

## Women and democracy. Between the hegemonic vision and the social reality in a Mayan community

Itzel Rubi Díaz Tinoco<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, México

**ABSTRACT:** *The objective of this paper is to present the results of an ethnographic research focused on understanding the citizen participation of Mayan women with the vote, in one of the highest marginalization communities in Latin America; Tadzú, Yucatán, México. All This since the premise to understanding the hegemonic mexican electoral politics, and the assimilation of women from their social and cultural context. Thus, assuming the Mayan woman as a being inserted in an established gender role, the hypothesis is raised that the Mayan woman is found under three labels that prevent her adequate development within the Mexican political system, although this refers to a particular problem, the reality is that at the macro level, it means that democracy cannot be consolidated since it has not been possible to establish a sense of identity or belonging to the institutions. These labels are: the woman as possessor of the feminine gender; women as indigenous and women as rural.*

**KEYWORDS** -Mayan woman, electoral politics, vote, culture, democracy

### I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy represents for the Mexican State one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century. After the fall of the Porfiriato and the rise of Maderism, Mexican politics turned to the search for power through the institutionalization of the vote. However, it was not until the government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) that women were seen as a fundamental actor in the consolidation of democracy. However, it was until 1957 when women were able to vote for the first time in México. Thus, the question that motivates this research derived from the contemplation of the social reality in which indigenous Mayan women find themselves, which is far from the vision founded on the basis of basic concepts about democratic work, and electoral politics used in the mechanisms of reproduction, in charge of giving continuity to the Mexican political system. One of that mechanisms is the free basic education is one of the ways to insert in children and young people knowledge about the historical past of the nation and encourages the construction of the Mexican citizen. That is why it is important to ask whether the Mayan woman can internalize such mechanisms, with the aim of being a conscious citizen of what the power of the vote represents.

In that case, we have the premise that at present, the Mayan woman continues to be part of a patriarchal scheme that borders on practices of conditional freedom, in this case, the exercise of her vote. Thus, the present work contemplates that distance, language, lack of information, marginalization and submission to men combine to provide women with a climate of uncertainty regarding the importance of their vote, as well as an ignorance of the function of democracy.

Although the Mayan area is extensive and extends beyond the Mexican Republic, this time the investigation focused on the case of the Mayan woman from a small indigenous town called Timul, in Tahdziú, 192 kilometers from the capital of the state of Yucatán This with the aim of exposing a clearer idea of the Mayan woman in their communities Thus, the main problem of the investigation is to contemplate that despite the years of democratic life that we have in the country, it has not been possible to integrate all the communities within a vision of electoral democracy.

The approach of the Mayan woman and her vote as a problem, falls on her social reality that can impede the development of democratic life, since it is inserted as a leak or gap within the Mexican political system that does not allow its consolidation. Despite their efforts to raise awareness among the population, the campaigns to promote the vote do not fully reach the communities in the interior of the states and what arrives does not manage to be perceived as part of their identity, this because what is presented does not fits with the reality of the indigenous Mayan woman.

### **1.1 Research Novelty**

Beyond the gender perspective and the indigenous worldview, I consider it vitally important to reinforce some leaks that do not allow the consolidation of democracy in Mexico. By that I mean that democracy is not only consolidated with political alternation, since it is just as important that citizens, in this case Mayan women, are aware of the meaning that the exercise of voting carries with it. In recent years. We have been carried away by the increasing influx of voters in the elections. However, we must ask ourselves if this influx originates from within the citizens as conscious and critical people of the meaning of their choice, taking into account the repercussions that the vote brings with it. Or the corruption mechanisms have been sophisticated to increase the percentage of votes for any of the political parties. Attracting, in this case, women through gifts. We know the high degree of corruption during political processes in Mexico. At this point, we must start by differentiating the type of environment between two spheres, the urban, in which we usually concentrate the objectives, studies and results in figures, and the rural, which, although today is immersed in globalization, which does not make it so alien to the political and electoral affairs of the big cities, it is still a remote population, in many cases marginalized, which makes it fertile ground for questions of purchase and vote coercion. In this sense, it should be pointed out that it is not the same for a person with a preparation for civic life to sell their vote, to an indigenous woman who did not have the education, preparation and ratification of the meaning of being a citizen. In addition to their marginal reality, subjection due to their gender condition and ignorance of the functioning of democracy, the shore to stay out of a reality that they present as a reliable fact but that they have never perceived, especially if they do not identify themselves and it does not feel part of national politics. For this reason, I consider it vitally important to know to what extent Mayan women know the scope of living in a democracy.

