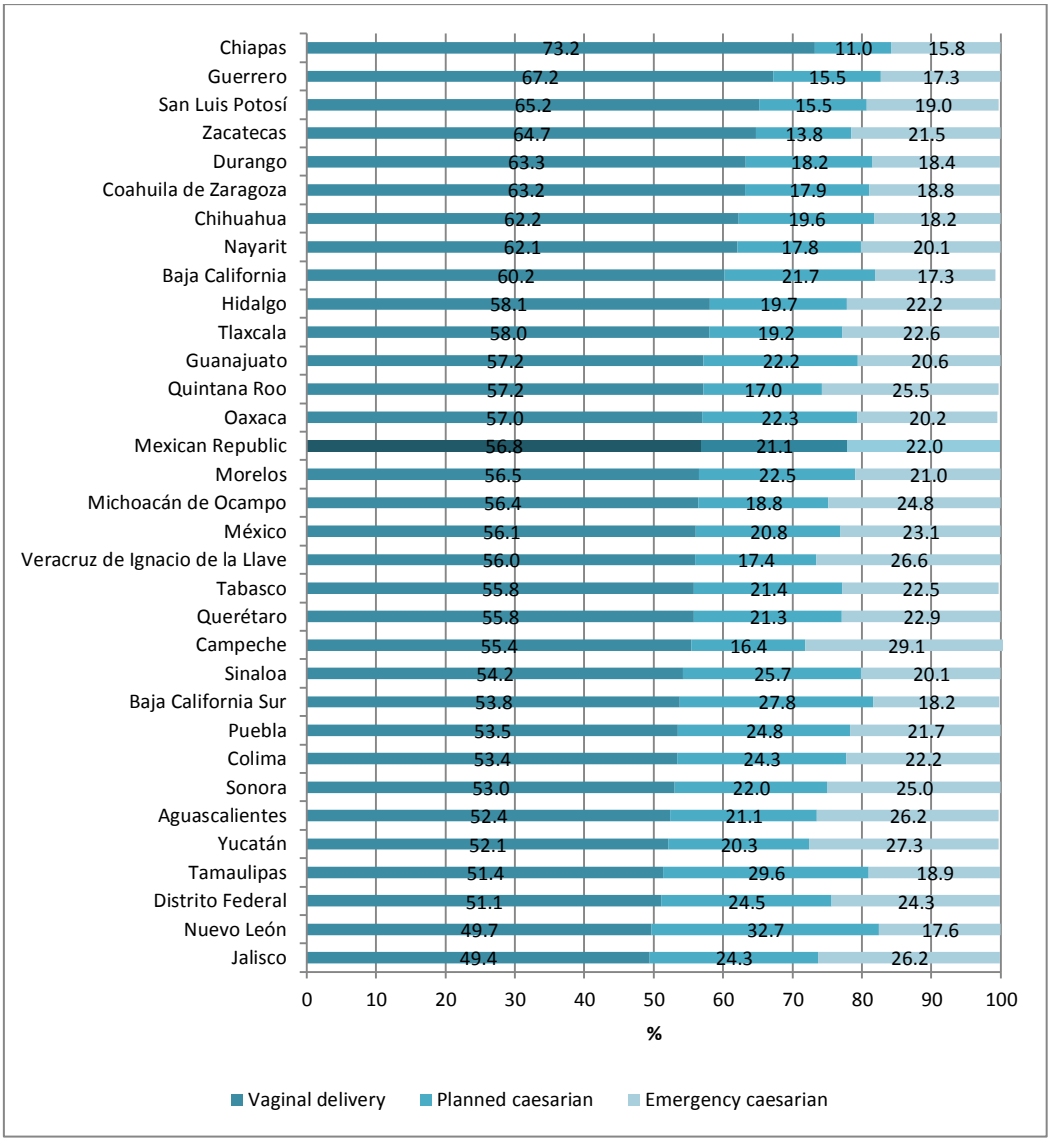
Perinatology and Human Development of the Pan American Health Organization, and president of the International Federation of Gynecologists and Obstetricians, declared: "Except for hanging by the feet, the supine position is the worst position for women during delivery (Caldeyro-Barcia in Cosminsky, 2006: 22)". In traditional medicine, women are attended depending on their necessities; in Western medicine women seem to be attended depending on the necessities of the doctor (Gil, personal communication, 2011).

Furthermore, women are not informed about important procedures, such as episiotomies[62] or caesarians. The percentage of caesarian sections in Mexico is extremely high. On a national level, 43% of all deliveries between 2004 and 2009 were caesarians. The states with the lowest percentages of caesarians were Chiapas and Guerrero, with respectively 26.8% and 32.8% of caesarian sections. This can be explained by the fact that women in these more marginalized regions have less access to institutionalized medical care. The states with the highest percentages of caesarians are the more prosperous states of Jalisco, Nuevo León, and the Federal District, respectively with 50.5%, 50.3%, and 48.8% of caesarian births (INEGI, 2009b: 43). These numbers are exceptionally high. Already in 1995, the Secretaría de Salud recommended a national standard of 15% to 20% caesarian births, but this norm has not been observed[63] (Secretaría de Salud, 1995). Furthermore, in Nuevo León a striking 32.7% of all deliveries between 2004 and 2009 were performed by a planned caesarian section (see figure 5) (INEGI, 2009b: 43). Planning a caesarian is in some cases necessary for medical reasons. But, planning a caesarian also gives the obstetrician the possibility to perfectly schedule all his or her deliveries, as he or she can define the exact hour and date of the procedure. In Mexico, doctors in private clinics in particular are tempted by this practice. In 2012, as many as 42.3% of all deliveries in Mexican private clinics were planned caesarians (INSP, 2012: 100). The World Health Organization has been pointing out the increased health risks related to unnecessary caesarian sections and labor inductions (Souza, 2010). Furthermore, if there are no actual medical reasons, it denies women the right to listen to the necessities and the rhythm of their own body. Their right to take decisions on how to give birth and how to experience this moment is negated to better suit the doctor. Thus, the humanization of the delivery process would not only be beneficial for indigenous women, but for all women giving birth in Mexico.

[62] A surgical incision made on the perineum and the posterior vaginal wall during labor, to facilitate the baby's birth. In Europe and the United States the use of this technique is debated.

[63] The number of caesarians around the globe differs from country to country. According to the WHO, an estimated 25% of all deliveries worldwide are done by caesarian sections (WHO, 2010). By comparison: in 2004, Belgium recorded, just over 18% caesarian births (Intermutualistisch Agentschap, 2006: 10), whereas the Netherlands reported 15% caesarian births that same year (Stichting Perinatale Registratie Nederland, 2007).

Figure 5: Percentage of pregnancies according to the type of delivery for each federative entity, Mexico (Last pregnancy occurred between 2004 and 2009) (INEGI, 2009b: 43).



Some government initiatives include traditional medicine in professional health care. For example, official training courses for traditional midwives have been organized in the past. However, these courses have mainly focused on hygiene, and on recognizing when to send future mothers to the doctor. While these subjects are important, there has been little attention for the traditional knowledge of the *parteras*. Traditional practices are criticized, and *parteras* are forced to accept Western ones, such as the supine position and the use of patented medicine. Furthermore, as Araceli Gil also testified, the medical staff does not respect nor trust the *parteras* and considers them to belong to the lowest category of medical staff (Cosminsky, 2006: 29-33; Gil, personal communication, 2011).

Other actions are taken to include traditional medicine in official Mexican health care, for example, the translation of prevention leaflets in several indigenous languages, the presence of interpreters in certain hospitals[64], workshops on health care for traditional practitioners, etcetera. However, these are mostly local and ad hoc initiatives. While such initiatives are definitely important, more structural actions are needed, valuing and respecting traditional medicine, addressing the mentality of medical practitioners, and leading to a real exchange of medical practices between allopath and traditional medicine.

Due to a limited amount of staff and medical centers, there is a lack of medical attention in rural areas. Traditional practitioners could play a role in the follow-up of pregnant women. It is important to give them some basic training, but including respect for traditional elements considered positive, such as eating chicken broth, giving massages, accepting the squatting position, etcetera. Neutral elements, such as prayers, should be accepted as they may have a positive psychological effect, facilitating the delivery. Negative practices, such as bad hygienic conditions, or the use of dirty rags, should be corrected through education and training, showing there are alternative and safer techniques for the patient. More research is needed on the use of medicinal plants and the exact effects traditional medicine has on patients (Cosminsky, 2006: 34).

The most important step when developing adequate health care for indigenous peoples is to communicate with the local communities. Their specific needs and demands have to be taken into consideration for initiatives to be effective. A recent study of Tucker et al. (2013) on the establishment of an intercultural birth house in the highlands of Chiapas illustrates the importance of communicating with the local community. To address the high maternal mortality rates in the state, the Secretary of Health of the State of Chiapas built an intercultural birth house next to the hospital in the indigenous community of San Andrés Larraínzar. To make women more at ease, the birth house looked more like an indigenous house than a hospital, and women could give birth with their own *partera*. If needed the medical staff of the hospital was next-door. However, after three months, not a single woman had given birth in the birth house. Research revealed that the birth house was no success because women had a preference for home births, and that the transport costs to get to the birth house were too high for many of them. This research shows the importance of participation of the community and of the *parteras* in planning and implementing these kinds of services. Such communication will not only make it possible to develop effective projects, it will also improve the

[64] This is for example the case in the state of Querétaro, where a law was voted in 2014 providing Otomí interpreters in health centers of the Secretaría de Salud located in regions of this state with large numbers of indigenous population (AM Querétaro, 2014).

mutual respect and understanding between authorities, medical staff, and the community (Tucker et al., 2013).

Flor Julián also emphasizes the need to include communities in the planning of health care centers. She recalls the construction of a new health care facility, specifically meant for traditional medicine. It was a nice and clean space, with spotless white walls. However, indigenous women did not like giving birth in these white rooms, because they were considered too 'cold', and thus not good for birth giving. For Julián, these kind of problems stem from the fact that health care programs are designed behind a desk, by a person who has never been to the concerned communities. Furthermore, programs cannot simply be translated from one community to another. The state of Oaxaca for example, has many different indigenous peoples, with different characteristics and needs. Specific analysis are necessary to define which programs would be most effective and beneficial for the communities (Julián, personal communication, 2012).

D. Conclusion

The rights of indigenous peoples regarding health care are twofold. On the one hand, indigenous peoples should have equal access to qualitative institutional health care services without being the subject of discrimination. On the other hand, there should be respect for their traditional medicine and healing practices. In Mexico, neither of these rights is yet guaranteed.

The general health care situation in Mexico has improved during the last decades. But certain important issues remain. Both the quality and quantity of medical services differs widely. People living in rural and marginalized regions have most difficulties, both physically and financially, to access health care. This is especially the case for indigenous peoples. Furthermore, women and children are the most vulnerable.

Women are still facing basic health risks, especially regarding reproductive and maternal health. During the last decade, family planning campaigns resulted in a decrease of fecundity rates in Mexico. But, these campaigns have had their limitations. The use of contraceptives has been promoted by state campaigns, and a majority of people has a certain knowledge of contraceptive methods. However, the use of these methods does not seem to be evident for everybody. Especially in regions with a low socio-economic profile, people use less contraceptives, yet these are the regions potentially benefitting most from family planning.

Consequently, teenage pregnancy rates across the country, and particularly in more marginalized regions, including indigenous communities, are persistently high. Teenage pregnancies are hazardous as they entail important health risks both for the young mother and the baby. As Mexico has very high rates of teenage girls getting married, part of these teenage pregnancies occur within marriage. Most of these early marriages also take place in indigenous communities. In addition to the health risks, early marriage and teenage pregnancies limit the emancipation of women, because girls quit secondary school upon marriage or pregnancy, and do not pursue further education. This limits their opportunities for the future and their possibilities to become economically independent. In certain cases girls are forced into marriage and are even sold to their husband. According to existing reports, most of these cases happen in indigenous communities. This topic is relatively frequently commented upon in press and social interaction, but precise and in-depth studies have not been published. The Mexican government has not taken action to stop these practices of women and child trafficking, and tends to hide behind the argument that it is part of the '*usos y costumbres*', even though indigenous women's organizations have condemned these practices. In general, and as part of a general focus on gender in policy making, the government should take action to limit the number of teenage marriages and teenage pregnancies. However, with the exception of a few local initiatives, currently little attention is given to the subject, and the Civil Code legally accepts early marriages. By raising the minimum legal marriage age in the Civil Code, the government would signal commitment to protect the health of women, and support their general emancipation. But, as the church wedding is more important in Mexico than civil marriage, amending the legal framework would only have limited results. The Church too should play a role in this matter and encourage girls to finish high school before getting married.

Undesired pregnancies could be terminated by aborting, but abortion remains a taboo topic in Mexico. Although progress had been made, there has been a retrogression in Mexican abortion laws. In 2014, abortion was penalized in 17 out of 32 states, making it legally impossible to get an abortion by a certified medical practitioner. As a result, unsafe abortions, entailing important health risks for the mother, increase. Women in marginalized situations are again most vulnerable. In Mexico, the Church is the fiercest opponent of abortion. This institution has managed to influence politics and Mexican society in general, resulting in a very strong anti-abortion movement. The anti-abortion policies are implemented without offering alternative actions, such as better sexual education and awareness campaigns to prevent abortions, or the creation of social security systems supporting teenage mothers. Thus, the state gains control over women's bodies – depriving them of the right to decide over their own bodies –, but without offering other realistic options to prevent or address unwanted pregnancies.

Family planning campaigns in Mexico have also been misused. In the past, there have been reports of forced sterilization of indigenous women and men. This is a severe violation of human rights and of the Mexican Constitution, as it denies people the right to decide on their own family planning. At international level, forced sterilization is considered to be genocide. More research is needed to know if the reproductive rights of indigenous women are respected in Mexico. The government needs to address this issue instead of hiding behind the '*usos y costumbres*' system as it currently does.

These different situations related to reproductive health show that women in regions with a low socio-economic profile, and especially indigenous women, are most vulnerable for health risks. Moreover, there is an urgent need for more sexual education and prevention. This would in the first place reduce health risks for women. Being well-informed and able to decide on their family planning also empowers people. The emancipation and empowerment of both women and men would have a positive impact on the socio-economic development of individuals as well as communities.

In addition to reproductive health risks, Mexican women also face risks related to maternal health. The persisting problems illustrate the precarious health situation which especially indigenous women still encounter.

Mexico still has high levels of maternal deaths, particularly in the poorest states with the highest numbers of rural and indigenous communities. Pregnant women in these regions do not get sufficient medical attention. Although there have been improvements, there are still women giving birth without the assistance of medical staff, which entails serious health risks. This situation is an indicator of a larger problem in Mexican health care: the lack of adapted health care for indigenous peoples. In the first place, it would be important to increase the number and the quality of health care centers and medical staff. But, when working with indigenous patients, another issue often forgotten in Mexican medicine becomes apparent: the cultural context. Culture can have an important impact on the experience of illness and health care. As the medical staff and the indigenous patients have a different cultural background, difficulties arise in their contacts, especially because allopath medical practitioners have no knowledge of and no respect for traditional medicine. As a result, some indigenous persons avoid going to the health center, taking important health risks.

Therefore, there is a need for an intercultural approach to health care in Mexico. This approach implies respect for traditions within the institutionalized health care, but also cooperation with traditional practitioners. A systematic cooperation with the traditional *parteras* would be valuable when following-up pregnant women and assisting during standard deliveries. This cooperation would

make it possible to reach more women. Furthermore, the approach of the *partera* could be adopted in the process of the humanization of delivery. Introducing certain elements of traditional midwifery would be beneficial not only for indigenous women, but for all Mexican women. There is a need for training of the *parteras*, but this should be a training that respects traditional medicine and adopts best practices from both worlds. More research is necessary to better understand all elements of traditional medicine in general. It is important not to romanticize indigenous medicine, but to recognize the elements that are valuable both for Western and traditional medicine.

An intercultural approach to health care would help reduce the health risks for indigenous peoples, and more particularly indigenous women. The health risks indigenous women are facing are very basic health issues. Addressing these issues should be a priority for the Mexican government, but this is not yet the case. Ad hoc initiatives and local actions take place, but there does not appear to be a consistent policy to resolve these basic health issues. The situation in indigenous communities is most often ignored.

An important problem in this regard is the lack of statistical data and correct information on the health situation in indigenous communities. It is important to be able to estimate the extent of the problem in order to take the necessary measures, yet complete statistics are unavailable for several key topics, such as maternal mortality. Consequently, certain health issues of indigenous peoples are invisible. The lack of data shows a lack of commitment by the government. For such important topics, the government should make sure that the required data is collected, and a consistent policy in the interest of the people is developed.

Indigenous communities in Mexico are confronted with significant problems regarding health and health care, but these problems often remain invisible. Here anthropologists, advocates, and indigenous experts could play a role as they could help denounce this situation by emphasizing the reality of indigenous peoples' living conditions and the need to pay attention to the voices of the communities. Through their research, they can draw the attention to certain issues, such as inadequate health services, high levels of maternal mortality, cases of teenage marriages, forced sterilizations, etcetera. In addition, they could point at the difficulties indigenous peoples encounter when visiting allopath doctors. Finally, they could show the role traditional healers play in indigenous society, and the advantages of an exchange of best practices between traditional and allopath medicine.

V. FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: CONQUERING SPACES

"*El reconocimiento pasa por la palabra:*
quien no participa en el diálogo humano, socialmente no existe."
(Espinosa Damián, 2010: 104)

The level of political participation of women is one of the indicators most often used to measure female emancipation. Political participation has two components: the right to vote and the possibility to be eligible and carry out a political mandate. The right to participate in a democratic representative system is a determining factor in the construction of citizenship. Whether women have equal political rights compared to men, is considered an indicator of the position of women within that society. In what follows female political participation in Mexico will be analyzed.

The UNDRIP guarantees indigenous peoples the right to participate in decision-making processes, and to follow their own normative systems:

> "Article 18
>
> Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions (UN, 2007)."

Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution states that indigenous peoples have the right to elect representatives according to their own traditional systems, and to maintain these systems in their communities. These political rights have to be regulated in the different state constitutions:

> "Article 2. The Mexican Nation is one and indivisible.
>
> A. This Constitution recognizes and guarantees the right of indigenous peoples and communities to self-determination and, consequently, to autonomy to:
>
> [...]
>
> III. Elect, according to their traditional norms, procedures, and practices, authorities or representatives for the exercise of their own forms of internal government,

guaranteeing the participation of women in conditions of equality to men, in a way that respects the federal pact and the sovereignty of the states.

[...]

VII. Elect, in municipalities with indigenous populations, representatives to town councils.

The constitutions and laws of the federated entities will recognize and regulate these rights in the municipalities, with the aim of strengthening the political participation and representation in accordance with their traditions and internal norms (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[65]."

Regarding indigenous women, Article 2 of the Constitution does state that the political rights of women to participate in traditional normative systems have to be guaranteed.

From a legal point of view, Mexican men and women have been having equal political rights for six decades. At a municipal level, Mexican women obtained the right to vote and to be voted in 1947. General suffrage at a national level was obtained in 1953. But, are Mexican women actually participating in political life at the same level as their male fellow citizens? They have the right to vote, but are they also carrying out political mandates? Are they participating equally in local, state, and national decision-making processes? In the context of this research special attention must be given to women in rural and indigenous communities. Are these women limited by patriarchal social structures or can they participate in political processes? Do they have a voice and a vote in their local communities, and do they have access to higher political levels? In which spaces and to what extent can they participate?

[65] Original:
"Artículo 2o. La Nación Mexicana es única e indivisible.
A. Esta Constitución reconoce y garantiza el derecho de los pueblos y las comunidades indígenas a la libre determinación y, en consecuencia, a la autonomía para:
[...]
III. Elegir de acuerdo con sus normas, procedimientos y prácticas tradicionales, a las autoridades o representantes para el ejercicio de sus formas propias de gobierno interno, garantizando la participación de las mujeres en condiciones de equidad frente a los varones, en un marco que respete el pacto federal y la soberanía de los estados.
[...]
VII. Elegir, en los municipios con población indígena, representantes ante los ayuntamientos.
Las constituciones y leyes de las entidades federativas reconocerán y regularán estos derechos en los municipios, con el propósito de fortalecer la participación y representación política de conformidad con sus tradiciones y normas internas (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

Analyzing the political participation of indigenous communities is important because it shows the political emancipation of these communities. Since the 1990s, in the context of the struggle for indigenous autonomy, this subject has received a lot of attention. In addition to specialized publications, ethnographies almost systematically discuss the political structure of indigenous communities. Unfortunately, researchers tend to show a very masculine perspective of political life, which aligns with the machismo that is generally also very much present in traditional communities. In many indigenous communities, the political functions are still covered by men. Researchers thus speak to men and seem to find it evident that women are not participating. However, to give a complete image of the studied community they should question this gender division. Are women really not participating? What can be their role? Why don't they have equal access to politics and how could this be changed?

A certain number of researchers do work on female political participation and citizenship in Mexico. Studies specifically focusing on rural and indigenous women have been carried out by researchers such as Dalia Barrera Bassols (UNAM), Paloma Bonfil Sánchez, Margarita Dalton Palomo (CIESAS), Gisela Espinosa Damián (UAM-Xochimilco), Alejandra Massolo (UNAM), Maria Luisa Tarrés Barraza (Colmex), Ana María Tepichin Valle (Colmex), and Laura Valladares de la Cruz (UAM-Iztapalapa).

In this chapter, first the political participation of Mexican women will be analyzed. The national policy regarding female political participation will be looked at, and especially the use of gender quota. Then the question will be raised whether Mexican women can exercise their right to vote just like Mexican men. Subsequently, the same question will be asked about the eligibility of women. In this context three different political levels will be considered: the national level, state level, and municipal level. At a national level special attention will be given to the presidential elections of 2012 and the candidacy of Josefina Vázquez Mota, the first female candidate to have real possibilities to be elected as Mexican president.

After having studied the general degree of political participation of Mexican women, the focus will be on political participation of indigenous women. First, the specific indigenous political context will be explained, in which women have to find their place between a traditional political system and equal gender rights. The situation in the state of Oaxaca will be used to illustrate the position of indigenous women in Mexican politics. Then, several of the structural and cultural obstacles to participation encountered by indigenous women will be analyzed. Finally, special attention will be given to the changes that are occurring in indigenous communities, to alternative forms of participation, and to actions taken by indigenous women to gain a voice at the political level.

The national policy on female political participation will be critically analyzed, and certain specific statistics will be looked at. Official statistics of the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) have many limitations, and often lack a gender dimension. This is also the case for statistics on female political participation. Statistics regarding the number of female members in National Secretaries, National Congress, and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, as well as the number of female State Governors are available. The data for local state governments and municipalities are harder to find. Other institutions, such as the Instituto de la Mujer, developed their own gendered statistical documents based on different sources. The gaps in official statistical data can be attributed to lack of importance given to the gender perspective at policy level. It can also be considered symptomatic for the lack of commitment to really improve female political participation.

To complement the statistical data, literature on the topic was consulted. For the electoral campaign of 2012, a large amount of material could also be found in online newspapers. In addition, the available information was compared with personal experiences of female indigenous activists interviewed during fieldwork in Mexico.

A. National Policy on Female Political Participation

Since 1947, Mexican women have the right to be elected and to vote at municipal level. In 1953, they acquired full citizenship and thus the right to vote and to be elected in federal elections. Article 34 and 35 of the Mexican Constitution guarantee equal political rights for men and women:

> "Article 34
>
> The citizens of the Republic are those men and women who, in addition to having the status of Mexicans, meet the following requirements:
> I. To have attained 18 years of age, and
> II. To have an honest way of living.

Article 35

Citizens have the following prerogatives:

I. To vote in popular elections;

II. To be voted for all publicly eligible offices, [...];

III. To associate individually and freely to participate peacefully in the political affairs of the country; [...] (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[66]."

At a global level, Mexico participated in all international women conferences and ratified international agreements on gender equality. Yet, in the 1990s, after four decades of female suffrage, it was striking how few women actively participated in political life. In particular, there was a large gap between the numbers of women that voted, and the ones that were eligible during elections. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), called upon governments to enforce equal participation of women in politics and in national power structures. It was clear that there was a need for special policies to stimulate female participation. After this conference, the Mexican government started to develop a national gender policy. Mexico had already included a first adaptation to its legislation in 1993. Article 175 of the *Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*[67] (COFIPE) was amended to include that parties should promote the political participation of women. While this was a very general mention, it was nevertheless the first time better distribution of women in politics was included in legislation, and small improvements were noticeable. In 1996, after the Beijing Conference, and later in 2002, the COFIPE was further elaborated, replacing the general mention by concrete gender quota, and sanctions in case of nonobservance. From then on, not more than 70% of the candidates were allowed to be of the same sex (Reynoso and D'Angelo, 2004: 5). In 2007, the COFIPE was again modified, changing the existing

[66] Original:
"Artículo 34
Son ciudadanos de la República los varones y mujeres que, teniendo la calidad de mexicanos, reúnan, además, los siguientes requisitos:
I. Haber cumplido 18 años, y
II. Tener un modo honesto de vivir.
Artículo 35
Son prerrogativas del ciudadano:
I. Votar en las elecciones populares;
II. Poder ser votado para todos los cargos de elección popular, [...]
III. Asociarse individual y libremente para tomar parte en forma pacífica en los asuntos políticos del país;
[...] (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

[67] Federal Code on Electoral Institutions and Procedures that regulates federal elections.

quota of 70% to a gender quota of 60%. This change implied that a minimum of 40% of all candidates had to be female (Aparicio, 2011: 46).

In 2014, an electoral reform took place in Mexico, replacing the COFIPE by the *Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (LEGIPE). This new law includes new provisions regarding gender quota. For the next elections, parties will have to reach gender parity on their candidate lists (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a).

1. Mexican Gender Quota: The Gap Between Candidacy and Election

The use of gender quota in politics is subject to discussion. Worldwide the use of gender quotas seems to have a limited effect on the number of democratically elected women. According to Dahlerup and Freidenvall, the success of such policies depends on different factors: "the specific type of electoral system, the mean party and district magnitude, rank-ordering rules, open or closed lists, and sanctions for non-compliance (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2008: 29)". Opponents criticize such measures as positive discrimination, and fear that affirmative actions will have a negative influence on the kinds of women that will participate, and thus on the policy-making process. They argue that limited participation of women is the result of free and individual choices, often made in the context of motherhood and family care. The obligation for a female presence would only result in parties attracting unqualified women (Baltrunaite, 2012: 3). In this reasoning certain factors are overlooked, for example, difficult access for women to politics, persisting gender discrimination and stereotyping, as well as the fact that choosing to stay at home is not always a free choice for women, etcetera.

In the case of Mexico several problems became apparent. Studies show that, between 1993 and 2004, the implementation of quota has had little effect on the number of women in Mexican politics (Reynoso and D'Angelo, 2004). When the gender quota were introduced at the end of the 1990s, political parties tried to reach the 30% threshold by listing women as substitute candidates. The nominal lists thus complied with the quota, but women did not get elected proportionally (Tarrés, 2008: 118). After the quota reforms of 2007, the 2009 federal deputy elections showed a slight increase in the number of female candidates. However, the number of elected women rose very little. This shows that women have still a lot of obstacles to take before being de facto elected (Aparicio, 2011: 47).

Another problem is visible in the National Congress. The Lower Chamber of the Mexican National Congress counts 500 deputies; 300 are elected by relative majority in single-member districts, while the remaining 200 are elected by proportional representation through the system of party lists in five multi-member districts of 40 seats each (IFE, 2012b). Following Article 219 of the COFIPE, the 300 districts with relative majority are exempted from the gender quota if their candidatures are the

result of a democratic election within the party (Cámara de Diputados, 2008). The quota apply thus mainly to the 200 candidates in the popular representation system. In the 2009 elections, this resulted in an almost equal amount of male and female candidates in this representation system (Aparicio, 2011: 46).

Article 219 of the COFIPE could be questioned. José Antonio Aguilar, for example, wondered why the legislator included an exception on the gender quota if parties had chosen their candidates in a democratic way. He questioned why in this case it was allowed to choose democracy over gender (Aguilar, 2011: 49). Furthermore, according to Francisco Javier Aparicio, the fact that not all districts with relative majority had to maintain the quota allows manipulation of the system in two ways: first by minimizing the number of districts subject to quota, and secondly by placing female candidates in weak electoral districts (Aparicio, 2011: 46). The latter can clearly be illustrated by the 2009 federal elections. In these elections, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in coalition with the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), put forward less female candidates than the two other largest parties, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), yet they obtained the highest number of female members elected. According to Aparicio, this discrepancy between the number of female candidates and the number of elected women was due to the fact that women were often put in weak single-member districts where their chances to be elected were very low. During the 2009 elections, parties who put more women on their lists, such as the PAN and the PRD, put the majority of these women in weak districts, while parties with less women, such as the PRI, tended to list women more evenly among stronger districts (Aparicio, 2011: 47).

2. The Use of *'Juanitas'*: Getting Around Gender Quota

Another concrete example of the problems regarding the enforcement of gender quota in Mexico, is the case of the '*Juanitas*'. To get around the gender quota in National Congress, certain Mexican politicians introduced the system of the so-called '*Juanitas*'. Although the practice might already have been used in the past, the term '*Juanitas*' and '*Juanitos*' first appeared during the elections of 2009. In Iztapalapa, a delegation[68] in the east of Mexico City, the local street vendor and actor Rafael Acosta Ángeles, known by his nickname Juanito, was put forward by the Partido del Trabajo (PT) as electoral candidate-head of delegation. The candidature was pushed by the allied Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who declared from the start that if Juanito would win the elections, he would be replaced by Clara Brugada of the PRD. Juanito's popular background and peculiar personality contributed to his election. After first accepting the terms of his

[68] A delegation is a territorial and administrative entity within the Federal District.

election, he reconsidered, and protested against his replacement, but ultimately Brugada obtained the position as planned (Torres, 2011).

The way Juanito was treated and used can be criticized; his low social profile, lack of education, and characteristic tricolor head band, made him an easy object of derision and target for television jokes. Yet, this case was not gender related; Juanito was, in fact, replaced by a woman. The gender perspective of the replacement practice came to light in September of the same year, when eight female federal deputies resigned from their function just a few days after being elected, to be replaced by male substitutes (García Velázquez, 2011; Torres, 2011). Having problems meeting the gender quota, parties put female candidates on their lists. Upon election, however, they were replaced by male party members. The gender quota on the lists were thus respected, but in practice there were fewer women in Parliament.

The Mexican Electoral Tribunal and the Chamber of Deputies condemned this practice, and adopted an amendment in December 2011, to prevent this from happening in the future. To preserve the gender equity in Congress, this amendment states that resigning candidates will have to be replaced by candidates of the same sex (Cámara de Diputados, 2011). This reform was not yet in force for the 2012 elections. But, the use of '*Juanitas'* would probably be limited for presidential elections as this election process gets a lot of media coverage and the image of the candidate is crucial. However, the reform is important, specifically for the deputy elections. As deputy elections concern 500 deputies, replacements could easily go unnoticed (García Velázquez, 2011; El Universal, 2011a; Garduño and Méndez, 2011). In December 2013, celebrating 60 years of female vote in Mexico, President Peña Nieto initiated a request to the Senate to amend the COFIPE in order to guarantee equal political rights for women and men (SEGOB, 2013). His request was accepted, and included in the general electoral reforms adopted by the government in 2014. The COFIPE was replaced by the *Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (LEGIPE), which includes reforms regarding gender quota. The new law confirms that candidates on the lists have to have a substitute of the same gender, and extends the gender quota to parity. Thus, electoral lists will have to have 50% female candidates (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a).

Another important change is that the LEGIPE will apply to all federal, state, and municipal elections (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a). The COFIPE was only valid for federal elections. Essentially, the reform to prevent the use of '*Juanitas*', proposed in 2012, only applied to senators and deputies of the National Congress, and not to other political levels (Cámara de Diputados, 2011). Other levels, for example state governor or municipal elections, were not subject to such stipulations. The normativities regarding elections in the 32 federal entities of the Mexican territory were defined by

every local state legislation. The existence of gender quota for local elections depended thus on the decisions made by the individual state congresses. Every state included gender quota in its electoral legislation, but the rates differed. In most states only a maximum of 70% of all registered candidates could be of the same gender; in the remaining states the maximum was 60%. An exception to these quota was made for processes in which the candidates were chosen in a democratic election.

For the 2012 local elections, there were reports of candidate substitutions in all parties. In the state of Mexico for example, 163 changes to the candidate lists were accepted after the ballots were already printed. The names on the ballots differed therefore from the actual candidates. Although most of these substitutions do not seem to have been directly related to the avoidance of the gender quota, this situation left room for malpractices (Montaño, 2012; El Universal, 2012a). In some places gender quotas were met by nominating female family members for the National Congress[69] (Excelsior, 2012: 12-13). After the elections, some of these women might have been replaced by the initially envisioned male candidate. To prevent further abuse, it was important to implement gender substitution rules at all political levels, especially the lower levels where there is less control. Using women just to fill the candidates lists, but denying them to participate in the political decision-making process is a severe form of gender discrimination which had to be addressed. Even so, we will have to wait until the following elections to evaluate the real impact of the new legislation. It also remains to be seen to what degree and how fast this legislation is adapted and applied at the state and municipal levels.

In general, the use of gender quota is debatable. After six decades of political participation, the number of women in politics is still significantly lower compared to men. But, the use of gender quota is an important first step towards female participation, and governments should continue to support these affirmative actions. However, it cannot be denied that until now gender quota have shown limited results. Demanding an equal number of men and women in legislative bodies can be an incentive. But, up to now, parties seem to value the gender of the candidate higher than his or her capabilities. There is a risk that parties put forward certain women to fill the quota, even if they are not the best qualified candidates. However, it is not enough to just fill the seats equally. It would be more important to take measures that tackle the root of the problem. It is crucial to create an environment in which women and men experience the same social, educational, economic, and

[69] For example: In the state of Sinaloa, Esteban Valenzuela García (PRI) handed over his candidature for federal deputy to his wife María Victoria Vega. In the state of Querétaro, Raúl Orihuela González (PAN) handed over his candidature for national senator to María Marcela Torres Peimbert, wife of the former governor of Querétaro. Similar situations take place in other states of the Republic (Excelsior, 2012: 12-13). If elected, who will be the actual decision makers? Although it also must be said that Mrs. Torres Peimbert, at least until December 2014, has been an active and present senator (Senado, 2014a).

cultural conditions that allow them equal access to functions of political representation. The same is true for high functions in the economic, social, and judicial sectors. If equal opportunities are created, more women will start participating, and more suitable and well prepared candidates will be available to compete on an equal basis with their male colleagues (Aguilar, 2011: 48).

3. Other Government Initiatives Regarding Female Political Participation

In addition to the gender quotas, other measures have been taken to facilitate female political participation. The legislation on the expenses of political parties has, for example, also a gender perspective. Since 2008, the COFIPE stated that all Mexican political parties were obliged to annually spend two percent of their public funding for the "training, promotion, and development of women's political leadership" (Cámara de Diputados, 2008: Art. 78 §1a; IFE, 2012f). Concretely, parties were supposed to use these funds to organize workshops and seminars, finance research or analysis, and diffuse and distribute information on gender and political participation (IFE, 2012f). In se, two percent of all public funding is negligible, especially when taking into account the importance of the issue and the considerable arrears of women in Mexican politics. But additionally, past events have shown that it is important to control expenses made by political parties, and to impose sanctions in case of abuses. In 2011, the newspaper La Jornada reported that the political parties were misusing the funds for the promotion of female leadership:

> "The PAN spent on promotional material, events, end-of-year bonuses, vacation bonuses, gratuities, honoraria, savings funds, IMSS and Infonavit; the PRI used these resources for telephone payments, electricity, water, surveillance, general maintenance costs, cleaning, fumigation, supplies, general services and events. The PRD did not use the money, for which it was fined; it disposed of a certain quantity for other things not related with the promotion of female leadership. The PVEM channeled it to personal services, materials and supplies, general services, taxes and rights, call center, bags, aprons and embroidered bracelets (Martínez, 2011)[70]."

The lack of respect for this kind of legislation shows the position of political parties regarding female empowerment. They do not seem to consider it a matter worth investing in. The new law on political parties following the 2014 electoral reforms (*Ley General de Partidos Políticos*), includes the

[70] Original: "El PAN gastó en material promocional, actos, aguinaldo, primas vacacionales, gratificaciones, honorarios, fondos de ahorro, IMSS e Infonavit; el PRI usó esos recursos para pago de teléfono, electricidad, agua, vigilancia, mantenimiento general, limpieza, fumigación, suministros, servicios generales y actos. El PRD no aplicó el dinero, por lo cual fue multado; dispuso de cierta cantidad para otros asuntos no relacionados con la promoción de liderazgos femeninos. El PVEM lo canalizó a servicios personales, materiales y suministros, servicios generales, impuestos y derechos, call center, bolsas, mandiles de gabardina y pulseras bordadas (Martínez, 2011)."

obligation to increase the use of public funding of parties for the training, promotion, and development of women's political leadership, from two to three percent[71] (Congreso de la Unión, 2014b: Art. 51 §1a).

The changes made to the legislation are positive, but the next elections of 2018 will have to be awaited to measure the results of these initiatives. Furthermore, no sanctions seem to have been included in case of non-compliance. The law on electoral crimes (*Ley General en Materia de Delitos Electorales*) only comprises very general sanctions for the misuse of funding, but nothing specifically for the funds to promote women's political leadership (Cámara de Diputados, 2014c).

The Mexican government started other initiatives to address gender discrimination in politics. For example, the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) had a section on its web page on female political participation, encouraging women to participate in the 2012 elections (IFE, 2012c), as well as a separate web page on gender and democracy (IFE, 2012d). Radio and television spots promoted political equality between women and men (IFE, 2012e). On a regional level, not many, but some of the state governments and their respective Instituto de la Mujer have been working on the same subject. In Oaxaca for example, the governor launched the *Sistema Estatal para la Igualdad entre Hombres y Mujeres* on the 30th of May 2012. The purpose of the system was to enforce a true gender policy in the state, focusing among others on female political participation (IMO, 2012). However, it is very clear that the number of such initiatives is limited, and that it is still a big step from intention and legislation to practice.

[71] The new law states that these funds can be used for research, communication, workshops, events, etcetera, focused on female political leadership (Congreso de la Unión, 2014b: Art. 73).

B. Female Voters

The Mexican Constitution and national gender policy ensure equal political rights for men and women. The legislation supports equality, however, it must be analyzed whether equality is also achieved in practice. Political rights are twofold: the right to vote, and the right to be elected. A first question that should be asked is whether Mexican women can cast their individual vote in the same way Mexican men can. To answer this question the statistical data on the number and the gender proportion of voters must be studied.

According to Article 36 of the Mexican Constitution, the vote is compulsory for all Mexican citizens, both men and women (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a). However, in practice, not voting is not sanctioned. Mexicans have to register with the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE)[72]. Only registered citizens have the possibility to vote during the elections[73]. In Mexico, the registration card is also used as an official identification and has to be presented for any official procedure or payment. People are thus encouraged to register even if they do not wish to vote. Statistics show that in 2012, an estimated 70% of Mexicans were registered and had a valid registration card (IFE, 2012a). But, this does not mean that all these people actually voted during the 2012 elections. During the 2009 federal elections, only 44% of all registered Mexicans cast their vote (IFE, 2010). For the presidential elections of 2006, 58.55% of registered voters participated (IFE, 2006b). A general upward trend can be observed, as in 2012, 63.3% of all registered voters voted for the presidential elections (IFE, 2012g).

In 2012, of all registered Mexicans, 51.85% were women and 48.15% were men (IFE, 2012a). For the 2009 federal elections, statistical data on the proportion of men and women that actually voted show a slightly larger number of women casting their vote in comparison to men[74] (IFE, 2010). There are thus more women than men participating as voters[75]. This basically shows that women are equally participating as electorate during federal elections.

Although this seems to be an excellent outcome, a few important points have to be made. Being able to cast an individual vote does not necessarily mean the vote will be free. The level to which the voter might be influenced or even forced to vote in a certain way is hard to measure, and I have found no studies on Mexican female voters related to this topic. In patriarchal communities, be it in

[72] The electoral reforms of 2014, replaced the former Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) by the INE.
[73] Registration cards issued since 2008 are valid for ten years (IFE, 2012).
[74] Approximately 47.3% of registered women voted, compared to 40.5% of registered men.
[75] The total Mexican population consists of 51.17% women and 48.83% men (INEGI, 2010).

an urban or rural environment, women might be expected to vote in line with their father's or husband's suggestion. Children around the world are educated in a certain context, often resulting – at least temporarily – in the same political preferences as their parents. But, lack of political knowledge and education may limit free choice, making the right to vote another opportunity to blindly obey the patriarch of the family. In Mexico, other institutions may also influence the vote. Even though the government finances campaigns to promote free vote, it is known that voters are easily influenced by bribes of political candidates. Candidates visit communities and offer food or drinks to their loyal voters. Promotional material, such as pens, bags, hats, watches, blankets, etcetera, with the candidate and party logos, are presented as gifts. Especially in poor communities, such simple items can buy votes easily. During the 2012 elections, there were reports that the PRI gave prepaid cards at a value between 100 and 700 pesos[76] for shopping in the Soriana super market chain among others, to voters from poor neighborhoods of Mexico City, such as Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, upon showing a picture of their ballot in favor of the PRI (Quintero, 2012). After one and a half year of investigations, the IFE acquitted the PRI with the peculiar argument that there was insufficient evidence, that beneficiaries of the cards never experienced threats nor violence, and they were never forced to vote for any particular party (Cervantes, 2014).

Beneficiaries of aid programs such as *Oportunidades*, are also vulnerable. *Oportunidades* is a federal program of the Secretary of Social Development that does not depend on the support of political parties. However, some people fear they might lose the much needed help if they do not favor a certain candidate. On the Frequently Asked Questions page of the *Oportunidades* website one of the questions is: “The authorities in my municipality tell us to vote for candidate or political party "X". Failing to do so, they will take away the aid of *Oportunidades*. What can we do?”[77] (SEDESOL, 2012). The fact that this question is present on the Frequently Asked Questions page shows it is a recurring concern. Unfortunately, a majority of beneficiaries of these aid programs are women. In fear of losing the help they need to feed their family, they might be vulnerable to intimidation. People can be influenced by the local authorities, a local teacher, health workers, or even the church. During the 2012 election campaign, government radio and television spots warned people not to accept bribes, nor to believe threats of political candidates, but the question is how effective these campaigns really are.

[76] Approximately between 5 and 40 euros.

[77] The answer to the question reads: “Remember: *Oportunidades* is a federal program, intended for Mexicans, and beneficiary families must only meet their responsibilities to receive the support. Those responsibilities do not include the vote for a particular party or candidate (SEDESOL, 2012).”

Nevertheless, everything should be nuanced and placed in perspective. There are also many women, both in urban, rural, and indigenous communities, who are voting very consciously, follow politics, and are well informed. Overgeneralizations and victimization of women should be avoided at all cost.

In Mexico, a certain level of gender equality seems to have been achieved regarding the right to vote. This equality can be threatened in patriarchal communities if women are socially forced to follow the political preference of the male members of the family. More attention should be given by the government to the development of political consciousness, education, and emancipation of women in such situations. This would enable them to cast an individual and considered vote, and arm them against bad influences that prejudice women's political rights.

C. Eligible Women

A second element of citizens' political rights is the right to be elected and to carry out a political mandate. Mexican women seem to be able to vote in almost the same way as men do. But can this gender equality also be found when looking at the proportion of elected women and men? Different levels have to be analyzed. This analysis will first look at the national level, which includes the National Government, with the National Presidency and the State Secretaries, the National Congress of the Union, and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation. A second level is the state level, with the State Governors and local State Congresses. Finally, the municipal level will be analyzed briefly.

1. National Level

a) Presidents of the Mexican Republic

Until now, Mexico has had no female President of the Republic. There have been five female presidential candidates. The first female presidential candidate in Mexican history was Rosario Ibarra de la Garza. She was presidential candidate in 1982 and again in 1988, for the defunct Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores. She was succeeded by Cecilia Soto González, candidate of the socialist Partido del Trabajo in 1994; Marcela Lombardo Otero, presidential candidate of the former Partido Popular Socialista in 1994; and Patricia Mercado Castro, candidate of the extinct Partido Alternativa Socialdemócrata in 2006 (IFE, 2007). The electoral success of these women was limited. Before 2012, Cecilia Soto González and Patricia Mercado Castro obtained the best results with 2.75%

(IFE, 1994) and 2.70% (IFE, 2006a) of the votes respectively[78]. For the 2012 presidential elections, Josefina Vázquez Mota was the candidate of the Partido Acción Nacional. It was the first time that one of Mexico's three largest political parties put forward a woman as presidential candidate. Therefore, she was the woman with the best prospects in the history of Mexican elections. In the end, Vázquez Mota obtained 25.4% of the votes, but she was overtaken by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (PRD), and Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI), with respectively 31.59% and 38.21% of the votes (IFE, 2012h).

As Josefina Vázquez Mota was the first Mexican woman with real chances to reach the national presidency, it is interesting to look at her campaign and at her messages from a gender perspective. Vázquez Mota had been the first female Secretary of Social Development (2000-2006) and of Public Education (2006-2009) in Mexico. In 2012, she put herself forward as the first female Mexican president (Vázquez Mota, 2012b). Her main campaign slogan was "Josefina Diferente!". By stating that she was different, she distinguished herself from the other presidential candidates. The main difference she pointed at was that she is a woman. With other slogans, such as "Today we get a female president[79]!" and "The century and the time of women has come[80]!", Vázquez Mota emphasized her female gender, and tried to appeal especially to women. As part of her electoral campaign she participated in different meetings of women's organizations, for example in Monterrey, Puebla, and Zapópan (Vázquez Mota, 2012d, e, f). Electing a woman does not necessarily guarantee attention to female issues, but Vázquez Mota seemed to take a clear position on this subject. She addressed several gender subjects in her campaign proposals, such as a law on Responsible Paternity, giving women the right to demand a DNA test if the father of their child denies responsibility (Vázquez Mota, 2012a).

The candidature of Josefina Vázquez Mota showed that women can reach the highest echelons of Mexican politics. It makes her an important role model for young women. Although her focus on female issues was positive, the emphasis on her gender was, in my opinion, and from a feminist point of view, more negative than positive. First, she asked women for their vote appealing to their role as mothers, and because she, as a mother herself, understood their needs:

> "I ask all mommies of Mexico, I ask them all for their vote and I ask them for their trust because like you, I understand what it means to be a mother. I will look after

[78] Rosario Ibarra de la Garza obtained 1.76% of the votes in the presidential elections of 1982 (SEGOB, 1982: 6) and 0.39% in 1988. Marcela Lombardo Otero obtained 0.47% of the votes in the presidential elections of 1994 (IFE, 1994).
[79] Original: "¡Hoy toca Presidenta!"
[80] Original: "¡Ha llegado el siglo y el tiempo de las mujeres!"

> and protect your families, I will not consort with organized crime… How can we not win when we are more than half of the electoral register and the mother of the other half of the electoral register, with that in mind, of course we will win (Vázquez Mota, 2012c)[81]."

Vázquez Mota tried to take a feminist stance, however, her discourse tended to revert to gender prejudices. In an effort to show that women are capable of ruling the country, she attributed certain characteristics to women. But in doing this, she often reduced women to their reproductive and domestic role. Although she wanted to highlight the qualities of women, Vázquez Mota's discourse presented a very stereotyped and conservative image of women, limiting these qualities to the household sphere. This can be illustrated by several of her quotes (Valdez & Sánchez, 2012):

> "The females are the first ones to wake up and the last ones to go to bed, they keep the house clean and in perfect condition, they know how to manage the household resources and where to find them. We women know where the things are in the house and in that sense I will bring order and discipline to the public servants if I am elected president[82]."

> "Women do politics in their home: they reconcile brothers, they make sure the family meets at a certain time. And the married ones, when (the husband) misbehaves, when they are asleep, we get some instincts… like, passionate. But the next day we go ahead, we are builders of homes[83]."

> "Widows do not remarry, while men start looking for a girlfriend during the vigil of their former wife[84]."

> "After permanently cleaning the house, women ought to wonder about what life has in store for them and look for dreams to come true, instead of tackling the next task in the house[85]."

