

Courage
creativity
hope

VII LATIN AMERICAN CONGRESS
ON GENDER AND RELIGION

Daniéli Busanello Krob, Marli Brun, Sabrina Senger (orgs)



COURAGE | CREATIVITY | HOPE

VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion

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SUMMARY

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PRESENTATION¹

Daniéli Busanello Krob²

Marli Brun³

Sabrina Senger⁴

The year 2021 challenged us with urgencies, needs, dreams and desires. In everyday life, we experienced the worst health crisis in recent times: the Covid-19 pandemic. We started the Congress, at the end of August, with around 600,000 lives lost to Covid-19 in Brazil. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 15 million people have died as a result of Covid-19. The deaths caused by the pandemic have exposed the violence of exclusionary and unequal social

structures, which privilege capital and monoculture to the detriment of people's lives and the ecosystem. In different contexts, religion has been used to justify situations of suffering, violence and death. During the pandemic, some of them became evident, such as the criminal actions of governments, cases of gender violence (misogyny, femicides, murders of LGBTQIA+ people), persecution and death of community leaders, xenophobia, racism, religious intolerance, environmental decimation, among others. On the other hand, support, welcoming, solidarity, denunciation and resistance networks were strengthened and expanded, building new possibilities for social, cultural and religious organization.

In this context of diverse, compound and complex crises, the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion of Faculdades EST took place. The event, organized by the Gender and Religion Program and the Gender Research Center, took place from August 24 to 27,

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2021, bringing together researchers, leaders and members of religious groups and institutions, social movements and the field of public policies throughout Brazil, Latin American countries and other continents. It aimed to share and discuss current issues in the academic field, social and political action and community experience in the intersection of Gender and Religion themes, from the most diverse areas of knowledge. The themes chosen to inspire us were: “Courage – Creativity – Hope”.

Courage has its etymological root in the Latin *coraticum*, that is, in the heart (*cor*). The suffix *aticum* indicates an action in relation to its root, therefore, literally, it refers to the action of the heart. In this sense, courage is daring, risky, and demonstrating desire. It resists the domination of fear, perseveres in living, experimenting, acting, deciding, facing, despite the risk and self-exposure. Courage manifests a tenuous border between fear, recognition of vulnerability and the impetus to overcome.

Creativity points to the possibility of creating, producing, understanding, expanding and inaugurating. It is related to the imagery and subversive capacity to believe that transformations are possible and necessary. Creativity feeds on internal and external resources, such as knowledge, wisdom, confrontations, desires, references, experiences, dreams, frustrations – presenting itself in an authentic way. It can be experienced as something individual, however, when it provokes and moves the world around it, it carries with it a community dimension and power. Creativity points to other paths, other possibilities, ways of expressing, gathering, weaving networks and relationships.

Hope is a recurrent concept in the theological field and indispensable in community practice. It is reflected in biblical texts as an

expectation of divine action that strengthens human actions so that life reaches a state of peace and liberation. Hope drives and sustains praxis – it is active waiting. Hope is also an important aspect of educational practice. In Pedagogy of Hope, Paulo Freire affirms it as an ontological reality, a resource of insistence in the midst of inequality, injustices and discouragement⁵.

Due to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, for the first time in the history of the Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion, we had an entirely online edition. The organization faced the challenge of reinventing and adapting the dynamics and structure of the event to virtual platforms, without losing its diverse and plural characteristic, which feeds and invigorates our commitment to justice, respect and a dignified life. We had the support of NEAD (Distance Education Nucleus) of Faculdades EST, as well as volunteer students from the institution.

Our biggest concern, given the increasing cyber-attacks by fundamentalist groups and individuals⁶, was with the safety of the

5 FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogia da Esperança: Um Reencontro com a Pedagogia do Oprimido*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992.

6 “[...] accompanying the growth of meetings and activities carried out by videoconference, as a reflection of the need for social isolation in the pandemic of the new coronavirus, a practice has become systematic: the invasion of meetings and virtual activities by far-right groups. [...] in Brazil, for the most part, they are racist and misogynistic attacks, with the attackers even using pornographic and even rape images. Social media is also seeing an increase in hate crimes, child pornography and neo-Nazism. A survey by Safernet, an NGO that monitors human rights violations on the internet [...] shows a growth of 5,000% during the pandemic.” FERREIRA, Marcelo; REINHOLZ, Fabiana. Crimes de ódio aumentam durante a pandemia em invasões de videoconferências. *Brasil de Fato*, Porto Alegre, 04 set. 2020. Available at:

participants and the event as a whole. Thanks to attentive and dedicated work carried out together, the Congress took place without any type of problem related to virtual security. It is true that the virtual did not supply the smells, flavors, colors, sensations, hugs and reunions that the six previous editions provided. But, we entered, with the doors open, into the world of each and every one. Instead of feeling it, we imagined the smell of coffee, the taste of cake, the warmth of the hug that was there, on the other side of the screen.

In addition to the opening and closing conferences, the program included twelve thematic tables, fifteen working groups and several workshops. There were also Moments of Spirituality, the Experimental Gallery of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology Sul-Rio-Grandense (IFSul) – Sapucaia do Sul campus, with the virtual artistic intervention *Maria vai com as outros* [Maria goes with the others], The Virtual Fair of Solidarity Economy, from the Fair and Solidarity Trade Network (RCJS) and the celebration of the award of the collective honorary doctorate title to Maricel Mena-López, Mercedes García Bachmann, Lori Altmann, Nancy Cardoso and Wanda Deifelt.

Given the socioeconomic and pandemic context, the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion took place as a meeting of courage, creativity and hope. The Congress constitutes a space for articulation, debate and production of knowledge in the fields of studies of religion, gender and feminism, providing space for the construction of strategies at the local, national, regional and global levels, of resistance

and transformation. The texts in this book are part and fruit of the reflections presented at the seventh edition of the Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion.

May we, for the next edition of the Latin American Congress of Gender and Religion, dream of a face-to-face reunion and overcoming the pandemic, celebrating the construction and sharing of knowledge and experiences that cross this knowledge. With courage, creativity and hope we close the seventh edition of the Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion and we wish you a great reading. See you soon!

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COURAGE, CREATIVITY AND HOPE IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC

SIGNS TO CELEBRATE¹

Adriana Gastellu Camp²

Dear sisters, dear brothers, it is a pleasure to be here with you in this important event of the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion under the theme of Courage, Creativity and Hope.

We are going through difficult times, times of crisis where values, the economy, habits and even relationships are put to the test, causing radical changes that rarely benefit us.

Confinement, masks, work from home, isolation, loss of income, depression, death, are some of the realities that we have had to face. In our own life or in that of our loved ones. But perhaps never before have we seen such clear signs that the whole world is united and interrelated in a very close way, and at the same time witness so many signs of creativity, courage and hope.

In these times of pandemic, we have realized the value of a hug. The value of an encounter in real life, looking into each other's eyes, feeling smells, using touch, appreciating nuances that the screen does not capture, sharing a coffee, a mate, a wine. Many of us haven't seen our older relatives for months, or visited children or relatives who live far away.

At the same time, the internet has allowed us to be closer than ever. There is a boom in webinars, online Bible studies, talks, conferences,

¹ Lecture given at the Closing Conference "Courage, Creativity and Hope on the spiral path of Gender Justice". Translated by Marlon Machado Oliveira Rio. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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etc. We do this same Congress from home, without having to travel with high costs, without polluting the environment by plane flights, without having to do logistics work that helps us leave our places for a more or less prolonged time. We don't see each other in real life, we don't hug or conspire during breaks, but we can do it at much lower cost and with less environmental impact, and, furthermore, facilitating broad participation for those who would not have been able to travel.

Despite the difficulties and the adverse situation in each country, people continue to organize themselves, spontaneously, with alternative strategies, sharing life and needs. In these times we have seen thousands of examples of courage, creativity and hope in the midst of the pandemic. Examples that inspire us, that invite us to celebrate despite difficult times. I am going to name a few.

In Uruguay, **on March 8** of last year, international women's day, gatherings in public places were prohibited for groups of more than 20 people. The different groups and associations of women called to meet outdoors in neighborhoods and squares, each in their place, keeping distances and respecting health protocol. After the activities carried out in each place, which were very varied, with cultural expressions of dancing, singing, painting, talks, testimonies, etc., the women from their places began to walk towards the center of Montevideo and gathered at the main avenue in front of the Municipality, becoming an enormous flow of people who demanded the rights of women and denounced injustices. There were no repressive reactions and the media coverage was enormous. Spontaneous courage, common creativity, hope.



Source: Author's personal archive.

In Central America, the **Ecumenical women's group for the Right to Decide**, based in Honduras, but which works regionally, created in 2020, virtual training, among which there is a Certified Course on Sexual and Reproductive Rights. A difficult job in a complex context, suffering threats and harassment online, in a Honduras where women's rights are highly repressed. In addition, they have also trained a group of more than 20 teachers to support girls and adolescents in sexual health issues, in schools in Honduras, where this type of topic is considered a taboo, and many topics related to sexuality are prohibited. It takes courage, creativity and hope to be able to carry out this kind of work.

Another example is the **Network of Women Christian Theologians, Pastors, Activists and Leaders – TEPALI**, which was created just three

years ago, following in the footsteps of a group of theologians and pastors created in the 1980s. TEPALI is forming a network of knowledge and theological experiences of Latin American women, with contributions also from other women around the world. The launch of the TEPALI Network in a virtual way allowed allies from all over the continent, from Argentina to the United States, the Caribbean and beyond, to be connected in real time. Tepali has online publications, including a book that may be downloaded from the internet called *Feminist Theologies against Religious Fundamentalism*. In addition, they have created a virtual School of Feminist Theologies, with conferences on YouTube that are open to everyone. Creativity, courage and hope are required to do what TEPALI does.



Source: TEPALI. Available on: <https://www.tepali.org/>. Retrieved on: 20 Aug. 2021.

In another context, at an altitude of 4,500 meters, in the area of Ayacucho, Peru, three indigenous sisters, **Magdalena, Marcela and Lidia Machaca**, have turned a desert into a meadow. They are indigenous women, the kind of people that society discriminates against and marginalizes. They are agricultural engineers, and through ancestral techniques of community work, knowing how to listen and respect nature, they have created natural lagoons where water from springs and rain is stored for animals and crops from neighboring communities. Due to the overexploitation of the water in the area, and the drying of the nearby glaciers, the lagoons became swamps. At the initiative of these three women, 10 families began to organize themselves to build rustic dikes with elements of the nearby nature. Stones, branches, mud, trying to alter nature as little as possible. It took time, patience, courage, creativity and hope to get this job done. At first the neighbors had some doubts, how these *cholitas*, as they are called, were going to defy the drought and improve the water conditions? But over time, and with the faith and trust of only 10 families, the springs arose and the lagoons were filled with water. Water is a living being, they say, it is *yakumama*. “That’s why you don’t have to exploit it. The key is to treat it with love. Only in this way will the deities allow the water to emerge from the depths of the earth and never abandon us”, says Marcela. With this method, 12 lagoons were created, which nowadays supply 70 families. Creativity, courage and hope of these three women, produces miracles of life in the Peruvian Andes.



Fuente: THE SISTERS WHO breed lagoons. *Apacheta*, 7 jun. 2021. Available on: <https://apacheta.pe/las-hermanas-que-crian-lagunas/>. Retrieved on: 20 Aug. 2021.

UN-Women has confirmed that cases of violence against women and girls have increased considerably during the pandemic times. Women have been confined to the most dangerous place for them, their own home. For girls it increases the risk of sexual abuse, and in many countries, it also increases the risk of being married off against their will, even as children. In Colombia, the **National Women's Network** created an application for cell phones called ELLAS. The application is very educational, with an emergency button through which a notification is sent to a close contact, with

information about where the person is to file a complaint, ask for help or go for treatment in case of medical need. It has a space with frequently asked questions and a cell phone tracking, which allows you to track the person who is in danger. This requires a lot of creativity, courage and hope.



Source: THE NATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN activated the ELLAS app in Cauca. *ONU MUJERES*, Colombia, 2 jun. 2018. Available on: <https://colombia.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2018/06/lanzamiento-ellas>. Retrieved on: 20 Aug. 2021.

In other continents, the situation of women during the pandemic has also worsened considerably. In South Africa, many women work informally, selling on the streets, or with very low-paid jobs, which depend on meeting others. Confined to their homes, they are subject to increased violence. In South Africa 8 women are murdered, for the simple fact of being women, every day. In this confinement, women's income, as well as contact with other people outside the home, becomes null or very limited. An organization called **ACT Ubumbano**

works for women's sexual and reproductive rights in South Africa. ACT Ubumbano workers bring bags of food to families, and through these visits they may have access to talk with women or detect cases of violence. This sometimes puts them at risk from the aggressor or increases the danger of Corona contagion. It takes courage, creativity and hope to carry out these visits, often on foot, with no protection other than themselves, to reach the most remote homes where the poorest women live.



Source: ACT Ubumbano. Available on: <https://www.actubumbano.org/>. Retrieved on: 20 Aug. 2021.

In Palestine the situation is critical. In addition to isolation, the absence of tourists, and the occupation of Jewish groups in Palestinian territory, the situation worsened significantly with the clashes between Jews and Palestinians and the total closure of the Gaza Strip. In Jerusalem there is a hospital named **Augusta Victoria**, which is the best hospital for cancer treatment and dialysis with care for Palestinians. It is a hospital that is largely financed by donations from Lutheran churches through the Lutheran World Federation. With the fighting and the closure of the Gaza Strip, sick people cannot travel to Jerusalem to continue their treatment, and women cannot get their mammograms. Breast cancer is one of the biggest causes of death for Palestinian women. That is when the women doctors have found a solution, through a mobile clinic that can go to where these women are and do the corresponding tests. A partial solution, which cannot provide all the help that could be given in the hospital, but which is essential to make timely diagnoses or continue treatment for many Palestinian women. Courage, risking life, creativity, and hope, once again, in practical life.



Source: AUGUSTA VICTORIA HOSPITAL. Dr. Khadra Salameh, *Oncóloga infantil*. Available on: <https://www.ihf-fih.org/beyond-the-call-of-duty-for-covid-19/organizations/augusta-victoria-hospital/>. Retrieved on: 20 Aug. 2021.

In the biblical stories we also have several examples of women of courage, women who, moved by hope, find paths that seem impossible to achieve what they are looking for.

An example is that of the women who go to the tomb to take charge of the body of Jesus. It was a very tense moment; Jesus was highly controversial both for the local Jews and for the Romans who occupied Jerusalem at the time. On the cross, the women are close to him and it is these women who go to the tomb three days later. In Mark (16:3) we are told that they go to this place, even knowing that there is a large stone in front of the cave where Jesus was buried. They know they will not have the strength to remove it. But even so they go. Moved by hope. Logically we could say that they should not have gone without making sure that someone would help them. With that stubbornness that moves women in pain, they go, even if the mission seems crazy. And it is these women, who, for the first time in the history of humanity come face to face with

the resurrected. They are the first messengers of the gospel. Courage, creativity, hope.

Another example is Ruth and Noemi's strategy to obtain sustenance and social protection at a time of poverty and social abandonment, asserting their rights according to the law of the time. Or the mother and sister of Moses, to protect a baby from death; or the Egyptian midwives who organize themselves to lie to the authorities of their time, who order them to kill Jewish male babies, and they say that they arrive late for the birthing since Jewish women are very strong. Courage, creativity, hope.

The examples seen are examples of women creating strategies together, working together to achieve their goal. They meet, they organize, they conspire. The mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, as well as the lesser-known mothers of Mexico searching for their disappeared ones, each one began from their own reality, from their pain and despair when a son, a brother, a life partner did not come back home, and they never saw this loved person again. From personal pain and despair, meeting other women in a similar situation, together they formed a space of courage, creativity and hope. It is in the encounter and solidarity that the miracle takes place.

We live in a society where personal effort is instilled in us, competition and selfishness are instilled in us. What you don't take, someone else will take. "Hurry up, push yourself and compete", is the message we hear over and over again.

The neoliberal model that is being implemented throughout the world, from China to Brazil, through all of Europe and Africa and Oceania, is the model of stark competition, of selfishness as the engine of development. The role of the state is less and less important, and so is

the role of partisan politicians. Those who move the world are the great businessmen and investors. It makes no difference to vote for one or the other, we are all under the same system that reduces people to consumers and entrepreneurs.

And Christian fundamentalist movements go hand-in-hand with this model, reducing salvation to a personal act and the Christian life to being entrepreneurs in our own race to success. Pastors are the great businessmen who promote personal investments for entrepreneurs who want to achieve personal success and God's blessing.

This is not the path that Jesus taught us. Perhaps, this situation we are experiencing wants to show us that we need to see very important things. The pandemic has taught us two great things. One is that the world is a great unit, a great organism that pulsates, lives and suffers together. We see it in the impact of the virus and in the impact of climate change. Nobody can be saved alone; no nation is powerful enough to do something without the others. We are all interconnected and there is no salvation if it is not with everyone.

Another lesson is that we cannot continue living as we have done until now. It is imperative to change attitude. If we continue the same, if we want to go back to what we were before, it will be the collapse of the planet. We must look for alternatives, live differently, bet on unity, companionship, solidarity.

The examples given today, together with many more of which we do not hear on television, speak of women who act from solidarity and teamwork. Brave and creative women who act from hope and faith in a better world. The challenge is together and in solidarity to seek

alternative paths. We need to take care not to run the risk of repeating, being women, the same oppressive, selfish, competitive and hierarchical system in which we live. We need to open spaces for mutual learning between younger and older women, using our creativity looking for alternative ways to organize, celebrate and share, nurturing hope.

Together, weaving networks, supporting each other, being supportive, creative and brave, moved by hope, miracles are possible. Ruah goes with us. She accompanied Ruth and Noemi, the women on their way to the grave, and accompanies Latin American women in their struggle for a fairer world.

I end with a text written by the beloved Argentine singer-songwriter **Maria Elena Walsh**, who reminds us:

*Because the road is arid and discourages.
'Cause we're afraid to grope
Because when waiting alone, little is achieved
Two fears are worth more than one hope*

*Give me your hand and let's go,
Give me your hand and let's go.*

*If by delicacy I lost my life
I want to win yours by being decided.
Because silence is cruel, the journey is dangerous.
I give you my song, you give me courage.*

*Give me your hand and let's go,
give me your hand and let's go.*

PROMOTING HOPE WITH FREIRE AND HOOKS, A TRANSGRESSING MIXTURE¹

Edla Eggert²

Introduction

The invitation I received to be part of the opening of the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion carried out by Faculdades EST, together with the companies of Julieta Paredes (Courage) and Mary (Joy) Philip (Creativity) and I with (Hope), made me feel proud and challenged. My preparation required seeing and (re) reading new texts and others read a long time ago with my reading marks and organizing arguments about the painful time of clamoring for life that we have been experiencing every day. This was my challenge. I hope I succeeded.

The time we live in Brazil today would have been unimaginable ten years ago. Yes, there were some signs that the pendulum was swinging back from left to right³, but no one could imagine an extreme right like the one we are witnessing. In January 2011, we were swearing in the first woman President of the Republic. And in her speech, we could see her awareness of what it was like to be a woman at the highest post in the political history of that country. And as Linda Rubim and Fernanda Argolo claim⁴, we thought it would be a new page in the

1 Lecture presented at the Opening Conference “Breaths of courage, creativity and hope in times of clamoring for life”. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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3 I will use this language, because it is real. As much as some journalists who shape public opinion and even some professors have tried to sweep away this language that implies concepts that are intensely discussed in political life and in academia. These concepts have a history and, therefore, deserve to be revisited, over and over again! What they want to imprint, especially in the open media, is that right and left do not exist, as also class, or race, much less gender do not exist. And also, when there are positions of the left, the media and the right, in general, accuse these positions of being ideological, as if the media and the right were not also ideological.

