

# Usta Speaks



11th edition



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**SANTO TOMÁS**  
— VILLAVICENCIO —



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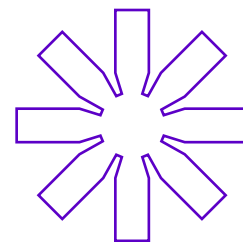
# Usta Speaks

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Cristina Gallego



Sonia Jiménez de Tejada



Adriana Ocampo Uría



Toto la Momposina

# Colombian Women in Arts, Science and Politics: Lessons we've learned

We live in the year 2023; it is hard to deny that today's society has made huge advancements in terms of equality and equity. We are fortunate enough to live in a world that gets to see class, gender or race issues as the unfortunate situations that they are; which a few years ago seemed like a far away dream. Today's world is closer to social struggles and better understands the violences it has exerted through the decades. It almost seems like we took a minute too long to reach this realization; like these truths would have been evident for us for a long time. In any case, the fights of afro, LGBTQ+ communities and women have settled these debates in the core of our relationships with each other (and even with ourselves) and that makes us a different society.

All the new space for marginalized communities in the public sphere doesn't come for free: it is the result of countless people who decided to break the glass ceilings and face the access barriers that society keeps arbitrarily putting up for some of us. This edition of USTASpeaks wants to recognize the work of Colombian women and share their stories with our community. Lawyers, singers, scientists and movie producers: these women have faced all sorts of difficulties and have still made a name for themselves in these areas, where gender disputes are still prevalent. The weight of their work speaks volumes and it is testament to the place they now have in our society and their respective fields.

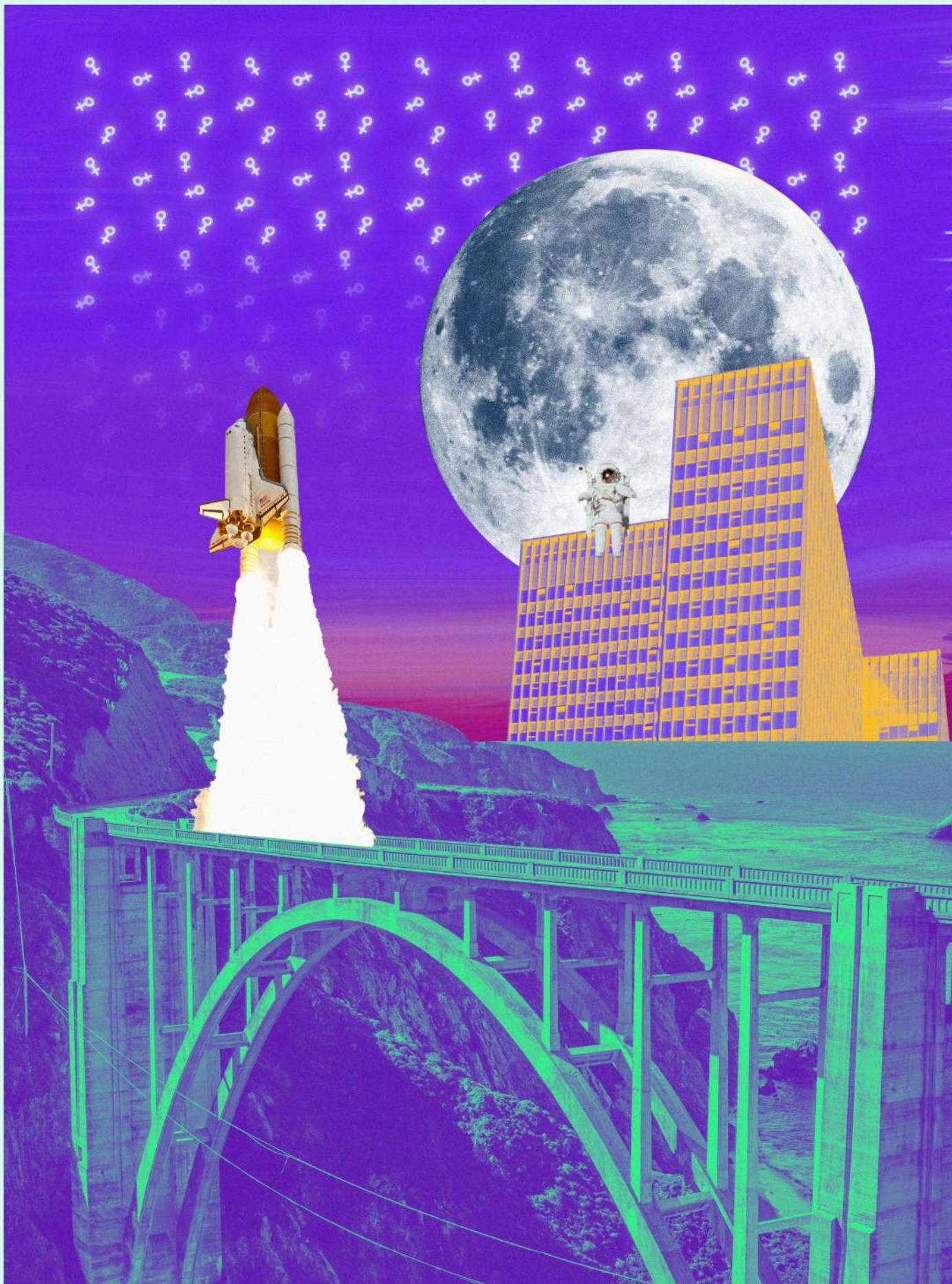
This edition of USTASpeaks is specially important because it is the first one we produced in our TEA: or Taller de Escritura Académica. This was an exercise for the development of writing skills in a foreign language amongst USTA students. It was also a place where peers gathered and reflected together. The tools we shared in the TEA helped produce the texts you are about to read and we are proud of the results we obtained. We hope to maintain this strategy and include more students every time. For our TEA attendants, we hope to have been a useful space for your academic growth and for our USTASpeaks readers, we hope you enjoy this collection of reflections about the lessons we have learned from Colombian Women in Arts, Science and Politics.



