

The social representation of gender-based violence on Mexican radio

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Abstract

This work has been developed in the framework of wider research whose aim is to promote the human rights of women and children, namely "The influence of media in the social representation of violence against women and girls in Mexico". The research has the goal to promote the Media Observatory for the Human Rights of Women and Girls. The Observatory, which is in an initial phase, aims to analyse the role played by the media and cultural industries in women's human rights. This article is based on content analysis of the highest-rated radio stations programming in Mexico and points to the responsibility of these institutions in the social representation of the gender violence, in order to call upon its eradication.¹

Key words

Women, Girls, Human Rights, Gender-Based Violence, Social Representation, Radio Agenda.

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Resum

Aquest treball ha estat desenvolupat en el marc d'una recerca més àmplia que té com a finalitat promoure els drets humans de les dones i les nenes, titulada "La influència dels mitjans de comunicació en la representació social de la violència contra les dones i les nenes a Mèxic". Un dels objectius centrals d'aquest projecte és l'impuls d'un Observatori de Mitjans dels Drets Humans de les Dones i les Nenes. L'Observatori, que es troba a la seva fase inicial, té l'objectiu d'informar sobre el quefer de les indústries de la comunicació i la cultura en l'impuls dels drets humans de les dones. Part dels productes derivats d'aquest Observatori es comparteixen en aquest article, que, basant-se en una anàlisi de contingut de la programació de les estacions radiofòniques de més audiència i cobertura a Mèxic, apunten a la responsabilitat d'aquesta indústria en la representació social de la violència contra les dones amb l'objectiu de convidar-la a contribuir a la seva eradicació.

Paraules clau

Dones, nenes, drets humans, violència de gènere, representació social, agenda radiofònica.

1. The context. Gender-based violence: the obstacle to achieving human rights for women and girls

The adoption of United Nations statutes in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, forcing member states to globally recognise, set up, protect and strengthen human rights, did not establish the principle of universality to which it alluded. The principles were expressed in masculine terms, which stopped legal instruments and application mechanisms from including women.

It took the Worldwide Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, in 1993, for women's human rights to gain status in international legislation,² derived from the specific recognition of gender-based violence as a major obstacle blocking women's access to human rights.

Within this context, the recent approval of the *Ley general de acceso de las mujeres a una vida libre de violencia* (General Act on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence)

(2007), published in Mexico, shows that violence against women and girls constitutes a structural problem that, if not eradicated, will stop Mexico from achieving the full democratic status to which its society aspires.³

Information that supported the urgent need to pass this law comes from *Investigación diagnóstica. Violencia feminicida en la República Mexicana* (Diagnostic Research. Femicide Violence in the Mexican Republic).⁴ This research on the violent death of girls and women in the country, documented in official information,⁵ has revealed the authorities' impunity which, summarising the precarious conditions under which most women live and the prevalence of violence throughout their lives and in all social classes and ethnic groups, leads to femicide.⁶

Unfortunately, data gathered in the course of this research reveal that:

- 1,205 girls and women were killed in the country in 2004
- 4 girls and women were murdered each day

- 1 girl or woman was killed every 6 hours
- 106 girls and women were killed in Mexico City in 2004
- More than 6,000 girls and women were killed in the country in 6 years (1999-2005)
- 3 girls and women were murdered in Mexico City in these six years (Special Commission for Femicide, Chamber of Representatives, 2006).

It's also shocking to realise that this is common worldwide. Numerous investigations show that different types of violence are committed against women around the world. The statistics corroborate this:

- every year in the United States, one-and-a-half million women are subjected to physical or sexual violence by someone they know well (Now Legal Defense and Education Fund 2005)
- in Sweden, one woman dies every ten days at home as a result of domestic violence (IORTVE 2002)
- in Russia, in 1993, 14,000 women were murdered by their husbands and 54,000 suffered physical and psychological abuse (Seager 2001)
- in Spain, official figures show that there were 25,000 reported female victims of domestic violence, although this figure represents only 10% of the real situation (IORTVE 2002)
- and in Canada the situation is no less worrying, given that 29% of women experience some type of violence in the home (Seager 2001).

In poorer countries, the situation becomes more difficult: in India, between 1988 and 1993 more than 20,000 women were murdered in cases of domestic violence. In Vietnam, 70% of registered divorces in 1991 cited violence against women as their reason (Seager 2001).