[81] Original: "Les pido a todas las mamás de México, a todas les pido su voto y les pido su confianza porque como ustedes entiendo lo que significa ser madre. Yo cuidaré y protegeré a sus familias, yo no pactaré con el crimen organizado...Cómo no vamos a ganar si somos más de la mitad del padrón electoral y ahora que somos la mamá de la otra mitad del padrón electoral, solamente bajo esta premisa, claro que vamos a ganar."

[82] Original: "Las féminas son las primeras en levantarse y las últimas en irse a la cama, mantienen la casa limpia y en perfecto estado, saben administrar los recursos del hogar y dónde ubicarlos. Las mujeres sabemos en dónde están las cosas en la casa y en ese sentido yo voy a poner orden y disciplina en los funcionarios en caso de ser electa presidenta."

[83] Original: "Las mujeres hacen política en su casa: reconcilian a los hermanos, hacen que la familia coincida en algún momento. Y las casadas, cuando (el marido) no se porta muy bien, cuando están dormidos, nos entran unos instintos… así, pasionales. Pero al día siguiente seguimos adelante, somos constructoras de hogares."

[84] Original: "Las viudas no vuelven a casarse, mientras que los hombres empiezan a buscar novia durante el velorio de la que fue su esposa."

In this portrayal, women wake up early, keep the house clean, are organized, have a talent for mediation, are virtuous; their lives are centered around the household. It disregards all the efforts and accomplishments of women, and minimizes the participation of women in all sectors of Mexican society. Vázquez Mota displayed a very stereotyped and paternalistic approach towards women, which raises questions about her engagement on the subject of real gender equality. Probably her basic idea was to show her capabilities as a woman to become president. She chose to emphasize the differences between men and women, but in doing so, she fell into the trap of, on the one hand, presenting men as untrustworthy womanizers, and, on the other hand, putting up a conservative and idealized image of the virtuous housewife. This mistake shows gender equality is not yet given in Mexican politics. Instead of stereotypically opposing the sexes, a more balanced discourse should be developed, reflecting equality between men and women as a matter of fact.

On the other hand, the PAN party of Vázquez Mota has been known for its conservatism regarding family values, opposing free abortion, among others. In her campaign, Vázquez Mota stressed again that the PAN is "the party of life". They defend life starting from conception, consequently opposing the right to abort. Vázquez Mota does not support abortion, but she is against the criminalization of women who have had an abortion (Vázquez Mota, 2012e). Despite the conservative stand towards abortion, the non-criminalization of women at a national level would be a first step towards free sexual and reproductive rights for Mexican women.

Vázquez Mota made another remarkable statement, perhaps unconsciously, which hardly qualifies as gender friendly. In an attempt to stimulate general electoral participation, on a campaign meeting in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, Vázquez Mota asked all women to cast their vote during the elections. She also asked them not to come alone, but to convince their partners and other family members to vote too. As an incentive, she joked that women should deny their partner one month of 'cuchi cuchi' if he failed to vote. This statement generated a lot of reaction from the public opinion, but she later reiterated it, and added that men who did cast their vote deserved a double portion of 'cuchi cuchi', if their wife was up to it. Although in later interviews she defined 'cuchi cuchi' as being merely hugs and kisses, the Mexican public interpreted it in a more sexual context. The comment may have been made to get the audience's attention, to appeal to the public. However, such a statement can hardly be considered an appropriate discourse for a candidate who claims to support gender equality. The statement may have been innocent, a little joke to boost the electoral 'passion', but the underlying message is not adequate. By suggesting that a vote should be rewarded with 'cuchi cuchi', she implies in fact that democratic elections can be obtained in exchange for sexual relations. Women

[85] Original: "Después de limpiar permanentemente la casa, las mujeres deben preguntarse qué les toca por vivir y soñar, en lugar de qué tarea sigue por realizar en el hogar."

are put in a subordinate position in which they are 'expected' to reward their partner's political participation with sexual favors (and where is the women's reward?). Taking it one step up, Mexican women would be 'offering their bodies' for democracy. Probably Vázquez Mota only meant to draw the attention of the audience, however, in a country with so many problems of gender inequality, and claiming to be a president for women, the presidential candidate should have picked her words more carefully.

The intention of this analysis is not to evaluate whether Vázquez Mota was, generally speaking, a good or a bad candidate for Mexico, and only a few elements of Vázquez Mota's campaign are highlighted here. What is important to realize is that it takes more than a woman leading the country to improve the situation of Mexican women. Vázquez Mota claimed to be different compared to her opponents, however, regarding gender equality she seemed in many ways to perpetuate the patriarchal ideology of her male predecessors, and of Mexican society in general. And while her intentions may have been good, she had to function within the confines of the party structures that are still dominated by men. A general hierarchy and mentality change within the parties is therefore necessary.

Although she did not win the elections – the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto did – it is clear that the candidature of Vázquez Mota must nevertheless be acknowledged as a significant step towards female emancipation. A female candidate for the most prestigious function of the country shows women can reach the highest echelons of Mexican public life. However, much remains to be done to consider this a normal situation. Mexicans should be able to vote for the most capable candidate. The sex of this candidate should not define his or her capabilities. To make a real difference for Mexican women and foster substantial changes, the help of the entire Mexican society is needed.

b) Secretaries of State Departments

At national level, the President chooses the Secretaries of the different State Departments, who together form the cabinet. In the Vicente Fox administration (2000-2006), only the Secretary for Social Development was led by a woman. Another woman was the head of the Secretary of Agrarian Reform, but after three years she left and was replaced by a man (Presidencia de la República, 2006). During the LXI Legislature under Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), three of the eighteen State Departments (*Secretarías*) were led by women (16.7%), while fifteen were led by men (83.3%). The Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Secretary for Tourism were all women. The cabinet of the President was completed with a Legal Advisor of the Federal Executive, and with a General Attorney of the Republic, respectively a man and a woman (Presidencia de la República, 2012). Four female Secretaries served at the beginning of the legislation, but after several

changes only three remained. In the LXII legislature under Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), again only three out of seventeen State Departments are headed by women (17.6%): the Secretary for Social Development, the Secretary of Health, and the Secretary for Tourism. The Legal Advisor of the Federal Executive and the General Attorney of the Republic are both men. It is notable that in this cabinet, all women are given the responsibility over so-called 'soft' topics (Presidencia de la República, 2014).

It is clear that little efforts have been made to attain a certain degree of gender parity within the presidential cabinet; the Secretaries are predominantly male. President Peña Nieto launched an initiative to reach parity in the National Congress (SEGOB, 2013), but he did not apply the same rules when choosing his cabinet, which serves to illustrate the inconsistency of Mexican gender policy. Awareness about gender inequality seems to be lacking, even at the highest levels of Mexican politics. Enough capable women should be available to take up the function of Secretary. When forming the government, more attention should be given to offer opportunities to these women. The President would really show his commitment to the issue by appointing a government with a better gender balance.

c) National Congress

Mexican citizens can elect a presidential candidate of their choice. The members of the cabinet are chosen by the president. Additionally, the most important body of representation is the National Congress. The Mexican National Congress consists of a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies. The Senate counts 128 senators, elected for six years. They cannot be reelected for the next legislature. Every one of the 31 states and the Federal District (Distrito Federal) elect three senators; two with a relative majority vote, the third senator is attributed to the first minority. The remaining 32 senators are chosen by proportional representation, through lists voted in one national multi-member constituency (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 56). The Chamber of Deputies has 500 national deputies. They are elected every three years, and cannot be reelected for the next term[86]. Of the 500 deputies, 300 are elected by relative majority in single-member electoral districts. The 200 remaining deputies are chosen by proportional representation, through regional lists voted in multi-member constituencies (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 51-52). The variation in voting systems means that a certain amount of candidates can directly be chosen by the voters, while to some extent the political parties can control a part of the elected members.

[86] As a result of the new electoral reforms, entering into force with the 2018 elections, senators will be eligible for reelection for two consecutive terms (6 years), and deputies for four consecutive terms (12 years), if they remain in the same political party (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 59).

The National Congress elections are subject to gender quota. According to the 2008 *Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales* (COFIPE), at least 40% of the registered candidates for senator or deputy had to be from the same gender. An exception was possible for democratic election processes within the parties (Cámara de Diputados, 2008: Art. 219 & 220). For the next elections, the 2014 LEGIPE demands parity between female and male candidates, and exceptions have been abolished (Congreso de la Unión, 2014a: Art. 233 & 234).

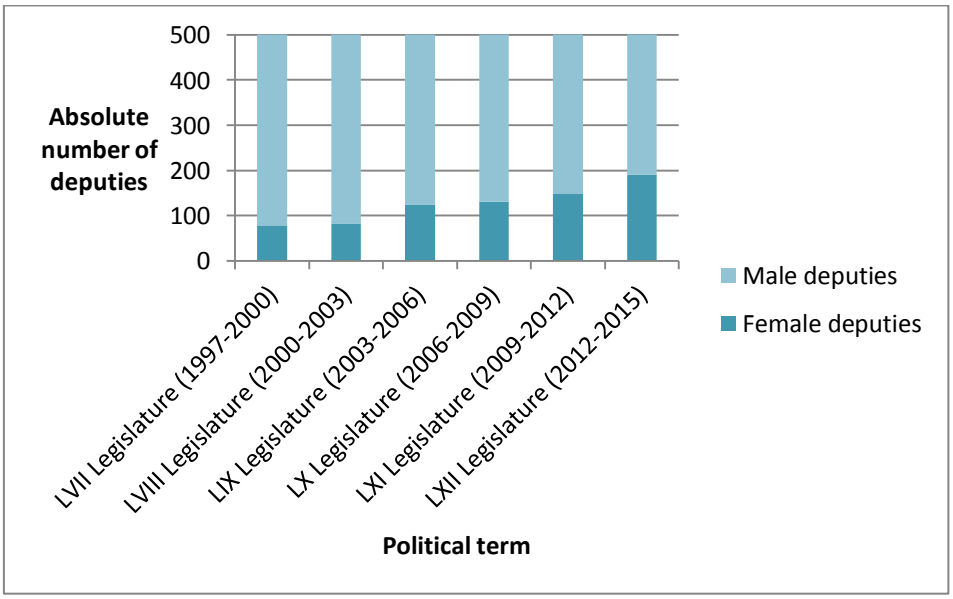
In 2012, the National Congress had 99 male senators (77.3%), and 29 female senators (22.7%) (Senado de la República, 2012a,b). Among the 500 deputies, there were 341 men (68.2%), and 159 women (31.8%) (Cámara de Diputados, 2012c). In 2014, there were 85 male (66.4%) and 43 female senators (33.6%) (Senado de la República, 2014a,b). The Chamber of Deputies consisted of 310 men (62%) and 190 women (38%) (Cámara de Diputados, 2014d).

Despite the introduction of gender quota, the number of women in Mexican Parliament has only been increasing slowly during the last fifteen years. The obligatory quota have never been reached (see figures 6a, 6b, 7a, and 7b). It remains to be seen what effect the new electoral reform will have.

Figure 6a: Members of the federal Chamber of Deputies, by sex, Mexico, 1997-2015.

Political term	Female deputies		Male deputies		Total number of deputies (male and female)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
LVII Legislature (1997-2000)[87]	79	15.8	421	84.2	500	100
LVIII Legislature (2000-2003)[88]	83	16.6	417	83.4	500	100
LIX Legislature (2003-2006)[89]	124	24.8	376	75.2	500	100
LX Legislature (2006-2009)[90]	131	26.2	369	73.8	500	100
LXI Legislature (2009-2012)[91]	159	31.8	341	68.2	500	100
LXII Legislature (2012-2015)[92]	190	38	310	62	500	100

Figure 6b: Members of the federal Chamber of Deputies, by sex, Mexico, 1997-2015[93].

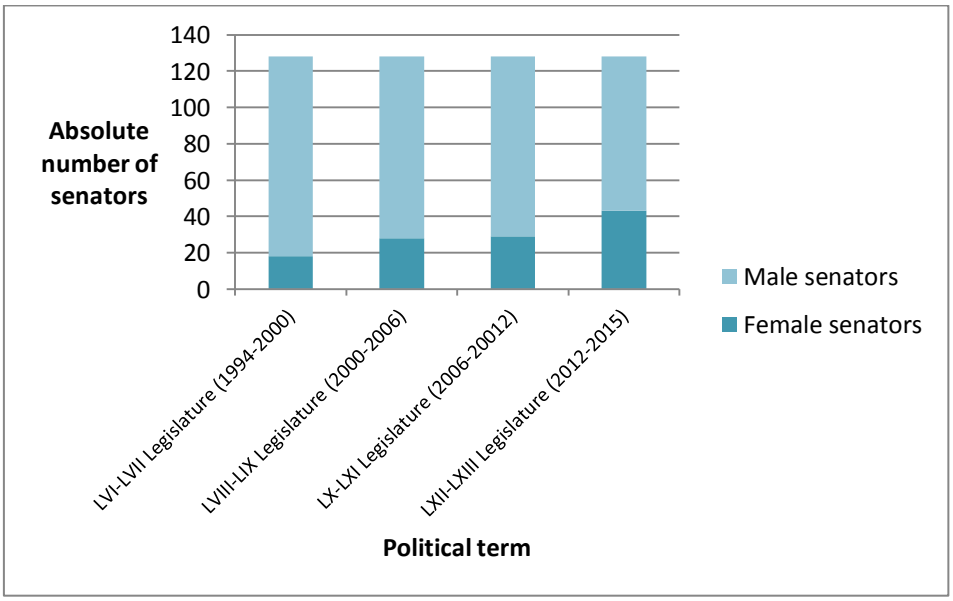


[87] Valladares, 2004: 142.
[88] Valladares, 2004: 142.
[89] Cámara de Diputados, 2012a.
[90] Cámara de Diputados, 2012b.
[91] Cámara de Diputados, 2012c.
[92] Cámara de Diputados, 2014d. Situation as it was in December 2014.
[93] Valladares, 2004: 142; Cámara de Diputados, 2012a, b, c.

Figure 7a: Senators, by sex, Mexico, 1994-2015.

Political term	Female senators		Male senators		Total number of senators (male and female)	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
LVI-LVII Legislature (1994-2000)[94]	18	14.1	110	85.9	128	100
LVIII-LIX Legislature (2000-2006)[95]	28	21.9	100	78.1	128	100
LX-LXI Legislature (2006-2012)[96]	29	22.7	99	77.3	128	100
LXII-LXIII Legislature (2012-2015)[97]	43	33.6	85	66.4	128	100

Figure 7b: Senators, by sex, Mexico, 1994-2015[98].



[94] Senado de la República, 2007.
[95] Senado de la República, 2012c.
[96] Senado de la República, 2012a.
[97] Senado de la República, 2014a. Situation as it was in December 2014.
[98] Senado de la República, 2007; Senado de la República, 2012a, c.

To some authors, such as Laura Valladares de la Cruz, the actual number of women in Parliament shows that the gender quota of the COFIPE are not followed (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 141). Although it is true that the quota seem to have limited effects on female participation in Parliament, this statement must be nuanced. The quota suggested in the COFIPE consider the number of candidates for the election; the quota cannot guarantee the number of women that will de facto be elected. The government can stipulate the percentage of female candidates, but it cannot impose how many women must be chosen in a democratic election process. It is therefore normal that the proportion of women in Parliament will not match the required election quota. This is not a problem as such. Problems arise when registered female candidates are not chosen because they are women, or when they are replaced by male candidates, basically disregarding the quota. Furthermore, parties should commit and place more women in eligible positions. Not the number of women or men in Parliament are important, but equal opportunity to access these functions as well as the mentality of the electorate who would consider women equally up to the job, will make a difference and result in gender equality.

d) Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation

The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation is the highest judicial power in Mexico. The Court consists of eleven Ministers, elected by the Senate among the candidates put forward by the President. They can be appointed for up to 15 years, thus changes in the composition of the Supreme Court are bound to be slow. In 2014, nine Ministers were male (82%) and two female (18%) (SCJN, 2014).

e) Party Structures

Currently, Mexico has three main political parties: the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN, founded in 1939), the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD, founded in 1989), and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, founded in 1928). In 1994, the PRI was the first party to have a female party president. In 85 years of political history, three women have been president of the PRI[99]. The PRD had two female presidents during its 24 years of existence[100]. The PAN has always been ruled by men. None of the current smaller parties have had female presidents either[101].

[99] I.e. María de los Ángeles Moreno Uriego (1994-1995), Dulce María Sauri Riancho (1999-2002), and Beatriz Paredes Rangel (2007-2011). Cristina Díaz Salazar, the fourth female president, was not listed here because of her short term as interim president between 2 and 8 December 2011.
[100] I.e. Amalia García (1999-2002) and Rosario Robles (2002-2003).
[101] I.e. Partido del Trabajo (PT), Partindo Nueva Alianza (PANAL), Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC).

2. State Level

a) State Governors

The Mexican Republic has 32 federal entities. Every six years each state elects a local governor[102]. In two hundred years of political history, there have only been six female state governors in Mexico: Griselda Álvarez in the state of Colima (1979-1985), Beatriz Paredes in Tlaxcala (1987-1992), Dulce María Sauri in Yucatán (1991-1993), Rosario Robles in the Federal District of Mexico (1999-2000), Amalia García in Zacatecas (2004-2010), and Ivonne Ortega in Yucatan (2007-2012) (El Universal, 2011b).

In 2012, out of 32 state governors there was only one woman (3%), Ivonne Ortega in Yucatán (CONAGO, 2014a). During that same year, governor elections took place in the Federal District and in six states: Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Tabasco, and Yucatán. Jalisco and Yucatán had each one female candidate[103]; Chiapas had two[104]. With the exception of one PRD candidate in Chiapas, all of them belonged to small parties with little chance to be elected. In the six states, men won the elections. The Federal District had three female and one male candidate[105], but the women did not even get close to being elected, so the male candidate won (El Universal, 2012b). The most recent governor election was in 2013 in Baja California, but also there a man was elected. Currently, Mexico has no female state governor, only men. This situation will not change at least until the elections of seven new governors in 2015 (CONAGO, 2014b).

It is important to point out that in these cases the women did not lose because of their gender, but because of their political affiliation. In the D.F., for example, Beatriz Paredes proved to be a capable state governor in the past. However, her PRI party was not favored by the electorate during the 2012 elections, and the PRD won with a decisive 63.56% of the votes[106] (El Universal, 2012b). Nevertheless, it is remarkable how out of a total of 29 candidates, divided over the six states and the Federal District, only 7 were female (24%). Even more noteworthy is that with 32 federal entities, not even one woman was elected. Undoubtedly, Mexican women striving to become state governor have to face an unequal fight. It is clear that a lot of work still needs to be done at this level to give women access to the candidacy. An important responsibility lies within the political parties. At this moment they do not seem to be concerned about gender equality within their party structures, and there is a considerable lack of commitment. It is not about choosing the required woman, it is about giving

[102] In the case of the Federal District, a head of government is chosen.
[103] Respectively María Martínez (PANAL) and Olivia Guzmán (PANAL).
[104] María Elena Orantes (PRD/PT/MC) and Marcela Bonilla (Partido Orgullo Chiapas).
[105] María del Rosario Elena Guerra Díaz (PANAL), Miguel Ángel Mancera Espinosa (PRD/PT/MC), María Isabel Miranda Torres (PAN), and Beatriz Elena Paredes Rangel (PRI).
[106] Compared to only 19.75% for the PRI, 13.62% for the PAN, and 1.23% for the PANAL.

women and men equal opportunities to become valuable candidates. As a first step, a certain amount of affirmative actions could ease the path toward gender equality. More support is needed from within the parties to train women and give them the necessary experience to be able to compete at an equal level against their male counterparts.

b) State Congresses

Every Mexican state has a local state Congress. This Congress consists of a number of deputies, established by law and chosen for three years[107]. Part of them are elected by relative majority, the remaining ones are elected by proportional representation (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 116 § 2). Each state has its own constitution, and its own electoral code for local elections.

Before the 2014 electoral reforms, the gender quota differed from one state constitution to another. The second column of figure 8 shows the minimum percentage of local deputies that had to be of the same sex for each state. The 40% quota, adopted in the COFIPE, had to be incorporated in electoral legislation of each state. Yet after four years (2008-2012), the incorporation proved to be still incomplete. Of the total 32 states, 14 states, or almost half of them, had not yet implemented a gender quota of at least 40%. The majority of the states had a gender quota of 30% (37,5% of the states). Only one state out of five demanded parity. Furthermore, when the results of the 2012 elections are analyzed, it is clear that none of the states saw the quota demands on the lists reflected in the actual number of elected female deputies. In this respect, Oaxaca is the state that came closest to its gender quota (see figure 8). With the 2014 reforms, the new LEGIPE will have to be applied at state level, requiring the states to include a gender quota of 50% in their local electoral legislations. Future research will reveal whether the states adopted the new quota, and what effects this will have on electoral results.

[107] Following the adoption of the 2014 electoral reforms, they will have the possibility to be reelected four times, if they stay in the same party or coalition (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a; Art. 116 §2).

Figure 8: Gender quota in electoral state legislations, and proportion of female and male deputies in the state congresses, Mexico, 2012 and 2014.

	Federal entity	Gender quota for elections 2012 & 2014	Female deputies 2012		Female deputies 2014[108]		Total number of female and male deputies	
			No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*	*No.*	*%*
1	Aguascalientes[109]	40%	2	**7.4**	8	**29.6**	27	**100**
2	Baja California[110]	40%	8	**32.0**	9	**36.0**	25	**100**
3	Baja California Sur[111]	40%	6	**28.6**	7	**33.3**	21	**100**
4	Campeche[112]	50%	12	**34.3**	9	**25.7**	35	**100**
5	Chiapas[113]	50%	14	**34.1**	16	**39.0**	41	**100**
6	Chihuahua[114]	50%	7	**21.2**	14	**42.4**	33	**100**
7	Coahuila de Zaragoza[115]	50%	3	**12.0**	12	**48.0**	25	**100**
8	Colima[116]	30%	5	**19.2**	7	**26.9**	26	**100**
9	Federal District[117]	40%	18	**27.3**	21	**31.8**	66	**100**
10	Durango[118]	30%	5	**16.7**	6	**20.0**	30	**100**
11	Guanajuato[119]	Not specified	8	**22.2**	7	**19.4**	36	**100**
12	Guerrero[120]	30%	7	**15.2**	9	**19.6**	46	**100**
13	Hidalgo[121]	30%	8	**26.7**	9	**30.0**	30	**100**
14	Jalisco[122]	30%	8	**20.5**	9	**23.1**	39	**100**
15	México[123]	40%	12	**15.8**	15	**19.7**	76	**100**
16	Michoacán de Ocampo[124]	40%	11	**27.5**	9	**22.5**	40	**100**
17	Morelos[125]	30%	9	**30.0**	7	**23.3**	30	**100**
18	Nayarit[126]	/	9	**30.0**	14	**46.7**	30	**100**
19	Nuevo León[127]	30%	11	**26.2**	13	**31.0**	42	**100**
20	Oaxaca[128]	40%	16	**38.1**	17	**40.5**	42	**100**
21	Puebla[129]	30%	6	**14.6**	12	**29.3**	41	**100**

[108] Based on 31 states.
[109] Congreso del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2009 and 2014.
[110] Congreso del Estado de Baja California, 2013 and 2014.
[111] Congreso del Estado de Baja California Sur, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[112] Congreso del Estado de Campeche, 2014a and 2014b.
[113] Congreso del Estado de Chiapas, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[114] Congreso del Estado de Chihuahua, 2009 and 2014.
[115] Congreso del Estado de Coahuila de Zaragoza, 2012 and 2014.
[116] Congreso del Estado de Colima, 2014a and 2014b.
[117] Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, 2014a and 2014b.
[118] Congreso del Estado de Durango, 2014a and 2014b.
[119] Congreso del Estado de Guanajuato, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[120] Congreso del Estado de Guerrero, 2014a and 2014b.
[121] Congreso del Estado de Hidalgo, 2012a, 2012b and 2014.
[122] Congreso del Estado de Jalisco, 2008, 2012 and 2014.
[123] Congreso del Estado de México, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[124] Congreso del Estado de Michoacán de Ocampo, 2014a and 2014b.
[125] Congreso del Estado de Morelos, 2014a and 2014b.
[126] Congreso del Estado de Nayarit, 2012, 2013 and 2014.
[127] Congreso del Estado de Nuevo León, 2014a and 2014b.
[128] Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2012 and 2014.

22	Querétaro[130]	40%	5	**20.0**	2	**8.0**	25	**100**
23	Quintana Roo[131]	30%	5	**20.0**	9	**36.0**	25	**100**
24	San Luis Potosí[132]	50%	6	**22.2**	5	**18.5**	27	**100**
25	Sinaloa[133]	30%	7	**17.5**	13	**32.5**	40	**100**
26	Sonora[134]	50%	7	**21.2**	8	**24.2**	33	**100**
27	Tabasco[135]	40%	7	**20.0**	15	**42.9**	35	**100**
28	Tamaulipas[136]	40%	11	**31.4**	12	**34.3**	35	**100**
29	Tlaxcala[137]	50%	6	**18.8**	-[138]	-	32	**100**
30	Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave[139]	30%	19	**38.0**	12	**24.0**	50	**100**
31	Yucatán[140]	30%	5	**20.0**	6	**24.0**	25	**100**
32	Zacatecas[141]	40%	9	**30.0**	12	**40.0**	30	**100**
	TOTAL	40%	**272**	**23.9**	**324**	**29.3**	**1138**	**100**

3. Municipal Level

The Mexican Republic has a total of 2,440 municipalities in 31 states, and 16 delegations in the Federal District (INAFED, 2012c). Every municipality and delegation has a municipal council, the a*yuntamiento*, headed by a president and composed of one or two *síndicos* and several *regidores*, all chosen by popular election (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 115). In addition, the authorities can appoint a treasurer, auxiliaries, *comisariados*, and specific committee members. Municipalities constitute a very important political level, because at this level local decision-making is closest to the citizens. It is also the level impacting women most directly in their daily life in the community. In theory, it could be considered the most accessible political level for women. In practice however, it seems that participation of women is limited (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 1; Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 136-137). In 2002, only 3.4% of 2,427 Mexican municipal presidents were women (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 2). Ten years later, in 2012, only a slight increase could be seen, with a total of 6.38% female municipal presidents (Inmujeres, 2012). More women could be found in functions reporting to the municipal president. The higher the position, the less accessible it seems to be for them. The less important the function, the more women are present (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 136-137). In the lower positions their numbers have grown significantly in the last ten years. In 2002, 6.8% of Mexican

[129] Congreso del Estado de Puebla, 2014a and 2014b.
[130] Congreso del Estado de Querétaro, 2014a and 2014b.
[131] Congreso del Estado de Quintana Roo, 2012a, 2012b and 2014.
[132] Congreso del Estado de San Luis Potosí, 2014a and 2014b.
[133] Congreso del Estado de Sinaloa, 2012 and 2014.
[134] Congreso del Estado de Sonora, 2014a and 2014b.
[135] Congreso del Estado de Tabasco, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[136] Congreso del Estado de Tamaulipas, 2012, 2013 and 2014.
[137] Congreso del Estado de Tlaxcala, 2012 and 2014.
[138] There is no information on the deputies on the website of the Congress of Tlaxcala, only the number of deputies per party.
[139] Congreso del Estado de Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave, 2012a, 2012b and 2014.
[140] Congreso del Estado de Yucatán, 2012, 2014a and 2014b.
[141] Congreso del Estado de Zacatecas, 2012 and 2014.

síndicos and 15.9% of the *regidores* were women (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 2). In 2012, there were 26.81% female *síndicas* and 38.47% female *regidoras* (Inmujeres, 2012).

Dalia Barrera Bassols studied female municipal presidents in 21 municipalities across Mexico. According to her research, most female presidents can be found in rural and semirural municipalities, and in small or medium urban municipalities (with a population of less than 50,000 inhabitants) (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 6). She also noted that most women in her research had completed at least technical studies, followed normal school, or even obtained professional qualifications. This level of education seems to give them a certain legitimacy and authority to take up a responsible role in their community (Barrera Bassols, 2003: 12).

In general, efforts to improve female political participation have shown certain results. Between 2012 and 2014, a small increase could be seen in the number of women with a political function at a national level. Especially the number of female senators has increased by almost 10 percentage points; the number of female deputies by 6.2 percentage points. However, the number of women at the highest levels of the political structure remains limited; parity has nowhere been achieved. At a municipal level, the number of women in political functions is even less (see figure 9). The correlation between the level of the position and the presence of women is also noteworthy: the higher the position, the fewer women. The highest percentages of women can be seen at the deputy level, where the decision-making process is conducted with 500 deputies. When looking at the level of the Secretaries of State Departments or the State governors, women are underrepresented. The same is true at municipal level. The higher the position, the less accessible it seems for women; and conversely, as the function is lower ranking, more women will be found.

Figure 9: Presence of women and men in the political structures, Mexico (2011, 2012, 2014).

	Year	Women		Men		Total	
		Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*
Secretaries of State Departments[142]	2012	3	**16.7**	15	**83.3**	18	**100**
	2014	3	**17.6**	14	**82.4**	17	**100**
National Congress: Senators[143]	2012	29	**22.7**	99	**77.3**	128	**100**
	2014	43	**33.6**	85	**66.4**	128	**100**
National Congress: Deputies[144]	2012	159	**31.8**	341	**68.2**	500	**100**
	2014	190	**38.0**	310	**62.0**	500	**100**
Ministers of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation[145]	2012	2	**18.0**	9	**82.0**	11	**100**
	2014	2	**18.0**	9	**82.0**	11	**100**
State governors[146]	2012	1	**3.1**	31	**96.9**	32	**100**
	2014	0	**0.0**	32	**100**	32	**100**
State congresses[147]	2012	272	**23.9**	866	**76.1**	1138	**100**
	2014	324	**29.3**	782	**70.7**	1106[148]	**100**
Municipal presidents[149]	2011	-	**6.4**	-	**93.6**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**6.8**	-	**92.8**	-	**99.6**
Local deputies[150]	2011	-	**22.4**	-	**77.6**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**26.1**	-	**73.9**	-	**100**
Local *síndicos*[151]	2011	-	**26.8**	-	**73.2**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**29.2**	-	**70.8**	-	**100**
Local *regidores*[152]	2011	-	**38.5**	-	**61.5**	-	**100**
	2014	-	**38.3**	-	**61.7**	-	**100**

[142] Presidencia de la República, 2012 & 2014.
[143] Senado de la República, 2012 & 2014a.
[144] Cámara de Diputados, 2012c & 2014b.
[145] SCJN, 2014.
[146] CONAGO, 2014a & 2014b.
[147] Cf. figure 8.
[148] Based on 31 states with available data.
[149] Inmujeres, 2012. Data based on SEGOB, INAFED, Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal, October 2011; Inmujeres, 2014. Data based on SEGOB, INAFED, Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal, July 2014.
[150] Ibidem.
[151] Ibidem.
[152] Ibidem.

D. Indigenous Women and Politics: Between Tradition and Modernity

When analyzing political participation in Mexico, indigenous peoples, and particularly indigenous women, deserve special attention. Research on politics in indigenous communities usually focuses on men. Except for some specific studies mentioned earlier, women are invisible. They are generally considered not to be participating. The numbers seem to support this statement; there are very few indigenous women participating at a political level. However, most scholars do not seem to question women's absence, they consider it normal and attribute it to tradition. But by doing so they disregard women's social role. Irrespective of local traditions, women should have the same political rights as men. Anthropologists, advocates, and indigenous experts themselves could play an important role by exposing this situation. As they are familiar with the specific local context, they could also support women in the development of initiatives to include women in local politics.

Several questions have to be asked. To what degree are indigenous women participating in the decision-making processes? Why don't they have equal access to politics and how could this be changed?

The analysis of the presence of indigenous women in Mexican politics clearly shows: there are very few indigenous women with a political mandate. At the national level, some indigenous candidates succeeded in becoming a member of the Mexican National Congress. Official numbers are not available – Congress does not keep data on the ethnic origin of its members –, and even specialized researchers can only give rough estimates. What is clear, is that indigenous representatives are a very small minority of the national deputies and senators. Although 14% of the total Mexican population defines themselves as indigenous, and 10% of the electoral districts have more than 40% indigenous population, in 2012, not even 2% of the deputies in Congress were indigenous[153] (INEGI, 2010; Xantomila, 2012). The number of indigenous women reaching National Congress is consequently even lower. In certain states, such as in the state of Oaxaca, indigenous women have been able to participate in the local Congresses. Yet again, exact numbers are hard to find.

[153] According to the president of the Congress Commission for Indigenous Affairs, Jorge Venustiano González Ilescas, there were eight (out of 500) "really indigenous-indigenous" deputies in Mexican Congress in 2012 (Xantomila, 2012). Mr. González' definition of what is 'really indigenous-indigenous' is not know. Sonnleitner counts 17 indigenous deputies between 2009 and 2012 (3.4%) (Sonnleitner, 2013).

A study for the electoral tribunal estimates a total of five indigenous senators in Mexican National Congress (1.3%) between 1994 and 2012. Of these five senators there was only one woman[154] (Sonnleitner, 2013: 38, 100-101). When looking at the number of deputies between 1989 and 2012, the study counts around 60 indigenous deputies in the National Congress (around 3% of all deputies for that period), of which 10 were female. Thus, over a period of 23 years, the Mexican National Congress only numbered 11 indigenous women as representatives[155]. It is however very difficult to define whether a person is indigenous or not. In the past, this information was considered of no importance. With the reforms of 2006, redefining electoral districts and resulting in a reconfiguration of 28 districts with more than 40% of indigenous population, indigenous Congress members are slightly more visible (Sonnleitner, 2013: 13, 32-38). But even with nothing but estimates, it is clear that the proportion of indigenous Congress members is not representative of Mexico's indigenous population, and in the case of indigenous women the situation is even more alarming.

1. The Trap of Tradition? '*Usos y Costumbres*' in Indigenous Municipalities

To be able to reach the higher levels of state or national politics, it is important for candidates to gain political experience, and the local municipal level is a good place to start. Within the *ayuntamiento*, indigenous women could become municipal president, *síndica*, or one of the different *regidoras*. As said before, the municipality is the most accessible level for political participation and the one where decision-making is most directly related to daily life issues. It is therefore important to evaluate access of indigenous women to this level.

First, the particularities of the indigenous political system must be explained. In part of the indigenous municipalities, decision-making processes differ from the rest of Mexican municipalities. During the last two decades, there has been an emergence of indigenous civil action. Indigenous peoples in Mexico have fought for respect of cultural diversity. They have been demanding control over their territories and natural resources as well as the right to use their own traditional normative systems. In 2001, the Mexican Constitution was changed to recognize the multiethnic and multicultural composition of Mexican society. This change of the Constitution has given indigenous communities the right to have social, economic, cultural, and political institutions adapted to their needs and traditions (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 11-13). At a political level indigenous communities can now choose to vote according to their traditional systems, called '*usos y costumbres*' or '*sistemas normativos internos*'.

[154] Cirila Sánchez Mendoza, a Chatina woman from Oaxaca, was senator for the PRI from 1994 to 2000. She had previously also been a local deputy in the State Congress of Oaxaca (1983-1986), and deputy in the National Congress (1989-1991) (Sonnleitner, 2013: 101).
[155] There are in fact nine women, but two of them were elected twice (Sonnleitner, 2013).

Protecting their traditions has been an important step in the process towards respecting the autonomy of indigenous peoples. While this evolution has been applauded, there have also been critical voices. The traditional normative system is often criticized because it would discriminate women by denying them the right to participate in local politics. The traditional organization of indigenous communities is based on a hierarchic civic religious system of '*cargos*'. Different positions and tasks are divided among the citizens of the community, and throughout their life they can climb the hierarchical pyramid. The system can vary from one community to another, but it serves to make all decisions and resolve conflicts (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 59).

In indigenous communities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*' the assembly is the body of representation. The members of the assembly are elected for one, one and a half, two, or three years, depending on the community. To have a right to speak and a right to vote, citizens generally have to be married, own land, and be the head of the family (Bonfil Sánchez, 2003). In practice, these citizens are men. They are generally the head of the family, and as land is usually passed on to male family members, women cannot become *comuneras*, and consequently not assume a *cargo* either. Finally, to become municipal president, it is necessary to have fulfilled other *cargos* in the hierarchical system (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 63). The traditional power structures tend thus to favor men as decision makers. Women's access to political functions is made very difficult. They get the chance to participate primarily as wife of the *carguero*, supporting their husband in his tasks and, for example, cooking the food for the celebrations (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 61).

Alma Isunza Bizuet describes how in traditionalist municipalities in the Highlands of Chiapas[156], women are not allowed to participate in the cargo system. The only tasks they can do are the ones related to the household and the family, for example, attend the parent or health committee, or prepare school breakfasts, and always subject to the husband's approval. In the case of San Juan Chamula, women have no right to speak in the assembly; they can only ask for permission to listen. Usually, women are represented by their father or husband. If they have neither father nor husband, or if they are absent, the women have to ask another man to represent them and speak on their behalf (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 22, 40).

The people in the assembly are supposed to represent the interests of the community as a whole. As the demands and needs of women are not necessarily the same as those of their male companions, one could question whether the voices in the assembly really represent the entire community (Bonfil Sánchez, 2003). Paloma Bonfil Sánchez states that, in principle, as the people in the assembly are

[156] She mentions among others: San Juan Chamula, Chenalhó, San Andrés Larráinzar, Tenejapa, Zinacantán, Amatenango del Valle, etcetera.

mostly married landowning males, the needs of other groups, such as women, youth, singles, or people without land, are disregarded in the assembly (Bonfil Sánchez, 2003). Although access to the assembly is indeed difficult for these people, I believe it is too radical to state their needs would not be addressed. Each man in the assembly is the father and husband of people not represented. As head of the household, he would be representing all members of his family, and one would expect him to support measures favoring his family. Undoubtedly, within their households, issues will be suggested to the members of the assembly. Bonfil's statement gives very little credit to a body which has been primarily working for the wellbeing of the community for centuries. However, it is true that not all problems might be addressed. The specific needs of women are different from those of men, and men might overlook some of these needs or maybe consider some of them irrelevant. The problem here is not that the needs of women would be disregarded in the assembly. The main issue is that certain groups, such as women, have no *direct* voice in the assembly, and that they are in fact excluded on a gender basis. Women should have the right to speak and vote on the same level as men.

It has to be pointed out that not all indigenous communities follow the '*usos y costumbres*' political system. Often a mixed system is preferred in which the '*usos y costumbres*' are respected, but combined with political party structures. These communities are officially registered as following party politics. Consequently, little official data are available to analyze at which level the '*usos y costumbres*' are enforced or influence the decision-making processes. Furthermore, every community following the traditional system defines and interprets its own rules. The possibilities and opportunities for women depend thus largely on the local context.

2. Working with the Available Data: The Case of Oaxaca

As mentioned before, the availability of statistical data on the exact number of men and women with a local political mandate is very limited, and even worse for indigenous political participation. Hardly any official information on this topic can be found, neither at local nor at national level. Therefore, the combination of several sources is needed to analyze how many indigenous women are participating in the local authorities. Unfortunately the results are often only estimations.

The state where most information is available is Oaxaca. Oaxaca has one of the highest percentages of indigenous population in Mexico (INEGI, 2010). Compared to other states, Oaxaca has also the highest number of female municipal presidents (INEGI, 2013b). As a consequence, it is the state where participation of indigenous women has been studied more extensively, and where more information is available (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 137). The main research on female political participation in Oaxaca was carried out by scholars such as Dalia Barrera Bassols (e. g. 2003), Paloma

Bonfil Sánchez (e. g. 2008), Margarita Dalton Palomo (e. g. 2003), and Laura Valladares de la Cruz (e. g. 2004). At an official level, the Instituto Estatal Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana of Oaxaca also compiled certain statistics on female political participation. Although these data should be analyzed critically, the existence and availability of such information is exceptional within the Mexican institutional context.

Oaxaca was the first Mexican state to recognize in its constitution the right of indigenous communities to elect their authorities based on the traditional system (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 63). The number of communities voting through the traditional system varies from election to election. In 2011, 418 out of 570 Oaxacan municipalities organized elections by '*usos y costumbres*' (73,3%) (Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011: 25).

Isunza Bizuet has analyzed the right to vote of women in communities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*'. In 2007, she studied the 361 Oaxacan municipalities registered under the '*usos y costumbres*' system at that time. She found that not all women could vote within these municipalities, and that their right to vote depended on their marital status. But, the conditions they had to fulfill to be able to vote differed. In more than half of the municipalities, all adult women voted. Yet, in almost 16% of the municipalities women were not allowed to vote at all. In certain municipalities only married women had the right to vote; in others only single women or only widows could vote; in other places both single women and widows were allowed to vote, excluding all married women (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 33). These results show a large diversity in the levels of participation of the female electorate in communities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*'.

Based on the *Encuesta Nacional de Gobierno, Seguridad Pública y Justicia Municipal* of 2009, the INEGI put together data on the possibilities of indigenous women to vote in municipalities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*'. The data are very poor as they are only available for the state of Oaxaca and partially for the state of Puebla. The INEGI found that in 2009, women were allowed to vote in 361 of the 418 Oaxacan municipalities that followed the '*usos y costumbres*' (86.36%). In 48 municipalities women were not allowed to vote (11.48%). For the remaining 9 municipalities the situation was unknown (2.15%) (INEGI, 2009a). It should be noted that the INEGI only questioned whether women could vote or not. The study of Isunza clearly shows that the situation is more complex and that there are other factors to take into consideration, starting with the marital status. By ignoring this, the INEGI offers incomplete and distorted information.

When turning to the possibilities of being elected as a woman, we see that there are also variations. In 2009, women in the state of Oaxaca were allowed to take up an administrative *cargo* in 350 out of

570 municipalities; in 60 municipalities they were not allowed to do so. The situation in the remaining 8 municipalities was unknown (INEGI, 2009a). Again, no more details are available.

Indigenous women do get elected for municipal *cargos*. Although the Oaxacan average exceeds all other states, the total number of women governing municipalities remains low. This is true for the political party structures as well as the '*usos y costumbres*' system. In the electoral period 1999-2001, only 8 out of 570 municipalities in Oaxaca (1.4%) were ruled by a woman (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 138). Between 2002 and 2004, there were 5 female municipal presidents in the state of Oaxaca (0.88%). For the year 2010, the INEGI reports that there were at least 540 male and 10 female municipal presidents (1.7%) in Oaxaca[157] (INEGI, 2011). In 2012, Oaxaca had 18 female municipal presidents (3.1%) [158] (INEGI, 2013b).

Overall, during the 2010-2016 legislature, there were 19 municipalities with a female president before 2014. Although it is an increase, this still means only 3.3% of the total amount of municipal presidents of Oaxaca are women. Twelve of these presidents were elected in the system of '*usos y costumbres*'[159]; the remaining seven female presidents were chosen in the political party structures[160]. Although in the 2010-2016 legislature there are more women chosen in the political party structures than by '*usos y costumbres*', the percentages of women in both political systems is very limited[161].

The situation is similar for the other municipal *cargos*. In 2010, in all Oaxacan municipalities there were 19 female *síndicas* (3.1%) and 166 female *regidoras* (5.9%)[162] (INEGI, 2011). In 2012, Oaxaca had 15 *síndicas* (2.4%) and 271 *regidoras* (9.6%) (INEGI, 2013b). Exceptionally, data on the number of women elected for *cargos* or as substitutes in the municipalities ruled by '*usos y costumbres*' are available for Oaxaca for the period 2011-2013 (see figure 10). Unfortunately, a comparison with the political party system is not feasible due to lack of records specifically on indigenous women elected in communities, indigenous or non-indigenous, following this electoral system.

[157] The INEGI had no information on the sex of the 20 remaining municipal presidents. Based on other chronologic data, they are most probably mainly men.
[158] In the 2012 statistics, the sex of 225 municipal presidents is marked as unknown.
[159] This means 2.87% of municipal presidents chosen in the '*usos y costumbres*' system were female.
[160] This means 4.60% of municipal presidents chosen in the political party system were female.
[161] It has to be pointed out that the numbers of female municipal presidents can slightly differ from one source to another.
[162] It has to be noted that this is much lower than the national average of respectively 18% female *síndicas* and 29% female *regidoras* (INEGI, 2011).

Figure 10: Women elected as counselor in the municipalities following the '*usos y costumbres*' for the period 2011-2013, Oaxaca, Mexico (IEEPCO, 2012)[163].

Cargo	Elected women	Elected female substitutes
Municipal presidents	7	9
Municipal *síndicas*	1	1
Regidora for Finance	13	8
Regidora for Education	24	16
Regidora for Health	15	18
Regidora for Construction Works	2	4
Regidora for Ecology	0	2
Regidora for Hygiene	1	1
Regidora for Public Health	0	1
Regidora for the Market	3	0
Regidora for Tourism	2	0
Regidora for Gender Equity	1	1
Regidora for Culture and Recreation	1	0
Second *Regidora*	1	0
Third *Regidora*	1	0
Fourth *Regidora*	1	0
Sixth *Regidora*	2	3
Eighth *Regidora*	1	0
TOTAL	**76**	**64**

[163] Every municipality chooses the composition of its *ayuntamiento*, depending on the kind of functions they need. Therefore, there can be overlaps in this list, for example in the case of the *regidora* for Health, the *regidora* for Hygiene, and the *regidora* for Public Health. The number of *regidores* also varies depending on the community.

For Mexican standards, the availability of these data is exceptional. However, it is only a first step in the right direction. Gendered statistics should include data on both women and men, and that is not the case here. The presented numbers need to be contextualized to enable any analysis. What can be said about the number of female counselors when the number of indigenous male counselors is not known? The only observation is that only 76 women have been chosen in the *ayuntamientos* based on a total of 418 municipalities. According to 2010 data (INEGI, 2011), there have to be around 600 *síndicos* and around 2,800 *regidores* (male and female) in the entire state of Oaxaca, which would mean that merely 1 out of 600 *síndicos* (0.16%) and 68 out of 2,800 *regidores* (2.4%) are indigenous women. When compared to the total number of female *síndicas* and *regidoras* in both political systems in Oaxaca in 2010 (INEGI, 2011), we see that an estimated 5% of the female *síndicas* and around 40% of the *regidoras* are indigenous[164].

When looking at the type of *cargo* assigned to women, it can be noted that women are most often elected as *regidora* for education, and secondly as *regidora* for health. Less stereotyped is the election of women as *regidora* for finance. These numbers do not allow further deductions due to the lack of data about indigenous men.

3. Structural Obstacles for Indigenous Women in Politics

Despite being the most accessible level, very few indigenous women participate in municipal politics. Several reasons can be found for their absence. As mentioned before, indigenous municipalities provide a particular context for female participation. A part of the indigenous communities adopted a traditional political system that allows hardly any change, and thus limits the possibilities for female participation. This context is crucial to understand the political situation of indigenous women. In addition, structural, economic, or organizational problems can difficult the participation of indigenous women. Finally, indigenous women have to face numerous social and cultural obstacles.

Generally speaking, indigenous persons have difficulties attaining any public function in non-indigenous communities. This is true at local level, and even more so at state and national level. Although it is rarely acknowledged, Mexican society has a very high level of racism against indigenous peoples. This racism is deep-rooted in Mexico's colonial past, and it is a key aspect contributing to the invisibility of and lack of interest in the indigenous populations of Mexico.

But, both in indigenous and non-indigenous communities, indigenous women are facing other gender-specific obstacles in the process towards political emancipation. As mentioned before, the

[164] It has to be noted that comparing the years 2010 and 2011 without having exact numbers can only lead to estimations. But, if we consider that the presence of women in local governments is quite stable and only rises slowly, the comparison can be made to obtain at least a general panorama. These figures are not absolute numbers.

traditional structures of the '*usos y costumbres*' system can be a hindrance. Bonfil Sánchez identifies other general factors obstructing participation. For instance, the remoteness of many indigenous communities results in limited access to basic services, to opportunities in the labor market, and to information in general, which can hinder acceptance of an official function in the chief municipality. Not only the travel time, but certainly the transport costs, for example, from a local *ranchería* to the chief municipality, can be very high (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 27). This is even more of an issue for many indigenous women without income of their own[165]. In daily life, indigenous women would rather walk the distance, but this would be too time consuming when taking up an official function. Although the distance may remain an obstacle, the cost problem can be solved if the function foresees remuneration.

Furthermore, even if this situation is changing, education also plays an important role in the participation process. In this regard, women are disadvantaged as they often have less access to education than men. One of the conditions to be a member of the *ayuntamiento* is to be able to read and write (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011a: Art. 133). Although the alphabetization level has risen, this might still discourage certain women. Their low level of education can thus be an obstacle, and especially their language knowledge. In the community, the local language can be used, but Spanish is the official language at the other decision-making levels. The majority of official documents and procedures is also in Spanish. Knowledge of the Spanish language is therefore a requirement for participation, at least beyond the municipal level.