### **1.2 Methodology**

One of the best ways to get to know a different social reality or culture is through ethnography, although the qualitative method based on observation and interpretation can be questioned, the reality is that ethnography requires broad methodological rigor. For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with Mayan women from Timul, using the data saturation method.

## **II. THE PROBLEM AND THE THEORY FROM THE CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS**

In order to understand the problem to which the research is oriented, it is necessary to incorporate key concepts into the text that serve as the guiding axis of the work. That is because in remote communities, it is common for political parties to use strategies to obtain the vote, taking advantage of the marginalization. These same parties are the ones that promote voting as an immediate bargaining chip through aid in kind, without promoting a long-term vision of change such as job creation or improvement of living conditions. Limiting the gaze of the citizen to think that the only time you can receive something from the government is during the political campaign. Tejera, points out a hindrance in participatory citizenship due to the forms of association between political parties and citizens that begin to take root from the political-cultural aspect. [1]

### **2.1 The Mayan woman as a citizen and indigenous**

Democracy as a form of government is a reality that today is seen as part of daily life, especially from the urban sphere, however, this daily life built through years of civic training, promoted by the State and projected from the school classrooms from infancy to adulthood and that is constantly reinforced in that it does

not take into account the indigenous woman, the rural woman, the woman who did not have the opportunity to undergo the years of basic education. Astelarra [2] speaks precisely about the systematic exclusion of women in terms of citizen participation and voting, which represents the basis of democracy. At this point, it should be clarified that although the vote has been exercised in an institutional way since 1953, this does not imply that it is carried out completely under the ideology that its execution implies. Sonnleitner [3] talks about the contrast between “western” electoral democracy and the cultural distance that separates it from the indigenous communities of the world. That is observed in prejudices, language differences, and more ingrained sexual roles. This is how we understand as a form of discrimination, the prohibition of knowledge about political issues that concern women in their community, local and national context. In the same way, the impediments, which due to the condition of women, and indigenous, prevent the adequate formation of citizenship. In this regard, Astelarra [4] mentions that discrimination towards the best becomes plausible given the differences in terms of the distribution of goods, services, prestige and power. In our case, we consider knowledge as a valuable resource that is deprived during which citizenship training is supposed to be promoted. In an indigenous community, women act in reference to what is allowed by their traditions and culture. Marginalization and distancing from urban centers deprive indigenous women in many cases even of the knowledge of their own rights.

Speaking in terms of culture means entering into various theoretical-methodological issues, addressed by countless anthropologists, meanwhile we use the definition of Ortega [5] who reminds us that culture can also be understood as those behavioral models necessary to satisfy the needs of the other part of the group, such as childcare and food preparation. Those are then the knowledge traditionally transmitted for the development of culture but that does not combine with the institutional knowledge for the formation of citizenship that is taught in cities.

## **2.2 The social role and gender in a rural context**

The issue of role assignment is a recurring theme when seeking to understand the cultural dynamics of a particular community, in our case, where the issue of ascription to hegemonic western electoral politics in an indigenous and rural community is taken into account. , we can take into account the already known association of the natural inferiority of women, which, from the Aristotelian tradition, served at the time as a legitimating element of legal inequality. The subjugation of man over woman, or of the masculine over the feminine is a constant reality, promoted by ancient thinkers, hidden in current times but which nevertheless remains a recurrent thing in our society. We then find a woman relegated to a lower category, and turned into an object, forced to fulfill the functions assigned to her gender, which limits them to a reality that makes them visible only as wives, daughters or mothers, which discriminates against them. Intrinsically when considering them as secondary subjects. The misogynistic discourse, in which the entire group of women is disqualified on the basis of assuming despicable traits for them [6]; [7].