**Jessica Galvez Granada.**

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# Dignifying the Professional Development of Women in Colombia

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## Abstract

*Advances in the recognition of the rights and capabilities of women have been quite extensive. However, for the vindication of the role of women in society, it is important that Colombia contribute to their professional development, a process that is hindered by gender roles, lack of job opportunities and education, affecting in turn the socioeconomic development of the country and the dignity of women.*

### \*KEYWORDS

Lack of opportunities   education   dignity   prejudice  
socioeconomic development   vindication

The role of women in society has required promoting their recognition throughout history. There has been a widespread belief that the low visibility of women in predominantly male professions is due to their low participation, interest or performance. Despite the history of women leaders who have developed knowledge and initiatives on par with men, they have been contrasted by a credibility system based on gender and social class as a scale of value, demeriting and even hiding their performance based on gender roles. Although today representative progress has been made in the recognition of women's capabilities and rights (almost everywhere in the world), the lack of opportunities for women's personal and professional development is part of the challenges faced in Colombia. In spite of this, we have women leaders such as Adriana Ocampo Uría (planetary geologist), Diana Trujillo (aerospace engineer) and Sony Jiménez de Tejada (1924-2014; civil engineer). Therefore, an analysis of the factors that influence the backwardness of women is necessary, seeking to promote their vindication.

Among the factors that hinder the entry of women into male-dominated professions, it is stated that these fields are not a representative part of women's interests. However, this is due to various factors that influence this entry statistic. As evidenced in various investigations, the social, economic and ethnic context; the family context; gender

issues; the influence of schools and the quality of teaching; interests and aptitudes for science have to be considered (Scantlebury and Baker, 2007). In this way, the importance of the development of motivation in the education and progress of this population is identified. The importance of positive relationships between parents and children is a fundamental element for adaptation and success in the educational context; this is equally important due to the difficulties that young women may face when integrating into the educational community, since, likewise, these sociocultural factors may affect the perception of men.