4 RUBIM, Linda; ARGOLO, Fernanda (Orgs.). *O Golpe na perspectiva de Gênero*. Salvador: Edufba, 2018.

cultural and political history of a country that, for the first time, had chosen to be led by a woman. If in 1932 Brazilian women won the right to vote and be voted on, 79 years later a woman was elected by popular and sovereign vote. A left-wing woman who resisted torture in the government of the military dictatorship that began in 1964 and ended only in 1985. The Brazil that chose the continuity of a third government led by the Workers' Party on a popular front, succumbs in 2016 to a legal-parliamentary coup, against this same president reelected in 2014. The media, the lower echelon parliament of the Chamber of Representatives, the Federal Police, the Judiciary together with the Public Ministry, the latter established during the Lula and Dilma governments, will be the basis of support for both the impeachment of the President and the arrest of former President Lula, in 2018, when he was the most popular candidate for the election and faced the candidate of the lower echelon of the Federal Chamber that was left over for the oligarchic right of this slave-holding country, to return to power. Ironies aside, the scenario only got worse, when this "new" government promised as "apolitical" was already instituted, and the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. Pandemonium set in.

And here we are, speechless, looking for strength to be able to think and talk about the hope that triggers the verb, to promote hope through the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion of Faculdades EST. The scenario is bleak. I suspect that the Brazilian patriarchy and oligarchy, which built a political history committed to bargaining and personal gain, did not support the radicalism of the woman who refused to follow this model.

And it is in this set of realities that I sought the books "Pedagogia da esperança [Pedagogy of Hope]"⁵ and "Educação como prática da liberdade [Education as a practice of freedom]"⁶ by Paulo Freire, celebrating the 100th anniversary of his birth in 2021, along with the book by bell hooks that I've been studying for the last few years, "Ensinando a transgredir. A educação como prática da liberdade [Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom]"⁷. The three books mix and reflect teaching experiences in the skin of a disruptive teacher who mobilized Brazil and the world to read the world with the awareness of reading the word and reality, and a black teacher and student in the United States, a reader marked by the work of Freire, instigator of a teaching aware of the possibility of transgression in search of practices of freedom.

The mixture of Freire with hooks

I want to mix Freire and hooks even more. I call attention to aspects of the pedagogy of hope that seeks the action of **promoting hope** and, at the same time, presents the transgression for the possibility of this verb happening in our days in what hooks calls **self-actualization**. Therefore, it is an exercise in weaving threads woven through two educational inspiring people seeking the transformation of the world for a more

5 FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogia da esperança*. 4. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1997.

6 FREIRE, Paulo. *Educação como prática da liberdade*. 17. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1983.

7 HOOKS, bell. *Ensinando a transgredir*. A educação como prática da liberdade. 2. ed. Translation of *Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom*. Translated by Marcelo Brandão Cipolla. São Paulo: WMR Martins Fontes, 2017.

dignified coexistence of people with each other, together with nature that is increasingly disastrously expropriated.

The theme of promoting hope in the book “Pedagogy of hope” begins with an analysis of why, in the early 1990s, Paulo Freire was being accused of not being an educator but being too political. And in today’s context, 30 years later, I can see what Freire already said at that time and is still valid today, that is, the assertion about the criticism he unleashed in the debate about the neutrality of education.

They criticized in me what seemed to them my exaggerated politicization. They didn’t realize, however, that by denying me the status of educator, because I was too political, they were as political as I was. Certainly, however, in a position contrary to mine. Neutral is what they were not nor could not be.⁸

Freire, the Patron of Brazilian Education, has in his thought, his work and his praxis, the breaking of borders with everything that oppresses and subjugates. And when he points to neutrality as a border, he is very explicit that it is not possible to be neutral in the educational act of any teacher. We learned from him that if we don’t take a stand, we are positioned by someone or some political system. Because if we do not make history conscious of our presence in it, we suffer history for our absence of being politically positioned.

The Pedagogy of Hope book was first published in 1992 – which was also a year of great upheaval in Brazilian life. Only three years had passed since the 1988 constitution, two years since Lula’s first defeat to the Presidency of the Republic against the hunter of corrupt civil servants,

⁸ FREIRE, 1997, p. 9.

Fernando Collor, who was impeached in 1992! And in our recent past, Brazil had lived twenty-four years of military dictatorship.

The other book by Freire that I sought for this reflection was written and published in the sixties, therefore prior to the “Pedagogy of Hope”, more precisely, in 1965, it was published in Spanish in Chile, the country that welcomed Freire when he was persecuted, arrested and exiled from a Brazil having recently suffered a coup in 1964. In Brazil, “Education as a practice of freedom”, was first published in 1967. And in this book Freire begins his fruitful argument of the awareness raising of students as they become literate and learn to read the world from their reality. We are all invited to think about the machination of education for domestication/alienation x education for freedom.

The book by bell hooks, “Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom”, was released in the United States in 1994 with the title: *Teaching to transgress*. In Brazil, it was first published in 2013, with a second edition in 2017, and received the subtitle, “Education as the practice of freedom”. The mixtures I mentioned earlier are also signaled by this subtitle

Author bell hooks has this spelling, all in lowercase, as a political choice. She has the given name of Gloria Watkins. And the choice of the name bell hooks, is in honor⁹ of her maternal grandmother for the example of struggle and resistance against American racism. In the

⁹ “Mulheragem” is a feminist word play that Professor Cheron Moretti and I have been using as a way of drawing attention to what has been “naturalized” by androcentric language as “**homenagem**”. [Translator’s note: there is no English equivalent for this word play since the word meaning ‘in honor of’ in Portuguese has the word ‘homen’ – ‘man’ in its formation. Therefore, Prof. Cheron Moretti and Prof. Edla created a word to mean ‘in honor of’ using the word ‘mulher’ – ‘woman’ in its formation].

memoirs described in her book, hooks shows herself to be complicit in the denunciations that Freire made in “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, but she identified in his language the naturalization of machismo, which needed to be denounced. Hooks was able to speak personally with Freire about this sexism at a seminar when he was in the US and took several courses at the University of Santa Cruz, where she was a professor. According to hooks, colleagues of hers tried to stop her from attending the seminar because they knew she would ask questions that addressed the topic of sexist language, which they thought was insignificant. They didn’t want to go through that embarrassment, but the colleagues’ plan didn’t work and she was able to attend the seminar, as well as talk about the topic of sexist language with Freire. For hooks, Freire was consistent with his theory, as he listened to it and, in front of all his colleagues and audience, said that this was a very important topic. According to hooks:

[...] at the same moment that certain people spoke out against my raising these questions and downplayed their importance, Paulo intervened to say that these questions were crucial and answered them. At that moment I really loved him, because he exemplified with deeds the principles of his work.¹⁰

This passage narrated by hooks sounds to me like the necessary transgression. The theme of sexist language was taken up by Freire in the book “Pedagogy of Hope”. He shares the processes of change and learning together with people who have read “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. And among those people, he says, many women organized on the front lines against machismo noticed his sexist language and wrote to him. In his

memoirs, he reflects on the coherence of consciousness, that it is not fixed and that on the path of acting-thinking, speaking and writing, he too was able to change his position. In Freire’s words:

What is impossible for me is the lack of coherence, even recognizing the impossibility of absolute coherence. Deep down, this quality or this virtue, coherence, demands from us the insertion in a permanent process of seeking, it demands from us patience and humility, virtues also, in dealing with others.¹¹

Analyzing this event, that is, the denunciation made by American feminists in relation to sexist language, reveals his dialogical stance. From that event, he analyzes the use of language centered on the masculine and understood by him, until then, as natural and correct in the formality of the language. In this part of the book “Pedagogy of hope”, Freire signals his taste for metaphors, but also his sexist mark with which he wrote “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” as well as “Education as the Practice of Freedom”. And he attests that acknowledging that he was sexist was a sign for change and the realization of its coherence: “[...] talking about the sexist mark is not only important, but necessary”¹², and our centenary author continues his reflection by remembering that this sexist language towards women was only noticed and highlighted by the fact:

[...] that innumerable American women from different parts of the US wrote to me between late 1970 and early 1971, a few months after the first edition of the book came out in New York. It was as if they had

¹⁰ HOOKS, 2017, p. 78.

¹¹ FREIRE, 1997, p. 66.

¹² FREIRE, 1997, p. 66.

combined to send their critical letters that reached my hands in Geneva during 2 to 3 months, almost without interruption.¹³

The curious thing about this passage in the “Pedagogy of Hope” book is that he doesn’t remember the name of any of them. Though he revealed that he wrote to each of them thanking them for declaring the importance of inclusive language. Unfortunately, according to Freire, “all the letters from these women were lost!”¹⁴ The author of “Educate to Transgress” did not send letters to Freire, but was able to personally confront him, a messenger of the same criticism made by the missives from other compatriots, as noted above. I’m very happy to hear that hooks was one of those women. The way hooks narrates the event about how Freire recognized his sexist language was through a dialogue built between her and her codename. Hooks tells Gloria Watkins how she came to personally talk about sexist language with Freire¹⁵.

Our meeting was incredible; it made me a dedicated scholar and a comrade of Paulo forever [...] At the same time that people were speaking out against my raising these questions and downplaying their importance, Paulo intervened to say that these questions were crucial and answered them. At that moment I really loved him, because he exemplified with acts the principles of his work.¹⁶

For hooks, with this gesture by Freire, he pointed to the importance of “[...] Freire’s own model of critical pedagogy that welcomes the critical

questioning of this flaw in the work”¹⁷. He also warns that critically questioning an author is not the same as rejecting that same author.

A dream of bell hooks that did not come true was that she wanted to write a book dialoguing with Freire. For her, the way he spoke and wrote was “[...] as if my tongue was in my friend’s mouth.”¹⁸

Transgress to promote hope in pedagogy

For hooks, teaching “[...] is not simply sharing information, but participating in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students.”¹⁹ This conviction is based on Paulo Freire and the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Hooks’ book is an inspiration to transgress didactics classes and any other subjects. Reading her book takes us back to Freire’s texts and, in turn, Freire takes us back to Álvaro Vieira Pinto’s books, in particular, the book published in 1960, and recently republished by Contraponto, “Consciência e Realidade Nacional”²⁰. This book is one of the inspiring sources for the book “Education as the practice of freedom”, published by Freire fifty-six years ago that presents the “provocative” and courageous words mixed with those of bell hooks through an autobiographical reflection in which she discusses the concept of self-actualization.

13 FREIRE, 1997, p. 66.

14 FREIRE, 1997, p. 67.

15 HOOKS, 2017, p. 77.

16 HOOKS, 2017, p. 78.

17 HOOKS, 2017, p. 70.

18 HOOKS, 2017, p. 81.

19 HOOKS, 2017, p. 25.

20 VIEIRA PINTO, Álvaro. *Consciência e Realidade Nacional*: Vol. 1 e 2. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 2020.

In my understanding, hooks²¹ consolidates Freire²² with a vision of the world from the experience of a black woman, student, teacher in her racist country. And she invites us to transgress, inspired by Freire, by integrating the debate of intersecting gender, class and race. She analyzes her teaching activities, discussing what Freire evoked in the reflections systematized since 1965 in Chile, living the dramatic time of exile. And when she presents the concept of self-actualization, she produces what in feminist theory is foundational, that is, the private is political. The life story of women, of the bell hooks woman, requires recognition. First of itself so that it can be recognized and then, by others, so that it has epistemological, historical, political recognition. The historical subject perceived and highlighted from its mishaps seeks, in theory and in practice dialectically articulated, to demonstrate the importance of the act of knowing. And in the case of teachers like hooks and Freire, learning and teaching.

Freire and hooks invite us to look for theory. “I came to the theory,” says hooks, “because I was hurt—the pain inside me was so intense I couldn’t go on living. I came to the theory desperate, wanting to understand – to grasp what was happening around and inside me.”²³

I read hooks thinking about Brazil today... and I return to “Paulo”’s text on Education as the Practice of Freedom, in which he says very explicitly that this book was written for the Brazilian people. It is explicit²⁴ through an introductory **clarification** for Brazilian society. In those

years of 1965, Freire believed that Brazil was experiencing a transition under the military dictatorship. Freire’s effort in this ‘enlightenment’ presupposed the need to look at the country to be ‘de-objectified’ or, as hooks would say, ‘self-actualized’. His intention with the book “Education as the practice of freedom”, was the ‘elevation of the thinking of the masses’, he intended politicization. And, inspired by Álvaro Vieira Pinto and Franz Fanon, he says that we needed to seek self-reflection, deepening the awareness that would result in the insertion in History no longer as spectators, but as authors. That is, arriving at theory, trying to find a place of healing, as hooks indicated in her experience of being in the world.

And, this considered for the collective, requires individual and collective study, many meetings and re-readings not only of Freire with hooks, but also of Álvaro Vieira Pinto, of books and texts such as those of Carolina Maria de Jesus, Maria Firmina dos Reis, by Conceição Evaristo, by Beatriz Nascimento, by Petronilha Gonçalves e Silva, by Nilma Lino Gomes, among so many other authors that present a real Brazil with many struggles. A special highlight goes to Lélia Gonzalez who, with her very own language, points to the authorship and originality of “*latinamefricans*”²⁵ and expands the network to think about impoverished, black, indigenous, trans, lesbian, transvestite women who face patriarchy in its most violent face.

21 HOOKS, 2017.

22 FREIRE, 1983.; FREIRE, 1997.

23 HOOKS, 2017, p. 83.

24 FREIRE, 1983, p. 35.

25 Lélia Gonzalez has in her texts the inventiveness of words. The article “The political-cultural category of amefricanidade” was first published in the magazine Tempo Brasileiro, in 1988 and more recently, in 2018, in the book that brings together all the author’s published texts, entitled “Primavera para as rosas negras: Lélia Gonzalez em primeira pessoa” [Spring for the black roses: Lélia Gonzalez in the first person].

Conclusion

Based on Freire's hopeful pedagogy, I claim hope for women and, in the global context, I think of the women who lived on the front lines of the fight against the pandemic, and I also I think of the Afghan women and the concrete and technical support for self-defense that the Kurdish women offered to Afghan women, demonstrating that it is not possible to expect help from above or from men, charming princes or usurpers, but they need to promote hope from within themselves.

I claim the hope that is built in the circles/*lives* of learning to protect themselves from the violence inside and outside the home. Because it is necessary to promote hope from the verb to promote hope, different from the verb to wait. Promoting hope is going after it, it's getting up and building, it's not giving up and it's seeking together with other people to expand the sustaining network of hope²⁶. And bell hooks teaches, along with Freire, about the many "practices of freedom" of a teaching practice committed to integrality. And in times of pandemic and political pandemoniums, we are challenged to reflections based on theories that move the thinking about teaching and learning in the world of Education.

Brazil has not yet faced its wounds or, as Freire stated in the book "Education as the Practice of Freedom", that we have not yet faced the **Historical-Cultural Pororoca**²⁷, which is the confrontation between emerging values in economic and political autonomy X oligarchic values

of yesterday which insist on keeping their privileges. The sociological theorizations/reflections on a pedagogy of freedom and a pedagogy of hope were a pre-announcement to what today, the 21st century, the year 2021 – fifty-six years after the first publication of the book *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, we continue to live. In other words, we are **still** trying to get out of being subservient as a nation. And with hooks, we are admonished that it is not possible to speak of a nation in the abstract, pains have a face, they have a name, they need to be named: "[...] it is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from this place"²⁸.

Social movements such as feminism and black feminism demonstrate the complexity of a revolutionary making, presented by Freire and sentenced by hooks, to be an event through a transgressive pedagogy, in search of education as a practice of freedom.

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- 28 HOOKS, 2017, p. 103.

26 FREIRE, 1997.

27 Translator's note: pororoca is a big and destructive wave caused by the confrontation of the ocean waters with the river water.

COURAGE, CRIATIVITY AND HOPE IN THE SPIRAL PATH OF GENDER JUSTICE¹

Elaine Neuenfeldt²

I begin my reflection by quoting Augustine, who lived between 353-450 of the common era, in North Africa, in Hippo, today Algeria. He is known to us, especially for his misogynistic, patriarchal and sexist phrases. But it's what he says about hope that I want to use here: "Hope has two dear daughters: indignation and courage; indignation to refuse things as they are; and the courage to change them".

What inspires me in this phrase is that it points to a path where, in order to cultivate hope, it is necessary to be indignant. And what does this mean for women in the current context? What would feminist outrage be?

Perhaps indignation is what we lack in these moments, to take steps towards hope and courage. An indignation that spurs us on to actions of change. Faced with increasingly appalling statistics of cases of gender-based violence, of the loss of hard-won rights, especially for women, we should cultivate that "sacred indignation" that is close to "sacred anger" – this ability to be indignant with what you see, with what you live, and therefore, have the courage to engage in transformation movements.

As people engaged in communities of faith, sacred texts can inspire this capacity for indignation. For example, those moments of Jesus, when faced with a place of prayer completely taken over by the economic interests of a few, to exploit the majority, transforming the temple into a market. This anger is explicit in his actions, which, indignant, leads him to overturn the tables, to expel the merchants. Indignation rooted in biblical testimonies such as that of the widow, from the text of Luke 18, who with

¹ Lecture given at the Closing Conference "Courage, Creativity and Hope on the Spiral Path of Gender Justice". Translated by Marie Krahn.

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insistence and resilience claims her rights before the unjust judge. This anger and indignation goes hand in hand with courage. Courage to face publicly and openly those who claim absolute power. Indignation that leads to taking the risk of not being well regarded, of saying harsh words that come out of throats and bodies disgusted by injustice.

What I learn from this path is that in order to cultivate hope, moments of anger and indignation are part of it. But the problem is that anger and indignation have a construction process that is limited by gender role expectations: women are not educated and socialized to publicly express their anger and ire or indignation. Women are taught to swallow their anger, to smile in the face of indignation and to hide their ire. It would not be adequate for the ideal of femininity for women to show their strength of indignation and courage to transform their reality. Their role is expected to be passive, to bear the weight and burdens and not complain. But even with this lump in the throat generated by injustice, fear, situations of oppression, there is the expectation that they will continue to have and promote hope.

The challenge lies precisely in this ability to first articulate indignation and anger, with courage, in order to move forward with hope on the spiral paths of gender justice. This articulation has to do with the individual ability to recognize in one's body what churns one's guts. As in the prophecy of Jeremiah (4:19) where the bowels cry out. Some translations locate the cry from the heart. In any case, it is the body that stirs, writhes in pain and roars, prophetically cries out in the face of injustice: "Oh, my bowels, my bowels! I am writhing in my heart! My heart roars; I cannot keep silent, because you, O my soul, have heard the sound of the trumpet and the war cry."

So, what I am proposing is what many of us already know and about which much has already been studied and researched. The spiral path of gender justice is spiral because it is full of comings and goings, ups and downs; it is neither linear nor homogeneous. It is full of curves and climbs. Precisely because gender roles are learned and constructed, having several other intersectionalities, such as class, ethnicity/race, geographic location, generational, among others, to consider. For women to be able to follow this path, engaging courage, creativity and hope, it is necessary that they take a previous step: recognize themselves as an oppressed subject and excluded or marginalized from power relations.

