

A day in the life of ..

The gendered citizenship of women in Mérida, Mexico



Krista Wassenburg

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With help of Mark Heshusius

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## The gendered citizenship of women in Mérida, Mexico

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I am very grateful for the experience I had in Mérida, and I would certainly suggest anyone who is interested in Mexico to pay this beautiful city and its friendly inhabitants a visit.

Map of Mexico



Source: <http://www.mexonline.com/maps.htm>

## Abstract

Citizenship means being part of a political community and having certain rights, duties, and opportunities. However, not every citizen has the same opportunities. In Mérida, class, gender, and ethnicity play an important role in determining your citizenship and thus your opportunities. Traditionally, the women in Yucatán were housewives, but that seems to be changing. More and more women study and have a job. However, they do not have the same chances in the job market as men. Another issue which limits women in their citizenship is the value of family in society. This can pressure women into staying married, even when their husband is violent. Although it has become more common for men to perform tasks in the household, women usually bear more responsibility. Younger generations seem to have a more equal position compared to men. The government's involvement in the matter is a double edged sword; on the one hand it invests in women's organizations, but on the other hand it also discriminates against women in governmental institutions. One thing does seem to be clear, though: things are slowly changing for the better.

## Introduction

It's Saturday, 9.30 in the morning. Several classrooms of one of the universities in Mérida are filled with people, most of them in their twenties. Having had trouble finding the rooms in the complicated building, I arrive just in time to witness the start of the workshop. First topic of today: sexist language. The teacher begins talking, and on the PowerPoint presentation I can see a list of sexist expressions we are going to discuss. "*Juegas fútbol como niña!*". The translation in English: "You play soccer like a girl!" This is a common expression in Mexico, used to indicate that a guy is bad at playing soccer. It refers to girls as being less capable of playing sports than guys. There are more expressions like this in Mexico such as: "*Calladita te ves mas bonita*". This expression refers only to girls and women, it literally means that you look better if you keep your mouth shut. In other words, do not say anything because it is probably nonsense, you are not intelligent, you are only good to look at. Expressions like these refer to girls and women as inferior compared to men in different ways, in these cases physically (sports) and intellectually. The workshop is organized by ICADEP, a committee of the governing PRI party, and is meant to make future politicians aware of the language that they need to use. One of the students remarks that most young people do not think this way anymore. However, when the teacher starts explaining the difference in meaning of certain words depending on gender, it becomes clear to me that men and women are not exactly treated the same way.<sup>12</sup> Another example came from a girl I met named Elsa, 18 years old. Elsa has a passion for cars and she was working in a garage for a while. They asked her "Do you want to learn this? You're never going to learn." "Why not?" responded Elsa. "Because you are a woman." They did not think Elsa, a woman, was able to do a job they considered only for men.<sup>3</sup> These examples raise questions about the position of women in society in Mérida, Mexico. It is clear that there are some very strong ideas about what women can or should do in everyday life.

### 1.1 Debate

In a democracy, citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. "All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (Marshall 1950, 28-29). But is citizenship only about the legal rights and obligations of citizens and the state? Not according to Brian Turner, who finds it important to emphasize the dynamic social construction of citizenship, which is influenced by

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<sup>1</sup> Participant observation workshop ICADEP, 11-3-2017. ICADEP stands for *Instituto de Capacitación y Desarrollo Político*, Institution of training and political development.

<sup>2</sup> For example, *mujer pública* (public woman) refers to a prostitute, whereas *hombre público* (public man) refers to a man with a public position.

<sup>3</sup> Semi-structured interview Elsa, 20-4-2017.



historical (political) struggles. This definition places the concept of citizenship in the debate about inequality and power differences (Turner 1993, 3). By using this other side of citizenship as Turner describes, it is possible to analyse the different opportunities of individuals and groups to become competent members of society (De la Paz 2012, 2). Werbner (1998, 2-3) argues that the discourse of citizenship started from a historical contradiction; the time of universal emancipation was also the time of subordination and exclusion based on ethnicity and gender (whereby females were excluded and subordinated). Nowadays, the relationship between gender and citizenship is still challenged by feminist movements (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 25). In Mexico, as in many other countries in Latin America, there has been an increase in demands for citizenship coming from women's movements, which suggests a certain dissatisfaction of the current situation (Franceschet & Macdonald 2004,5). This begs the question of how women feel about their citizenship and what the reasons are for this dissatisfaction. Therefore, the research question of this thesis is:

How do gender relations inform the ways in which Mexican women perceive, give meaning to, and construct their social citizenship in daily life in Mérida, Mexico?

## 1.2 Relevance

When it comes to the scientific debate about citizenship, gender, and the way these influence the daily lives of people, more specifically women, there seems to be a certain lack of anthropological research. Catherine Neveu (2005, 200) critiques anthropologists who confuse nationality and citizenship, and she states that citizenship is socially and politically constructed (Neveu 2005, 200). She recommends that anthropologists study citizenship to explore how it relates to cultural issues for example (Neveu 2005, 202). However, most anthropological research about citizenship still only focuses on dealings with the government (Stack 2013, 74). In literature about women and citizenship, most anthropological articles revolve around how these women try to combat their lack of rights. What it is exactly that is lacking for women in general and what the underlying reason(s) for this are according to them is not written about so much. This research contributes to the theoretical debate by providing insights into how Mexican women perceive their citizenship and why they experience it this way. It helps to fill in these gaps in order to provide a more holistic view of the connections between gender and citizenship in Mexico. Judging by all the events and activities organized in Mérida around subjects like gender equality, gender discrimination, and violence against women, it is safe to say that these are hot topics at the moment. The societal relevance of this research therefore is to contribute to the debate by providing

information about the underlying reasons for issues surrounding gender inequality.

During my three months of fieldwork in Mérida, I found that the women I talked to have very different experiences of their citizenship. Women involved in politics or working for organizations striving for more gender equality were often more critical of the current position of women, whereas other women were more or less satisfied. I was surprised to see the passion of certain women, many of whom were involved in feminist organizations, while at the same time seeing the down-to-earth attitude of women who were not involved in anything comparable. Generally, though, there was a certain critical stance about opportunities and inequality, not solely based on gender but also on ethnicity and class. The aim of this thesis is to give attention to this dissatisfaction and the way people perceive this in daily life, in order to create more consciousness and possibly to change this in the future. I will argue that the gender inequalities are quite severe in some aspects, but the younger generations seem to be making quite some changes for the better.

### 1.3 Research population and methodology

My fieldwork took place from February 3 until May 1, 2017 in Mérida, a city in the east of Mexico in the state Yucatán. I started by contacting women's organizations on Facebook who fight for a better position of women in society, of which two replied: *Mujeres Icadep* (women's empowerment) and *Mujer es Yucatan 2017* (focused on the political involvement of women). I was able to conduct some interviews with people working for these organizations. As the feminist community in Mérida is quite close, these women gave me the names of other women to interview and spend time with, who in turn did the same. The host family I was living with at the time also provided me with a lot of participants: family, friends, and neighbours. Mexican friends of my American roommates were also willing to help me with my research. By going to events for women's rights I was able to have some more conversations with the women involved, and thus to expand my research. Most of these women did not identify as indigenous. About half of the people I interviewed were from Mérida, the other half had moved to Mérida from other parts of Mexico. I have talked to some men as well, to get a possible different kind of view on gender equality. The ages ranged from 18-76 years old, as I wanted to see whether there would be different opinions depending on generation. Most people I talked with were middle class, which means that their perspective might be different than the perspective of people of the lower and higher classes.

One of the research methods I used most was semi-structured interviewing. I found this a very useful method, because I was able to obtain nuanced and detailed information by giving my participants some space but at the same time keeping control (Ferraro and Andreatta 2011,110). The location varied every time; sometimes I was asked to go to the

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person's office, other people I met at Starbucks, some people came to our house and other people invited me to their house. Participant observation was another method I used, by observing and interacting with my host family during family events, but also by attending lectures about women's rights and taking part in the aforementioned workshop for example. Participant observation is a useful tool in developing trust and connections with participants, which provides a better access to participants and activities (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 110). By attending certain feminist events, I found people at first to be surprised that I had taken part, which quickly resulted in appreciation for my research and invites to other events. I also conducted participant observation with a few families with small children, to see how the tasks in the household would be divided. Unfortunately this was quite difficult to plan since the people had difficult schedules, which meant I could not visit them as often. This made me aware of the fact that they might do things a little differently due to my presence than they usually would, even though I asked them to do everything as they would if they were following their normal routine. I think it is important to be aware of the influence your presence as a researcher can have on people, especially in the beginning or when you do not see people as often. I therefore found solely observing also to be very useful, for example by walking around in the centre of Mérida, when people are less occupied with others. This provided me with information about the family and gender roles within the family for example. I found hanging out, observing people during leisure activities (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 5) quite important as well in my research because, especially within the host family, people were being themselves instead of being very self-conscious and trying to act and say things they thought I wanted to hear from them. Through informal conversations with my host family but also with taxi drivers for example, I discovered information that at first did not always seem to be relevant, but later still proved to be useful. What I found to be very frustrating at times was how people deal with appointments. Several times people did not show up, even when they had confirmed to me the day before that they would. Some locations were quite far away and more expensive to get to, so to travel to them felt like a waste of time, money, and energy at times. Other times people were very warm, inviting, and helpful. Some people were a little hesitant at first, but when they felt more at ease they tried to help me as much as they could. The amount of information I was able to gather in these three months unfortunately does not all fit into one thesis, but I have tried to demonstrate the different methods I have used with the most relevant information to give as much of a holistic view as possible.

### 1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter discusses the role of gender (influenced by patriarchal ideas) in daily life, such as within the family, in the household, on

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the job market and in politics, to see the thorough influence it has in daily life. In the second chapter, the concept of citizenship will be discussed, including the notion of belonging, the role of the government and the things that many people find lacking in their citizenship. The final chapter brings the two previous chapters together, by explaining the connection between citizenship and gender by demonstrating the obstacles and opportunities of women. The role of the government in this matter will be discussed as well, followed by the final paragraph about changes and the future of women's position and thus their citizenship in society. This chapter is followed by a conclusion, bibliography and a few appendices.

## Chapter 1: Gender in daily life

This chapter will connect theories about and related to gender with the way in which gender roles effect the daily life of women in Mérida, Mexico. The chapter will start with a theoretical explanation of the terms *machismo* and patriarchy. These concepts serve as a guiding principle in the existing ideas about gender in Mérida. The chapter will then explore several areas of daily life that are affected by gender and gender roles. The aspect of gender and gender roles in the family will be discussed first, since family serves as a pillar of society, as became clear to me very early on as I started talking to people in Mérida. “*El valor de la maternidad, el valor de la familia sigue superando a cualquier modelo*” – the value of motherhood, the value of the family remains the leading model. This quote from Beatriz, an anthropologist, shows that family is a priority and is highly valued in Mérida.<sup>4</sup> Family is also the first place where people taught how to behave and what ‘fits’ their gender. As my host brother told me, “Everything starts with the upbringing in the house”.<sup>5</sup> The next theme is the household, which was traditionally seen as the woman’s domain. Since work is a part of daily life as well, this will be discussed next, to see whether there are differences in this aspect between men and women. To discuss other parts of social life that do not fit within the other themes, the next topic that will be discussed is the social expectations and behaviour of men and women. The chapter ends with a discussion about gender and politics, followed by a short conclusion of the chapter.

*Machismo* could be viewed as a grand narrative in the cultural history of Latino men, social exchanges, and gender behaviour. Since this research is about social relations and gender, it is important to discuss this concept. According to Bilmes (1992) and Mayo and Resnick (1996), cited by Segrest, Romero and Domke-Damonte (2003, 16), *machismo* is a form of masculinity. It often has a negative connotation and is used to outline how male superiority and dominance are strengthened by parents and society. Falicov (2010, 313) however cites Mirandé (1997), who sees male gender roles as multidimensional behaviours which can be placed on a continuum from positive to negative. There are many theories about *machismo* and its origins. Certain theories see *machismo* as a possible ‘colonial inheritance’ from when the Spanish conquered Latin America (Falicov 2010, 314). Others, like Peña (1991) argue it stems from social class, in which men with little power express their need for power in the domestic sphere by oppressing women (Falicov 2010, 310).