Currently, despite the fact that nearly 51.6% of the world's population is female, only 55% have access to higher education. Additionally, while 74% of men are active in the labor market, only 54% of women are employed, presenting a wage gap of 18.9% (UN Women, 2017). The above added to the time women devote to unpaid care work are the main barriers that make their personal and professional development impossible. As for the Colombian context, although in the last decade Colombia has consolidated some of the most educated generations of women with 54.4% of those who graduate from universities, their talent and ability is not reflected in the same proportion in job opportunities, development, or income. Thus, nested in the cultural factor, women in Colombia do not usually develop in a social environment that allows them to explore their own interests, but often develop as a result of the sum of their opportunities, which could have better statistics with the gender equality programs currently implemented by the State. In spite of this, it partly detracts from the performance of women professionals, given that these are calls that categorize the merit of the candidate according to their gender, reflecting the path that remains to rethink "equality" for equity in the workplace, further dignifying the visibility of women.

In terms of women in research and the production of knowledge and technology, according to UNESCO, Colombia ranks 15th out of 20 in Latin America in terms of gender and research. Despite the above, in a general overview, women are barely recognized for their contributions to science, mainly in the STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Studies have shown that women lose interest in entering these areas of knowledge at an early age. This is why, according to the Pew Research Center, women today continue to be underrepresented in the areas of engineering, technology and computer and physical sciences. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to recognize and provide exhibition spaces such as this to give exposure and recognition to those women in Colombian history who have had courage and dedication to exalt their academic potential, being able to name among them:

#### **Sonny Jiménez de Tejada (1922-2014)**

She was the first civil and mining engineer graduated from UNAL in Colombia. She received her M.S. in Science in Civil Engineering from Carnegie Institute of Technology (Pittsburgh, USA) and Urban Physical Planning from UNAL. She was in charge of the municipal and departmental council of Planning, was a member of the Assembly of Antioquia and executive director of cooperation for development (Universia, 2020).



### Adriana Ocampo Uria (1955)

She is the planetary geologist who currently manages NASA's Science Program, as the person in charge of the Juno space probe mission to Jupiter and the New Horizons mission to Pluto. Through her arduous research she has contributed to the understanding of the Chicxulub impact crater (CNN, 2022).



Deepening and understanding the social dynamics that make up our reality brings us closer to the construction of society, allowing us to get involved in the formulation of social identity, which, articulated with government programs, provides opportunities for the recognition, support and dignification of the role of women in the historical evolution, so that prejudices are not an impediment to the participation of women in different professions. This is so that the lack of opportunities does not put an end to women's dreams and vocation, especially those in less developed regions, and so that the visibility of women who have stood out with their performance is taken as an inspiration for future generations.

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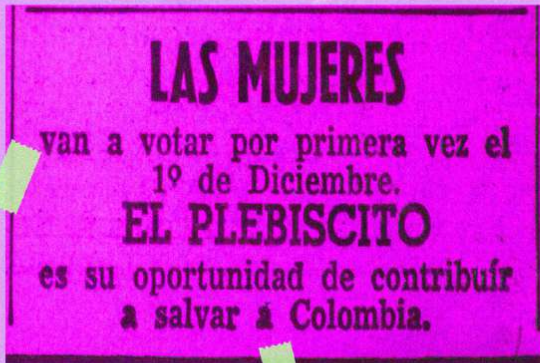
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# Being a woman in Politics

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## Abstract

*The political participation of women has always been very limited, and Colombia is no exception. In fact, Colombian women are currently the ones with the most difficulties in gaining access to public power. In this article, I explain the reasons why I think this continues to happen, contextualized to Colombian society.*