We have become involved in a society that continues to reproduce archaic forms of domination in contrast to women. Although urban centers are home to a significant number of self-sufficient women who do not see themselves as the object of discrimination, there are also rural societies in which the locks imposed on the category of women constitute the daily routine. It even permeates public affairs. As an example, we observe common situations in some Indigenous areas of Mexico where the community has normalized “that the man vote for his wife” [8].

One of the ways to maintain locks is by reproducing the sexual division of labor, especially in rural communities. This division, imposed, traditional and to some extent obligatory, remains in the communities of Yucatán in rituals such as *hetz mec*. This act that is still practiced among the Yucatecan Mayans has the purpose of inserting the babies within their social role, or in other words, allocating them within the social division of labor, therefore, the ritual implies that the godparents offer the baby growing tools and corn seeds to the child. In the case of girls, the godmother offers a casserole and an apron. The social division of labor is a concept that is used to socially differentiate the peculiarities between men and women, which determine the competences

according to sex and assign tasks according to what is sexually associated with the characteristics. So the author determines this characterization based on the sexual division of labor as a social gender system [9].

## **2.2 A brief ethnographic review**

“And they are here, indeed. In the Indian regions they can be recognized by external signs: the clothes they wear, the “dialect” they speak, the shape of their huts, their festivals and their customs”[10].

As Guillermo Bonfil Batalla mentioned, the presence of indigenous groups remains in communities far from urban areas, although in some cases, the urban stain has been eating into the communities in such a way that there is a contrast between what has always been and what has always been there. In the cases where the urban area has remained at the margin of the communities, as in the case of the towns furthest from the state capital, the archetype mentioned in the previous paragraph continues to be reproduced. It should be noted that such a model not only represents the diversity and cultural richness of the Mexican people, it also represents the form of domination of which the "other" is the object.

The post-revolutionary ideal of integrating all people into the Nation State, encouraged the continuation of discrimination and segregation towards the indigenous, due to the issue of difference with the "other". Since the fall of the henequen in Yucatán, urban centers have been seen as recipients of the rural population. Since the second half of the 20th century, this constant migration implies an irreversible process of cultural change [11]. However, there are still families rooted in their community and that despite the lack of opportunities in their place of origin, they are not seen outside of it.

Therefore, another of the category that builds the imaginary of the Mayan woman falls on her facet as indigenous and inhabitant of a rural community. The Mayan people are characterized by being agricultural or fishing communities that base their subsistence on self-consumption. The little surplus from cultivation or fishing is commercialized at low cost. In Yucatán, ejido land is experiencing problems in its production. For just over two decades, pests and drought have affected a large part of Yucatecan farmers. Many of the plots lack an irrigation system, which forces farmers to depend on the storm that is increasingly inaccurate. The infestation in the crops of the whitefly, the borer and the coquillo are some of the pests with which the farmers have to deal. Because these are the ones that affect the main crops of the Mayan peasants: the habanero pepper, corn and squash respectively.

One of the best way to understand the social reality from the agrarian counter-reform in Mexico meant a decrease in agricultural productivity and an increase in poverty in the indigenous agricultural areas. This has pushed yucatecan Mayan society to remain in a climate of uncertainty and marginalization. In view of the sexual division of labor, men have found it necessary to stop planting and work informally in masonry or opt for migration to Quintana Roo or the United States. In the event that the man remains in Yucatán as a bricklayer, the role of the woman continues to be subject to the provisions of the husband.