Another factor is that for indigenous women, the right to participate often depends on their marital status. As mentioned previously, this can have an influence on the opportunities a woman has to express herself. Indigenous women tend to marry at a young age. If their community excludes married women from participation in the decision-making processes, they lose any possibility of participation at a young age. Usually, the recognition of the services offered to the community can grant a person the right to speak. However, the traditional tasks of women are seen as part of their 'natural' tasks, and are not valued the same as a man's job. Women have less access to economic and productive resources and thus cannot offer the same services as men. Furthermore, women have little time to dedicate to public functions because of the long hours they spend taking care of the household and the children (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 27-30). As said by a woman of

[165] Local transport in rural communities generally costs around 10 pesos (0.60 euro) for a single journey (as experienced personally between 2009 and 2012). This is expensive if considered that a large part of the indigenous population is self-sufficient with limited cash income. In 2000, 27% of indigenous persons had no income, 29% earned less than one minimum wage (in 2012 the minimum wage was around 60 pesos or 3.7 euros a day (SAT, 2012)). In the case of indigenous women, 23.5% had no income, and 34.8% earned one minimum wage or less (INEGI, 2004: 108-109), which means that 20 pesos to go back and forth is a lot of money.

Oventik Grande in the municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, interviewed by Alma Isunza Bizuet: "We, women, have a lot of work at home, therefore it are all men, that is how it has been since before (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 44)[166]."

A factor worth analyzing in the future is the influence of migration. Large groups of indigenous persons have migrated to larger cities in Mexico or to the U.S.A.. As many men left their communities, migration resulted in shifts within the traditional gender structures, and an increasing number of women are taking up the role of head of the household. However, as women are often still denied the right to inherit or be landowners, the position of head of the family does not always guarantee them the right to participate (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 31).

4. Cultural Obstacles: "Tú cállate, tú eres mujer, no sabes nada."

The previous obstacles can be considered of structural, economic, or organizational nature. But when becoming a political candidate, indigenous women are also confronted with hurdles with a cultural or social component. Traditional indigenous communities have, until now, always been ruled by men. This was institutionalized by the Spanish colonial authorities, as women were given no individual rights and could thus not assume public functions. Considering that this has been the tradition for so many centuries, there is a certain reluctance, even rejection, of the idea that women could have a political function. Machismo is very strong, and women cannot rule, *because they are women*. This situation can be seen in both indigenous and non-indigenous Mexican communities. However, in indigenous contexts it is more obvious because it is institutionalized by the '*usos y costumbres*' system. Communities that do not want women to rule, have attributed this exclusion to the '*usos y costumbres*', stating that changes in the system would be in contradiction with the preservation of the indigenous traditions. Men have always ruled, and this tradition should not be altered.

[166] Original: "Es que las mujeres tenemos mucho trabajo en la casa, por eso son puros hombres, así ha sido desde antes."

Isunza Bizuet has recorded, primarily in Chiapas, statements of indigenous women on their political participation. A woman of Bayalemó, in the municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, says:

> "In the past women were not taken into account, it was said that they could only stay at home their entire life, they could not speak, only men felt very strong. […] When a woman spoke, the man said: "Shut up, you are a woman, you do not know anything, I do because I am a man"; — That is what the man said — [...] when the [Municipal] Agents are changed, we do not go, only men go (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 43)[167]."

Although she speaks about the past, this perception still persists in several communities.

Not only the local authority, but also her own family and her husband can advise against female political aspirations. According to Bonfil, overcoming this hurdle is often a difficult first step for indigenous women. To attain leadership, indigenous women constantly have to surpass traditional norms and expectations (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 54). Women engaging in a public role, have thus to convince their family of the importance of their presence; they have to find financial resources and support, without neglecting their household responsibilities (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 131-132). Gossip can be the family's part, the husband may be called weak because he cannot control his wife, and the woman can be accused of abandoning her maternal and marital obligations. Women can get a bad reputation, and men can get jealous:

> "I think we women could not have another *cargo* in the politics of the community because it would be seen as wrong, we cannot start working with men, they are going to talk badly about us, men get mad and jealous […] We have already experienced it with other women and young girls, they do not last long, the husbands get angry, sometimes meetings take place until late at night and they do not allow it. That is why a woman cannot take up a *cargo* because men put obstacles (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 42-43)[168]."

[167] Original: "Antes las mujeres no se tomaban en cuenta, decían que no servían más que para quedarse toda la vida en la casa, no podían hablar, sólo los hombres se sentían muy fuertes. [...] Cuando una mujer hablaba, el hombre le decía 'Tú cállate, tú eres mujer, no sabes nada, yo sí sé porque soy hombre'; —Así decía el hombre— [...] cuando cambian a los Agentes [Municipales], nosotras no vamos, van puros hombres."

[168] Original: "Creo que las mujeres no podríamos tener otro cargo en la política de la comunidad porque se vería mal, no podemos entrar trabajando junto con los hombres, van a hablar mal de nosotras, los hombres se enojan y sienten celos [...] Ya lo hemos experimentado con las demás mujeres y con las muchachas, no aguantan mucho tiempo, los esposos se enojan, a veces les agarra la noche en alguna reunión y ellos no lo permiten. Es por eso que una mujer no puede ocupar un cargo porque los hombres ponen obstáculos."

The pressure on the family can thus be very high. But, the opposition can also deliberately come from other women in the community:

> "It is difficult because when women participate, the same women started the gossip between themselves… (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 47)[169]."

Another woman of Bayalemó says:

> "It would be good if women participated, however the *Regidores*, the auxiliaries, the President and the Judge are all men. A woman among men would not be considered good, their wives would think bad things (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 44)[170]".

These accounts clearly show, that not only men oppose a woman's political ambition. Other women of the community can also disapprove of it, denying women's capabilities. It is an example of how machismo is not only a male attitude. Women themselves perpetuate patriarchal social structures and even reinforce them. Thus, changes of mentality are needed for both sexes.

When women do participate in political issues, there is often opposition to their decisions, and even pressure to make them resign. In particular when decisions have to be taken that seem to be opposed to certain groups in the community or in favor of the female population, women can be pressured to step down (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 65). In 2001, 101 women in 64 Oaxacan municipalities were elected by '*usos y costumbres*' for a *cargo* in their local government. However, 22.6% of these women left the *cargo* before the end of the term. I have no data on the number of men leaving their *cargo*. It is clear, though, that women in indigenous communities experience a lot of pressure. Their presence is seen as breaching tradition, and any step towards change is considered a betrayal of the community. Their ambition and public role often meets with disapproval. The social, personal, economic, and political burdens make it an extremely difficult task for women to take up a *cargo* and follow a political vocation (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 139). Studies of Margarita Dalton Palomo (2003) and María Cristina Velásquez Cepeda (2003) have shown that the numbers of indigenous women resigning from a political function are significantly high. The pressure from the community and other local political players, the accumulation of domestic tasks and responsibilities with political obligations, the lack of financial resources, and the lack of political emancipation of indigenous women, all have a negative impact on the political participation of indigenous women.

[169] Original: "Es difícil porque cuando hay mujeres que participan, las mismas mujeres comenzaron los chismes, entre las mismas mujeres... ."

[170] Original: "Estaría bien que participaran las mujeres, sin embargo los Regidores, los auxiliares, el Presidente y el Juez, son puros hombres, no se vería bien que una mujer estuviera entre todos ellos, sus esposas pensarían mal."

The case of Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza exemplifies how indigenous women experience a lot of resistance to their political participation. Eufrosina Cruz, an indigenous Zapotec woman of the community of Santa María Quiegolani in the southeast of the state of Oaxaca, always fought to improve her life conditions. She learned Spanish and left her native village to sell *elotes* (corncobs), cucumbers, and *tortas* in the Oaxacan city of Salina Cruz in order to pay for her education. She managed to obtain a university degree in accountancy. Later, she became a Community Instructor for the National Commission for Educational Development (Comisión Nacional de Fomento Educativo), and traveled to other villages to assist people. There she became aware of the social problems in Oaxaca, the lack of health services and good education, and especially the subordination of women (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 11-13). In 2007, Eufrosina Cruz was candidate for the municipal presidency of Santa María Quiegolani. In this village, elections are held according to the '*usos y costumbres*'. Supporters of the sitting president strongly opposed her candidacy, and intimidated and threatened people who inclined to vote for Cruz. Women were not allowed to vote in Santa María Quiegolani (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 55-58). But Cruz had proven to be socially engaged, and she received a high number of votes from the male voters. However, during the count of the votes, the ballots with her name were systematically declared invalid. When Cruz complained about this, she was told that, according to the '*usos y costumbres*', women and persons with a profession – Cruz is an accountant – are not allowed to take up the *cargo* of municipal president (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2007: 260).

> "It is sad to say this, but in my community it looks as if it is a punishment to be a woman, because we have no rights at all. Immediately the municipal president came out and confronted me, telling me that it was the people's decision that the ballots in my favor were declared invalid. Next, the sister of the municipal president intervened arguing that people with a profession do not have the right to take up that *cargo*, causing a disturbance in the assembly and a few drunk citizens attacked me verbally for the simple fact of being a woman, at this the municipal president only mocked my presence and he ignored what was happening (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2007: 260) [171]."

[171] Original: "Es triste decir esto pero en mi comunidad tal parece que es un castigo ser mujer, pues no tenemos derecho a nada, en seguida salió el C. Presidente Municipal y me enfrentó diciéndome que el pueblo es quien decidió la acción de que las personas que confiaran en mi sus boletas fueran nulas, a continuación la hermana del Presidente Municipal intervino argumentando que los profesionistas no tienen derecho a ocupar este cargo, provocando que la asamblea se alterara y algunos ciudadanos en estado de ebriedad me agredieron verbalmente por el simple hecho de ser mujer, a esto el Presidente Municipal solo se burló de mi presencia y no hizo caso a lo que sucedía."

The Municipal Electoral Council for '*Usos y Costumbres*' of the Congress of Oaxaca declared that the elections in Santa María Quiegolani were valid because they were held following the '*usos y costumbres*' system. After having knocked on many doors that mostly remained closed, Eufrosina Cruz appealed to the National Human Rights Commission. On the 5th of March 2008, this commission decided in her favor, and recognized that the gender discrimination she had suffered violated her rights as a Mexican citizen to be voted, and that of her voters to choose freely. The commission recommended a reform of the Constitution of Oaxaca. Following this case, Article 25 of this Constitution was amended, making it impossible to deny women the right to participate in municipal governments following the '*usos y costumbres*' (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2007: 261-275; Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 11-13):

> "The law will protect and promote democratic practices in all communities of the state of Oaxaca, for the election of its municipalities, according to the terms established by Article 2, Paragraph A, Section III and VII of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico and 16 of the Political Constitution of the Free and Sovereign State of Oaxaca; it will establish the mechanisms to guarantee the full and total participation of women in said electoral processes and the exercise of their right to vote and be elected on equal terms with men, and will penalize violations (Congreso del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011b: Art. 25 §A)[172]."

Cruz' case received a lot of media coverage, simultaneously launching her political carrier within the PAN party. She continued to be politically active and was an advocate for the political rights of indigenous women. And with success: in the year 2010, she became the first indigenous woman to become president of the Congress of Oaxaca. In 2012, she was elected as Federal Deputy in the Mexican National Congress (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 13).

Eufrosina Cruz has not been the only indigenous woman struggling to participate in local politics. Sometimes local newspapers report stories, and so several examples can be found. Ezequiel Zárate describes how an active militant of the PRD was appointed as treasurer of her community San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca in 2001. She was replaced after strong opposition. The municipal president argued that men consider women cannot take up a function in the authority because they do not do community work in the *tequios* as men do (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 38). In 1995, Bernardina

[172] Original: "La ley protegerá y propiciará las prácticas democráticas en todas las comunidades del Estado de Oaxaca, para la elección de sus Ayuntamientos, en los términos establecidos por el artículo 2º apartado A fracciones III y VII de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y 16 de la Constitución Política del Estado Libre y Soberano de Oaxaca; establecerá los mecanismos para garantizar la plena y total participación de la mujer en dichos procesos electorales y el ejercicio de su derecho a votar y ser votada en condiciones de igualdad con el de los varones y sancionará su contravención."

Tequiliquihua Ajactle tried to become the municipal president of Los Reyes, a Nahuatl speaking municipality in the Zongolica mountains of the state of Veracruz. Although she was elected, and in 2007 was able to become the first indigenous deputy in the state Congress of Veracruz, she recalls how she experienced a lot of difficulties and opposition during her political campaign:

> ""When I considered becoming municipal president I was discriminated a lot by men and by everybody, my campaign was very difficult but with the conviction of the community I won." [...]
>
> She remembers the multiple occasions men of the communities shouted when she passed by: "You cannot govern, you are a *chamaca*[173], you know nothing."
>
> And the Nahua men of the communities asked: "Who rules at home, the men or the wives?" And when the people present answered, shouting, they demanded that she returned home to cook and clean (Castro Medina, 2007) [174]."

Although these women struggled, the different stories tell that not everybody in the communities opposed their candidacy. In the community of Eufrosina Cruz, women are not allowed to vote. This means she was clearly supported by a considerable group of male voters. The treasurer of San Mateo del Mar was appointed, and Bernardina Tequiliquihua was elected municipal president. Every time there were difficulties, but eventually at least part of the community believed in their capacities, which illustrates a certain evolution in the minds of people, both of women and men.

Now that she is a member and even the president of the Congress of Oaxaca, Eufrosina Cruz is sometimes seen as the representative of indigenous women. Yet, her case illustrates that it is not enough to have one indigenous woman participating. Certain indigenous groups, for example the women of the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca, have not accepted her as their representative in Congress. They disapprove of her because she is believed to have discredited the '*usos y costumbres*' system in order to launch her own political career (López, 2011). Critics could argue that this proves indigenous women are not ready for politics, or that they are not able to agree on a common approach. In my opinion, this is not the case. When comparing this situation with non-indigenous politicians, not a single member of congress is supported by the entire population. Every

[173] A *chamaca* is a young girl, but the term has a negative connotation.

[174] Original: ""Cuando comencé a buscar la presidencia municipal fui muy discriminada por los hombres y por todos, fue muy difícil mi campaña pero con el convencimiento de la comunidad la gané." Recuerda las múltiples ocasiones en que los hombres de las comunidades gritaban a su paso: "tú no puedes gobernar, eres una chamaca, no sabes nada." [...] Y preguntaban los señores nahuas de las comunidades: "¿Quién manda en las casas, los hombres o las esposas?" Y tras la respuesta de los presentes, a gritos, le exigían que regresara a su casa a cocinar y a lavar."

politician only represents a specific group of citizens. It is rather an illustration of the fact that more female indigenous candidates are necessary. More candidates would offer more options for the indigenous population to find candidates addressing their specific needs. This is part of democracy. The presence of Eufrosina Cruz is a very important step, as she can be a role model for other indigenous women, but it is only a first step on a long road.

5. Changing Times: Defying Traditions and Social Structures

Indigenous women have to overcome many obstacles in order to reach political participation. Nevertheless, the traditional structures are slowly changing, and more women are able to take up *cargos*. Increasing migration has been a significant factor. Large numbers of indigenous persons, primarily men, migrated to bigger cities of the Republic, or even to the United States of America. They leave their home town to find better employment, and hope to be back soon. But, often they stay for several years, or never return home. The women that stay behind in the communities increasingly participate in *cargos* as representative of their emigrated male relatives. This situation has also led to certain women inheriting land, allowing them to gain a voice and a vote in the municipal assemblies. In some cases migration limited the number of male villagers, and thus women are bound to take up *cargos* (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 61).

Participation of women depends a lot on local contexts. Certain factors can have more influence depending on the region. In the state of Oaxaca, for example, the strong migration process facilitated women's access to political functions in the Mixteca region; in the Southern Sierra and the Isthmus region, women gained experience as activists against megaprojects such as the construction of dams; in the Northern Sierra, more indigenous peoples had access to education, and adopted the opinion that it is politically incorrect to deny women the right to participate (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). In communities facing severe local conflicts, such as with the Triqui of Oaxaca, women will probably be taking up more political *cargos* in the future. Migration is one reason for this shift, but also the fact that women in this conflicted area have, more often than men, a clean criminal record, a condition to be elected (Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca, 2011: Art. 133). Most adult men in these communities have been involved in the troubles. In addition, women have been very active in the Triqui protest movements during the conflicts. They have learned how to participate and to raise their voices in favor of their community. This experience will hopefully stimulate future female political participation.

Thus, female participation often originates in the deconstruction of social structures. According to Bonfil Sánchez, the participation of women resulting from socio-economic difficulties, does not necessarily lead to an increase of status (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 62). While women bear more

responsibilities and pressure, they do not gain higher status. Furthermore, Valladares does not believe indigenous women are just filling in the spaces left open by men. As members of their community, they experience problems and injustices firsthand, and have the growing need to participate actively in the decision-making process to improve their situation (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 134).

In addition to migration, a growing level of education also opened doors for women. While the general education level of indigenous women is still significantly lower than the national average, some young indigenous women are now not only finishing high school, but also attending university, which was unachievable in the past. With a higher level of education as well as a profession, women can gain the recognition and trust of the community, paving the way for political participation. The downside is that educated women often do not return to their community because of the lack of employment opportunities in the village. Only certain professions may return, for example lawyers, primary school teachers, or accountants (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 23). Nevertheless, qualitative education also helps to develop civic and social skills. It helps increase the consciousness of women regarding their rights, and the role they can play in politics and in society in general.

At an economic level, women are involved in more non-domestic activities; they are participating in the labor market, and are contributing to the domestic budget. As a consequence, they are increasingly conscious of their right to participate at all levels of society, including the level of political decision-making.

These different elements allowed women to engage in the local political scene, proving that they are capable of making decisions. Consequently, the opinions regarding the capabilities of women are slowly improving (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 62). Both men and women are starting to accept female representatives. Eufrosina Cruz, for example, states:

> "The lie of politicians is saying it is the problem of the '*usos y costumbres*'. If you ask men whether they agree that women participate, many will say yes, that they prefer it (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 62)[175]."

Thus, indigenous women have to face many obstacles, and a long road ahead, but changes are slowly happening.

[175] Original: "La mentira de los politicos es decir que es problema de los Usos y Costumbres. Si preguntas a los hombres acerca de si están de acuerdo en que participen mujeres, muchos van a decir que sí, que lo prefieren (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 62)."

6. Are Indigenous Women Not Participating?

In general, studies on the '*usos y costumbres*' agree that women have been excluded from political participation in this traditional system. While the statistical data are often only estimates, they indicate a general trend showing very limited presence of women in local politics. Numbers are important, but taking the research one step further, it is also crucial to talk to the women involved, and ask them what their experiences are.

Certain testimonies regarding cultural obstacles have already been discussed. These women acknowledge that it is difficult for them to participate in political *cargos*, or simply not done. Their contributions focus on local situations, yet they are valuable. To broaden the scope, these testimonies were complemented with interviews conducted with young indigenous women who are very active in their communities, but also at a regional or even national level. I deliberately chose indigenous women with a university degree because they can comment on their personal experiences from different points of view, taking into account the traditions of their community, theoretical academic discourses, as well as political opinions. They offered additional insights rarely captured in the studies on '*usos y costumbres*', and also criticized some of the preconceptions of anthropologists. It is important to present these very active and engaged indigenous women, with experience in different types of organizations, with academic degrees, who are agents of change, and can speak up. Their knowledge and experience has to be acknowledged and valued.

Zaira Alhelí Hipólito López[176] is a young Zapotec woman who had the opportunity to study abroad, and is now very active in the female indigenous movement as one of the coordinators of the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca. The different experiences she lived have made her into a self-confident and emancipated woman, also proudly conscious of her indigenous background, which makes her analysis of female political participation very interesting. She describes, for example, the first time she wanted to speak to the local authorities of her community, a community adhering to the '*usos y costumbres*' system:

[176] Zaira Alhelí Hipólito López is from Tanetze de Zaragoza, a municipality of around 1,700 inhabitants in the state of Oaxaca (INAFED, 2012b). Her mother's family is Zapotec; there has been no contact with her father's family. Her mother and aunts are bilingual. Her grandmother is bilingual too, but she does not like to speak Spanish. The mother of Zaira is a Zapotec teacher and thus Zaira herself has a good level of written Zapotec. In her community, most people older than 18 years are bilingual. According to her, women speak more Zapotec than men, because they prefer it over Spanish. Zaira has a master's degree in psychology and she received a scholarship from the Fundación Ford to study abroad in Chile for a year. Currently, she is active in the female indigenous movement as one of the coordinators of the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas.

"The first time I wanted to talk to the municipal authority, well, we always go there, but now it was to speak with the authority about a territorial conflict. I raised my hand, and when it was my turn, I said, "Well...", but I got stuck after the "Well…" because the president interrupted me. And I thought, "No way, I will have none of that!" But he said, "Excuse me, I want to tell you all that Zaira has been involved in the community for this and that matter, and I think she has the right to speak, what do you say?" And they all accepted. If I would have reacted from my Western perspective, never having gone to the municipality – because women do not go to the municipality, the occasions we go to the municipality are very rare – and I would have risen and said, "No! Let me, I must speak!"... Fortunately I restrained myself. That is a very important ritual. I understood it was like a ritual to ensure that your voice counts, whether you are a woman or a man. And when I got home my mom asked me how I had felt, because we went together. I said, "I thought he would not let me speak. You should have told me that was the ritual". And she said: "We all have to go through that, men too, and also young boys." It is like, "He or she has not done, he or she cannot. He or she did, he or she can". It is a different practice to "I become 18 years, and I can go to everything". If I had not passed this ritual first, it would have been no use for me to be there. They would have let me speak, but the others would not have considered my speech as important, my word as important. The word is valuable to the extent that it contributes (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012)[177]."

[177] Original: "La primera vez que quise hablar con la autoridad municipal, bueno uno siempre va, pero eso ya era para hablar con la autoridad sobre un conflicto territorial. Yo alzé la mano, y cuando ya me tocaba el turno, yo dije: "Es que...". Y entonces me quedé en el "es que", porque el presidente me interrumpio. Y yo pensé: "Ay no, en este momento le digo sus cosas!" Pero él dijo: "Permítanme, les voy a decir que Zaira ha participado con la comunidad en tal, en tal y en tal cosa, y creo que tiene el derecho de hablar, ustedes qué dicen?" Y todos aceptaron. Si yo hubiera reaccionado desde mi perspectiva occidental, de nunca haber ido al municipio – porque las mujeres no vamos al municipio, son muy raras las ocasiones en las que vamos al municipio – y me hubiera levantado y hubiera dicho: "No! Usted déjeme, tengo que hablar!"... Afortunadamente me contuve. Ese es un ritual sumamente imporante. Entendí que era como un ritual de garantía de que tu voz cuenta, seas mujer o seas hombre. Y cuando llegué a casa mi mamá me preguntó que tal había sentido, porque fuimos juntas. Le dije: "Pensé que no me iba a dejar hablar. Me hubieras dicho que ese era el ritual". Y dijo: "Es que todos pasamos por eso, a los hombres también les pasa, también a los chavitos." Es como "No ha hecho, no puede. Ya hizo, ya puede." Es una práctica diferent a "Cumplo 18 y ya voy a todo. Si no hubiera pasado este rito previamente, no hubiera valido nada que estuviera ahí. Me hubieran dejado hablar, pero el resto no hubiera considerado mi discurso como algo importante, mi palabra como algo importante. La palabra vale en la medida en que aporta."

The testimony of Hipólito reveals that women in her community rarely go to the municipality. However, this does not mean women cannot acquire the right to speak. In this case, women who demonstrate their engagement in the community, receive recognition and a valuable voice in the local decision-making process. Hipólito herself feared not to be allowed to speak because of her occidental academic education. But, as she had already proven herself on several occasions, there was no opposition from the assembly. This example illustrates that not all traditional communities are against female participation, and that there have also been changes from within. Hipólito argues that existing studies do not acknowledge a certain level of acceptance in the communities to allow female political participation (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012).

For Hipólito it is also important to point out that there are different ways of female participation. She feels academic research focused too much on the more obvious political participation, ignoring the importance of other forms of participation in committees and assemblies. There is a persistent perspective that women have to participate actively, their name has to be mentioned in order for this participation to be recognized as valid (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012).

> "There are quite debatable interpretations, especially on the subject of women. For example, the idea that within the normative system women do not participate, has made us women believe we do not participate. When you ask women who are participating in their communities, they say they are not, because they have been told they do not participate. But, for example, at celebrations, they cook for the celebration, they prepare, they clean up, they serve, they get up very early, and are on their feet all day. An academic colleague said that the women do not enjoy the celebration because they spend all the time cooking. But this is precisely their community work, and they are very proud to be able to contribute (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012)[178]."

Hipólito argues that all women's activities must be recognized. Interpreting their role as merely an extension of their 'natural' domestic tasks, denies the true value of their participation. Furthermore, considering these tasks as inferior is the result of interpretations constructed from a Western point of view in which the 'private' domestic work of women is seen as inferior to the 'public' work of men

[178] Original: "Hay interpretaciones bastante discutibles, sobre todo en el tema de mujeres. Por ejemplo, la idea que dentro del systema normativo las mujeres no participamos nos ha hecho creer a nosotras que no participamos. Cuando le preguntas a las mujeres en qué participan en su comunidad te dicen que no participan, porque les han dicho que no participan. Pero por ejemplo en las fiestas, ellas cocinan para la fiesta, preparan, recogen, sirven, se levantan muy temprano y estan paradas todo el día. Una compañera académica ha dicho que ellas no disfrutan de la fiesta porque se la pasan cocinando. Pero esto justamente es su trabajo comunitario, y ellas estan muy orgullosas de poder hacerlo."

(Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Without Western bias, researchers could become aware of different levels of participation in which women are present and play an important role. For example, food and hospitality offered to guests are crucial for any kind of social event. Any festivity or ritual, be it a wedding or a patron saint celebration, needs to be accompanied by food and drinks offered to the guests, and this is mainly the responsibility of the women of the community[179]. Women are thus not merely heating food, they are enabling an important part of the ritual.

Hipólito makes an important point: it is not because women are not present in the local authority that they are not participating. Hipólito herself is very active in social organizations, but as she says herself, she is not interested in a political *cargo* (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Female leadership can also be developed and obtained through other civil organizations and movements, but these do not have to be political. In indigenous communities, women can be found participating at three main levels: at the political, social, and religious level. At the political level, they can be present in different departments of the local authority. Women can be elected to become *síndica* or *regidora* in the *ayuntamiento*, or exceptionally municipal president. In some cases wives can be registered as substitutes for their husbands in the *ayuntamiento*. Women can also be part of the lower municipal administration, as treasurer, secretary, controller, phone operator, or librarian. A second level is the social municipal space. Women can have access to local committees, especially those related to health, nutrition, education, and social programs, such as *Oportunidades*. They can, for example, be part of the mill committee, parents committee, prepare school breakfasts, promote milk distribution programs, such as *Liconsa*, etcetera. Sometimes, there are specific women's committees or small municipal women's institutes. Thus, women can mostly be found in committees that are complementary to their domestic and family care tasks. But, they have also been active in farmers' associations or as social activists, promoting the well-being of the community. A third level of participation is in the traditional *cargo* system, which includes several religious functions. Mostly, women have to support their husband in his role as *carguero*, but in certain municipalities women can be the main participant, for example being *mayordoma*, taking care of the church, a specific saint, or giving catechism. Women can also be asked to participate in community services; this often implies cooking during festivities, or cleaning the public spaces. In some cases they can even become a local police officer. In several places, carrying out these community services is a prerequisite to reach higher functions in the *ayuntamiento* (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 34-37). In communities where women's participation at the social and religious level is limited, access to political participation can thus be more difficult.

[179] As a matter of fact, this is also still true for Western social events, although here too women's role is undervalued.

As mentioned before, participation at municipal level is very important in the empowerment of women. The proximity to home and focus on local agendas about daily life items familiar to all women of the community, makes it the ideal place for women to learn to participate and to become leaders. Indigenous women have learned to participate actively in these different bodies. Within their organizations they strived to include a gender perspective. Their work is not always easy, but their participation in these organizations helped them to obtain a certain degree of recognition, and a voice in their communities (Bonfil Sánchez et al., 2008: 54). Ezequiel Zárate describes the memories of a woman in the Oaxacan community of San Mateo del Mar, who wanted to participate:

> "When I participated, people shouted: "Throw this woman out, because she is worth nothing." And then I told them, directing myself to the one that was shouting, inviting him to take the microphone. And I was scared, but I participated. Later, we lost our fear, and we continued participating … (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 39)[180]".

The gained experience makes women stronger and more confident, and encourages them to keep participating.

Judith Bautista Pérez[181] also believes women are participating at more levels than visible at first sight. When she was young, women in her community did not participate in the assemblies, but not for lack of interest. Bautista tells how, as a young girl, her mother always sent her to the mill, or the well, of the community. While waiting for their turn, the adult women were always discussing local politics. They commented on the decisions made by their husbands in the assembly and had a very clear opinion on community matters. She also remembers how her own mother discussed political decisions with her father at home (Bautista, personal communication, 2012). The power of women to influence their husband's choices may vary a lot. In certain homes, the man might listen to his partner, but it is clear this will not be true everywhere. Women need to have more direct and formal ways of participation. However, this example is meant to illustrate that women are interested in the decisions concerning their community and will try to find ways to participate, even indirectly. When developing programs to enhance their empowerment, it is important to keep already existing dynamics in mind as they could serve as a starting point, rather than believing that these women are ignorant and not participating.

[180] Original: "Cuando participé, la gente me gritaba: "Saquen a esa mujer porque no vale nada". Y entonces les dije dirigiéndome al que estaba gritando invitándolo para que pasara a hablar en el micrófono y yo tenía miedo, pero participé. Ya después perdimos el miedo, seguimos participando… ."

[181] Judith Bautista is a young Zapotec woman from the town of San Juan Atepec, in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca. Atepec has about 1,500 inhabitants, mostly bilingual. Bautista had to start working at the age of eleven, but got a scholarship of the Fundación Ford, and obtained an MA in sociology.

Sofía Robles, of the organization Ser Mixe, testifies how women can gain experience in local organizations. When Ser Mixe started with projects for indigenous women, it was difficult to convince women in the communities to participate. At the beginning, women brought their husbands along so they would speak for them. Yet, over time they learned to stand up for themselves, and now these same women are hard to stop once they start talking (Robles, personal communication, 2011).

As we have seen with Hipólito, participation in community matters can open the door to participation in the decision-making process. The different levels of participation are thus interconnected; the social and traditional levels can be a platform to attain the political level. To specifically analyze female political participation, it is therefore important to take all levels of participation into account, which is often forgotten in current research. Thus, specific research is necessary to analyze the participation of indigenous women at all levels of the community.

The different levels of participation are important, but the lack of indigenous women in politics cannot be denied and needs to be addressed. Women ought to get equal access to political decision-making processes. The role of the different participation levels could be part of the solution. Hipólito believes that the integration of women in local politics has to be a process coming from within the communities (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). The more experienced and confident women become at a more accessible social level, the more they might be stimulated to take up a political *cargo*. It is a process that is happening. Not everywhere, but in part of the indigenous communities change is occurring from within. Women are starting to receive recognition for their work. But, the process is very slow, partly because changing mentalities is difficult. Furthermore, progress has been hampered by a lack of institutional involvement, and recognition from the political and academic world. Consequently, specific policies are needed to support women's struggles.

7. Movement of Indigenous Women: Activism and Leadership

In addition to their participation in local committees, certain indigenous women have taken their participation one step further and integrated the indigenous movement. Some are activists in mixed indigenous associations, others have specifically chosen to engage in the improvement of the situation of indigenous women.

As previously discussed in the historical overview, in Mexico the movement of indigenous women gained visibility in the 1990s. Indigenous women managed to create a national network and develop a specific discourse. It is a movement overlapping the indigenous and the feminist movement, but questioning both.

As Espinosa states:

> "It forces to recognize the generic dimension of the social inequality in the project of the indigenous movement, and the plurality of subjects and political strategies within the feminist movement (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 86)[182]".

Research has shown that Mexican indigenous women have been participating actively in most revolts and conflicts throughout colonial and post-colonial history. But it was during the Zapatista uprising in the 1990s that the participation of indigenous women caught the attention of the general public. Hundreds of women were members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), as part of the militia, as insurgents, or helping in the support bases. But most important was precisely that they were not only fighting for their rights as indigenous peoples, but that they also had gender specific demands (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 128).

Valladares recalls how the Zapatistas were called cowards whenever women were seen in the front line of demonstrations against the military. This standpoint does however not take into consideration women's role as protagonists in the fight for better life conditions for their community. Furthermore, it portrays women as inferior, ignorant, and in need of protection (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 136).

On the 8th of March 1993, nine months before the uprising, the EZLN had already accepted the *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres*. This document addressed the need to integrate specific rights for indigenous women in the traditional normative system of '*usos y costumbres*'. But the indigenous women's movement also took a critical stand towards the '*usos y costumbres*', questioning the elements that oppressed women (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 90-91; EZLN, 1993). They fight for ethnic recognition and want to protect their traditions, but they do not accept all traditions blindly. They are very conscious of the unequal rights they have as women, and want to change this situation. Gutiérrez and Palomo interviewed a Tzeltal woman in Chiapas who stated:

> "Not all *costumbres* are good! Some are bad. If they say that the government is going to respect the *costumbres* of indigenous peoples, we women have to say which *costumbres* are good and have to be respected and which *costumbres* are bad and have to be forgotten (Gutiérrez and Palomo, 1999)[183]."

[182] Original: "Obliga a reconocer la dimensión genérica de la desigualdad social en el proyecto del movimiento indígena, y la pluralidad de sujetos y estrategias políticas al interior del movimiento feminista."
[183] Original: "¡No todas las costumbres son buenas! Hay unas que son malas. Si dicen que el gobierno va a respetar las costumbres de los indígenas, las mujeres tenemos que decir cuáles costumbres son buenas y deben respetarse y cuáles costumbres son malas y deben de olvidarse."

Participating in the indigenous women's movement is not always easy. These women are faced with resistance from the mixed indigenous movement, which believes that the gender demands weaken the indigenous movement. The critical approach of the '*usos y costumbres'* and the exposure of problems regarding gender relations within the communities – considered to be private matters – is experienced as a betrayal of the mixed movement.

But at the same time, their critical approach shows the strength, maturity, and independence of the movement. Indigenous women are not helpless creatures in need of saving; they are not just following the mixed movement either. They have their own priorities, and are capable of developing a critical discourse questioning all mechanisms of oppression, both inside and outside their communities.

Many initiatives have been organized, bringing indigenous women together, for example the *Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América* (2002), and local groups have been created, such as the Coordinadora Guerrerense de Mujeres Indígenas (2004) and the Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas de Oaxaca (2011). Maybe the movement has lost some strength since the 1990s, but new generations of young indigenous women are already standing up.

Hipólito testifies that there are many differences within the female indigenous movement. Women have different demands and needs, especially among the different generations. This is not always easy to coordinate. The Asamblea de Mujeres Indígenas of which Hipólito is a member, for example, consists of women of different communities and indigenous peoples of Oaxaca. These women have different experiences and different trajectories within and outside their communities. About a hundred indigenous women participated in the last assembly; many of them are teachers, but also women who are not part of any organization, or young women finishing their academic education in the capital. They have in common that they are addressing similar subjects, such as sexual and reproductive health, political participation, land owning rights, community communication, or collective rights. The organization started as a local project, but now different initiatives with similar agendas have emerged from other spaces and are coming together (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Similar processes are happening all across the country. As mentioned, the difficulty is to coordinate, but also to recognize the specific demands and needs within the organizations, which has not been an easy task. The differences often divide the movement, and other views are not always accepted. In addition, the lack of resources hampers the indigenous women's movement. Most women in the organizations are participating on a voluntary base, on top of their normal activities. Hipólito explains how for government meetings they have to see who is free at that specific moment. This makes it difficult to guarantee a systematic follow-up.

Furthermore, the influence of the indigenous women's movement on the political authorities remains limited. They are invited to attend certain meetings, but are clearly not yet important stakeholders for politicians (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). In general, the initiatives of indigenous peoples are heterogeneous. They are very diverse in strength and scale, and in the spaces they use. This reflects the diversity existing within the Mexican indigenous population.

The women in the indigenous movement acquired a great deal of experience regarding leadership. They learned to participate in assemblies, workshops, and social protests, and have been in contact with both national and international academia, human rights activists, feminists, etcetera. Mexican indigenous women participated in international meetings, such as the *Encounter of Women of the First Nations of Abya Yala* in Quito, Ecuador (1995). Certain indigenous women have also been able to participate in work groups and subcommittees of the United Nations (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 142-143). These experiences helped to empower them even more. They learned to claim new spaces, and serve as a positive example for other indigenous women. Some female indigenous activists are Martha Sánchez (Amuzga of Guerrero), Sofía Robles (Mixe of Oaxaca)[184], Cándida Jiménez (Mixe of Oaxaca), and Margarita Gutiérrez (Hñahñu of Hidalgo), among others. These women have been playing an important role in the fight for the recognition of indigenous women's rights, both at local, state, national, and international level. Sofía Robles, for example, participated in the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, as the only indigenous woman in the Mexican delegation (Robles, personal communication, 2011).

Nevertheless, the number of female indigenous leaders remains limited. They have a lot of problems to conquer these spaces, and have to resist economic, social, and personal pressure. Although their main objective is to improve the situation of indigenous peoples, they are sometimes criticized by their own community because they are thought to have lost the bond with the community and no longer able to understand them. Female activists have to fight again on different levels, both within and outside their community, in the feminist movement, within the indigenous movement, and with the other female indigenous activists.

The female indigenous movement has however been able to give indigenous women a voice, and it has put specific social and gender issues on the national and international agenda (Valladares de la Cruz, 2004: 144). The agency of indigenous women needs to be acknowledged. The discourse of the female indigenous movement has become very mature, criticizing society's paternalistic, racist, and sexist elements that have been oppressing them. They also show that tradition and modernity are no

[184] Sofía Robles is originally from a Zapotec town in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. However, since she married a Mixe man, she has primarily been active in the Mixe region.

contradiction, seeking a balance between the two. Because they believe: "You can remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same[185] (Espinosa Damián, 2010: 105)".

Another very important point stressed by indigenous women whenever I spoke to them is that they do not want to be treated as poor, pitiful, and needy souls. They are not victims, they speak up demanding equal rights as indigenous peoples, and as women. Researchers – still generally outsiders – often approach them as if they were helpless children needing to be saved, but this is a paternalistic approach. It cannot be denied that indigenous women are confronted with situations of oppression and discrimination, but this does not mean that they do not have the capabilities to speak up, or are unable to participate. Researchers should connect with the people in question, give moral and concrete support, help to open up spaces, starting within the academia itself. But they should not impose their voice, as this would mean reduplicating the situation of oppression.

Overall, several changes are necessary to improve the political participation of indigenous women. Isunza Bizuet lists different points that can help to integrate more indigenous women in politics. First, mentalities have to change, starting in the families of the women, so that they receive the necessary support and understanding at home. Women should also support each other's ambition. The culture of imposition, submission, uncertainty, and offense has to be changed into a culture of motivation, perseverance, and engagement. Women have to be able to work with men, and their opinions have to be respected. All capacities and roles of women have to be valued, including the domestic tasks they perform. There is also a need for gender inclusive education encouraging broader development of girls. Girls and boys have to learn that both sexes are equally capable of taking up a significant role in the decision-making processes of the community and by extension, the country. Within the family, education is also crucial; women should avoid teaching machismo to their children. Daughters and sons should be brought up in a context of gender equality. Furthermore, to improve their self-awareness and self-confidence, but also their political skills, women should receive specific trainings (Isunza Bizuet, 2009: 51-55). These points have to be addressed in the communities. But mentality changes are also necessary outside the communities. Non-indigenous society should accept the capabilities of indigenous women to participate at all levels, be it at local, state, or national level. Spaces have to be made more accessible for these women, and they should be empowered and encouraged to participate. Another important point is the creation of specific policies that take indigenous women into account, and stimulate and facilitate their participation. At this moment, the government has not made enough efforts to include indigenous women as full and valuable citizens.

[185] Original: "Se puede permanecer cambiando y cambiar permaneciendo."

At international level, it can be noted that indigenous women become more visible, and gain agency. For example, indigenous women very actively participate in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which is currently presided by Dalee Sambo Dorough, an Inuit woman and associate professor of the University of Alaska Anchorage. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, is also an indigenous woman (Kankanaey Igorot peoples of the Philippines). In 2015, the 59th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reviewed progress made regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women since the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action that is now 20 years old. For this occasion, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) specifically evaluated the achievements and obstacles of indigenous women and girls. In national politics, for example, the former secretary of culture of Guatemala (2000-2004), Otilia Lux, is a K'iché woman. In countries such as Canada and the U.S.A., indigenous women are also present in academia. Several of them are specifically engaging in historical, social, and anthropological research on their own peoples, for example Sonya Atalay (Anishinaabe) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Jennifer Nez Denetdale (Diné) at the University of New Mexico, and Waziyatawin (Dakota) at the University of Victoria, among others.

Despite the fact that Mexico has about 15% of indigenous citizens, opportunities for political and academic participation are rarely available for indigenous women in Mexico.

E. Conclusions

This chapter looked at the political participation of women in Mexico, giving special attention to political participation of indigenous women. Are Mexican women and men participating in politics at the same degree? Do they have equal opportunities to participate, and are women equally represented at all levels of political hierarchy? Political participation of women is an indicator of the level of female emancipation, but it is also an indicator of the place women have within Mexican society. The same is true for indigenous women; the level of political participation illustrates the place indigenous women have within Mexican society as a whole, but also within their own communities. In the indigenous context, specific questions had to be asked. Do indigenous women have a voice and a vote in their local communities? And do they have access to higher political levels? In which spaces and to what extent can they participate?

First, the national policy on female political participation was analyzed. Following international agreements, the Mexican government pledged to enforce equal participation of women in politics,

and in the power structures of the state. At a national level, measures have been taken, such as the adoption of gender quota for candidate lists for federal, state, and municipal elections. The electoral reforms of 2014 stipulate parity between female and male candidates on party lists. Furthermore, candidates on the lists have to have a substitute of the same gender.

In the past, more limited quota laws were already in place, but during previous elections, the gender quota had limited effects on the electoral results. Women were placed in strategically less important positions and districts, or even replaced by men after election. The new measures will have to prove their effectiveness during the following elections.

When looking at the right to vote, gender equality seems to have been reached in Mexico. Certain factors can negatively influence this equality. Within patriarchal structures, women can be influenced to vote according to the wishes of a male family member. They can also be influenced by other actors, such as government officials or the church, or by fear of losing government aid. To ensure freedom of vote and to empower women, government initiatives should focus on the development of more political consciousness, education, and the emancipation of women on this subject.

The analysis of the number of women elected within the political structures shows a grimmer picture. As illustrated by the female candidacy for the presidential elections of 2012, women can reach the highest ranks of Mexican politics. Between 2012 and 2014, there was also a small increase in the number of women with a political function at national level. However, at almost every political level, female representatives are still a minority; parity is nowhere reached. Women and men do not have equal access to political functions. Parties seem to be reluctant to give seats to women, believing men are more capable. The higher the position, the fewer women are present; the lower the position, the more women can be found. This essentially means that women are underrepresented and do not participate at all levels of the decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the few women among the highest political ranks are not necessarily the best ambassadors for women. Often they still operate within the existing patriarchal structures and conservative values; they tend to revert to stereotypical ideas on gender relations and on the role of women. This illustrates a deeply rooted and structural gender inequality.

To give women effective equal opportunities, mentalities have to change. In this process, the government should set an example. To address this problem, the first step is to have data showing the extent of the issue and the evolution of the number of men and women in politics. At this moment, there are no gendered statistics available for all political levels. The lack of these official data illustrates the lack of importance given to gender equality in Mexican politics, and the lack of

effective commitment of the government. Mexican institutions are still not aware of the need to collect gender specific data. Officially, the national gender policy has to be followed at all levels. In practice, however, it is not considered important.

When focusing on indigenous women, the situation is even worse. Until now, indigenous women have only exceptionally been able to reach the national political level, and in the state congresses they are rarely present either. In the municipalities, more indigenous women are active, but their numbers are still low. Access of women to public functions differs depending on the community and the local context, but it is difficult to have a clear overview of the situation. An important problem in measuring participation of indigenous women within the institutionalized political structures is the absolute lack of statistical data to make a complete analysis. Hardly any statistics are available about the number of indigenous persons participating in politics, and official data on indigenous women do not exist at all. To be able to address gender issues in rural and indigenous communities, it is indispensable to have an overview of the different contexts and situations indigenous women are living in. They do not all have the same opportunities and access to resources, and the local and national policies should be adapted to their specific needs. How can the government evaluate and improve the situation of indigenous women, if no data are collected to show the extent of the issue? Here again the absence of the most basic information illustrates the lack of commitment of the government.

At the local municipal level, the degree of participation of indigenous women differs, depending on the specific context of each community. In certain communities, women encounter little resistance when taking up a political *cargo*. In others, however, women have to face many obstacles to be able to participate, and sometimes they are even forbidden to do so. In general, to be able to participate, indigenous women have to face both structural and cultural obstacles. Furthermore, in certain communities, the traditional political system of '*usos y costumbres'* makes it impossible for women to participate in local politics. Indigenous communities fought to get this distinctive normative system recognized at a national level, but traditionally it is a patriarchal structure led by men only. Therefore, the '*usos y costumbres'* system is often considered to be harmful for gender equality and for the emancipation of indigenous women. The '*usos y costumbres'* system has indeed been used as an excuse to refuse access to women, however, positive examples have shown that this is not necessarily the case. Within indigenous communities, changes have been taking place and women are being included in the traditional normative system. To counter external criticism claiming that the '*usos y costumbres'* is an oppressive system, indigenous women have clearly stated their support for the system and they know which changes have to be made to the system to grant them equal political rights. Indigenous women are finding their place between a traditional political system and

equal gender rights. They do not feel they have to choose between tradition and modernity; they believe they can remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same.

The agency of indigenous women should not be underestimated and should be acknowledged. They are themselves actors of change. At the political level, indigenous women are slowly taking actions to gain a voice. It is important to realize that there are both indigenous women and men supporting these changes. On the other hand, women are using alternative ways to participate, and are acquiring leadership experience in different spaces, within political structures and beyond, both at national and international level.

It is important to make the agency of indigenous women more visible. The previously mentioned story of Eufrosina Cruz, for example, has been published in the book *Alas de Maguey* (2012) by Marta Gómez-Rodulfo. Cruz also accepted to participate in the documentary *La revolución de los alcatraces* (2013) by Luciana Kaplan, which describes her struggle to participate in local and national politics against the background of the '*usos y costumbres*' system. The documentary won the Al Jazeera Documentary Award at the 2013 Vancouver Latin American Film Festival, among other prizes, and participated in numerous film festivals in Mexico and abroad, getting much visibility. This kind of media is important to show that indigenous women are not passive victims. They are taking action themselves to improve their situation, and they are speaking up for themselves.

However, more spaces should open up for indigenous peoples, such as civil organizations, academia, official institutions, cultural centers, etcetera. This would give them the opportunity to gain more experience and expand their agency. Both the Mexican government, and the other actors in society must take their responsibility to decolonize mentalities, and create the conditions for indigenous women to be able to participate and have a voice in all spheres of society.

VI. The Image of Women in Mexican Media: Fighting Stereotypes

The media play an important role in the expression of values, ideology, and cultural identity of a society. At the same time, they influence the codification of gender, race, and class themes within this society (Abercrombie, 1996; Beard, 2003: 87).

Regarding the relation between indigenous peoples and media, Article 16 of the UNDRIP states:

> "Article 16
>
> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.
>
> 2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity (UN, 2007)."

Thus, the UNDRIP gives indigenous peoples the right to establish their own media, but also to be correctly represented in other media. States are urged to encourage good practices of representation both in private and in State-owned media. Mexican Constitution on the other hand makes no mention of any rights regarding the presence and representation of indigenous peoples in the media.

In the media context, indigenous women again suffer from multiple discrimination. Mexican media are another area where both women and indigenous peoples are underrepresented and also misrepresented. The current chapter will start by analyzing the general image of women in Mexican media. How are women portrayed in media? This can teach us how women are perceived, and what impact this might have on their place in Mexican society.