The other concept that needs some explanation, is patriarchy. Hunnicutt (2009, 553) describes the bottom line of patriarchy as “systems of male domination and female subordination.” However, the term *patriarchy* has been criticized heavily, because it was

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<sup>4</sup> Semi-structured interview Beatriz, 28-2-2017.

<sup>5</sup> Semi-structured interview Alberto, 1-5-2017.

used as a fixed, timeless structure, without space for differences in context or room for variation in gender relations (Hunnicuttt 2009, 558). Discussing patriarchy and *machismo* is important because they are part of the meanings attributed to gender. Gender refers to the social and cultural definitions of masculinity or femininity (or to a different gender that a culture may recognize). Gender and gender relations play a big role in all social organizations (Ingham 1996, 66). The traditional patriarchal culture in Latin America makes it difficult for women to be treated as equal to men, in different levels of society. These traditional roles and the concept of democracy as equality for all causes a certain friction (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 25). This friction exists because the traditional roles in Yucatecan society are determined for the most part by gender. One aspect in which gender plays an important role is the first foundation in life: family.

One of the first things that will catch your eye when walking around in the centre of Mérida is the presence of many families spending time together. You will see parents taking their children to restaurants, or enjoying some ice cream in the park. On Sunday mornings, parents often take their children to church. After church, grandparents and other family members come together to spend some time with each other. However, it is interesting to note that seeing a father alone with his children is quite rare. Vigoya (2001, 241) refers to the research of Escobar Latapí (1998), who researched the lives of Mexican men in Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Mexico City. Escobar Latapí concludes that the influence of mothers on their son's rearing and schooling is quite determining. This means that women seem to be (much more) more involved with their children than men. This first glance is a good representation of the place of family in society in Mérida: number one. As Beatriz stated: "*Los mexicanos somos muy de la familia*" (We Mexicans are very much about family). Beatriz (57 years old), has a PhD in Anthropology, with a focus on gender. She describes herself as a feminist.<sup>6</sup> Several people I spoke with stated that family is seen as one of the biggest, if not the biggest priorities in life.<sup>7</sup> For many people, women in particular, the goal is to create a family first, and after that to see if it is possible to get for example a university degree, according to Regina, who works at the Women's Institute in Mérida. This is what the couple Natalia and José confirmed, as they admitted that they had done the same thing.<sup>8</sup> In Mérida, there is still a substantial number of women who are housewives. As many people told me, for generations, the division of tasks has been the following: men work outside the house and support their families financially, women maintain the house and take care of the children. This seems to be changing among younger generations, for most younger people I talked to decide to go to

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<sup>6</sup> Semi-structured interview Beatriz, 28-2-17.

<sup>7</sup> Semi-structured interview Beatriz, 28-2-2017.

Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-2017.

Semi-structured interview Adriana, 20-4-2017.

<sup>8</sup> Hanging out with Natalia and José, 28-5-17.

university before they get married and start a family. That this choice does not apply to everyone, however, becomes clear from what my American friend Sophie told me. One of her teachers on her study abroad program, who was working in a private middle school, told her the following story. When she asked her class, which mostly consisted of female students, what they wanted to become, some of the girls responded that they wanted to become housewives.<sup>9</sup> This means that even in the higher social classes there is still this sense of the importance of family and of the mother having a central position in the house. It might also point to the pressure from society for women to start their own family. The expression “*ya se dejó el tren,*” for example, which means that the time for getting married and having children has passed, is a rather common one. It refers to women of a certain age, who are judged for not having done these things, as Regina explained.<sup>10</sup> This puts a certain pressure on these women. Until the late 1970s, Mexican society was influenced heavily by hegemonic, patriarchal cultural models, with a foundation in Catholic morality and historical traditions. In these models, the nuclear family was central and there were strong differences in power and the division of labour. Since then, there have been drastic social changes, that have affected the gender order in both the private and public sphere, according to Olcott, Vaughan and Cano (2006), Tuñón Pablós (1987), Villafuerte García (1998), and McGinn (1966), cited by Clough-Riquelme (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 40). Examples of these changes are birth control and women entering the job market, which have improved women’s position in society.

Despite these changes, the nuclear family is still seen as the number one priority for many people. The importance of family can be seen in the difficulties that some women face when they are no longer happy in their marriage, and they try to seek a way out. One of these women is Silvia, who is 59 years old. We met at the *Instituto de la Mujer* (Women’s Institute), which she has been attending for years. One of the most important things she learned there was building up her self-esteem, which was ‘buried’ as she described it. When she learned to stand up for herself in her own home, her husband and children thought she had been brainwashed. For 32 years she stayed with the same man, a man who became jealous whenever she talked to a male neighbour, who would not let her go to workshops because she had to serve him dinner, who would not give her permission to meet with her friends, and who would use violence against her at times. She reasoned that his behaviour was due to his low self-esteem having come from a family that yelled at each other, insulted each other, and where violence was also common. She, however, came from a home where all of this did not happen, so it was not something she was used to. Then why would she stay with him for 32 years? Because of her family. This reflects the value that is placed upon

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<sup>9</sup> Hanging out with Sophie, 20-4-2017.

<sup>10</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-17.

keeping your family together. Now that she has separated from her husband, her brothers and sisters think it is strange that she is living alone. Silvia, however, decided to choose freedom, and is now developing a small food delivery business from home<sup>11</sup>. This is a bold choice, and is one which can be very difficult for women in a similar situation. When she was married, Silvia was not allowed to work or study, as is the case for many women. Not being able to provide financially for yourself and your children and in some cases having to miss the support of your family makes this a very difficult situation to escape from. Regina stated that some women decide to stay with their husbands until their children have grown up. Usually, people in Mérida live with their parents until they get married.<sup>12</sup> As my friend Camila, who is 21, explained, she has to live in Mexico City while she studies, and her mother is terrified that something will happen to her, and wants to keep all her children with her for as long as possible.<sup>13</sup> Most of the people in their twenties I spoke with that were in their twenties still lived at home, and did not have plans to move out in the near future. This reflects the preference of most people to stay with their family instead of finding a place of their own if they are not married, which also shows the high value of family for these people.

A lot of people I worked with made statements about the presence of *machismo* in daily life. “*El Mexicano es muy machista*” - “Mexican men are very macho” - according to Elsa, an 18 year old culinary school student.<sup>14</sup> Many people expressed their dissatisfaction with the influence of *machismo* in Mexican society. Katia describes her husband as *machista* as well. “He has the idea that the man gives orders and the woman has to oblige.”<sup>15</sup> The Spanish word *machismo* is often used when describing a mindset of male domination or superiority, legitimized through patriarchal social patterns and supported through cultural values and norms (Segrest, Romero, and Domke-Damonte (2003, 16). Dominant culture and socio-political variables influence cognition and behaviour. In Mérida, *machismo* is part of the dominant patriarchal culture. The ideas and traits of *machismo* have become part of men’s and women’s cultural identity; the socially acceptable images that have become internalized as the public ideal (Falicov 2010, 311). As previously explained, the idealized image of having a perfect family plays an important role in society, for many people it is part of their cultural identity. Silvia, the woman who stayed with her husband for 32 years despite his violence, told me how her oldest sister did not agree with her on this decision. “We all have our cross to bear,” she rationalized, and continued that if she could stay with him for all this time, she should have stayed with him for the rest of her life.<sup>16</sup> For the family’s sake,

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<sup>11</sup> Open interview Silvia, 28-4-2017.

<sup>12</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-17.

<sup>13</sup> Semi-structured interview Camila, 12-4-2017.

<sup>14</sup> Semi-structured interview Elsa, 20-4-2017.

<sup>15</sup> Semi-structured interview Katia, 30-4-2017.

<sup>16</sup> Semi-structured interview Silvia, 28-4-2017.



women are often expected to stay with their husbands, even if they suffer from violence of any kind. Family remains the most important thing, so for the sake of your children or because no one else in the family has gotten a divorce, separation or divorce is strongly disapproved of by certain people. Regina talked about how some women decide to wait to divorce or separate from their husbands until their children have grown up.<sup>17</sup> This shows the pressure of family and society, and how they can disapprove of women that decide to escape the violence or bad treatment of their husbands (this is not to say that there are no women who are violent towards their husbands). *Machismo* and the family as idealized image are still part of the dominant culture in Mérida, although some people and organizations try to change this. One example is how many younger women I spoke with were studying, trying to build up a future and become independent. On the other hand, according to Natalia, many people in the first instance are concerned with creating a family. This often means that they decide to postpone studying until after they have children.<sup>18</sup> What is also noticeable in the centre of Mérida, is that there are often a lot of (very) young couples. These are examples of the conviction that relationships and family are important from a very early age, and are part of the cultural identity of many people in Mérida.

Another theme in which gender and gender relations play a very important role is the household. The household used to be the domain of women only in Mérida, but this seems to be shifting ever so slightly towards a more equal division of tasks between all family members. Most women seem satisfied with the division of tasks. Many made statements about their husbands such as “he helps me” or “he prepares his own breakfast,” and they were happy he did.<sup>19</sup> However, ‘helping’ still implies that the women are the ones in charge of the majority of the tasks in the household. Christina, fifty years old, explained that in older generations, as with her stepfather’s, many men would refuse to do anything in the house. She feels this is why women are satisfied quite easily nowadays if their husband does do chores in the house.<sup>20</sup> Many women I talked to came from a traditional background. This means that their father was the one that made all the decisions, and their mother took care of the family and the household by herself, for the most part. Rosa, who is 32 years old, recalled a situation from her childhood related to this subject where the father of one of her friends would not eat if the mother did not serve him his food on the kitchen table. This shows how strict some people take these traditional gender roles.<sup>21</sup> Some interviewees, most of them age forty and up, stated that they had to serve their brothers and fathers. This was

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<sup>17</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-2017.

<sup>18</sup> Informal conversation Natalia, 26-4-2017.

<sup>19</sup> Semi-structured interview Yolanda, 30-3-2017.

Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>20</sup> Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

<sup>21</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.

the division: the men take care of the work outside the house, whilst inside the house the women have the responsibility to serve the men and take care of the house. An example of this gendered vision comes from Katia, who is 76 years old. When she and her husband bought a house in Mexico City, her husband let her decide on many things in and about the house, because he thought that she as a woman would know best when it came to what was needed in the house. Katia worked as a teacher until she became a mother. She stated that it was not possible to divide the tasks in the household and the care of the children, since her husband would always come home very tired. He was away a lot for his job, so she had to be both mother and father for their four children. People at her children's schools even thought she was a single mother. It became clear to me by the way she was talking about him that she was not too happy about his behaviour. "*Él quería estar atendido en todo (...), como un rey*" - he wanted to be taken care of at all times, like a king. This implicates something about how he saw his position and the position of his wife, himself being superior in this sense, and his wife there to serve him. This is an example of *machismo*, the idea that the man is dominant and superior. Other people, especially the younger ones, state that their brothers and sometimes their fathers as well do take part in maintaining the household. It is possible that because of this background and history, women are not experiencing this unequal division as such. As I can conclude from the stories of many people I spoke with, it seems that the gendered pattern of only the woman being responsible for the household is changing towards a more equal division. At the moment, women do still have more responsibilities in the household. Age plays an important role in this division, as among younger people there seems to be more equality, and gender roles are not as strict as they often are with the older generations.