Faced with the unavoidable and universal evidence of violence against women and girls, and promoted by the feminist movement, international organisations and governments have been tasked with taking action to tackle and eradicate this problem, recognising that its prevalence, which confirms the violation of human rights for both women and girls, represents an obstacle to peace, democracy and development.

As a result, in 1979 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed the creation of the *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, which constituted the first international means by which women's and girls' human rights could be dealt with extensively. It also stated that violence is a threat to life and clearly established the legal boundaries so that all forms of gender discrimination and violence could be eradicated. Regionally, in 1994, the members of the Organization of American States, to which Mexico belongs, met at the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, known as the *Belem Do Para Convention*. One year later, in September 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women adopted the Beijing Declaration, and the Platform for

Action established that the end of violence against women was essential for equality, development and peace in all nations.

Mexico has ratified these agreements. The *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia* (published in the Federation's Official Gazette on 2 February 2007, and agreed with the *CEDAW* and with *Belém Do Pará*) represented an opportunity for Mexico to assume responsibility for the eradication of this structural problem.

2. Violence against women and girls

When we talk about violence against women, we are using scientific terms that have been widely defined and discussed by feminism and which underlie the legal instruments we refer to.

Violence against women and girls can be considered as negative conduct directed against them that includes any aggression, be it physical, psychological, sexual, asset-based, economic or femicide, merely because they are women (Lagarde, 2006). It is a type of violence that occurs within a philosophy of unequal power, which seeks to subjugate and control women and girls, which harms and injures them, and which violates their human rights. In this way, the patriarchal system establishes and normalises hierarchies between men and women, giving men power and authority and turning women into objects of subjugation and discrimination, while violating their human rights. Consequently, the act of discriminating and committing violence against women means denying them their humanity: not only their rights but also their very existence.

Violence against women and girls is also used by men to safeguard their position of power and its associated privileges. It has been built into our structures and ideologies and is permitted in a series of social conventions, laws and conventions; it is "a way of conducting business", and yields enormous economic benefits to men (Kaufman 2009). Together with the control of power, the perception that men are entitled to privileges (for example, to insult or hit their spouse, believing that they own them; or to harass and even rape a woman on the basis that pleasure is their right) forms the basis of this violence. Within this framework, violence against women constitutes a way of re-establishing masculine power and is used by men to affirm their virility in the eyes of the world. Violence against women and girls is therefore an individual compensation mechanism for each man, while it constitutes a socially acceptable way of affirming male control and power:

"Such a feeling only heightens masculine insecurities: if manhood is about power and control, not being powerful means you are not a man. Again, violence becomes a means to prove otherwise to yourself and others" (Kaufman 2009).

For this reason there is an urgent need to dismantle the power structures and privileges for men and to eradicate the cultural acceptance that allows them to threaten the life and dignity of women and girls.⁷

The types of violence against women and girls include violence that is *physical, psychological, sexual, economic, wealth-based* and *femicide*. Types of violence in terms of where it is perpetrated are *at home, at work, in education, in the community* and *in institutions*.

3. The media's responsibility in supporting the human rights of women and girls

The media have been flagged as an institution that has a vital responsibility in eliminating violence against women and, consequently, in promoting their human rights. Since the media have become a source of both formal and informal education in society, alongside the family and school, they play a major role in the search for solutions.

The particular importance of media industries – and communication as a whole – in promoting women's human rights was added to the United Nations' agenda in 1995, and embodied in the World Conference of Women held in Beijing that year. For the first time, the right to communication was recognised as a condition for gender equality to be achieved. In the Conference's Platform for Action, Chapter J, "Women and Broadcast Media", was included, which established a series of recommendations for the member states, human rights organisations, media owners and advertising agencies and professional communication associations. The intention was for them to examine the consequences of reproducing sexist stereotypes in their content, including adverts that promote gender violence and discrimination, and to adopt measures to eliminate these negative images, with the hope of promoting a society based on principles of equality and respect: essential for development and peace in all nations. Also to promote the idea of women taking part as owners of these industries and as producers of content, encouraging those responsible for producing content to establish professional directives and codes of conduct. Finally, it drew people's attention to the important function of the media in informing and educating the public about the causes and effects of violence against women, and to stimulate public debate on this topic.

