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

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# 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
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> 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).

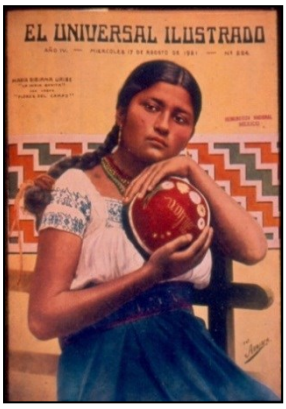
Eventually, the contest was won by María Bibiana Uribe, a 15-year-old Nahuatl speaking girl from Necaxa in the Sierra de Puebla (López, 2002: 292, 309). She was chosen because she was believed to match the characteristics that the jury had defined as being of 'Aztec' descent. For the intellectuals of 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*.**

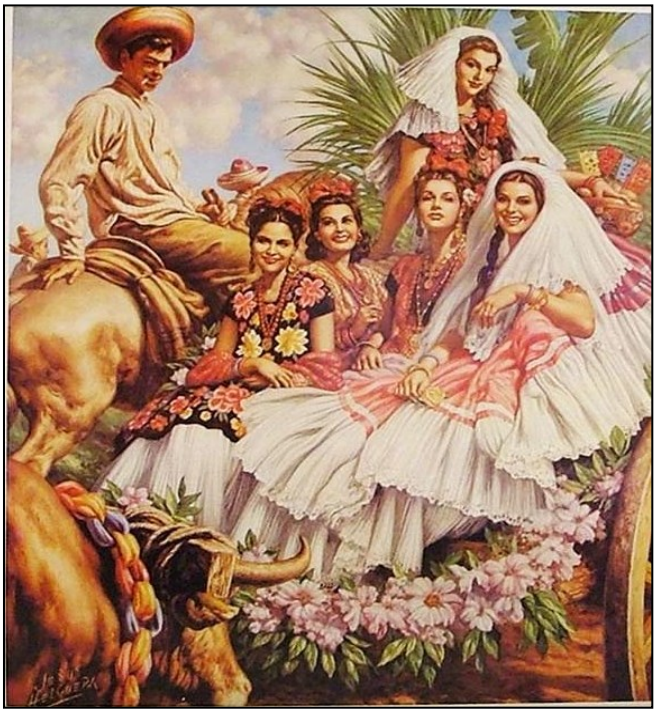

**Figure 15: Jesús Helguera, *Cuquita y la fuente*, Oil on canvas, 1953.**

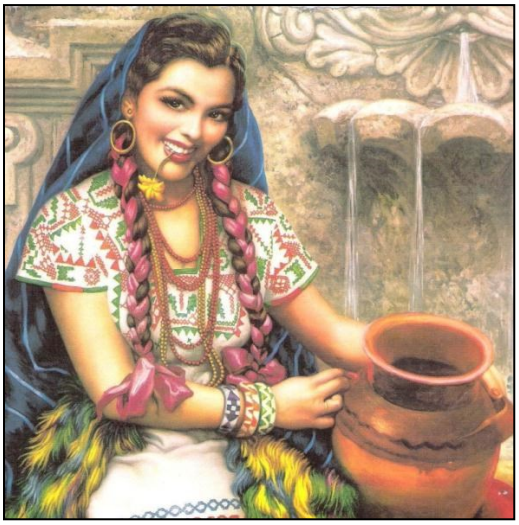

**Figure 16: Jesús Helguera, *La michoacana*, Oil on canvas.**

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.