### \*KEYWORDS

Women

Financial capability

Care work

Female

leaders

Inequality

The right to suffrage that Colombian women have today wasn't on the list for our grandmothers. In fact, just 68 years ago, in 1954, a woman voted for the first time in Colombia. This is a problem for many reasons, but this writing will focus on understanding the difficulties Colombian women have in being understood and respected as political humans, participatory and capable of deciding on the country where we want to live. Social difficulties women face to access power are inconsistent with the results given by those who have managed to reach public jobs. For example, only in the COVID-19 pandemic, the 7 countries classified as those that best managed the virus and had the fewest deaths (in proportion to their population) had something in common: they were all led by women (BBC News, 2020). This is just one of many times that women have proven to be equally or even better qualified than men for leadership roles, yet opportunities to access these roles in politics remain limited.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in its 1992 declaration, stated that "The concept of democracy will only have a true and dynamic meaning when national policies and legislation are decided jointly by men and women and pay equal attention to the interests and aptitudes of the two halves of the population" (n.p). However, according to the chronicle made by the United Nations entitled "Women in politics - The fight to end violence against women",

currently, 18.6% of the seats in parliaments around the world are occupied by women. This explains why the public policies of most countries are so hostile against them, since the absence of representation in public power has led to forgetfulness and abandonment by the State as a direct consequence. Colombia is no exception: for the 2022-2026 period, only 85 of 295 congressional seats will be held by women; that is, 28.8%, according to figures from the national registry (United Nations for Women, 2022). What causes this lack of representation in public jobs? The answer derives from social and historical factors such as gender stereotypes and economic factors. These influence circumstances of inequality, which in turn, hinder access to real democracy.

Historically, care work has been relegated to women, and when this is said, people usually think that we are talking about last century housewives, but it is much more than that, since it is women who usually take care of children, old people, animals, the house, and feeding their families. According to the DANE (national planning department), between 2016 and 2017, there were 18 million women who carried out unpaid care work in Colombia. This is a drawback since these care activities are only paid for 2.6 million people, of which the 77% are women (according to data from the ILO - International Labor Organization). Thus, we can observe the tendency to delegate care tasks to women, which causes not only repercussions on women's health in general, but also time limitations due to these extra responsibilities in comparison with men. This is, in fact, one of the reasons why there are more men in politics.





It is no secret to anyone that being a woman, especially in a developing country like Colombia, is really an obstacle to achieving any goal; but it's even worse when economic circumstances are another problem on the list. As I mentioned before, women are in charge of care work and, in addition, are not paid most of the time. This results in an irregular distribution of money, since all the tasks that are commonly carried out by men are paid, but it is not so in the case of the tasks commonly carried out by women. In addition to this inconvenience, the wage gap is another aspect that limits the possibility of a woman reaching a public job. This gap in Colombia is 12.5%, according to figures from DANE for the year 2021. It should be clarified that this number had been reducing over time, but due to the quarantine in which the country was plunged during the covid-19 pandemic, this figure went up again. In fact, Simone de Beauvoir already said at the time "Never forget that it only takes a political, economic or religious crisis for the rights of women to be questioned. These rights can never be taken for granted. You must remain vigilant throughout your life", and this quote resonates more and more every day.

The prejudices that women have historically faced, the cultural perceptions about the tasks that we can or cannot do, the difference in financial capacity between genders, the indifference and ignorance of the institutions regarding the need for the representation of all groups in public power continue to impede the access and participation of women in politics. Obviously, no one would think of campaigning for politics when they have to take care of their children, the house, and also have to work longer hours and harder to support themselves, considering that a political career requires a lot of time traveling or away from home and a lot of money, between advertising, expenses of the campaign team, transportation, etc. In Colombia, the political participation of women has increased, and likewise, their representation in the great branches of public power. This, thanks to some women that have been such good references of female political leaders, who, regardless of the political ideologies of each person, have been admirable for overcoming all the difficulties of being a politically active woman and have reached positions of public power.