Although Mexico signed up to these agreements, it was not until very recently that definite actions were carried out to legally encourage the media to contribute to eliminating violence against women in all its forms and to bring about respect for the dignity of women. It was the *Ley general de acceso de las mujeres a una vida libre de violencia* that first involved the media in clearly establishing a series of recommendations.

Published on 1 February 2007, this **General Act** highlighted

the following, in its Title III, Chapter II of the Integral Programme to Prevent, Attend to, Sanction and Eradicate Violence Against Women:

Article 38 – *The Programme will contain actions with a gender perspective to:*

I. To promote and encourage knowledge and respect for women's human rights;

II. To transform socio-cultural models of conduct for women and men, including the formulation of programmes and actions in formal and informal education, at all educational and instructional levels, with the aim of preventing, attending to and eradicating stereotypical behaviour that allows, encourages or tolerates violence against women;

VIII. To ensure that the media do not encourage violence against women and that they instead encourage the eradication of all types of violence, to strengthen respect for human rights and the dignity of women;

Article 41 – *These are the powers and obligations of the Federation:*

XVIII. To ensure that the media do not promote stereotypical images of women or men, and that they eliminate standards of conduct that condone violence.

Article 42 – *Corresponding to the Governance Secretary:*

X. To ensure that the media encourage the eradication of all types of violence and strengthen women's dignity;

XI. To penalise, in accordance with the law, those media that do not comply with what is stipulated in the above section.

4. The theoretical-methodological strategy

With the aforementioned basis, this article's aim is to *analyse and determine, from the perspective of gender, the representation of violence against women and girls in Mexico's radio agenda*, to contribute to the generation of proposals that promote the responsible coverage and broadcasting of this problem, in such a way that this medium incorporates its elimination in educating and raising the awareness of society.

Particular aims that have been established are:

1. To identify, from a feminist perspective, radio content that deals with violence against women and girls.⁸

2. To determine, from a feminist perspective, the way that radio programmes treat violence against women and girls.

3. To corroborate if radio provides evidence of gender inequalities which lead to violence against women and girls.

Agenda setting is the key theory in analysing this communicative process. It represents a useful tool for determining how the media build their agenda and contribute towards reproducing the social agenda concerning the problem in question. In line with Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), through their content the media thematise⁹ an agenda that passes on to the public themes that they should have an opinion on. However, this theory also recognises that what the media cannot influence is how society makes sense of these themes, since a series of mediations are involved in this process that go beyond the media's agenda, such as: gender, age, educational level, socio-economic level, socio-historic context, etc.

From this perspective, we can recognise the form and mechanisms through which radio programming builds a discourse around gender violence against women and girls.

Representation is the unit of analysis used in empirical work, since it allows us to understand the social construction of meaning and, in particular, to locate the process through which social groups and institutions (including the media) appropriate at the same time as they make and reproduce meanings. To define this, it has been necessary to refer to the field of social representation, inaugurated by Moscovici (1976), which are defined as places of social knowledge that possess a symbolic nature and that are constructed from the experience of the subject with its environment. Social representations constitute a never-ending daily process of reconstructing what is real, of relations between subjects and society, thanks to which people make sense of reality. These representations have at least four functions:

- 1) Knowledge, in as much as they enable the subject to understand and explain reality;
- 2) Identity, which allows the subject to identify him or herself with a social group with which he or she shares certain rules and values;
- 3) Orientation, providing codes by which subjects structure their practices and behaviours; and
- 4) Justification, which allows subjects to justify a type of behaviour before a social group (Abric 1994).

In this, gender constitutes a fundamental representation of the social system, a place where discourses, beliefs and rules intersect on what female and male identities represent and on the power relationship between both genders that deprives, and which has historically been translated into male supremacy over female subordination. These discourses, stereotypes and beliefs are seen in inequalities between genders, expressed in a social dimension as well as in economics, law, politics and culture, leading to the discrimination of women (Flores-Palacios 1996).

On this point, we recognise that key social institutions such

as the family, education, government, political parties and the media create and reproduce this social representation, through distinct and varied social technologies (from Lauretis 1987). And that's why this piece of research has concentrated on the area of social representations, since they give us the chance to ask questions, as Margara Millan states, "about language and its forms, what they include and what they leave out" (1996, 179). We also examine how the media standardise and dichotomise the organisation of gender relations and how they therefore play a key role in the production of such representations, as:

"They label and organise what is 'real' (and, furthermore, what is considered legitimate and institutional), which becomes entrenched in how individuals act and behave in society; they establish and reinforce power relations [...] This implicitly involves dominance, in discourse terms, of those ideological perspectives with the greatest weight in the social structure: the middle class order, patriarchal order [...]" (Pedraza 2008, 41).