Katia stopped working when she had children, but not all women in Mérida decide to stop working when they become a mother. In Mérida, it is quite common for middle and upper class families to have a cleaning lady, or a male cleaner in some cases. Mostly women from Mayan descent offer their services as a cleaning lady for a very low price, which is why many families can afford to hire someone to clean the house.<sup>22</sup> However, usually it is still the woman who is in charge of hiring this person and giving them tasks and assignments. It therefore seems that the household is something more of a woman's responsibility. My 64 year old host mother Andrea and her son Alberto who both grew up in Mexico City, often told me that this idea of men not doing anything to help maintain the household is a more Yucatecan trait. In Mexico City, women have to work outside the house as well for financial reasons, and it is not as common to be a housewife. Therefore they do not have enough time to do everything in the house by themselves. Alberto explained how he had to learn to clean

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<sup>22</sup> Semi-structured interview Beatriz, 28-2-2017.

his room and wash and iron his clothes as a child, because his mother Andrea did not have enough time to do this. During my stay with this host family, Alberto and Andrea would often clean the house together. However, Andrea was the one in charge.

The ideas of men having the sole economic responsibility of the household and women existing exclusively to tend to the family seem to be changing, says Escobar Latapí (cited by Vigoya 2001, 241). This would mean that more and more women have a job outside the house, which is the next theme that will be discussed: work. Vigoya (2001, 250) calls the worksite a place influenced by gender relations; for example inequalities, income distribution, and the classification of work as male or female. This was confirmed in several ways in my research. For example, in the centre of Mérida, you will find many stores (selling food, clothes, souvenirs, and so on) looking for employees. Interestingly, these job advertisements often ask specifically for female employees, within a certain age range, and sometimes they even demand that applicants are single. The women of ICADEP, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, told me that even if in the job application there is no request for future employees to be single, when women get invited for a job interview they often are asked whether they are married and whether they have children. If the answer to both questions is yes, it makes them a less desirable candidate. Employers think that in this case, women are less flexible in hours and that they also need more free days, in case their children get sick for example and they need to take care of them. They say this is the opposite for men. Men often get complimented for having a family and thus being responsible.<sup>23</sup> Many women I spoke with stated that women often earn less even while doing the same job as men. Some people also said women are more likely to be exploited, for example in having to work overtime but not getting paid. In some cases, sexual favours are requested in order to get a job or a promotion. According to Alberto “women are seen as objects, and are not chosen for their intelligence or capabilities”.<sup>24</sup> In the case of a woman and a man applying for the same job, with the same capacities, many of the people I worked with told me that usually the man would be chosen. This shows the unequal starting point that women have on the job market compared to their male counterparts. It is an indication of certain qualities and characteristics that many people in Mérida attribute to men, and different less positive ideas about what women are capable of.

In fact, in daily life in Mérida, you can spot a certain gendered pattern job-wise. In clothing stores and small shops, the majority of the employees are female. On the other hand, there are barely any women driving a bus or taxi. In American or Western companies such as Starbucks, I have seen that the staff is a lot more mixed. Manual labour such as construction work is typically seen as male profession, according to Sara. Sara represents a

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<sup>23</sup> Semi-structured group interview members ICADEP, 1-3-2017.

<sup>24</sup> Semi-structured interview Alberto, 1-5-2017.

political party in the local council of Mérida. She says that women working in these *trabajos para hombres* ('men's jobs'), are often thought to be lesbian. It is not considered as feminine, because they are working in a male-dominated area. Besides her job in politics, she has a fumigation company. This means she deals with construction workers, architects, and engineers for example, who are all mostly men. Before that, she worked as an administrator for her father's bus company. "In the beginning, when the drivers or mechanics had an issue to discuss, they would approach me and tell me to get my father". However, in time they started to respect her and they developed a strong bond. She says that in the beginning it was very difficult for them to have a woman as their boss. In other bus companies this is still the case. Sara explains that in bus companies where women have a certain share of the company, it is often because they are the widow of the owner. However, they often get more or less forced to sell their share, which leads to a continuation of this 'men's world'.<sup>25</sup> In other words, there are quite fixed ideas about which jobs are suitable for men and for women, and it is difficult to change this. This limits women in their choice of line of work, which means they cannot practice their citizenship like men can.

The idea of certain jobs or areas of work only being for men (or women), also stretches to certain studies. One time, I decided to visit a university called the *Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana* (UTM), a university that offers mostly technical studies. The first thing that caught my eye was that most students sitting there were male. One of the young men I had a conversation with told me how some parents do not let their daughters study something like engineering, or at least try to talk her out of it. They think it is not a suitable area of study for girls (here we see the classification of certain areas of study as male or female, as Viveros Vigeró (2001, 250) stated about the workplace). However, several students said that there are more girls studying than before, and that little by little more and more girls choose these types of subject. Of course, this also has something to do with personal taste.<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned in the previous part, some women quit their job when they become a parent. This is very well accepted in Yucatecan society, probably because in the older generations the majority of women stopped working when they had children, or maybe never worked. A woman who stays at home to take care of the house and her husband and children is called an *ama de casa*. This is not a free choice for everyone. Several people told me how they know neighbours, family members, or friends who are forbidden from studying or working by their husbands. It is important to be clear about how this is not the situation for every woman in Mérida, but these traditions seem to be quite strong in certain families. For younger women up to about 35 years old, it seems to be more common to get a job outside

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<sup>25</sup> Semi-structured interview Sara, 16-2-2017.

<sup>26</sup> Informal conversations with students of UTM, 27-4-2017.

the house. This is partially because of financial reasons, as one salary often is not enough to take care of an entire family anymore. Escobar Latapí (1998), as cited by Vigoya (2001, 241), sees that there is clearly a process of change in male attitudes about their wives having a job outside the house, but that does not necessarily mean that gender relations are constructed equally everywhere.

Though I have discussed some of the main areas of daily life, there remains a number of important issues influenced by gender which do not belong with any of the previously discussed themes. These parts of social life are therefore reviewed in this paragraph. A thing that seems to be part of dominant culture is the difference in the way men and women are judged for the same type of behaviour. As 21 year old accountancy student Adriana explains, "A guy could get drunk every weekend, and would be seen as a hero, but girls need to be very careful."<sup>27</sup> In other words, generally it is socially acceptable for guys to drink a lot and hang out with or date many girls, but it is seen as something negative if a girl does it. Another example of the difference in judgement is when it comes to dating or hanging out with people of the opposite sex. "When a man dates several women at the same time, he is seen as a ladies' man. When a woman dates several men at the same time, she is a whore". This is what Christina told me, who, judging by her tone clearly disapproved. Although she feels as though things are changing for the better, she says it is a very slow process.<sup>28</sup> Her statements reflect the double standard for women. Many people in their twenties that I encountered seemed to be quite liberal in their ideas about gender and gender roles. I say 'seemed', because if you ask certain questions, it turns out they still have some of the more traditional Mexican ideas about differences between boys and girls. Some of the male students I spoke with at the university told me that girls often have different curfews than their brothers. Daniel, one of these students, had several friends that often sent their girlfriends home early, because they did not want the girls to be out late.<sup>29</sup> The students all stated they were in favour of gender equality and that they would treat their own children equally. However, when asking about curfews for example, they would awkwardly smile and say that in that case they would not let their daughter out until late, for safety reasons.<sup>30</sup> This shows that even in the younger generation, in certain ways they stick with the traditional upbringing. This can be explained as *benevolent sexism*. Glick and Fiske (2001), as cited by Falicov (2010, 315) present *hostile sexism* and *benevolent sexism* as existing ideologies in patriarchal societies. *Hostile sexism* is the idea that women should be dominated and mistrusted, because they are thought to have hidden powers or cunning ways. *Benevolent sexism* assumes that women need protection and affection. This paternalistic idea is implicit

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<sup>27</sup> Semi-structured interview Adriana, 20-4-2017.

<sup>28</sup> Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

<sup>29</sup> Informal conversation Daniel, 27-4-2017.

<sup>30</sup> Informal conversations with students of UTM, 27-4-2017.

in the conviction that women are weaker and need the protection of men. The difference in curfews for boys and girls is an example of this idea that girls need more protection than boys, and thus points to the influence of patriarchal ideas in society in Mérida. Another thing that struck me was that different people pointed to how they were in favour of equality between men and women, but that they also pointed to the physical differences (the man being stronger), even if that was not really relevant to the question.<sup>31</sup> The awareness about the physique of men and women is apparently quite high, which possibly influences their ideas about what is best for women when it comes to safety and certain jobs.

The attention for the safety of women became clear to me during the celebration of Carnival. The location of the Carnival was outside the city of Mérida, but there were free buses going there. There were special buses for women and children offered by the municipality. Employees in pink shirts approached women and girls in the centre to make them aware of this service and guide them to the departure point. This was to the great delight of my host mother, who was already worrying about my having to return and being harassed by drunk people. At the Carnival, there were several posters on the bathroom stalls with phone numbers and information about help services in case of domestic violence and emotional abuse for example. The special buses and posters pointed to the awareness and involvement of both municipality and civil organizations in women and women's safety.<sup>32</sup> As a matter of fact, there are several feminist groups in Mérida that are fighting for women's rights and safety. On International Women's Day on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2017, all day long there were events in different places in Mérida. The events ranged from a demonstration with handmade signs and an interview with the press in the park, to an intellectual gathering with speakers on the roof of the Anthropology Museum. At the demonstration in the central park of Mérida, many women protesting (for example against discrimination based on gender and violence against women), were in their fifties. They stated that it was important that young people joined them in their fight, and that they needed to be more aware of their situation and the sometimes horrible situations some women are in. Afterwards, Beatriz commented to me that she understood why they had a shortage of young people joining them. The younger generations go out to clubs, they drink, study, they do not start a family at a very young age and they have better chances of being economically independent. They feel like their position is not that bad, and they may even be quite satisfied with it. In contrast, the fight of these older women seemed like a throwback to fighting for basic rights which many young women already feel as though they have.<sup>33</sup> This indicates that younger and older women have a different perception of their position in society. Nowadays it is more common for girls to go to

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<sup>31</sup> Semi-structured interview Hector, 24-4-2017.

Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.

<sup>32</sup> Participant observation at Carnival, 27-2-2017.

<sup>33</sup> Informal conversation Beatriz, 8-3-2017.

university or have a job outside the house, whereas this was not as common when these older women were still young. However, these older women still see a lot of inequalities that they are trying to improve. Younger women may not see as many problems since there are a lot of things they can do, so they might not get confronted as much with the inequalities or do not recognize them as inequalities.

Besides feminists, I met some other women that had their doubts about the current position of women. They were talking about politics, which is the final theme of this chapter. To promote gender equality, there is a 50/50 rule in politics in Mexico. As Sara explained, the national Congress must consist of 50% women and 50% men. Half of the candidates that each political party presents must be female. Several women I spoke with were very critical about this rule. Political parties put women forward as their candidates in the districts where they know they will most likely not win, and they put their male candidates in the districts where they know they will win, according to Sara.<sup>34</sup> “Look at what jobs they have, they always get the social departments, never the ones with the actual money,” was what Lilian told me. Lilian is a Dutch woman who moved to Mexico over twenty years ago. She started a foundation for children with disabilities and their parents. She has a critical stance about gender equality in Mérida, not only about the current situation, but also about the solutions that are brought forward. This quote shows how she does not have a lot of confidence in the 50/50 rule, because the men get all the departments with the most money and power. When I said the phrase “Mexico is a democracy,” she sneered.<sup>35</sup> It was obvious that she had low confidence in politics. Sara feels like she is being respected and valued as a politician now a lot more than before. She says her age (she turned fifty a few months after our interview), is probably an important reason for this change. As a young woman in her twenties, men mostly looked at her as though she was an object, she did not feel valued for her opinion or capacities.<sup>36</sup> I noticed that women in Mérida who are not involved in politics are a lot more positive about the presence of women in politics, and they feel that the situation has progressed a lot and that women are getting more power in politics. However, generally the trust in politics and politicians remains very low in Mérida.

What can be concluded from this chapter is that there is a strong presence of gendered patterns in daily life. They are influenced by patriarchy and *machismo* and the way these are embedded in the dominant ideas and values in society. There are certain differences, for example between older and younger people or people involved in politics and people not involved in politics. In the next chapter, it will become clear what it means to be a citizen in Mérida, which involves politics as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Semi-structured interview Sara, 16-2-2017.

<sup>35</sup> Semi-structured interview Lilian, 3-3-2017.

<sup>36</sup> Semi-structured interview Sara, 16-2-2017.