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WOMAN  
RIGHTS  
WOMAN  
RIGHTS  
WOMAN



# Process of struggle and resilience for women

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## Abstract

*This article is an account of the life of Colombian women, those of before and those of now. It is about how history generated an impact for women we know in today's society and what it is still missing to achieve long-awaited equality. The article also recognizes the importance of women, even when they were not seen and how all their contributions generate development for our country.*

## \*KEYWORDS

Women

empowerment

struggle

recognition

In society, women have had a different process than men, and in Latin American countries, that reality was very strong. Women lived a time where they were oppressed and systemic violence affected their lives in all dimensions, regardless of their economic status, race, creed. The image of women and their reputation was the most important thing about them; education was only for a minority, which made it difficult for the cycle of submission to be broken. But then, it seems that we open a completely different book and the story changes, in which women take on an empowered role, where there are more opportunities. It was a very long process from the recognition of women's rights to the 21st century Colombian woman and their transformation. This is why we are going on a little time journey between women's current life and the past.

As previously described, women occupied roles defined by society; that is why imagining women and science together in Colombia sounded like nonsense, but as mentioned by Eleanor Roosevelt in her iconic phrase "Women with good behavior rarely make history". Thanks to all those who questioned the system, today there are Colombian women who inspire with their contributions to science. However, the percentage of women in research positions is 37%, still very low, which places Colombia in the 15th place out of 20 in the UNESCO Women in Science report.



Therefore, the contributions of women who have ventured into intellectual production and the qualification of careers destined for men have been very important and will continue to be so for the future.

Another field in which Colombian women have been involved from their ancestral knowledge is art. "Women have always been part of the manifestations of art, either as creators, collectors or researchers, but have been left out of the official narrative of the history of art" (Frigeri, 2019). Their role, interpretation and knowledge have generated and sustained the artistic movement, but before production, such as the construction of looms, the oral tradition that is linked to culture, muses of inspiration, but with the necessary academic training, they took a position where they are seen with respect and admiration, recognizing the profound impact caused on the discipline and the social tissue. As did Blanca Sinisterra, a portrait painter, who participated in the First Artists' Exhibition in 1940 (Parra, 2017).

From not having the right to vote to participating directly in Colombian politics, the exclusion of women in politics means that even though there are people who represent us before the State, women like Esmeralda Arboleda, suffragette, first woman elected senator, generate a structural change where women take their own voice (Semana, 2022). It is not a significant percentage, which also means that there are not enough people who represent, endorse and support legislative projects for the benefit of women's equality and who understand from their own experience the need for them. However, in recent years we have had an advance towards women taking political power, so that political positions in different sectors have been occupied by women, who represented 27.78% of the occupation of ministries by 2021 (El Tiempo, 2021).

Women have undergone a transformation and evolution in their individuality and how they have been perceived by society. They have gone through various historical processes in which they have fought fervently for the recognition of their work, equal conditions, respect and better living conditions. As a pillar of society, women have always been relevant but not recognized or visible, the impact they have had on science, arts and politics has been growing due to restructuring of the system. It is important to highlight all the women who at the time were stigmatized and rejected by society because they did not fit into it and that made a better tomorrow for all of us, those of now and the future, because their effort was not in vain and was the basis for the development of women today.

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Men Ministers in 2021  
72,22% vs Women Ministers in 2021  
27,78%





# WOMAN

## COLOMBIAN

### CULTURE





# Progress and contribution of women in cultural representation

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## Abstract

*Colombia has a wide variety of culturally representative women who have made progress in the evolution of arts and female empowerment in Colombia. This article reflects on the teachings of Totó la Momposina and Cristina Gallego.*

### \*KEYWORDS

Culture

Female empowerment

Art

Cultural

Expression

Woman Initiative

Before the end of the 20th century, Colombian women were quite limited in the way they could develop their lives, their way of dressing, acting and participating in society itself. However, it is well known that some of them managed to shine despite the oppression of that time. In the Colombian Constitution of 1991, it is established that women in Colombia have the right to bodily integrity and autonomy, to vote, to work and are entitled to equal conditions in many other aspects. Because of this, the role of women has achieved a great evolution over time. Many women have chosen to thoroughly break stigmas; although, since ancient times, there were already many who, regardless of the consequences, took their place and became historical legends. These women of ancient and modern times left us and still leave us extremely important lessons from different areas of knowledge, such as culture.