The media is important in social representations because of its power to create beliefs and opinions which then become social rules. Of course, the media bring about such representations by following the rules and principles for constructing the reality of the social group. However, they have the power to influence social awareness and therefore to transform reality itself.

It is particularly important to draw attention to one of the risks involved in the media's oversimplified construction of the social representation of gender: stereotypes. If the media refer to production demands as a conditioning factor and even an obstacle, providing a wealth of explanations regarding the causes and consequences of social problems (which is what happens), then they are very unlikely to become a vehicle for social change that promotes equality between women and men.

Consequently, it is believed that representation as a unit of analysis makes it possible to accurately deconstruct the forms, spheres, subjects and objects that prevail in media discourse concerning gender violence against women and girls.

Content analysis is a useful study tool and technique for identifying what has been defined as *Spheres of representation*:

- Characteristics of representation. Refers to the characteristics of the messages in which violence against women is represented.

1. Medium
2. Type or format (news item, song, tabloid press piece, advertising, etc.)
3. Appearance schedule
4. Number of times represented (totals)
5. Description of content

- Subjects of representation. Refers to the subjects and institutions included in the content.

1. Woman or Girl who is the object of violence
 2. Aggressor
 3. Authorities
 4. Civil society
 5. Catholic church
 6. Political parties
 7. Academia
- Forms of representing subjects. Refers to the assessment of the action of subjects and institutions.
 1. Ways in which women and girls are seen as objects for violence
 2. Way in which the aggressor is seen
 3. Ways in which the authorities are seen to act
 - Types and modalities of representation. Refers to the types and modalities represented of gender violence against women.
 1. Physical violence
 2. Psychological violence
 3. Sexual violence
 4. Economic violence
 5. Wealth-related violence
 6. Femicide violence
 7. Family violence
 8. Industrial and educational violence
 9. Community violence
 10. Institutional violence
 - Contexts of representation. Refers to the space in which violence is represented.
 1. Public space
 2. Private space
 - Valuation of representation. Refers to the rating and/or description received by violence against women via the medium.
 1. Represents a problem
 2. Does not represent a problem
 - Meaning of representation. Refers to the objective expressed by the content of the discourse.
 1. To denounce
 2. To trivialise

5. Empirical data

Within the context of this article, the radio agenda was analysed broadcast by Mexico City's five stations with the biggest audiences and highest ratings and with relay stations in the country's different states,¹⁰ during the 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 16 of June 2007, between 6.00 am and 11.00 pm. In each case, these are private radio stations^{XI} predominantly listened to by young people and housewives:

- La Z, which belongs to the Grupo Radio Centro (GRC), is the most listened-to station in the Valley of Mexico and is classified as a broadcaster of pop music, associated with styles such as *ranchero*, tropical and reggae. Played in all the station's programmes, some of whose songs denote the sexist

nature of their content – *Los adoloridos* and *El club de los chóferes*.

- Stereo Joya, also owned by GRC, and classified as a Spanish romantic music station, has housewives as its target audience. Its main programme – “Mañana con Mariano” – is broadcast from Monday to Sunday, 6.00 am until 1.00 pm and consists of sections such as “Narration”, “Mariano in your life” and “Reflection”, in which Mariano relates stories about women who are discriminated against (a couple of titles include *Arráncame la vida* and *Salto de amor por la vida*). However, these stories do not delve into the causes or consequences of violence and in some cases suggest that women are responsible for any violence committed against them.

- 97.7 – a Spanish pop music station – also belongs to Grupo Radio Centro, with a predominantly young audience. Its main programmes are “La Chicharra”, “Metronomo 97.7”, “El break de Rosalet” and “Konecta2”. The station's most popular genre is reggae.