First we will look at women working in Mexican media. The question has to be asked whether both genders are equally represented in the media business. Are there female television hosts and journalists? Are women who work in the media treated the same way as their male colleagues, and do they get the same career opportunities? Do women reach decision-making levels within the media concerns? And can they include a gender perspective to the media content?

Analyzing the presence of women in the media, and the influence they can have on the media content is a first step in understanding the image of women in Mexican media. A second step is analyzing how women are portrayed in the media content. What image is shown of women, both in fiction and in non-fiction? How are gender relations portrayed in television shows? This image has a certain impact on the way Mexican women are treated on a daily basis. The audience is influenced by the image of women they see, but this image also mirrors reality.

The situation of indigenous women deserves special attention. Women suffer gender discrimination, but on top of that, indigenous women suffer from racism, and the media seems to enforce this discrimination. First, a brief overview will be given of the historic evolution of the image of indigenous peoples in Mexican visual culture, and specifically of indigenous women. Then an analysis will be made of the current image of indigenous women in Mexican media. How are indigenous women portrayed? What influence can this have on their self-image and their self-esteem? The image that is shown of indigenous women cannot only influence the way the non-indigenous population looks at them, it can also have an effect on their own social and economic development.

There has been extensive research on the representation of indigenous peoples. Postcolonial theorists were among the first to criticize the way indigenous peoples have been represented. Authors such as Franz Fanon (1952), Albert Memmi (1957), Edward Said (1978), and Homi Bhabha (1983; 1994) all concurred that the existing image of subordinated people, such as indigenous peoples, was an erroneous and harming image, invented and imposed by the West. This imposed image contributes to the continuing oppression of the subalterns:

> "In all these areas – gender, class, and race – criticism has correctly focused upon the institutional forces in modern Western societies that shape and set limits on the representation of what are considered essentially subordinate beings; thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate subordinate, the inferior inferior (Said, 1994: 80)."

For Homi Bhabha, negative stereotypes are furthermore part of a colonial discourse that serves to justify the conquest and the subordination of indigenous peoples (Bhabha, 1983).

On the American continent, several authors, often of Native American descent, have denounced the constructed image of Native American peoples and also the appropriation of their culture[186].

[186] Richard Rogers defines cultural appropriation as "the use of one culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture. […] Cultural appropriation, however, is an active process and, in this sense, retains the meaning of a "taking". […] The active "making one's own" of another culture's elements occurs, however, in various ways, under a variety of conditions, and with varying functions and

Indigenous imagery and objects, such as traditional dress, have been appropriated by dominating non-indigenous cultures. In Mexico for example, traditionally embroidered blouses, shawls, and traditional textile patterns are worn by urban high-class women. These objects have to legitimize a national identity, showing this identity can be traced back to a glorious past. The appropriation has not only meant the seizing of objects, it has also led to what Gayatri Spivak has called an 'epistemic violence[187]' in which indigenous identities have been redefined and the real characteristics of indigenous peoples have been replaced by an image created by Western culture.

Some of the major reference works written in the late 1960s and 1970s on the representation and cultural appropriation of Native American culture are for example, *Custer Died for Your Sins* by Vine Deloria (1969), and *The White Man's Indian* by Robert Berkhofer (1978). Benjamin Keen's *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (1971) specifically focused on the construction of the image of the Aztecs. More recently, the representation of Native American peoples has again been addressed in for example *Dressing in Feathers* by Elizabeth Bird (1996), *Playing Indian* by Philip Deloria (1998), and *Native American Representations* by Gretchen Bataille (2001). Currently, the discussion has been revived, among others by Adrienne Keene on her blog Native Appropriations[188].

In the context of representation, there has also been attention for the representation of minorities in the media. One of the first theories in this regard was the cultivation theory of George Gerbner. According to cultivation theory, the longer a person is exposed to images and stereotypes on television, the more this person will interiorize these images and believe they correspond to reality (Gerbner et al. 1986). Negative stereotypes connected to minorities will also be adopted as correct representation of reality (Dixon, 2000; Dixon and Linz, 2000; Greenberg et al., 2002). The media can thus be reinforcing the negative images of minorities, and legitimizing social differences. In addition to the general works on representation, certain authors have specifically focused on the representation of Native Americans in the media, for example Ward Churchill in *Fantasies of the Master Race* (1992), or Michael FitzGerald in *Native Americans on Network TV* (2013).

When turning to Mexican media, it first has to be noted that very little research has been done on gender in present-day media. The existing studies have primarily been carried out at the initiative of the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres and of the organization Comunicación e Información de la

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outcomes. The degree and scope of voluntariness (individually or culturally), the symmetry or asymmetry of power relations, the appropriation's role in domination and/or resistance, the nature of the cultural boundaries involved, and other factors shape, and are shaped by, acts of cultural appropriation (Rogers, 2006: 476)."

[187] Gayatri Spivak uses Michel Foucault's concept of 'epistemic violence' to describe the imposition of a Western perception of the world on non-Western peoples (Spivak, 1988: 76).

[188] www.nativeappropriations.com

Mujer (CIMAC). Scholars that have currently been working on the subject are Aimée Vega Montiel, Josefina Hernández Téllez, María Isabel Barranco Lagunas, Mercedes Charles Creel, and the late Olga Bustos Romero, among only a few others[189]. A majority of the research focuses on women in written media and on the issues faced by female journalists. Some research has been done on the genre of the *telenovela*, but without much focus on the role of women in these programs[190].

The situation is even worse regarding the presence of indigenous peoples in Mexican media. Certain attention has been given to indigenous media, such as community radios, but the place of indigenous peoples in mainstream media has hardly been studied. A few exceptions that do address this specific topic are the works of Lozano (2006), Flores and García (2007), Muñiz, Serrano, Aguilera and Rodríguez (2010), and Marañón and Muñiz (2012).

The main focus of this present chapter lies on mainstream visual media, and predominantly on television. Other media can also be influential, in Mexico however, television is the most accessible media for a wide audience and therefore has the most impact (CONACULTA, 2010). Furthermore, television is the medium with most influence, because it is believed it is the medium that represents social reality most accurately (Gorham, 2004; Entman, 1992; Tamborini et al., 2000). Indigenous media will not be analyzed in this context. At a local level indigenous media play an important role in the strengthening of the cultural identity of indigenous peoples (Raffa, 2010; Gasparello, 2011). However, in this research the focus lies on the invisibility of indigenous peoples in 'mainstream' Mexican media, and the effects this has on the perception of indigenous peoples in Mexican society[191].

Research information presented here was primarily obtained through the observation and analysis of different Mexican media, during fieldwork and online, especially in the years 2012 and 2013. The results were supplemented with personal experience as a long-time viewer of Mexican television and reader of Mexican newspapers.

Television is among the most popular media with one of the largest audiences in Mexico. According to the *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010*, 92.57% of the private homes in Mexico have at least one television[192] (INEGI, 2010). Television is omnipresent in Mexican households, as well as in an impressive amount of shops, restaurants, and bars. You can even find small televisions in ambulant

[189] For more information also see: Hernández Carballido, 2006: 164.
[190] An exception is the work of Laura Beard (Beard, 2003).
[191] On indigenous media in Mexico, see for example: V. RAFFA (2010); G. GASPARELLO (2011); E. C. WORTHAM, (2013), *Indigenous Media in Mexico. Culture, Community, and the State*, Durham: Duke University Press.
[192] These numbers refer to occupied private homes, excluding mobile homes, shelters, spaces not built for habitation, and houses without occupancy information (INEGI, 2010).

food stalls and in the markets. The indigenous communities are among the poorest of the country. But despite their precarious life conditions, about 70.9% of indigenous homes have television (CDI, 2011: 34-35).

According to the preliminary results of the *Encuesta Nacional de Hábitos, Prácticas y Consumo Culturales 2010*, around 90% of Mexican population report watching television. Of this group 35% watch between one and two hours of television a day. About 40% of all Mexicans watch two or more hours a day[193] (CONACULTA, 2010).

The most popular programs are, by far, the news reports and national soap operas or *telenovelas*, both respectively with an audience of 20%[194] (CONACULTA, 2010). The popularity of television in Mexico makes it an influential medium.

In Mexico there are two main television networks: Televisa and Televisión Azteca. At a national level, Televisa has four principal channels: Canal de las Estrellas, ForoTV, Canal 5, and Galavisión. Televisa owns just under 70% of the Mexican television market (Televisa, 2012a). The channels Azteca 7 and Azteca 13 belong to Televisión Azteca. This network owns almost 30% of the market segment (Televisión Azteca, 2012).

A. Female Gender in Mexican Media: A General Overview

To analyze the image of women in Mexican media two aspects of the media business have to be considered. First, there is the presence of women working in the media landscape, for example as television hosts, journalists, or in management. How is the relation male-female in Mexican media? Are women working at all levels of the media business? Do the media concerns respect gender equality? A second step is looking at the women shown in television programs. How are these women portrayed? What place do they have in society?

The presence of women in media, their image, and the function they may have, are important because they influence the audience and impact the image of women in general.

[193] Inquiry conducted between July 24 and August 5, 2010, among 32,000 people older than 13 years of age, with a thousand people in every state of Mexico (CONACULTA, 2010).
[194] The other types of programs (sports, music, foreign movies, cartoons, Mexican movies, comedy, adventures, documentaries, games, culture, reality, political discussion, interviews, and others) are only preferred by 1% to 9% of the audience (CONACULTA, 2010).

1. Women Working in Mexican Media: The Struggle for Equality

From the beginning, journalism was dominated by men. Nevertheless, at the end of the nineteenth century, a limited number of Mexican women started writing contributions for magazines. In most cases they discussed 'feminine' subjects, such as fashion, recipes, or societal news. Women writing on other topics tended to use pseudonyms. In that same period, the first women's magazines emerged in Mexico, such as *Almanaque de las Señoritas* and *Panorama de Señoritas.* Other publications were more strongly influenced by feminism, such as *Mujeres del Anáhuac* and *Las Hijas del Anáhuac*, later renamed *Violetas del Anáhuac* (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 10).

In the twentieth century, more women started writing, but the majority still focused on feminine topics. Furthermore, journalism was not seen as a decent job for young ladies, and middle and high class women usually did not work outside the home. With the emergence of the feminist movement in the seventies, more women were accepted as journalists (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 10-11).

In Mexico, television was popularized as of the fifties. In the first decades, the few women working in television were often seen as a piece of scenery. They acted as the beautiful assistant of the male television host. After the seventies, and especially in the eighties, women started to claim their place on television screens, however, their numbers remained low (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 11-12).

In 1995, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, urged for more gender equality in mass media worldwide. It was pointed out that the media showed a stereotypical image of gender relations. Furthermore, men dominated the decision-making levels in the media business. Therefore, governments, the international community, as well as the private sector, were called upon to take measures, both to increase the number of women working in the media, and to improve the image of women in media content (UN, 1995: 13, 16-17, 53, 99-103).

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, actions have been taken and improvements have been made. Currently, about half of the staff in Mexican editorial offices are women. However, some of the issues raised in 1995 still persist. While more Mexican women have been employed in the media in the last decades, they rarely reach the decision-making levels. As a result they have little influence on the content of television programs. Most women are working in administration or in the editorial office; their presence is limited in technical functions and in management. And when they do reach the decision-making levels, they often adopt the masculine company policy, prioritizing commercial interests, and giving little attention to gender equality in the media content (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 9-10).

Furthermore, female journalists in Mexico still tend to present 'soft' subjects, such as health, social events, or fashion. On television, women are often only the assistant of the male host, with limited contributions on beauty advice, gossip, or entertainment. The weather forecast has traditionally been presented by women as well. But these topics give them little professional recognition. Male journalists, on the other hand, are taken more seriously because they cover subjects such as economy and politics (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 10-11).

The physical appearance of television hosts also illustrates the differences between male and female media figures. Most female presenters have to be young and attractive. This is especially the case for hosts of entertainment programs. Much importance is given to these women's physical appearance. Female television hosts have a slim figure and a fair complexion. They wear their long hair loose, walk on very high heels, and wear clothes that emphasize their female curves, such as miniskirts and low necklines. It is not uncommon for women to undergo plastic surgery in order to be able to conserve the illusion of youth, and to prolong a career on screen. Unlike for their male colleagues, beauty seems to be a prerequisite for recruitment. On average, male presenters are older, with a preference for mature men, which increases their level of authority (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 11-12).

A striking example is that of Televisa weather reporter Mayte Carranco Rodríguez. Carranco is a young model and started to present the weather on a local Televisa channel in the northern city of Monterrey. She was then promoted to present the weather forecast on the national ForoTV channel. Carranco is a voluptuous woman, and she is consistently wearing rather short, close-fitting, and low-cut dresses to present the weather forecast (see figure 11 showing screenshots of the weather forecast over a period of only ten days). The focus of the forecast seems to lie on Miss Carranco's body and not on the weather.

Figure 11: Screenshots of the ForoTV weather forecast with Mayte Carranco, October 23 – November 1, 2012 (Televisa, 2012b).

The same is true for entertainment shows, such as *Venga la Alegría* and *Venga el Domingo* on Azteca 13, and *Hoy* on Televisa's Canal de la Estrellas (Televisión Azteca, 2013c-d; Televisa, 2013f). These programs feature a mixed group of male and female hosts. The female hosts are beautiful young women with very high heels, and rather short skirts; there is a lot of emphasis on their physical appearance. The programs *Venga la Alegría* and *Venga el Domingo* also have a group of young female dancers in revealing outfits that appear for sexy dance intermezzi[195]. The women in these shows are often objectified and sexualized, and the male hosts regularly make sexist or macho comments, both to their colleagues, the guests, the dancers, and the audience and interviewees.

[195] On the website of *Venga la Alegría*, the ballet has a separate section where the audience can review all the dances they performed in the show (Televisión Azteca, 2013d).

These comments seem to be accepted as normal. The sexualization of female television hosts illustrates that there is still no consistent policy to improve the position of women in Mexican media.

Gender equality in the Mexican media industry might not be ideal yet, however it cannot be denied that important changes are visible. It is important to point out that there are currently several women among the most important journalists in Mexico. A number of women are news program hosts, for example: Paola Rojas on ForoTV (Televisa, 2013a); Adela Micha on Galavisión (Televisa, 2013b); Lolita Ayala on Canal de las Estrellas (Televisa, 2013c); Adriana Pérez Cañedo, Irma Pérez Lince, and Guadalupe Contreras on Canal Once (Once TV México, 2013a). Other respected female journalists that have been working for a variety of audiovisual and written media are, for example, Carmen Aristegui and Denise Dresser. Denise Dresser is an acclaimed political journalist who writes for the magazine *Proceso* and for the newspaper *Reforma*, among others. Carmen Aristegui is considered one of the most influential opinion leaders in Mexico. Until March 2015, she was the anchor of the main morning radio news program *Noticias MVS* (MVS Radio, 2013). Currently, she leads the news program *Aristegui* on CNN en Español (CNN en Español, 2013), she has her own online news site *Aristegui Noticias*[196], and she writes opinion pieces for the newspaper *Reforma*, among others. Aristegui covers the main news topics, ranging from national politics, economy, to international conflicts, and is known as a very critical journalist, not afraid of researching, tackling, and bringing to light sensitive subjects. With her work she has earned various national journalism awards (CNN en Español, 2013).

Other recognized and award winning female journalists of the written media are, just to name a few, Alejandra Xanic Von Bertrab[197] (various newspapers), Marcela Turati (newsmagazine *Proceso*), Anabel Hernández (newspaper *Reforma*, newsmagazine *Proceso*), Ana Lilia Pérez (various newspapers), Adela Navarro (journalist and editor of the weekly magazine *Zeta* of Tijuana), Sandra Rodríguez Nieto, and Rocío Idalia Gallegos (newspaper *El Diario de Juárez*). These journalists have primarily done research on organized crime and corruption (Lara, 2013).

Another research journalist worth mentioning is Lydia Cacho. She specifically adopts a critical feminist viewpoint and is particularly concerned about human rights topics. She has been internationally recognized for her work on child prostitution and female trafficking in Mexico, unveiling relations between prostitution networks and public and political Mexican personalities[198].

[196] http://aristeguinoticias.com/

[197] Alexandra Xanic Von Bertrab has won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting.

[198] Based on her research, she published several books including "*Los Demonios del Edén. El poder que protege a la pornografía infantil"* in 2005, and "*Esclavas del Poder. Un viaje al corazón de la trata sexual de mujeres y niñas en el mundo*" in 2010.

As a result she has been harassed, threatened, arrested, and tortured by the people she incriminated (CIMAC, 2011b: 42). Unlike Mayte Carranco, most of the women mentioned here were not selected for their physical appearance nor for their age, but for their journalistic work.

Female journalists might be in a minority in Mexico, but they have a significant influence as opinion makers. They are thus numerically underrepresented, but they do have a very strong and critical voice that is taken seriously within Mexican society.

Although women are working in Mexican media as journalists and reporters, only a limited number of women also reached management positions (CIMAC, 2011b: 11; Vega Montiel, 2012: 313-314). Thus, the influence of women at the decision-making level is limited. Exceptions are, for example, Enriqueta Cabrera y Cuarón, who is the general director of the public educational television network Once TV México (Once TV México, 2013b)[199], Ana Cecilia Terrazas as Director of News Systems of the public radio broadcaster Instituto Mexicano de la Radio[200] (IMER, 2013), and Carmen Lira, director of the newspaper *La Jornada* (La Jornada, 2013). Except for *La Jornada*, one of the best-selling newspapers in Mexico, these organizations are public media with a minor market share. The main commercial media concerns tell another story. Televisa and Televisión Azteca, for example, do not have female representatives, either in the board of directors[201], or the executive board[202] (Televisa, 2013d, e; Televisión Azteca, 2013a, b).

Women are still a minority in the Mexican media landscape, but the opportunities for female journalists are improving. The women mentioned here are acknowledged and respected journalists; they offer critical analyses of national and international news items, be it politics, economy, conflicts, or other issues. On television they are mostly treated the same as their male colleagues. But, notwithstanding certain exceptions, such as Lydia Cacho, their presence does not seem to result in more gender equal media content.

Besides, it has to be taken into account that journalism is not an easy job in Mexico. Since the year 2000, drug-related violence and corruption has only made it more difficult. According to the United Nations and Reporters without Borders, since 2010 Mexico is even considered one of the most

[199] Once TV México is a Mexican public television network owned by the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN).
[200] The number of female owners in the private radio sector is slightly higher than in other media. Aimée Vega Montiel points out that 82% of Mexican private radio is owned by fifteen families or groups, and that female owners have thus often inherited the position, being rather figureheads than influential decision makers (Vega Montiel, 2012: 313).
[201] The board of directors of Televisión Azteca consists of 6 men, that of Televisa of 4 men (Televisa, 2013d, e; Televisión Azteca, 2013a, b).
[202] The executive board of Televisión Azteca comprises 12 men, that of Televisa has 20 men (Televisa, 2013d, e; Televisión Azteca, 2013a, b).

dangerous countries worldwide for journalists[203] (CIMAC, 2011b: 23; Reporters Without Borders, 2013). Female journalists are especially vulnerable to intimidation and aggression. Since 2010, the civil organization Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC), analyzes complaints from female journalists. It notes that this last decade, and especially in the period 2009-2011, Mexico has seen a significant increase in the violence against female journalists (CIMAC, 2011b: 21).

In addition, women experience little support and empathy from their company, male and even female colleagues. The violence they face is seen as 'part of the job'. Moreover, women are often suspected of having provoked the violence themselves. The lack of awareness and visibility of specific gender problems makes access to the justice system very difficult. Furthermore, procedures to report violence against journalists are designed for male journalists and do not offer gender specific solutions (CIMAC, 2011b: 11).

The many obstacles they have to face makes working in the media a difficult job for women:

> "Thus, the challenges of the female journalists and reporters are wrapped in macho and misogynous ideologies. These ideologies force them to compete with their colleagues for the spaces, work and professional opportunities, and for recognition and prestige. In a hostile environment in which double morals and double standards prevail, they face moralist attacks accompanied by double work, attention, and service demands, as well as sexual and intellectual harassment and intimidation. At the same time, female journalists are called upon as if they were in gender equality. All of this feeds their depreciation (CIMAC, 2011b: 11)[204]."

This makes journalism a less attractive job for young women starting a career in the media. As the inflow is limited, the number of women who eventually reach television screens and management levels is also restricted.

In general, there is an urgent need for more effective gender policies in Mexican media. The Mexican media business has to become aware of its current role in the perpetuation of gender discrimination. Female journalists and reporters have to be valued for their work and not for their physical appearance. Media concerns could help to improve the image of women in general by supporting the

[203] In 2010, only Iraq was considered to be more dangerous for journalists (CIMAC, 2011b: 23).

[204] Original: "Así, los retos y los desafíos de las mujeres periodistas y comunicadoras están envueltos en ideologías machistas y misóginas. Estas ideologías las obligan a competir con sus colegas por los espacios, las oportunidades laborales y profesionales, así como por el reconocimiento y el prestigio. Ellas enfrentan, en un ambiente hostil en el que prevalecen la doble moral y la doble vara de medir, ataques moralistas acompañados de dobles exigencias laborales, de atención y servicios, así como acoso y hostigamiento sexual e intelectual. Al mismo tiempo, las periodistas son convocadas como si estuvieran en igualdad de género. Todo esto alimenta su desvalorización."

credibility of their female reporters. The valorization of women in the media will make it easier for them to access management levels in media concerns. Support is also necessary both from male and female colleagues, as they now often enforce the existing stereotypes. Finally, the government needs to recognize the specific gender violence female journalists have to face, and offer appropriate support and follow-up. Addressing these problems could increase the number of women in the media, attaining thus a gender equilibrium that reflects social and demographic reality.

2. Women in Mexican Media Content: The Female Body at the Service of Men

Gender equity cannot only be reached by having more women working in the media, the image of women that is shown in the media content has to be considered too. How are women portrayed in television shows? How are gender relations presented in television programs? What place are women attributed in society?

Gender representation has been improving in Mexican media content. However, one of the main issues is still that women are often represented in stereotypical ways, both in fictional programs such as *telenovelas*, in non-fictional programs such as news items or interviews, in entertainment shows, and in television advertisements. The stereotypical representation of gender relations in the media is problematic because it influences the way gender issues are approached in daily life. As the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres states:

> "The stereotypes and images transmitted by the media are deeply rooted in our mentalities and they last in time. These stereotypes have the characteristic of passing unnoticed, and that is why they are powerful and effective; they are imposed on us without us noticing, and so they forge our mentalities (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 2)[205]."

On Mexican television, women are often associated with the private and domestic sphere, while men tend to be presented in the public and political sphere. Women are linked with beauty, fashion, home, kitchen, and children. Their marital or family status is also used as a reference. They are not seen as individuals, but as wives, mothers, or daughters, while men are more often identified by their social position or occupation, and valued for their individual capacities. Furthermore, women on television will not often be characterized as rational decision makers, but rather as impulsive, emotional, romantic, naïve, and dependent human beings (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 3-7; GMMP, 2010).

[205] "Los estereotipos e imágenes que transmiten los medios de comunicación se arraigan profundamente en nuestras mentalidades y perduran en el tiempo. Estos estereotipos tienen la característica de pasar inadvertidos, y por ello resultan potentes y eficaces; se nos imponen sin que nos demos cuenta, y así van forjando nuestras mentalidades."

a) News Reports

News reports usually give no special attention to gender. In the last decades, different international organizations, such as Media Watch and Isis International, have started initiatives to promote and monitor women's rights in the media (Media Watch, 2013; Isis International, 2013). In Mexico, the civil organization Comunicación e Información de la Mujer has been offering news items on its website with a gender perspective and with special attention to human rights (CIMAC, 2013). But this organization is an exception, most mainstream news channels do not consider gender. Gender specific data, for example in statistics, are rarely given. In interviews, women are often identified by their marital or family status, while men are identified by their occupation. Furthermore, the media are very sensationalist; women make the news primarily when they are involved in a scandal. For example, female politicians usually get less coverage than male, unless juicy details about their private life come to light, such as in 2006, when the candidate deputies Lorena Villavicencio (PRD), Alejandra Barrales (PRD), and Brenda Arenas (Partido Alternativa), posed in a men's magazine. The same is true for Lydia Cacho's book *Demonios del Edén* on child pornography, which got more attention as soon as the phone calls between the businessman Kamel Nacif and the governor of the state of Puebla, Mario Marín, to harass Cacho were uncovered (CIMAC, 2011a: 33). Women also get attention in case of disasters, such as earthquakes or floods. In such circumstances, there is nothing better than the image of a crying mother. In general, women are shown as victims. It is much more uncommon to see successful or enterprising women in Mexican news reports.

b) Telenovelas

Much importance is given to women's physical appearance in entertainment programs. The actors of fictional series, such as *telenovelas*, have to meet Western beauty ideals. Beauty is a standard quality of the characters they play. In addition, the behavior of the female characters also has to meet some expectations. Not only do they have to be beautiful, but also virtuous, respectful, and caring. Female characters are also expected to be subordinate to men. In general, families in *telenovelas* are very traditional, with a strong patriarchal hierarchy. The paterfamilias is the head of the family, there is a lot of respect for the parents, and wives are expected to obey their husbands.

Disagreements between the sexes do occur often, but this is experienced by the male character as an act of defiance by the female. A recurring example is that of the female protagonist rejecting the advances of the villain, followed by him losing his temper. The woman is usually brave enough to oppose the male villain, but then she risks physical violence. Consequently, the vulnerable woman has to be rescued by her male love interest who confronts the villain, confirming traditional gender roles.

The women in these series have to be the ideal woman, according to Mexican conservative standards, and primarily in their traditional role of mother and housewife. They have to be the perfect wife, mother, or daughter. According to the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, the main female character has only one option for a happy future, no matter what her job or situation was as an unmarried girl, her ultimate goal is to become a mother and a wife:

> "Even when the protagonist of the series is an independent or professional woman, the argument will be shifting this characteristic to find reasons to prove her wrong, leaving her the choice of two options: a woman who stays alone and bitter and consequently becomes a villain; or the happy woman who has forgotten her yearning for independence or professional development. Thus […] woman is shown facing the dilemma of the "responsible maternity" or the work outside the home (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2005: 4)[206]."

Remembering the paradigm used by Marcela Lagarde in her book *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: Madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas* (1993), the only possible outcome for the pure and humble – almost virginal – female hero, is to become a perfect wife and mother. If she does not, she can only become crazy and evil.

c) Entertainment Shows

Another genre of television shows where gender stereotyping is still very strong, is entertainment magazine shows. Some examples are the previously mentioned shows *Venga la Alegría* and *Venga el Domingo* on Azteca 13, and *Hoy* on Televisa's Canal de la Estrellas. *Venga la Alegría* and *Hoy* are shown daily, starting at nine o'clock in the morning; *Venga el Domingo* is aired on Sunday mornings from half past ten to half past one. These entertainment programs include different sections such as lifestyle, health, cooking, and gossip (Televisión Azteca, 2013c-d; Televisa, 2013f). *Venga la Alegría* and *Venga el Domingo* are considered to be family programs. *Hoy*, on the other hand, is described on its website as: "a show for housewives with sections on cooking, health, beauty, sex, yoga, horoscopes, and entertainment news (Televisa, 2013f)." This description alone reinforces traditional gender roles, and stereotypes women as housewives. It also presumes that only housewives will be home at that time of day, and only they can be interested in these 'soft' topics. This view illustrates the general attitude of these programs towards women.

[206] Original: "Aun cuando la protagonista de la serie es una mujer independiente o profesional, el argumento irá desplazando esa característica para encontrar las razones que le demuestren que está equivocada y que la llevarán a optar por alguna de las dos únicas posibilidades: una mujer que se queda sola y amargada y que en consecuencia se convierte en villana; o bien, la mujer feliz que ha olvidado sus anhelos de independencia o desarrollo profesional. Así [...] se muestra a la mujer ante el dilema de la "maternidad responsable" o el trabajo fuera de casa."

Other than the influence of the physical appearance of the hosts, mentioned above, the content and the language of these shows also enforce gender stereotypes. The items discussed are treated lightly and defined as typically feminine. But most striking is the large amount of sexist and macho comments and suggestive remarks made by the program hosts; women are constantly objectified and sexualized. Comments can be made both to co-hosts, and to the audience or the interviewees. Most remarks refer to the physical appearance of a woman, for example, how sexy and desirable she looks, or reinforce traditional gender roles, such as how a good wife should have her husband's dinner ready when he comes home. In *Venga el Domingo,* for example, the leading male host, Daniel Bisogno, always makes comments about the looks of his female co-hosts and the dancers. On the program of July 14, 2013, for example, he entered the stage for the section 'Los moños de Bisogno', as always flanked by three short-skirted and high-heeled female co-hosts. Referring to them he said: "Look at this, what a trio of biscuits, for all tastes. You at home, don't say no. Mixed and varied, whatever you prefer, but the three of them are beautiful (Televisión Azteca, 2013e)[207]." It was as if he was selling goods on the market. This is certainly no isolated case. The comments are often disguised as innocent jokes, but the fact remains that women are constantly objectified and sexualized in these entertainment programs. The main role of the women is to be beautiful; their body is the center of attention, and they are reduced to sexual objects. The female hosts themselves actively participate in the perpetuation of this situation. The sexism is seldom questioned and generally accepted as normal.

d) Violence

Another undeniable problem in all different types of Mexican media is the general presence of violence. This is certainly true for the different forms of gender violence in fictional programs, be it physical, sexual, economic, and emotional or psychological gender violence. Women are seen as subordinated to men; they are submissive, they have to listen to their husbands, they can get beaten, they are treated as inferior, they are yelled at, and they are seen as dumb.

It is not uncommon in *telenovelas* to have a male character beat a woman. The other characters disapprove of this behavior, but it is still part of the common behavior in these shows. Often the main character of the *telenovela* is a young woman of humble origin, working for a rich family. Usually, the man she works for or who 'owns' her, is an evil character in the story. He or his son want to conquer her, if necessary by force. In this relation there is often a lot of physical or psychological violence towards the girl. She is threatened, beaten, and sometimes there is an attempt to rape her. This also results in a violent relationship between the antagonist and the male protagonist, who is

[207] Original: "Véa nadamás que trio de bizcochos para todos los gustos. Ustedes en sus casas, no me diga que no. Ahora sí que campechano y variadito, lo que usted eliga, pero las tres hermosas."

the woman's love interest. Angry male characters often grab female characters by the shoulders. Even if the woman resists the man, the relationship continues to be one of subordination. This violence is experienced as part of the passionate story and is, as such, accepted by the audience.

The Study Center for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equity of the Mexican House of Representatives (CEAMEG) states that the media mirror the reality of structural violence against women in Mexico, adding that they simultaneously help maintain this situation by showing gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. It also points out that Mexican legislation does not clearly condemn gender violence in media content. There is no legislation supporting the eradication of violence against women in the media, or enforcing the promotion of equal gender rights. According to the CEAMEG, in Mexico there is still little awareness about the role of the media in the creation and preservation of gender stereotypes (CEAMEG, 2011: 3-4).

As a result of the abundant presence of violence in the media, the audience loses its sensitivity towards real life violence. Furthermore, in Mexican news items violence, and especially gender violence, is often trivialized. The focus lies on sensationalism and less on the condemnation of the facts. The organization Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC), for example, notes that reports on the feminicides in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua show interest in the number of deaths and try to link the murders to organized crime and drug trafficking, but rarely present in-depth research or opinion pieces on the social context of these murders. According to CIMAC, media treat these facts with ignorance, clumsiness, prejudice, and sensationalism. It points out that stories on violence against women are mistakenly treated as separate cases, and not as a social phenomenon, which it is in reality. The women are supposed to be victims of troubled individuals, who were drunk, drugged, or jealous, and therefore turned to violence. CIMAC argues that gender violence is not only a purely criminal fact that has to be dealt with by the police, but more importantly a social and structural problem that has to be addressed by society (CIMAC, 2011a: 40-41).

It is clear that there is a need for more efficient gender policies in Mexican media. Although certain improvements have been made, the recurring stereotyping of women has to be addressed. This is important because the stereotypical images influence the way gender issues are approached in daily life. By showing these images, television is perpetuating and enforcing the subordination of women. Women are reduced to sexual objects on the one hand, or perfect wives and mothers on the other hand. An image is created in which the ideal woman is beautiful, caring, sensitive, virtuous, and submissive. Her body belongs first to the men who desire her, and once she is married her life and body have to be at the service of her husband and children.

However, the media could play a more positive role. Media concerns have to realize that television can be perpetuating the subordination of women, but that it can also be promoting women's rights. Television can help improve the image of women. It can educate its viewers, avoiding gender stereotypes, both for men and women, banning sexism, treating female hosts with the same respect as men, and showing a society in which gender equality is embraced as the norm[208].

B. The Representation of Indigenous Women in Mexican Visual Culture: Historical Context

So far, the media image of women in general was discussed. However in the case of Mexico, special attention has to be given to the situation of indigenous women. Although they partly suffer from the same gender discrimination, indigenous women face additional difficulties because of their indigenous identity. The image of indigenous women in Mexican media has its own history and characteristics. This image cannot be understood without first looking at the historic evolution of the representation of indigenous women in Mexican visual culture.

Since colonial times, the indigenous population was considered to be inferior to the white colonizers. The 'Indians' were seen as uncultivated savages and irrational heathens; they had to be educated and converted to Christianity, but regardless of their efforts, they always remained subordinated to the 'white race'. In Mexico, the creation of a visual image of indigenous peoples goes back to colonial times[209]. In the sixteenth century, the indigenous population was depicted in colonial sources, such as in codices and chronicles. In these documents, indigenous characters could mainly be distinguished from the Spanish by their clothing. Indigenous men wore a cape, and a tunic or a loincloth. Indigenous women were depicted wearing a *huipil*, and a specific hairstyle in which they seem to have two little horns. This hairstyle and dress can also be found in pre-colonial codices. The Spaniards were dressed in armor or Spanish clothing, recognizable by the trousers, and often a hat[210]. Most Spaniards are also depicted with a beard. Sometimes, important Spanish figures were drawn larger than the indigenous commoners to illustrate the social hierarchy.

[208] It has to be pointed out that what is advocated here is not the creation of special so-called 'woman-friendly' programs. In trying to address women, these programs often repeat the existing stereotypes. Rather, there is a need for programs that are directed at both genders equally. For example, sports programs are not exclusively watched by men, and programs on health and cooking should not only be directed at women. The audience should be treated equally, without being patronized.

[209] There are pre-colonial sources in which indigenous peoples represent themselves. But here we focus on the image that was created by non-indigenous people.

[210] Among others: *Florentine Codex* (Book twelve); *Yanhuitlán Codex*; *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Spanish elaborated a caste system that organized all races hierarchically. At the top were the peninsular Spaniards and the *criollos* (children with two peninsular Spanish parents, but born in the New World), far below them in the hierarchy were the *indios* (native indigenous people) and even lower the *negros* (Africans imported as slaves by the Spaniards). In between was a large variety of mixed races: *mestizo*, *castizo*, *mulato*, *morisco*, etcetera[211]. These different races were exemplified in the *pintura de castas* or *casta* paintings[212]. The introduction of the caste system was a way for the Spaniards and the *criollos* to clearly distinguish themselves from the inferior mixed races (Katzew, 2004: 40). In some cases, having more Spanish blood could improve the social status and facilitate the access to public and ecclesiastical functions. Another advantage was that Spaniards and *criollos* did not have to pay tribute. Although the division was mainly based on physical appearance and descent, belonging to a certain *casta* also came with a reputation and the attribution of certain personal characteristics, such as being lazy, dumb, or untrustworthy. Therefore, a 'more white' descent was always preferred (Katzew, 2004: 45). The indigenous population, the afro-descendants, and their race mixes, were the lowest social groups in colonial society.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, foreign travelers looking for exotic cultures, such as the German Carl Nebel (1805-1855), registered the characteristics of different Mexican peoples, including Romantic style drawings of indigenous peoples in traditional attire. Mexican *costumbrista* painters, such as José Agustín Arrieta (1803-1874), illustrated Mexican popular culture, not for the exoticism, but from a more nationalist point of view[213].

During the Porfiriato (1876-1911), the trend changed and the glorification of Mexico's indigenous past began. Neoclassicist paintings and sculptures showed historic characters from pre-colonial times. Inspired by the Neoclassicist paintings of Roman emperors, Aztec emperors such as Moctezuma, Cuauhtémoc, or Nezahualcóyotl, were depicted as athletic and powerful warriors, and were used to glorify the truly Mexican indigenous past (as opposed to the colonial period)[214]. Painters, such as Felix Parra (1845-1919), José Obregón (1838-1909), Leandro Izaguirre (1867-1941),

[211] *Mestizo*: child from a Spaniard and an indigenous woman; *castizo*: child of a Spaniard and a *mestiza*; *mulato*: child of a Spaniard and a black woman; *morisco*: child of a Spaniard and a *mulata*. These are just some examples of a large list of possible race mixes.

[212] On *casta* painting, see for example: I. KATZEW (2004); A. RUY SÁNCHEZ (ed.) (1998), *La pintura de castas*, (Artes de México: nueva época, vol. 8), Mexico: Artes de México.

[213] On these painters, see for example: A. AGUILAR OCHOA (2006), *Carl Nebel: pintor viajero del siglo 19*, (Artes de México: Nueva época, vol. 80), Mexico: Artes de México; E. CASTRO MORALES (1994), *José Agustín Arrieta (1803-1874): homenaje nacional*, Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes; X. MOYSSÉN (1965), *Pintura popular y costumbrista del siglo 19*, (Artes de México, vol. 61), Mexico: Artes de México.

[214] An example is the statue of the Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc on the Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City, commissioned by president Porfirio Díaz.

and Rodrigo Gutiérrez (1848-1903), focused on realistic and detailed depictions of pre-colonial scenes[215]. They also emphasized the suffering of the indigenous population, but always in the context of the conquest. The Aztec emperors were seen as the nation's heroes who fought against the oppression of the Spanish colonizers. They were seen as the fathers of the heroic 'bronze race[216]'.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the image of indigenous peoples changed under influence of the indigenist movement. In the revolutionary discourse of that time, indigenous peoples were the link between Mexico's glorious past and the modern nation. Indigenous peoples were seen as pure and in touch with nature. They were the heirs to the great pre-colonial civilizations. They made Mexico unique (Ruiz, 2002: 285). As López states: "to be modern, a nation had to be a culturally, economically, and politically distinct and unified people with deep historical roots" (López, 2002: 294). Thus, Mexico had to be a mestizo nation. According to Ruiz, the 1920s were crucial in the creation of discourses on the composition of the new national subject. These discourses were shaped by intellectuals through new means of communication, such as newspapers, radio, and movies. A growing amount of 'Indians' appeared in national visual culture. The idea was to include indigenous elements – that were seen as 'from the past' – to the national imagery. But, the point of departure was a homogenous image of indigenous Mexico. The constructed image of 'Indianness' was seen as the key to the *mestizage* that was the base of national identity. Different initiatives were taken to create a sense of a shared identity (Ruiz, 2002: 286; Lopez, 2002: 296). Famous examples of artists of this period were the muralists, such as Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974). Their murals were inspired by nationalism, and often glorified the Mesoamerican past through the depiction of indigenous people[217]. In addition to Pre-Columbian scenes, there was also a focus on the contemporary indigenous peoples. Various artists portrayed them during their daily activities; some examples are Saturnino Herrán[218] (1887-1918), Alfredo Ramos Martínez[219] (1871-1946), Ramón Cano Manilla[220] (1888-1974), and Alfonso X. Peña[221] (1903-1964).

[215] For example: *Fray Bartolomé de las Casas* by Felix Parra (1876); *El Descubrimiento del Pulque* by José Obregón (1869); *El senado de Tlaxcala* by Rodrigo Gutiérrez (1875); *El Suplicio de Cuauhtémoc* by Leandro Izaguirre (1893).

[216] This term was first used by the Mexican poet Amado Nervo in his poem "La raza de bronce", that he pronounced in front of the Chamber of Deputies on July 19th, 1902, in honor of Benito Juárez (Nervo, 1991: 1410-1415).

[217] This is for example the case in Rivera's murals of the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City.

[218] For example: *La cosecha* (1909), *La ofrenda* (1913), *Nuestros dioses antiguos* (1916), *Mujer con calabaza* (1917).

[219] For example: *Vendedora de alcatraces* (1929), *Casamiento indio* (ca. 1931).

[220] For example: *Danza del Xóchitl Pitzahuac* (1930), *India oaxaqueña* (1928).

[221] For example: *Jóvenes en el mercado* (ca. 1938), *Mercado* (1940).

In the post-revolutionary period, type photographs gained a lot of popularity. These photographs of ethnic and regional types circulated in urban environments and were collected as curiosities. But the images also had a considerable influence on the construction of a national identity.

Deborah Poole researched the image of indigenous peoples in Oaxaca between 1920 and 1940. In this period, intellectuals wanted to promote a specific regional identity for the state of Oaxaca. Type photography was used to show the cultural diversity of the state and to categorize the different ethnic groups. According to Poole, type photographs helped to define and support a shared feeling of "Oaxacanness". This shared identity was specifically constructed through photographs of women in traditional dress representing the different Oaxacan regions. Poole states that an association emerged of race and region, with women's clothes and the female body (Poole, 2004: 39-41).

Through the work of foreign photographers based in Mexico City, such as Charles Waite and Hugo Brehme, the Tehuana dress of the Istmo of Tehuantepec region surpassed the regional level and became a national type. In the early twentieth century, urban women in Mexico City began to pose in Tehuana dresses when having their portrait made. Mexican actresses and famous personalities fostered this trend. According to Poole, this "transformed the Tehuana from an ethnologically curious Oaxacan type to a symbol of the Mexican woman as both sexual being and bearer of the nation (Poole, 2004: 64)". When seeing the popularity of the Tehuana type in the capital, upper-class women in the city of Oaxaca also started to be portrayed in this traditional costume. Oaxacan men, on the other hand, did not follow this trend. They preferred the *charro* costume, symbol of the ultimate Mexican male, and of the revolution (Poole, 2004: 64).

The traditional dress was very popular. The pictures were first used to categorize the different regions, cultures, and races. Later, the use of a traditional dress became a symbol in the creation of a national identity. But it was not really seen as linked to the indigenous population. The attention went to folkloric elements, but not to the real life of the portrayed (Poole, 2004: 79-80). This illustrates the dualistic approach toward indigenous peoples. On the one hand, the dresses had to illustrate the diversity of the Mexican state, but on the other hand, indigenous peoples were ignored. The idea of the cultural diversity of Mexico was acknowledged, but not the people that were the bearers of this diversity.

1. *La India Bonita*: The Creation of a Stereotype

In post-revolutionary Mexico, the image of the indigenous woman was partly shaped by the *La India Bonita* beauty pageant that took place in Mexico City in 1921. The beauty pageant was organized by the newspaper *El Universal Ilustrado*, to celebrate the Centennial of Mexican Independence. The goal of the pageant was to include more 'Indianness' in Mexican identity. It was believed the contest would help to integrate the indigenous population in Mexican culture, and make them visible for politics (López, 2002: 297-299, 309).

At first, the organizers had some problems finding suitable contestants. People in Mexico City did not understand what was meant by 'indias bonitas', they did not associate beauty with the indigenous population. Newspaper cartoons, for example, used to show indigenous peoples as filthy, bewildered, hunched, and graceless, with thick lips. Thus, pictures were submitted of white Mexicans in folkloric costumes, such as the popular *China Poblana* or Tehuana dress. The white elite loved to wear these costumes on national holidays, but the outfits had no ethnic connotation[222] (López, 2002: 301-303). People were familiar with the Western beauty ideal, but they had to learn what 'Indian beauty' was. During several months (from January till August 1921), the newspaper gradually instructed his readers on the physical characteristics of an ideal mestizo woman (López, 2002: 304-305). In *El Universal Ilustrado* of August 17, 1921, for example, Manuel Gamio, a leading indigenist intellectual, and one of Mexico's first anthropologists, wrote a justification for the contest entitled "La Venus India", in which he criticized Western beauty pageants (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 163). Although the newspaper wanted to include Indianness as part of Mexican culture, they were ambivalent about this integration, and did not treat Indian beauty as equal to white beauty. López mentions that in the case of the *India Bonita* contest, the newspaper focused on specifics such as skin color, braided hairstyle, pure race, little knowledge of the Spanish language, traditional attire, shyness, innocence, humble social background, etcetera (López, 2002: 305). The Mexican elite was also looking for a figure to unite the nation, thus no attention was really given to cultural diversity. Furthermore, the indigenous contestants were treated as passive subjects. Their candidacy and selection were completely managed by the white urban elite. The participants were merely symbols, and not individuals with an own opinion (López, 2002: 308).

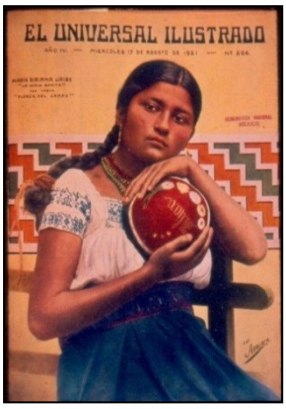
Eventually, the contest was won by María Bibiana Uribe, a 15-year-old Nahuatl speaking girl from Necaxa in the Sierra de Puebla (López, 2002: 292, 309). She was chosen because she was believed to match the characteristics that the jury had defined as being of 'Aztec' descent. For the intellectuals of Mexico City the following characteristics formed the ideal image of the mestiza: "brown skin, black

[222] This dressing-up had to be seen in the context of the popularity of folklore in that period. In Europe, the elite also loved to dress up in peasant outfits.

eyes, petite, delicate hands and feet, straight black hair" (Ruiz, 2002: 290). The images of María Bibiana published in the newspaper helped define the image of the indigenous woman. María Bibiana was wearing traditional clothing, she had dark skin and long straight braided hair (see figure 12); her simplicity and purity were also praised. On the cover of *El Universal Ilustrado* of August 17, 1921, María Bibiana was portrayed holding a lacquered bowl typical of the state of Guerrero (see figure 13). This was a prop handed to her for the shoot, but it had to emphasize her indigenous background (López, 2002: 309-311).

Figure 12: María Bibiana Uribe, *El Universal*, September 15, 1921.

Figure 13: María Bibiana Uribe "La India Bonita". Cover of *El Universal Ilustrado*, August 17, 1921.



In interviews, she is depicted as a humble, rustic, and uneducated girl; she speaks Spanish with an accent, and is in touch with nature (López, 2002: 312). And when she does not seem to know her age the reporter explains:

> "What difference does it make to her whether she is 15 or 20? In her forests, under the protective shadow of giant pine groves, surrounded by the exquisite aroma of gardenias, this mountain-girl contemplates the natural world that has bestowed upon her such beauties. Bibiana lives in peace and tranquility, rising early and meeting the sun and moving through the morning breeze. She strolls through the woods singing the song of life, watching the love of the birds nesting in the swaying boughs. Picking flowers as she goes, to carry them to her village church (Dalevuelta J., "Mi entrevista con la India Bonita", in: *El Universal*, 2nd of August 1921 cited in López, 2002: 312)".

This romantic discourse was reiterated in all the articles related to the *India Bonita*. Although the intellectuals wanted to see the indigenous culture as the root of 'authentic' Mexico, once confronted with it, the urban elite continued to experience indigenous peoples as strange and exotic (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 161). This can be illustrated by the newspaper reports regarding María Bibiana Uribe. When the rural girl is invited to have tea in the palaces of high dignitaries, the journalists emphasize her strange characteristics, as if they were visited for the first time by a savage tribe; they focus on her bare feet, her traditional *huipil* dress, and her shyness. At the same time, the discourse on the *India Bonita* has many references to Aztec mythology (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 163):

> "She came to us accompanied by her grandmother, an Indian of pure 'meschica' race who does not speak Spanish. She comes from the Sierra, where she was born and lived, and she still wears a 'huipil' tied to her waist. Today she possesses three thousand pesos [the prize money], and a large amount of gifts; and seeing herself surrounded with so many unknown people, she remembers the legend of the handsome prince Tonatiuh who united his destiny with that of a plebeian girl that was named after a flower. She is called María Bibiana Uribe and is 18 years old[223] (*El Universal Ilustrado*, August 4, 1921, as cited in Pérez Montfort, 1994: 163)[224]."

[223] There was some confusion on the exact age of María Bibiana, but according to the data found by Rick López, she would have been 15 years old (López, 2002: 309).