Colombian culture has been highly enriched by women. As is well known, culture is one of the aspects that stands out the most within the country and abroad; this is recognized by the Ministry of Culture, which in 2015 held an event for the recognition and visibility of women, empowerment and of course, cultural contribution. The ministry states:

In this occasion, the role of women as cultural managers will be highlighted. Those who, from the work and experience of their practices and cultural manifestations, dignify and exalt their communities. Participation of women from different regions of the country who will share their knowledge and knowledge around their trade as cultural managers (MinCultura, 2015).

These contributions cover the artistic, linguistic, musical and dance fields. All the vital aspects for the cultural enrichment of the country, where the effort, beliefs, creativity and expression of those women who were oppressed for so long are finally recognized. In the system in which they found themselves, all of them were in search of equal recognition, for themselves and for the many others forgotten throughout history.

An example of recognition and performance is “Toto la Momposina”, afro-descendant dancer and singer of Caribbean music. Her career was based mainly on the cultural representation of the Colombian coast, with its African, indigenous and Spanish roots. Toto suffered first-hand the oppression and violence of the country in her youth. She was forced to move to the capital city, where she created her own musical group in the 60's, only 30 years after the promise of Colombian cumbia would she achieve international fame. Currently, at 82 years old, on September 24, 2022, she retired with her last show at the Cordillera festival. Here her career and artistic contribution to Colombia were commemorated, with her rhythms and dances that obtained multiple national and international awards. Toto is a clear example of everything that women can represent; she made visible the role of women in Colombian culture, their perseverance and love for art. She showed us a new world of possibilities, one that provides an initiative to the woman to fulfill and exploit her talents freely.



In the modern era, there has been a great participation of exemplary women for Colombian society. The idea of representing female empowerment has prevailed over the years, evolving along with technologies and forms of art representation. Cristina Gallego is a good example of what this text has already talked about. Cristina has a story quite similar to Toto's; she comes from a peasant family, which had to move to the capital in search for opportunities. She always felt a great love for representation through film and television; she wanted to tell stories and help to put them to work. She went to the National University of Colombia for the Film and television program, and after graduating, she created "Ciudad Lunar Producciones" together with her ex-husband. Great recognition came to Cristina for her ideas and methods that allowed an advance in Colombian cinema. A clear example is her work in "El abrazo de la serpiente", Colombian film that had a nomination at the Oscars and won a variety of international awards, where she participated as main producer. In recognition of her role in the creation and production of different films, the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences invited her to be part of its organization. The Academy ensures that

The selection of members is based on professional qualifications, with an ongoing commitment to representation, inclusion and fairness that continues to be a priority. The Class of 2022 is 44% female, 37% from underrepresented racial/ethnic communities, and 50% from 53 countries and territories outside of the United States. Among the guests there are 71 Oscar nominees, including 15 winners" (El Espectador, 2022).

Her dedication took her to the place where she is and it shows us that women can dominate in an industry as sexist as cinema.



Certainly, the progress and contribution of women to culture has been of great variety and weight for the country. Many who come from very low spheres in society are rising in the search for a dream, love for art and perseverance. With the beautiful need for representation, these women achieved what many seek to allow themselves, to be free and offer their art to the world.

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# Oblivion of the Colombian woman as a thinking human being

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## Abstract

*Women have been forgotten as thinking and capable human beings. However, they have managed to cope with and overcome different social challenges, like gender gaps. Still, there are Colombian women who managed to reach the top of their professional life, forming a fundamental part of different fields such as science, art and politics.*

### \*KEYWORDS

Social impediments

gender

anonymity

oblivion

history

Throughout history, women have been considered and valued only for being the most important part in the work of procreation, neglecting to consider her as a thinking human being with abilities or skills. It is obvious that the situation is quite different from the one experienced a couple of decades ago when without any reservations women were prevented from being admitted to universities. Many still remember how there were quotas for women for careers such as medicine or engineering, in private universities. Those who managed to enter mention spaces where intimidation and harassment were common, like a dark time, where the problems were known, but they were not talked about, because there were no mechanisms that allowed them to be discussed and remedied. (Tovar, 2008) .

