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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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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.