## Chapter 2: Citizenship in Mérida

In this chapter, the citizenship of people in Mérida will be discussed. The chapter starts with a theoretical explanation of the meaning of citizenship, because it is a difficult concept which can be explained and interpreted in many ways. Then, the issues of belonging and identity will be explained and applied to people living in Mérida, since these concepts are closely related to citizenship. In the next paragraph, the role of the government in this citizenship will be brought to light. In the final paragraph, the shortcomings of citizenship according to people in Mérida will be discussed.

Citizenship can be explained as “a legal relationship between the legitimate members of the political community and the state” (Joseph 2000, xvii). So among other things, citizenship is a membership in a certain political community. Cecchini (2003), cited by Sweetman, Rowlands, and Abou-Habib (2011, 349), argues that there are different dimensions of citizenship: political, legal, regional, national, international, economic, and social. Citizenship can provide a framework of ideas about roles and relationships in society; it does not suggest a certain interpretation of the world (Taylor and Wilson 2004, 155). As has become clear from the previous chapter, there is a certain dominant gendered framework in Mérida. This can have negative connotations for women, for example with regard to job opportunities. Yuval-Davis (2007, 561-562) calls attention to the debate in political and sociological theory about whether citizenship should be considered as an abstract category of ‘the citizen’ or as an embodied category, or somewhere in between. An embodied category refers to people that are different, for example in terms of class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. This can be linked to multi-layered citizenship, which I will explain in the third paragraph. The community that Joseph (2000) mentioned, turned out to be quite strong in Mérida.

### 2.1 Identity in Yucatan

February 27, 2017. It is a warm day in Mérida, and people from all over the city are coming together at the Carnival festival. Carnival is celebrated every year in Mérida, over several consecutive days. The area where it is celebrated this year is a little outside the city. Buses are packed with people, and the parking lot is filled with cars. The atmosphere is inviting and cheery. There are shops with clothes and food, and some small stages where the audience can participate in the performance. The main attraction, though, is the parade. In the burning sun, people cheer for the different groups passing by in the parade. Some are promoting brands, others show off their dance skills, and then there are some groups who hand out candy and other products. After the parade, a lot of people gather in front of the main stage.



At one point, the man leading the performance starts chanting “*Yucateecoos!*” (the name for people from Yucatán). The crowd responds by shouting the same thing. This is repeated a few times. While witnessing this I wondered, what is the relevance of cheering for your region, when this is a worldwide Christian tradition? People in Mérida appear to identify a lot with the regional aspects of life of the state Yucatán; it is an important marker of their identity. This feeling of unity and being part of the community of Yucatán can be described by Anderson’s term ‘imagined community’ (1991). In this case, people living there will never meet most other visitors of the Carnival, but they still feel united. It shows that “citizenship is a lived experience of a relationship or set of relations” Clough-Riquelme (2007, 31).

Carnival is only one example. Many people in Mérida talk proudly about Yucatán and its traditions. The unique Yucatecan cuisine is highly valued by the inhabitants. One of the Yucatecan traditions is to eat a certain dish consisting of a bean soup and pig (*frijol con puerco*) every Monday. Among the original inhabitants of Yucatán this is still quite customary. Another tradition and identity marker is the Yucatecan traditional dance called *la jarana yucateca*. This dance was performed in the centre of Mérida every few weeks, in front of a large crowd in the restaurants nearby. Men dress in white suits and wear a little white hat. Women wear white dresses with colourful patterns of flowers, and the music is usually played live. The dance consists of a lot of turning while holding the arms up and keeping the upper body straight. This allows the dancers to balance objects on their head without letting them fall. For Hector, who is 42, it is important to him that his daughters learn this traditional dance, “because they are yucatecas.” He is from Tabasco, but still he finds it important that his daughters follow the Yucatecan traditions such as the *jarana yucateca* and being able to speak Maya. He wants them to identify with the state they are growing up in.<sup>37</sup> This feeling of belonging, in this case to Yucatán, can be an act of self-identification or identification by other people. Belonging is always a fluid process, never static (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). After having lived in Yucatán for 16 years, Hector says he also feels a little Yucatecan.<sup>38</sup> He is an example of how belonging is fluid, because as he confirmed the state you are from indeed is quite important for your identity. Before he only identified with Tabasco and its habits and traditions, but now the traditions of Yucatán are part of his identity as well. It shows how people can be open to changes in their identity and how feelings of belonging can change, like Yuval-Davis (2006) argued. Belonging is constructed on three analytical levels. The first level is social locations; when people are said to be of a certain age group, gender, or class, for example, it refers to social and economic locations. Some differences do not always imply power positions, but are only markers of locations. It is important to note that these locations are almost never determined by only one category. For example, it is not the same being a

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<sup>37</sup> Semi-structured interview Hector, 24-4-2017.

<sup>38</sup> Semi-structured interview Hector, 24-4-2017.

woman of middle class or lower class (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199-200). The second level is about identifications and emotional attachments. Yuval-Davis (2006, 202) defines identities as narratives, in that people tell themselves and others about their identity. They can be reproduced from generation to generation, but this reproduction is always done in a selective way, and the narratives can be changed and contested. Hector's daughters' learning the traditional Yucatecan dance and Mayan language is an example of how their mother (and father) tell and teach them about their identity. People are emotionally invested and look for attachment in the way their belonging is constructed. Constructions of belonging have a performative dimension according to Vikki Bell (1998), as mentioned by Yuval-Davis (2006, 203). Certain repetitive practices that connect individual and collective behaviour are very important in the construction and reproduction of attachment and identity narratives. The traditional Yucatecan dance is a clear example of this performative dimension. The final dimension of belonging are the ethical and political values. This also means there are decisions about the boundaries, with respect to where they should or could be drawn. This is where the transition from the realm of belonging to the politics of belonging can be made (Yuval-Davis 2006, 203-204).

The politics of belonging refers to the boundaries that are made around and according to the political community. This is where the distinction of 'us' versus 'them' is made (Yuval-Davis 2006, 204). There are a few differences between citizenship and the notion of belonging. The identification of the self and 'the other' is one of the differences. People seen as members of other communities (based on ethnicity for example), are not seen as *belonging* to the nation state community, even if they have formal citizenship of this country or community (Yuval-Davis 2007, 563). Another difference is that of the emotional aspect of belonging; people *love* their country, or they *fear* loss and pollution of their culture and traditions (Yuval-Davis 2007, 564). Several people I talked to told me how difficult it was for them when they moved to Mérida. Their stories are examples of the difference between citizenship and belonging. Formally, they had Mexican citizenship so they could just move to Mérida, but for many of them it took a long time before they had even the slightest feeling of belonging in Mérida. Alejandra, a 55-year old woman who runs a homemade jam business, had a very hard time as well when she moved to Mérida. She felt like "the circles were closed." She means that people in Mérida are generally not very open to people from other places, as they prefer to stay with their own group of friends.<sup>39</sup> Adriana, who is actually from Mérida, confirms that it is very difficult to mix with people from Mérida because most of them are very closed off.<sup>40</sup> She does say that people in Mérida are gradually starting to open up more towards newcomers, but at the same time, people in Mérida stay true to their traditions.

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<sup>39</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>40</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

Alejandra calls them very *arraigada*, rooted. She says it is very difficult to change them.<sup>41</sup> This word came up in a lot of the conversations I had, which confirms once again the importance Yucatecans attach to their traditions. For people from other states, fitting in has been very difficult. Many Yucatecans see them as ‘the other,’ as people who do not have the same traditions or mentality as they themselves do. From the previous examples it has become clear how much people love Yucatán, and how proud they are to be from this particular state. This emotional attachment to Yucatán seems to be quite strong among the Yucatecans, but among some people that are originally from other states as well. Alejandra is very positive about living in Mérida. “I like living in Mérida, it is beautiful, tranquil (safe), it is nice living here, you live well”.<sup>42</sup> Many people describe Mérida as *tranquila* and *segura*, tranquil and safe. Some refer to the danger and violence in other states of Mexico, like Christina, who is from Guadalajara. She talks about “a violence you would not believe.”<sup>43</sup> People that originally are from Mérida often state that they are happy living there and do not want to leave the city to live somewhere else. Mérida is thus seen as a nice place to live, because of this safety and tranquillity, especially compared to other Mexican states. This indicates something about the status of this city, it has a very good reputation. However, there is more to citizenship than just the cultural aspect. The government plays an important role in the expectations, rights, and duties that come with this citizenship.

## 2.2 The role of the government

In order to see how the government and citizens are connected with each other, and thus how the role of the government with regard to citizenship can be described, it is important to go back to the foundation of the relation between state and citizens. Enciclopedia Britannica describes ‘social contract’ as “an actual or hypothetical compact, or agreement, between the ruled and their rulers, defining the rights and duties of each.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, citizens and the state are in a certain (hypothetical) agreement, each with specific duties and rights. Rawls, as cited by Hickey (2011, 428) includes the legitimacy of all social and political institutions in the contract. He states that people would not agree with political authority over them unless there are certain conditions that secure their basic freedom and equality. However, there is a difference between juridical citizenship and the practices and perception of citizenship, even though these are subjected to the laws of citizenship (Joseph 2000, 3). Several people I spoke with told me about the discrepancy between what is permitted or prohibited by law and what actually happens. Rosa, who is 32 years old, is working as a

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<sup>41</sup> Semi-structured interview Adriana, 20-4-2017.

<sup>42</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>43</sup> Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-contract> last visited on 6-8-2017.

teacher at a Spanish school for tourists. To her, citizenship has to do with freedom of speech. Officially, freedom of speech exists in Mexico, but in reality you could get in a lot of trouble if you were to say things the government does not like, she said, clearly dissatisfied. People are afraid of the government. She says you have to be careful when talking about things you are not supposed to know, and that it is better to keep quiet, which Christina confirms.<sup>45</sup> This begs the question whether you are a fully respected citizen if you have to be careful about what you say. The citizenship created in this sense by the government limits people in daily life by limiting their citizenship in a way that is easiest for the government, though this does not happen as openly. Christina is from Guadalajara, a place which she describes as extremely dangerous. "They have kidnapped several friends of my children. They pay, they release them and they find the dead bodies. (...) You don't see it in the news but you live it every day".<sup>46</sup> Lilian recalled that a journalist recently got arrested because she had said "too much." She does not consider Mexico to be a real democracy, because this journalist was stopped from writing what she wanted to.<sup>47</sup> In this sense, the freedom of this citizen was limited by the government, despite the social contract between citizen and state. The dangerous situations that Christina described show how the government does not comply with its end of the deal, such as protecting its citizens. These stories show that the way citizens experience citizenship does not match with the theoretical (juridical) citizenship they are supposed to have. This points to certain shortcomings. According to Saavedra and Tommasi (2007, 2), the informality that exists in Latin America consists of several features that are a reflection of systematic defects in these societies. Some of these features are the poor and unsystematic enforcement of laws, little trust in the state, and low levels of participation in the social security system. Each of these features shows the dysfunctional relationship between individuals and groups with the state, which is in turn linked with the state's ability to effectively perform its duties, for example providing protection to its citizens. All in all, different aspects of informality reflect the interaction between individuals with the state and with each other, which is the degree of 'formalization' and inclusiveness of the '*social contract*' of a country (Saavedra and Tommasi 2007, 3). Based on the stories of Christina and Lilian, this formalization seems to be lacking. I will continue the discussion about shortcomings in the final paragraph of this chapter.

The aforementioned stories show it is not easy being a citizen in Latin America, which Taylor (2004, 213) confirms. Taylor gives the example of how people learn about freedom of speech at school, but that at the same time, opinions can be silenced, which leads back to

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<sup>45</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.

Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

<sup>46</sup> Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

<sup>47</sup> Structured interview Lilian, 3-3-2017.

the story about the journalist that Lilian mentioned. This duality in society is something that Lilian has noticed in other aspects of daily life as well. From her experience with working with disabled children, she has seen this duality in what the government says and what they do. The government wants children with a disability to go to school. However, there is no special attention for these children at schools, and many children are told to stay home.<sup>48</sup> I found another example of this duality of the government on International Women's Day in Mérida. The Judicial Power of the State of Yucatán decided to organize an event in the name of International Women's Day.<sup>49</sup> They decided to have a panel consisting of five people, speaking to the audience and answering questions, in the Superior Court of Justice. The original panel was going to consist of four men and one woman. However, after civil and feminist organizations protested, they decided to change the panel into three women and one man. To invite a panel of mostly men on a day that is dedicated to women shows this duality once again. This is only one example of how citizens, in this case civil organizations, criticize the government. Isabel does not think there is enough discussion in politics about citizenship, because this is not in the interest of the politicians themselves. She works as a professor and researcher for a university in Mérida called *Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán* (UADY). She did her Master's in Clinical Sexology, calls herself a feminist, and is quite critical not only about gender relations but also about politics. According to her, most politicians are in politics for personal gain, such as social status, money, or certain privileges. They do not think about the common interests, so they do not care about citizens empowering themselves. "*En Mexico, la ciudadanía es muy pobre. (..) Muy pocos saben ejercer su ciudadanía*". This roughly translates to "In Mexico, citizenship is very poor. Very few know how to exercise their citizenship." She explains that the majority of people see citizenship purely as being able to vote, while she herself knows exactly what her rights are. She knows where she can go to leave her complaints and what she can do. The majority of the people however do not know, because they do not know that they have this right. "Citizenship means practicing my rights, no one will just give them to you, you have to defend them and practice them." Most people do not know them, however, so she feels that children should learn about it in school. She does think that the younger generations are already changing in this sense.<sup>50</sup> Isabel thus expresses her concerns about the knowledge of citizens of their rights, but also about the lack of interest of politicians in this subject.

Despite all these negative comments, there are also some good elements and initiatives of the government, which can contribute in a positive way to people's citizenship. In Yucatán, a program called *Programa Seguro de Vida para jefas de la familia* was initiated to

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<sup>48</sup> Structured interview Lilian, 3-3-2017.

<sup>49</sup> International Women's Day took place on 8-3-2017.

<sup>50</sup> Semi-structured interview Isabel, 23-2-2017.

financially support children with their studies in case their mother passes away. Francisco, coordinator of this program (part of the Social Development Ministry) explained to me how his team visits villages in the entire state of Yucatán to offer this aid to families. When the mother registers at the program, she secures a financial aid for her children in the future in case she passes away. The children have a right to financial aid up until age 23, which means they could even go to university if they wanted to. In this way, this program gives children whose mothers have passed away a chance to educate themselves, and with this education perhaps secure a better future.<sup>51</sup> Referring back to the social contract earlier mentioned in this paragraph, one could say that the state in this case makes an effort to fulfil its end of the deal by providing these young citizens a sort of protection, by giving them chances to educate themselves.

Before coming to Mérida, I did not really have any idea of what to expect of the city and what there was to do. Apart from all several impressive museums, the horse carriages and the big market for example, I found out that the municipality organizes a lot of events. Some of them are weekly events, others may only take place once a year. The weekly activities are for example the demonstration of the typical Yucatecan dance and the light show projected on the church in the central park. The Mayan history, one of the things Yucatecans are most proud of, is included in an event that takes place every Friday. It is organized by the municipality and it is an important tradition of the Mayans: sports. On one particular Friday late afternoon, the roads around central square of Mérida are partially blocked for traffic. A minibus filled with chairs arrives. Several men quickly put the chairs in rows for people to watch the upcoming show. It does not take long before the first chairs are filled. The suspension rises, people are curious to see what is going to happen. After a while, when all the chairs have been filled, a woman welcomes everyone, first in English, followed by Spanish. She explains some things about what we are going to see here; *juego de pelota*, or *Pok ta Pok* in the Mayan language. This is a Mayan sport played between two teams. The goal of the game is to get the rubber ball through the hoops that are placed in the middle of the field (the field is part of one of the roads going through the centre). This may sound easy, but the catch is that the players are only allowed to touch the ball with their hip. Shortly after her explanation, several men step forward. They are wearing a kind of bandana, very short shorts, and their bodies are covered with body paint in different kinds of pattern. Both teams take their positions, one of the players rolls the ball to the other team, from which one of the men swoops down and hits the ball with his hip. This goes on for a while, and each time the ball gets a little higher up in the air. After a while, one of the men manages to score, and the crowd responds with loud cheers. In the third and final round, to the surprise of the audience,

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<sup>51</sup> Semi-structured interview Francisco, 13-2-2017.

the ball is set on fire. This time, the players have to score by throwing it to each other and then trying to get it through the hoop. The audience is shocked when they see the players throwing each other the ball, which is still on fire, seemingly without a hint of pain. And again, one of the players manages to score and the crowd cheers. It was an exciting event.<sup>52</sup> The game reminds the inhabitants of the famous ancestors they share, which they are very proud of. It is an example of the performative dimension of identity (Yuval-Davis (2006, 203), in this case encouraged by the government. History plays an important role in citizenship. Citizenship is therefore configured within the socio-historic context, that includes conflicts over power and significance among members of a nation-state (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 31). The Yucatecan dance, cuisine and Mayan game are all examples of this importance of history in the current citizenship of Yucatecos.

### 2.3 The shortcomings of citizenship in Mérida

As I discussed in the beginning of the previous paragraph, many citizens feel like their citizenship is not respected. This dissatisfaction is not exclusive to Mexico. According to Oxhorn (2011, 4), the majority of citizens in Latin America prefer democracy over other forms of government, but there is a lot of dissatisfaction with their political parties and governments. This implies a certain hollowness to their democracy. Citizens can choose their government but do not trust the people they can vote for. Citizens see politicians and political parties as corrupt and only working for their self-interest (Oxhorn 2011, 4). This is how many people in Mérida see the Mexican government as well. Having a Spanish father, Alejandra says she does not really like 'being Mexican', there are many things she does not like and that are difficult to solve. Corruption is one of the things she dislikes the most, next to politics and the way the country is being governed. This means she is unhappy as a citizen, and she is very disillusioned.<sup>53</sup> Adriana does not have any confidence in the government: "The government does not work for its citizens, the government works for itself." She defines the widespread corruption as "the cancer that never stops."<sup>54</sup> Christina even calls Mexico one of the most corrupt countries in the world. She says the politicians only have campaigns to take money from taxes, and in so doing, from the Mexican citizens. They only want power, they do not care about all Mexico's problems, like violence for example.<sup>55</sup> Gabriela agrees that corruption is a huge problem in the government, and that money is stolen in every government level. She also talks about how some hospitals do not even have the most basic equipment, and about the insecurity and inequality nationwide. She finds it very troubling that there is only a

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<sup>52</sup> Participant observation, Central Park 10-2-2017.

<sup>53</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>54</sup> Semi-structured interview Adriana, 20-4-2017.

<sup>55</sup> Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

small, powerful group of people, while there is a large group of people living in poverty.<sup>56</sup> Corruption can be linked with inequality in this way; a small group gets richer and richer while the majority of the people continues to live in poverty. What Alejandra also finds troubling is the limited possibilities of development, she calls Mexico very 'primitive' in this aspect.<sup>57</sup> Rosa calls attention to the laws that are not respected, because people do not get punished if they break the law. She is in favour of tougher sentences. Currently, if someone is driving his or her car while being drunk, their license often is not taken away, according to Rosa. This impunity is something she finds troubling.<sup>58</sup> All these critiques are linked with a low level of trust in the state and low enforcement of the law, which Saavedra and Tommasi (2007) connect with the degree of formality of the social contract. Citizens do not feel as though the state is performing its duties adequately, as can be read from various very critical statements that they made. This negatively influences their citizenship, as their rights are not respected.

Even in a democracy, the question lies in how far people are actually able to make use of the rights granted by their citizenship, and how they feel about this. Since the early 2000s, the awareness has increased about the limitations of the Western idea of a representative democracy to guarantee political, economic, and social rights for all (Sweetman, Rowlands and Abou-Habib 2011, 352). In Mérida, the division between rich and poor is very (visibly) marked. People with little resources live in the south or centre of the city, whereas rich people have their houses in the north, along the grand avenue *Francisco Montejo* for example. In the north, you will find exclusive shopping malls, expensive hotels, and luxurious clubs. In the south, you will not find anything like this. This segregation is not only spatial, but in many cases also social. Alejandra explains the importance of social status for some people by telling me about her sons. One of them is friends with everybody, one is a bit more selective, and the third one only has friends with a certain social status. This status is still based upon surname, people whose grandfather founded something important in the city for example.<sup>59</sup> Yolanda calls Mérida very 'elitist,' your socio-economic level determines a lot for you. In society, it is almost impossible for a poor person and a rich person to be friends.<sup>60</sup> This spatial division and the lack of contact between the different classes in society mean there is also a difference in access to certain services, for example. It means the citizenship of the higher classes is different to the citizenship of the lower classes, marked for example by a difference in opportunities. This shows the limitations involved in providing equal rights for everyone and thus confirms the statement of Sweetman, Rowland and Abou-Habib (2011).

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<sup>56</sup> Semi-structured interview Gabriela, 17-2-2017.

<sup>57</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>58</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.

<sup>59</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>60</sup> Semi-structured interview Yolanda, 30-3-2017.



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Major inequalities restrict citizens from using their civil and political rights. It is also important to note that this inequality is not random, it is systematic and is related to social and class structures which influence people's lives (Taylor 2004, 214). Yuval-Davis (2007, 562) argues that people deal with rights and obligations in for example local, ethnic, religious, regional, and national political communities in daily life. She calls this the "multi-layered citizen." People's citizenships of these different layers affect each other. It is important to note that people's citizenships are marked as well by their positions in the different layers, because they are often constructed by other social divisions that come together, such as gender and class. In this sense, the idea of multilayered citizenship corresponds with the vision of citizenship as an embodied category (Yuval-Davis 2007, 263). There is an awareness in Mérida about the unequal treatment of people based on their social status. In several businesses, such as the coffee company Starbucks and the mobile phone company Movistar, there are signs specifically stating they do not discriminate, see Appendix 1. Apparently, these companies find it necessary to mention this to their customers. In other words, this unequal treatment seems to be something that is embedded in daily life, but is also something people are aware of and feel strongly about. Concluding from the previous information about inequality, it turns out that citizenship is very much influenced by certain characteristics. The main bases that determine social classification in society are usually class, ethnicity, and gender. Therefore it is important that the relevance of cultural meaning in social practices be recognized in politics in order to change this (Dagnino 2003, 5). Many people in Mérida state that there is a lot of discrimination against Mayans. This discrimination became strikingly clear during a family event I attended. During the birthday party of my host mother's grandchild, dinner was served to the guests. The nanny of this child, who could be recognized as Mayan by her appearance (such as her facial features and height), was also present. Most of the guests had already had the main course when the nanny and the child's mother sat at the table to eat. The nanny had already asked for a plate of food, but she had to ask for it again, after having tried several times to get the waiter's attention. Later, when the waiter asked the guests whether they wanted cake, he did not look at the nanny at all. He just put a plate in front of her. No one seemed to have noticed this, or perhaps to find anything strange in this interaction. This is an example of how people may have become used to these sort of situations and treatments, and perhaps do not recognize them as discriminatory. Earlier that day, the other grandson was baptised. After the ceremony, the photographer took pictures of the two parents and their two children with several friends and family members. At one point, my roommates and I were asked to be on the photos as well, since we were the 'aunts' of the baptized boy. His older brother fell asleep during the photo

## A day in the life of ..

shoot. All this time, the nanny had been sitting to the side, and only when it became clear that the boy was sleeping was she called to take care of him.<sup>61</sup> Considering the fact that the nanny had been living with the family for almost four months and still was not asked to be in the picture, while me and my roommates were, was also something that seemed quite contradictory. Perhaps this was not so much because she was Mayan, but because she was only considered as an employee. However, this still says something about the different classes; the middle and higher class have employees such as nannies who apparently are not considered to be of the same level as they are (in this case not important enough to be in the pictures). What has become clear from this chapter, is that citizenship (in which belonging plays an important role) is not the same for everyone, considering the large inequalities. Citizens do not feel the government is really interested in improving this situation, as with other problems such as crime. The inequalities and differences in citizenship are not random but influenced by certain factors. In the next chapter, the influence of gender on women's citizenship will be demonstrated.