Courage, creativity and hope require a prerequisite: recognition of the place of exclusion and anger, indignation with this place assigned as limiting and indignant. The recognition of the place of exclusion is the awareness of the mechanisms of patriarchal and sexist power that operate in power relations. For this awareness it is necessary to understand how power relations are articulated in this social kaleidoscope.

There are cultural, economic, social and political elements that are intertwined in the networks of power that regulate relations between genders. I do not intend to work on each aspect of the aforementioned, but I want to provoke some reflections and raise some suspicions in some, already pointing to possible ways of overcoming injustices and inequalities.

Religion plays a fundamental role in the construction of expectations and gender stereotypes, as well as in the experiences of relations between genders and their distribution of power. Religion and practical experiences in faith communities play a structuring role in each person's identity and in the way they relate to each other. Faith lived in a community can help to give a sense of belonging, of being part, of feeling integrated in a social

group. It can also be an element in building hope and the courage to engage in changing injustices. The community can be a place of welcome and integration.

On the other hand, one cannot belittle the possible alienating role of faith and religion. Fundamentalist interpretations of sacred texts and the evangelical faith result in the dangerous and intolerant association of religion with patriarchal and misogynistic values that condemn any manifestation of diversity, which questions hierarchy and the unfair distribution of power between genders. Religious fundamentalism limits women's rights, from the possibility of economic independence, access to property and resources, or sexual and reproductive rights and bodily autonomy, to access to education and political participation.

These forms of injustice and discrimination that are generated in systems of unequal power, justified by fundamentalist ideologies, affect life in communities and families, bringing greater insecurity to women, increasing their vulnerability to situations of violence in all its expressions.

In order to overcome discourses of religious intolerance and political extremism and to have spaces for a breath of hope, in this spiral trajectory of gender justice, then, as I indicated at the beginning, it is necessary to learn and cultivate this capacity to be indignant. From this indignation it is possible to generate the necessary strength for the courage to start processes of transformation.

Another step to advance in this spiral is to create safe spaces for dialogue, where respect must govern relationships and guide the ability to embrace differences. This means going beyond tolerance, which is little in the face of forces of exclusion and hatred prevailing from fundamentalist

practical manifestations. Tolerance alone is no longer enough: it is necessary that these manifestations of hate be compensated with actions of indignation, courage, that creatively sow hope, love and justice.

Language matters and learning the grammars and vocabularies that incorporate rights and mix with the perspective of faith and religion becomes crucial for us to build a progressive, prophetic narrative committed to transforming unjust systems.

To combat setbacks, we must promote and defend the rights of all people. This implies ensuring that diversity is a recognized value and incorporated in our actions and that difficult issues, and often taboo in ecclesial spaces, but deeply urgent to be discussed, such as sexual and reproductive rights and respect and inclusion of people's rights in their diverse sexual orientations, such as the LGBTQIA communities, are debated and defended as a rights agenda, with women and girls and people of diverse gender identity as subjects of rights.

I learn from Ivone Gebara how to mix religion and faith in this trajectory of gender justice. I quote a long text of hers, which says well what I want to express:

Religion (re-ligare) emerges as an ability of an art to connect us to each other, beyond our selfishness and our individualistic interests, although these are common currency in our daily lives. Religion as ethics that invites us to go and meet those who have fallen on the road has to be reaffirmed as a work of human art, that is, something of us and directed towards ourselves. In this sense, religion will be a help in the politics of common compassion and mercy if it stops being a defense of dogmas and metaphysical political truths beyond human history. Furthermore, it will be a policy of mercy or solidarity if it ceases to be a commodity in the competition of religious markets in search of followers and social

influence. Religion should then convert to the faith of the human in the human, proposing to lower itself to the limits of simple and everyday relationships, to cherish dreams within reach of our steps, to console the pains of the immediate, without promising miraculous or magical solutions attributed to the divine powers of the patriarchal world.³

This for me is the biggest challenge in this spiral: how to deconstruct this theological architecture that continues to be a wall, a barrier and rubble that hinders just relations! How to overcome theological constructions that are based on a sacrificial logic, especially of women's bodies? How to overcome this idea that suffering is cleansing and helps to reach a happy ending? How to move forward without relying on sacrificed women's bodies, as a donation and a necessary step, in this patriarchal logic that hooks in guilt and fear?

I learned in these years of walking with grassroots groups, faith organizations, churches and social movements that good intentions are not enough. We need institutional and intentional policies that assume gender justice as a programmatic action and inherent in the organizational arrangement. I am currently working in an organization where we have an institutional commitment to the promotion of gender justice, and where religion and faith are elements of transformation, forces that move change, that promote peace and justice.

The ACT Alliance is a coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and faith-based organizations working in humanitarian actions of development and human rights advocacy. We are committed to working with our 135 members with gender justice as one of our

priorities. This includes promoting advocacy actions at local and international level, as well as combating internal and external reactions, which in these times are increasingly frequent and systematic, based on religious discourses, in this confluence of fundamentalisms, which are most often, also marked by hatred of all manifestations of diversity.

This agenda of rights, which has theological and faith concepts, which nourish engaged and prophetic spiritualities, such as justice and solidarity, are foundations that support our actions. As an Alliance of faith-based churches and organizations, we express our support and commitment to walk together, to seek strategies to confront fundamentalisms that threaten our already fragile democracies.

The VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion helped renew strength, gather hopes, mix creativity. We keep reaffirming ourselves – no one lets go of anyone's hand! And so, hand in hand, we go dancing in this spiral, in this circle of conversations, building theologies that help us to dance, to breathe, to conspire. Critical, feminist, liberation, decolonized theologies, with many names, in many ways and mixtures. Theologies that help us to say words of healing, of consolation, of love, that embrace our fears, our bodies, in transition, in less or more – pauses. A theology that walks together, in partnership with movements and on the move. And that causes movements – exchange, transformation, with courage and creativity – that is the hope.

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GEBARA, Ivone. *Mulheres, Religião e poder*. Ensaios feministas. São Paulo: Edições Terceira Via, 2017.

³ GEBARA, Ivone. *Mulheres, Religião e poder*. Ensaios feministas. São Paulo: Edições Terceira Via, 2017, p. 176.

THE PATHS WE WALK WITH COURAGE, CREATIVITY AND HOPE FOR GENDER JUSTICE¹

Courage is contagious.

(Brené Brown)

Marcia Blasi²

For the first time in the history of our congresses we are in the online modality. Instead of hugs, encounters in the hallways and paths of Faculdades EST, celebrations in the tent, we meet on the computer screen. Each person in their square, in their house...

¹ Lecture given at the closing Conference of “Courage, Creativity and Hope on the spiral path of Gender Justice”. Translated by Marie Krahn.

² Doctor in Theology, professor in the undergraduate and Post Graduate Program in Theology at the Faculdades EST and Executive of the Gender Justice and Women’s Empowerment Program of the Lutheran World Federation.

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We hear a lot: “Can you turn on the microphone?” “Turn off the microphones, please.” “Turn off the cameras; turn on the cameras.” “Please identify yourselves or you will be removed from the room.” “How do I share the presentation?” “I can’t access the room.” To ensure that each virtual room was ready at the agreed time, students mobilized, learned and were instrumental in the success of the congress.

Everything was new: instead of tents, a virtual room. Instead of applause, emojis. Instead of a face-to-face fair for products from the

Solidarity Economy Network, a virtual fair. Instead of holding hands, prayer for the safety and health of all people.

Thus, together, we challenged patriarchal, sexist, classist, racist, homophobic, fundamentalist powers. We created and recreated feminist theologies and expanded gender studies.

On the *Honoris Causa* night, we celebrated the lives, academic production and work of five women who called us to walk together, in a collective effort, celebrating our differences as gifts from God, learning from each other, unlearning, living life with all its contradictions.

The title of this conference invites us to weave courage, creativity and hope into the spiral path of gender justice. I confess that sometimes I lack courage, creativity slips through my fingers, hope remains a faint, faint light in the distance...

But then I see a dandelion. It could be in the field, in the garden, or in a photo that a friend sends, and something happens... hope stubbornly springs from somewhere and invites us to dream and continue the journey.

Courage – Creativity – Hope

The Japanese poetess Hiratsuka Raicho wrote:

“Originally, woman was the sun.

She was an authentic person.

But now woman is the moon.

She lives depending on another and she shines by reflecting another’s light.

Her face has a sickly pallor.

We must now regain our hidden sun.

Reveal our hidden sun!

Rediscover our natural gifts!

This is the ceaseless cry

Which forces itself into our hearts;

It is our final,

complete, and only instinct

through which

our various

separate instincts

are unified.”³

Asian women’s struggle and challenge to become sun again inspired Korean theologian Chung Hyun Kyung⁴. Wouldn’t that also be the struggle of all women within the patriarchal system?

I feel that the quest to recognize ourselves as “sun” is a quest for all of us, women, but also for the men who are willing to build masculinities that are free and generate a dignified, good and fair life.

On this path of self-recognition, we need courage, creativity and hope, and more dandelions....

³ RAICHO, Hiratsuka. *The Hidden Sun. From the Mind of The Harlot*, 2009. Available at: <https://theharlot2013.wordpress.com/2009/12/13/the-hidden-sun-by-hiratsuka-raicho/>. Accessed on: 07 Sept.. 2022.

⁴ KYUNG, Chung Hyun. *Struggle to be the sun again: introducing Asian women’s theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990.

The American social scientist Brené Brown states that courage is different from bravery. Courage does not ask for heroic acts, it only asks that we be who we are. Courage springs when we tell our story wholeheartedly, it doesn't matter if we win in the end, but we maintain ethics and dignity along the way. She says, "Courage is contagious. Every time we are courageous with our lives, we inspire people around us to be a little more courageous too"⁵. Feminist theologian Mary Daly experienced this when she asserted: "You become courageous by doing courageous acts... Courage is a habit."⁶. So let's "be courageous". Together.

We are invited to practice courage, with creativity, building hope in different paths and experiences. Just as the women, in the silence of the Sabbath, prepared herbs and perfumes to embalm the body of their friend Jesus, so we too are called to courageous care, full of hope and creativity.

Courage, creativity, hope

In the Lutheran tradition, courage is all about grace. God presents us with his grace, without us having to prove anything and much less pay anything. To experience grace, we need to experience vulnerability. To live in vulnerability, we have to believe in grace. We can only be who we really are if we believe that God loves us just as we are, with our gifts, our

shine, our shadows, our imperfections. And when we understand that love is enough, we are free to live with joy and courage, without letting other people's expectations define our lives.

But grace wants to be shared. It dies if it gets locked in a drawer. It calls us to responsibility and commitment. It invites us to live with courage, creativity and justice.

Gender justice is not concessions, it is not crumbs, but it is transformation. This is not easy. It messes with privileges. It messes with our way of being, with the way of living in community, with the way of being a church in the world.

Gender justice also needs to be practiced among us. Wanda, Lori, Nancy, Maricel and Mercedes shaped this upon receiving the title of Doctor Honoris Causa: they spoke of each other with affection, with care, with admiration, with sisterhood, with courage and creativity. Together they made hope sprout.

Living and practicing gender justice among us does not mean that we will always agree, that we will have one way of doing things. Quite the contrary, it is in diversity, with difficult questions, with challenging experiences, that we will build gender justice. There is no ready model and there is not only one model. We will need courage, creativity and justice to build another possible world, without repeating models of hierarchical structures and hierarchical ways of living.

We are invited to spiral, to create paths. Sometimes you have to go back. Rethink, change your mind. Start over in another way. This will not be a sign of failure, but of courageous living; one that recognizes the imperfections and vulnerabilities of each person.

5 BRENÉ BROWN: the Call to Courage. Direção de Sandra Restrepo. *Netflix*, 2019. On-line (1h16min).

6 DALY, Mary. *Quintessence... Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.

This congress took us down many paths, made new dreams sprout, invited us to exercise creativity, rediscover that we are the sun, but we are also the moon.

Sometimes we practice being the sun, other times we can only be the moon. No problem with that. No person needs or should shine all the time. There is also time to reflect the work, creativity and brilliance of fellow travelers. If we manage to take turns in this task, illuminating each other in moments of fear, of shame; if we go together, holding hands, sharing bread, water and wine, life will be lighter and better.

We cannot and do not need to be everything all the time. Perfection is exhausting and does not exist. No person is perfect, but we move together, because we are free by the grace of God (Gal. 5).

In this freedom, God walked with Ruth and Naomi, danced with Miriam, judged with Deborah, protected Hagar, wept with the violated concubine, gathered in Tamar's pain. In this freedom, Jesus allowed himself to be transformed in the encounter with the Syrophenician woman, he felt the love of Mary Magdalene, he was graced with the friendship of Martha and Mary. When we experience this freedom, courage, creativity and hope springs.

The small dandelion plant grows in compacted soil with little fertility in the middle of lawns. It sprouts insistently and offers its leaves and flowers for human consumption. When the right time comes, it throws seeds into the wind... Wind of the divine Ruah that also takes you and me... That blows, that spirals us along paths of gender justice, and suddenly we smile... we give a laugh that springs from deep down and makes the belly hurt...

Rubem Alves quoted: "Hope is when, being absolutely dry on the outside, the fonts continue to bubble inside the heart."⁷ I would say that hope is when a warm little light appears inside us, very funny, that makes us smile and sing.

Life is made of beginnings and endings. And this is an ending. The VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion is coming to an end. There were days of encounters, strangeness, reflections, tears, celebrations, sharing, celebrations, life lived and spiraled. There were days of planning, meetings, creation of strategies, mutual support, discoveries, exercises of hope. Days of hard work, care and affection.

Thank you for everything we've experienced, for the paths we've created with courage, creativity and hope. Thank you very much!

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⁷ ALVES, Rubem. *Palavras para Desatar Nós*. 10ª reimpr. Campinas: Papirus, 2021, p. 75.

CREATIVITY:

KEY TO LIVING THROUGH COVID AND LOOKING BEYOND COVID¹

Mary Philip aka Joy²

Introduction

How does one speak about “creativity” when a microscopic virus seems to be creatively generating variants of itself throwing the world into a spiral? But then, I stop and think: how can I not? Creativity in all its manifestations is probably the only proper response to this virus so that it does not have the last word.

History has had its share of pandemics – Justinian plague, Black death, Cholera, Russian flu, Spanish Flu, SARS, MERS – to the

most recent and ongoing one, COVID-19. But what is it that made the COVID-19 pandemic this catastrophic? Unlike the other pandemics the tentacles of COVID-19 reached every nook and corner of this world. Except for the uncontacted people, I don’t think there were any peoples or communities on earth who were able to resist the summons of this virus. In addition to bringing the world to a halt in more ways than one, the pandemic also exposed the many inequities in our societies. Just as it was in the case of climate change and other disasters, it was the poor and marginalized and among them women and children that suffered the most. So, this Seventh Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion titled, *Courage – Creativity – Hope* was both relevant and timely.

It was indeed moving to see the picture of a dandelion seed head on the poster for the Congress. What better metaphor for women than the dandelion? These flowers are seen as weeds and constantly pulled

¹ Lecture presented at the Thematic Table “Breaths of Courage, Creativity and Hope in times of clamoring for life”. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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out, but they are not easily oustable. The more dandelions are cut or pulled out, the more resolute they become. They have great regenerative power and can grow out of a broken root as tiny as three quarters of an inch. They refuse to play victim but stand their ground. Instead of crying “why are you pulling us out”, they just get rooted. The more you try to pull it out, the stronger they get rooted and come out of the ground. And once they produce the flower and the seed head, the possibilities are innumerable! One seed head has about 172 seeds and each dandelion plant produces about 5000 seeds a year and they fly far and wide with their parachute. What a great way to picture women and their resilience! The other metaphor for women is the sacred Lotus. But that is for the next Congress!

The opening day of the Congress was August 24, 2021! It was the 533rd day since WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic and it had been 602 days since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Wuhan, China³. We are living through COVID and looking beyond COVID at the same time. Just when we thought things were in control, out comes another variant!

In Canada, my adopted home, the day marked 70 days since wildfires started in British Columbia; 91 days since 215 unmarked graves of children were found at a former Residential School; 81 days since members of a Muslim family were run down by a driver motivated by hate.

However, it was also the 34th day since Monarch butterflies started gracing our gardens, teasingly flitting by the cone flowers. Despite

diminishing food and habitat, these beautiful creatures live fully in the present inviting us to do the same. The honking of the geese, however annoying, gave a sense of place and the recurrent glowing of the fireflies at night offered hope amidst the hopelessness that was lurking in the shadows.

Living through COVID has been a testing time and yet a wellspring of opportunities. “There are opportunities even in the most difficult moments” as Wangari Maathai said. We are all gathered here to talk about how we are navigating this “corona time”⁴ and at the same time looking beyond it. Creativity is indeed the key to both – living through COVID and looking beyond COVID. And, yet, it is not as simple or straightforward as it might seem. COVID infections are still on the rise, whether in Brazil or in Canada or India. So, what is creativity amidst this pandemonium? What kind of creativity are we talking about?

I would like to bring to your attention a few different ways in which creativity is seen in these trying times. The pandemic, as mentioned above, has been revelatory exposing the many inequities amidst us, and the disproportionate way in which it affected women, girls, children, people of colour, LGBTQIA2S+, and other minorities. What is hopeful for me is that despite girls and young women being hit hardest by COVID-19 they have shown themselves to be leaders of recovery.

³ The WHO (World Health Organization) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020 and the first case was reported on December 31, 2019.

⁴ A term that Prof. Ara Parker used during her candidature lecture on June 24, 2021, at Martin Luther University College.

Creativity – a talent and response to context/need

During the first wave of the pandemic Afghanistan was one of the countries that was hard hit and the poor country that it is and also being the victims of continuing war, they did not have any ventilation kits to help COVID victims. However, a group of schoolgirls called the Afghan Dreamers, decided they weren't going to let their friends, families or anyone die without a fight. So, what did they do? They put their heads together, combined their talents and made affordable ventilators out of car parts. The girls, aged between 14 and 17 came from the western province of Herat, where Afghanistan's first case of Covid-19 was reported. Herat, at that time, was the nation's hotspot for the pandemic because of its close proximity to Iran, the region's epicenter of the outbreak⁵. The girls built a prototype using a motor from a used Toyota Corolla and a chain drive from a Honda motorcycle⁶. Nadim Rahimi, a member of the team said, "It's important even if we can save one life with our effort."⁷ Creativity amidst the cry for life!

Afghanistan has only around 30% female literacy rate. However, the teenagers through their creativity not only inspired others but changed the perception of women in the engineering industry. After Kabul fell, this all-girls robotics team did not have much hope in the country. With the help of friends and supporters, 10 of the members of

the Afghan Dreamers were rescued from Afghanistan last Thursday. In a way the girls rescued themselves. The power of their creativity was such!

Another example of creativity amidst the pandemic comes from Egypt. The pandemic affected women and girls the most in Egypt. The measures taken by the government were such that they were housebound, without being able to go out even for food or essential items, many staying in their homes most of the time⁸. This, not unlike in other countries, increased their burden at home of taking care of the household and also put them at risk of gender-based violence. But, 21-year-old Basma from Qalyubiyya was not falling a prey to that and decided to challenge the traditional gender stereotypes. "Through her volunteer work she became an inspiring example of the positive change that girls and young women can achieve."⁹ She said, "I see opportunity in each challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic gave me the opportunity to develop my skills and acquire new ones so that I can continue raising awareness in a way that most appeals to people."¹⁰ Building on her natural talent to entertain, she learned the skill of puppetry to "raise awareness of the pandemic and more importantly to affect social change."¹¹ Basma used puppets to share accessible information on COVID-19 via her social media. She realized that people had neither the time nor interest in reading long posts about COVID-19 prevention. So, using the puppet show that she loves she

5 HANSON, Kait. 10 girls on Afghanistan's Robot's team rescued. *Today*, April 19, 2021. <https://www.today.com/parents/afghanistans-robotics-team-rescued-228683>. Accessed August 12, 2021.