If, on the other hand, the husband emigrates, the wife is subject to the husband's mother-in-law and family. Therefore, it must remain ingrained in the habit of remaining at the expense of remittances sent, since if the woman decides to go out to work it may cause suspicions of infidelity. As women, they have to assume the broad responsibility of feeding, caring for and protecting their children and relatives, often without the support of the migrant husband and in extremely precarious living conditions. These activities make it difficult to excel in political rights. In addition to this, the multiculturalism of Mexico occurs that in many communities people do not identify themselves as part of the nation, because they put their ethnic identity first, before the Mexican, our case study is not an exception. Many of the women interviewed assumed that reality [12]. For Castellanos, the forms of social, political, cultural and economic organization are the elements that build a social identity and create a sense of belonging in the community. The problem arises when that identity contrasts with the majority national group. What is observed in our problem is that the democratic political system was introduced to a different ethnic reality [13].

### **III. THE MAYAN WOMEN OF TIMUL AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY**

At this point it should be remembered that the objective or the ethnographic research was to give an

approximation of the electoral political reality of the Mayan woman. However, a theme that came to light in the interviews, and that is touched on in the theoretical body of the text, is that which talks about traditions and culture. In this regard, it was observed and heard that the Mayan language is the most used on a daily basis. Both, children and adults lack knowledge of the Spanish language, with some exceptions with limited knowledge of the language. These exceptions are limited to some men and women who go out to other communities to work, or some children whose teachers force them to speak Spanish, especially since these teachers do not belong to indigenous communities, therefore, they do not know the Mayan language. We can see this like as the first problem with the perception of a hegemonic way to democracy: the problem of the language. The second problem we can see, is the attachment to the sexual division of labor and the reproduction of patterns referring to the work that culturally dictates their gender. Most of the women interviewed take the man as the person who makes the decisions for the whole family, including political participation decisions.

### **3.1 Electoral behavior of Mayan women**

The electoral behavior of Mayan women is based on their roots and culture, which translates into language and the sexual division of labor, in that sense, political participation is limited by the lack of education that does not allow internalization of citizenship, and the belief that man has a greater knowledge of political and economic life, so his participation is not important, minor decisions, such as those related to cooking, are the accepted contributions. Women in the community do not assume equality with men, in physical matters, rights, knowledge and responsibilities.

Women also have a negative opinion of democracy. They consider that voting just represents a form of steal money. Voting and democracy in general are not seen as something that directly affects the population, reality and marginalization make them consider that voting and democracy do not represent the possibility of improving their living conditions.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Throughout this brief ethnographic review, we were able to verify the hypothesis that the Mayan woman, -in our case, the Mayan woman of Timul, Tadzú, Yucatán, Mexico, a small town far from the urban context-, represents a sample of reality of women throughout the Mexican territory. In the sense that multiculturalism and linguistic diversity are factors that in some way limit the struggle of the Mexican State for citizen training.

This review allowed us to observe two types of identity: ethnic identity and national identity. In the first case, in the towns far from the cities, the ethnic identity stands out over the national identity that has been sought to be incorporated in Mexico since the Mexican Revolution. This is due in large part to the fact that the main strategy for citizen training is based on the free education provided by the State, where as part of the training, subjects such as Mexican history and civic education are offered, with the aim of training in children and young people the idea of citizenship and democracy.

However, the social and cultural reality of remote villages with a different language such as Mayan, cause various problems that do not allow the solidity of citizen training. School dropout as an effect of marginalization and cultural customs that push women to accept the role of mother and wife as their sole destiny, leads to Mayan women not being able to internalize citizenship training, and therefore adjust the hegemonic reality of democracy to its socio-cultural reality. Therefore, in theory, women participate in the voting, but not from the ideology involved in their execution. They vote according to the indications of the men in their family or because they receive some compensation from a political party to do so. They do not do it from their own criteria and analysis since they consider democracy and voting as a reality far from their daily life, that does not benefit them and that only works to enrich those who participate in politics. Thus, it is observed that the Mexican State has concentrated the consolidation of democracy from a hegemonic vision that does not take into account the multiculturalism of its population. Despite the years that have passed since the institutionalization of democracy in Mexico, we are still far from saying that it has been consolidated, because not all the social actors that participate in it are aware of what democracy and voting imply for them. The Mayan women of the community of Timul, Tadzú, Yucatán are a clear example of the failures of civic education.

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