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<sup>61</sup> Participant observation during baptism and at the birthday party, 22-4-2017.

## Chapter 3 Citizenship and gender

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed the role of gender in daily life in Mérida, and the concept and perception of citizenship and its implications. By introducing the concept of multi-layered citizenship, the foundation has been laid for this final chapter: to see where citizenship and gender meet, and how this is perceived by people in Mérida. As became clear in the previous chapter, inequalities affect people's citizenship, whether this inequality is based on social status, ethnicity, or gender. During my time in Mérida, there were a lot of activities organized by different civil and feminist groups in order to protest against, and inform about, unequal treatment and other unfairnesses against women. Judging from the range and number of activities organized around the theme of gender inequality, I can conclude that it is currently an important issue in Mérida. Gender seems to have a certain influence on women's citizenship. First, I will discuss the current obstacles and (changing) opportunities for women, followed by the dual role of the government. I will end the chapter by showing the opinions on the future of women's position in society and the way certain people are trying to make a positive change.

### 3.1 Obstacles and opportunities

"Your sex is not related to things like love and art." This is a quote from Carmen, one of the first transgender women in Yucatán. During her book presentation, she shared her story of how difficult it was for a transgender to be accepted and how being transgender does not make you any less of a person.<sup>62</sup> Although she was using this quote more in the sense of being respected regardless of your sexuality, I started wondering whether your sex is related to other aspects of daily life, like job opportunities, studies, and the household, for example.

Citizenship is a membership to a specific political community, which provides the people of this community with access to the political, social and civil resources of the state for example (Joseph 2000, xvii). This would mean that any citizen has the same rights in voting, using emergency services such as the police, and access to housing for example. However, in many countries this access is very dependent on gender in several ways, juridically, politically, economically, and culturally (Joseph 2000, 3). What almost everyone that I spoke to agreed on was the unequal access to the job market for women. "There are certain companies, businesses, like governmental institutions, which still prefer men. They push women aside (..) They do not give women the same opportunities in work," is what Hector told me.<sup>63</sup> Alejandra, too, said that men have more opportunities than women when it

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<sup>62</sup> Participant observation book presentation Carmen, 24-2-2017.

<sup>63</sup> Semi-structured interview Hector, 24-4-2017.

comes to jobs.<sup>64</sup> Rosa and Patricia add that the salaries of men are higher as well.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, when a woman does have a certain position, it is often still the male version that is written down (*director* instead of *directora*), as Regina told me.<sup>66</sup> It must be noted, though, that the position of women in Latin America has improved a lot since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as women became more politically active and the unemployment in the 1980s encouraged women to find a job outside the house (both formal and informal)(Diekman, Eagly, Madinic and Ferreira 2005, 212). The fact that in Mérida women still experience several disadvantages compared to men shows that in spite of a development towards more gender equality, a patriarchal ideology supporting power inequalities can continue to exist (Hunnicut 2009, 554).

As I explained before, a lot of women in Mérida are *amas de casa*. The older women I spoke with all had mothers who were housewives, something that was very common in that era. Nowadays, there are also a lot of women who go to university or who have a job outside the house, and it is not automatically only the women who are responsible for the household, as often it was in history. Feldman (1992), cited by Clough-Riquelme (2007, 37), states that because of the increasing intra-household divisions of labour, the norms and values involved in everyday life in both the public and the private domain are altered. This created certain contradictions in the household and in the workplace (Clough Riquelme 2007, 37). For some, it generated subordination and exploitation for women, but for others it contributed to an increase in independence and control over household resources. Katia looks back on the time when she was still working. "It was a double job." Being a teacher, she would be working during the day, but her husband also expected her to keep the house clean, cook and serve him his food.<sup>67</sup> In Katia's case, you could say her having a job meant she had an extra weight on her. Most younger interviewees, though, were happy to work. Yolanda, 28 years old, is very satisfied with her work as a Spanish teacher. "I like working, it makes me happy. Having goals, saving money, travelling."<sup>68</sup> She sees the benefits of working and prefers it over being a housewife. There seems to be a difference between younger people under the age of thirty and people of the older generations. In the younger generations, the housework is not necessarily the responsibility of women alone, and more of these women have a job outside of the house. These jobs also mean more financial independence for these women. The housework in most younger families does not seem to be divided entirely equally, as most women said "he helps me," when referring to their husbands, implying that

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<sup>64</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>65</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.  
Semi-structured interview Patricia, 23-3-2017.

<sup>66</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-2017.

<sup>67</sup> Semi-structured interview Katia, 30-4-2017.

<sup>68</sup> Semi-structured interview Yolanda, 30-3-2017.

they still carry the final responsibility. This confirms the theory of Hunnicutt (2009, 562), who emphasizes the importance of keeping in mind the variation in patriarchy, for example there could be variations in women's status. Their status in one aspect - work - could be unrelated to their status in a different aspect - home. In other words, for some women, like Katia, having a job does not mean that they have less responsibilities in the household, for example. Younger people seem to have divided the tasks in the household more equally and more often seem to have a job outside the house. You could therefore say that the status of women in Mérida seems to be shifting towards a more equal position with men, though the household still is more the women's responsibility more than the men's and it is possible that their status differs, depending on which domain. It is clear however that the patriarchal ideas still have a certain influence in these matters.

Another factor that has a large influence on women's lives and therefore their citizenship is the value of family. As stated in the previous chapter, citizenship also presents a framework about roles and relationships through which people can fuse their personal ideas (Taylor and Wilson 2004, 155). It is possible that certain customs and practices that influence women's lives are tolerated and supported by society, even when women may suffer because of them (Sweetman, Rowlands and Abou-Habib 2011, 349). Silvia, who told me her story about how she stayed with her abusive husband for 32 years, is an example of the custom in Mérida to stay married in order to keep the family together despite the possible suffering of women.<sup>69</sup> As Rosa explained, for many families divorce is not an option because it would look bad on the rest of the family. In this case, parents can pressure their children into staying married, which can be a burden for both men and women.<sup>70</sup> The value that society attributes to keeping the family together is reflected in the hesitance of many women, and in some cases men as well, to get a divorce. Despite the fact that women can divorce their husbands by law, the tradition to keep the family together often weighs heavier for the women involved, despite the fact that this limits their wellbeing. In other words, in this case women's citizenship can suffer under certain traditions and values in society which are part of the dominant framework that citizenship in Mérida provides. The traditional patriarchal culture in Latin America can put women at a disadvantage compared to men (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 25). This means women's citizenship is not the same as the citizenship of men. According to Werbner (1998, 3), there is not one singular form of citizenship across the globe. Ideas about universal citizenship are affected by the complex, diverse local societies. Hunnicutt (2009, 554) adds that patriarchy also can come in many different manifestations. Patriarchal models are situated with other hierarchical systems (Hunnicutt 2009, 563). An example of these other hierarchies in Mérida is the position of the indigenous population

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<sup>69</sup> Semi-structured interview Silvia, 28-4-2017.

<sup>70</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017

compared to the non-indigenous population. “*El color es más discriminante que el género*” – Colour (ethnicity) is more discriminating than gender, according to Beatriz.<sup>71</sup> “You don’t want your daughter to marry a *mestizo*<sup>72</sup>, you don’t want your grandchild to be *moreno*.<sup>73</sup> Nobody wants that. Because he is going to be discriminated against,” is how Sara explained it.<sup>74</sup> As Hunnicutt (2009) emphasizes the importance of other hierarchies that play a role in the patriarchy, it is possible to use the aforementioned ‘multi-layered citizenship’ of Yuval-Davis (2007). Yuval-Davis explains how people’s citizenship consists of different layers which have an influence and which can be connected to patriarchal models. Sara told me that most people in Yucatán who live in the countryside are indigenous.<sup>75</sup> There are more opportunities in the city than in the country, according to Patricia, for example in education.<sup>76</sup> The image that Isabel paints of young women in rural areas is not very positive. Speaking from her work experience in family planning, she has seen a lot of teenage pregnancies and she says that the chances of girls from the countryside going to university are “practically zero.” She does, however, think that things are very slowly starting to change.<sup>77</sup> The research of González-Lopez (2005) as mentioned by Falicov (2010, 313) about Latino immigrants living in Los Angeles discovered the concept of regional patriarchies. This means that there are certain regional patterns and locally defined constructions of gender, which can be divided into rural and urban patriarchies. These different patterns of patriarchy are influenced by socioeconomic and power dynamics, and the cultural histories of the different local regions of the individuals. The rural patriarchies (mostly small places in the countryside) have more intense expressions of patriarchy and gender inequality. Urban patriarchies refer to urban metropolises like Mexico City, where gender inequalities are more disguised or deemphasized (Falicov 2010, 313). Most women I spoke with were a lot more positive about the position of women in the city of Mérida. It can be concluded that, generally, gender relations are more equal in the city of Mérida than in the countryside of Yucatán, which can be explained by the rural and urban patriarchies. Even though Mérida is not a metropolis like Mexico City, the city offers many opportunities in education and work, which can contribute to an improved citizenship for women and more knowledge of gender roles, because of their access to information about this subject (which is not as much available in the villages). Alejandra, on the other hand, compares Mérida with Mexico City and finds that women in

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<sup>71</sup> Semi-structured interview Beatriz, 28-2-2017.

<sup>72</sup> As Christina explained to me, officially the term *mestizo* refers to a mix of the Spanish and indigenous population, in other words a large part of the current Mexican population. In Yucatán however, *mestizo* is used to refer to indigenous people, it has a negative connotation.

<sup>73</sup> Refers to people with a dark skin, also has a mostly negative connotation in Mexico according to Gina. See explanation *mestizo*.

<sup>74</sup> Semi-structured interview Sara, 16-2-2017.

<sup>75</sup> Semi-structured interview Sara, 16-2-2017.

<sup>76</sup> Semi-structured interview Patricia, 23-3-2017.

<sup>77</sup> Semi-structured interview Isabel, 23-2-2017.

Mérida still have a long way to go. She thinks women in Yucatán are more submissive than women in other parts of Mexico. “In Mexico City, everyone is running around all day, working, taking care of the children, which makes women stand up for themselves more.” Women in Mérida who are over 55 years of age are supposed to stay in the house, take care of the children, and cook. “Among young people this is not as strict, but still the roles of men and women are quite strongly marked. A friend of my son is only 23 years old but she was raised by her grandparents, so she thinks in the same way.” She has seen friends of her son who do what their boyfriend tells them to do, who accept what their boyfriend says. This is linked with his upbringing as well, and the attitude of “I am the man so I decide.” Alejandra therefore feels that Mérida has very strong, marked, ideas about gender roles. Other girls, such as her daughter, tell their boyfriends that they are going to the cinema with their friends, and he waits for to get home without any problems.<sup>78</sup> Adriana thinks Mérida is only a city in the province (compared to Mexico City for example). This influences the way of thinking in Mérida, especially when it comes to gender equality and opportunities for women. She compares some of her friends in Mérida to her cousins living in Mexico City. Her friends are mainly looking for a boyfriend, whereas her cousins are more occupied with working and developing themselves.<sup>79</sup> This reflects the priorities of her friends in Mérida (having a boyfriend, then starting a family), whereas her cousins in Mexico City have completely different priorities. This means that even one ‘layer’ of citizenship (being from a rural town or a city) already has quite a substantial influence on the citizenship of women, for example when it comes to opportunities. As many indigenous women live in smaller villages, they are at a double disadvantage (seeing as their ethnicity is also seen as lower in the hierarchy).