6 HANSON, 2021.

7 HANSON, 2021.

8 If food or other essential items are needed, it is usually the men who go out. PUPPETS AND POSITIVITY: Basma tackles COVID-19 in Egypt. *Plan International Egypt*, June 4, 2020. <https://plan-international.org/case-studies/puppets-and-positivity-basma-tackles-covid-19-egypt>. Accessed August 12, 2021.

9 PUPPETS AND POSITIVITY: Basma tackles COVID-19 in Egypt, 2020.

10 PUPPETS AND POSITIVITY: Basma tackles COVID-19 in Egypt, 2020.

11 PUPPETS AND POSITIVITY: Basma tackles COVID-19 in Egypt, 2020.

started communicating easy to understand messages in a light-hearted manner that contain the right information¹². Her efforts paid off and her Facebook page got innumerable positive responses. Basma now uses her platform to also feature topics such as early marriage and female genital mutilation¹³. Creativity through laughter amidst cries for life!

Talent, tenacity, resilience, resolve – these are the characteristics of these girls. The Generation Equality Forum Paris 2021 in June was an amazing display of the creativity of young women around the world. “There is no doubt that women and girls have the energy, creativity and leadership skills required to build the ‘new normal’ after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.”¹⁴ They have what it takes to create “a new world with new rules – one that listens and responds to girls’ and their unique needs,”¹⁵ a new world where we do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God¹⁶.

Creativity – a privilege?

Now a change of scenery. During the pandemic, as I was mostly teaching through zoom, one of my favorite pastimes was to stand on the back deck of our home and watch the water flowing down the rocks. Then I look around and think “how can I be creative and make this look

even more beautiful?” Do I plant more daisies by the rocks, or should I put lights going down the water spillway?

Creating something, a piece of art, (a painting, a sculpture etc.), a song, a garden – these are poetic acts. Something that was not there before is brought into being and it is great. But the thing is – that thought of mine to be creative and make my garden more beautiful is a privilege. Being creative is not a bad thing. But, in this instance, what is the point of my creativity other than aesthetic value and to bring pleasure to myself? It does not do any good to my neighbour who is in need. My creative act is something that appeases me and fans my ego.

Creativity – who would not want it? But can everyone afford it? To some, creativity is a luxury, a privilege. We cannot romanticize creativity because it comes with a cost for many.

Creativity – an everyday action, a survival tactic

The pandemic put us all into a spiral. What we knew and lived as normal became a thing of the past. For someone like me living in Canada, COVID has been more of an inconvenience than anything else. Yes, we missed physical contact and family dinners, and we had zoom fatigue. I am not diminishing that, but for some others it has been extremely difficult for a variety of reasons. For many, social distancing itself was a privilege. Many people have lost jobs while others, a good number of them from marginalized communities, had to work as frontline workers. Yet others worked under stressful conditions. Creativity is something entirely different in this context.

12 PUPPETS AND POSITIVITY: Basma tackles COVID-19 in Egypt, 2020.

13 HOW GIRLS ARE taking the lead during COVID-19. Plan International, July 22, 2020. <https://plan-international.org/girls-get-equal/how-girls-are-taking-lead-during-covid-19>. Accessed August 12, 2021.

14 HOW GIRLS ARE taking the lead during COVID-19, 2020.

15 HOW GIRLS ARE taking the lead during COVID-19, 2020.

16 Micah 6: 8.

Creativity for the poor women in my village in India, is a way of life. Most of them are domestic help and depend on daily wages and the pandemic cut off that means of living. So, when they do not have resources what else could they do but be creative. It is not the kind of creativity where you perform a miracle like finding a cure or a wonder drug. It is another kind of creativity which stretches a small dekshi¹⁷ of dhal for a family of 8; it is the kind of creativity where 2 pails of water not only is used to cook rice and vegetables but also bathes 4 bodies, washes the dishes and quenches the thirst of plants and the cow, which is also equally miraculous! They were creative in different actions and situations that were presented to them in their daily lives. Survival is creativity par excellence for them!

So, it is worthwhile to give some thought to what it means to be creative in the context of the pandemic ridden time and space.

What is creativity?

Is creativity innate or is it something that is learned? Studies have shown that creativity is a potentiality all people have that can develop in different domains and contexts¹⁸. Though a potentiality for everyone, creativity is constrained by various factors – time, resources (like money), individual agency, social structure etc. As seen in the case of Afghan dreamers or the women in India, it is the ability to solve problems and transform reality despite the unavailability of resources. Creativity

¹⁷ Dekshi means bowl.

¹⁸ ELISONDO, Romina Cecilia; VARGAS, Ana. Women's Everyday Creative Activities: a Qualitative Study. *Creativity*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2019, p. 92.

happens in the various activities in everyday lives as well. “It is seen as central to human survival, and, to some extent, it is (and must be) found in everyone. Because everyday creativity is not just about what one does, but also how the creative process as well as the product is observed.”¹⁹

In a way creativity is a label applied to a variety of human actions or activities that lead to results that are original, valuable or significant²⁰. Hannah Arendt, the German philosopher, talks of 3 fundamental human activities – labor, work and action²¹. She says that they are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to [hu]man²², and I add that these fundamental activities are an expression of creativity. UNESCO's document, “Gender equality, Heritage and Creativity” says the following.

In this pandemic ridden Creativity is an inherently dynamic process that draws together tradition, imagination and innovation. It offers individuals and communities multiple channels to explore questions and social norms, identities and expectations around gender roles and relations. As such, it has the potential to open an important space for social dialogue around gender equality issues in cultural life as well in other socio-economic and political spheres. Creative expression can also strongly support women's social, civic and political empowerment

¹⁹ RICHARDS, R. Everyday creativity. In: KAUFMAN, J. C.; STERNBERG, R. J. (Eds.). *The Cambridge handbook of creativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. p. 189-215. p. 190.

²⁰ GLĂVEANU, Vlad Petre. Educating which creativity? *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, p. 25-32, 2018, p. 27.

²¹ ARENDT, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 7.

²² ARENDT, 1958, p. 7. The human condition of labour is life; work=worldliness; action=plurality.

through a respect for their human rights, in particular cultural rights and freedom of expression, and economic empowerment.²³

In this pandemic ridden context, in addition to experiences of pleasure and well-being, creative activities empower women, link them with other people and allow them to build products of subjective and social value.

Creativity – a Zoologist’s perspective

I was a zoology professor and became a theologian later in life. In other words, I am a zoologist!²⁴ So, I offer a zoologist perspective. As you know by now, I work best with metaphors and so here is another one. Butterflies! Butterflies are about creativity! Though most of us know how butterflies emerge, no one really knows what happens in the chrysalis; the struggle that the pupa undergoes to become the butterfly. On the one hand, enzymes are released to digest most of the caterpillar and on the other hand, hormones are produced for the development of a new creature inside. Dying to the old and rising to the new. Sounds like baptism, isn't it? After 10-14 days of eating themselves out of existence, these beautiful creatures emerge! Finally, they are free to fly about! The freedom in and through creativity! Freedom in and through struggle!

23 UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION. Gender equality, Heritage and Creativity. UNESCO: Paris, 2014, p. 75. [Open access document] http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/gender-equality-heritage-and-creativity-2014-en_1.pdf. Accessed August 12, 2021.

24 There is no such word. I just made it up!

Creativity is also a pursuit for freedom and the pursuit for freedom is a struggle!

Freedom that comes from creativity is hard to live out. It requires faith and comes through struggle as the butterflies exemplify. Freedom is not the license to do and say anything. Freedom demands of me to make tough decisions. In Dostoevsky's famous novel, *Brother's Karamazov*, there is a scene featuring the Inquisitor, representing the church, and Jesus. The inquisitor taunts Jesus and says, Yea, sure you came and set people free; you gave the people freedom, but you know what, they couldn't handle it, so they gave it back to us, the church and we are administering it now. How about that, Jesus?²⁵ Like the butterflies this freedom comes at a cost. With freedom comes responsibility, responsibility to my neighbour, be it a human being or a tree. It demands a response from us. And, most often we don't want to respond. So, I give it in or do a trade in with the government or the church or organizations so that I do not have to see the face of my neighbour, be it the refugee or the poor and marginalized or the one suffering from COVID. But that is not the kind of freedom that we are called to live out. It is not the kind of freedom that faith imparts. It is the freedom that demands that I live simply so that others may simply live, to use the words of Gandhi.

Creativity amidst the cries for life

To conclude, what is creativity amidst the cries for life? I use the paintings of Maxine Noel, a Canadian indigenous artist to sum up what

25 My paraphrase of the conversation.

creativity might mean amidst the cries for life. Maxine was born on the Birdtail reserve in the Canadian province of Manitoba, but at the age of six had to leave her home to attend an Indian residential school. For her creativity was about resistance, justice, healing, courage, freedom and hope and that is what it should be in this corona time.

Creativity is the dream catcher; it is hope for healing and for the creation of a better world that has a place for everyone and everything.



Source: NOEL, Maxine. *Sa-Cinn Native Enterprises Ltd.* Available in: <https://www.sa-cinn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/30025FB.jpg>. Accessed on: Aug. 12, 2021.

Creativity can lead to justice when it makes it possible for others to breathe and live!



Spirit of the Plains

Iyan mani

Source: NOEL, Maxine. *Sa-Cinn Native Enterprises Ltd.* Available in: <https://www.sa-cinn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/7434AC.jpg>. Accessed on: Aug. 12, 2021.

Creativity is resistance, grit and courage that the pandemic will not have the last word.



Going to the Dance

Ioyan Mani

Source: NOEL, Maxine. *Sa-Cinn Native Enterprises Ltd.* Available in: <https://www.sa-cinn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/9463AC.jpg>. Accessed on: Aug. 12, 2021.

So, in this time of crisis, not just of COVID but also of hate speech and threats to our LGBTQIA2S+ neighbours, may we be blessed with creativity of resistance, healing, courage and justice. I use the words of a Brazilian scholar, Yohana Junker, in lieu of a conclusion – Creativity is poetics of resistance that “re-imagines and re-creates the present towards a future that yearns for the Spirit of God to grace us with hopeful awareness, subversion, solidarity, and response-ability.”²⁶

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²⁶ JUNKER, Yohana. *On Art, Religion, and the Poetics of Resistance*. <http://www.yohanajunker.com/about-1>. Accessed August 12, 2021.

BIBLICAL NARRATIVES AS PEDAGOGIES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY¹

André S. Musskopf²

Introduction

Studies of gender and sexuality have shown, based on various concepts and categories, that social roles are constructed and defined in each context according to the organization of power relations, having as a starting point the biological substrate as a supposedly stable base. Perceived differences in terms of sex (either at birth or throughout life) are used in different societies to determine the social place that people occupy and what behaviors are expected of them.

Such constructions are not random and do not dispense with the biological element, including its variability and instability, but are, more or less, strategically defined responses based on the needs of social groups and considering the objective and subjective conditions of their definition. Furthermore, the processes of construction and consolidation of meanings and practices do not take place immediately, but over relatively long periods of time and depend on mechanisms of reproduction that can be subtle or violent, transmitting certain values until they are apprehended. Even so, they are never definitive and take place in relationships of conflict and permanent resistance.

Modern notions of gender and sexuality (including their conceptualization) are marked by a dualistic and hierarchical model that establishes rigid distinctions and complex classifications that

¹ Lecture presented at the Thematic Table “Identities of gender, sexual diversity and biblical narratives”. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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result in oppression and domination. Such notions, as far as possible naturalized, are repeated, taught and learned in the most diverse social spaces, including the religious scope. Religious experiences, always lived in the broader social context, also carry the marks of gender and sexuality relations and their meanings built not necessarily in this context, but also potentially re-signified in them.

The purpose of this text is to reflect on how biblical narratives participate in – and can resist – gender and sexuality pedagogies. Based on some basic operational definitions, re-reading exercises of some narratives are carried out, asking questions about how their reading in the community can affect un/learning in relation to gender and sexuality.

Definitions and concepts

The biblical narratives contained in the Christian Scriptures are testimonies of faith of the experience of the sacred lived in different historical situations, transmitted orally and re-signified in new contexts, codified in written texts with different versions and variations. The process of formation of the canon took place over hundreds and thousands of years and its delimitation, despite some consensus, holds divergences and disputes in the different Christian denominations even today. In this sense, the narratives here are approached both in their theological meaning, considering issues of revelation and authority for those who participate in a community of faith, and in their approach as a form of expression of religious experience in the form of language within

the scope of Science of Religion. It is understood that one perspective does not invalidate the other and the two complement each other in the construction of religious meaning and reflection on the social impact of the narratives based on their pedagogical use

Likewise, the ways of approaching, reading and interpreting these narratives are different. The idea that there would be a neutral and universal access to biblical texts to discover their fundamental and definitive core of meaning does not survive a quick analysis of those perspectives that claim to be more literalist and fundamentalist. There are indeed issues of authority in relation to the reading and interpretation of texts that vary according to the vectors of power that determine who has the authority to do so and what assumptions guide the reading and interpretation.

Here, at least three distinct and complementary perspectives are carried out to approach and relate to the biblical narratives. There is the Popular Reading of the Bible, as developed in the Latin American context in the last 50 years; Feminist Hermeneutics, developed in different contexts from a critical engagement with the reality of oppression and domination of women; and Queer Hermeneutics or sexual and gender diversity, developed from dialogue with LGBTQIA+ studies and social movements, articulating issues of sex, gender and sexuality from the experience of sexual dissidents

In terms of method, it could be said that the central perspective is in the Popular Reading of the Bible, which assumes that the production of meaning in biblical reading takes place in the encounter between the real and concrete experiences of those who read with the experiences narrated in the texts. It is a dialogue between text and context (then and

now) favored by the mediations offered by different areas of knowledge, as well as feminist and sexual and gender diversity studies, in this case assumed as hermeneutics that allow for a deeper analysis and enrich the dialogue. In common, the three perspectives consider the experience as a central category for reading, assuming the presuppositions of the texts and of those who embark on their reading. Social transformation – of relations of inequality, violence and injustice – is also present as an element that motivates such exercise and practice.

From the studies of gender and sexuality, these categories and the methodological tools developed from them are used. Despite not having absolute consensus on their meanings and uses, one starts from issues raised by Joan Scott about gender, considering that her reflections, already studied in-depth and developed by other scholars, point out important issues for the exercise that is proposed. According to the author: “(1) gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes and (2) gender is a primary way of giving meaning to power relations.”³. Besides this:

Gender is one of the recurring references by which political power has been conceived, legitimized and criticized. It does not just refer to the

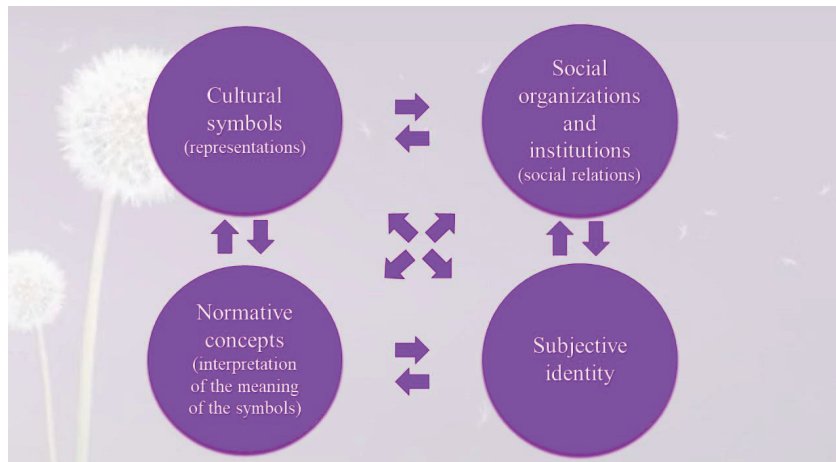
meaning of the male/female opposition; it also establishes it. To protect political power, the reference must seem certain and fixed, outside all human construction, part of the natural or divine order. In this way, the binary opposition and the social process of gender relations become part of the very meaning of power; calling into question or altering any of its aspects threatens the entire system.⁴

Such a definition helps to understand how gender (and sexuality) does not only refer to particular and private issues but is related to the way societies are organized. It also points to the intimate relationship that such issues have with religious systems in their naturalization process, since they are raised to divinely established mandates and orders. In the Christian West, this naturalization/divinization has reinforced and legitimized a hierarchical and violent order.

In this sense, the way in which gender (and sexuality) are structured, according to Joan Scott, depends on different dimensions that the category of gender helps to explain: cultural symbols; normative concepts; organizations and institutions; subjective identity. There is no prior relationship between these dimensions, but they are constantly fed back to ensure their effectiveness, as shown in the following diagram:

³ SCOTT, Joan. Gênero: uma categoria útil de análise histórica. *Educação e realidade*, Porto Alegre, v. 20, n. 2, p. 71-99, jul./dez. 1995, p. 86. Available at: <https://seer.ufrgs.br/educacaoerealidade/article/view/71721/40667>. Accessed on: 4 Dec. 2021.

⁴ SCOTT, 1995, p. 91.



Source: Diagram elaborated by the author from Joan Scott's propositions.

One of the main contributions of the formulation of the gender category in its original context was to denaturalize the perspective based on a biological perspective of the perceived differentiation in relation to sex. Subsequent studies and reflections, particularly in the field of sexual and gender (queer) diversity, pointed to the limitation of this differentiation between the “purely biological” and the “purely social”, especially when it reaffirms the dichotomous separation of two sexes, seen as opposites, and universally identifiable. As Judith Butler put it, “perhaps sex has always been gender, so that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be absolutely no distinction at all”⁵.

5 BUTLER, Judith. *Problemas de gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade*. [*Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*] Translation to Portuguese by Renato Aguiar. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 2003, p. 25.

The claim of sexuality as a “device” based on its historicization, making the analyses of sex-gender-sexuality more complex, were fundamental to highlight the instability and variability of these categories and their multiple combinations. According to Michel Foucault, sexuality is “a decidedly heterogeneous set that encompasses discourses, institutions, architectural organizations, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions [...] device elements”⁶.

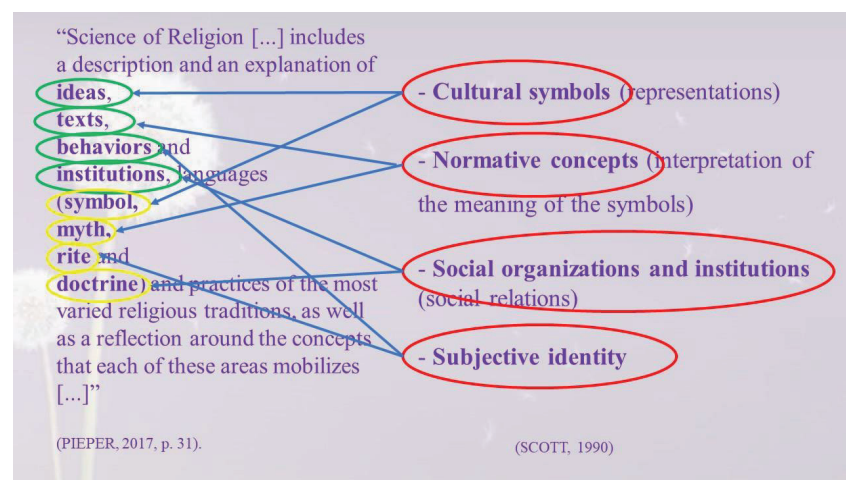
Thus, when referring to gender and sexuality pedagogies (and their relationship with religion), it is understood that, although the distinction between these three aspects is important, they work articulatedly in the concrete reality in which it is not always possible to distinguish them or understand how they are related. The idea of continuity and linearity between them is a reflection of their use as a form of normalization of identities and relationships and, therefore, oppressive and mutilating. Thus, gender and sexuality (as well as sex) are used here as distinct elements of the same process and, therefore, treated as a whole and considering the multiple possible combinations.