[224] Original: "Ha llegado a nosotros acompañada de su abuela, una india pura de raza 'meschica' que no habla español. Viene de la Sierra, donde nació y vivió y aún trae un 'huipil' atado a la cintura. Hoy posee tres mil pesos y una enorme cantidad de obsequios y al verse rodeada de tanta gente desconocida piensa en la leyenda

Although she was a symbol chosen by 'whites' only, María Bibiana was seen as a national symbol that was supposed to appeal to the entire Mexican population, and not only to the whites, such as other beauty contests that celebrated the Hellenic beauty type (Ruiz, 2002: 291). She was meant to represent the ideal Mexican woman. And the public was educated by the media on how this ideal mestiza had to be. With the *India Bonita* contest, Mexican aesthetics were defined (López, 2002: 317-318). But María Bibiana was merely seen as a symbol, and not as an individual person. She was treated as a passive subject, and her real life story was ignored[225]. She was in no way a spokesperson or representative of indigenous women. The indigenist project of the white Mexican elite was filled with contradictions and ambivalence. The white intellectuals wanted to include more 'Indianness' in Mexican identity, but indigenous peoples themselves had no input in this process (López, 2002: 327). Neither were these indigenous beauty ideals mixed with Western beauty standards. The superiority of the Western beauty ideal continued to be self-evident. The cultural diversity of the indigenous population was ignored, and they remained a marginal and subordinated group. The *India Bonita* contest was important because it created a precedent; it produced and promoted an image of the ideal indigenous woman, a pure native virgin that embodied the national identity. This representation was adopted in Mexican image-building.

2. Consolidation of a Stereotype

In the 1920s and 30s, indigenist intellectuals, such as the previously mentioned Manuel Gamio, wanted to incorporate the indigenous population in 'modern' Mexico. Initially, they showed engagement, and were concerned for the social well-being and the improvement of the living conditions of the indigenous population. But a decade later, these concerns had faded and only the romantic folklorism remained in Mexican popular culture (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 171). From the 1920s until the 1940s, the indigenous population was stereotyped with 'typical Mexican' characteristics. This stereotype was repeated over and over again in the media, theatres, movies, and in the arts (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 173). Movies projecting the indigenous stereotype were, for example, *La Rosa de Xochimilco* (1938), *La India Bonita* (1938), *María Candelaria* (1943), or *Tizoc* (1956). Ricardo Pérez Montfort points out that these movies showed "more glamour than condemnation" regarding the situation of indigenous peoples (Pérez Montfort, 1994: 173).

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del bello príncipe Tonatiuh que unió sus destinos a los de una plebeya que tenía nombre de flor. Se llama María Bibiana Uribe y tiene 18 años."

[225] Critics of the contest questioned María Bibiana's rural background and 'pure' race (López, 2002: 297). Later it also became clear that she was not a 'virgin' as such at the time of the contest, but in fact pregnant outside of wedlock (López, 2002: 324). These facts did not matter for the pageant organizers; María Bibiana had to be a symbol.

The 1940s and 50s, were a Golden Age for Mexican cinema. The movies of that time bulged with nationalist and 'Mexican' symbols. The stories were often set in the revolutionary period, and stereotypical images were shown both of men and women. Iconic actors such as Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete, portrayed handsome, virile, dominant characters. Women had a supporting role and were mostly submissive, helpless, and fragile. As Casas Pérez tellingly states: "Females would be represented as companions of, or background to, the main characters, serving much the same purpose as nice scenery or a fine horse (Casas Pérez, 2005: 409)."

The glamour of the movies could also be found in the work of Mexican painters and illustrators such as Jesús Helguera (1910-1971). His paintings also influenced the image of the indigenous woman in Mexican society. In the 1940s and 1950s, Helguera designed very popular calendars for the tobacco company Cigarrera La Moderna, printed by Imprenta Galas de México (Museo Soumaya, 2000). For many years, these calendars could be found everywhere in Mexican homes, stores, and workshops, and his images were used in advertisements and merchandise for a variety of products. Their widespread presence made their impact significant.

Helguera was inspired by the nationalist imagery of the muralists, and wanted to emphasize the Mexican identity (Museo Soumaya, 2000). He painted scenes from Aztec mythology, such as *La leyenda de los volcanes* (c. 1940), but also romanticized images of the Mexican countryside. These images show people, and most often young women, in traditional costumes. The women are sensual, slim, and voluptuous; they have long, thick dark hair, sometimes braided, sometimes worn loose; and their skin is usually quite clear. They show an ideal image of the mestiza, with Spanish features rather than indigenous ones (e.g. figure 14).

Figure 14: Jesús Helguera, *Carreta tehuana*.

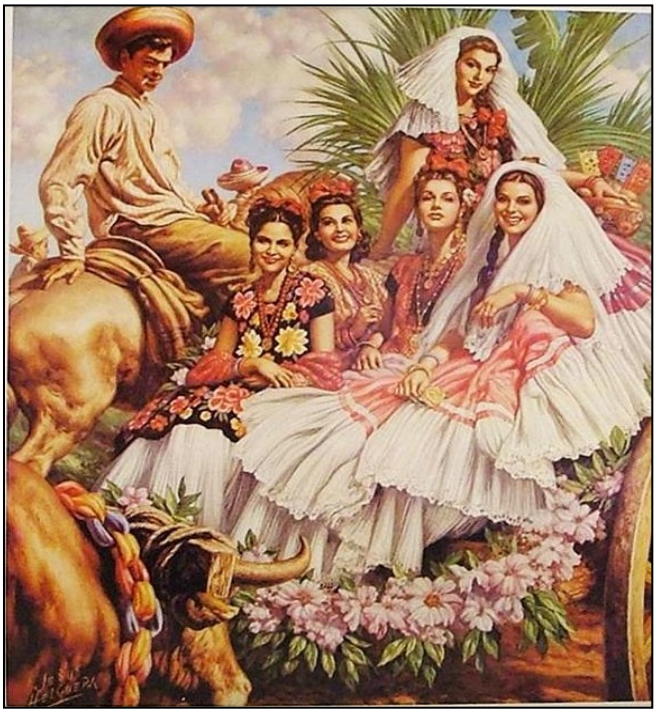

Figure 15: Jesús Helguera, *Cuquita y la fuente*, Oil on canvas, 1953.

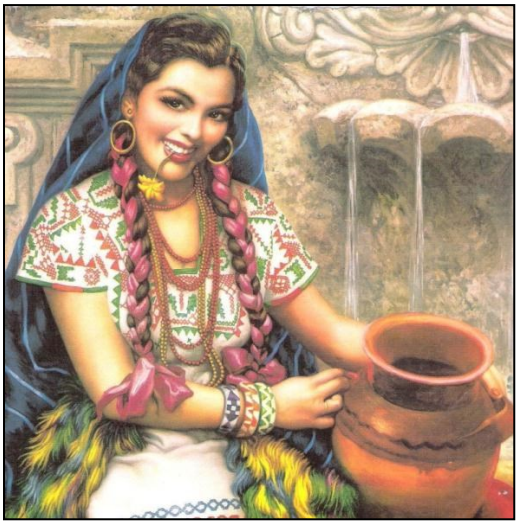

Figure 16: Jesús Helguera, *La michoacana*, Oil on canvas.

When the two images of Helguera, *Cuquita y la fuente* and *La michoacana* (see figure 15 and 16), are compared with the pictures of María Bibiana (see figure 12 and 13), certain parallels are apparent, but also some differences. The pose, clothes, and attributes, can be recognized as similar: the braided hair, the traditional dress, the necklaces, and the jar or bowl. Both artists show a romanticized portrait of indigenous women. However, in the case of Helguera, the woman has no physical indigenous traits, she corresponds to Western beauty ideals. This illustrates how the folklore and the romance became more important than the reality of indigenous life.

Although social issues are addressed in the movie *María Candelaria* (1943) by Emilio Fernández, the same aesthetic ideals can be found. The main character of the movie is an indigenous woman known for her beauty. But this character is portrayed by the white actress Dolores del Río, who matches Western beauty ideals. Based on style, she could easily have been one of Jesús Helguera's models (see figure 17).

Figure 17: *María Candelaria* (MX, 1943), screenshot with Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz.

For Elena Deanda, these white females representing indigenous women, are part of a 'whitening' process that took place in Mexican society. In her work on the figure of María Candelaria, Deanda states:

> "Dolores del Río as the image of the "pure Mexican race" is the best example of a "whitening" process in the representation of the indigenous woman, whereas being whiter than the 'original', the movie seems to suggest, she is indeed more "beautiful" (Deanda, 2011: 75)[226]."

And she continues:

> "With the "whitening" of María Candelaria and Dolores del Río, we see how at every turn Mexican art shows us the impossibility of representing the beauty of the indigenous woman. […] The Indian is not Indian but mestiza (Deanda, 2011: 76)[227]."

Indigenous women were present in the narratives of Mexican visual culture, but they were portrayed as white mestizas. Furthermore, indigenous features were not considered to be 'beautiful'; beauty could only be represented through Western beauty standards.

In parenthesis, the whitening process has continued to this day. 'Non-white' remains synonymous with poor, uneducated, lazy, and dumb. Many Mexican women do everything to remain as white as

[226] Original: "Dolores del Río como imagen de la "pura raza mexicana" es el mejor ejemplo de un proceso de "blanqueamiento" en la representación de la mujer indígena, ya que por ser más blanca que la "original", parece sugerir el filme, es efectivamente más "bella"."

[227] Original: "Con el "blanqueamiento" de María Candelaria y Dolores del Río, vemos cómo el arte de México nos muestra a cada paso la imposibilidad de representar la belleza de la mujer indígena. [...] La india no es india sino mestiza."

possible. Whitening creams and make-up are abundantly used, and exposure to the sun is avoided. Numerous women dye their hair blond or at least lighter. This is not only the case in high social classes with a predominance of 'whiter' people, the same can be seen in low social groups. In Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Mexico City, women – and even very young girls – dye their pitch-black hair yellow-blond in an effort to be as 'white' as possible (Reynoso[228], personal communication, 2011).

Furthermore, for certain Mexicans Spanish descent remains an element of pride and prestige. For example, young elite in Oaxaca can still be heard saying, almost apologetically: "But my great-grandfather was Spanish." The actual great-grandfather is of little importance in this discourse, the main issue is to point out the 'white' ancestry in contrast to an indigenous ancestry. The purer the race of the family, the better. The Spanish descent is an indicator of a certain social status. The mixed character of the race has thus never been accepted.

Returning to the image of indigenous women, it can be concluded that since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has mainly been based on stereotypes. In the 1920's, the *India Bonita* contest helped to define and generalize the characteristics of this stereotype. The image that was created in that period was continued in popular art, such as advertisements, and in the new forms of visual culture, such as movies. These representations have one element in common: the indigenous woman is used as a symbol, not as a person. Her image is used as a symbol of the Nation, as well as a symbol of purity and virginity, but it rarely refers directly to the indigenous population. Through these stereotypes indigenous peoples became invisible and subjected to numerous prejudices and discrimination.

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C. Making the Invisible Visible: Indigenous Women in Mexican Media

In the 1970s and 1980s, the production of Mexican movies decreased. On the other hand, television gained more popularity with the advent of color television and the introduction of cable. In Mexico, the 1990s were important for the recognition of indigenous rights and for the official acknowledgement of the multicultural composition of the nation. But did this change anything for the image of indigenous peoples?

This section is an analysis of the representation of indigenous peoples in present-day Mexican visual media, and specifically of indigenous women. The focus lies on television, the medium with the largest audience in Mexico. The image of indigenous women can help us understand the general perception in Mexico of these socially and economically marginalized peoples. This information is particularly important to analyze the impact and consequences of the images on the self-esteem and self-image of indigenous viewers. What effects do these images have on their cultural identity? What life perspectives does television show them? What messages does the indigenous woman get, and what effects can this have on her social and economic development? The images discussed above were mainly intended for an urban elite audience. But, as a result of the popularization of television, indigenous peoples also became part of that audience.

This analysis is based on representative examples from Televisa dated 2011 and 2012. The study focuses mainly on news reports and *telenovelas*. Despite their precarious life conditions, about 70.9% of indigenous homes have television (CDI, 2011: 34-35). Indigenous peoples watch mostly Televisa channels, partly because of the availability of the channels in rural areas (in areas without access to cable television only a limited number of channels can be received through the antenna and reception can be poor). Moreover, the most popular programs in indigenous communities are the traditional Televisa *telenovelas*. As they have more viewers, their influence is more extended.

1. Television As a Role Model

Television, and communication media in general, contribute to the definition of the world that surrounds us and also to the construction of our own image. Media offer us ways to see and understand the world (Gripsrud, 2002: 5). Gerber argues:

> "Television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of an otherwise heterogeneous population. The repetitive pattern of television's mass-produced messages and images forms the mainstream of a common symbolic environment (Gerbner et al. 1986: 18)."

Television programs reflect the world in a way that is generally accepted by the audience, following the prevailing norms and points of view. This is also true for fictional programs such as the *telenovelas* (Abercrombie, 1996: 26-31). Rosalind Pearson states that the world in the *telenovelas* shows similarities with the real world, but it is not an exact copy; it is a constructed reality (Pearson, 2005: 402-403). The viewers are aware that the *telenovelas* present fictional stories. Nevertheless, the social interaction and the behavior in the *telenovelas* serve as a model imitated by the viewers. The way the characters act confirms the social norm, or teaches what an appropriate reaction would be in a certain situation (Lull, 1990: 41-42; Gripsrud, 2002: 15). According to Wolf, Nichols, and Decelle, part of our self-image is developed by social comparison. By comparing us with other people, including media figures, we form our self-image (Wolf, Nichols, and Decelle, 2004: 37).

Furthermore, research on race and visual media in the United States of America has shown that white people base their conceptions of African Americans on the images of this ethnic group as shown on television. This is especially the case if they have little contact with African Americans (Atkin, Greenberg, and McDermott, 1983). Conners concludes that if it is true for African Americans, it will also be the case for other minority groups (Conners, 2004: 207). Following these findings, it can be stated that the image of indigenous peoples shown on Mexican television will influence the general conceptions of these peoples, especially if the audience has little contact with them, as is the case for many of the urban middle and higher class in Mexico.

In addition, television programs influence the construction and consolidation of cultural identity, in line with dominant ideologies (Casa Pérez, 2005: 407). The media support the creation of a national identity, building an image of 'we' versus 'them'. On television, we see, for example, that we like the same music, the same clothes, that we have the same traditions and values, that we share the same history and the same cultural icons. With regard to Mexico, some typical examples would be the actor Pedro Infante, the painter Frida Kahlo, the dish *chiles en nogada*, mariachi music, and the

Virgen of Guadalupe. These images shape our collective identity. And the media, among others, contributes to the creation of this identity. Benedict Anderson speaks about an *imagined community*. Through the images we see, we feel connected with a group of people that belongs to the same national community, that shares those same images, but that we do not know and will likely never know (Anderson, 1983: 15-16; Gripsrud, 2002: 6). But, by reflecting the national identity, some questionable aspects of this identity become apparent. In the case of Mexico, machismo and also racial division can emerge (Gripsrud, 2002: 12; Estill, 2001: 179).

2. Absence of Indigenous Women on Mexican Television

When analyzing the image of women in Mexican visual media, several recurring elements can be distinguished. In Mexico, most female television hosts and presenters of the main national channels are slim women with a clear complexion. There are many women with fair hair, something that is not very common in Mexico. As mentioned before, hosts of entertainment programs also wear heavy make-up, clothing that accentuate the female body, with plunging necklines, short skirts, and vertiginous heels. The presenters correspond to a Western beauty ideal[229]. It is very rare to see women with mestizo or indigenous features[230]. The same can be observed in commercial advertisements, be it on street signs or on television. Different types of women can be seen: there are elegant women in tailored suits advertising department stores (e.g. Palacio de Hierro), there are girls in sports outfits promoting cereal biscuits (e.g. Bimbo), and there are also housewives with an apron recommending some brand of *mole* (e.g. La Costeña). What they have in common is that the majority of women represented in Mexican commercial advertisements have white skin or at least a clear complexion. With some exceptions in rural areas, women with a darker skin or indigenous features are almost never seen.

In general, there is an absence of indigenous women on Mexican television. A special case is that of the *telenovelas*. *Telenovelas* are a specific kind of soap operas that are very popular in Latin America. Contrary to other soap operas that can go on indefinitely, *telenovelas* have a predetermined duration. The plot is usually a melodramatic love story, rendered more difficult by complicated family relations, treason, and lies. The story generally ends with a wedding, and with the defeat of the villains (Pearson, 2005: 400-402).

[229] Some examples: Lolita Ayala, Karla Iberia, and Adela Micha (Televisa news anchors); Mayte Carranco (Televisa weather forecast); Vanessa Huppenkothen, Marisol Gonzalez, and Martina Franz (Televisa Sports presenters); Andrea Legarreta (host of the Televisa morning entertainment program Hoy).

[230] It has to be pointed out that there is no such thing as an indigenous physique. The indigenous population cannot be identified by its physical characteristics. However, in Mexico there are certain stereotypical characteristics that are identified as 'indigenous'. In this case we refer to the characteristics that the Mexican viewer would perceive as indigenous, and would make him aware that the person on his screen is mestizo or indigenous.

A typical element in the *telenovelas* is the conflict between social classes. A recurring plot line is, for example, the forbidden love between the poor girl and the rich boy. Often the story develops in a wealthy high class family. It is a world of rich people, landowners, or entrepreneurs, with enormous mansions or *haciendas*, luxurious cars, horses, and private jets. The characters of the *telenovelas* are based on stereotypes: the rich gentleman, the poor but honest woman, the evil stepmother, the jealous brother, etcetera. The characters have uncomplicated personalities and act in a dualist system of good against bad.

Telenovelas typically have some characters from a low social class, generally the maid and a servant. These characters are clearly subordinated to the rich family. Although it is rarely mentioned explicitly, these personages tend to have characteristics that are part of the indigenous stereotype. The maid speaks in a halting voice and her vocabulary is elementary. She is an obedient, submissive, and loyal woman. Another common visual characteristic is that she wears her long hair in braids, a hair style that can be identified as typical of indigenous women[231]. But it has to be noted that these characters are always interpreted by actresses with a fair complexion. It is rare to see actresses with indigenous features.

As mentioned before, there is generally no explicit reference to the indigenous population in the *telenovelas*. An exception was the *telenovela Un refugio para el amor*[232] (Televisa, 2012c, d). The central character is Luciana, a young indigenous woman of the Tarahumara Sierra who arrives in Mexico City escaping the problems she has at home, searching for a better life. There she meets the young entrepreneur Rodrigo, and they fall in love. In the first episode we see that Luciana belongs to a Rarámuri community[233]. Luciana's family lives in a humble village in the mountains. Luciana's mother wears a *rebozo* (shawl), and has her hair braided. The father of Luciana is an older man with a straw hat working the land. Luciana always wears long skirts and sometimes a colored head band. She is also seen painting traditional ceramic pots. As it often happens in indigenous communities, Luciana's family loses its land to a landowner, and she sees no other option than to migrate to the city to look for work.

It has to be noted that physically Luciana does not look indigenous: she has dark long hair, but she is tall and has a very white skin tone. The Rarámuri tend to be small and have a dark copper colored skin. In this specific case her physical appearance can be explained because later in the story it turns

[231] In the cities, only women of low social classes, and especially indigenous women, wear their hair waist long and braided. Young indigenous women who move to the city tend to stop wearing braids as one of the ways to blend in and to hide their indigenous identity (Bautista Pérez, 2012).
[232] This *telenovela* is an adaptation of the Venezuelan *telenovela La Zulianita* of 1977.
[233] The Rarámuri or Tarahumara are indigenous peoples of the state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico.

out she was adopted and her biological parents are not indigenous. But her adoptive mother, who is supposed to be indigenous, is also interpreted by an actress with a fair complexion. Nevertheless, the clear reference to indigenous peoples is an exception in the world of the *telenovelas*. And although there is room for improvement, the effort made to introduce these characters has to be applauded. This *telenovela* tried to present a respectful image of the indigenous population. At the end of the series, Luciana marries the young entrepreneur. A feast is organized, but the couple also performs a supposedly Tarahumara wedding ceremony with a Tarahumara priest who talks in indigenous language. Hearing an indigenous language on Mexican television, and even more so in an entertainment program, is quite exceptional. The *telenovela*'s web page mentions: "Luciana never lost her customs and traditions", "Luciana always carried her roots in her heart", and "Rodrigo always respected Luciana's beliefs"[234] (Televisa, 2012c). The indigenous traditions are seen as positive cultural elements that deserve to be respected. But it has to be noted that this only happens in the first and in the last episode of the series. The other 163 chapters mainly take place in the city and have very few references to the indigenous world.

Although the intentions were good, the *telenovela* keeps showing a stereotypical image of indigenous women: with a colored head band and painting pots. The image shown is remote from the reality of life in indigenous communities. The often precarious living conditions of the Rarámuri are hardly mentioned. But maybe it is not the medium to do so either. It has to be recognized that *telenovelas* are meant to entertain and not to provide social critique; people want to see a nice story. However, these elements have to be taken into account when analyzing the image of indigenous peoples. Because, although the *telenovelas* always work with stereotypes, regardless of the origin of the character, this is the image that the viewer perceives of the indigenous person.

Televisa has made other efforts to show a positive image of indigenous communities. One of them was the cultural promotion series 'Televisa Tradiciones'. These television spots, of approximately one minute and a half, were transmitted on the Televisa channels during 2011. The idea was "to pay a tribute to our people, to the Mexicans, capturing all the magic, all the spirituality, all the mysticism of our traditions (Televisa, 2011c)[235]". Fourteen videos were made, each one showing a tradition of a certain state of the Republic[236]. Several elements of these videos can be criticized, among others the political agenda of the local governments when selecting the traditions for these series, the most

[234] Original: "Luciana nunca perdió sus costumbres y tradiciones"; "Luciana siempre llevó sus raíces en su corazón"; "Rodrigo siempre respetó las creencias de Luciana."
[235] Original: "Rendirle tributo a nuestra gente, a los mexicanos, capturando toda la magia, toda la espiritualidad, todo el misticismo de nuestras tradiciones."
[236] The states that were included are: Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Distrito Federal, Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, México, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Sonora y Veracruz.

flagrant being the video of the state of Quintana Roo. Here we focus on a questionable visual aspect, namely the participation of two or three female models in each video. These models are tall, slim, women with a fair complexion, but dressed in indigenous clothing. Televisa explains that this is for the general public to feel more involved, because, as the motto of the series states: "It is a tradition and it is ours[237]". It can be argued whether this purpose can really be achieved this way. Why could a non-indigenous person not identify himself with an indigenous person? It seems to confirm the ethnic division. And it seems as if indigenous women are not 'beautiful' enough to promote these traditions.

In general, the series 'Televisa Tradiciones' seems to present interesting material. Yet there is one exception, namely the video made in the state of Quintana Roo (Televisa, 2011d). This video pretends to show the tradition of the Travesía Sagrada Maya (Sacred Maya Journey). The video states that "As five hundred years ago, the Maya of today revive the tradition of celebrating Ixchel, the goddess of fertility[238]". But, instead of showing contemporary Maya, the video displays people wearing loincloths, feather headdresses, and facial paint. The scenes can be recognized as a stereotypical reconstruction of what the Maya might have been in the Classic Period (approx. 250 – 900 A. D.). This representation is not related to the life of the current Maya, and the Travesía Sagrada is not a ritual they perform either. It is the reconstruction of a ritual that the ancient Maya might have done. The ritual was 'recovered' in 2006 by the park Xcaret as a tourist attraction. There might be local indigenous persons participating as extras in the show, but it is not a current Maya ritual. Obviously there were commercial reasons to present it as such, but the Mayan communities keep performing a large number of rituals, and it is regrettable that Televisa chose a commercial show instead of paying tribute to an authentic ritual.

Briefly moving on to informative programs, it can be observed that very little attention is given to indigenous communities in the news reports of the main Mexican channels at a national level. And the few times they are covered, the news tends to be related to disasters or conflicts. In 2012, there was for example an emergency situation in the Sierra Tarahumara, where famine struck the indigenous population as a result of long drought (see figure 18). Another example are the persisting territorial conflicts within the Triqui population of Oaxaca. In these news items, indigenous women always appear as victims. It is on the other hand very rare to see indigenous persons with university degrees in the news; often only the misery is apparent. People with indigenous or mestizo features also appear in news items related to crime. Multiple studies have shown that news portrayals have

[237] Original: "Es una tradición y es nuestra."
[238] Original: "como hace quinientos años los mayas de hoy reviven la tradición de celebrar a Ixchel, la diosa de la fertilidad."

an impact on the way audiences relate race and crime, stigmatizing certain ethnic groups (Dixon, 2004: 133). Thus, Mexican media perpetuates the existing negative image of the indigenous person and feeds the discrimination[239]. It is important to emphasize the problems the indigenous population are facing. These news items have to make people conscious of the precarious situation indigenous peoples are living in. But, instead of a sensationalist approach, attention has to be given to the real and underlying problems for indigenous peoples. In addition, more positive stories are needed in the media to illustrate the capacities and the qualities of indigenous peoples.

Figure 18: *La Jornada*, 15th of January 2012 (Villalpando, 2012).

Grave problema de desnutrición en comunidades debido a la sequía de 2011: El Barzón

Al menos 6 personas han muerto de hambre en la sierra Tarahumara

Se dejaron de producir 20 mil toneladas de maíz de autoconsumo; fundación entrega ayuda a rarámuris

Habitantes de las comunidades Napuchi, Wisarorare, Baquiachi y Pasigochi, del estado de Chihuahua, se forman para recibir ayuda alimentaria en centros de acopio ubicados en el municipio de Temósachi
Foto Alejandro Bringas

[239] Similar situations have been happening, for example, in the United States of America with black minorities, and in Belgium and the Netherlands, with North African minorities.

Differences exist depending on the type of program and on the television channel. For example, it has to be recognized that Televisión Azteca has triggered a change since its creation in 1993, introducing social themes that had never been discussed on Mexican television, such as domestic violence or teenage pregnancies (Casas Pérez, 2005: 409-410; Pearson, 2005: 404). The physical appearance of the characters and the presenters is now more diversified too. For example, in series for adolescents some characters have darker skin. However, it has to be taken into account that the channels currently most watched by the indigenous population are those of Televisa. And the most popular programs continue to be the traditional *telenovelas* presented by Televisa.

In general, Mexican communication media show a stereotypical image of indigenous peoples, or at least a distorted image of the reality of these communities. This image does not only influence the way indigenous peoples are treated, but it also affects the self-image of indigenous peoples.

3. Influence of Television on the Indigenous Self-Esteem

According to the *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010*, 14.86% of all Mexicans self-identify as indigenous (INEGI, 2010). In Mexico, indigenous peoples have been discriminated for a long time, and until now, many of them continue to live in a situation of economic and social marginalization. In this context, indigenous women are obliged to face even more difficulties; on top of being indigenous they suffer gender discrimination.

On television, indigenous women are confronted every day with images that do not reflect the environment they live in, in fact, quite the opposite. The woman appearing on television has very little in common with the indigenous viewers. Not only does she have a very different physical appearance, she also has another life style. While indigenous women living in cities will recognize some characteristics of the woman on television, even if this life style is not always accessible for them, it is unlikely that women in rural areas feel any affinity with the image that appears on television. For them it is a world that is very distant from their daily lives. The Mexico they see on their television screen is one in which Mexicans have a clear complexion, work in the city, have luxurious cars, and live in enormous properties. They are all dressed in delicate clothes, clothing that cannot be found in the villages and is too expensive for most indigenous persons living in the cities[240]. One could argue that the main target audience is located in urban areas. But this does not justify the racial exclusion.

Television mirrors how indigenous peoples are really treated in Mexico. People with indigenous features are treated as inferior. Daily, they suffer from a high level of discrimination and racism by

[240] In rural villages, the access to modern clothing is limited to the market or to small locally held stores selling cheap clothes.

the non-indigenous population. They are told that physically, they are ugly, so girls and women feel ashamed about the way they look. They are often also portrayed as naïve indigenous persons who speak Spanish poorly. In reality, for part of them Spanish is not their maternal language. They never were granted education in their own language, and due to the poor quality of national education they were never taught Spanish properly either. As a result, indigenous peoples are perceived as stupid and ignorant. In addition, because of their low education level, they only have access to low income jobs, for example domestic or farm work, in factories, or construction work (PNUD, 2010: 59-60). Despite this negative image, the *telenovelas* continue to be very popular because they offer the opportunity to dream and to "make you forget reality for one moment" (Pearson, 2005:405).

It has to be pointed out that not all aspects of *telenovelas* are negative. Despite the differences with the indigenous reality, the *telenovelas* can have an educational function regarding relations and social problems, also for indigenous peoples. During the last two decades, new social themes have been included in the story lines. For example, there has been more attention for domestic violence, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, etcetera. (White) women in the *telenovelas* become progressively more independent, and less subordinated to men. They work outside the house, meet up with friends, and drive their own car (Casas Pérez, 2005: 409-412). Although the changes occur slowly, they can be relevant. Their influence should not be overrated, but through the *telenovelas* indigenous women can get information. As Pearson states: *telenovelas* "inform and educate at the same time as they entertain (Pearson, 2005: 404)." For example, the audience could see that the lead characters condemn a man who hits his wife; or how a girl can say 'no' to a boy who tries to force her to have sex; that she has the right to have an opinion, and should not be beaten because she disagrees with her husband. It can also instruct women on the use of contraception. And if one of the characters has breast cancer, this could convince the female viewers of the importance of regular check-ups. Sexual preference is not often discussed in traditional *telenovelas*, but it is also a subject that can slowly be introduced. There is still a big step between watching a *telenovela* and for example going to a doctor, but there can at least be an exchange of information maybe leading to a first level of awareness. The most popular traditional Mexican *telenovelas* still mainly portray a macho and patriarchal society, but the gradual integration of these social topics can give them a certain educational value. The audience sympathizes with the characters, and could also copy them in a positive way.

When focusing on the image of indigenous peoples, and specifically of the indigenous woman, shown on Mexican television, it is clear that this image confirms the existing social differences in Mexico. Research has shown a correlation between negative stereotypes shown in the media and self-esteem. Rivadeneyra, Ward, and Gordon for example, have shown that the negative

stereotypical portrayal of Latinos on U.S.A. television can result in low self-esteem among Latino viewers (Rivadeneyra, Ward and Gordon, 2007)[241].

Thus, the negative representation of indigenous peoples can affect the self-esteem of indigenous viewers, even more so if this image is internalized. It shows them that as indigenous persons their future is there, in domestic work, out in the fields; that they will always be inferior to the white population; that they do not need to be more ambitious because it is pointless. The television seems to demarcate the spaces in which the different social classes can move. White people go to the office, they stroll in idyllic places, and go to parties. Meanwhile, indigenous women are preparing food in the kitchen or cleaning the house of their employers, and they do not leave the house. A doctor, lawyer, entrepreneur, or television host with indigenous features is almost never seen. Social ascend seems not to be within reach of indigenous peoples. It is essential to show indigenous women and girls, who are more prejudiced socially and economically, that they can reach higher goals, that education is important, and that it is possible to have better perspectives. Television could offer them a positive role model.

It was mentioned previously that television has an influence on the creation of a national and cultural identity. In this case the indigenous viewer is excluded again. The indigenous person is invisible in the Mexico that is shown on television. Are they not part of this nation then? It is a recurring problem in Mexico. The Mexican is very proud of his Pre-Hispanic past, he is very proud of his costumes and of his customs, but he rejects the people that are the bearers of these traditions. It seems to be impossible to see an indigenous person as a dignified and rightful human being. This can, for example, also be seen in tourist promotion. Tourist advertisements often have images of women in typical costumes. But in most cases these women have a fair complexion. It is rare to see women with dark skin in tourist promotion.

The exclusion of the indigenous population from what is 'Mexican' can have an impact, not only at a personal level – the indigenous person feels inferior – but also at a national policy level. The social and economic problems in the indigenous communities are – or at least should be – a concern for the governments. But, how to improve the situation of these populations if at the same time they are daily excluded from the national project?

[241] On the psychological relation between stereotypes in the media and self-esteem, see for example: B. S. Greenberg, D. Mastro, and J. E. Brand (2002); A. Bandura (2001), "Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication", in: *Media Psychology*, 3, p. 265–299; T. Ford (1997), "Effects of Stereotypical Television Portrayals of African-Americans on Person Perception", in: *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 60, p. 266-278; R. J. Harris (1999), *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum; D. E. Mastro and B. S. Greenberg (2000), "The Portrayal of Racial Minorities on Prime Time Television", in: *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, p. 690-703; C. M. Steele (1997), "A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance", in: *American Psychologist*, 52, p. 613-628.

D. Conclusion

The current chapter analyzed the main aspects of the image of women in Mexican media. The way women are portrayed in the media can teach us how women are perceived more generally in Mexican society. Special attention was given to the image-building of indigenous women. The image of this socially excluded group influences the way the non-indigenous population looks at them, but it can also affect their own social and economic development.

To start with, the focus lay on women employed in Mexican media. At first sight, both genders are well represented; many women are working in Mexican media. However, looking more closely, it becomes clear that women have less access to the different levels of the media business. The majority of women work in lower hierarchies, and the number of women reaching management levels is very limited. Thus, women have little access to the decision-making processes in the media. In the exceptional case that they do, women tend to favor the existing business policies, and have little attention for an integrated gender perspective or the improvement of the media content. On the other hand, certain female journalists have stood out and are now among the most respected opinion leaders in Mexico. The influence of these leading women on Mexican society and on Mexican politics should not be underestimated. However, the large majority of female journalists and television hosts is still treated as inferior compared to their male colleagues. Women are predominantly presenting soft topics, such as cultural or societal news, while men present politics and economic subjects. Media concerns should support the credibility of their female reporters, and start valorizing the work of female journalists equally as that of their male colleagues. Recognition of women in the media may also facilitate their access to higher management levels. Furthermore, a general climate has to be created in which co-workers support each other instead of enforcing existing stereotypes, as is the case now. Finally, the government has to recognize the specific gender violence female journalists are facing, and organize adequate support and follow-up mechanisms.

Next was the analysis of how women are portrayed in the Mexican media content. Improvements have been made, however, both in fiction and in non-fiction programs the image of women is often still based on stereotypes. Especially in entertainment shows, women are sexualized and objectified, and they are subjected to sexist remarks from their male co-hosts. In fictional programs, such as *telenovelas*, women are always subordinated to men and they often have to face gender violence. In addition, the life of the female hero, who starts off as an independent and confident woman, has only one right outcome: only by becoming a perfect wife and mother she will reach true happiness. Thus, the media creates an image of the ideal woman being beautiful, caring, sensitive, virtuous, and

submissive. Her body is always at the service of men, first as on object of desire, then as his servant, and mother to his children. This situation is generally accepted by the audience as normal, both by men and women.

The images shown by the media, and their corresponding messages are important, because they influence how the audience approaches gender relations in daily life. Consequently, Mexican media are currently enforcing and perpetuating the subordination of women. But the media could also play a more positive role, improving the image of women and promoting women's rights. The media could take up an educational function, and consciously avoid gender stereotypes, both for men and women. Sexist remarks or behavior should be banned, and female hosts should be treated with the same respect as their male co-hosts. Overall, there is an urgent need for more effective and consistent gender policies in Mexican media.

In the Mexican context, the situation of indigenous women deserves special attention. Women in Mexico have to face gender discrimination at different levels, but indigenous women additionally suffer from racism, and from discrimination because they are poor. The indigenous population in Mexico has been socially excluded and treated as inferior to the non-indigenous population, and indigenous women are virtually invisible in Mexican society. In this chapter an analysis was made of the evolution of the image of indigenous women. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this image has been based on stereotypes. In the 1920's, the *La India Bonita* beauty pageant was used by white urban intellectuals, to define the stereotypical characteristics of the Mexican indigenous woman. The image they created continued to be used in popular art, such as advertisements and merchandising, and in movies. In these representations the indigenous woman was not seen as an individual, but as a symbol of the Nation, of purity, and virginity. Her image rarely referred directly to the indigenous population. The image also gave little attention to cultural diversity; indigenous peoples where seen as one heterogeneous group. The stereotypes made real indigenous peoples invisible and subjected them to numerous prejudices.

When analyzing the current image of indigenous women in Mexican media, and specifically on television, it has to be observed that there is an absence of indigenous women in Mexican media, both in fiction and non-fiction programs[242]. Most female television presenters correspond to a Western beauty ideal; the presence of women with mestizo or indigenous features is very rare[243]. When fictional programs include a character with indigenous features, this representation is usually

[242] This research focuses on the situation of indigenous women, but it has to be pointed out that indigenous men are equally invisible in Mexican media.
[243] It has to be noted that the lack of cultural diversity in Mexican media is general. Not only are there very few indigenous persons, but Afro-Mexican or Asian-Mexican people are even more uncommon.

still based on stereotypes. In non-fictional programs, such as news reports, indigenous peoples are often associated with negative news items, such as crime or disasters. The image that is shown of indigenous peoples perpetuates their negative perception, and enforces their discrimination.

Furthermore, these negative images influence the self-esteem and self-image of the female indigenous audience. Through television they get the message that they are inferior to the non-indigenous population. They perceive that certain spaces and jobs are inaccessible for them. They learn that they are ugly, and become ashamed of their physical appearance. And they also mistakenly believe that they must be less intelligent than the white population. These elements can lead to a very low self-esteem.

Indigenous women are invisible in Mexican mainstream media, but this does not mean they are not doing efforts to participate and increase their agency. In the last decades, several indigenous media have been created, such as community radios, videos, television, websites, blogs, etcetera. Indigenous media are run by and for indigenous peoples. They are the only media in Mexico offering content in indigenous languages, and they also play a role in the strengthening of the cultural identity of indigenous peoples. Women have been participating in these initiatives. This fact illustrates that the problem is not that indigenous women do not take action, the problem is that their access to mainstream spaces remains very limited or is even inexistent, and thus they remain in fact invisible in Mexican media. More spaces need to be opened up for indigenous peoples to enable them to participate in mainstream media and to guarantee their correct representation in Mexican society.

VII. EDUCATION IN MEXICO:
BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE, OR REPRODUCING INEQUALITY?

Fighting stereotypes and changing mentalities starts at school. It is therefore important to look at how gender and cultural diversity are approached in Mexican education. Other than at home, school is the main place where children learn social behavior and common ideologies. Education lays the foundation of both intellectual and social knowledge of every child. Through education children also learn about gender relations and cultural identity. In order to understand how gender and cultural relations in Mexico are defined, but also how they are perpetuated, and how they could be improved, it is crucial to look at how these topics are approached in Mexican education, and what role current education plays in the lives of Mexican children, especially children in rural and indigenous communities. This chapter addresses the situation of girls in the context of Mexican education. Specific attention will be given to indigenous girls. Is education improving the situation of indigenous girls in Mexico? What opportunities does education offer these girls? Do they get the same educational opportunities as boys? Is education adapted to their needs?

Education is fundamental for the future of every child. UNICEF emphasizes its importance at many levels, and states:

> "Education is a fundamental human right: Every girl and boy in every country is entitled to it. Quality education is critical to development both of societies and of individuals, and it helps pave the way to a successful and productive future. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come (UNICEF, 2013)."

And also:

> "Education ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for sustainable development. A quality basic education equips girls and boys with the knowledge and skills they need to adopt healthy lifestyles, protect themselves from HIV and take an active role in social, economic and political decision-making as they transition to adolescence and adulthood. Educated adults are more likely to have smaller and healthier families, to be informed about appropriate child-rearing practices and to ensure that their children start school on time and ready to learn (UNICEF, 2013)."

UNDRIP Article 14 protects the rights of indigenous peoples regarding education:

> "Article 14
>
> 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
>
> 2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
>
> 3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language (UN, 2007)."

In the Mexican Constitution, Article 3 is dedicated to education. It states that the government is responsible, at all levels, for the implementation of education, and also has to guarantee qualitative compulsory education:

> "Article 3
>
> Every individual has the right to education. The State – Federation, States, Federal District, and municipalities – shall provide preschool, primary, lower and higher secondary education. Preschool, primary, and lower secondary education constitute the basic education; the latter and higher secondary education will be mandatory.
>
> The education provided by the State will tend to harmoniously develop all the faculties of the human being, and promote in him, both the love to the Nation, respect for human rights, and awareness of international solidarity, in independence and in justice.
>
> The State shall guarantee the quality of compulsory education so that the educational materials and methods, school organization, educational infrastructure, and the suitability of the teachers and managers would guarantee the highest learning achievement of the students (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 3)[244]."

Article 2 of the Constitution focuses on education for indigenous peoples. It states that bilingual and intercultural education should be favored, and indicates educational programs have to recognize and respect the cultural diversity of the nation.

> "Article 2. The Mexican Nation is one and indivisible.
>
> […]
>
> B. To promote equal opportunities for indigenous peoples and eliminate any discriminatory practice, the Federation, States, and Municipalities, will establish the institutions and determine the necessary policies to ensure the observance of the rights of indigenous peoples and the integral development of their peoples and communities, which should be designed and operated together with them.
>
> To eliminate the shortcomings and lags that affect indigenous peoples and communities, these authorities have the obligation to:
>
> […]
>
> II. Guarantee and increase the levels of education, favoring bilingual and intercultural education, literacy, conclusion of basic education, vocational training, and higher secondary and higher education. Establish a scholarship system for indigenous students at all levels. Define and develop educational programs with a regional content that recognize the cultural heritage of their peoples, in accordance with the laws on the matter and in consultation with the indigenous communities. Promote respect and understanding of the various cultures in the nation (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)[245]."

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[244] Original:
"Artículo 3o
Todo individuo tiene derecho a recibir educación. El Estado – Federación, Estados, Distrito Federal y Municipios –, impartirá educación preescolar, primaria, secundaria y media superior. La educación preescolar, primaria y secundaria conforman la educación básica; ésta y la media superior serán obligatorias.
La educación que imparta el Estado tenderá a desarrollar armónicamente, todas las facultades del ser humano y fomentará en él, a la vez, el amor a la Patria, el respeto a los derechos humanos y la conciencia de la solidaridad internacional, en la independencia y en la justicia.
El Estado garantizará la calidad en la educación obligatoria de manera que los materiales y métodos educativos, la organización escolar, la infraestructura educativa y la idoneidad de los docentes y los directivos garanticen el máximo logro de aprendizaje de los educandos (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 3)."

[245] Original:
"Artículo 2o. La Nación Mexicana es única e indivisible.
[...]

Politically, education has been considered an important topic in Mexico. However, politicians have primarily been interested in having control over education because it gives power at many other levels (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 122).

From a research perspective, education in Mexico has been discussed extensively. Research institutes of different universities, among others at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN), and the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), published numerous works on a variety of education themes, such as educational practices, teacher training, curriculum, educational policies, and social rights (Weiss, 2007: 133-135). Some of these studies included a gender perspective, focusing especially on gender equity and gender based violence at school[246].

Research has also been conducted on indigenous education, usually called intercultural or bilingual education. There are studies on the need for specific education for indigenous students, on the modalities, didactic approach, and curriculum that would best suit this education. Among the authors who carried out research on Mexican indigenous education are Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán[247], María Bertely Busquets[248], Erica González Apodaca[249], Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado (2002), Héctor Múnoz

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B. La Federación, los Estados y los Municipios, para promover la igualdad de oportunidades de los indígenas y eliminar cualquier práctica discriminatoria, establecerán las instituciones y determinarán las políticas necesarias para garantizar la vigencia de los derechos de los indígenas y el desarrollo integral de sus pueblos y comunidades, las cuales deberán ser diseñadas y operadas conjuntamente con ellos.
Para abatir las carencias y rezagos que afectan a los pueblos y comunidades indígenas, dichas autoridades, tienen la obligación de:
[...]
II. Garantizar e incrementar los niveles de escolaridad, favoreciendo la educación bilingüe e intercultural, la alfabetización, la conclusión de la educación básica, la capacitación productiva y la educación media superior y superior. Establecer un sistema de becas para los estudiantes indígenas en todos los niveles. Definir y desarrollar programas educativos de contenido regional que reconozcan la herencia cultural de sus pueblos, de acuerdo con las leyes de la materia y en consulta con las comunidades indígenas. Impulsar el respeto y conocimiento de las diversas culturas existentes en la nación (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a)."

[246] For example: SEP (2009); SEP (2010); G. DELGADO (2003), "Educación y género", in: M. Bertely, *Educación, derechos sociales y equidad. Volume II*, (La investigación educativa en México 1992-2002, 3), Mexico: Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa & SEP & CESU-UNAM, p. 467-573.

[247] For example: G. AGUIRRE BELTRÁN (1992), *Teoría y práctica de la Educación Indígena*, Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana – INI – FCE.

[248] For example: M. BERTELY (2003), *Educación, derechos sociales y equidad*, (La investigación educativa en México 1992-2002, 3), Mexico: Consejo Mexicano de Investigación Educativa; M. BERTELY (2006), *Panorama Histórico de la Educación para los Indígenas en México*, Mexico: CIESAS; M. BERTELY (2006), "La construcción desde debajo de una nueva educación intercultural bilingüe para México", in: L. E. TODD and V. ARREDONDO (eds.), *La educación que México necesita. Visión de expertos*, Mexico: Centro de Los Altos Estudios e Investigación Pedagógica/ CECyTE-NL; M. BERTELY (2007), *Conflicto intercultural, educación y democracia activa en México. Ciudadanía y derechos indígenas en el movimiento pedagógico intercultural bilingüe en los altos, la región norte y la Selva Lacandona de Chiapas*, Mexico: CIESAS; M. BERTELY, J. GASCHÉ, and R. PODESTÁ (2009), *Educando en la diversidad. Investigaciones y experiencias educativas interculturales y bilingües*, Abya-Yala; M. BERTELY, U. ECIDEA, S. SARTORELLO, et al. (2009), *Sembrando nuestra propia educación intercultural como derecho. Diálogos, experiencias y modelos educativos de dos organizaciones indígenas del estado de Chiapas*, Mexico.

Cruz[250], Sylvia Irene Schmelkes del Valle[251], Martha Patricia Tovar (2004), Saúl Velasco Cruz[252], etcetera. Furthermore, research on indigenous education was commissioned by the Mexican Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública – SEP), and more specifically by its Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe (CGEIB) and by the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI, 2011; DGEI, 2012). Some of these studies include a gender perspective, but overall gendered research on indigenous and rural education has been limited. These subjects have for example been covered by the following authors: Paloma Bonfil Sánchez[253], Rosa María González Jiménez[254], María del Pilar Miguez Fernández[255], and Concepción Silvia Núñez Miranda[256], among others.

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[249] For example: E. González Apodaca (2009), "The Ethnic and the Intercultural in Conceptual and Pedagogical Discourses within Higher Education in Oaxaca, Mexico", in: *Intercultural Education*, 20: 1; E. González Apodaca (2009), *Los profesionistas indios en la educación intercultural. Etnicidad, intermediación y escuela en territorio mixe*, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana & Editorial Juan Pablos; E. González Apodaca (2011), "Re-posicionamientos del maestro indígena en el encuentro con el conocimiento de sus pueblos. Una experiencia de apropiación de la pedagogía inductiva intercultural entre maestros y formadores de docentes en Oaxaca, México", in: *Cuadernos interculturales*, 14; E. González Apodaca, I. Aldáz, E. Bautista, et al. (2011), "Aprendiendo a hacer educación intercultural con nuestros pueblos. La experiencia formativa en la Nueva Educación y la Educación Inductiva Intercultural entre maestros indígenas y no indígenas de Oaxaca, México", in: *Interaprendizajes entre indígenas: de cómo las y los educadores pescan conocimientos y significados comunitarios en contextos interculturales*, Mexico: CIESAS & UPN; E. González Apodaca (2013), "Evaluación integral, participativa y de política pública en educación indígena desarrollada en las entidades federativas: Capítulo Oaxaca", in: *Evaluación integral, participativa y de política pública en educación indígena desarrollada en las entidades federativas*, Mexico: SEP & Organización de Estados Americanos; E. González Apodaca (2013), "La apropiación étnica de la escuela entre los pueblos mixes de Oaxaca. Proyectos educativos interculturales comunitarios en las miradas de sus jóvenes egresados", in: *Perfiles Educativos*, 141.