- WFM 96.9 is owned by the firm Televisa and by the Spanish group Prisa, which owns 50% of Radiópolis. It is classified as a talk station (topics and news items). Its main bulletin, “Hoy por Hoy”, has three daily broadcasts (morning, afternoon and evening), as well as “El Weso”, which is promoted as political satire, although Televisa has always been accused of a pro-government editorial policy and of supporting the economic interests of its owners. The station's other main programmes are “OK! W” and “Martha Debayle en W”, which are sensationalist and mainly centred on celebrity gossip.

- Reporte 98.5 belongs to the communication group Imagen, to which the newspaper Excelsior and television channel Cadena Tres also belong. As with WFM, its programming makes it a talk station, focused almost exclusively on news items.

6. The findings

Within the context of this article, 525 hours of radio programming were analysed. The total representations recorded were 682, comprising the following types: musical (468), advertising (209), magazine-style and gossip (22), news (13). (See Table 1).

The most mentioned types of violence against women were: psychological (436) and sexual (45), mainly portrayed in domestic settings (178) (see Table 2).

Regardless of programme type – music, news, advertising or entertainment – radio programmes favour representing women as responsible for acts of violence committed against them (179), acting as an argument to justify its use. To a lesser extent, women are represented as victims (63), subjects of other people's actions, and never as empowered individuals with the ability to act with liberty and autonomy (See Table 3).

Table 1. Total number of representations of violence against women and children on Mexican radio

Station / Type	Music	Advertising	Magazine	News	Total
Stereo Joya	135	170	16		321
97.7	38				38
La Z	265	21			286
WFM		18	3	10	31
98.5			3	3	6
TOTAL	468	209	22	13	682

Source: In-house.

Table 2. Types and modalities of violence against women and girls on Mexican radio

Type and Place / Genre	Music	Magazine	Advertising	News	Total
Psychological	242	18	170	6	436
Sexual	44	1			45
Physical		1		5	6
Femicide		1		4	5
Family	6	12	160		178
Work				7	7

Source: In-house.

Table 3. Representation of women who are subject to violence on Mexican radio

	Music	Magazine	Advertising	News	Total
Responsible for violence	176			3	179
Victims	60			3	63

Source: In-house.

6.1 Music programming

Music is one of the most popular types of programming with Mexican radio audiences. Three of the stations with the highest ratings are music stations and they are analysed in this research: *Stereo Joya*, which is a romantic music station aimed at housewives; *97.7*, which targets young audiences with reggae and Spanish pop music playlists; and *La Z*, a station that concentrates on both audience groups and plays popular styles such as *ranchero*, tropical music and reggae. On all these stations the same tendency is seen: the same 10 or 12 songs are broadcast during the day, and the conclusion that can be drawn is that they contribute to the perpetuation of the idea that the only way to be a man is by denigrating women.

Without exception, the lyrics of the most popular songs in Mexico are misogynistic in nature, as they justify discrimination and violence against women. Reggae – one of the most-listened to genres nowadays – invariably refers to women as sexual objects, reinforcing the idea that women should be

exploited sexually and that their only value is as sexual objects. This can be seen in the songs: *Pásame la botella*, *Impacto*, *La gasolina* and *Ven y báilalo*. One of the most played songs - *Muévelo* - is by a reggae group called Los Súper Reyes, and its lyrics reflect how music, as a cultural product, constitutes a way of reproducing and naturalising violence against women into social conduct:

*Deja que te gocen
Dales lo que piden, sólo por esta noche
Danos ese cuerpo sin censura
No te detengas nena, danos tu calor*

*[Let them enjoy you
Give them what they want, just for tonight
Give us your body freely
Don't delay, girl, give us your heat]*

Ranchero and pop band genres are enjoyed by listeners. They originate from the north of Mexico and are broadcast throughout the country nowadays, as well as in the United States (amongst the migrant Mexican community). In these, suspicions concerning women are the main theme. Songs such as *Vas a sufrir*, *Alma de metal*, *Me quedé sin nada*, *Mil heridas* and *Antes muerta que sencilla* all threaten women, justified by them being unfaithful. An example of these lyrics is from the song *Humíllate*, from the group *Pesado*:

*Humíllate, pídemle perdón llorando de rodillas
Háblame, dime que sin mí tu vida no es la misma
Implórame que vuelva a besar tus labios con ternura
Ruégame que vuelva a llenar tu cuerpo de caricias
Convénceme que no voy arrepentirme si te quedas*