Whenever I interviewed anyone, most people told me the same two things. First of all, there is still a long way to go for women to have the same position, opportunities, and everything else that comes with it as men (so in other words, their citizenship needs a lot of improvement). The second thing, however, was that a lot of progress has already been made, even if it is true that these changes happen quite slowly. Interestingly, some people emphasized specific differences between men and women. “Men and women are never going to be equals. I feel like we cannot compare the two,” says Rosa.<sup>80</sup> She refers to physical aspects of men compared to women, but also to different ways of thinking. She states that generally, women are more responsible than men. Hector also refers to different physical aspects. He finds certain jobs inappropriate for men, for example in fashion or beauty. He also thinks women should not participate in combat, because he thinks

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<sup>78</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.

<sup>79</sup> Semi-structured interview Adriana, 20-4-2017.

<sup>80</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.

something that is "ugly, heavy, and dramatic" is not suitable for women.<sup>81</sup> Regina takes it a step further and says how some men see women as a weakness because they have to menstruate and perhaps have children. "They see that as something weak of women, without seeing the capacity that women have. I do not mean to generalize all men, but some men are not aware of this capacity." She says some men still abuse their power of 'being a man.' She does have faith that little by little this will change for the better.<sup>82</sup> These statements show the ideas about differences based on gender. According to Bauman (2000), as cited by Hunnicutt (2009, 559), patriarchal structures, customs, and power are changing constantly, so judging by this theory and the way that things have changed for women in the last few decades, Regina's prediction may well be accurate. Change needs to start somewhere, and as many people stated, the government plays a very important role in this.

### 3.2 Government

When it comes to the connection between citizenship and gender, the government has the chance to set the right example by assisting in improving women's citizenship. There are several governmental initiatives designed to promote gender equality and to help women. *El Instituto de la Mujer*, or Women's Institute, is one of the places women of Mérida can go to when they need help. Many women who are victims of domestic violence go to this institute to seek help. The institute has different departments: the legal department, psychological department, and social work. Regina, who works in the department of social work, explained to me how it works.<sup>83</sup> The first contact women have in the institute is with the people of social work. After the first interview where they can tell their story, they ask for her personal information. After hearing her story, they decide together with the woman what the best plan of action is. In some cases they refer her to other institutions if they cannot help her. The majority of women do not return to the institute after the first contact. Regina gives several reasons for this: financial reasons, distance, or not having made a decision yet. "They are always welcome to return, though," says Regina.<sup>84</sup> The services of all three areas are free of charge; only when copies need to be made or when things which cost money need to be done do the women have to pay. There is also a department which goes to various locations to give information to prevent violence. Gloria is part of the *Comité de refugio* (refuge committee), which helps women who have suffered violence find shelter. As in social work, they are the first contact of women who arrive for the first time at the institute, and they keep in touch with several other related associations, such as medical associations, for example.

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<sup>81</sup> Semi-structured interview Hector, 24-4-2017.

<sup>82</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-2017.

<sup>83</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-2017.

<sup>84</sup> Semi-structured interview Regina, 26-4-2017.



They will also accompany the women if they want to report someone or something to the police.<sup>85</sup> Patricia, however, who is a feminist activist, has little confidence in the support the government offers women. She says that it often takes a very long time before they actually do what they promised, for example with financial support. However, she is a lot more positive about the local government (the municipality), which for example organized the special buses for women and children going to Carnival.<sup>86</sup>

Another large governmental initiative is called the IPIEMH (Institute for Equality between Women and Men), which focuses on promoting gender equality. Their official mission statement is as follows: "To teach women to participate in taking decisions and to diminish the distance (inequality) between the sexes, giving focus to the fundamental rights supporting dignity and value of the person, providing psychological attention and professional juridical advice to women who have been a victim of violence, and to contribute to the elimination of all types of discrimination in our state."<sup>87</sup> When I visited the institute, to my surprise, one of the women working there told me beforehand that the people working there would paint me a very nice picture of the effectiveness of the different programs, perhaps better than it is in reality. When I was taken on a short tour of the institute, they showed me the different departments: prevention and attention to violence against women, empowerment and participation of women, planning and research, institutional connections, administration and finances, and the legal department. What caught my eye was that, although the majority of the employees were female, there was also a substantial number of men working there. You could say this is a good example set by the government, a mix of male and female employees in different positions working on helping women and fighting for gender equality.<sup>88</sup> This pretty picture however is not standard in all governmental organisations. According to Hector, certain companies but also certain governmental institutions prefer male employees over female employees.<sup>89</sup> This means the government fails in setting the right example of gender equality. This does not only happen in the job market, though. Lawyer Christina gives the example of how the sons of some important politicians sexually assaulted a girl. When the case came to trial, the boys admitted what they did. The judge said they had not thought it through and had not done anything wrong. According to Christina, this judge was probably paid. "This tells us that the girl is not important, she does not matter. This is what is happening in our country."<sup>90</sup> Here we can see how the citizenship of the girl in this case is influenced by her gender and possibly her social

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<sup>85</sup> Semi-structured interview Gloria, 26-4-2017.

<sup>86</sup> Semi-structured interview Patricia, 23-3-2017.

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.ipiemh.gob.mx/conocenos/> last visited on 5-8-2017.

<sup>88</sup> Participant observation IPIEMH, 21-3-2017.

<sup>89</sup> Semi-structured interview Hector, 24-4-2017.

<sup>90</sup> Semi-structured interview Christina, 2-4-2017.

class. If the judge indeed was bought off, the boys of the higher class benefitted from the higher status of both their gender and their social class. This is another example of Yuval-Davis' theory of multilayered citizenship (2007), that layers of gender and class influence your position in society. I could sense Christina's frustration from her tone as she was telling me about this case. Her statements show that she is unsatisfied as a citizen, since there was no justice for the girl, because of her class and her gender. It is not only the judicial system which is criticized, one of the universities of Mérida got into trouble with local feminist groups and civil organizations as well. In March 2017, FILEY (*Feria Internacional de la Lectura Yucatán*, for the promotion of reading among students) and the UADY (the university) were heavily criticized for publishing a certain image in a reading campaign, see appendix 2. In a country where violence against women is considered to be quite a problem, this image containing a man with a whip on a woman's back, accompanied by the sentence "Punish me but let me read" was not very well received. It was seen as promoting violence against women, which a lot of people on social media critiqued. FILEY later apologized for this insensitive publication.<sup>91</sup> It reflects a certain lack of consciousness about violence against women.

These different examples mirror the duality of the government. On the one hand, gender inequality continues to be present for example in justice and governmental organizations, but on the other hand there are also many governmental initiatives designed to promote gender equality. No one I talked to mentioned the IPIEMH to me, as the Women's Institute seemed to be more well-known. Generally, opinions are not very positive about the efforts of the government, in that the government is not doing enough to stimulate gender equality, and that it is actually part of the problem in certain scenarios such as in the justice and work example. Still, most people I interviewed think that the government will have a future role in educating about gender equality and giving the right example. This brings us to the next and final paragraph of this chapter, about changes and what the future will or should look like according to the people in Mérida.

### 3.3 Changes and the future

*"Culture is political because meanings are constitutive of processes that, explicitly, aim at redefining social power. This means that when movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy or citizenship, that destabilize dominant cultural representations, they enact a "cultural politics" (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998, 7). In other words, the dominant ideas in society, for example about gender, can be changed by*

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<sup>91</sup> <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2017/02/20/filey-se-disculpa-por-polemica-campana> last visited on 9-8-2017.

movements which are deliberately trying to change these conceptions. The feminist movement in Latin America addresses the continued omnipresence of patriarchal culture, and the cultural role it plays in systematically discriminating against women in social institutions, from family, to community, to society (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 25). As a consequence of the dominance of this patriarchal culture, women have to fight for the right to participate at every level and in every public sphere on the basis of equal opportunities and respect for differences (Clough-Riquelme 2007, 27). The fight of these organizations is still very much alive, as I concluded after spending three months in Mérida. Besides all the different activities on International Women's Day, I went to the book presentation of one of the first transgender women of Mérida, I attended several seminars with female speakers, I read about a protest march against *feminicidio*<sup>92</sup>, I witnessed several times how organizations had set up tables and tents in the central park, providing free health services for women. And that was probably just the tip of the iceberg, as sometimes there were several events planned which I did not hear about until after they had happened. Clearly, people are not satisfied with women's citizenship (opportunities, judgements, behaviour, discrimination, and so forth).

However, changing cultural ideas about gender and gender roles is very difficult, according to Adriana. "We all have that chip, even if we don't want to. This is what I think. Yes, we have made a lot of progress, because the *machismo* in Mexico is very strong in my opinion, but we continue to be restricted by certain things. We aren't there yet."<sup>93</sup> When I asked people how to get more gender equality and how to diminish the existing machismo, everyone gave me the same answer: it starts in the family. The education you received in your family is very important, for example in the way people think about the roles within the household, according to Yolanda.<sup>94</sup> Rosa emphasizes the importance of mothers in teaching their sons not to become *machista*, by letting them do chores in the house as well. "From generation to generation, there is going to be a change (..) But there are also people who do not have their parents and are brought up by their grandparents. So there are generations behind with certain things."<sup>95</sup> In other words, with every new generation ideas about gender roles, for example, become less fixed. Many people also think the government should do a lot more to promote gender equality, diminish *machismo*, and thus improve women's citizenship, for example through campaigns. Some people think schools need to encourage gender equality as well, so that children know about it from an early age on. In order to change the (unequal) gender relations and to stop *machismo*, both of which affect mostly

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<sup>92</sup> *Feminicidio* is the killing of women because of their gender (Godoy-Paiz 2012, 88). See bibliography.

<sup>93</sup> Semi-structured interview Adriana, 20-4-2017.

<sup>94</sup> Semi-structured interview Yolanda, 30-3-2017.

<sup>95</sup> Semi-structured interview Rosa, 30-3-2017.

women's citizenship, there are many initiatives to make a change. Some are from political parties, others are from for example the IPIEMH as mentioned earlier, and some come from civil and feminist organizations. In the ICADEP workshop, there was a section focused on changing stereotypes. In the seminar, several examples of these stereotypes and how to change them were mentioned, such as the portraying of women as sexual objects, images of the men working in the office while the women are at home, women as victims of violence, and suggesting that women are the only ones in charge of sexual health and reproduction. In order to change these stereotypical ideas, they suggested using more images of men cleaning, little girls playing with cars and tools, and portraying women in more powerful positions such as bosses and managers instead of secretaries for example.<sup>96</sup> All this attention for what needs to be improved cannot take away from the fact that women have actually gained a lot of ground themselves already. In patriarchal systems, both men and women can hold different types of power (Hunnicutt 2009, 555). Women have the power in the house, according to Sara. MacCoby (1967, 63) stated forty years ago that it was actually the woman, especially the mother, with the real power in the family. "Yucatecan women are the ones with the central power in the house," argues Gina. "They make important decisions about the expenditure of the household, take care of the grandchildren, give permission to the children..."<sup>97</sup> Yolanda is quite positive about women's citizenship. She refers to women in politics, women who are directors, and female leaders of neighbourhood groups. She says that nowadays it is possible to see both female and male leaders. With the freedom that exists nowadays, Yolanda thinks there will be good results. Many other people, though, say there is still a long way to go. Gloria, employee of the *Instituto de la Mujer*, pointed to the lack of consciousness about gender roles among less educated people.<sup>98</sup> Others, Alejandra and Alberto, think that personality has a certain influence as well, that confident women would not tolerate *machismo*.<sup>99</sup> So, even in a society where the patriarchy is a dominant force, standing up for yourself will help you to escape it.

This chapter has shown how gender influences the lives of people in Mérida, and it has shown how women have a different kind of citizenship than men. This difference can be seen for example when it comes to a career or job, but also in the household and family. But seeing as gender is only one layer of citizenship; the other layers such as class and ethnicity also influence the way women can exercise their citizenship. There is a lot of awareness about this in Mérida, but at the same time it seems to be very difficult to make drastic changes. Most people do have faith that things will improve, little by little, with alterations

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<sup>96</sup> Participant observation workshop ICADEP, 11-3-2017.

<sup>97</sup> Semi-structured interview Beatriz, 28-2-2017.