[250] For example: P. Mena, H. Muñoz, and A. Ruiz (1996), *Práctica docente y actitudes de los maestros bilingües hacia la educación indígena del Estado de Oaxaca*, Oaxaca: SEP & Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Oaxaca; H. Muñoz (1997), "La educación bilingüe en comunidades indígenas mexicanas", in: H. Muñoz (ed.), *El futuro desde la autonomía y la diversidad. La situación educativa en las regiones autónomas de Nicaragua y de otros países latinoamericanos,* Universidad Veracruzana & Terra Nuova & Kepa Cooperación Finlandesa; H. Muñoz (2006), "La reorganización intercultural de la educación escolar indígena de México", in: H. Muñoz (ed.), *Lenguas y educación en fenómenos multiculturales*, Mexico: UAM-I & UPN, p. 263-295.

[251] For example: S. Schmelkes (2010), "Indígenas rurales, migrantes, urbanos: Una educación equivocada, otra educación posible", in: *Pensamiento iberoamericano*, 7, p. 203-222.

[252] S. Velasco Cruz and A. Jablonska Zaborowska (eds.) (2010), *Construcción de políticas educativas interculturales en México: debates, tendencias, problemas, desafíos*, Mexico: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

[253] For example: P. Bonfil Sánchez (2001), "¿Estudiar para qué? Mercados de trabajo y opciones de bienestar para las jóvenes del medio rural. La educación como desventaja acumulada", in: E. Pieck (ed.), *Los jóvenes y el trabajo: la educación frente a la exclusión social*, Mexico: UIA-CINTERFOR/OIT/IMJ- CONALEP- UNICEF-RET.

[254] For example: R. M. González Jiménez (ed.) (2000), *Construyendo la diversidad: nuevas orientaciones en género y educación,* Mexico: Porrúa & Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

[255] For example: Ma. del P., Miguez Fernández (2008), "Barreras étnicas y de socialización de género para la formación en ciencias: imágenes de futuro de niñas y niños indígenas", in: C. Miqueo, Ma. J. Barral, and C. Magallón (ed.), *Estudios iberoamericanos de género en ciencia, tecnología y salud: GENCIBER*, Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, p. 549-554; Ma. del P., Miguez Fernández (2010), "Bilingüismo en una comunidad rural: un análisis de género en educación indígena", in: A. Lara (ed.), *Género en educación. Temas, avances, retos y perspectivas*, Mexico: UPN & Plaza y Valdés, p. 71-83.

Extensive research has been conducted on the need for indigenous education and different ways to organize and improve this particular type of education. Therefore, it will not be the focus here; the emphasis will lie on the issues indigenous girls have to face within the context of indigenous and general education. First, a general overview will be given of the structure of Mexican education. Next, the main problems of the Mexican educational system will be analyzed. In a third section, the focus will be on indigenous education and the specific problems for Mexican education in a rural and indigenous context. In the last part, gender within Mexican education and the situation of indigenous girls will be addressed.

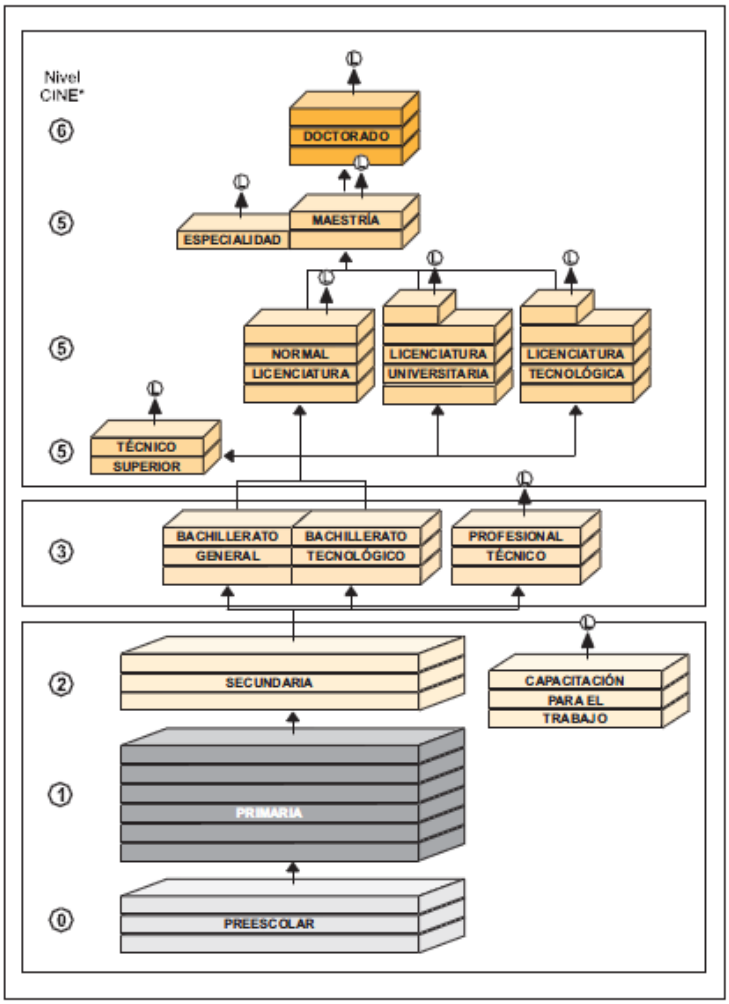
For this research, specific studies on the subject were consulted, as well as annual reports and statistical data of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, its Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI), and the INEGI. In addition, critical evaluations of Mexican education by the civil organization Mexicanos Primero were analyzed, including their awareness raising documentary *De panzazo* (2012). This information was completed with the data collected during interviews and formal and informal contacts in Mexico. I was able to talk to current and former students of both general and indigenous education in Mexico City and in Oaxaca, and with teachers who have taught both at public and private schools in Mexico City. Especially valuable for my understanding of the situation of indigenous education were my contacts in Oaxaca with a group of indigenous Triqui girls of the *bachillerato*, and with young female indigenous intellectuals. The experiences they shared with me showed me the extent of their problems, but also the determination young indigenous women have to improve their lot in life.

[256] For example: C. S., NÚÑEZ MIRANDA (2012), "Pobres, indígenas y mujeres: experiencias educativas para lidiar con la violencia de género en comunidades indígenas", in: J. L., SILVA MÉNDEZ (ed.), *Género y educación: Aportes para la discusión jurídica*, Mexico: Fontamara/ SCJN.

A. Types of Education in Mexico

The Mexican educational system consists of a basic education level (ages 3 to 14) and a higher secondary education level (ages 15 to 17). Basic education is divided in three years of preschool, followed by six years of primary education, and three years of lower secondary school. After higher secondary school, students can choose to continue superior education at university or technical schools (See figure 19).

Figure 19: Equivalence of the National Educational System with the International Standard Classification of Education (SEP, 2012a: 243).



Ⓛ: Labor market

**Nivel CINE*: Level of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED version 1997).

Mexico has different types and modalities of education. A first differentiation can be made based on funding of schools. There are public schools, subsidized by the government, and private schools, financed by private initiative. About 86% of Mexican schools are part of the public system, while nearly 14% are financed by private or autonomous[257] funding. In 2013, approximately 89% of Mexican students attended public schools, whereas almost 11% went to private schools (INEGI, 2013a). Public schools rely on the Mexican Ministry of Public Education (SEP) and often lack resources. This is reflected in the poor infrastructure and shortage of educational material. Private schools are characterized by their high tuition fees and are therefore usually only attainable for medium-high and upper social classes. These schools are only partially controlled by the SEP. For the basic education levels, they have to use the official textbooks, but they may complement them with didactic material of their choice. Private schools are considered to be of a better level than public schools, facilitating access to private top universities, such as the Universidad Iberoamericana or the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (colloquially known as the Tec de Monterrey). Although private schools have more resources than public schools, it is not always a guarantee for a high level of organization or quality of teachers. In general, both public and private education in Mexico are of a varying quality.

1. Schooling Level

In 2013, the SEP estimated that about 25,777,384 children and 2,107,670 teachers were registered in 261,631 schools across the country[258] (INEGI, 2013a). About 64% of Mexicans did not go to high school; secondary education was their highest education level. Only 56% of students between 15 and 19 years of age were still at school[259] (OECD, 2013: 4).

In 2010, the average schooling level in Mexico was 8.6 years[260], which corresponds to the second or third year of secondary education (usually around the age of 14). In the age group from 20 to 24 years, the average schooling level was of 10.4 years, showing an increase of the schooling level in the younger generations. Mexican men had a slightly higher schooling level than women, but the difference is small at national level (8.7 versus 8.4 years). The state with the highest average is the Federal District, with an average of 10.5 years of schooling. This corresponds to the first or second year of higher secondary education (usually around the age of 16). The state with the lowest average is Chiapas, with an average of only 6.6 years of schooling, meaning that a large majority of people in

[257] For example: schools funded by autonomous universities.
[258] This includes preschools, primary schools, and lower and higher secondary schools. These numbers are however estimates as the SEP actually has no exact data on the number of teachers and schools in the country. The INEGI itself publishes varying numbers depending on the section of its webpage.
[259] The OECD average is 84% of children attending school between 15 and 19 years old (OECD, 2013: 4).
[260] This is the average number of years for a student to attend school, starting from the first year of primary school.

Chiapas only have primary education. Other states with low averages are Oaxaca (6.9 average years of schooling), Guerrero (7.2 average years of schooling) and Michoacán (7.4 average years of schooling) (INEGI, 2010[261]). These are also states with high percentages of indigenous peoples.

Preschool is compulsory since the school year 2008-2009, and higher secondary education since 2012 (SEP, 2012a: 251; Santiago, 2012: 14). Thus, Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution states that students have the obligation to receive 15 years of education (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a). In 2005, around 70% of children attended preschool. This percentage has now increased to almost 100% (OECD, 2013: 1-2). But this is certainly not yet the case for secondary education, where children of low social groups and in rural areas in particular tend to drop out of school to start working. In the case of girls, they can leave school after secondary education to get married.

2. Modalities of Education

Mexico's public education system has different modalities of education (see figure 20). For preschool education there are general schools, *Centros de Desarrollo Infantil* (Cendi)[262], indigenous education, and community education; for primary education there are complete and incomplete general schools, indigenous or bilingual primary schools, and community schools; lower secondary education, consists of general schools, technical schools, *telesecundarias*, *Secundarias para Trabajadores*, and community schools; at the higher secondary level, several types of general and technical *bachilleratos* exist, in a few places indigenous *bachilleratos* are available as well as *telebachilleratos* (Rosas Carrasco, 2005: 296; SEP, 2012a; Santiago, 2012: 15-16).

[261] Population of 15 years and older per federative entity, sex, and five-year age groups, according to the education level and average schooling years (INEGI, 2010).

[262] The Centros de Desarrollo Infantil are the equivalent of day-care centers. They look after children between 45 days of age and 5 years old. In these particular centers the staff has been trained for activities stimulating the development of the children, like in kindergarten. These centers are mainly present in urban areas and are mostly used by working mothers (SEP, 2012a: 249).

Figure 20: General scheme of the Mexican national educational system: educational school services (Based on SEP, 2012a: 8).

Type of Education	Level	Services
Basic education (*Básica*)	Preschool (*Preescolar*)	• General • Indígenous • Community courses • CENDI[263]
	Primary (*Primaria*)	• General • Indígenous • Community courses
	Lower Secondary (*Secundaria*)	• General • Technical • *Telesecundaria* • For workers (*para Trabajadores*) • Community courses
Higher secondary education (*Media Superior*)	*Bachillerato*	• General[264] • Technological • Others
	Professional technical	• CET[265], CECYTE[266] • CONALEP[267] • Others
Higher education (*Superior*)	Superior technical	• Technological universities • Others
	Undergraduate (*Licenciatura*)	• Normal • University • Technological
	Graduate	• Speciality • Master • PhD

General schools are the most common in urban areas. In rural areas, a larger variety of types of education can be noted. In general preschool and primary school, there is usually one teacher per class, while in general secondary schools, each subject has its own specialized teacher. At complete schools, covering all school grades, every grade has its own teacher, whereas at incomplete schools, not all grades are available (e.g. only the first three years of primary school). Some schools are multigrade schools: students from two or more grades follow class together under supervision of one teacher. In the worst cases there is only one teacher for all the students of all grades. On top of their teaching activities, teachers in small schools without supporting staff also have to take care of administration (Calixto Flores & Rebollar Albarrán, 2008: 7).

[263] Centros de Desarrollo Infantil.
[264] Sometimes also called *preparatoria*.
[265] Centro de Estudios Tecnológicos.
[266] Colegio de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos.
[267] Colegio Nacional de Educación Profesional Técnica.

Indigenous education is offered in certain indigenous communities. These schools depend on the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI) of the SEP. The education is supposed to be bilingual and intercultural. Indigenous preschools employ bilingual teachers, who are supposed to teach children Spanish before they start primary school. Teachers and promoters of indigenous primary schools are bilingual and should teach both in the indigenous language of the community and in Spanish (SEP, 2012a: 250-252). This type of education will be discussed more in depth further on.

The DGEI also offers *Albergues de Educación Indígena* and *Centros de Integración Social*. The *albergues* are boarding schools for indigenous children as well as non-indigenous children in rural areas, and for children of migrant workers. The children come from different communities and speak different languages. The main focus lies on primary education, but there are also preschool and secondary school students attending these boarding schools. Attention is given to the cultural background of the children, and often the teachers and staff also speak an indigenous language (DGEI, 2012: 4, 40-41). The less common *Centros de Integración Social*, are similar boarding schools for indigenous and non-indigenous children between 6 and 16 years old from remote areas. Besides primary education, the students are also introduced to various professions and farming activities (Jiménez Naranjo & Mendoza Zuany, 2012: 423-424).

The *telesecundaria* is a low cost televised educational system offered in remote areas without access to general or technical secondary schools. Instead of having one teacher per subject, there is only one teacher per class responsible for all subjects, and relying on support from long distance school television courses broadcasted by the SEP. In remote areas, the *telesecundarias* can also be multigrade, and thus have only one or two teachers for all students (SEP, 2012a: 252).

The *Secundaria para Trabajadores* offers education to youngsters over 15 years who work during the day. The courses are usually given in the evening (SEP, 2012a: 252).

In very small and distant communities with high levels of marginality, the Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo[268] (CONAFE) can install community education. For preschool, the community needs to have less than 29 children at preschool age or less than 500 inhabitants; community primary schools are installed in communities with less than 100 inhabitants. These schools usually have only one teacher in charge of several grades (SEP, 2012a: 43, 251-252).

Half day schooling is very common in Mexican basic education. There is a morning shift and an afternoon shift. Such double shifts can be due to the high number of students, but also be part of

[268] National Council for Educational Promotion.

separate modalities of education, sharing the same school building. For the latter, some researchers pointed out that the afternoon shifts tend to have a lower academic level (Santiago, 2012: 26).

Compared to other OECD countries, Mexico has the highest number of average students per teacher. These large groups increase the difficulty for teachers to offer good education. In preschool, every teacher has an average of 25 students. In primary school the average is 28.1 students per teacher, compared to an average of 29.9 students in secondary and high school[269] (OECD, 2013: 7). Student population in public schools tends to be larger than in private schools (Mexicanos Primero, 2012b).

In addition to the general modalities, there are specialized educational services, such as education for adults, and *Centros de Atención Multiple* (CAM) for students with a disability (SEP, 2012a: 9). Public education for children with mental or physical disabilities is at the bottom of the system in Mexico (Santiago, 2012: 16). This type of education is not the subject of this study and will therefore not be discussed here, but it is important to point out that the situation of these students is dramatic. Their schools have little or no resources, adapted programs are barely developed, families get no support, and the students are often left to their own devices. Although small changes are visible, disabled people are largely ignored in Mexican society, which is also true for their education. The situation is especially hopeless for disabled children in rural or indigenous communities where even less resources are available.

When looking at the percentage of children in the different education types, it can be observed that 90.08% of the pupils in preschool go to general schools. Indigenous preschools are attended by 6.17% of the children, and community preschool education reaches 3.75% of the pupils[270]. In primary school, indigenous education and community education lose ground, with respectively 3.90% and 0.83% of the students, while 95.27% of the children attend general elementary schools (INEGI, 2013a; see figure 21 and 22).

At the secondary education level, it is striking how many students are attending the *telesecundaria*. As many as 19.22% of Mexican children go to *telesecundarias* (INEGI, 2013a; see figure 23). Meaning that nearly one fifth of all Mexican students have no access to regular secondary education.

[269] The OECD averages are: 14 students per teacher in preschool, 15 students per teacher in primary school, and 14 students per teacher in secondary and high school (OECD, 2013: 10).
[270] The census of 2013 does not include the number of infants going to Centros de Desarrollo Infantil. In the school year 2011-2012, 1.40% of the children attended these CENDI (SEP, 2012a: 43).

Figure 21: Percentage of students in preschool education per educational service, Mexico, 2013 (INEGI, 2013a).

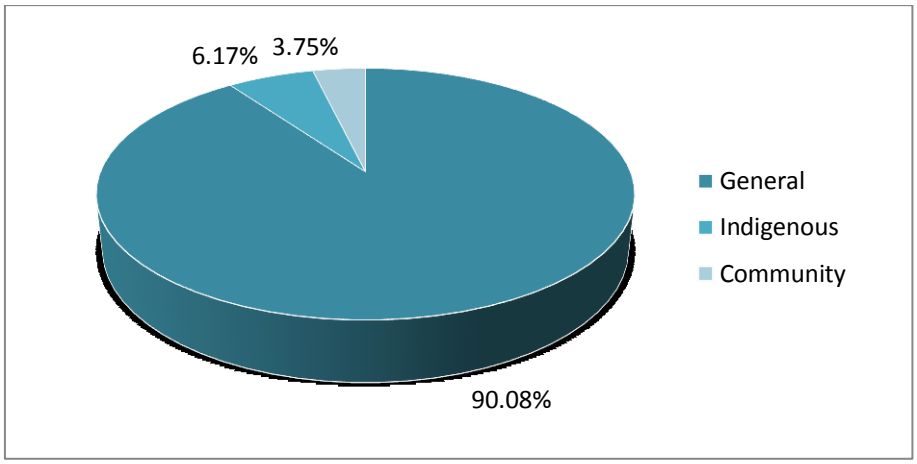


Figure 22: Percentage of students in primary education per educational service, Mexico, 2013 (INEGI, 2013a).

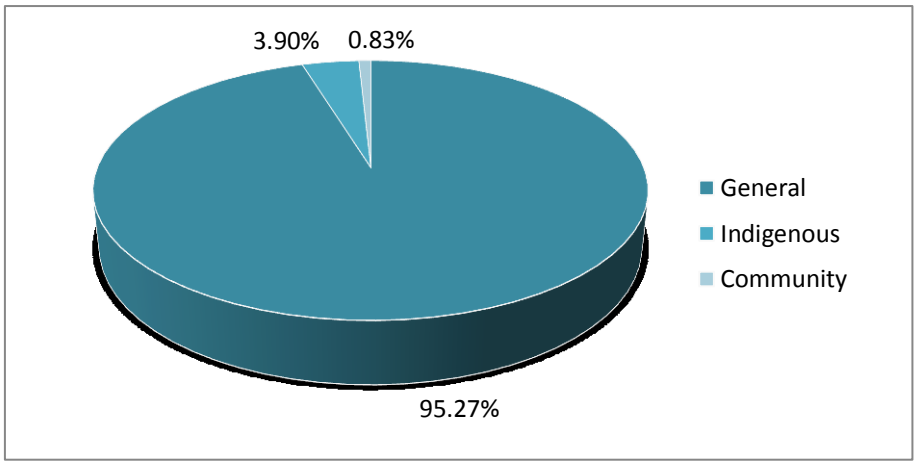
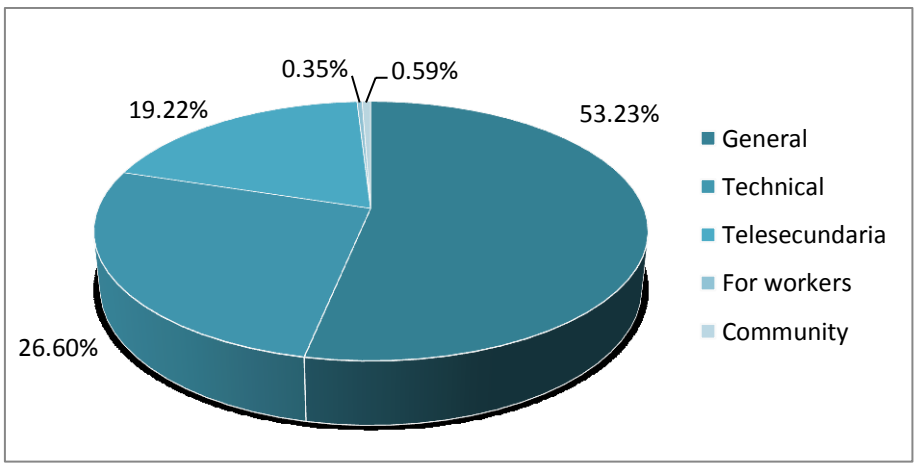


Figure 23: Percentage of students in secondary education per educational service, Mexico, 2013 (INEGI, 2013a).



B. General Problems in Mexican Education

Mexican education faces multiple problems. These problems are often complex and interrelated. Some of the main issues are the dominance of the national teachers' unions, the waste and uneven distribution of resources, the poor quality of the education partly due to a lack of professionalization of the teachers, and the use of educational programs not adapted to the varying teaching contexts (Santiago 2012; Mexicanos Primero, 2012a).

1. Dominance of the Teachers' Unions

Mexico has two main teachers' unions. The largest one is the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE), founded in 1943. The Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE), established in 1979 as an alternative for the SNTE, unites teachers mainly from the southern states, such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero. The SNTE is the biggest union in Mexico and one of the biggest teachers' unions in the world. All teachers in basic education have to be affiliated to the SNTE, and 1% of their salary is automatically transferred to the SNTE. The SNTE has much influence on the Ministry of Education, especially regarding the appointment of teachers and the supervision of schools (Santiago, 2012: 20-22). The power of the unions is also solid at local level. In Oaxaca, for example, the state institute for education (Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca – IEEPO) is under considerable influence of the CNTE union, who boycott any development in Oaxacan education (Mexicanos Primero, 2013: 88).

Mexican teachers' unions have been known as very corrupt institutions, wasting and misusing education funds and controlling the access to teaching positions. In 2012, for example, at least 22,353 commissioned teachers supposedly worked for and received a wage from the SNTE. Yet, none of these teachers were active, while being paid with resources meant for education (Mexicanos Primero, 2012a: 22). According to the 2014 census, as many as 39,222 ghost teachers are not known in the institutions where they are registered. They are probably receiving a wage from the SEP, but without working at an educational institution. It is striking that in the state of Chiapas there are up to 9.44% ghost teachers. This is considerably more compared to the second worst state of Michoacán, with 3.79% of unknown teachers (INEGI, 2013a). As a result of the census, the SEP has stated that actions will be taken to address this issue (Servín and Hernández, 2014).

Under President Peña Nieto, the Mexican government has tried to address the dominance of the teachers' unions. In 2012, after 9 years of presidency[271] and 24 years of actual power, the union's

[271] In 2007 she was voted president of the SNTE for an indefinite period, or 'for life'.

president, Elba Esther Gordillo, was arrested under suspicion of embezzlement of 2 billion Mexican pesos from the SNTE (approx. €13,000,000), using it to buy properties and a private jet, for luxury shopping sprees, and plastic surgery, among other things (BBC, 2013). Gordillo was charged with fraud and organized crime, but the union still has a lot of influence today, and it remains unclear whether the arrest of Gordillo was not in reality a political move.

2. Unequal Distribution of Education Resources

According to the OECD, Mexico spent 6.2% of its GDP on education in 2010. This was close to the OECD average of 6.3% (OECD, 2013: 2). Just over 83% of the resources for education were used to pay the wages of teachers, and 93.3% for staff in general. These percentages are much higher than the OECD averages of 62% and 78.2% respectively, and it means only 6.9% of resources were available for infrastructure and educational materials (OECD, 2013: 3). In 2013, Reyes Tépach Marcial, a parliamentary analyst in the Mexican Chamber of Representatives, noted that only 3.37% of the GDP was spent on education for the same year (Tépach Marcial, 2013: 8). In addition, he calculated that 96.84% of the resources for education were used for overhead costs, such as wages, contributions for social security, pensions, and other operational costs. Only 3.16% are invested to modernize and foster education, such as the improvement of the infrastructure or the development of adapted educational programs[272] (Tépach Marcial, 2013: 60).

Furthermore, the resources are unevenly distributed across states, schools, and across different systems. In 2002, *telesecundarias,* for example*,* received only half of the budget compared to general and technical secondary schools (Santiago, 2012: 27-28). As a result, not all schools can offer the same services and facilities, and often schools with the most pressing needs are the ones that receive the least resources from the government.

3. Poor Infrastructure and Lack of Educational Material

The lack of resources results in deficient school infrastructure and a lack of educational materials, among others. The problems come in varying degrees and in different forms. Many school buildings do not offer a safe environment for children, with worn-out school furniture, broken windows, leaking roofs, or non-functioning sanitary facilities. Especially schools in rural areas suffer from deficient infrastructure. According to the 2013 census, 2,249 of the 173,007 school buildings in Mexico are made of light and precarious materials (1.29%), 167 schools do not have buildings

[272] It is not entirely clear why there is so much difference between the numbers of the OECD of 2010 and those of the Mexican Chamber of Representatives of 2013.

(0.09%), and no information is available for 772 schools (0.44%). The schools with the worst building infrastructure can be found in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero[273] (INEGI, 2013a).

In addition to problems with infrastructure, certain schools also lack the necessary educational material, such as school books, or other teaching material. In the school year 2008-2009, 50% of primary schools lacked computers for educational use. The situation was worst in indigenous and community primary schools where respectively 75% and 99% had no computer. In lower secondary education 27% of schools had no computer, with 32% in *telesecundarias*, and 61% in education for workers (Santiago, 2012: 27). Adriana Márquez Altamirano, a young Zapotec woman, recalls how, in 2008, students in her *bachillerato* could only learn to type on old typewriters, because there were no computers for proper computer lessons (Márquez, personal communication, 2011). In 2005, 65% of primary schools, including 83% of indigenous primary schools, had no library for the students (Santiago, 2012: 27). These issues make it very difficult, even for the best teacher, to ensure quality education. It also raises questions on how these students are prepared for the labor market.

4. Professionalization of Mexican Teachers

On top of the insufficient educational material, the quality of Mexican teachers is very disparate, both in private and in public schools. But the situation is even worse in areas with a low social background, and especially in rural areas. Therefore, an evaluation of teachers' abilities would be necessary to ensure quality education.

Many issues concern the access to permanent teaching posts. The SNTE union often controls appointments in a non-transparent way. It is known that teachers can buy or sell their posts, or inherit them from a family member or acquaintance, without necessarily complying with the requirements to be a teacher (Santiago, 2012: 27). Measures are being taken to address this fraud, but this practice has been ongoing for years.

Many schools do not require special education or training to become a teacher; anybody can be hired to teach. Often teachers choose their profession not because they care about the children's education, but because of job security. In Oaxaca, for example, only half of secondary school teachers are certified. Since 2007, all new teachers, except those in Oaxaca and Michoacán, have to take an admission test. Eight out of ten teachers failed these tests, nevertheless, many of them are

[273] In Chiapas, 7.20% of schools are built with precarious materials, 0.29% of schools have no buildings, and there is no information on the building infrastructure of 2.38% of schools. In Oaxaca, 3.55% of schools are built with precarious materials, 0.13% of schools have no buildings, and there is no information about the building infrastructure of 0.68% of schools. In Guerrero, 2.99% of schools are built with precarious materials, 0.27% of schools have no buildings, and there is no information on the building infrastructure of 0.68% of schools (INEGI, 2013a).

teaching. Consequently, students can have teachers lacking the necessary knowledge on their teaching subject, or on didactic methods (Mexicanos Primero, 2012b; 2013: 88).

There are also very high levels of absenteeism, with teachers not coming to school for weeks or even months, leaving the pupils unattended, not to mention the educational arrears made up. Other teachers systematically arrive late at school.

Occasionally, extra teacher trainings are organized, however, the main motivation for participating teachers is to earn a certain amount of points they need to comply with in order to obtain a better position. Regular teacher training could be important to acquaint teachers with new didactic methods and materials. But the importance of these trainings is undervalued even by the organizing entities, and the content of the trainings is very superficial and not practically applicable. At the end of the training, the teachers' accomplishments are not assessed. The concept of teacher trainings is not taken seriously, neither by the teachers, nor by the SEP (Mexicanos Primero, 2012b; Pinet, personal communication, 2011).

In many schools, the teacher is not perceived as a trusted person students can turn to for help. In the worst cases teachers and even school directions reportedly use physical violence against children as punishment (SEP, 2009: 109). Demotivation, absence of qualification, and lack of commitment and work ethics of certain teachers are not beneficial for the educational level. Students lose trust in their teachers and in the educational system, and are not motivated to pursue further education.

5. Efforts to Evaluate Mexican Education

The Mexican authorities are to some extent aware of the problems, but until now they have failed to collect enough exact data to tackle actual issues. The available statistics are incomplete and there is no systematic inventory of the situation in every school, yet this is crucial to take efficient measures.

The educational level of Mexican schools is evaluated, but the results of these assessments only give a partial image. The Mexican Ministry of Education, and the Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEE) created in 2002, evaluate the educational system as a whole, for example through the *Exámenes de la Calidad y el Logro Educativos*[274] (EXCALE). However, the results of these tests are not used for further in-depth analysis, and there is no evaluation of individual schools (Santiago, 2012: 11-12).

[274] Quality and Educational Achievement Exams.

Since 2006, the *Evaluación Nacional del Logro Académico en Centros Escolares*[275] (ENLACE) evaluates the knowledge of individual students. It is organized on an annual basis by the Ministry for Education for all public and private primary and secondary schools in Mexico. The test is not undisputed, but it is designed to evaluate the level of Spanish and mathematics of the students. A third subject is added every year, for example Natural Sciences in 2012 or Civic and Ethic Education in 2013. In 2013, the test was taken by almost 95% of the students, and in 90% of the schools. But in the state of Oaxaca, the teachers' union opposed the test and therefore only students of the CONAFE schools, depending directly on the SEP, were tested (SEP, 2013). Although the results are published annually, it is not clear what concrete actions are taken by the SEP to address the apparent issues.

Because of the lack of a general evaluation of schools, in 2009 the civil organization Mexicanos Primero developed the *Índice de Desempeño Educativo Incluyente*[276] (IDEI). The IDEI is an annual evaluation of the education in the different Mexican states, and of these states' efforts to improve education. The evaluation is based on a wide variety of parameters, and the results are compared to previous years in order to determine progress (Mexicanos Primero, 2013: 11). According to the IDEI 2012, the states with the best scores, both for primary and secondary education, – although still far behind on an international level – are Sonora, Aguascalientes, Puebla, and Nuevo León. The states with the worst score are Oaxaca and Michoacán, while Guerrero also has a very low score. Chiapas is the state with most considerable arrears in education in Mexico, as evidenced by the very poor IDEI score for primary education, with the CONAFE and indigenous schools as the worst cases. Thus, the states with the highest levels of poverty and social marginalization, and with the highest numbers of indigenous population, also have the lowest quality of primary education. In Chiapas however, efforts are made to improve the situation, already resulting in a better score for secondary education (Mexicanos Primero, 2013: 48, 62). The information provided by the IDEI is valuable, but the question remains whether the government will use this available information and take concrete action.

Considering the varying qualification of the teaching staff, an evaluation of teachers would also be necessary. In 2012, under pressure from civil organizations such as Mexicanos Primero, the government realized the *Evaluación Universal de Maestros*, with the participation of 263,024 primary school teachers. But also in this case, the unions opposed strongly and the teachers of Michoacán and Oaxaca did not participate (Mexicanos Primero, 2012a: 17). In 2013, only 113 of the approximately 127,000 Oaxacan teachers took the test (less than 1%) (Mexicanos Primero, 2013: 88).

[275] National Evaluation of the Academic Achievement in Educational Centers.
[276] Index for Inclusive Educational Proficiency.

In 2013, the government of Peña Nieto introduced an educational reform, including measures to address some of the previously mentioned issues. Among others, the reform wants to achieve the professionalization of teachers, by means of training and evaluations; a general assessment of the educational system, including an evaluation of school buildings, teaching staff, and educational programs; and increase participation of parents and directors in school management[277] (Gobierno de la República, 2013).

Between the 26th of September and the 29th of November 2013, and in the context of the educational reform, the INEGI and the SEP organized a national survey on schools, teachers, and students of basic and special education (*Censo de Escuelas, Maestros y Alumnos de Eudcación Básica y Especial*) (INEGI, 2013f). The survey was sent to 261,631 schooling centers[278]. Of these centers, 90.6% responded positively to the survey. Almost 10% of the schools did not participate in the survey. The majority of these schools are situated in the states of Michoacán, Chiapas, and Oaxaca, where respectively 53%, 50%, and 44% of the schools did not respond to the survey (INEGI, 2013a, f). The main reason was that the teachers' union refused to take part in the survey as a protest against the current educational reforms. For these schools, there are thus no data on the number of teachers, students, nor on the teaching conditions. In addition to the 24,164 schools which refused to participate, 68 schools could not be surveyed because of security risks, or could not be accessed. Furthermore, there were 426 ghost schools which could not be located (INEGI, 2013a, f).

There is much resistance from the teachers' unions against the educational reform, and especially against the teachers' evaluation because they are afraid teachers will lose their jobs. In 2013, the CNTE of Chiapas went on strike for 86 days, preventing children from attending class during this period, because they opposed the reforms (Montalvo, 2014). In 2014, many of the CNTE teachers continued to protest in Mexico City, even though, the consequences of a bad evaluation have been reduced to a minimum in the current plan. Only multiple and recurrent negative evaluations would, for example, lead to the transfer of a teacher to an administrative function (Gobierno de la República, 2013). Thus, the concrete impact of the measures still remains unclear.

The minister of education, Emilio Chuayffet, stated that the teachers who did not participate in the survey because they opposed the educational reforms, would be taken off the payroll as of 2015 (Montalvo, 2014). But, it remains to be seen whether this decision will be enforced.

[277] At a national level an average of 90% of primary schools and 86% of secondary schools have a school council. However in Oaxaca, only 55% of primary schools and 24% of secondary schools have a school council (Mexicanos Primero, 2013: 88).

[278] These included preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, Centros de Atención Multiple for disabled children, and other schooling centers that were active during the school year 2013-2014.

It is problematic that so many schools located in states which already show considerable backlog in education, refused to take part in the survey. The lack of data will make it even more difficult for the authorities to evaluate the needs of these schools and to take the necessary measures. Thus, the boycott of the teachers' unions adversely impacts the students of these regions in particular.

On the other hand, teacher evaluations are just a first step towards the improvement of the education system. As Dr. Manuel Gil Antón of the Centro de Estudios Sociológicos of the Colegio de México has said: the Mexican educational system is like a bad truck on a bad road. It is not enough to teach the driver better driving skills to make the truck go faster (Gil Antón, 2013).

C. Education in Rural and Indigenous Regions: The Need to Adapt to Varying Teaching Contexts

1. History of Rural and Indigenous Education: In Pursuit of a Homogenized Mexican Nation

Within the national project, the education of the rural population has always been on the agenda of the government. The Mexican Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública – SEP) was created in 1921. As part of the national project during the Mexican Revolution, a first step was taken with the establishment of federal rural schools, thus bringing modernity and discipline to the rebellious farmers in general. In 1923, the SEP created the *Casa del Pueblo*, providing education specifically for indigenous peoples. Later, the *Casa del Estudiante Indígena* was opened in Mexico City, offering technical education for indigenous boys. In 1932, eleven boarding schools for indigenous education were founded. These institutions were tools to work towards the main goal of the Mexican government: to create a homogeneous nation. Mexican culture had to be homogenized, and all elements of the indigenous culture not leading to modernity had to be erased (Tovar, 2004: 269-270; Sandoval Forero & Montoya Arce, 2013: 4).

Between 1930 and 1960, and with the creation of the Instituto Proalfabetización en Lenguas Indígenas, efforts were made to increase the levels of literacy and to reduce the numbers of monolingual indigenous speakers. In 1946, the Dirección General de Asuntos Indígenas was founded, and in 1948, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI). But in the 1940's, the importance of Mexican industrialism grew; the agrarian development as well as rural education were neglected. The education had to be unified to support the national unity. Thus, in 1942, president Manuel Ávila Camacho passed the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* stipulating that all primary schools of the Republic were to follow the same program, both in urban and in rural areas (Tovar, 2004: 271).

In the 1960's and 1970's, bilingual education was officially introduced and several institutions were founded. In 1963, the Servicio Nacional de Promotores Culturales y Maestros Bilingües was created. In 1971, the SEP established the Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo (CONAFE), to design educational strategies for the indigenous and rural communities (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 125). In the 1980's, the CONAFE founded the *Programa de Financiamiento Educativo Rural* (FIDUCAR), to offer children of communities with no primary school the possibility to study in another community. In 1981, the SEP created the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI) within its department for basic education (Tovar, 2004: 272-274).

In the 1990's, under influence of the Zapatista movement and the demand for more indigenous rights, more attention was given to specific indigenous education. In 1990, the *Programa para la Modernización de la Educación Indígena 1990-1994* (PMEI) and the *Programa Nacional de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas 1991-1994*, were launched. These programs were meant to adapt indigenous education to the requirements of the indigenous communities. The objective was to decentralize Mexican education again, and give attention to case-specific situations (Tovar, 2004: 288).

In 1991, the CONAFE also started the *Programa para Abatir el Rezago Educativo* (PARE) to develop printed educational material for the first years of primary education in a selection of indigenous languages (Tseltal, Tsotsil, Nahuatl, Tlapanec, Otomí, Mixtec, and Zapotec). In addition, the program offered specific training for bilingual teachers (Tovar, 2004: 289).

Since 1993, Article 38 of the *General Education Law* (*Ley General de Educación*) states that basic education should be adapted to the linguistic and cultural context of all indigenous peoples, as well as rural and migrant communities (Cámara de Diputados, 2013b: Art. 38). In 2007, the SEP introduced so-called intercultural education with the launch of the *Programa Sectorial de Educación 2007-2012* (Jablonska, 2010: 56).

However, be it in periods of centralized or decentralized educational policies, children in rural areas did not receive the same education as urban children. The education in rural areas was restricted to primary education with the basics of reading and writing, and was more focused on the work these children would be doing on the field. The school did not prepare them for another future (Rosas Carrasco, 2005: 300). Notwithstanding the efforts made at a policy level over many years, education in indigenous communities has remained inadequate and not adapted to the real needs of these peoples.

2. Obstacles for Rural Education

For Lesvia Rosas Carrasco, education in Mexico has been conceived as a homogenous system. It has been designed based on the possibilities, necessities, and perspectives of a majority of mainly urban children. Therefore, problems arise in the context of rural and indigenous communities, because this education is not adapted to their needs. In this perspective, the difficult access to the communities, the cultural differences, and the language, are perceived as obstacles. At this moment, the communities have to adapt to the education system, and not the other way round (Rosas Carrasco, 2005: 297-298).

In 2001, for example, a quarter of all elementary schools were multigrade schools, the majority of which are located in rural areas. Contrary to other countries, where multigrade schools are conceived as such, with adapted materials and trained teachers, in Mexico, this school system does not originate from an educational choice, but from a lack of resources. Therefore, neither the material, nor the teachers are adapted to the multigrade situation. Slowly more attention is being given to these multigrade schools and some help is given to the teachers, but the underlying issues still need to be tackled (Rosas Carrasco, 2005: 299-301).

Similar problems arise with the *telesecundarias*. In 1966, the Mexican government started to offer televised education in rural areas. The current Red Satelital de Televisión Educativa (EDUSAT) was developed in the 1990's. Today, the *telesecundaria* reaches as many as 20% of Mexican secondary school students, but it neither functions properly nor efficiently (INEGI, 2013a; Calixto Flores & Rebollar Albarrán, 2008: 3-7). At the national ENLACE test, as well as at the *Examen de Ingreso a la Educación Media Superior* (EXANI-I), students of the *telesecundaria* score poorly, especially for reading comprehension and mathematical reasoning. The results of these tests show that very few students of the *telesecundaria* have acquired the necessary knowledge to pursue further academic education beyond secondary school (Calixto Flores & Rebollar Albarrán, 2008: 6).

The model of the *telesecundaria* does not work as it was conceived because of various difficulties. There is, for one, a lack of trained teachers; in many cases there are only one or two teachers for all levels. Moreover, teachers in normal secondary schools usually specialize in one subject; they are not adequately prepared to impart different subjects as required in the *telesecundaria*. In certain multigrade *telesecundarias* one teacher has to give different subjects to different grades, without being properly prepared to do so. In addition, there is a lack of adapted printed material for students and teachers. Furthermore, technical problems are not uncommon. Sometimes the television does not work, or the reception is poor, and in remote communities waiting for repair services or replacement can take forever. In the worst cases, there is no electricity in the school, and thus you

have a *telesecundaria* even without television (Calixto Flores & Rebollar Albarrán, 2008: 6-7; Rosas Carrasco, 2005: 300).

In general, the *telesecundaria* system is treated as inferior by the authorities and not given the necessary attention, however, for many students, it is the only available option for secondary education (Calixto Flores & Rebollar Albarrán, 2008: 8).

On top of the previously mentioned problems encountered by Mexican schools, schools in rural areas can also be negatively impacted by their location and social context of their surroundings. In general, access to resources and targeted educational programs is more difficult in remote areas. Furthermore, disadvantaged areas attract less qualified teachers because of difficult access and the teaching context. From a financial point of view, the low socio-economic level of the region affects the schools; they have more limited donations from parents, and can count less on the support of their municipalities. Besides, parents with a low educational level will not be able to support their children as much with their homework. The social context has thus an influence on the schools' possibilities and on the parents' participation (Santiago, 2012: 26-28; Jiménez Naranjo & Mendoza Zuany, 2012: 427). For indigenous education a similar situation can be observed. The teaching methods and didactic materials are not adapted to the needs of indigenous students, and the teachers are not always qualified or prepared to offer quality education.

In certain areas attending school has been complicated because of situations of insecurity. This insecurity intensified during the last years with the armed conflict between the drugs cartels in the state of Michoacán, for example, or in northern states such as Chihuahua, Coahuila, or Nuevo León. All schools suffer from the growing insecurity, but schools in remote areas are more vulnerable as there is less control from the authorities. In addition to the war on drugs, there are also territorial conflicts making life in the communities difficult, as is the case in the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. In general, many fathers have been killed, or ended up in jail. Many have moved or temporarily migrated to larger cities or the U.S.A.. These conflicts have pushed some mothers to send their children away to study in another town; however, not everybody has the financial means to do so. And thus, children in dangerous communities or in places where school has been closed for safety reasons, are kept at home.

3. Current Situation of Indigenous or Bilingual Education

The *General Education Law* states that speakers of indigenous languages will have access to compulsory education in their own language and in Spanish (Cámara de Diputados, 2013b: Art. 7 §IV). The SEP has thus developed specific education for children living in indigenous communities,

also called bilingual, bicultural, or intercultural education. The goal is "to preserve and promote the customs, traditions, and other elements of the ethnic culture (SEP, 2012a: 250)".

However, it is important to point out that not all indigenous communities and students have access to indigenous education. In Mexico, 24 out of the 32 states offer indigenous education[279]. For the school year 2010-2011, the states with most indigenous primary education centers were Chiapas (2,830 centers), Oaxaca (1,769 centers), Veracrúz (1,040 centers), and Guerrero (906 centers). The same states account for the largest group of students in indigenous primary education: Chiapas (239,945 enrolled students), Oaxaca (140,898 enrolled students), Veracrúz (79,422 enrolled students), and Guerrero (102,947 enrolled students) (DGEI, 2011). It has to be noted that in Yucatán, where almost 30% of the population speaks an indigenous language, only 173 centers exist for indigenous primary education. The same can be observed in the state of Quintana Roo, with around 16% of the people speaking an indigenous language, but only 77 centers for indigenous primary education[280] (INEGI, 2010; DGEI, 2011).

As mentioned before, schools in rural areas, and even more so indigenous schools, are especially vulnerable. Remote places are faced with the difficult access to the community which complicates access for teachers, students, material and financial resources. Insufficient resources often result in schools with poor or no infrastructure.

Another problem is the lack of qualified teachers for indigenous education. Only 24% of teachers in indigenous education have completed their teacher training, 50% have an incomplete training, and as many as 26% have had no teacher training at all (Sandoval Forero & Montoya Arce, 2013: 9). In rural communities, there are preschool and primary school teachers who only finished lower secondary education themselves. Indigenous education is often regarded and treated as inferior to general education. Teachers in bilingual indigenous schools are therefore receiving less respect and are considered less capable by parents and teachers of general schools (Jiménez Naranjo & Mendoza Zuany, 2012: 427). Another problem is that in certain cases indigenous teachers are put in front of children who speak a different indigenous language. As mentioned before, this is further complicated by difficult access to remote communities, and the challenging teaching context. All these factors do not motivate teachers to pursue a job in indigenous education.

[279] Mexican states with indigenous preschool and primary education in 2011: Baja California, Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, México, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Yucatán (DGEI, 2011).

[280] In comparison: Oaxaca has almost 34% of indigenous language speakers, and Chiapas has just over 27% of indigenous language speakers. Guerrero and Veracruz have respectively just over 15% and 9% of indigenous language speakers (INEGI, 2010).

Sandoval and Montoya consider that bilingual and intercultural education in Mexico has not favored indigenous languages. Although officially both Spanish and an indigenous language should be taught, in practice, the teaching language in classrooms is predominantly Spanish, while the use of indigenous languages has been suppressed (Sandoval Forero & Montoya Arce, 2013: 4-5).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the best education policies and teaching practices to ensure a successful indigenous education. Yet until now, the government has not made significant changes, only minor measures have been taken. In general, educational programs and pedagogic methods are defined at a national level, without any input from the indigenous communities, and are thus not adapted to their social context. The lack of connection between the official educational system and the indigenous communities resulted in distrust and reluctance of certain parents to send their children to school. Inevitably, this has a negative impact on the children (Sandoval Forero & Montoya Arce, 2013: 11-13).

There is currently no good and consistent policy for indigenous education in Mexico, which shows that the national state does not respect indigenous peoples nor indigenous languages. According to the UNDRIP (Art. 14) and the Mexican Constitution (Art. 2 & 3), adequate education should be a basic right, but the national authorities do not seem serious about giving indigenous peoples education in their own languages. The SEP makes very little material available in the different indigenous languages. Currently, there are only official textbooks for first or incipient grades in 42 of the 68 indigenous languages[281] (CONALITEG, 2014). With a couple of specific books in a few indigenous languages the task seems to be considered completed. It is generally observed that even these incipient text books are not put into practice. Materials in indigenous languages are not considered to be part of the normal production of textbooks, but rather exotic exceptions. This attitude shows that the national authorities are not serious about indigenous education. If they were, all the free textbooks of the SEP would be available in the different indigenous languages.

Current indigenous education is not strengthening indigenous language and identity. It is still part of a dominating and colonizing system focused on teaching its students Spanish, on homogenizing their culture, and making them fit in the national education system. This system puts indigenous students at a disadvantage, and creates a major obstacle in their education.

It should be understood that in general in Mexico the concept of bilingual education is interpreted in a very specific and restricted manner. The idea of this education system is that children that speak an indigenous language are taught Spanish, so that they become bilingual. Native speakers of

[281] Officially Mexico has 11 indigenous language families, with 68 language groups, and 364 language variations (INALI, 2008).

indigenous languages may be employed as teachers, but only to use the indigenous language in an incidental manner to facilitate instruction in Spanish. Besides, there is an enormous lack of studies of Mesoamerican languages and literatures. There are hardly any grammars, dictionaries, culturally relevant texts or literature that could be used as course books. Obviously, the teaching of Mesoamerican languages demands on the part of the teacher – even if he or she is a native speaker – a thorough specialist didactic schooling and linguistic-literary preparation, which are generally not part of the programs of the institutions where teachers are formed (Normal, Normal Superior, or Universidad Pedagógica Nacional). After decades of talking about bilingual education, no significant progress has been made in this practical aspect of preparing human resources and adequate teaching tools – so one doubts if there was ever a serious intention to develop this modality of education.

Consequently, young indigenous students are obliged to learn Spanish in primary school, but as the general education level in rural areas is poor, their Spanish remains at a low level. To go to the *bachillerato*, students often have to travel to other towns or cities to find themselves in a classroom with native speakers of Spanish. The indigenous students are expected to adapt to the situation, but the courses are particularly difficult for them because of their considerable language arrears. Little attention seems to be given to this problem. In addition, indigenous students keep suffering from discrimination and negative stereotypes, such as being considered less intelligent because of their difficulties with the Spanish language. However, the reason for their difficulties is the fact that the national government does not provide them with an education system that is adapted to their real needs. Indigenous students are denied the right to receive education in their own language, and to develop their own identity and capacities at school. They have to conform to a dominating system. In addition, the education provided is of a very poor level, thus further burdening their outlook in life.