[Grovel, get on your knees and beg me for forgiveness
Talk to me: tell me that without me your life won't be the same
Beg me to kiss your lips tenderly again
Beg me to fill your body with caresses once again
Convince me that I won't regret it if you stay]

The situation is the same with tropical music (*cumbia*, *salsa* and *merengue*). These songs justify women being raped if they forget their place in society, as is the case in *Te va a doler*, by Maelo Ruiz:

*Es una pena que tú seas así,
Que no te guste ser llevada por la buena
No entiendo cómo tú pretendes ser feliz
Con ese idiota que te trata como a una cualquiera
Sé que algún día te hará falta mi amor
Y no lo digo por despecho aunque parezca
Te equivocaste al elegir entre él y yo
Pero te vas a arrepentir la vida entera*

*Te va a doler, tarde o temprano ya verás lo que te toca
Cuando tu piel ya no le excite y te abandone
O al descubrir con amargura que tiene a otra*

[It's a shame you are the way you are
That you don't like having a good time
I don't understand how you try to be happy
With that idiot who treats you like any other
I know that one day you will miss my love
And I'm not saying it out of spite, though it may seem so
You made a mistake choosing between him and me
But you will regret it for it for the rest of your life
You are going to hurt, sooner or later you will see what will happen
When your skin no longer excites him and he abandons you
Or when you bitterly discover he has someone else]

A recent example, which has not been analysed as part of this research, deserves a mention. It is the song *Unas nalgadas*, by Alejandro Fernández, an icon in *ranchero* music in Mexico, in which he warns the woman that infidelity deserves a lesson: that he will give her "some smacks on the bum with a prickly pear" and "some scratches with maguay spines".

Evidence from this research shows that pop music in Spanish is also to blame. Songs such as *Si tú no estás aquí* by Rosana, *Volverte a amar* by Alejandra Guzmán and *No me queda más* by Selena emphasise the stereotype that women only want a man to protect them. Other songs, such as *Camisa negra* and *Ojalá* by Juanes and Marco Antonio Muñoz blame women for being the main threat to their stability:

*No sé el nombre que en verdad tú te mereces
Lo busqué y no existe en el diccionario
Si quisiera describir lo que pareces
Le harían falta letras al abecedario
Ni qué hablar de tus infames actitudes
No merecen ser siquiera pronunciadas
Has perdido la última de tus virtudes
Al hacerme así la vida desgraciada*

[I don't know what name you truly deserve
I looked and it doesn't exist in the dictionary
If they wanted to describe what you're like
There wouldn't be letters in the alphabet
Not to speak of your vile attitudes
They don't deserve to be mentioned
You have lost the last of your virtues
On making life so unhappy for me]

We can therefore confirm that popular music promotes sexist representations in which aggression and insults against women are presented as part of socially acceptable conduct, and in which the jealousy and threats of men against women constitute the central theme of the most frequently broadcast songs on Mexican radio.

6.2 Advertising

Advertising does not distinguish between different time bands to broadcast content that discriminates and is aggressive towards women. One example is the airline Volaris, whose adverts feature a pregnant woman in a dangerous situation, trivialised so that her family takes advantage of their travel offers. It is also common to represent women as silly, frivolous and *shopaholics*. Such is the case with the supermarket *Gigante* ("women are going crazy for Gigante's reductions") and the insurers *Afore* (which say that women exercise to look after their figure, while men go to their doctor to take care of themselves). Like television advertising, radio reproduces the stereotype of women as sexual objects. An example is *Nestlé's* ice cream adverts, in which women are easy and fast.

During the same period, this research recorded broadcasts of institutional advertising to promote the eradication of violence against women and girls, which accounted for no more than 15%. This came mainly from the Telmex Foundation. The ads produced by radio stations *Stereo Joya* and *La Z* deserve a special mention here. These count on housewives as their main target group, calling on them to denounce the violence they are subjected to by their partner, through “self-help” telephone lines.

6.3 Magazine programmes and gossip press

The genre known as the gossip press concentrates on criticising and gossiping about celebrities, including the ‘beautiful people’. Although this type of journalism dates back to the beginning of the last century, through the first publications directed at women, nowadays it constitutes one of the most profitable audiovisual and printed products in the media industry. These programmes relate tragedies that befall celebrities (affairs, divorces, arguments, deaths, and now, in Mexico, the link these people have with organised crime). They emphasise the stereotypes of men as subjects of power and women as objects to be dominated, and examples include information on politicians’ extramarital affairs with actresses. In these relationships, women are stereotypically portrayed as stupid, superficial and frivolous sex objects, who are responsible for men’s unfaithfulness. Examples of these programmes include “OK! W”, hosted by Javier Poza and “La Noche W”.