<sup>98</sup> Semi-structured interview Gloria, 26-4-2017.

<sup>99</sup> Semi-structured interview Alejandra, 10-3-2017.  
Semi-structured interview Alberto, 1-5-2017.

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made by the government and in personal upbringing as the most important way to effect this change.

## Conclusion

Over the course of three chapters I have studied and discussed various themes, of which gender and citizenship are the most prominent. In chapter 1, I provided an outline of how gender is of relevance in the daily life of women. It has become clear that certain phenomena and ideas are quite dominant in society in Mérida. The patriarchal model of society (Clough Riquelme 2007) influences the lives of women in a number of aspects, such as in the job market, the difference in acceptance of certain types of behaviour depending on whether you are a man or a woman, the conflicted involvement of women in politics, and the role of women within the household and family. Women used to be expected to be an *ama de casa*, or to become one after they had children, but this idea seems to be losing support among the younger generations of Mérida. However, benevolent sexism as explained by Falicov (2005) can still be detected in many ways among in the current generation: girls do not get the same liberties as boys when it comes to going out or choosing certain studies, which stems from the idea that girls must be protected. Family and *machismo* are two other important factors influencing women's lives, and the societal pressure to have a perfect family still weighs heavy on many women, to the point where it is often given priority over studying at university. Many people I talked to did study, but they all had a lot of examples of friends who were raised very traditionally and therefore prioritized finding a boyfriend and starting a family over studying. Divorce is still a painful subject for many people, who either think that the parents should stay together for the children's sake or who simply do not want to have a divorce in the family. This pressure limits women in their citizenship, because many women take a decision for the family's sake that they themselves suffer from. However, since there are also a lot of opportunities to study, go out, get a job, and travel, for example, many people of the younger generations are quite satisfied.

In chapter 2, I explained how citizenship and being part of a political community offers a certain framework, especially when it comes to ideas about gender (Taylor and Wilson 2004). Citizenship is not equal for everyone, it consists of several layers such as gender and ethnicity, which influence your position and opportunities in society (Yuval-Davis 2007). Belonging is an important part of identity and citizenship, of which certain narratives and a performative dimension are a part (Vikki Bell cited by Yuval Davis 2006). The Yucatecan identity is very strong, Yucatecans are proud of their state, in aspects such as their dance, cuisine, and Mayan history. Women staying at home to take care of their husbands, children, and the household is very common in Yucatán, in Mexico City for example this is very different. The role of the government in citizenship, for example by protecting citizens is criticized heavily by the people in Mérida. Politicians are seen as corrupt, there is a lot of violence in the country, freedom of speech is questionable, and some people feel the

government does not care at all about solving the problems that exist. Inequality is another of these problems, and is one which is very visibly present in Mérida. This inequality is related to citizenship mainly through class, gender, and ethnicity, which influence the opportunities that people have (Yuval Davis 2007). I showed how this has a substantial influence on the daily life of women by giving the example about the indigenous nanny, who was treated differently by waiters because of her ethnicity.

In the final chapter, I discussed that despite of the development of the position and opportunities of women, patriarchal ideas still have an impact on the daily life of women. It is harder for them to get a job, especially one in a higher position, but also when they do have one the language that is used to refer to them is masculine. Dividing tasks in the household combined with having a job seems to be a step in the right direction for the younger generations. Among older people, the woman was often responsible for the household even if she was working as well. Despite the changes I have mentioned, the household still is more the responsibility of women than it is of men, as I concluded from the various statements and some observations while staying with my host family. The women of these younger generations, however, seem to be quite satisfied with the division of tasks; they are not longer solely responsible, which shows the changes in patriarchy as Hunnicutt (2009) stated. However, the influence of the patriarchy and the value that is placed upon creating the perfect family is something that can limit women, and sometimes men as well, severely in practicing their citizenship, because they have to make sacrifices in order to keep the family satisfied. In this sense, Mérida is quite different than a metropolis like Mexico City, where women's priorities are not so much focused on creating a family but more on self development, starting a career, and so forth. Women from rural areas have to deal with much stricter gender roles. This proves that location, that is, whether a woman lives in a small village or city, also influences women's citizenship, this being one of the many layers of citizenship. The dual role of the government, on the one hand discriminating by gender in certain cases while on the other hand working on gender equality through special organizations such as the IPIEMH and Women's Institute, is also something that could affect women's citizenship and the way they perceive it. There is a lot of attention on the subject of gender equality and violence against women in Mérida, and most people think that there is a certain progress, albeit very slow. It has become clear that gender and gender relations play a very determining role in the (perception of) citizenship of women. All in all, it will probably take a lot of patience but women's citizenship definitely seems to be changing for the better.

This research contributes to the knowledge and understanding of women's citizenship in Mérida, which, as can be concluded, still needs a lot of changes. It is important to note once again that there are several organizations and institutions contributing to this change. However, since this research is mostly about middle class women in Mérida, it is possible

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that women of other classes have different experiences. We can therefore not conclude that the results of this research speak for everyone in Mérida, which is why it could be very useful to see how women of other classes experience their citizenship based on gender relations. I think this could be very enlightening, as the opinions may vary a lot among different groups of women. This means it could provide a lot of new information, which can be used to effectively make more changes and in this way support and encourage gender equality. Seeing as anthropology is very much about giving people a voice, I think this would be something worth considering for the future.



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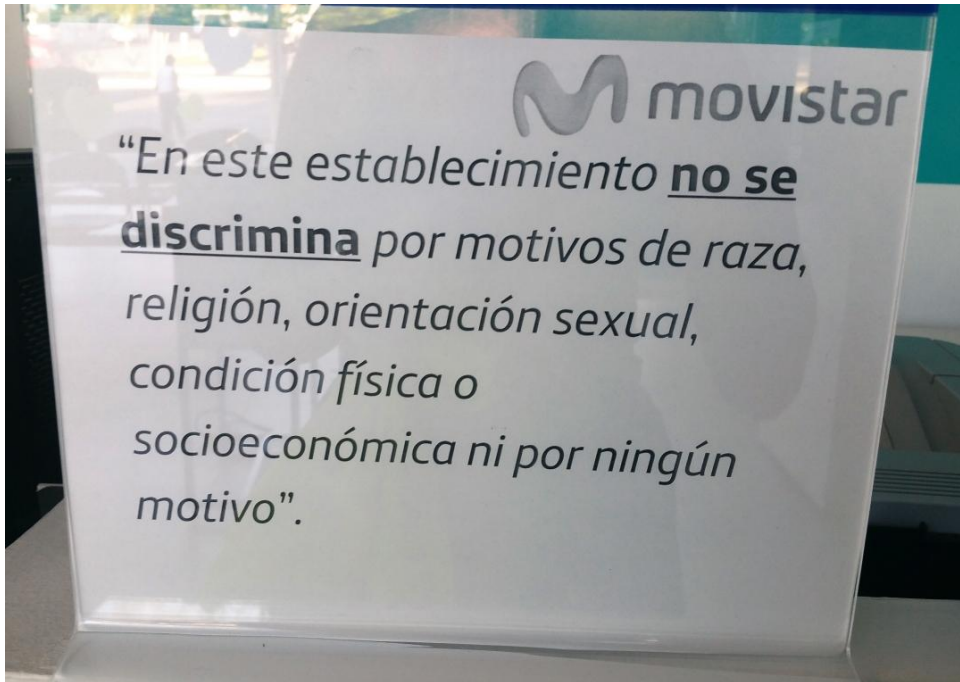
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.Appendices

Appendix 1: Anti discrimination declaration Movistar.



Translation: In this establishment there will not be discriminated on ground of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical or socio-economical condition.

Appendix 2: Poster FILEY

The poster is divided into three horizontal sections. The top section has a purple background with the FILEY logo (Universidad de Yucatán) on the left, the text 'FILEY.® FERIA INTERNACIONAL DE LA LECTURA YUCATÁN' in the center, and '2017 11 al 19 de Marzo' on the right. The middle section is a black and white photograph of a woman's back being whipped, with the text 'Castígame pero déjame leer' overlaid in white. The bottom section has a purple background with the text 'Invitados de honor' on the left, followed by logos for 'AÑO DE CULTURA CHINA EN MEXICO' (2017), 'CRECER EN GRANDE CAMPECHE 2015 - 2021', and the 'Universidad Autónoma de Campeche' logo.

Translation: "Punish me but let me read."

Source:

<http://laviejaguardia.com.mx/noticias/la-filey-2017-inicia-con-desafortunada-campana-publicitaria-contra-la-mujer>

### Appendix 3 Resumen (abstract in Spanish)

Ciudadanía significa ser parte de una comunidad político y tener derechos, deberes, y oportunidades específicas. Aún así, no todos los ciudadanos tienen las mismas oportunidades. En Mérida, clase social, género, y etnicidad juegan un papel importante en determinar la ciudadanía y las oportunidades de los ciudadanos. Tradicionalmente, las mujeres de Yucatán siempre han sido amas de casa, pero parece que esto va cambiando. Hay muchas mujeres que estudian y trabajan. Sin embargo, no tienen las mismas oportunidades de empleo que los hombres. Otra cosa que limita a las mujeres de Mérida en ejercer su ciudadanía es el valor de la familia en la sociedad. Esto puede presionar a las mujeres para que permanezcan casadas, incluso cuando sus maridos utilizan la violencia hacia ellas. es violent. A pesar de que hoy en día es más normal que los hombres hagan tareas en la casa, en la mayoría de los casos son las mujeres las que todavía tienen más responsabilidad. El papel que juega el gobierno es una arme de doble fila; se dedica a crear organizaciones para mujeres, pero al otro lado a veces es discriminatorio hacia las mujeres en instituciones gubernamentales. No obstante todo esto, una cosa queda muy clara: parece que poco a poco las cosas van mejorando.

#### Appendix 4: Interview questions

- Name
- Age
- Sex
- Marital status
- Brother/sisters
- Children
- Living situation (with parents, alone, nuclear family?)
- What kind of house & where (small apartment, big house etc)?
- Education
- Occupation
- Where are you from?
- If you have moved here, how long ago was that?
- Religion
- How do you identify yourself? (*mestizo*?)
- What does it mean for you to be *mestizo*/what does it entail?
- How do you look upon *indigenas*?
- Do you have indigenous friends/acquaintances?

*Then I will continue with the topic about gender roles.*

- How would you describe life for women in Mexico?
- In what aspects does it differ from men's?
- Are there certain domains that you consider to be only for women and or only for men?
- Do you see men and women as equal?
- Do you feel men and women are treated equally? In what ways (or in which cases not)?
- How do you see the relation between men and women in Mexico?
- Do you have male friends?
- At your home, which tasks are there to be divided?
- Who does which tasks?
- Who decided on this division?
- Are you satisfied with this division?
- Are there certain tasks only women do? Or should do?
- Are there tasks you consider only men should do?
- How is this relation in your case?
- Do you think this will change?
- What would you like to see improved in this relation

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-What are you satisfied about?

*I will now make the transition to citizenship.*

-What does it mean for you to be a Mexican citizen?

-Do you feel like your rights are respected?

-Do you think your opinion matters, that the government (municipality) would listen?

-Have you ever tried to change something you did not agree on?

-Is there anything you would like to see improved at the moment?

-Have you ever encountered any practical trouble or problems in this aspect?

-How did you resolve this?

-Have there been any changes in the last five years?

-What are you satisfied about?

-How do you see the future in this aspect?

-What is your opinion about indigenous people?

-Do you think they are treated the same as *mestizo* citizens? If it differs, in what aspects?

*In this final section, I will look at the ways that gender and citizenship are connected with regard to social relations.*

-Do you think everyone encounters the same problems regarding citizenship? Why? Who?

-Do you think gender is connected to citizenship? In what way?

-Are there different perspectives on this topic?

-What are they and what are the reasons?

-Is this a discussion in politics?

-Who else is taking part in this discussion?

-Do you think this will change in the future?

-Do women face certain social obstacles in gender relations that effect their citizenship?

-What are they, and can you give an example?

-Have you ever faced such problems in your daily life?



A day in the life of ..