Currently, there are no legal impediments that overshadow women in any field; however, there are social obstacles that become challenges to reach the peak of their professional lives. This is how the advancement of society brought with it different possibilities for women in fields such as science, art and politics. However, not only in Colombia but worldwide, the role of women and her contributions have been forgotten. Furthermore, the existence of women who have had to face gender gaps to reach the peak of their career today is evident.

In Colombia, a country colonized by Spaniards who imposed customs and ways of thinking, there is the supremacy of men as thinkers, artists, philosophers, researchers and human beings. It is clear that for many people it is very difficult to accept the questions that have been raised since the seventies, where the male experience is criticized as inclusive of the experience of both genders. The first to fall was the definition of anthropology as "the study of man" to now be the "study of human beings" since it was evident that it was assumed that everything important in society was the product of male minds (Tovar, 2008). With globalization and the advancement of both Colombian and world society, possibilities and spaces in science, art and politics have been opened to women, leaving behind gender differences to share different understandings, points of view and different types of art.

Despite the existence of a large gender gap in sciences, arts and politics, several women have managed to stand out in their professional lives to the point of having social recognition for what they do. It is striking how the indicators show more men researchers than women (Tovar, 2008). Likewise, in the field of politics, 60 presidents had to go by before Colombia had a female vice president and the wait continues before we get to see a woman as president. In the arts, few women are known to come out of anonymity. "Few people bothered to ask what was the role that women had in society, not always subordinate and also with important contributions to science, to discover, later, that in fact, with few exceptions, in many disciplines the study of half of humanity had been left out." (Tovar, 2008). The problem is not only local or current; this problem requires a review of history, which frequently ignored women's contributions.

There are women who have stood out for their abilities in Colombia, stories that must be told, of those women who have written important chapters in science, art and politics in the country, leaving an important mark with their experiences and inspiring different communities with their work. One of them was Débora Arango, the first Colombian painter to paint female nudes, a woman who, through art, helped to redefine the perception of the female role in a sexist society with great social injustice. Likewise, in the area of science there is Diana Trujillo, leading aerospace engineer of an important mission at NASA, "She thus became the 108th flight director in the history of NASA and is preparing for the lunar missions of the Artemis program of the US agency. In 2021, the Colombian government awarded her the Cruz de Boyacá, the highest merit that a civilian can achieve in the country, for her performance and great work at NASA" (AS, 2022). Finally, in politics, different women can be highlighted who have known how to lead movements and revolutionize the country. Among them, Francia Márquez, vice president of Colombia, the first time that an Afro-Colombian woman holds the position of vice president in Colombia. She is a social leader, environmental activist, human rights defender, feminist, lawyer, and Colombian politician. "Francia embodies the collective struggle for ethnic and gender equality in a country that has historically been governed by white elite and urban men" (BBC News Mundo, 2022). All of them have had to face gender and social gaps to reach the peak of their career. This is how, despite social impediments, Colombian women have been able to face and overcome each impediment and social oblivion, go through a process of metamorphosis in order to emerge in society.



The biggest problem is not the number of women who stand out or the number who carry out research or are part of politics, the problem arises in the upbringing and social sphere that is still full of sexist attitudes.

“The issue of gender is much more complex than we imagine. It could be argued that the problem of access to science would be solved by removing the obstacles that prevent women from entering and performing successfully in the field of science. The same could be argued with respect to the field of politics or the arts, where special privileges are not sought for women, but rather all people have equal opportunities without being discriminated against based on their gender” (Tovar, 2008). Colombian women have managed to overcome social impediments to reach the peak of her professional life, including not only have they stood out, but they have reached the point of having social recognition for what they do.

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