Gender and religion, pedagogies and narratives

The studies of religion (in Brazil known as Science of Religion), through the use of phenomenology, commonly identify four main forms of expression of religious experience, in what is defined as “languages

6 FOUCAULT, 1993, p. 244 *apud* LOURO, Guacira Lopes. *O corpo educado. Pedagogias da sexualidade*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 1999, p. 12.

of religion”⁷. This understanding of religion as a social phenomenon helps to establish a relationship with the way gender is articulated and produced. In the diagram below, it is possible to perceive this relationship stemming from the four dimensions of the gender category presented by Joan Scott above and a description of the object of study of Science of Religion presented by Frederico Pieper⁸:



Source: Diagram elaborated by the author from Joan Scott’s propositions.

Perceiving this relationship between religion and gender (and sexuality) also allows us to show how pedagogies that promote certain notions about gender and sexuality are articulated and operate.

Pedagogies are understood here as the practices and languages that leave their marks through investments, as articulated by Guacira Lopes Louro:

All these practices and languages constituted and constitute feminine and masculine subjects; were – and are – **producers of ‘marks’**. Adult men and women tell how certain behaviors or ways of being seem to have been ‘recorded’ in their personal histories. In order to make these marks effective, a significant **investment** is put into action: family, school, media, church, law participate in this production. All these instances carry out a **pedagogy**, make an **investment** that often appears in an articulated way, reiterating hegemonic identities and practices while it subordinates, denies or refuses other identities and practices; at other times, however, these instances provide divergent, alternative, contradictory representations.⁹

The result of this “investment” operated through gender pedagogies, however, is neither a given nor inevitable. The notion of performativity, as developed by Judith Butler in relation to language, is useful here to understand the processes of resistance and contestation that occur within the pedagogical practices themselves. According to her: “Understanding performativity as a renewable action with no clear origin or end implies that **language is not restricted either by its specific speaker or by its originary context** [...] Thus, performativity has its own temporality within which it continues to be effective thanks to the contexts with which it breaks”¹⁰.

7 CROATTO, José Severino. *As linguagens da experiência religiosa*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2010.

8 PIEPER, Frederico. Ciência(s) da(s) Religião(ões). In: JUNQUEIRA, Sérgio R. A.; BRANDENBURG, Laude E.; KLEIN, Remí (Orgs.). *Compêndio do Ensino Religioso*. São Leopoldo, São Paulo: Sinodal, EST, Vozes, 2017. p. 131-139.

9 LOURO, 1999, p. 25. [bold highlighting was added]

10 BUTLER, Judith. *Linguagem, poder e identidade*. Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2009, p. 71. [bold highlighting was added]

In other words, the educational process itself does not depend only on who has the power to define the practices and contents pedagogically activated, although this power and its effectiveness should not be underestimated. According to Louro:

The production of subjects is a plural and also permanent process. This is not, however, a process in which subjects participate as **mere receptors**, affected by external instances and manipulated by alien strategies. Rather, subjects are implicated and **active participants** in the construction of their identities. If multiple social instances, including the school, exercise a **pedagogy of sexuality and gender**, these processes continue and are completed through technologies of self-discipline and self-government that subjects exercise over themselves.¹¹

When it comes to biblical narratives, the hermeneutical methodologies and perspectives presented above point to this procedural and dialogic relationship between texts and readers. The reading process itself carries with it the possibility of breaking with hegemonic interpretations and closed prescriptive approaches. This is due to what Judith Butler calls “utterance equivocality”. According to the author:

Indeed, **the equivocality of the utterance** means that it is possible that it does not always signify in the same way, that its meaning can be inverted or deflected in some significant way, and, even more important, it means that the very words that try to injure can equally miss their target and produce an effect contrary to the intended. The **disjunction between utterance and meaning** is the condition of possibility for revising the performative, the condition of possibility of

the performative as a repetition of its first instance, **a repetition that is at the same time a reformulation.**¹²

Readings of biblical narratives from the perspective of gender and sexuality are placed in this space of disjunction that can be related to the text itself and its utterances, as well as to the way in which they were and are traditionally interpreted and activated in the production of gender and sexuality pedagogies. Here, an external authority over the text is questioned as an act of production of meaning, pointing to its continuous performance in the construction of resignifications and alternatives. According to Judith Butler:

[...] in order to be able to read these texts against themselves, it is necessary to recognize that the **performativity of the text does not depend on sovereign control**. On the contrary, if the text acts once, it can act again, and it is possible that this time it will do so against the preceding act. This **re-signification** opens the possibility of an **alternative reading** of performativity and politics.¹³

From these perspectives and having the question of gender and sexuality pedagogies formulated in and from the biblical narratives, the exercise of reading two narratives is proposed, having as a background the following questions:

How do gender and sexuality appear in the narrative?

What does the narrative “teach” about gender and sexuality?

How is the narrative used in the religious context?

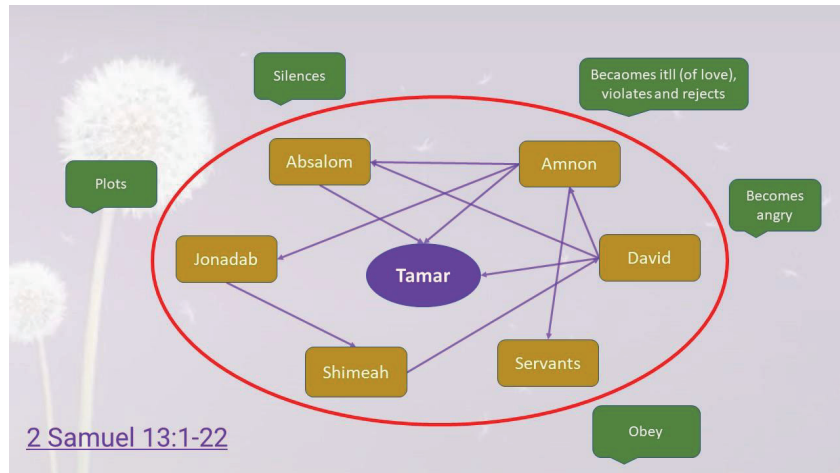
11 LOURO, 1999, p. 25. [bold highlighting was added]]

12 BUTLER, 2009, p. 148. [bold highlighting was added]]

13 BUTLER, 2009, p. 117. [bold highlighting was added]]

Pedagogies of gender and sexuality in the biblical narratives

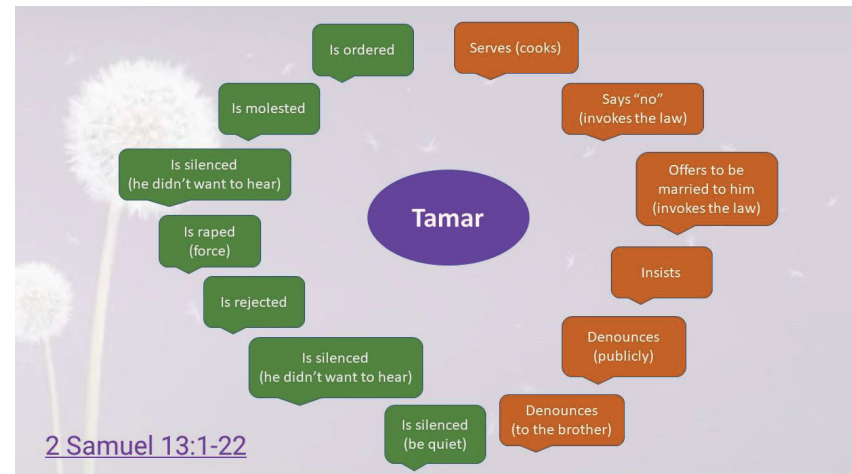
The narrative found in 2 Samuel, chapter 13, verses 1 to 22 presents a paradigmatic example of sexual violence committed against women. In addition to taking place in the family context (place of greater incidence of the various forms of violence against women), the way in which relationships are woven and presented in the narrative evidence the construction of masculinity as the basis for violent practices, the pact between men to protect such constructions and the power relations that entangle and imprison women, in this case the character Tamar, as explained in the following illustration:



Source: Diagram elaborated by the author.

While the diagram above shows the plot in which Tamar is involved, the chart below shows, from the actions to which she is

subjected and from her own actions, how she tries to face, protect herself and break with this plot – unsuccessfully.



Source: Diagram elaborated by the author.

In terms of gender and sexuality pedagogy, a traditional reading and one legitimizing patriarchy could suggest that women should act like Tamar and follow the guidance of her brother who, upon learning of what happened, asks her to keep silent (even though she has faced the aggressor and publicly denounced the aggression). Such “teaching” can be justified – as, in fact, is done by many religious leaders – as an inverted pedagogical process to support God’s designs in a misogynistic, violent and diabolical pedagogy.

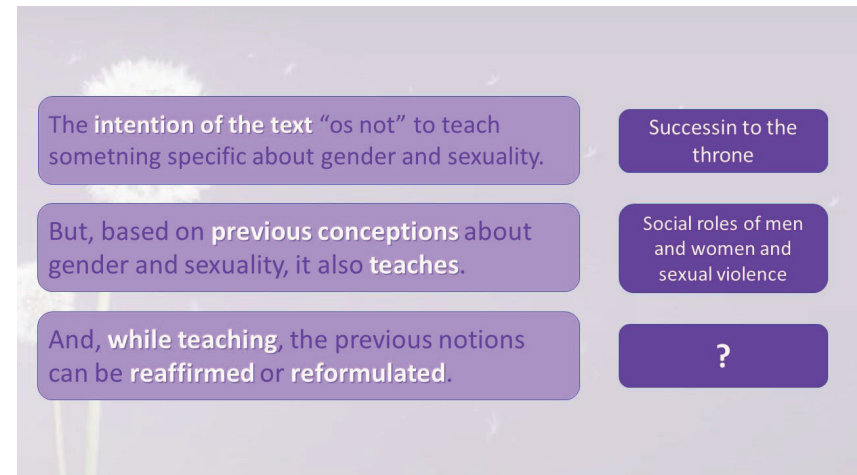
Other readings, possibly more uncomfortable with the blatant violence expressed in the text and with the failure to resolve the issue

adequately, may suggest a “neutral” reading in relation to gender and sexuality, pointing to the fact that the narrative does not have the function of “teaching” something specific about these issues. In this sense, it is pointed to the fact that the narrative has the function of highlighting the dispute for the succession to the throne and (as if this were less violent and less marked by gender and sexuality issues) to justify the murder of the aggressor brother in the continuity of the narrative. Even so, one would not escape an analysis of gender and sexuality that demonstrates the role of masculinities and their activation in conflict resolution and in the organization of life.

In any case, when inserted in the dispute for the succession to the throne, this narrative makes use of and is based on understandings of gender that – it is assumed – make sense for those who elaborate, transmit and receive such a narrative. Within this interpretative framework, “it makes sense” that the narrative of sexual violence against Tamar and the different behaviors of the men involved and explicitly mentioned in the narrative behave the way they do. That is, the effectiveness and possibility of intelligibility of the narrative depends on previous understandings about gender and sexuality to produce the meaning it intends. In this case, such understandings are supported by patriarchal perspectives and a tacit legitimization of violence against women as an “excuse” on the way to seizing political power – a profoundly current issue.

In this sense, the narrative operates a pedagogy of gender and sexuality both in its internal logic and in the way in which it is reproduced in the contexts in which it is read and reread contemporaneously. Thus, the questions that pertain to the path that is being followed in this

reading exercise and based on the questions raised above are: What is the possibility of breaking with a patriarchal and violent reading of this narrative? Is there, here, the possibility of disjunction between utterance and meaning that allows reformulations and the construction of gender and sexuality pedagogies outside the heteropatriarchal system?



Source: Diagram elaborated by the author.

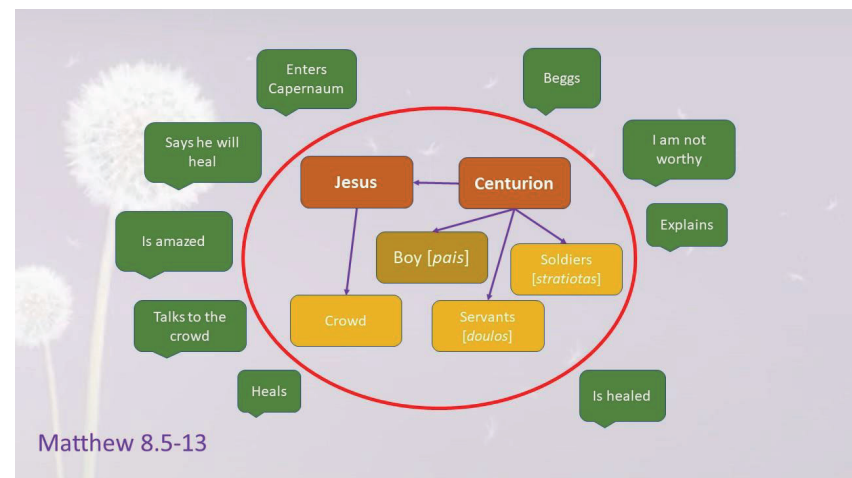
The Ujamaa Center in South Africa has built a program to combat violence against women based on the exercise of reading this narrative with women’s groups¹⁴. Using the Contextual Reading of the Bible

¹⁴ The Ujamaa Centre makes available a series of materials from the “Tamar Campaign” on its site. One of the materials is NYABERA, Fred; MONTGOMERY, Taryn. *Contextual Bible Study Manual on Gender-Based Violence*. Nairobi, Kenya: The Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and The Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), 2007. Available at: http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/TAMAR_CAMPAIGN.aspx. Accessed on: 4 Dec. 2021.

method¹⁵, the narrative is used as a way of highlighting sexual violence against women and developing strategies and alternatives to overcome such practices and the systems that support them. In this process, the traditional pedagogies of gender and sexuality are put on hold to think about ways of teaching and learning about gender and sexuality that overcome the practices of violence expressed in symbols, myths, rites and religious texts, putting in check cultural symbols, normative concepts, the form of organization of institutions and, finally, how these issues are marked or “engraved” in the subjectivity of the subjects who produce and reproduce these standards.

A lesser-known narrative and less associated with gender and sexuality issues is found in Matthew, chapter 8, verses 5 to 13. In this narrative, a Roman soldier (centurion), faced with the suffering of his “servant”, goes out in search of a solution (cure) for the same and comes to Jesus. The dialogue between the two and the social place that each one occupies are quite revealing and work as elements to reinforce the message that the narrative wants to convey.

The diagram below shows the network of relationships established between the characters (men) and the actions of each of them:



Source: diagram elaborated by the author.

Jesus, as a Jew, and the centurion, as a Roman soldier, occupy positions of opposition due to the political conflicts of that context. This undoubtedly reinforces the tension of the narrative both in relation to the centurion – who is not expected to look for a Jew (both as a citizen of an occupied and exploited people, and in religious terms) – and in relation to Jesus – from whom it is not expected to grant the request of someone who is responsible for the exploitation and domination (political, economic and religious) of its people.

There are several possible interpretations of the motivations that led to this encounter, generally pointing to the centurion’s faith and to the generous welcome of Jesus, “in spite of”. A closer look at gender and sexuality relations, however, helps to highlight other issues made invisible by traditional readings and that may want to hide gender and sexuality pedagogies outside their scope of possible experiences. The main one

15 See WEBBER, Elisa Fenner Schröder. *Contribuições de metodologias de leitura da bíblia para o cuidado pastoral com mulheres com HIV e AIDS*. 2016. 259 f. Tese (Doutorado em Teologia) – Faculdades EST, São Leopoldo, 2016. Available at: <http://dspace.est.edu.br:8080/jspui/handle/BR-SIFE/732>. Accessed on: 4 Dec. 2021.

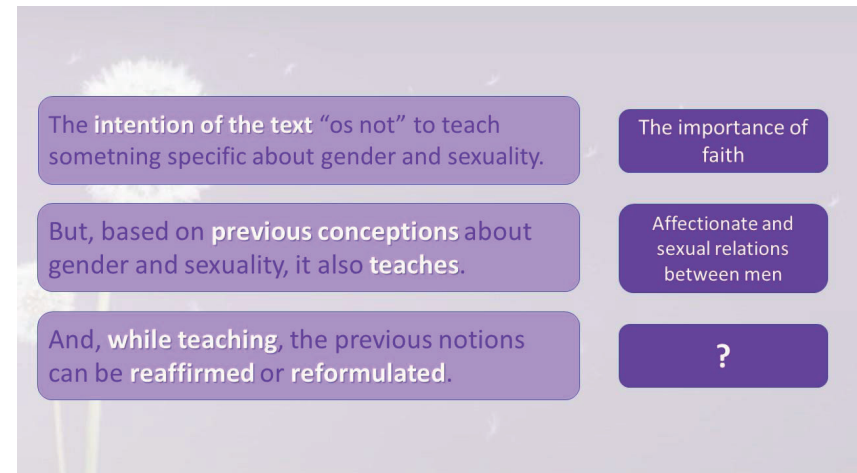
is in the relationship between the centurion and his “servant” and, consequently, in the reaction – or lack of reaction – of Jesus regarding this relationship.

Several elements of the narrative point to a “special” relationship between the centurion and his “servant”. The detachment, or even despair, of the centurion in relation to his social place and the risk he takes when seeking help from one who, in that context, is naturally his enemy, make explicit a relationship of great closeness and affection in relation to this “servant” in particular. After all, he himself claims that he has many “soldiers” (*stratiotas*) and “servants” (*doulos*) at his service, which places this specific “servant” (*pais*) in a special place in relation to the others. The very terms used in the narrative in its original language show this differentiation and suggest a relationship (homoaffective, homoerotic, homosexual?) between these two men¹⁶.

Perhaps this relationship justifies – or strengthens – the centurion’s claim that he is not “worthy” when Jesus is willing to go to his house (a space for intimate coexistence). But what could be seen with suspicion or even disrespect on the part of Jesus, is affirmed by him as proof of the strength of faith (or the desire to overcome the suffering of the servant and, by extension, of the centurion), now directed to the crowd that was possibly aware (or at least suspicious) of the centurion’s personal situation and his motivation. In this way, (homo)affective and (homo)sexual relationships can be seen as elements of a pedagogy of faith that starts from particular assumptions in relation to gender and sexuality.

16 For studies about this text see: MUSSKOPF, André S. *Bíblia, cura e homossexualidade. Ribla*, Petrópolis, v. 49, n. 3, p. 93-107, 2004.

Repeating the scheme proposed above, in this case one would have the following questions:



Source: Diagram elaborated by the author.

Also in this case, a traditional and heteropatriarchal reading of the narrative in question could claim that gender and sexuality identities and relations are irrelevant to the narrative and its intention. After all, it seems evident that the narrative seeks to affirm the importance of faith and its concrete and visible effects in the lives of believers – in this case, the miracle of healing. In this way, the traditional pedagogies of gender and sexuality also remain unchanged and continue to teach the norms established and agreed by a heteropatriarchal perspective¹⁷.