Morning magazine programmes, aimed at housewives, deserve a special mention. These emphasise the idea that a woman’s place is in the home and that her duty is to serve her family (without any consideration to the fact, of course, that most Latin American women have been working for decades now, and that they have a double or even triple working day). The areas that go to make up these programmes normally include healthcare, children’s nutrition, advice on saving and beauty, amongst others. One example of this type is the radio programme *Televisa*, “Martha Debayle en la W”. However, the most eloquent case is represented by “Mañana con Mariano” on *Stereo Joya*, broadcast from Monday to Sunday, from 6:00 am until 1.00 pm. This programme contains slots in which the speaker relates stories whose protagonists are women suffering from some sort of discrimination (titles include *Arráncame la vida* and *Salto de amor por la vida*). However, these do not delve deeper into the causes or consequences of violence and suggest that women are responsible for any violence levelled at them.

6.4 Newscasts

The social function of news programmes – to inform and raise awareness of social problems in their audience – is not followed in this sense. Even when news programmes (e.g. *Hoy por Hoy*, *98.5 Noticias*) cover types of violence suffered by women (mainly physical, sexual and femicide), their attention and analysis is superficial and minimal compared to the num-

ber of news stories that comes in throughout a day. During the course of this research, we noted there were news stories about assassinations of women in Mexico City and other parts of the country, and the sensational and shallow treatment they received made it difficult for audiences to think about the causes or consequences of violence. It is important to note that the news does not define violence against women as a public order problem, demanding that the state and government take responsibility for it, but as a matter of domestic order which only applies to women and, only in some cases, to their partners. Women are represented as victims or, more extremely, as responsible for the violence that affects them, and their aggressors are seldom identified. To this we should also add that no news item referred to the existence of the General Act.

One item that received a lot of coverage during our week of analysis was the story of the mayor of Los Angeles’s extra-marital affair with a journalist from the American channel *Telemundo*, who was later suspended from her duties due to an anti-ethical attitude. This new item was yet another example of the stereotypical representation of women as a threat in conducting public space and, more specifically, political activity.

Finally, we should mention that the news programmes on *La W*, owned by the firm *Televisa*, have an evening edition which takes the form of political satire, *El Weso*. This trivialises, through jokes and gossip, the representation of violence against women and one of the female hosts is often the butt of misogynistic jokes by her male co-presenters.

On this point, and before we end this section, I would like to clarify that, generally, women’s human rights are not considered an important topic in the Mexican media’s news programmes. This does not mean that there are no relevant issues that affect half the population of this country, or that transformative actions promoted by women themselves, which show their power as agents of political, social and economic dynamics, do not exist. The problem lies in the perspective adopted by radio news programmes towards women and their citizenship.

7. Conclusions

Given the above, it is important to note a series of preliminary considerations.

By treating it as an isolated, trivial and domestic problem, radio discourse encourages women to be represented as responsible for the violence they suffer. Such is the case with lyrics of popular songs, in which the ambitious and unfaithful nature of women justifies the violence they receive. From this perspective music, as with other cultural industries, can be seen as part of an extended ideological process, in which male domination over women is normal.

Radio advertising follows the same norms as television advertising, as they reproduce the stereotypes that form the

basis of violence against women by portraying them as sexual objects who are frivolous and superficial, and show them occupying traditional roles – as mothers and wives – that reaffirm the gender duties they should assume.

As far as the news is concerned, women's human rights are invisible. When dealing with stories about violence against women, news programmes hardly ever identify the perpetrator and, what's more, seem disinterested in finding out who is responsible. Not much reference is made to the role of the authorities and barely their responsibility in eradicating this problem. Meanwhile, magazine and tabloid programmes emphasise sexist stereotypes that discriminate against women.

Unfortunately, within this context, the treatment of violence against women and children is not done with the aim of discovering what types of violence there are and what causes them, and much less with the aim of eradicating them but rather to reproduce them. The most prevalent types are psychological and sexual violence. Moreover, these are represented as domestic issues, since they take place in the family home.