The language issue was illustrated in my contacts with indigenous Triqui girls of the *bachillerato*. They followed basic education in a school in their own community, but for security reasons, as a result of the Triqui conflicts, they moved to a *bachillerato* in a small town near the city of Oaxaca, about four hours from their home town. At home and in their community, these girls speak their native Triqui[282]. Traditionally, this is mainly an oral language. Several of their parents and grandparents are monolingual Triqui speakers. But no official education in Triqui was available, so the girls had to start learning Spanish at school. The level of Spanish they were taught in primary and lower secondary school was very poor, which became obvious in conversations with them; their vocabulary is limited, they often have to search for the right words in Spanish, they speak in easy sentences, and have a particular accent. When watching them read a street sign, I realized they also

[282] Triqui is an Oto-Manguean language belonging to the linguistic subgroup of the Mixtecan languages. According to the 2010 census, there are about 25,883 Triqui speakers (of five years and older) (INEGI, 2010).

had difficulties reading. These girls between 15 and 19 years old had the reading ability of primary school children, spelling each letter out loud, trying to figure out the right word to form the sentence. They are barely coping with Spanish – a language pronounced almost literally as it is written –, but they have to take English lessons as well. For them, even basic English words are a real challenge. Their speaking and reading difficulties have nothing to do with their level of intelligence, but are due to the lack of access to adequate education that is adapted to their needs. They are denied the right to receive education in their own language, and in addition the poor Spanish education stigmatizes them, reinforces the negative stereotypes, and puts their future at stake.

Zaira Hipólito gave a similar testimony regarding superior education. Professors at university, not conscious of the difficulties of indigenous students, provide reading materials in English and French. Part of the non-indigenous students have had English since primary school; however, English was not taught in the public primary school of Hipólito, in Tanetze de Zaragoza in the state of Oaxaca and in secondary school, she only had two hours of English a week. Both Hipólito and the Triqui students were told by teachers that learning a third language should be easy as they already knew two other languages. Nothing is further from the truth though (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012). Although the teachers' comments might be well-intended, they do not take the learning context and the poor level of education of indigenous students into account. Mexican education is not adapted to the needs of its indigenous peoples; indigenous students have to adapt to a national education system that does not take them into account.

4. Racism and Discrimination of Indigenous Children

In general, indigenous peoples are confronted with racism and discrimination in numerous places, and school is no exception. Indigenous students can be ridiculed because of their accent, their physical characteristics or for speaking another language. They are often considered to be less intelligent by their fellow class mates, but sometimes also by their teachers. It is not uncommon for indigenous children to be insulted by their teachers (SEP, 2009: 110).

This racism has been interiorized by indigenous peoples. They have been taught that they are indeed inferior to the mestizo and white population. Therefore they can sometimes be intimidated and reluctant to speak up in the company of non-indigenous persons. This attitude can also be observed in the classroom. Teachers should be aware of this and support, stimulate, and train timid indigenous students to make their voice heard, in order to strengthen their self-confidence.

The Triqui girls I met did not mention feeling discriminated at school. Their classmates rather seem to be curious about the language they speak, and have asked them to teach them some words. But others had more negative experiences. Judith Bautista has done research on racism in Mexico, based

on her own life experiences. She was discriminated based on her physical appearance, even at university. It was certainly not the only occasion, but to illustrate what she experienced, Bautista recalls a professor giving a reading assignment with a Maya woman on the cover. She noticed a group of girls laughing and making comments on her own physical characteristics and she heard them say: "Even the woman on the cover is more beautiful than her". At other occasions, girls pulled her braids when she passed by. This happened at university, at a time when leftist classmates were supposedly very concerned about the situation of indigenous peoples (Bautista, personal communication, 2012).

Indigenous students already have a hard time catching up with the curriculum; being discriminated in the classroom makes life at school even harder and does not encourage them to pursue further education.

For researchers Sandoval and Montoya, the Mexican state gives too little attention to indigenous education, and does not commit to offer quality education to indigenous peoples (Sandoval Forero & Montoya Arce, 2013: 12-13). Following the UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights* (1996), they state that:

> "Most governments still define and exercise assimilation policies. An intelligent policy regarding minorities should preserve their languages, giving them the opportunity to integrate into the majoritarian community. School has to teach various languages, especially the local language (or that of the minority), and the language of the majority, in order to offer people opportunities to develop their capacities (Sandoval Forero & Montoya Arce, 2013: 5)[283]."

Thus, they believe Mexican government still adheres to assimilation politics. Benjamín Maldonado takes it one step further. He states that Mexican national education has had an ethnocide function, and that it continues to result in acculturation (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 124-125). Maldonado states:

> "The intention of the Mexican state is to maintain domination, given that ethnic liberation would break its structure. […] Official education has been one of the principal platforms for the expression of this function of domination, and school has

[283] Original: "La mayoría de los gobiernos todavía definen y practican políticas de asimilación. Una política inteligente con respecto a las minorías debería de preservar sus lenguas, brindándoles la oportunidad de integrarse a la comunidad mayoritaria. La escuela debe enseñar varias lenguas, especialmente la lengua local (o de la minoría) y la lengua de la mayoría, a fin de ofrecer a las personas oportunidades para que desarrollen sus capacidades."

> been its principal weapon. […]. For the Mexican regime, equality is not conceived as *different* individuals who interact in equal circumstances, but in making only *equals* interact, from an equality that implies homogeneity and is defined by the State itself. This shows that plurality only exists in the discourse: diversity exists, but it is neither respected, nor tolerated (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 126-127, emphasis in original)[284]."

For Maldonado, cultural diversity has not been respected in Mexico, and education has played an important role in the continuing intolerance. It is also clear that the problem with indigenous education is much more than a pedagogic problem; it is closely interwoven with ethnopolitics and with indigenous rights:

> "Every time it becomes clearer that the educational problem is an ethnopolitical problem which cannot be resolved at a pedagogic level only. It is not a fight to incorporate ethnic contents, but to recover the educational function – left in the hands of school and teachers –, which implies the reorientation of the reproduction of indigenous cultures to a self-determined future. Here lies the importance to establish a sample of this set of indigenous experiences in the context of the material and mental progress of school in indigenous territory (Maldonado Alvarado, 2002: 148-149)[285]."

Providing adapted teaching contents is crucial to offer qualitative indigenous education. But in addition, fundamental actions are needed at numerous other levels of Mexican society.

[284] Original: "La intención del Estado mexicano es mantener la dominación dado que la liberación étnica rompería su estructura. [...] La educación oficial ha sido uno de los escenarios principales para la expresión de esta función de dominación, y la escuela ha sido su principal arma. [...] La igualdad para el régimen mexicano no es concebida como *distintos* que interactuan en igualdad de circunstancias, sino en hacer que sólo interactúen *iguales*, a partir de una igualdad que implica homogeneidad y es definida por el mismo Estado. De esto se desprende que la pluralidad no exista más que en el discurso: existe la diversidad pero no se le respeta ni tolera."

[285] Original: "Cada vez es más claro que el problema educativo es un problema etnopolítico que no puede resolverse sólo a nivel pedagógico. Es decir, que no es una lucha por incorporar contenidos étnicos a la escuela sino de recuperar la función educativa – dejada en manos de escuela y maestros –, lo que implica volver a orientar la reproducción de las culturas indias hacia un futuro autodefinido. En esto radica la importancia de ubicar una muestra de este conjunto de experiencias indias en el contexto del avance material y mental de la escuela en territorio indio."

D. Gender Policies in Mexican Education: More Than Good Intentions?

A final subject that has to be discussed is that of gender in Mexican education. What is the situation of girls in Mexican education? Specific attention will be given to indigenous girls.

1. Legal Context

The introduction of specific gender policies in Mexican education is quite recent. The 2007 *General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence* (*Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia)* stated that the SEP had to promote a life free of violence at school. The SEP recognized that:

> "Gender stereotypes, roles and preconceptions, as well as sexist practices, are repeated, transmitted, and reinforced at school in varying ways – often unconsciously –, be it in collective activities, work within the classroom, attitudes and behavior, or interpersonal interactions and relations (SEP, 2010: 28)[286]."

Consequently, the SEP actively started to include a gender perspective in Mexican education policy, wanting to "deconstruct the stereotypes and social roles that perpetuate the inequality between women and men, and also to make visible and denaturalize gender discrimination and violence (SEP, 2010: 9)".

The *General Education Law* (*Ley General de Educación*) states, in more general terms, that Mexican education has to:

> "Promote the value of justice, observance of law, and equality of the individuals towards it; promote the culture of legality, of peace and non-violence in any of its manifestations, as well as knowledge of Human Rights and respect of the latter (Cámara de Diputados, 2013b: Art. 7 §VI)[287]."

This law addresses discrimination and violence, but the term 'gender' is not mentioned explicitly.

[286] Original: "Los estereotipos, roles y sesgos de género, así como las prácticas sexistas se repiten, transmiten y refuerzan de manera variable en la escuela — muchas veces inconscientemente —, sea en las actividades colectivas, en el trabajo dentro del aula, en las actitudes y comportamientos o en las interacciones y relaciones interpersonales."

[287] Original: "Promover el valor de la justicia, de la observancia de la Ley y de la igualdad de los individuos ante ésta, propiciar la cultura de la legalidad, de la paz y la no violencia en cualquier tipo de sus manifestaciones, así como el conocimiento de los Derechos Humanos y el respeto a los mismos."

2. Equal Access to Education

When looking at the gender statistics on Mexican education, the overall situation of boys and girls is quite balanced. It can be observed that there are slightly more men than women going to school (50.8% of students is male, while 49.2% of students is female[288]) (INEGI, 2013a). Regarding the schooling level, little difference exists between the average number of years a boy and a girl attend school. However, girls still have a slight disadvantage. At a national level, the average schooling level[289] of men in 2010 was 8.7 years, versus 8.4 years for women. In Chiapas, the difference was the largest, with respectively 7 and 6.2 average years of schooling for men and women. Yet in 6 of the 32 states women had a slightly higher schooling level than men (INEGI, 2010[290]).

More improvements can be noted. When focusing on the age group between 15 and 29 years only, women appear to be slowly excelling men, reaching higher schooling levels. For the age group between 15 and 24 years, Chiapas is the only state where boys still have a slightly higher schooling level than girls (INEGI, 2010[291]).

This evolution regarding access to education was illustrated by Lucía, an indigenous Triqui girl of the state of Oaxaca. When we met, Lucía was 16 years old and following the first year of *bachillerato*. She is the youngest of several siblings. In the generation of her mother, girls did not go to school; her two oldest sisters only finished primary school; her third sister stopped after secondary school; her next sister finished *bachillerato* and was looking for a university likely to accept her average mark of 6 out of 10; when we met, Lucía and her youngest brother were attending the *bachilllerato* (Lucía, personal communication, 2012). She finished the *bachillerato* in 2014 and wanted to pursue further education, but the university of her choice was located too far away, and therefore too expensive for her family. Finally, she started studying engineering in a local public university near the city of Oaxaca (Lucía, personal communication, 2015).

In general, Mexican girls and boys have equal access to education, even in more deprived regions. The younger generations of girls are also staying longer at school. This equal access to education is very important, but more steps are needed. A gender perspective is also necessary in education policy and educational practice, be it in educational material, study content, or day-to-day treatment of female pupils.

[288] It is worth noting that 48.8% of the overall Mexican population is male and 51.1% is female (INEGI, 2010).
[289] This is the average schooling level of Mexican women and men, from 15 to over 85 years of age.
[290] Population of 15 years and older per federative entity, sex, and five-year age groups, according to the education level and average schooling years (INEGI, 2010).
[291] Idem.

3. Gender in Mexican Textbooks

The fruit of the SEP's efforts can be witnessed in their compulsory textbooks. It is important to analyze these textbooks as they constitute the materials all Mexican children are working with; they are an important part of what students learn in the classroom. Both private and public elementary schools throughout the country are obliged to use the free textbooks provided by the SEP for all courses. While these textbooks have improved in certain aspects over the years, the editions for the academic year 2013-2014 were criticized because they contained numerous spelling mistakes and other flagrant content errors (González Flores, 2013).

Despite these problems, the current SEP textbooks for primary education are designed with special attention for gender equality and diversity. The children are always addressed as both girls and boys ("niñas y niños"), and the illustrations show an equal amount of boys and girls, as well as people of different ethnicity and age. This is especially the case for the textbooks for Civic and Ethic Education. These textbooks give specific attention to people with different cultural backgrounds in the context of the discussed subjects, but also show images of people with different skin tones and traditional clothing. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on tolerance, mutual respect, resolving problems without violence, respect for disabilities, etcetera. These topics are recurring in the Civic and Ethic Education textbooks from first grade to sixth grade of primary school. On the other hand, the attention for indigenous history, culture, art, and literature remains minimal and even has downgraded.

Gender equality is addressed as a specific subject of discussion in the SEP textbooks for Civic and Ethic Education of the fifth grade of primary school (SEP, 2012b). The texts in the book stimulate appreciation of diversity and advocate against discrimination, stereotyping, and violence. They also ask students to be critical when analyzing images shown in the media. Other subjects are treated, such as puberty, a healthy life, addiction, disability, violence within the community, human rights, children's rights, justice, sports and recreation, etcetera. The focus lies on physical and emotional integrity and security. In a subsection on discrimination, discrimination against women and indigenous peoples is explicitly mentioned (SEP, 2012b: 63). There is also a contribution on female writers in Mexican history (SEP, 2012b: 87).

Specific references to gender equality are nevertheless quite short and are mainly limited to the Civic and Ethics' textbooks. In primary school history textbooks, for example, history is still addressed in a rather traditional and male biased way, with only little reference to women in Mexican history (SEP, 2012c). There is still room for improvement, but it is true that policy makers are giving attention to the gender perspective in compulsory textbooks, and by extension, in general communication of the

SEP as well, such as government campaigns addressed at children or linked to education, consistently showing girls and boys as equals.

4. And in Practice…

The SEP has made significant efforts to include a gender perspective in Mexican education, and to adopt an institutional discourse encouraging equality and opposing discrimination and violence. Much attention is given to stress the equality of boys and girls, and to ensure equal access to education for both genders. This is obvious in their education policy and educational material. Important progress has been made in these areas. However, when looking at the school context, it has to be noted that the integrated gender approach has not yet reached the class rooms. Although improvements can be seen, in practice, there is still a predominance of gender stereotyping in Mexican schools (SEP, 2009: 13).

First, teachers seem to consider gender equality as a subject of minor importance. I saw this illustrated while talking to my cousins who were at a private primary school in Mexico City. I asked them how they experienced the lessons on gender equality. My fifteen-year-old cousin recalled having talked about gender issues during Civic and Ethic Education classes; however, he testified it was only treated very briefly. For the teacher, this did not seem to be a very relevant topic and she assumed the students were already acquainted with the issue. In general, Civic and Ethic Education is seen as a more light and relaxed course. My eleven-year-old cousin told me: “When we have a bad day and we are too noisy, making trouble and not participating properly in a serious class such as mathematics or Spanish, the teacher says “Ok, calm down, let’s take our Civic and Ethic book”, and we have a more relaxed class to make us calm down (personal communication, 2010).” This serves to illustrate how subjects such as gender equality, non-discrimination, and non-violence are given limited importance in the context of the class room. It is an unfortunate reality considering the problems Mexico has related to these topics. School is a crucial place to address these issues in early education of children and youngsters.

Furthermore, the institutional discourse may have changed in favor of a gendered approach, but some teachers still adhere to traditional views on gender relations, and consciously or subconsciously pass these views on to their students. They may, for example, give more attention to boys than to girls, or be more indulgent with girls and more demanding with boys, or consider certain calm activities more suitable for girls while boys are allowed to participate in more boisterous games – for example, girls may be discouraged to come too close to the sports field. This can be true in urban as well as in rural schools, in low as well as high level social groups, and irrespective of the type of education (SEP, 2010: 29). Thus, the attitude towards a gendered approach in the class room is still

very traditional. It is clear that teachers need to be made more aware of the importance of gender policies.

The harmful effects of this traditional gender approach in education can be illustrated by a testimony of Dr. Jeanett Reynoso Noverón, lecturer at the Center for Hispanic Linguistics of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Each year the renowned Feria Internacional del Libro takes place in the Mexican city of Guadalajara. This is one of the largest book fairs in the world for publications in Spanish. During the fair, many cultural activities take place, and for this occasion Dr. Reynoso gave a lecture for a large audience including groups of primary school children. For the latter this was a compulsory activity, therefore after the lecture they came to Dr. Reynoso so she would sign off their attendance certificates. While she was chatting casually with the children, Dr. Reynoso's five-year old daughter interrupted her mother to ask something. Suddenly the children became aware of the fact that Dr. Reynoso was not only a university professor, but also a 'normal mum' – to quote Dr. Reynoso: "with a backpack full of wet wipes, cookies, and *Boing*[292] fruit juices". They looked at her full of surprise. One girl of about eleven years old stepped forward, and asked incredulously: "Then, madam, can we women also be intelligent (Reynoso, personal communication, 2011)?"

It has to be questioned what kind of female role models this girl sees, and what she is thought at home and at school about being a woman? How is it possible that a girl who attends school in the second most densely populated city in Mexico, has such a question? And if a girl in an urban context has these preconceptions, what happens with girls in rural environments?

After finishing school, the prevalence of traditional gender roles can be seen in following life choices. In the 15 to 29 age group, 24.7% of Mexicans is neither employed, nor at school or in training ("ni estudia, ni trabaja", the so-called 'nini' generation). The percentages of female 'nini's' is more than three times higher than that of male (37.8% compared to 11%). This difference is indicative of a high percentage of women staying at home as housewives rather than pursuing studies. The OECD points out that the number of 'nini's' remained constant over the last decade. This is no result of the economic crisis, but rather points to a structural problem within Mexican education (OECD, 2013: 5-6).

[292] *Boing* is a popular Mexican brand of fruit juices.

5. Indigenous Girls in Mexican Education

Indigenous girls are among the most vulnerable students in Mexican education as they are faced with a combination of all problems mentioned above. Most indigenous girls have a low socio-economic background, and in this context they often only have access to public schools with limited financial and material resources. In addition, indigenous girls face the difficulties of being an indigenous student, such as an educational system not adapted to their needs, schools with poor infrastructure, bad teachers, discrimination, or language issues.

On top of these issues indigenous girls are confronted with gender related situations. In rural areas, teachers and parents may have more traditional views on the educational perspectives of girls. They might not find it necessary for a girl to study. Teachers can therefore show more marked gender specific behavior, giving less attention to and putting less effort in the education of girls because they are expected to get married very young, drop out of school, and become housewives. Judith Bautista Pérez describes how in her Zapotec community people look differently at a woman who has studied. According to her, people are intimidated by a woman with power, making it, for example, difficult for such a woman to find a husband within the community (Bautista, personal communication, 2012).

Unfortunately, many girls with low social backgrounds, including many indigenous girls, stop going to school after secondary school or before ending the *bachillerato*, to start working, to help and support their family, to marry, or because they become pregnant. I met several indigenous Triqui girls in 2012; in 2014, I spoke again with one of the girls that had been in the second year of *bachillerato* when we met (she was 19 years at that time and had already some educational arrears). I asked her whether she was still at school, or if she had finished her *bachillerato*, and if so what she was doing now. Her answer was illustrative of the situation of many girls with lower social backgrounds. Regrettably, she stopped attending school in Oaxaca, moved to Mexico City where her parents were living, and had to start working because her parents needed help, thus not finishing her *bachillerato*. By the end of 2014 she had also given birth to a little girl (Alejandra, personal communication, 2014). Another of the Triqui girls recounted that girls and boys in her community used to marry around 12 years old. Today, their average marriage age is around 17 or 18 years, because they go to school first. She has a cousin though who married at only 11 years of age (Martha, personal communication, 2012). Adriana Márquez testifies that in her Zapotec community[293], girls often only finish primary school, and then get married (Márquez, personal communication, 2011).

According to the Mexican Civil Code the minimum legal age for men to get married is sixteen years; for women it is the tender age of fourteen years old (Cámara de Diputados, 2014a: Art. 148).

[293] The Zapotec community of La Guadalupe, a locality of La Pe in the District of Ejutla in the state of Oaxaca.

Statistics show that most of the girls marrying at eighteen years or younger are from the states of Guerrero (31.9% of women getting married), Chiapas (23.6% of women getting married), and Oaxaca (20.9% of women getting married), all states with the highest percentages of indigenous population (INEGI, 2012b). Girls marrying in this age group will not finish secondary school.

The financial situation of the family can also have a negative impact for a girl. Sending children to school is expensive for families in precarious situations; at least a uniform and school supplies have to be bought, and if the school is far away, transportation costs have to be added. In addition, school going children can help less at home and on the field, so the parents lose a set of hands. If financially the family can only send one child to school, they will more likely choose the boy over the girl, as she will probably get married and become a housewife anyway. In the meantime she can help her mother at home and learn the necessary skills to be a good wife.

Some girls have to work themselves to be able to go to school. As of the age of 11, Judith Bautista Pérez worked as a domestic help in order to fund secondary school attendance in Oaxaca. Her situation was not easy; there was a moment when she and her mother had to share the same pair of used shoes, her mother to go to work, she to go to school. A new pair cost 50 pesos, which was an incredible amount of money for them. A few years later, her family only had money to send one child to university. Atypical for a male-centered culture, her brother relinquished his option to study and started working so she only had to work part time and could thus also go to university. One generation earlier, her mother had stopped school after the second year of primary education and started working in Mexico City as a domestic help at the tender age of eight years old (Bautista, personal communication, 2012).

Yet, studying girls are not always discouraged. Zaira Hipólito testifies that it was not common in her Zapotec community to leave the village to study. She studied psychology and even did a postgraduate in Chile. Initially she was afraid of what people might say but, to her own surprise, she received a lot of support. Men reacted surprised by her daring, but did not disapprove, and the women encouraged her. In general, both men and women valued her efforts to pursue further education, and admired her courage. She often heard: "What good that you dared![294]". Some even asked why she did not stay in Chile after her studies (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012).

[294] Original: "¡Qué bueno que te atreviste!"

Eufrosina Cruz affirms education has been very important in her process of emancipation, and has been essential in being conscious about her rights:

> "Education is everything, because it allows you access to freedom. Education teaches you the meaning of the word justice, it allows you to know that we have the right to enter a university. Our features tell us we are indigenous, but we have rights, like the other people who are not. I have been told I am a 'light' indigenous woman, because they have seen me eat in restaurants. But through education, I learned what I can do. It has shown me that I have the right to the same as the rest of Mexicans, because I am a Mexican citizen too (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 92)[295]."

The Trap of Domestic Work

Yet, not every girl finishes school. To be able to support their family, many indigenous girls move to urban areas and end up in domestic work. Most often they work fulltime in a middle or high class private home where they primarily take care of the household and the cooking. In some cases they also take care of the children. It is very common for domestic workers to reside in a small room in their employer's home.

Domestic work is primarily a female job: 11,50% of working women in Mexico are employed in domestic work, and almost 90% of domestic workers are women[296] (INEGI, 2014). Furthermore, domestic work has become a stereotypical activity for indigenous girls and women leaving their village. No qualifications are required and even very young girls can handle the work[297], but the jobs are precarious, with extremely low wages, long hours, and with virtually no legal or social protection (Arrieta, 2008; CONAPRED, 2010).

[295] Original: "La educación lo es todo porque te permite acceder a la libertad. La educación te enseña el significado de la palabra justicia, te permite saber que tenemos derecho a entrar a una universidad. Nuestras facciones nos dicen que somos indígenas, pero tenemos derechos como el resto de las personas que no lo son. A mí me han dicho que soy una indígena light porque me han visto comer en restaurantes. Pero saber lo que puedo hacer me lo ha dado la educación, porque me ha mostrado que yo tengo derecho a lo mismo que tienen el resto de mexicanos, porque yo también soy una ciudadana mexicana (Gómez-Rodulfo, 2012: 92)."

[296] There are 2.1 million female domestic workers in Mexico (INEGI, 2014).

[297] We have for example already seen that Judith Bautista was eleven years old when she started working as a domestic worker.

In Mexican society, domestic workers can be found in many homes, but they are invisible and worth close to nothing. This is reflected in the way domestic workers are often treated. Judith Bautista testifies how she became invisible:

> "You are a piece of household furniture. You lose your status as subject, you lose your essence as a person. You are an unobtrusive accessory. As long as you do things good, you can go unnoticed (Bautista, personal communication, 2012)[298]."

The women and girls working in this sector are exposed to different forms of exploitation and abuse. Domestic workers can be ignored, shouted at, and even physically abused and sexually harassed. The domestic worker can complain, but as the abuse takes place in a private environment, little can be done to protect her. The employer will always be believed first, and the domestic worker risks for example being falsely accused of robbery, impeding the search for a new job (CONAPRED, 2010).

In addition to the possible abuse, if girls start working before they finish school, domestic work excludes them from social agency, and further education. Employers rarely give them the opportunity to continue their education. According to official statistics, 46,7% of female domestic workers only have a primary education level (INEGI, 2013c). These women have very little chances of ever improving their labor situation.

Household tasks are in general undervalued in society. Consequently, domestic workers are not valued either (Arrieta, 2008: 11). Female indigenous domestic workers are thus even more vulnerable as they suffer from multiple discrimination based on their gender, ethnic background, social class, and job. On a psychological level, discrimination they suffer as domestic worker reinforces their feeling of inferiority vis-a-vis the mestizo population. The mestizo, on the other hand, sees a confirmation of the stereotype of indigenous peoples as subordinated 'natural servants'.

An essential step towards the recognition and the protection of domestic workers in Mexico would be the introduction of a legal framework that would move domestic work out of the informal sphere. This sector concerns a lot of people who have currently no legal protection. In the fourth trimester of 2014, 4,8% of all workers in Mexico were employed in domestic work[299]. They outnumber other groups such as the employees in education (3,6%), and the officers and executives of the public, private, and social sectors (1,8%) (INEGI, 2014). Domestic workers constitute thus a considerable workforce, of primarily women, that has no legal protection. In a country with a strong syndical

[298] Original: "Eres un mueble de la casa. Pierdes tu condición de sujeta, pierdes tu esencia de que eres una persona. Eres un accesorio que tampoco molesta. En la medida que tu haces algo bien puedes pasar desapercibida."

[299] More concretely, there are about 2.4 million domestic workers in Mexico (INEGI, 2014).

tradition, it is striking how little attention is given to this group of workers. This illustrates how invisible they are in Mexican society. The CONAPRED rightfully states:

> "Their economic invisibility and their exclusion as subjects of human labor rights is not based on a question of numbers, it is symptomatic of the discrimination (CONAPRED, 2010: 8)[300]."

Paradoxically, the presence of domestic workers has been key in the participation of women on the labor market. Middle and high class women in Mexico, and in other parts of the world, have been able to work outside the home because they had somebody to take care of their household. It is paradoxical that for certain women to be able to gain economic independence and find a balance between work and family life, other women have to work in precarious jobs away from their families. Thus, the presence of women on the labor market has not changed traditional gender roles. Men have not taken up part of the household responsibilities, the gendered division of time use remains the same, but other women are exploited to maintain this situation.

E. Conclusion

In this chapter a general overview was given of the structure of Mexican education, and of the main problems of the Mexican educational system. This was followed by an analysis of the specific problems of Mexican education in a rural and indigenous context. A final part focused on the situation of girls in Mexican education. Specific attention was given to the issues faced by indigenous girls within the context of indigenous and general education. Is education improving the situation of indigenous girls in Mexico? What opportunities does education offer these girls? Do they get the same educational opportunities as boys? Is education adapted to their needs?

Mexican education faces many structural problems. The main issues are the dominance of the teachers' unions; the waste and unequal distribution of resources, leading to problems with the infrastructure and the didactic materials; the poor quality of the education, partly due to a lack of professionalization of the teachers; and the use of educational programs that are not adapted to the varying teaching contexts. The government needs to invest in more correct and complete evaluations of schools and teachers to be able to develop concrete and efficient actions to improve the quality of Mexican education.

[300] Original: "Su invisibilidad económica y su exclusión como sujetos de derechos humanos laborales no se fundamenta en una cuestión de cifras, sino que es sintomática de la discriminación."

Especially rural communities need to have better infrastructure, such as safe and functioning school buildings and the necessary didactical material. They also need teachers specially trained to teach in the rural context. Currently, education in rural areas is of poor quality. On top of these structural problems, indigenous students in all modalities of education face racism and discrimination. They are often treated as inferior to non-indigenous students, both by teachers and classmates, and often considered intellectually less capable. Indigenous education has been one of the most vulnerable types of education. In addition to a lack of resources, the main problem is that educational programs for indigenous education are designed at a national level, with little or no input from indigenous communities. The government has shown a lack of commitment regarding indigenous education. Indigenous students have been denied the right to have access to education in their own languages. Very few textbooks in indigenous languages are available. Existing programs are not adapted to the needs of indigenous students; the students are expected to adapt to a system in which there is no respect for their cultural identity and language. The poor education available for indigenous students has only reinforced the negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual capacities.

In addition to the general situation of Mexican education, attention was also given to the way gender is approached in Mexican education. This can help us understand how gender relations in Mexico are defined, how they are perpetuated, and how they could be improved. Since a few years, policies on gender equality have been actively developed for Mexican education. In general, girls and boys have equal access to education, even in more disadvantaged areas. In some states, girls even managed to reach higher schooling levels than boys. Both the institutional discourse and teaching materials include a clear gender perspective. But, the importance of including this gender perspective in the educational practice has not yet reached all classrooms. Teachers do not seem to be aware of the importance of teaching and applying gender equality. Consciously or subconsciously, teachers are passing on their sometimes traditional views on gender relations to their students.

Indigenous girls in particular can suffer from traditional views on gender relations. Their main role is still that of caretaker, and thus indigenous girls often drop out of school to get married, support their parents, or start a family. Having education is important, so a first step would be to encourage more girls to stay at school, to finish their education before getting married. This message should be given at school, but also in the media, and to parents. Raising the legal marriage age would be another important step for the national authorities to take. By postponing their marriage, these girls could at least finish their secondary education, and maybe also pursue further education, improving their chances for economic independence. Raising the legal marriage age would be a signal of real commitment by the government as it would enable the general emancipation of women. However,

as the Church marriage is considered much more important in Mexico than the civil marriage, the Church should also play an important role in encouraging girls to finish school before getting married.

There is also a need for targeted sexual education to reduce the numbers of teenage pregnancies. However, if the level of education remains poor, staying at school will not help teenagers much. A general improvement of their education is necessary.

While the focus here lies on indigenous girls, it is important to realize that many of their issues, especially regarding traditional gender views, can also be found in other social groups, both in rural, urban, low, and even in high social classes.

The intentions of policy makers regarding gender equality and non-discrimination have been positive, and efforts have been made to improve the situation of girls and indigenous students. However, the effects of these policies have been limited, and overall too little attention has been given to the reality in the field. Policies have been developed, but without input of the day-to-day experiences of teachers and communities.

Leo Zuckermann Behar, political analyst and professor at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), states:

> "This is, I believe, one of the big failures of Mexican Revolution: at a hundred years of its beginnings, education has not turned, as we can see, in a factor of social mobility, on the contrary […] Mexican education does not transform society, it reproduces the existing inequality (Zuckermann, 2010)[301]."

"We Are Educated, But Now What?"

The ideal would be that all indigenous students, both boys and girls, would have access to high quality education, based on their social and cultural needs. However, Zaira Hipólito López, a young Zapotec psychologist and part of the indigenous movement, is critical about this position because in her opinion it is not enough: "We are educated, but now what?" Zaira points out that education is a good start, but at this moment there is also a lack of opportunities for young people returning to their rural communities. Their diplomas do not match the job offers currently available in these communities. As a result, almost only teachers can return, while the other intellectual potential is

[301] Original: "E ahí me parece uno de los grandes fracasos de la Revolución mexicana: a cien años de su inicio, la educación no se convirtió, como vemos, en un factor de movilidad social, por el contrario [...] la educación en México no transforma la sociedad, reproduce la desigualdad que existe."

lost. Most indigenous persons who had the opportunity to study, moved to the cities. This shows that the problem with education is part of a much larger and complex issue within Mexican society.

Until now the Mexican government has only seen assistentialist politics as a solution to the problem. There is rather a need for employment opportunities and worthy wages within communities, to avoid situations where, for example, engineers can only stay in the community if they become school teachers. At the same time there are very few people graduating in agricultural sciences, of use in rural communities. Education alone does not resolve the reality of the community; it might offer better options, but economically it does not guarantee success. Thus, indigenous peoples face the dilemma: study to stay or study to leave? Many people with education do not return to the community because there are no real job opportunities for them (Hipólito, personal communication, 2012).

It is a common misconception that education is a guarantee for a successful future. This has especially been true for indigenous peoples. People are educated now, but they are still in a similar economic situation. This idea that education is the way out of misery can also affect educated individuals. Judith Bautista, who has a graduate in sociology, testified:

> "I am a woman and I am the eldest, and that weighs. The family thinks that you have made it, and that you can have access to better economic conditions, even if this is untrue. Nevertheless, this weighs so much that you have to hand in what you do not have to help your family in whatever they need (Bautista, personal communication, 2012)[302]."

She has had to work because of the pressure and the expectation that she would provide for her parents, her godmother, her two grandmothers, her uncle, etcetera. The idea persists that she has her future all worked out. In addition, it is seen almost as her obligation as a daughter to care for and provide for her family (Bautista, personal communication, 2012).

Education is crucial in the development of individuals, but measures have to be taken that go much further than creating a good educational system. Especially in rural areas, a good interaction between the educational offer and the labor market is needed. The government should also invest in the development of businesses in these areas, creating economic potential and job opportunities within the communities. This would eventually benefit the development of these communities and

[302] Original: "Soy mujer y soy la mayor y eso pesa. La familia cree que tu ya la tienes librada y que puedes tener acceso a condiciones económicas más grandes, aunque eso no sea verdad. Pero sin embargo eso pesa a tal grado que tienes que entregar de tí lo que no tienes para sacar a flote lo que necesita tu familia."

neighboring regions. Making education useful will stimulate more students to finish school and pursue further education.

Flor Julián testifies that even if girls have studied, part of them will return to their communities and repeat the existing patterns of subordination, of domestic violence, etcetera (Julián, 2012). This illustrates again that providing education is important but only a first step in addressing a complex issue.

To really offer indigenous girls better opportunities, the quality of Mexican education has to be improved at all levels in parallel with social and economic developments in their home regions. This education needs to give special attention to combating stereotypes, and changing mentalities. Finally, there is a need for educational strategies adapted to the different contexts of the students, especially in rural areas and in indigenous communities. The cultural diversity of Mexico should not be seen as an obstacle, but as an enrichment and an opportunity.

VII. General Conclusion

Indigenous peoples' rights have been on the international political agenda for over fifty years. A major step forward was taken with the adoption of the almost universally endorsed *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in 2007.

The UNDRIP stresses the need for specific measures for indigenous women, but remains very vague on the concrete issues indigenous women are confronted with. This illustrates the still limited attention given to indigenous women, even at international level. The absence of attention for women's issues is due to the lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the role women play in society and development of communities. It also illustrates the subordinated position women continue to have in society in general.

This research aims to contribute to the visibility of indigenous women and to give an overview of some of the challenges indigenous women are still facing, focusing on the specific case of Mexico. It is an effort to identify some of the fields in which indigenous women's rights are still not guaranteed and more action is needed.

Internationally, Mexico seems to subscribe to all agreements regarding indigenous peoples' and women's rights. At a national level, however, indigenous peoples are virtually ignored, and a very strong machismo still prevails. Except for limited ad hoc initiatives, few structural measures are taken by the national government to stimulate a real change in mentalities.

A. Making the Invisible Visible

Addressing the Male Bias

In Mexican society, indigenous peoples are the most marginalized, and indigenous women are particularly vulnerable. The problems of the latter are often invisible and unknown because of a general lack of interest in these communities. Not only indigenous peoples themselves, but also anthropologists can and should commit to make the reality of being an indigenous woman visible, to give them a voice, and denounce the issues they are enduring on a daily basis. For the anthropologist, sharing this information and generally undertaking actions that benefit the community, should be part of professional ethics and social commitment.

Within Mexican academia, there is a reluctance to include a gender perspective in anthropology. Scholars do not seem aware of the importance of this approach, which is striking for a discipline focused on understanding human societies. Consequently, after more than forty years of feminist theory within academia, the accomplishments of feminism are far from being integrated in anthropological research on Mexico.

An important first step for scholars is to become gender sensitive, and not to take gender for granted. A gender perspective should not be limited to studies on topics specifically related to women, all social science research should give attention to gender. Gender should be one of the standard indicators for researchers to take into account. It needs to be emphasized that it is not about turning every study into a gender study, nor about including a specific chapter on women in every anthropological work, nor about excluding men; it is about awareness, about asking questions to prevent any gender bias and distorted views to get into the research. Who is the actor, who is talking? Is it a man or a woman, and why is it a man or a woman? Are women participating? If confirmed: what is their role and how do they experience their participation? Do they give the same information as men do? If not: why are they not present? What does this tell us about social relations, social hierarchies, gender roles, and the division of tasks within the community? These are questions that can be considered for most research. For example, when describing a ritual, the gender of the participants can be questioned. Who is participating? Why are the participants men (or women)? Why are certain women and men present and not others? What does the gender of the actors tell us about gender relations within the community? And how about the power structures and the social hierarchy within the community? How will social changes and changes in gender relations influence this ritual?

Postcolonial feminism offers an additional point of view by criticizing the Western bias in the discipline. Current research needs to include indigenous people's voices. Researchers need to become aware of the possible Western bias in their work, and keep questioning themselves.

Not taking gender for granted, and being critical towards a possible Western bias will lead to a new and more complete understanding of the studied societies as a whole, and will result in more inclusive research.

Women and Health Care in Mexico: The Need for Education, Prevention, and an Intercultural Approach

Access to health care is one of the most fundamental issues indigenous women are confronted with in Mexico. The quality and availability of Mexican health care services vary considerably. People in rural and marginalized areas have most difficulties to access good health care, and women and children in these regions are particularly vulnerable. The most basic health risks for women are related to reproductive and maternal health.

The majority of teenage pregnancies and early marriages take place in indigenous communities. In addition to the health risks for young mothers, early marriage and teenage pregnancies significantly limit the emancipation of women. Girls quit school upon marriage or pregnancy, and do not continue further education, limiting their options of becoming economically independent in the future. There is a need for targeted campaigns to limit the number of teenage marriages and teenage pregnancies. Another important signal would be raising the minimum legal marriage age in the Civil Code. The Church should also engage on this subject and encourage girls to finish school before getting married.

Regarding abortion there has been a retrogression in Mexico. In 2014, more than half of the states penalized abortion. The legal impossibility to get an abortion by a certified medical practitioner leads to an increase in unsafe abortions. Women in marginalized situations, such as indigenous women, are again the most vulnerable in this regard.

A recurrent issue regarding reproductive health is the lack of effective sexual education and prevention. Especially in indigenous regions, people are not sufficiently informed about the inherent health risks and available options. There is thus an urgent need for more sexual education and prevention, not only to reduce the health risks for women, but also for the emancipation and empowerment of women and men that will lead to the improvement of the socio-economic development of the communities.

In addition to reproductive health risks, Mexican women also face serious risks related to maternal health. Pregnant women in indigenous communities in particular do not always get the necessary medical attention, resulting in high rates of maternal deaths. The lack of medical assistance for these women is an indicator of a larger problem in Mexican health care: the lack of adapted health care for indigenous peoples. To be able to guarantee adequate health care for indigenous peoples, two issues need to be addressed in parallel. Indigenous peoples have a right to equal access to good medical care within the existing institutional health care system. Therefore, the number and the quality of health care centers should be increased. In addition, it is essential to introduce an intercultural

approach to health care. Currently, indigenous peoples encounter difficulties when visiting allopath doctors, due to language and cultural obstacles. The mistrust and avoidance of allopath doctors can lead to serious health risks that could be reduced by implementing an intercultural approach to health care.

An intercultural approach to health care does not discard allopath medicine, nor does it favor traditional medicine. An intercultural approach wants to build bridges between two different sets of knowledge, including respect for local traditions and cooperation with traditional health practitioners. The *partera* could, for example, follow-up pregnant women and assist during standard deliveries, making it possible to reach more women, and reduce the numbers of maternal deaths. In addition, the approach of the *partera* could be introduced in allopath medicine in the process of the humanization of delivery. This would not only be beneficial for indigenous women, but for Mexican women in general.

The *parteras* need to be trained, but with respect for their traditional knowledge. More research is required to better understand traditional medicine, and to recognize those elements that are valuable both for Western and traditional medicine. This research needs to be done in cooperation with traditional experts.

The health risks of indigenous women are very basic health issues. An intercultural approach to health care would reduce at least part of the risks. Addressing these basic health issues should be a priority of the Mexican government. Currently, there are ad hoc initiatives and local actions, yet there is no consistent policy to address the health care situation in indigenous communities.

Female Political Participation: Conquering Spaces

Political participation of women is an important indicator to measure the level of female emancipation. In Mexico, women and men do not have equal access to all political functions, despite existing legislative regulations and quota. Changes are occurring very slowly, but women are still underrepresented at all political levels. The biggest obstacles for women to participate in politics are still the patriarchal mentalities, and persisting stereotypes suggesting that women in general are not capable of participating at the highest levels of decision-making.

For indigenous women, being elected has been even more difficult. Only exceptionally indigenous female representatives have reached the national political level, or even state congresses. At a municipal level, political participation of indigenous women can vary widely, depending on the specific context of the community. In many cases, indigenous women have to face structural and cultural obstacles to be able to participate in local politics. In certain communities, the traditional

normative system of '*usos y costumbres'* has been denying women the right to participate. Therefore, the '*usos y costumbres'* system has been regarded as detrimental for gender equality and emancipation of indigenous women. However, changes are taking place in the communities, and there have been positive examples of women included in the traditional normative system and participating as a result of this inclusion. Indigenous women have taken a stand for the traditional system, and are willing to fight for equal rights within this system. They do not want to choose between tradition and modernity; they believe they can "remain the same while changing, and change while remaining the same".

Shifts are indeed taking place in indigenous communities, and indigenous women themselves are agents of change in this process. They are looking for ways to gain a voice at the political level, and are conquering new spaces, finding alternative ways to participate, and building different forms of leadership. It is important to point out that these changes are supported by both women and men in the communities, showing a real, albeit slow, change in mentalities.

Yet it cannot be denied that indigenous women are still severely underrepresented in institutionalized political structures. Excluding them from the decision-making processes is a violation of their civil and human rights. The government and the political parties need to open up for indigenous women. The government should also invest more in sensitization and education regarding equal political rights, both of women and men, and actively enable and support the process of female political emancipation. Initiatives have to be taken to trigger a change in mentalities regarding gender equality. But the government also needs to develop specific policies that include indigenous peoples, and especially indigenous women, as full Mexican citizens. Until now, the government has been almost blind to the situation of indigenous women.

The Image of Women in Mexican Media: Fighting Stereotypes

Another area where women, and in particular indigenous women, are under- and misrepresented is the media. The way women are portrayed in the media is an indicator of the way women are perceived more generally in Mexican society. This is also the case for the representation of indigenous women. The image of indigenous women in the media can influence the way non-indigenous viewers look at them, but it can also impact their self-image.

The historical evolution of the image of indigenous women in Mexican media tells us that it has been based on stereotypes since the beginning of the twentieth century. All these representations reveal one common characteristic: the indigenous woman was never conceived as an individual, but rather a symbol. The indigenous woman was a symbol of the Nation, of purity, and virginity. There was rarely a link between her image and the indigenous population. In the imagery there was also little

attention for the existing cultural diversity; indigenous peoples were considered one heterogeneous group. This stereotypical image made actual indigenous peoples invisible and subject to numerous prejudices.

The analysis of the representation of indigenous women in contemporary media first leads to the conclusion that there is a general absence of indigenous peoples on Mexican television. If we focus on indigenous women, we see that they are invisible both in informative and entertainment programs. Female television presenters are women who correspond to Western beauty ideals; women with indigenous or mestizo features are rarely seen. In *telenovelas* some characters could be recognized as indigenous, but these representations are mainly based on stereotypes. On the other hand, the image of indigenous peoples in news reports tends to be associated with negative news. The absence of a realistic image of indigenous women illustrates the lack of cultural diversity in Mexican media, this in contrast with the reality of Mexican society. The media perpetuate the negative perception and discrimination of indigenous peoples in Mexico.

In addition, the negative images and stereotypes have consequences for the self-esteem and self-image of the female indigenous viewers. Through the media they receive the message that as indigenous peoples they are evidently inferior to the white population, that they have neither access to the same jobs nor to the same spaces. They also learn that they do not correspond to the beauty ideal, and that they must be less intelligent than the white population. These different elements can result in a very low self-esteem, and lead to the internalization of this discrimination.

Television confirms their reality: they are on the fringes of Mexican society. How to motivate these women to engage and fight for a better future when their environment suggests that there is no way out? How to stimulate their social and economic development from within?

Media could play a positive role. In the eighties and nineties, the perception of women improved, among others by improving the image of women on Mexican television, showing for example more working women. Similar strategies should be developed for indigenous peoples. The correct representation of these minorities in national media would be a symbolic recognition of the fact that they are citizens, as worthy as the rest of the population; it would constitute legitimation of indigenous peoples as citizens with equal rights (Gripsrud, 2002:12). Furthermore, there is a need for positive role models: people or characters of indigenous origin that were able to get ahead in life, who have successful careers, and who fully belong to Mexican society, doctors, lawyers, engineers, etcetera.

Indigenous peoples not only need to be given a face, they also need to be given a voice in the media. Indigenous women are invisible in Mexican mainstream media, however, this does not mean they are not participating in alternative spaces. In the last decades, indigenous women have been actively collaborating in numerous indigenous and community media initiatives. Indigenous women do not lack motivation and do take action, but they have virtually no access to mainstream media. As a consequence they remain invisible in Mexican media. The indigenous population has to be taken out of this invisibility; they have to be included in the national project, and offered the respect they deserve. This process needs to be pursued in the communication media, as well as Mexican society in general.

Education in Mexico: Bringing About Change, or Reproducing Inequality?

Changing stereotypes and mentalities starts at school. In the context of this research, it was therefore essential to look at how gender and cultural diversity are approached in Mexican education.

Mexican education faces multiple structural problems: the educational system is dominated by teachers' unions, the available resources are wasted and distributed unequally, the quality of education is poor, partly due to a lack of professionalization of the teachers, and the educational programs are not adapted to the varying teaching contexts. In order to develop effective actions to improve and guarantee the quality of Mexican education, a complete and correct evaluation of both schools and teachers is necessary.

Schools in rural communities in particular have deficient infrastructure, limited didactic material, and teachers that are often not prepared to teach in a rural context. The poor quality of education has a negative impact on the future perspectives of students in rural regions.

Indigenous education is one of the most neglected modalities of education. In addition to the lack of resources, the programs for indigenous education are designed at a national level, without input from the communities. Furthermore, very few textbooks in indigenous languages are available.

The lack of adapted indigenous education is more than a problem about educational content. It is a fundamental rights issue that illustrates how indigenous peoples are treated by the government, and by Mexican society as a whole. Indigenous students are denied the right to access education in their own languages. The existing programs are not adapted to the needs of indigenous students; students are expected to adapt and conform to a system that has no respect for their cultural identity and in which Spanish is the dominating language. The inadequate and poor education provided by the state

for indigenous students is an obstacle to their personal and intellectual development, limits their opportunities for the future, and only prejudices them by reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Indigenous students in all modalities of education are victims of discrimination and racism. They are confronted with negative stereotypes, and are treated as inferior and less intelligent. It is highly problematic that this discrimination comes not only from classmates, but also from teachers. This reflects how deeply rooted racism is within Mexican society. And up until now, virtually no actions have been taken to counter discrimination at school.

As this research focuses on indigenous women, special attention was given to the gender perspective in education. Analyzing how gender is approached in Mexican education gives an idea of how gender relations are defined in Mexican society, how they are perpetuated, and how they could be improved.