17 A masculinist approach, for example, could suggest that the “grandiosity” of the centurion’s gesture resides precisely in the fact that he is an “exemplary representative” of a paradigmatic heteropatriarchal masculinity (a strong, powerful, fearless man). In this reading, even a “real man” would be being called to faith and

However, for the discursive force of the narrative to be effective – and the affirmation of the gesture as an exemplary demonstration of faith – it is necessary that the listeners, and readers share certain understandings about gender and sexuality, particularly affective, erotic relationships and sex between men. When these issues are not abstracted or made invisible, and the narrative's reserve of meaning is activated in all its strength, other pedagogies of gender and sexuality can be perceived in biblical narratives and, in this case, reaffirmed as “affirmative pedagogies of differences”¹⁸ of gender and sexuality.

The community, dialogic and critical reading of this narrative can represent the space of “disjunction” between utterance and meaning, this time questioning the traditional meanings that ignore or distort the issues of gender and sexuality involved in the construction of the narrative and reaffirming the meaning expressed in the narrative itself and that echo in the experiences of those who read it.

proving the strength and legitimacy of his belief, reinforcing the pact of solidarity between men (homosolidarity) – one of the pillars of heteropatriarchy – in this case between the centurion, his “servant” (and Jesus?). Even so, such a reading would be open to criticism and possible reformulation in the context of gender and sexuality pedagogies, as discussed in this text.

¹⁸ The concept “affirmations of differences” was taken from the study on Inclusive Churches and from the typology elaborated by FREIRE, Ana Ester P. *Armários queimados: perspectivas queer da Igreja da Comunidade Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte*. 2019. 298 f. dissertation (Doctorate in Sciences of Religion) – Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2019.

Conclusion

The exercise proposed in this text can be carried out with any biblical narrative, or even with another text of a religious or non-religious nature. In some, issues of gender and sexuality may appear more clearly than in others, but the relationship established between religion and gender as dimensions of human experience and as categories of analysis points to the fact that any narrative, as well as any human experience and practice, is *gendered* – marked by issues of gender and sexuality. The way these questions appear and structure the narratives vary according to the contexts (historical, social, cultural, geographical) in which such narratives are formulated and, consequently, with the contexts in which they are read and interpreted.

The question of gender and sexuality pedagogies points precisely to the educational role of these narratives in the context of religious practice. The repetition of these texts, whether in collective spaces or in individual readings, can serve as an instrument to reaffirm heteropatriarchal notions of gender and sexuality. On the other hand, considering that these narratives may not always signify the same way and that the element of disjunction resides precisely in the experiences of those who are affected by these texts, the exercise of reading can also rediscover invisible pedagogies and give rise to the formulation of new ones. In any case, the exercise of questioning these pedagogies of gender and sexuality is a critical tool to facilitate this process of reading and re-reading biblical narratives.

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DECOLONIAL KNOWLEDGE, GENDER RELATIONS AND DECOLONIAL GAPS IN COLONIAL RELIGION¹

Anete Roese²

The decolonial perspective appears in Latin America as a front for dialogues that confront and challenge Eurocentric theses and assumptions. The critique of Western, hegemonic, Eurocentric, bourgeois feminism, from which we have imported academic knowledge for a long time, is a fundamental issue in decolonial feminism. In other

words, bringing feminism closer to a decolonial perspective implies the decoloniality of Latin American feminism itself. It is about the epistemological and political rupture with state, institutional, white and heterosexual feminism, to do a feminist reading from the place of black, indigenous, poor, lesbian women, with their experiences, knowledge, needs and worldviews. Implicit therein is the subject of feminism, which seems so evident, of course, it was the “woman”, the woman generalized from the white, heterosexual, middle-class woman. The turnaround of decolonial feminism evokes criticism of the colonial system, including mainstream feminism.

I will tell of myself a little in this text, giving an account of my reflection and my process of facing coloniality in myself and the process of decoloniality as well.

¹ Lecture presented at the Thematic Table “Production of decolonial knowledge and Gender Relations”. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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“I am a white woman, the daughter of small farmers, who struggled to raise their 4 sons and 2 daughters. I had to look for work as a nanny and housekeeper since I was 13, when I left home. My mother and father’s motto was: study, because there is no land for you. The land they had my mother had inherited from her father and mother, whom she took care of. My grandfather was heir of German immigrants who were placed on indigenous lands in southern Brazil, in the mountain ranges of southern Brazil. But he didn’t buy these lands from the indigenous people, he bought them from the government, who took/stole them from the indigenous people. Well, I studied and bought a little piece of land where I live today and grow most of the food I eat. Studying I learned to value so many things and I had the opportunity to have so many encounters that transformed me, like this one today when I am at the side of an indigenous woman and a black woman, who help me to think about my place as a white woman in the world and the privileges of this place and also everything that was kidnapped from me as a woman. I remember that on one occasion when I was in the bachelor’s program or maybe already in my master’s, I wrote a text/work that was a recovery of the biblical and Afro-Brazilian deities. I missed and wanted so much to have female deities in my story, not only today, but to have had them as a reference, I had a feeling of injustice for not having had the chance to revere the feminine as a deity. And I thought about how interesting and fair it must be that black women can now be able to recognize a whole group of female deities in Afro-Brazilian traditions such as Iansã, Oxum, Iemanjá, Nanã, Obá, in addition to several male orixás still within reach. For us white women, it seems that we have much less left. When I received the evaluation of that research work, the professor who evaluated it, returned it to me with a slightly sarcastic smile and said: imitating a chorinho “oh how I wish I had female divinities”, implying that what I had written had this nostalgia. And it had. But this, as it were, could not be manifest. This is an orphanage imposed on us all by

colonizing patriarchy and the current religious coloniality. In part, the women who today found their own churches in Brazil, which I will talk about later, give some new, unusual and creative response to this current project of Christian, media, business, patriarchal, white, heterosexual religious coloniality.”

The process of becoming human implies decoloniality, including the imposed standard of divinity. Black feminists, lesbian feminists, feminists from popular movements, community feminism, indigenous feminists are the protagonists of decolonial feminism in Latin America. It is a feminism that, as I said, starts from this critique of a dominant feminism and proposes that the matrix of domination is broader and more complex than just gender domination, and this cannot be taken in isolation. It understands that it is necessary to consider the interconnection of systems of domination such as race, sexuality, class and sex. As you can see, this is not a totally new feminism, something we’ve never heard of. We know that black feminists already spoke of this type of content in the 1980s-1990s, lesbians too, but feminists today, rereading these texts and movements, associating them with what we have today, realize that the decolonial idea was already present there.

I say it’s a turnaround, it’s an epistemic turn, because you see, Julieta Paredes, from Bolivia’s community feminism, says that, yes, they recognize the value of Western feminism, but that they want to make their own feminism from Bolivia. And she gives a very interesting example in explaining how European feminism does not apply to the context of most women in Bolivia. Western feminism starts from the notion of woman as an individual in relation to man-also an individual. Equal or different individual from man, speaking of the feminism of equality and difference.

Well, that's not possible in Bolivia where the idea of community is stronger than that of the individual. And Paredes simply says that they don't want to think of themselves in relation to men, but that they want to think of themselves as women and men in relation to the community. In fact, this is another version of feminism. It shows us how to think about feminism based on our needs, regardless of ready-made themes and theories. Furthermore, it is not a feminism that is made by women, which claims that first women need to free themselves so that they can eventually include men in the conversation. Community feminism is a community movement, it involves everyone. Paredes considers that a community is or can be any group of people, it can be friendship, church, club, neighborhood communities, rural communities... Thinking from a community logic is an alternative to individualistic society, says Julieta. I exemplify this, because it occurs to me that what Paredes relates is to say in a more practical way, how the process of rupture with European ideas and categories and the emergence of a decolonial feminism takes place. And about the creation of small communities, I want to talk later when I share about the movement of creating small churches by women in Brazil today.

It is quite evident that gender perspective or theory, analysis, epistemology and hermeneutics of gender have sufficed for white feminism, which applies it universally – as a theory that is sufficient for all women in a generalized way, and as the only way to deal with the reading of the “woman” problem. White feminism, not infrequently, has positioned itself in an authoritarian way by excluding more contextualized reflections from women from a continent such as Latin America, who are largely black, Indian, poor, and who are lesbians, of

various religions... In addition, a characteristic of white and hegemonic feminism is its historical denial of dialogue with black, indigenous, lesbian women, as well as with men, thus reflecting the supposed natural, biological binarism in social and historical power relations. of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Decolonial feminists make different analyses of gender relations in the colonizing pre-intrusion world in Latin America, from the understanding that there was no gender hierarchy among the peoples to the understanding that what happened was a patriarchy of low intensity.³ But there is a clear understanding that colonization creates the idea of race and racial difference, as Quijano maintains,⁴ as well as creating the idea of gender, sharp difference, gender binarism. In this process, colonized men, if they used to live in societies with another social organization of gender or in a low-intensity patriarchy, will now gradually become heirs of the idea of dominating male power. As Breny Mendoza well observes⁵, it is even necessary to recognize the colonizing process to which men also submitted themselves and were

3 LUGONES, María. Rumo a um feminismo descolonial. *Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, v. 22, n. 3, p. 935-952, set./dez. 2014.; SEGATO, Rita Laura. *Género y colonialidad: en busca de claves de lectura y de un vocabulario estratégico descolonial*. Argentina: Ediciones Godot, 2013. Available at: <https://americalatinagenera.org/genero-y-colonialidad-en-busca-de-claves-de-lectura-y-de-un-vocabulario-estrategico-descolonial/>. Accessed on: 06 Sept. 2022.

4 QUIJANO, Anibal. Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina. In: LANDER, Edgardo (Org.). *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales- CLACSO, 2000. Available at: <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/lander/quijano.rtf>. Accessed on: 21 July. 2015.

5 MENDOZA, Breny. La epistemología del sur, la colonialidad del género y el feminismo. In: MIÑOSO, Yuderky Espinosa. *Aproximaciones críticas a las prácticas*

submitted in order to guarantee a certain control of their societies. This does not exclude the recognition that the men of the colonized peoples were harassed by the colonizers in the gender colonization project, nor the privileges they acquired by allying themselves with the colonizers. One cannot fail to also recognize how privileged and allied white and heterosexual women were and are to white men in the colonization process and in colonial modernity.

Here I come back to telling you a little about my trajectory and an episode that fits very well in this research as well.

“At the age of 13 I left my family’s house and returned to live close to my mother at age 46. Already close to her, I carried out my postdoctoral research with one of the great anthropologists in the world, Rita Laura Segato, from the University of Brasília, from whom I learned a lot. She was my guest at the Congress of Decolonial Feminism and Religion, which I organized being at the head of the Interdisciplinary Group for Feminist Research at PUC-MG, in 2016, at the time, in the months, of the impeachment of the Former President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff. Years before, I had created the Interdisciplinary Group for Feminist Research and was coordinating the group at the time. And due to the advance of political and religious conservatism at that time, the Congress we organized was infiltrated by characters linked to ultraconservative groups of the Roman Catholic Church, who felt empowered by the political context in Brazil. They made attempts to destabilize that congress, left a letter at the end and spread articles (like a letter published in an online magazine in Spain), with threats that reached the world, such as that I was threatening Catholicism, the very continuity of the University (which had more than 40 thousand

students). In the same way, Professor Rita Segato was also threatened, as well as the Dean of the University. Anyway, the threats were increasing and gaining adhesions, which later came from colleagues from the Post-Graduate Program as well, indicating that the ‘fire was lit for me’, that I would be fired, that my continuity threatened the existence of the Post-Graduate Program to which I was connected, that if I wanted to continue in the Program I would have to abandon the Research Group, the classes in the Post-Graduate program with the title Religion and Gender. Despite much support that came from all over the world - and that ‘saved my soul’, at a certain point I felt that I would have to leave the country, but this was ‘remedied’ with the impossibility of continuing in the group and faculty of that Post-Graduate program where I worked, already researching decoloniality, and the institution months later. Interestingly, a few days after I left, those colleagues passionately appropriated my research topics and orientees, continuing what, if done by a woman, could lead her, or did, ‘to the fire’. As Rita Segato says, this colonial front is state-business-media-Christian, male, white, heterosexual, and produces the chaos of this violence and the current large-scale human and environmental disaster. This persecution of science, research and women, and also some groups of men, feminists, black and white, LGBTQI+ has not stopped since then in Brazil and has only intensified. My case is just one. Here we are living in a very delicate time. And I tell this here so that we have one more record.”

At that moment of the impeachment of former President Dilma (and mine) and of the Congress of Decolonial Feminism at PUC Minas, I had already published an article in the well-qualified magazine *Horizonte*, under the title “Religion and decolonial feminism: the protagonisms and the new religious assemblages of the women in the 21st

teórico-políticas del feminismo latinoamericano. Buenos Aires: En la Frontera, 2010. p. 19-36. Available at: www.glefas.org/glefas/index.php. Accessed on: 21 July. 2015.

century”⁶. This allowed me to talk about the topic and research in different spaces, such as congresses, classes, groups, etc.

In this article, the intention was to point to the protagonisms, ruptures and new religious assemblages of the current context, taking into account the idea of gender decolonization, or the break with gender coloniality. And the question was what is religion for women, how do women experience religion and how do they appropriate it in the third millennium.

Among the authors who work with the notion of decoloniality is María Lugones, who proposes the notion of ‘gender coloniality’ and ‘gender decolonization’. Gender coloniality includes the “analysis of capitalist racialized gender oppression”⁷, it is constitutive of modernity and the Christian religion strongly participates in it – the hegemonic religion in the West, which since the Middle Ages has been at the forefront of the colonization project of peoples, races and genders.

Breny Mendoza reminds us that women, in the colonization processes, were reclassified according to discriminatory Western criteria of race and gender, they were rationalized and “reinvented as women”⁸. In this process, colonized men adopted and ‘inherited’ the colonizers’ gender privileges. Now, white women also need to recognize, when it comes to the intersectionality of race and gender, their inherited and adopted racial privileges in the process of colonization and capitalist

domination⁹. Although, on the other hand, they were also excluded from the ‘social gender pact’ of white men.

For a more accurate understanding of the meaning that religion has in the current context for women, it is important to return to considerations about the treatment given to the concept of religion and its implications for what will become religion for women.

Sônia Maluf, in “Beyond the temple and the text: challenges and dilemmas of religion studies in Brazil”, analyzes methodological implications and limits of the concept of religion with the change in the focus of research and analysis of religious institutions and doctrines

[...] to the itineraries and narratives of religious and spiritual experiences. Tracking the subjects, mapping the transits, flows and networks formed by their displacements and circulation, even if this implies gathering what is doctrinally not gathered, becomes the central task of the investigation.¹⁰

In other words, researching the great religions, the media religions and the great movements, can lead us not to observe the singular subjectivities that cause ruptures in the dominant models, with colonizing characteristics - as decolonial feminism points out.

For Maluf, the current religious context is characterized by the “rupture of doctrinal boundaries by the high circulation of subjects, forming a dynamic of networks and flows in the articulation of these

6 ROESE, Anete. *Religião e feminismo descolonial: os protagonismos e os novos agenciamentos religiosos das mulheres do século XXI*. *Horizonte*, Belo Horizonte, v. 13, n. 39, p. 1534-1558, July./Sept. 2015.

7 LUGONES, 2014, p. 941.

8 MENDOZA, 2010, p. 23.

9 MENDOZA, 2010.

10 MALUF, Sônia Weidner. *Além do templo e do texto: desafios e dilemas dos estudos de religião no Brasil*. *Revista Antropologia em primeira mão*, Florianópolis, v. 124, p. 5-14, 2011, p. 9.

practices, above and beyond specific institutional dynamics”¹¹. This is how we also refer to the protagonist movement of rupture of the women of the Noiva do Cordeiro Community, in the interior of Minas Gerais, which breaks with all forms of institutionalized religion¹². Ivone Gebara¹³ refers to the ‘mobility’ of women. They are demarcations of this movement, this ‘circulation’, or this new appropriation that women make of religion, as a movement and protagonism in the 21st century, according to our hypothesis.

From a decolonial feminist perspective, we ask ourselves: who are the subjects that circulate, break up and articulate alternative religious practices?

We know that in the oldest hegemonic forms of religion, such as the Jewish and Christian, women were already accused of “betraying” conventional impositions. And they did so by subtly disobeying, precisely because they were not at the helm of these patriarchal traditions either¹⁴. We suspect, here too, that women were protagonists of the high circulation.

11 MALUF, 2011, p. 8.

12 ROESE, Anete; SCHULTZ, Adilson. Modos de vida alternativos: o caso da comunidade Noiva do Cordeiro. *Tecer*, Belo Horizonte, v. 3, n. 5, p. 152-158, nov. 2010. Available at: <http://pe.izabelahendrix.edu.br/ojs/index.php/tec/article/view/40>. Accessed on: 15 June. 2015.; SCHULTZ, Adilson. Pós-protestantismo: descrição e análise de um caso de dissidência religiosa na comunidade rural Noiva do Cordeiro, em Belo Vale, MG. *Protestantismo em Revista*, São Leopoldo, v. 30, p. 104-123, 2013.

13 GEBARA, Ivone. *A mobilidade da Senzala Feminina: mulheres nordestinas, vida melhor e feminismo*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2000.

14 See more at: ROESE, Anete. O silenciamento das deusas na tradição interpretativa cristã: uma hermenêutica feminista. *Aletria*, Belo Horizonte, v. 20, n. 3, p. 177-191, 2010.

For Ivone Gebara, it is necessary to listen to women and see their experiences so that we can then define what religion is for them. The answer is complex, as is our existence, which is “marked by ambivalence, paradox and contradictions”¹⁵. This is a substantial issue for the feminist perspective of research on religion, given that women circulate, lead and mediate practices, experiences outside the dominant patterns. They seek religion and adapt religion to the needs of their everyday lives and the people around them. Religion interests women in this sense.

To think about the roles of women, it is necessary to think about another type of religion, or to better observe how women practice religion. It is also necessary to pose again the question of what religion is. And this time ask what religion is for women. Furthermore, from a decolonial perspective, it is necessary to investigate what religion is for black, indigenous, white, lesbian, poor, transgender women, etc. suffering under the yoke of hegemonic traditions.

What is observed at this moment is religious and confessional infidelity and religious disobedience on the part of women. We must also speak of their rupture, a rupture that presents itself in various forms. It is, in our view, a rupture with the Christian colonial religious patriarchy, which can be verified in a phenomenon in process in Brazil.

A fundamental issue in the way women conduct their religious and spiritual life, their search and organization, is that for them religiosity and spirituality are expressions that take place in everyday life, and that affect their relationships, their corporeality, the world of work, life as a whole. They seek religion for and from the world of everyday

15 GEBARA, 2000.

life. Religion for them must be an expression of the context and needs of life. That is, religion involves all worlds – the world of home, body, work, family. Religion for these women, who break with the patriarchal model of religion, is not a business, even though, for most of them, it is one of the sources of income or the main source of income. It is a source of subsistence rather than profit, as their churches are small and do not have the appeal for extravagant tithing.

What we might call women's religious "polytheism" is in process. Elements of Afro, Indigenous, Christian and Oriental traditions are combined in a single religious experience. The suspicion here is that religious polytheism is beneficial for women because it meets their everyday needs, and they have also opted for institutional, denominational infidelity. I am referring here to surveys that show an informal movement of women founding their own churches. There are hundreds, hundreds...

They begin by disobeying their pastors, who tell them that according to the Gospel they cannot be ordained, even though they have become great leaders. Then, after much suffering and waiting, they 'do not obey' their pastors, leave the male-led churches of a modern colonial mark and found their own churches, in which they are ordained. How? How can pastors be self-ordained and be self-instituted? Based on the theological argument that founds and grounds their rupture action that they had a "call from God" to create their own church.