Since violence against women and girls is not represented as a problem, radio announcers do not raise it as an issue of social awareness but merely as a topic to reproduce. In this way, radio tends to trivialise the problem rather than identify it or, even less so, denounce it.

Similarly, we cannot fail to recognise that, even if the media do not determine what their audiences think, they do have an influence on the agenda of topics discussed by society, and it should be noted that the media is responsible for social apathy and for society not realising that this problem exists.

The aim of this work is to contribute to the eradication of violence against the world's women and children, as a condition for them to access a life free from discrimination, oppression, submission and abuse. In other words, to fully recognise and respect their human rights. In this respect, it is clear that media involvement is undeniable. A debt that media analysts owe to us is to generate strategies that convincingly bring about change in the duty of media institutions to ensure they contribute effectively to the elimination of the violence levied against women and children. And this is the reason why this Observatory exists.

Notes

- 1 This work has been carried out with the support of the PAPIIT Program of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), project IN308808, and has relied on the collaboration of scholarship students Nelly Lara, Gabriela Barrios, Amelia P. and Hilda Cruz. The book that will contain the findings from all the research will be published in 2010 by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNAM.
- 2 Women's human rights include the right to physical integrity, a full and healthy sexual and reproductive life, to work and to keep earnings, to possess personal assets, to education, to culture, to political participation, to access power, communication and information and, most importantly, to life and freedom.
- 3 The framework for this violence is the gap in inequality between women and men. In this respect, Emilio Álvarez Icaza, president of the Human Rights Commission of the Federal District, points out that, according to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2007, Mexico is 93rd out of 128. Also, that women in Mexico represent four out of every ten people in the Economically Active Population (PEA in Spanish), but only three per cent have a managerial post; 10.45 per cent of those in the PEA do not receive an income. With respect to political rights, 23 of the 128 seats in the Republican Senate are occupied by women: that means only 18 per cent; while in decision-making they only sit on five of the 57 committees, less than 10 per cent, when they constitute more than half the country's electorate. In the Chamber of Representatives, 117 seats of the 500 are occupied by women, scarcely 23 per cent, and they are on eight of the 44 committees. Mexico is made up of 2,439 town councils and delegations, but only 85 municipal presidencies are run by women – in other words, in this field 3.5 per cent are women (Álvarez Icaza 2008).
- 4 This research was promoted by the Comisión Especial del Femicidio (Special Femicide Commission) in the Republic of Mexico of the LIX Legislature of the Chamber of Representatives (2006), headed by the anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, and brought together the work of 80 researchers around the country, giving us the task of documenting the painful prevalence of violence against women and particularly of femicide in Mexico.
- 5 Of the state executives, women's institutes, the state justice bodies and state authorities and municipalities. Also, of state congresses, of the state and Federal District, of civil organisations and academic institutions and of press reports (Comisión Especial del Femicidio, Chamber of Representatives LIX Legislature, 2006).
- 6 In agreement with Marcela Lagarde, femicide constitutes the group of crimes against humanity that include the murder, kidnapping and disappearances of girls and women within a framework of institutional collapse. This is a rupture in the rule of law that favours impunity. Femicide is a crime of the state (Lagarde 2006).
- 7 On this point, it is important to clarify that, in a patriarchal society, violence by men against women does not happen in isolation but is linked to violence by men against others; a mechanism used by them since childhood to establish hierarchies. Therefore, an analysis of

violence against women, which is because of gender, is not the same as an analysis of violence against men, which is a fight for power.

- 8 The first phase of the research is based on diagnosing, via content analysis, the agenda of television and radio programming, as well as websites, newspapers and magazines. The next phase, which is now underway, aims to determine the influence of such content on the representation of violence against women and girls that is current in Mexican society.
- 9 Wolf (1994) defines 'thematization' as an informative process, crucial in agenda-setting theory. When we thematize a problem, we place it on the agenda for the public's attention, giving it adequate importance, highlighting that it is crucial and significant with regard to the normal course of news.
- 10 Out of a total of 58 stations that broadcast from the Federal District, 33 are on AM and 25 on FM, according to the information published on the website www.musicapordentro.com.
- 11 In Mexico, a total of 1,465 commercial radio stations operate on a national level, 225 are non-commercial, 32 are state radio broadcasting firms and two are federal (Esteinou 2005; Martell 2010).

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