In general, Mexican girls and boys have equal access to education, even in disadvantaged regions. Gender equality policies have been developed for Mexican education, and both the institutional discourse and teaching materials include a gender perspective. However, this gender equality discourse has not reached all classrooms yet, and many teachers underestimate the importance of actively teaching and applying gender equality. Consciously or subconsciously, they continue to pass on stereotypical views on gender to their pupils.

It is very important to tackle these stereotypes affecting all girls and boys. In education, indigenous girls are most vulnerable, because they suffer from multiple discrimination. Additionally, in an indigenous context, traditional views on gender relations impact girls in particular. As women are expected to be caretakers in the first place, girls often drop out of school at a young age to support their parents, get married, or start a family. Yet, not finishing secondary education limits their opportunities for the future; they will only have access to precarious jobs, leading to poverty and exclusion. Furthermore, organizations such as the United Nations stress the fact that educating women is beneficial for their communities and the prospects of their children too.

Despite good intentions at national level, gender stereotypes and stereotypes concerning indigenous peoples are still being perpetuated and even reinforced in Mexican classrooms. Overall, the general level and quality of Mexican educational services need to be improved, but special attention needs to be given to the implementation of gender equality and non-discrimination policies in classrooms. Results will only be obtained if these policies effectively reach teachers and students.

And yet, education is only a first step. At present, there is a lack of opportunities for educated young people in rural communities. Many people who have studied, move to the cities. This illustrates that

the problem with education is part of a larger and complex issue regarding the development of communities within Mexican society. For years now, Mexican government has only been providing assistentialist and clientelistic aid programs to rural communities. These programs make communities dependent on government help, instead of empowering them and stimulating their development. Efforts should be made to create decent employment opportunities within the communities. We should not be naïve; not all professions can be practiced in small communities. However, at this moment, the national authorities have not been taking the necessary structural measures. The government should support local initiatives and businesses that create economic potential, and in general invest in the social and economic development of the communities, always in consultation with the latter.

It is clear that the challenges indigenous women are facing touch every aspect of life. To better understand, it is therefore important to approach their situation from different angles. For example, the testimony of Adriana Márquez, regarding education, teaches us that in her Zapotec community[303], girls often only finish primary school, and then get married (Márquez, personal communication, 2011). However, when we look at the political participation of women, we see that in the principal town of La Pe of that same community, a woman was able to become municipal president between 2011 and 2013[304] (INAFED, 2015). Thus, all factors need to be taken into account to assess the level of female emancipation in this community. This example also serves to illustrate that every community has its own characteristics, and that policies to improve the situation of indigenous women cannot simply be copied from one community to another. To really understand the challenges indigenous women encounter, to be able to contextualize these challenges, and to have a global overview of their situation, it is indispensable to analyze their position from different perspectives.

[303] The Zapotec community of La Guadalupe, a locality of La Pe in the District of Ejutla in the state of Oaxaca.
[304] Telma Adriana Chavez, municipal president of La Pe between 2011 and 2013 (INAFED, 2015).

B. For Future Research

For this work, certain topics were selected. However, future research needs to discuss many other subjects that have an impact on the lives of indigenous women.

Gender Based Violence

An important subject, is violence, and more particular gender based violence, topics that due to this research's scope and purpose could not be included in this study. During the last decade, the levels of violence have risen exponentially in Mexico. The violence brought about by drug trafficking and the war on drugs has expanded to Mexican society as a whole, including a gruesome increase of violence against women. Best known are the feminicides[305] in the border town of Ciudad Juarez, but feminicides are taking place across the entire Republic. The national observatory for feminicide (Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio) estimates that between 2012 and 2013, 3.892 women were murdered in Mexico, this is more than five women per day (OCNF, 2014: 199). Furthermore, there are worrisome numbers of abductions, sexual violence, and of harassment of women and girls. In the private sphere, domestic violence is also very present. One of the problems in this regard is that domestic violence is not always rejected in Mexican society, on the contrary, it is even accepted by many women and men. Although certainly true in lower social classes, this phenomenon is prevalent in all layers of Mexican society, including the highest classes. It has to be pointed out that indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to all forms of gender based violence. Within their communities, domestic violence is considered to be normal. Outside their communities, indigenous women are discriminated and considered inferior; therefore they are easy targets for violence in public spaces, on the street, in a work environment, etcetera.

Official statistics on gender based violence in Mexico are almost nonexistent, and the majority of cases are never reported to the authorities. Although legislation exists to prevent violence against women, such as the *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia* of 2007, there are hardly any programs for victims and perpetrators. Therefore, in practice, these laws cannot be made effective (Aldaz Vélez, 2008). Moreover, the authorities are neither trained nor do they have the resources to deal with victims of gender based violence. Few women find the courage to go to the authorities to file a complaint; only to discover that they are rarely taken seriously. María del Rosario Martínez, coordinator of the Casa de la Mujer "Rosario Castellanos" in Oaxaca, testifies how these women are sent back home, asking them to be calm and behave, because it was probably only a mistake, or maybe she did do something wrong. No follow-up is provided for these victims. This

[305] A feminicide or femicide is a gender based homicide. It is the murder of a woman because she is female.

does not encourage women to file a complaint (Martínez, personal communication, 2011). In the case of massive abductions of women and girls, the authorities most often send worried family members home, telling them their daughter probably just ran away, or blaming the mother for losing sight of her child. Such disappearances are often not even investigated. It is believed that some of these disappeared girls are murdered, some are forced into large prostitution networks. Women are rarely rescued by the authorities; perpetrators are hardly ever incriminated. A culture of violence and impunity reigns in Mexican society.

The blaming of female victims of gender based violence is a recurrent issue in Mexico. The media, for example, often question whether women, who disappeared or were sexually abused, dressed appropriately or provoked the aggressor. The perpetrator, on the other hand, is always partly excused as his actions are attributed to external factors, such as the temporary effects of alcohol or drugs, or a surge of passionate jealousy caused by the victim. If the aggressor is judged, the sentence for the perpetrators of gender based violence is most often disproportionately light compared to the offenses committed.

This approach of cases of gendered based violence illustrates the disparate relation of power between women and men, the double moral standard, and the way these points of view are ingrained in Mexican society.

The authorities seem to support this position. Little effort is made to protect women against gender based violence; it is considered a minor issue, and many politicians and judiciary officials are not even convinced of it being a real problem. The case of the feminicides exemplifies this situation. Only in 14 out of the 32 federal entities the crime of feminicide is properly defined, in the other states offenses are impossible to prove due to the inadequate way feminicide is typified. The result is that out of the 3.892 cases of murdered women between 2012 and 2013, merely 613 (15.75%) were investigated as feminicides (OCNF, 2014: 199-200).

All women in Mexico are vulnerable to this situation of violence, but women in marginalized areas, and especially indigenous women, are even more exposed. First, they would probably not even consider filing a complaint, seeing such violence as part of daily life. But when they do, they first need to be able to physically get to the authorities. Furthermore, if they do not speak Spanish they will have troubles filing a complaint, because no services are offered in indigenous languages. Then, because of their indigenous background, they face the risk of being ignored, discriminated, or abused by the officials. Thus, in comparison to non-indigenous women, they will be even less capable of convincing the authorities to help them.

More research is needed on all forms of gender based violence in Mexico. In-depth research is necessary to have better estimates of the number of women suffering from violence. Studies are also required to better understand the contexts of violence indigenous women are living in, and to find ways to prevent violence from happening. These studies are also essential to try to convince the Mexican government of the importance of these topics in the lives of women, of the negative impact this has on the well-being of communities and Mexican society as a whole, and of the urgent need to address these matters with concrete and effective policies.

Migration: Shifts and Evolutions in Gender Relations

In the last decades there have been significant migration flows in Mexico, from rural areas to urban areas, but also abroad, and especially to the U.S.A. This phenomenon can certainly be noted in indigenous communities. Land conflicts, the difficulties of trying to be self-sufficient in the current economy, the lack of non-agricultural labor in the communities, and the growing levels of violence, are some of the factors that have forced people to leave their town to try to find a job in the larger cities or abroad.

Although women have also moved, the majority of indigenous migrants have been men. These men leave their home for months, for years, or never come back at all. While men left the communities, women often stayed behind. The absence of men has resulted in shifts within the traditional gender structures. An increasing number of women had to take up the role of head of the household for example. In certain communities women seem to have been at least partly in charge. It would be interesting to conduct research on the real impact of migration on traditional gender structures. It is unclear to what extent shifts have taken place. Are there really changes in the mentalities of people? Are the remaining men in the communities and the men abroad accepting these changes? And also, are these changes going to stand? During the last two or three years there have been reports of more migrant men and women returning permanently to their communities. Will this return result in a restoration of traditional gender structures? And also, to what extent did the experience of life in another cultural context impact these men and women's perspectives on gender relations?

Domestic Work

The situation of domestic workers was briefly discussed in the chapter on education. However, more specific research on this topic is needed. Domestic workers are omnipresent in Mexican society, but invisible and unprotected. They are among the most vulnerable employees in the Mexican economy. But for many indigenous women, domestic work is one of the few options to join the labor market and earn an income. Mexican government needs to take its responsibility and provide legal and social protection for these workers.

Furthermore, it is not acceptable that the economic emancipation of women of higher social classes happens at the expense of other women that are forced into precarious employment. Women in lower social classes also have the right to access decently paid jobs with the necessary legal and social protection. Other than the government, households employing domestic workers need to take responsibility in this matter. Improving the situation of domestic workers involves Mexican society as a whole, and will require a change in mentality.

Discrimination of Indigenous Women Within the Mexican Justice System

Discrimination of indigenous women within the Mexican justice system is a subject that has received almost no attention from scholars. Civil organizations, such as the Grupo de Estudios sobre la Mujer "Rosario Castellanos" in Oaxaca, report cases of indigenous women who were victims of questionable convictions and imprisonments. Some of these women were, for example, arrested for drug trafficking, and put in jail without any legal rights. The poignant stories are often about grandmothers travelling by bus to the city for some errands, and grandsons or nephews asking them to carry a bag with them for a good friend. These women are rarely aware that the bag contains drugs. When they are arrested, they are lost. Often Spanish is not these women's mother tongue, and many of them are illiterate. They do not understand the officials, and they are forced to sign documents they cannot read, often signing a confession without knowing it. No translator is provided. Neither they nor their family have the financial means to pay for a lawyer or to post bail. As nobody informs them about their rights, they are vulnerable to unjust treatments, and are denied the right to a fair trial. As a result, they are thus stuck in jail for years, without being able to appeal, until their disproportionately long sentence is over (Gesmujer, 2004). The way indigenous women are treated is discriminatory, and it shows that the Mexican justice system is not only legally questionable, but also racist and classist. More research is required to have a comprehensive idea about the violations of the legal rights of indigenous women in Mexican justice, and to prevent such situations from happening.

C. Final Remarks

Every subject discussed in this work has its specific challenges, but across the chapters certain recurring issues can be identified which deserve some final remarks.

Prevailing Machismo

A first conclusion is that machismo still prevails in Mexican society. There are exceptions, and changes are happening slowly, but in general, Mexican women continue to be considered inferior to men. Gender equality has not yet been achieved. We have seen that women are underrepresented in the public sphere and in decision-making, for example in politics and the media. When they are present, they are most often pushed into the stereotypical role of either caretaker or sex symbol. At home, even educated women tend to revert to traditional gender roles, and accept their subordinated position compared to men. Many boys and girls continue to be educated in this same perspective. It is important to point out that this is the case in rural as well as in urban contexts, from the lowest to the highest social classes, and both in indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

A change of mentalities regarding gender relations and sexism is necessary in Mexican society. As we have seen across the different chapters, the national authorities, media, schools, the Church, etcetera, have a role to play. It is clear that all actors in Mexican society need to participate in fighting gender stereotypes and in changing mentalities.

Racism and Interiorized Discrimination

Another recurrent element across the different chapters of this research is the persistent racism against indigenous peoples. They are systematically discriminated, ignored, and mistreated; the whiter the skin, the more superior, the darker the skin, the more inferior. Racism is deeply rooted in Mexican culture, yet it is never acknowledged. Non-indigenous Mexicans often proudly claim there is no racism in Mexico, but the contrary is true. This racism can be observed in public spaces on a daily base, in the way people are treated, in the way they are addressed, in the way they are looked at. It is also recurrent in the stories of indigenous women interviewed for this research. They all mention being confronted both with blunt and more subtle acts of racism. Based on this racism, indigenous peoples are largely excluded from Mexican society; they do not have equal access to public spaces, services, and ultimately, opportunities in life.

What is more, indigenous peoples themselves have interiorized this colonialism and discrimination. As we have seen, this feeling is currently only being reinforced by the media, in education, at an institutional level, and in society in general. Indigenous peoples have an interiorized sense of

inferiority with respect to the non-indigenous population. It is an obstacle to their personal development, and the recognition of their cultural identity. For indigenous women, a feeling of natural submission to men adds to the interiorized racism.

The fact that racism is not acknowledged in Mexico, is reflected in research. Very little research focuses on the discrimination of indigenous peoples and the racism they face. Yet racism can be a very influential factor in the lives of indigenous peoples. As an example, the young generations leaving their communities to study or work in non-indigenous communities, face unfair obstacles because of their cultural background. Persistent racism limits their opportunities on the labor market and in society in general. To raise awareness of the Mexican public and politicians regarding the need to stop all forms of racism and discrimination, more research is necessary to evaluate the impact on the lives of indigenous peoples. In this context it is important to listen to the experience of indigenous peoples, for example through the valuable work of the Zapotec Judith Bautista (2007, 2011), among others.

Furthermore, values of respect for cultural diversity and gender equality need to be embedded in education. Therefore teachers need to be sensitized about the importance of these topics. The media also have a crucial role in combatting stereotypes. The media should take up its responsibility and use its influence on society in a positive way by working towards inclusive and non-discriminatory media policies.

Institutionalized Discrimination

At a political level, no efforts are made to incorporate indigenous demands or elaborate policies for indigenous peoples even though indigenous rights and the corresponding obligations of the government are clearly stated in the Mexican Constitution. These obligations are completely ignored. The commitments made at an international level only seem to serve the purpose of projecting a positive image to the outside world. At a national level these commitments are void. It is clear that indigenous peoples are not a priority for Mexican politicians. Indigenous peoples are often forgotten, deliberately or unintentionally. Mexican authorities fail to understand they are supposed to meet the basic demands of all their citizens. Mexican politicians prefer not to be bothered with the real problems of indigenous peoples. Protests of indigenous peoples are seen as a nuisance, to be silenced as soon as possible.

In Mexico, discrimination is institutionalized. As a first step, the government needs to raise awareness among its own officials. Most politicians are part of a mestizo elite that is clearly racist and classist, as illustrated recently by the case of Lorenzo Córdova Vianello, director of the National Electoral Institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral – INE). During intercepted phone calls, he completely

ridiculed indigenous Chichimeca leaders he had met, among others because of their accent in Spanish and their way of speaking (Animal Politico, 2015). This blatant racism by a high ranking official is an appalling illustration of the racism present among Mexican authorities.

The government has to start taking its responsibility; it needs to start considering indigenous peoples as full citizens, and develop policies in favor of their wellbeing, instead of denying them the rights they are entitled to as indigenous peoples, as Mexican citizens, and as human beings.

Yet, getting government attention is not enough. Several current policies and government programs are not adapted to the needs of indigenous peoples. A crucial element in designing policies is the involvement of the indigenous communities. It is indispensable for projects to be geared to the reality of indigenous peoples' lives. Only initiatives offering realistic outcomes will make a difference. The communities need to be involved as equal partners in projects that concern them. They know best which initiatives will be beneficial and meet their specific needs.

The Need for Reliable Official Statistics

A common issue noted throughout this research is the lack of reliable statistical data. Good knowledge of difficult and complex situations is essential to develop effective policies. In Mexico, official statistics are available on a variety of topics, but these data may be incomplete or not representative of reality. Unfortunately, Mexican politicians sometimes prefer not to have exact numbers, or to inflate the results in order to avoid negative publicity, instead of addressing the problems.

If no data are available, certain matters remain unknown. The fact that no efforts have been made to collect data on essential topics, such as maternal mortality, illustrates the lack of commitment of the government. Collecting statistical data through surveys and local registers in such a large country as Mexico is not an easy task. Yet, for the government to address an issue, it is important to be able to estimate the extent of the problem. The Mexican government needs to establish a deliberate policy on data collection to identify problematic fields for which data are essential, both on specific topics and on intersecting subjects, such as the situation of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, if the government wants to show its commitment towards gender equality, all statistics on individuals, even at the local level (e.g. statistics on municipal presidents), should be disaggregated by gender. To obtain such numbers it is vital to raise awareness of the importance of reliable data collection among all administrative levels and other actors concerned – civil servants, hospitals, doctors, school directors, police officials, etcetera. In the end, the issues of indigenous peoples can be made more visible through reliable statistics.

Agency of Indigenous Women

When analyzing the challenges, there is a risk of seeing indigenous women as mere victims and passive subjects. Yet, it is very important to stress the agency of indigenous women. Indigenous women do not need saving. They do not want to be treated as poor, pitiful, suffering creatures. They are strong and want to take action. For many years, they themselves have been actors of change, taking numerous initiatives to improve their situation, that of their children and communities. Indigenous women are active in politics, community media, civil organizations, as human and women's rights activists, artists, etcetera, at local as well as national, and international levels.

Indigenous women do not need saving, yet they remain invisible. The problem is not lack of participation of indigenous women, but limited access to mainstream spaces within Mexican society due to racism, discrimination, and negative stereotypes. They are always kept at the margin of society.

In the 1980s, Gayatri Spivak already pointed out that subaltern groups, marginalized by dominant Western culture, are not heard within the dominant culture. Spivak questions thus whether people with alternative forms of knowledge have a voice:

> "On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?* (Spivak, 1988: 78. Emphasis in original.)"

This became very clear to me during this research. Talking with highly educated indigenous women, who are actors of change, was enlightening, because they illustrated how much they have to offer, and how little they are listened to. Their stories were filled with the discrimination they had to suffer, but also captured their strength to fight back, ultimately succeeding in conquering a space of their own.

One of the main changes necessary for indigenous peoples to be fully included in Mexican society is the opening up of more spaces, such as civil organizations, official institutions, higher education, etcetera. Indigenous peoples need to have equal access in order to be equally capable of participating, and become visible. This visibility is also crucial to fight stereotypes.

Valorization of Indigenous Knowledge

Some anthropologists and other scholars criticize governments and authorities for not respecting indigenous peoples' rights. However, one of the spaces that urgently needs to open up for indigenous peoples is academia itself. Despite good intentions, academia can be racist, and is still characterized by a Western bias.

There have been critical voices, especially from non-Western scholars, about the persistent dichotomy 'We' against 'the Other', and the dominance and supposed superiority of Western academia.

Indigenous knowledge is usually still treated as what Michel Foucault called 'subjugated knowledge', which is:

> "A whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity (Foucault, 1980: 82)".

Gayatri Spivak adds that in this process the imperialist knowledge and narrative have not been privileged as the best knowledge available, or the best description of reality. The imperialist narrative of reality was rather established as the norm, excluding all other knowledges (Spivak, 1988: 76).

Yet, despite these critiques, only small changes can be seen. When visiting conferences on indigenous cultures, very few scholars of these same cultures are invited to speak, hence their voices are rarely heard. Joint research projects between indigenous and non-indigenous scientists are exceptional too. This is not due to a complete absence of indigenous experts, but to the monopoly of Western knowledge.

Data on indigenous cultures only seem to be acknowledged when presented by Western researchers. Western scholars tend to speak for indigenous peoples; indigenous experts are generally excluded from academic circles. Yet, as the interviews for this research illustrate, indigenous peoples have many valuable contributions to make; they have a voice that has to be heard and respected. They have the ability and capacities to conquer spaces, provided that their knowledge is valued.

Within academia there is an urgent need to valorize more sources of knowledge. The inclusion and participation of indigenous peoples in academia should therefore be part of the scientific agenda.

Towards a Socially Engaged Discipline

The anthropological and historical disciplines could be improved in different ways. As discussed in this work, the male bias and Western bias need to be addressed, and alternative sources of knowledge need to be valorized. But, anthropologists should also strive for a more socially engaged discipline.

When writing about Mexico, most anthropologists (including archaeologists and historians) focus on ritual life, hierarchical structures, religion, etcetera. They focus on elements they consider to be 'traditional'. As a result, excellent monographs have been published, capturing an image of a large range of indigenous cultures. However, authors often fail to put the indigenous community in a larger context. For example, they hardly talk about the sometimes harsh social reality indigenous peoples are living in. They limit their research to specific rituals and traditions, and actually fail to give a complete image of indigenous reality. Furthermore, they rarely work together with indigenous experts as co-authors.

Anthropologists are in a privileged position; they are offered an exclusive view of daily life in an indigenous community. The position of privileged witnesses should be used more often to voice social injustices. As anthropologists have a social responsibility in this respect, they should commit themselves and try to give something back to the people who shared their knowledge with them. For example, they have the possibility to improve the visibility of indigenous women, but also to bring the problems these women are facing to the attention of a larger audience. They should report on discrimination, racism, and gender inequalities, but also on issues such as inadequate health services, cases of teenage marriages, deficient education, etcetera. The anthropologist can show the context specific situation of women in the studied community. Anthropologists should also contribute to making positive examples more visible, examples in which indigenous women speak up for themselves and manage to find a balance between tradition and modernity. This could inspire others to find a way to be heard. Through their work, anthropologists could propagate a more accurate image of indigenous communities and therefore indirectly have an impact on the improvement of their situation.

But there are also pitfalls. The anthropologist could profile him- or herself as 'the savior of the indigenous community'; bringing forward his or her own ideas on social justice and human rights, without taking into account the opinion of the communities themselves. This would be a patronizing position that is not acceptable as it replicates centuries of Western colonization and domination. On the other hand, the anthropologist should be careful that his or her commitment is not misused by others for their own private purposes, be it economic or political; he or she has thus to remain

critical at any time. Furthermore, anthropologists need to support indigenous peoples, but always be mindful not to speak for them. The anthropologist can provide an additional platform to make the voices of indigenous peoples heard.

In any case, anthropologists should show a more active engagement which transcends involvement merely for their own publications. It is about social engagement and about giving a scientifically complete and truthful image of the indigenous situation, with both its positive and negative sides, instead of perpetuating the idealized caricature of a romantic nature-centered life which dominated in anthropology far too long. Indigenous communities accept to share their life experiences with anthropologists; in return, it seems a small effort to engage in favor of their social situation. In general, anthropologists should strive to develop an inclusive and socially engaged discipline.

Already in the 1970's, Sally Slocum advocated:

> "The male bias in anthropology that I have illustrated here is just as real as the white bias, the middle-class bias, and the academic bias that exist in the discipline. It is our task, as anthropologists, to create a "study of the human species" in spite of, or perhaps because of, or maybe even by means of, our individual biases and unique perspectives (Slocum, 1975: 50)."

Indigenous peoples continue to be discriminated in Mexican society. To comply with international indigenous rights, Mexican government needs to step up its efforts. Action is urgently needed in various areas of life. For indigenous women, very basic rights are still not met; not only where specific indigenous rights are concerned, but also constitutional, and even human rights.

Yet, other than the government, there is an important role to play for all actors in Mexican society: administrations, schools, media, the Church, civil society, academia, and all Mexicans in general. Indigenous women are currently invisible in Mexican society, and they face multiple discrimination. Indigenous women are ready to participate, but first Mexican society needs to open up to them. Conditions need to be created for indigenous women to be able to participate. They need to be granted equal access to all spaces; they need to be included and be considered part of this society.

Indigenous women need to be allowed to speak up for themselves, they need to be able to let their voices be heard, and they need to be listened to and reckoned with. Indigenous women are being actors of change; now they only need to get the necessary support to make significant progress.

As has become clear throughout this study, Mexican society continues to be highly racist and sexist. To address this prevailing racism and sexism, a change in mentalities is essential. Mexican society needs to start acknowledging its culturally diverse identity and accept this diversity as an asset. This change can only happen if all actors in society engage against discrimination and in favor of an inclusive society in which all citizens have the same rights, and are treated as equals.

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

Making the Invisible Visible: The Position of Indigenous Women in Mexico

A General Overview of the Challenges Ahead

Indigenous peoples' rights have been on the international political agenda for over fifty years. A major step forward was taken with the adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) in 2007. Yet, very limited attention has been given to indigenous women. Among indigenous peoples, women are one of the most vulnerable groups, because they are subject to multiple discrimination: for being a woman, indigenous, and often, because of the stigma of poverty. The absence of attention for women's issues is due to a lack of awareness and knowledge regarding the role women play in society and in the development of communities, and it illustrates the subordinated position women continue to have in society in general.

This research wants to contribute to the visibility of indigenous women. Therefore, it provides an overview of some of the challenges indigenous women are still facing, focusing on the case of Mexico. It analyzes the position of indigenous women in Mexican society, to identify some of the fields in which indigenous women's rights are still not guaranteed and therefore require more action.

Mexico subscribed to all international agreements regarding indigenous peoples' and women's rights. At a national level, however, indigenous peoples are virtually ignored, and a very strong machismo still prevails. Few structural measures are taken by the national government to trigger a positive change in mentalities.

The real situation of indigenous women is still poorly known. One of the reasons is that within anthropology there is a certain reluctance to include a gender perspective. Scholars do not seem aware of the importance of this approach, which is striking for a discipline focused on understanding human societies. Consequently, after more than forty years of feminist theory within academia, the accomplishments of feminism are far from being integrated in anthropological research on Mexico, which continues to have a strong male bias. Postcolonial feminism offers an additional point of view, criticizing the Western bias in the discipline. Current research needs to include indigenous people's voices. Researchers need to become aware of the possible Western bias in their work, and keep questioning themselves. Not taking gender for granted, and being critical towards a possible Western bias will lead to a new and more complete understanding of the studied societies as a whole, and will result in more inclusive research.

Present research analyzes the position of Mexican women, and more particularly indigenous women, regarding four specific topics: health care, political participation, media, and education. These four topics were selected because of the major influence they have on the situation of women within society. The analysis of these subjects gives an image of the level of emancipation Mexican women have been able to reach. Furthermore, these subjects are all relevant, not only for women, but for their communities as a whole.

The first topic addressed in this research is health care. The limited access to adequate health care is one of the most fundamental issues indigenous women are confronted with in Mexico. The quality and availability of Mexican health care services vary considerably, and access is most difficult in rural and marginalized areas. Women and children in these regions are particularly vulnerable. The most basic health risks for women are related to reproductive and maternal health.

To reduce the risks related to reproductive health, more effective sexual education and prevention is needed, especially in indigenous regions. This will not only reduce the health risks for women, but also foster the emancipation and empowerment of women and men, which in turn will lead to the improvement of the socio-economic development of the communities.

Indigenous communities also continue to have high rates of maternal deaths. The limited medical assistance for these women is an indicator of a larger problem in Mexican health care: the lack of adapted health care for indigenous peoples. To be able to guarantee adequate health care for indigenous peoples, two issues need to be addressed in parallel: indigenous peoples need to get equal access to good medical care within the existing institutional health care system, and an intercultural approach to health care needs to be introduced. Implementing an intercultural approach to health care, that brings together allopath and traditional medicine and respects local knowledge and traditions, can help reduce the risks. Including the knowledge of traditional health practitioners in the institutionalized Mexican health care system, such as the traditional midwives or *parteras*, can also be beneficial, both for indigenous and non-indigenous patients.

A second subject discussed in this work is the political participation of women, which is an important indicator of the level of female emancipation. Changes are occurring very slowly, but Mexican women are still underrepresented at all political levels. Patriarchal mentalities and persisting stereotypes, suggesting that women are not capable of participating at decision-making, are still the biggest obstacles for female political participation.

For indigenous women, being elected is even more difficult. They are invisible in Mexican politics; only exceptionally indigenous female representatives have reached the national or regional political

level. At a municipal level, indigenous women face structural and cultural obstacles that hinder their participation in local politics. In certain communities, women are denied the right to participate based on the traditional normative system of '*usos y costumbres*'. Therefore, the '*usos y costumbres*' system has been regarded as detrimental for gender equality and emancipation of indigenous women. However, changes are taking place in the communities, and there have been positive examples of women being included in the traditional normative system. Indigenous women themselves are agents of change in this process. They are looking for ways to gain a voice at the political level, and are conquering new spaces, finding alternative ways to participate, and building different forms of leadership.

Another area where women, and indigenous women in particular, are under- and misrepresented is the media. The image of women in the media is an indicator of the way women are perceived more generally in Mexican society. This is also true for the representation of indigenous women. In the past, the image of indigenous women in Mexican media was based on stereotypes. All representations had one common characteristic: the indigenous woman was never conceived as an individual, but rather a symbol. This stereotypical image made actual indigenous peoples invisible and subject to numerous prejudices.

In Mexican contemporary media, there is a general absence of indigenous peoples. When indigenous peoples are represented, it continues to be in a stereotypical way. The media perpetuate the negative perception and discrimination of indigenous peoples in Mexico. In addition, the negative images and stereotypes have an impact on the self-esteem and self-image of the female indigenous viewers, resulting in a very low self-esteem, and leading to the internalization of this discrimination.

Changing stereotypes and mentalities starts at school, therefore the approach to gender and cultural diversity in Mexican education was also analyzed, with special attention to rural and indigenous education. Mexican education faces multiple structural problems, and indigenous education is one of the most neglected modalities of education. In addition to the lack of resources, the programs for indigenous education are designed at a national level, without input from the communities. The existing programs are not adapted to the needs of indigenous students; students are expected to adapt and conform to a system that has no respect for their cultural identity and in which Spanish is the dominating language. In addition, indigenous students in all modalities of education are victims of discrimination and racism, reflecting how deeply rooted racism is within Mexican society. Until now, virtually no actions have been taken to counter discrimination at school.

Analyzing how gender is approached in Mexican education gives an idea of how gender relations are defined in Mexican society, how they are perpetuated, and how they could be improved. In general,

Mexican girls and boys have equal access to education, even in disadvantaged regions. Gender equality policies have been developed for Mexican education, and both the institutional discourse and teaching materials include a gender perspective. However, this gender equality discourse has not reached all classrooms yet, and many teachers underestimate the importance of actively teaching and applying gender equality. Consciously or subconsciously, they continue to pass on stereotypical views on gender to their pupils. In an indigenous context, traditional views on gender relations impact girls in particular. As women are expected to be caretakers in the first place, girls often drop out of school at a young age to support their parents, get married, or start a family. Yet, not finishing secondary education limits their opportunities for the future.

Indigenous peoples continue to be discriminated in Mexican society. When it comes to indigenous women, very basic rights are still to be met; not only where specific indigenous rights are concerned, but also constitutional, and even human rights. The Mexican government continues to ignore its indigenous citizens and fails to take necessary actions.

Other than the government, there is an important role to play for all actors in Mexican society: administrations, schools, media, the Church, civil society, academia, and all Mexicans in general. Indigenous women are currently invisible in Mexican society, and they face multiple discrimination. Indigenous women are ready to participate, but first Mexican society needs to open up to them. Conditions need to be created for indigenous women to be able to participate. They need to be granted equal access to all spaces; they need to be included and considered part of this society.

Within academia, more sources of knowledge need to be valorized, and the active participation of indigenous peoples should be part of the scientific agenda. Anthropology should also strive to become a more socially engaged discipline.

Indigenous women need to become visible. They need to be allowed to speak up for themselves, to be able to let their voices be heard, to be listened to and reckoned with. Indigenous women are being actors of change; now they only need to get the necessary support to make significant progress.

Mexican society continues to be highly racist and sexist, both at a social and political level. To address this prevailing racism and sexism, a change in mentalities is essential. Mexican society needs to start acknowledging its culturally diverse identity and accept this diversity as an asset. This change can only happen if all actors in society engage against discrimination and in favor of an inclusive society in which all citizens have the same rights, and are treated as equals.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Het onzichtbare zichtbaar maken: de positie van inheemse vrouwen in Mexico.
Een algemeen overzicht van de uitdagingen voor de toekomst.

De rechten van inheemse volkeren staan al meer dan vijftig jaar op de internationale politieke agenda. De goedkeuring van de *Verklaring van de Verenigde Naties over de Rechten van Inheemse Volken* in 2007, was een belangrijke stap voorwaarts. Er werd echter weinig aandacht besteed aan inheemse vrouwen. Onder inheemse volkeren, zijn vrouwen een van de meest kwetsbare groepen, omdat zij onderworpen zijn aan meervoudige discriminatie: als vrouw, als inheemse persoon, en vaak, als gevolg van het stigma van armoede. Het gebrek aan aandacht voor de problemen van vrouwen is te wijten aan een gebrek aan bewustzijn en kennis over de rol die vrouwen spelen in de samenleving en in de ontwikkeling van gemeenschappen, en het illustreert de achtergestelde positie die vrouwen in de samenleving in het algemeen nog steeds blijven hebben.

Dit onderzoek wil bijdragen tot de zichtbaarheid van inheemse vrouwen. Daarom biedt het een overzicht van enkele van de uitdagingen waar inheemse vrouwen nog mee worden geconfronteerd, meer specifiek in het geval van Mexico. Het analyseert de positie van inheemse vrouwen in de Mexicaanse samenleving om enkele van de gebieden te identificeren waar de rechten van inheemse vrouwen nog niet worden gegarandeerd, en waar dus meer actie is vereist.

Mexico onderschreef alle internationale verdragen met betrekking tot de rechten van inheemse volkeren en de rechten van vrouwen. Op nationaal niveau worden inheemse volkeren echter vrijwel genegeerd en een zeer sterk *machismo* heeft nog steeds de overhand. De nationale overheid neemt slechts weinig structurele maatregelen om een positieve mentaliteitsverandering teweeg te brengen.

De reële situatie van inheemse vrouwen is nog weinig bekend. Een van de redenen hiervoor is dat er binnen de antropologie een zekere terughoudendheid is om een genderperspectief te integreren. Onderzoekers lijken zich niet bewust van het belang van deze aanpak, wat opmerkelijk is voor een discipline die gericht is op het begrijpen van de menselijke samenleving. Na meer dan veertig jaar feministische theorie binnen de academische wereld, zijn de verworvenheden van het feminisme nog lang niet geïntegreerd in antropologisch onderzoek over Mexico, dat een sterke mannelijke vooringenomenheid blijft vertonen. Postkoloniaal feminisme biedt een extra perspectief, namelijk door de Westerse vooroordelen in de discipline te bekritiseren. De stemmen van de inheemse bevolking moeten deel uitmaken van het hedendaags onderzoek.

Onderzoekers moeten zich bewust worden van de mogelijke Westerse vooroordelen in hun werk, en zichzelf in vraag blijven stellen. Gender niet vanzelfsprekend beschouwen en kritisch staan tegenover mogelijke Westerse vooroordelen, zal leiden tot een nieuw en vollediger begrip van de bestudeerde samenlevingen als geheel, en zal resulteren in inclusiever onderzoek.

Het hier voorgestelde onderzoek analyseert de positie van Mexicaanse vrouwen, en meer in het bijzonder inheemse vrouwen, met betrekking tot vier specifieke onderwerpen: gezondheidszorg, politieke participatie, media en onderwijs. Deze vier thema's werden geselecteerd omwille van de grote invloed die ze hebben op de situatie van vrouwen in de samenleving. De analyse van deze onderwerpen geeft een beeld van de mate van emancipatie die Mexicaanse vrouwen hebben kunnen bereiken. Bovendien zijn deze onderwerpen niet alleen voor vrouwen relevant, maar voor hele gemeenschappen.

De beperkte toegang tot aangepaste gezondheidszorg is een van de meest fundamentele kwesties waar inheemse vrouwen in Mexico mee worden geconfronteerd. De kwaliteit en beschikbaarheid van de Mexicaanse gezondheidszorg varieert aanzienlijk, en de toegang ertoe is het moeilijkst in rurale en gemarginaliseerde gebieden. Vrouwen en kinderen in deze gebieden zijn bijzonder kwetsbaar. De meest fundamentele gezondheidsrisico's voor vrouwen houden verband met reproductieve gezondheid en de gezondheid van moeders.

Om de risico's met betrekking tot reproductieve gezondheid te beperken, is meer doeltreffende seksuele voorlichting en preventie nodig, vooral in inheemse gebieden. Dit zal niet alleen de gezondheidsrisico's voor vrouwen verminderen, maar ook de emancipatie en *empowerment* van vrouwen en mannen bevorderen, wat op zijn beurt zal leiden tot een verbetering van de socio-economische ontwikkeling van de gemeenschappen.

Inheemse gemeenschappen blijven ook een hoge mate van moedersterfte hebben. De beperkte medische hulp voor deze vrouwen is een indicator van een groter probleem in de Mexicaanse gezondheidszorg: het ontbreken van een aangepaste gezondheidszorg voor inheemse volkeren. Om een adequate gezondheidszorg voor inheemse volkeren te kunnen garanderen, moeten twee zaken parallel worden aangepakt: enerzijds moeten de inheemse volkeren gelijke toegang krijgen tot goede medische zorgen binnen het bestaande institutionele systeem voor gezondheidszorg, anderzijds moet een interculturele aanpak van de gezondheidszorg worden geïntroduceerd. Het implementeren van een interculturele aanpak van de gezondheidszorg, die allopathie en traditionele geneeskunde bij elkaar brengt en lokale kennis en tradities respecteert, kan helpen om risico's te beperken. Het integreren van de kennis van traditionele zorgverleners in de geïnstitutionaliseerde Mexicaanse

gezondheidszorg, zoals traditionele vroedvrouwen of *parteras*, kan ook nuttig zijn, zowel voor inheemse als niet-inheemse patiënten.

Een tweede onderwerp besproken in dit werk is de politieke participatie van vrouwen, die een belangrijke indicator is van het niveau van de vrouwelijke emancipatie. Trage veranderingen zijn zichtbaar, maar Mexicaanse vrouwen zijn nog steeds ondervertegenwoordigd op alle politieke niveaus. Patriarchale mentaliteiten en hardnekkige stereotypen, die suggereren dat vrouwen niet in staat zijn deel te nemen aan de besluitvorming, zijn nog steeds de grootste obstakels voor vrouwelijke politieke participatie.

Voor inheemse vrouwen is het nog moeilijker om verkozen te worden. Zij zijn onzichtbaar in de Mexicaanse politiek; slechts uitzonderlijk hebben inheemse vrouwelijke vertegenwoordigers het nationale of regionale politieke niveau kunnen bereiken. Op gemeentelijk niveau, worden inheemse vrouwen geconfronteerd met structurele en culturele obstakels die hun participatie in de lokale politiek belemmeren. In bepaalde gemeenschappen worden vrouwen het recht om deel te nemen ontzegd op basis van het traditionele normatieve systeem van '*usos y costumbres*'. Het '*usos y costumbres*' systeem wordt daarom als nadelig voor de gendergelijkheid en de emancipatie van inheemse vrouwen beschouwd. In de gemeenschappen vinden echter veranderingen plaats en zijn er positieve voorbeelden van vrouwen die worden opgenomen in het traditionele normatieve systeem. Inheemse vrouwen zelf zijn agenten van verandering in dit proces. Ze zijn op zoek naar manieren om een stem te verwerven op politiek niveau, ze veroveren nieuwe ruimtes, vinden alternatieve manieren om te participeren, en ontwikkelen verschillende vormen van leiderschap.

Een ander gebied waarin vrouwen, en in het bijzonder inheemse vrouwen, ondervertegenwoordigd zijn of onjuist worden voorgesteld is de media. Het beeld van vrouwen in de media is een indicator van de manier waarop vrouwen meer in het algemeen worden waargenomen in de Mexicaanse samenleving. Dit geldt ook voor de afbeelding van inheemse vrouwen. In het verleden, was het beeld van inheemse vrouwen in de Mexicaanse media gebaseerd op stereotypen. Alle afbeeldingen hadden één gemeenschappelijk kenmerk: de inheemse vrouw werd nooit gezien als een individu, maar was eerder een symbool. Dit stereotype beeld maakte de echte inheemse volkeren onzichtbaar en onderhevig aan talrijke vooroordelen.

In de hedendaagse Mexicaanse media, is er een algemene afwezigheid van inheemse volkeren. Wanneer inheemse volkeren vertegenwoordigd zijn, wordt er nog steeds teruggegrepen naar stereotypen. De media bestendigen de negatieve beeldvorming en discriminatie van de inheemse volkeren in Mexico. Bovendien hebben de negatieve beelden en stereotypen een impact op het

gevoel van eigenwaarde en het zelfbeeld van de vrouwelijke inheemse kijkers, wat resulteert in een zeer laag zelfbeeld en leidt tot de internalisering van deze discriminatie.

Het veranderen van stereotypen en mentaliteiten begint op school, daarom werd ook de aanpak van gender en culturele diversiteit in het Mexicaanse onderwijs geanalyseerd, met speciale aandacht voor het rurale en inheemse onderwijs. Het Mexicaanse onderwijs wordt geconfronteerd met meerdere structurele problemen, en het inheemse onderwijs is een van de meest verwaarloosde onderwijsvormen. Naast een gebrek aan middelen, worden de programma's voor het inheemse onderwijs ontwikkeld op nationaal niveau, zonder inbreng van de gemeenschappen. De bestaande programma's zijn niet aangepast aan de behoeften van inheemse studenten; studenten moeten zich aanpassen en voldoen aan een systeem dat hun culturele identiteit niet respecteert en waarin het Spaans de dominante taal is. Bovendien zijn inheemse studenten in alle onderwijsvormen het slachtoffer van discriminatie en racisme, wat weergeeft hoe diepgeworteld racisme in de Mexicaanse samenleving is. Tot nu toe werden er vrijwel geen maatregelen genomen om discriminatie op school tegen te gaan.

De benadering van gender in het Mexicaanse onderwijs geeft aan hoe genderrelaties worden gedefinieerd in de Mexicaanse samenleving, hoe ze worden bestendigd, en hoe ze kunnen worden verbeterd. In het algemeen hebben Mexicaanse meisjes en jongens gelijke toegang tot onderwijs, ook in achtergestelde regio's. Een gendergelijkheidsbeleid werd ontwikkeld voor het Mexicaanse onderwijs en zowel het institutionele discours als het lesmateriaal houden rekening met een genderperspectief. Dit gendergelijkheidsdiscours heeft echter nog niet alle klaslokalen bereikt en veel leerkrachten onderschatten het belang van het actief aanleren en toepassen van gendergelijkheid. Bewust of onbewust blijven ze stereotiepe opvattingen over mannen en vrouwen doorgeven aan hun leerlingen. In een inheemse context hebben traditionele opvattingen over genderrelaties vooral een invloed op meisjes. Vermits van vrouwen wordt verwacht dat ze in de eerste plaats zorgtaken opnemen, verlaten meisjes school vaak op jonge leeftijd om hun ouders te ondersteunen, te trouwen, of een gezin te stichten. Het niet voltooien van het secundair onderwijs beperkt echter hun kansen voor de toekomst.

Inheemse volkeren blijven nog steeds gediscrimineerd in de Mexicaanse samenleving. Als het gaat om inheemse vrouwen, moet nog steeds aan basisrechten worden voldaan; niet alleen betreffende specifieke rechten van inheemse volkeren, maar ook inzake constitutionele en zelfs mensenrechten. De Mexicaanse overheid blijft zijn inheemse burgers negeren en neemt niet de nodige maatregelen.

Buiten de overheid, is er een belangrijke rol weggelegd voor alle actoren in de Mexicaanse samenleving: administraties, scholen, media, de kerk, het maatschappelijk middenveld, de

academische wereld, en alle Mexicanen in het algemeen. Inheemse vrouwen zijn op dit moment onzichtbaar in de Mexicaanse samenleving en ze worden geconfronteerd met meervoudige discriminatie. Inheemse vrouwen zijn bereid om te participeren, maar de Mexicaanse maatschappij moet zich eerst voor hen openstellen. De voorwaarden moeten worden gecreëerd zodat inheemse vrouwen zouden kunnen deelnemen. Ze moeten gelijke toegang krijgen tot alle ruimten; ze moeten worden opgenomen in en beschouwd worden als onderdeel van deze maatschappij.

Binnen de academische wereld moeten meer bronnen van kennis worden gevaloriseerd en de actieve deelname van inheemse volkeren moet deel uitmaken van de wetenschappelijke agenda. De antropologie moet er ook naar streven om een meer maatschappelijk betrokken discipline te worden.

Inheemse vrouwen moeten zichtbaar worden. Ze moeten toegelaten worden om voor zichzelf op te komen, ze moeten hun stem kunnen laten horen, er moet naar geluisterd worden en rekening mee worden gehouden. Inheemse vrouwen zijn actoren van verandering; ze hebben nu alleen nog de nodige ondersteuning nodig om een significante vooruitgang te maken.

De Mexicaanse samenleving blijft zeer racistisch en seksistisch, zowel op sociaal als op politiek vlak. Om het heersende racisme en seksisme aan te pakken, is een verandering van mentaliteit essentieel. De Mexicaanse samenleving moet haar cultureel diverse identiteit beginnen erkennen en deze diversiteit accepteren als een troef. Deze verandering kan alleen gebeuren als alle actoren in de samenleving zich engageren tegen discriminatie en ten gunste van een inclusieve samenleving waarin alle burgers dezelfde rechten hebben en gelijk worden behandeld.

PROPOSITIONS

1. In Mexico, the rights of indigenous peoples, and more specifically indigenous women's rights, are yet to be met.

2. Indigenous peoples, and indigenous women in particular, are invisible in Mexican society. Indigenous women face multiple discrimination: as women, as indigenous persons, and because of the stigma of poverty. This discrimination occurs in all spheres of society, both at institutional and social level. Action is therefore required, among others in health care, politics, media and education.

3. To be able to guarantee adequate and quality health care for indigenous peoples, two issues need to be addressed in parallel: indigenous peoples need to get equal access to good medical care within the existing institutional health care system, and an intercultural approach to health care needs to be introduced.

4. Mexican indigenous women are severely underrepresented at all political levels. Nevertheless, in the communities changes are taking place, and women are standing up for their political rights. Indigenous women advocate for achieving women's rights within the traditional normative system of '*usos y costumbres*'.

5. The representation of indigenous women in Mexican media has been based on stereotypes. These stereotypical images make actual indigenous peoples invisible and subject to numerous prejudices. The media perpetuate the negative perception and discrimination of indigenous peoples in Mexico, also leading to the internalization of this discrimination.

6. Indigenous peoples need to be offered quality education that meets their specific needs, including education and access to teaching materials in their own languages. To guarantee quality education, schools, teachers, and teaching programs need to be evaluated on a regular basis.

7. Indigenous women are agents of change. They are conquering new spaces and finding alternative ways to participate. However, more mainstream spaces should open up for indigenous women in all areas of Mexican society, and they need to be allowed to speak up for themselves.

8. Racism is deeply rooted in Mexican society, yet it is hardly acknowledged. Indigenous peoples are systematically discriminated, ignored, and mistreated. Stereotypes and prejudices need to be challenged, and mentalities need to change.

9. Mexican women in general, are still facing sexism and gender discrimination. Mexican society is characterized by a persistent machismo. Mentalities need to change to address this machismo and move towards gender equality.

10. There is a persisting male bias in anthropological research. By means of this male bias, anthropologists have been perpetuating the subordination of women. A gender perspective needs to be included in all research. Not taking gender for granted will lead to new and more complete understandings of the studied societies as a whole, and will result in more inclusive research.

11. Academia needs to valorize more sources of knowledge, for example indigenous peoples themselves. The inclusion and participation of indigenous peoples in academia needs to be part of the scientific agenda.

12. The Mexican government needs to make sure official statistics, disaggregated by gender and as trustworthy and complete as possible, are collected. Special attention must be given to disadvantaged areas and population. These data are essential to identify existing problems, to determine their extent, and to develop adequate policies.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Barbara Ortiz was born in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1984. In 2006, she obtained a master's degree in History at the University of Antwerp. As part of this master, she studied for one semester in Spain, at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, in the context of an Erasmus exchange program. During this semester she focused on Mesoamerican history and anthropology.

After her History studies, she obtained a master-after-master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy (2006-2007), and a master in Cultural Management (2007-2008) at the University of Antwerp.

In 2008, she enrolled in the Research Master in Latin American and Amerindian Studies at Leiden University. One year later, she started her PhD research at Leiden University, under supervision of prof. dr. Maarten Jansen (Leiden University) and prof. dr. Antonella Cammarota (Università degli Studi di Messina).

Between 2008 and 2014, Barbara Ortiz also worked as scientific staff at the Center for Mexican Studies of the University of Antwerp.

Since 2014, she is the research coordinator of the Belgian federal Institute for the equality of women and men.