Research points to a readaptation and reappropriation of Christianity by these women pastors. Their worship services have a

more horizontal, less hierarchical, more participatory structure. The movements of the dancing bodies of the black and mestizo pastors point to the reintroduction of elements of the Afro traditions in these services, without the 'old' prejudice against these traditions and religions of African origin, so strong in the evangelical services of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches. Drums, chants and circle dances point to a more horizontal structure in the distribution of power, the word and the integration of the community, including children.

The research of Janine Targino da Silva¹⁶ shows that the faithful from the communities of the women pastors are not prevented from attending services of other women pastors. In this sense, there is also a rupture with the loyalty of the 'faithful' and the prohibition of attending other churches or traditions. María Lugones includes, in addition to analyzing the process and system of oppression, the study of resistance to this oppression. Among these resistances, we recognize the role of women in the 21st century.

Naming this resistance, Lugones resorts to the idea of "active subjectivity" to refer to the action of those groups and individual subjects that somehow resist the "multiple oppressions". For the author, belonging to "impure communities [...] gives life to their agency"¹⁷. In other words, the dynamics of the women pastors and women who break with obedient belonging points to an active subjectivity, through

16 SILVA, Janine Targino da. *Lideranças pentecostais femininas: um estudo sobre a fundação de igrejas pentecostais por mulheres em Nova Iguaçu* – Rio de Janeiro. 2010. 104 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Ciências Sociais) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Rio de Janeiro, 2010.

17 LUGONES, 2014, p. 940.

autonomy, including economic autonomy, leadership and the power they assume, even if it is over their own lives and that of their family. In short, they bring about a new subjectivity, an active, creative subjectivity, as it presents an inventiveness and a new dynamic of life that breaks with the modern and current colonizers.

An interview of mine was published in *Mandrágora Magazine* in 2017, done by Leticia Rocha, whose title is “Decolonial Feminism and Religion in Dialogue”¹⁸. In this interview I address some of the foundations of decolonial feminism – which makes a more complex problematization of relationships. I say that from decolonial feminism it is no longer possible to speak of gender in an isolated way, outside the history of colonized countries with the imprint of the invention of race and the deepening of class divisions and created differences. The idea of gender, the gender binarism, the hierarchical and profound difference, is a creation of colonizing intervention, which is possible through a political, economic and religious alliance. The basis of Quijano’s theory¹⁹, of the colonality of power, is the creation of the idea of race, which sustains the whole machinery of subjection of peoples. Feminists see Quijano’s vision as generalizing because it does not include the comprehension, the creation of the idea of acute gender difference, which is also strategic to make domination viable. Quijano works with the idea of race and class, and in decolonial feminism, we move towards an intersectionality between race, gender,

class, sexuality, without which it is not possible to have a broad and consistent knowledge of a society.

Decolonial feminism is a set of productions from various areas, fronts, their practices, reflections, movements that were previously subjugated by the supremacy of hegemonic western approaches, which now arise and appear. Black, indigenous, lesbian, non-academic feminists, from community and popular movements, groups historically absent from formal academia, have produced critical reflections and have a fundamental role in the critique of Eurocentric, modern and Western epistemologies, and in the presentation of other content of reflection.

Decolonial feminism, then, turns to community knowledge, integrates local feminisms, in addition to the classic feminism forged in the academies, whose production pattern is strongly affiliated with and shares the knowledge internationally accepted by academies integrated to European and North American standards. Overcoming this pattern of knowledge of a colonial and patriarchal order means taking in local knowledge as truths, which implies other epistemologies.

Different and various authors who work with the front of knowledge and wisdoms of decolonial feminism call us to something that makes immense sense in this time that we are in, in a process of the dismantling of rights in Brazil and in other Latin American countries, which is the exercise of micropolitics. This means repairing networks broken in colonial modernity, be they neighborhood networks, or networks of gender relations – such as networks between women and men (which were also affronted by aggressive feminisms). It is about

18 ROCHA, Leticia Ap. Ferreira Lopes. *Feminismo Descolonial e Religião em Diálogo. Entrevista com Anete Roese. Mandrágora, São Bernardo do Campo, v. 23, n. 2, p. 119-138, 2017.*

19 QUIJANO, 2000.

betting on small communities of affinity, as Silvia Cusicanqui says²⁰, small groups and their inventive role.

In this very difficult time in a world in the midst of a pandemic, in which we need courage, creativity, hope, what decolonial feminists in our Latin American countries are already saying is very valid. And they say: It is time to go back to the local places and re-weave the bonds and community from the small groups and from the wisdoms, knowledge, and practices that break with the modern colonial pattern, with its overwhelming and destructive logic. Resuming an old ethic of trust in relationships, resuming the zeal of community bonds, recovering and reappropriating community practices that are still fair and inclusive. The counter-hegemonic is about that. It implies resuming religion from the way of doing religion of women at this moment in history. Women found fissures in the globalizing discourses of patriarchal theologies and religions in tune with colonial modernity and its excluding and enslaving logic – which distances women from the sphere of the sacred and creates moralizing laws about the woman's body. Alongside this, there is a way of doing religion carried out by women in Brazil, which breaks with the official discourse. They are doing religion in their own way, a “domestic” way, based on real bonds, on proximity, and on the resumption of autonomy and authority of their direct relationship with God.

20 CUSICANQUI, Silvia Rivera. Sobre la comunidad de afinidad y otras reflexiones para hacernos y pensarnos en un mundo otro. *Producir lo común: Entramados comunitarios y luchas por la vida*. El Apantle – Revista de estudios comunitarios. Entrevista concedida a Huáscar Salazar Lohman. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2019. p. 183-202.

I learned from the women who founded their own churches, from the black women priestesses of religions of African origin, from the women healers, not to separate religion, or the spiritual, from the domestic. Because women do and need religion in everyday life, a practical religion – one that is real, that gives strength, healing, hope. They break with the religions of great speeches, fancy words, great temples, dominated by men and by logics similar to those of the capital. From the anthropologist Rita Segato I learned that one path to politics is precisely to domesticate politics. That is, to introduce the old domestic logic into politics, with its ethics from the way women manage the house, in the sense of managing bonds, proximity, far from bureaucratic abstraction and protocol distances.

Rita Segato points out well when she says that the State takes with one hand what it has offered with the other. It is worth noting that distrust of the State is a strong tonic of decolonial feminism – and that it does not come from now. It is a suspicion, which works as a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion of the State, and therefore, as a feminist prophecy, a prophetic feminist hermeneutic that asks for the withdrawal of trust in the State and the bet on women's movements, on small groups, on the experiences of mutual trust. It is a withdrawal from this naive trust in the State, whose action, since the times of colonization, has been “the raping of women”²¹. And here we have to talk about colonizing religion and its tentacles of modern coloniality. It is necessary to talk about Christianity, this religion that participates in the modern era and shares with the modern colonial state the position of moral, economic,

21 SEGATO, Rita Laura. *La guerra contra las mujeres*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2016.

political, religious rapine against peoples and people – black women and men, indigenous, poor, young people, LGBTQIA+.

Also in 2016, I prepared a postdoctoral study project on the topic of decoloniality. Submitted to the CNPq, in the area of Anthropology, it was approved and I started to research the topic ‘Women’s way of doing religion. An ethnographic study at the Post-Graduate Program in Human Rights at the University of Brasília, under the supervision of Anthropologist Prof. Dr. Rita Laura Segato. I did my field research in a city in the interior of RS where I identified churches founded and led by women. The result of this research was published in the Revista Mandrágora, from UMESP, under the title: “The way of doing religion of women who found their own churches: decolonial feminism and community feminism”²².

In this article, I detail the results of the research with churches founded by women in a small town in the interior of RS, Encruzilhada do Sul. I return to central concepts of feminism such as ‘gender, patriarchy and feminism’ from decolonial theories. I address the teachings of community feminism, which helped me understand the meaning of small churches founded by women. As Julieta Paredes and Adriana Gusmán say²³, as an analytical category ‘gender’ is a concept of denunciation created in feminism, a political category that reveals the oppressive, violent power relations imposed on the bodies and lives of

women and men. The depoliticization of this concept is a serious mistake that today has even infiltrated feminism.

In the same direction, Segato argues that “patriarchy, or the gender relationship based on inequality, is the most archaic and permanent political structure of humanity”²⁴. Patriarchy is a process of permanent conquest, of “conquestuality”. The “patriarchy-colonial-modernity expression adequately describes the priority of patriarchy as the appropriator of women’s bodies and of the latter as the first colony-anity”²⁵.

These women who create churches in their homes or found churches in small spaces do so in the style of a house. They are churches decorated like houses and function as houses. There are ointments, laying on of hands on the suffering bodies of women, whispered words in the ear, generous listening during worship at any time. The women who attend these churches follow their need. That’s why they can attend more than one church at the same time, because it can happen that the pastor on one corner has the power of prayer and the pastor on another corner has the healing power. The preaching, the discourse on the word of God is not the high point of their services. Several small practices and gestures permeate the services. There are keys of meaning identified in the practice of women pastors who found their own churches: a) The ‘escape’ of women from patriarchal churches: the creation of small refuges – churches/protection communities; b) The creation or recreation of small communities: a political and spiritual project; c) Religion in a domestic key: ‘domesticizing’ religion, for

22 ROESE, Anete. O modo de fazer religião das mulheres que fundam suas próprias igrejas: feminismo decolonial e feminismo comunitário. *Mandrágora*, São Bernardo do Campo, v. 24, n. 2, p. 161-200, 2018.

23 PAREDES, Julieta; GUZMÁN, Adriana. *El tejido de la rebeldía. ¿Qué es el feminismo comunitario?* Ed. Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad. La Paz: Moreno Artes Gráficas, 2014.

24 SEGATO, 2016, p. 18. (Tradução livre).

25 SEGATO, 2016, p. 19. (Tradução livre).

a 'domesticated' religion; d) Defect: the language of rebellion. The Abandonment of Modern Colonial Patriarchal Religion – Catholicism, Classical Protestantism, and Pentecostalism.

They create small communities. They build or develop another religion project. They create a domestic religion. Domestic religion is a religion of small communities, and it is the creation of women. Undoubtedly it is the way of doing religion for women.

The image of the refuge to preserve their practices and knowledge is therefore not far from what we see women doing today in their small churches, as mentioned above. On the one hand, it is clear that women need to take refuge in their 'no signs' house-church, they need to hide, to create their own spiritual/religious world and avoid persecution. Women and their religion work on the margins, they appear in the cracks of the colonial religious system, whose power is patriarchal and monotheistic until the present day. They were persecuted at different times even before Christianity. There are accounts in the texts of the history of the Hebrew people, in the Bible, in the First Testament (in the book of Genesis, chapter 31) that show that Rachel takes with her, "steals" and hides the domestic deities when she leaves her father's house. The so-called "idolatry" of women and also of the people is known in different texts of the Jewish-Christian world. On the other hand, they and their way of doing religion denounce the violence and imposition of the single god, of the sacred model of monotheism, which does not always seem to meet the needs of women and the people.

The starting point in community feminism is precisely the 'community'. The Community as a 'form of life' and as a 'political project'.

"Community as a political project, as a horizon of possibilities, as a utopia that is built and therefore its enunciation is, from the proposal of community feminism, also one, because the community is not a theory or an ideology, the community simply or complexly is"²⁶. The creation of communities is, in the case of the women pastors, an intuition and a spiritual project, a project that constitutes their way of doing religion inserted in life.

In addition, they say, the movement is a methodology that, from a community perspective, allows articulations with other groups and instances, given that liberation cannot be thought of individually either, because it must take place in community, since each one is responsible for their own liberation, but is also responsible for the liberation of other people. That's what community feminism is, it's the women's social movement, in order to regain balance, it's to recover the *pacha* (space, time and movement) of the grandmothers, thus also recovering our daughters and granddaughters of the Andean peoples, in the villages, our time in cities, *ayllus* and communities²⁷.

I suspect that the deep intuition of women pastors who form small churches-communities, communities-not-always-churches, has to do with the notion of women's return, as an unorganized but intuited social movement, a return to the community, for the balance of the community. It's their return to regain balance, regain *pacha* – space, time, movement.

²⁶ PAREDES; GUZMÁN, 2014, p. 36.

²⁷ PAREDES; GUZMÁN, 2014, p. 60.

In such controversial times, the “return movement” is also a human movement, not only of women, a return of the human, to the human, the search for itself, for the human in its origin, to its origin, to itself, to its authenticity. And this is a quest. The return is a process of searching, of groping, without knowing exactly what you are looking for and where you are going. But it is guided by an intuition, a deep knowledge that comes from the bottom and is an unconscious knowledge about oneself. On this path, there are necessary ruptures, disobedience, painful and necessary confrontations for the process of decoloniality and, like women with their churches, protagonisms that build new worlds.

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THE BORDER IS NOT THE OTHER:

ART IN THE IN-BETWEEN-PLACES OF IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE WOMEN¹

Angelica Tostes²

The immigration crisis is global, and usually there is one reason: violence. There are 200 million migrants in the world, 60 million displaced people, 20 million of them refugees and 40 (sic) internally displaced people, and 4 million victims of trafficking. The most vulnerable are boys, girls, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersex, subject to all types of harassment: sexual harassment, physical aggression, human trafficking, organ trafficking, forced labor, prostitution, gender violence. They are people with no name, no face, no recognized identity. They live in social, political, moral and legal loneliness. They are denied their dignity and the right to life, as evidenced by the thousands of people killed in a legitimate attempt to cross borders.

1 Lecture presented at the Thematic Table “Feminisms, creativity and resistance”. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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In the in-between places: the identities that enmesh and the quest for a home

Who is this “Other”/immigrant & refugee? First, we need to think about this politics of otherness. Who is the other one? Who is my neighbor? Who is she who needs to find her home? Have you ever heard stories of how a young widow who leaves her homeland because of economic hardship, living among strangers, resorts to extraordinary means, including her sexuality, to survive and take care of herself and her mother-in-law? Does this sound familiar? This is not just modernity, but the story of Ruth, back in biblical times³. Stories like that of Ruth, the Moabite; the Syrophenician woman; Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute draw attention to thinking about the

3 KWOK, Pui-lan. *Postcolonial imagination and feminist theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. p. 100.

intersectionality between gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality in the encounters of cultural borders⁴. Kwok Pui-Lan, in her work “*Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*”, works the story of Ruth from the perspective of post-colonialism, trying to find, for Ruth, a home. We want to find a home for all immigrant & refugee women, but what would that home be? In Ruth’s book, mother-in-law Naomi wants to find a place for her daughter-in-law Ruth. The Hebrew word for home, house, (manoch) also means “place where one can find rest and a sense of security”⁵. Where to find this?

The issue of exile and refuge is part of human history. The causes of exile, in large part, involve wars, conflicts, direct or indirect persecutions. Migratory flows and the search for refuge occur as a consequence of these factors, as a form of protection, shelter or survival⁶.

The reality of the immigration flow, global displacement and the dispersion of countless people challenge the concept of home as a romantic image of comfort, sold by the “*American way of life*”. We cannot read the word “home” through a short-sighted lens of welcome and comfort without considering how private life intersects with national, ethnic, civil, legislative identity and with the rights of women and other minorities. In the global scenario – where war, violence, ethnic extermination, political instability, global market combined with the number of homeless people, refugees and diaspora – home is not a fixed thing and a stable place, but

the adventure of the crossing, which focuses on seeking refuge in strange lands, bargaining for survival and negotiating existence⁷.

The recent rise of restrictive migration policies has contributed to the humanitarian crisis affecting people in transit around the world. This situation must be taken as a factor of violation toward all migrants, and in particular toward social minorities: while rulers tighten restrictions and tighten controls at borders, the vulnerabilities that female migrants may face increase. With policies not oriented to thinking about gender specificities, such vulnerabilities are made invisible and the situational precariousness of the female migrant supports the occurrence of different types of violence, whether psychological, physical or sexual.⁸

It is important to emphasize that gender is intrinsically rooted in the experience of those who move, how these movements take place and what the impacts are on migrant women and families.

If international migration theories adequately and effectively integrate gender relations, they must take into account subtle and obvious factors that blend to create different experiences throughout migration. The definition and understanding of these factors better underpin international migration theories and also the individual experiences of migrant women around the world.⁹

4 KWOK, 2005, p. 101.

5 KWOK, 2005, p. 101.

6 SMAILLI, Soraya S. Migrantes, pós-colonialismo e fundamentalismo: enlases entre Oriente e Ocidente e a questão do Islã. *Psicologia Usp*, São Paulo, v. 26, n. 2, p.145-151, 2015. p. 145.

7 KWOK, 2005, p. 102.

8 CUNHA, Igor. Mulheres migrantes e refugiadas: riscos e proteção no contexto da violência de gênero. *Resenha Migrações na atualidade*, Ano 28, n. 106, mar. 2017, p. 3. Available at: <https://www.csem.org.br/artigo/mulheres-migrantes-e-refugiadas-riscos-e-protacao-no-contexto-da-violencia-de-genero/>. Accessed on: July 19 2021.

9 BOYD; GRIECO, 2003 apud PERES, Roberta Guimarães. “O que importa é o que acontece com a sua família”: Um diálogo entre família e migração. Paper presented at the 19th National Encounter of Populational Studies of the Brazilian Association of

Searching for a home for Ruth is no easy task, as she can find a home centered on heredity and patriarchy. Together, we must seek this house, with the sorority found in the feminist movement and theology. Being in foreign lands is difficult enough, even more in a refugee context. In this process, just like Ruth, all migrants are uprooted, they leave aside habits, customs, values, therefore they leave culture, identity, they migrate with a friend or relative, or alone; they carry out threatening experiences, go through feelings of fear, suffer pressure and violence, insecurity, experience fragility. But they don't give up, they resist all problems and end up achieving their goals¹⁰.

“From a subjective perspective, migration can be understood as the attempt by women to detach themselves from a received and introjected identity in search of creating new ways of being and living in which they can feel fully human”¹¹. As Tepedino points out, “The migrant women leave a known land (the traditional, patriarchal, granted identity) to go in search of a new land (new identity, that of a citizen and protagonist)”¹².

Populational Studies – ABEP, São Pedro, 24 to 28 of November of 2014, p. 2. Available at: http://www.abep.org.br/~abeporgb/abep.info/files/trabalhos/trabalho_completo/TC-1-4-369-310.pdf. Accessed on: July 19, 2021.

10 TEPEDINO, Ana Maria. Diversidade e paridade: Equivalência dos/das protagonistas. In: IRMÃS MISSIONÁRIAS SCALABRINIANAS (Org.). *Migrações Contemporâneas: Desafios à vida, à cultura e à fé*. Brasília: Centro Scalabrino de Estudos Migratórios – CSEM, 2000. p. 61-75.

11 SOUZA CANDIOTTO, Jaci de Fátima. A experiência das mulheres na hermenêutica bíblica. *Interações: Cultura e Comunidade*, Belo Horizonte, v. 10, n. 17, p. 200-215, Jan./June. 2015. p. 208. Available at: <http://periodicos.pucminas.br/index.php/interacoes/article/view/P.1983-2478.2015v10n17p200/8579>. Accessed on: July 19, 2021.

12 TEPEDINO, 2000, p. 63.

In a survey conducted by Roberta Guimarães Peres (2014), in one of the in-depth interviews, carried out with Bolivian women in São Paulo, the changes in the family environment were described by the migrant here called Cecília, married, mother of two children:

“Having to work, I have always worked, my whole life. In the end, what changed, after so many places I've moved to, was the way I [live] here at home. Because what matters is what happens in your home, in your family.” **And what has changed in your family since you left Bolivia?** “When I arrived here I was like all of my family who stayed there. Today I think I'm different. My marriage has changed. I don't see everything and stay quiet like I used to.” **And is this what makes you feel different?** “Of course! Today everything has changed. I work as much as before. I get just as tired, even more. I can give my boys chances that I didn't know. And they also have changed. The way they treat me is different from the way the children there treat their mothers and grandmothers. We didn't even care! But my husband... this one yes! He is the one who has changed the most. Today he has to... How do you say? Today he has to accept me as I am!”¹³

Contestation & Celebration

Decolonial and postcolonial theories offer a system of languages for and by those who had their knowledge, their voices and their stories silenced, which were “told” by the center-empire¹⁴. Here, we use the concepts of center and margin to demonstrate the ambivalence of the

13 PERES, 2014, p. 149-150.

14 YOUNG, Robert J. C. What is the Postcolonial? *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature, Canada*, v. 40, n. 1, p. 13-25, 2009. p. 12.

power relations that will be discussed. They are usually identified in two categories: i) spatial marginality – with geographic and physical focus in relation to the distance from the center; ii) social marginality – which concerns the human dimensions of culture, gender, sexuality, religion, social class, age, etc. We understand that there are three aspects of margins: 1) they are a constructed space; 2) they are a space for contestation; 3) they are a space for celebration

Women and girls face cumulative layers of discrimination: as women, as migrants and as unprotected workers. At worst, their vulnerabilities include increased exposure to exploitation, sexual, physical and psychological abuse, violence, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, human trafficking and contemporary forms of slavery.

The identities of immigrant women intersect and are intertwined, we could say that the identities of women in a refuge-migration situation is the in-between-place: “These ‘in-between-places’ provide the ground for the elaboration of subjectivation strategies – singular or collective – which initiate new signs of identities and innovative positions of elaboration and contestation”¹⁵. It is in the in-between-places that negotiations take place, negotiations that go beyond the logic within the denial of the Other. It is in border places that the changes take place. For Daniel Souza “In this relationship on the border, the dialoguers encounter strategies of interaction/negotiation and subversion, in which

identities/centers are reviewed, reconstructed and criticized from the margin”¹⁶.

The borders reveal understandings of humanity and life that are closer than they really are. Power and knowledge will remain untouchable as universal and global if borders are not considered. They are the ones that allow for a reordering of meanings, as they bring together the differences that intersect and articulate in human and social relations.¹⁷

This space for contestation implies questioning the identities, practices and values imposed by the center, by “normalization”. In this sense, when it comes to sexuality, the important task is to separate the constructions of sex, gender and sexuality and investigate how sexuality is shaped through the lenses of heteronormativity. Suspicion of Ruth and Naomi is necessary, their relationship is called into question by feminist theologians. We cannot forget the trans women who also suffer in the migration situation, and are often expelled, raped in the process.

And it is in this complicity between women that we should get to know Santa Mala, a Bolivian female hip hop group in São Paulo, Brazil. With a chola style of rap and fashion, this group is crossing all kinds of borders. The sorority of three sisters from La Paz, Jenny, Pamela and Abigail Llanque, become symbols that speak of the Bolivian female

15 BHABHA, Homi. *O local da cultura*. 2. ed. Tradução de Myriam Ávila, Eliana Lourenço de L. Reis e Gláucia R. Gonçalves. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2013. p. 20.

16 SOUZA, Daniel. Por trilhas e rumos ecumênicos: alguns caminhos para o diálogo inter-religioso. In: SOUZA, Daniel; CARDOSO, Nancy. *Ecumenismo: um grão de salvação escondido nas coisas do mundo*. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2014. p. 111.

17 RIBEIRO, Claudio de Oliveira. “Fronteiras”, “entre-lugares” e lógica plural: a contribuição dos estudos culturais de Homi Bhabha para o método teológico. *Estudos de Religião*, São Bernardo do Campo, v. 26, n. 43, p. 12-24, 2012, p. 18.

experience in Brazil and in the culture of Latin American hip hop. Their song, “Raza”, talks about their native Bolivian pride and colonial conditions. The strong music, with lyrics that address everyday issues of immigration, are part of the Bolivian diaspora in Brazil and sheds light on the inter-regional migration within South America.

São Paulo is the largest destination for Bolivian immigrants in Brazil, with a population of 80,000 to 150,000 Bolivians today. In the 1950s, many migrated to Brazil for educational, economic and political reasons. The 1980 wave of Bolivian immigration consisted of many young women and men seeking the promise of better wages in São Paulo. Although they came from different parts of Bolivia, most came from rural sectors like Cochabamba. In the mid-1990s, there was a strong Bolivian presence in São Paulo, with many neighborhoods – such as Bom Retiro, Brás and Pari – prominently Bolivian and keeping their culture alive.

With more than 50% of Bolivian immigrants in Brazil being women, Santa Mala and its strong identity with culture and hip hop is a testament to this narrative of inter-regional migration. Santa Mala itself suffered unfair treatment in the clothing industry. After understanding the market, they decided to make their own clothes to sell without working for anyone else. By creating connections in the South American hip hop community, Santa Mala promised to retrieve that narrative and make it their own through their music, networking and even clothing.

It is in everyday life that relationships are established, that pain appears, that negotiations occur and, also, that celebrations and joy overflow in the midst of chaos. The margins, as a space for celebration,

do not represent the exaltation of the condition of the marginal, but rather the celebration as resistance to dominant discourses and their subversion, challenging hegemony and presenting alternative views of life as marginal. Abigail tells about the construction of the lyrics in an interview with Verônica Raner for an article for *Hypeness*: “We talk about everything: about what we live, about what we see from other families, about what we think. Rap is based on free expression. It has a free style. We are free to protest and to speak our feelings. Inspiration comes from what we feel”¹⁸.

Hip Hop as art, a feminist art of resistance, of the re-existence of new paths, blurring borders, transcending them and breaking, with its strong lyrics and powerful rhythm, the machismos found in the trajectories, including within hip hop itself. Hip hop, since its development in Brazil, from the 1980s onwards, has been a space of dispute for women to put their movement into play. Rapper Issa Paz, who makes a sound with lyrics that exalt multiple bodies and the women who came before her, says: “There is a very strong machismo, which belongs to society, but in rap it is quite rooted, because the songs since the beginning were always very sexist”, highlights Issa¹⁹.

18 RANER, Verônica. Santa Mala: as irmãs imigrantes da Bolívia que querem fortalecer as mulheres do rap em SP. *Hypeness*, 23 dez. 2020. Available at: <https://www.hypeness.com.br/2020/12/santa-mala-as-irmas-imigrantes-da-bolivia-que-querem-fortalecer-as-mulheres-do-rap-em-sp/>. Accessed on: July 14, 2021.

19 FACULDADE CÁSPER LÍBERO. *As minas das rimas: o universo feminino dentro da cultura hip hop*: Reportagem sobre mulheres e a cultura hip hop. São Paulo, 13 Jan. 2015. Available at: <https://casperlibero.edu.br/revista-arruaca/minas-das-rimas-o-universo-feminino-dentro-da-cultura-hip-hop/>. Accessed on: July 19, 2021.

A non-white, non-westernized feminism that seeks to universalize what it means to be a woman is built on the letters and experiences of migrants from Santa Mala. Other women, like Negramone, who sings from the struggle of black women says:

This local feminist we can say that we, as youth, as women, it exists, but [...] understanding its diversities, understanding [...] how we want feminism. It's not universal, it's like Hip Hop. The Hip Hop movement is not universal within a racial, social justice policy. It exists in its diversities, it has its other strands of philosophy as well as feminism, got it? That's why people are directing towards that local feminism, that local movement, but dialoguing with this national and international diversity and understanding this diversity.²⁰

When one talks about art from women's experiences, it is important to mention that the expression "woman's experience" is far from the universalizing experience of women based on white feminism that covers the privileges of class and race in Latin America. The second point is the word feminism, in this project, must be understood in the context of Abya Yala; it is not a reference to a white hegemonic feminism, but an intersectional feminism that is intertwined with class, race, gender, sexuality, and geopolitics. We intend to build the idea of "decolonial feminism", a term coined by Argentine scholar Marías Lugones. Jenny, a member of Santa Mala, inspires us saying:

It's very important to have women rap. Because every female rapper is also a mother, wife... We have many roles in life and that is very strong. We want to show that women were not created to stay at home

and do the dishes. We want to empower women. We are already mothers and sometimes they think we don't have anything else to do in life, but it's not like that at all. We want to show that women can do it all. We continue crying out, in strength, in the fight. Because, to be a woman, you have to be strong, with a lot of struggle. The path is still slow, but we want to continue our journey following the dream.²¹

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TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES OF DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT WITH GENDER JUSTICE: CONTRIBUTIONS OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS¹

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened inequalities in Brazil, intensified by the development model based on unlimited economic growth, exploitation of working people, violation of rights,

and destruction of natural assets. The process of labor precarization has deepened, economic, social, gender, and racial inequalities have increased, and a growing contingent lives in food insecurity and below the poverty line. In this context, fundamentalisms are very strong, deepening violence, attacking defenders of rights, promoting a culture of hate, perpetuating misogyny, sexism, and racism. This context highlights the need for reflection, debate, and construction of models of society

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Panel “Democratic Institutional Management with Gender Justice”. Translated by Cesar Souza Barbato. Reviewed by Marie Krahn. This text was originally published in the Dossier “Solidarity Economy, Democratic Management, Gender Justice”, of the magazine Gender Stuff. See in: ZEELAND, Angelique J. W. M. van; GIERUS, Renate. Transformative experiences of democratic management with gender justice: Contributions from faith-based organizations. *Coisas do Gênero*, São Leopoldo, v. 7, n. 2, p. 36-45, jul./dez. 2021. Available at: <http://revistas.est.edu.br/index.php/genero/article/view/1383>. Accessed on: 31 Mar. 22.

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capable of ensuring the fullness of life for all beings on the planet. As well as the need to reflect on ways to ensure the full and effective participation of all people, especially women, with equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes in political, economic, and public life at all levels, as guided by the Sustainable Development Goal, SDG 5. Concrete experiences and practices of democratic management with gender justice can result in processes of social transformation.

This article presents transformative experiences of democratic management with gender justice developed and supported by faith-based organizations (FBOs). The specificity of FBOs and the terms diakonia and transformative development are presented. Taking the debates on democratic management and gender justice as a basis, the objective of the article is to understand the contribution of FBOs in promoting democratic management with gender justice at the institutional level and in networks and grassroots groups. Based on experiences and practices developed and supported by the Lutheran Diakonia Foundation (FLD), strategies adopted and lessons learned are identified. Democratic management with gender justice from an institutional perspective discusses the importance of institutional policies and practices such as parity in councils. The practices of grassroots groups and solidarity-based economic enterprises, supported by FLD's Small Projects Program and articulated in networks, point to ways to deepen democratic management with gender justice. The monitoring of these practices led to the elaboration of the FLD's concept of democratic management with gender justice, a concept that is subject to updates as a result of new learning. The article concludes with considerations on challenges and learnings of democratic management with gender justice for faith-based organizations.

Diakonia and transformative development from the perspective of faith-based organizations

FBOs are organizations based on the core values of their faith and are heterogeneous and complex⁴. The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities uses the term FBOs for “entities that are self-defined by a religiously informed common profession (faith) and practice (ethics), their congenital and community leadership and infrastructure, as well as for faith-linked health care providers and NGOs”⁵. Faith narratives help to offer a language rooted in values of their faith, in relation to the dignity of creation. FBOs fulfill their function in society from their religious understanding, which dialogues with the human rights discourse. Kuss and Bencke state that “the characteristic that has marked the Brazilian ecumenical trajectory is the commitment to the promotion of human rights”⁶.

4 ZEELAND, Angélique J. W. M. van. Transformational development in a changing context: A Latin American perspective. *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies*, v. 72, n. 4, 2016a. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3520>.

5 JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE ON FAITH AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES (JLIFLC). *Building more effective partnerships between public sector and faith groups*. 2015, p. 2. Available at: <http://jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/NEWBuilding-more-effective-partnerships-between-public-sector-and-faith-groups-1.pdf>. Accessed on: 8 Nov. 2021.

6 KUSS, Cibele; BENCKE, Romi M. Ecumenismo e cooperação inter-religiosa na diakonia transformadora. In: KUSS, Cibele (org.). *Fé, justiça de gênero e incidência pública: 500 anos da Reforma e Diaconia Transformadora*. Porto Alegre: Fundação Luterana de Diaconia, 2017, p. 81. Available at: <https://fld.com.br/publicacao/fe-justica-de-genero-e-incidencia-publica-500-anos-da-reforma-e-diaconia-transformadora/>. Accessed on: 10 Nov. 2021.

The current development model, based on unlimited economic growth that generates poverty, inequality, violence, and degradation of natural resources, has been questioned. Raworth points out that the focus should be on ensuring the human rights of every person within the means of our planet and not on economic growth⁷. The FBOs adhere to development as a comprehensive concept, focused on a human rights-based approach. The document “Our Understanding of Development” states the ACT Alliance’s understanding of transformative development⁸. “Transformative development originates in the theological affirmation that all people are created in the image of God, with the right and ability to live just, humane and dignified lives in sustainable communities”⁹.

Many FBOs of Christian faith, use the term diakonia, ecumenical diakonia or transformative diakonia. According to Nordstokke there is a demand for “an appropriate terminology in order to express the distinctive nature of these actors as a distinct type of faith-based organization and at the same time express the distinctive character of their action”¹⁰. The work of Christian FBOs can be characterized as institutional diakonia, a diakonia that goes beyond the work in Christian communities, expanding into society. In this way, it requires involvement

in confronting the violence and violations of rights present in the context. Menezes and Aguiar present the different dimensions of diakonia:

The practical dimension is guided by concrete actions of care and attention to people. The prophetic dimension involves the denunciation of violations and the announcement of perspectives for overcoming them. The ecumenical dimension is permeated by respectful dialogue and joint action with diverse religious organizations. The liberating dimension is committed to processes that promote autonomy and empowerment. The political dimension involves acting in the field of public advocacy and social control.¹¹

The performance from the different dimensions of the diakonia and its interconnections can trigger processes of transformation of the contexts.

Democratic management and gender justice from the perspective of faith-based organizations

FBOs work in the defense of rights and in the promotion of social transformation processes. A fundamental aspect of transformative diakonia is to increase the full and effective participation of people, especially women, in decision-making, which is a pedagogical process. The support of FBOs through processes of formation, training, organizational support, and access to resources strengthens grassroots

7 RAWORTH, Kate. *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. London: Random House Business Books, 2017. p. 25.

8 The ACT Alliance is made up of over 140 FBOs in over 120 countries committed to working ecumenically in the areas of humanitarian relief, development and advocacy.

9 ACT ALLIANCE. *Our Understanding of Development*. Geneva: ACT, 2013. p. 1. Available at: <https://actalliance.org/documents/our-understanding-of-development/>. Accessed on: 8 Nov. 2021.

10 NORDSTOKKE, Kjell. Ecumenical diakonia: Responding to the signs of the times. *Ecumenical Review*, v. 66, n. 3, 2014. p. 271.

11 MENEZES, Marilu N.; AGUIAR, Rogério O. Diaconia institucional em movimentos de reforma. In: KUSS, Cibele (org.). *Fé, justiça de gênero e incidência pública: 500 anos da Reforma e Diaconia Transformadora*. Porto Alegre: Fundação Luterana de Diaconia, 2017. p. 97.

groups. But only concrete practices of collective decision making and engagement in collective action result in collective agency and solidarity. Mukherjee emphasizes that building bonds of solidarity in groups takes time, involves shared costs and risks, and can only be achieved by exercising the practice of democratic management and shared responsibility¹². Democratic management implies that people make decisions and deliberate collectively about organizational processes.

A research carried out in solidarity economic enterprises of recyclable waste pickers in Rio Grande do Sul has demonstrated the potential of the exercise of democratic management as a learning process. The research showed that when the solidarity-based economic enterprises reach a certain level of democratic management, they prioritize policies for valuing work and, in many cases, assume a leadership role through community engagement and participation in spaces for political and economic articulation, promoting internal and external democracy and influencing public policies. The results show that solidarity-based economic enterprises favor equity with regard to the remuneration of workers, with more equal pay for women and men, and for black and indigenous people and white people¹³.

Gender justice means balanced power relations between women and men. The Lutheran World Federation states “Gender Justice implies the protection and promotion of the dignity of women and men who, being created and made in the image of God, are co-responsible stewards of creation” and the importance of “eliminating the institutional, cultural, and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination”¹⁴. Hillenkamp and Nobre reinforce the importance of concrete experiences of gender justice, as a process based on solidarities that strengthen and expand based on common goals among groups of women, which can transform their place of action¹⁵. Concrete practices of democratic management with gender justice can result in processes of social transformation.

Gender justice is not an abstract concept, far from the realities of groups, institutions, projects. Gender justice is inserted in everyday life, it sees the reality of inequalities and injustices in gender relations and promotes equity, through action, based on reflection. And to perceive the inequalities and discriminations that affect women, it is necessary to take a deeper look at each person’s identity. This is permeated by several intersections, which Crenshaw calls intersectionality¹⁶. Therefore, gender needs to be understood in a breadth that encompasses its relationship with race, class, sexual orientation, age, territory, spirituality. Vulnerabilities,

12 MUKHERJEE-REED, Ananya. Taking solidarity seriously: analyzing Kerala’s Kudumbashree as a women’s SSE experiment. In: UTTING, Peter (Ed.). *Social and Solidarity Economy: Beyond the fringe?* London: Zed Books, 2015. p. 311.

13 ZEELAND, Angélique J. W. M. van. *Economia solidária e desenvolvimento humano: Um estudo da sustentabilidade de empreendimentos econômicos solidários e das condições de vida de catadoras e catadores de materiais recicláveis*. Tese (Doutorado em Economia do Desenvolvimento) – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2016b. p. 203.

14 LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION. *Gender Justice Policy*. Geneva: LWF, 2013. p. 7.

15 HILLENKAMP, I.; NOBRE, M. Agroecologia e feminismo no Vale do Ribeira: Contribuições para o debate sobre reprodução social. *Temáticas*, v. 26, n. 52, ago./dez. 2018. p. 188.

16 CRENSHAW, Kimberlé. Documento para o encontro de especialistas em aspectos da discriminação racial relativos ao gênero. *Estudos Feministas*, v. 1, ano 10, 1/2002. p. 177. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/ref/a/mbTpP4SFXPnJZ397j8fSBQQ/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Accessed on: 22 Nov. 2021.

oppression, and violence become evident, making reality and daily life complex, and, at the same time, being the spaces where transformations need to occur.

FLD's contributions to the debate on democratic management and gender justice

FLD is a confessional-based diaconal organization whose purpose is to promote transformative development sustained by gender justice and prophetic diakonia. It supports and accompanies the projects of organized groups of civil society through the Small Projects Program and the execution of projects and social assistance benefits. Annually, it supports around 60 projects in the areas of rights, economic justice, socio-environmental justice, diakonia, and humanitarian aid throughout Brazil. It is also active in the field of indigenous rights through the Council for Mission Among Indigenous Peoples, and in the field of agroecology and family agriculture through the Center for Support and Promotion of Agroecology. FLD has implemented democratic management with gender justice in the institutional perspective since its creation. The statute defines gender equality in the composition of governance bodies (the Deliberative Council, the Executive Board, and the Fiscal Council). Thus, it seeks to ensure the representation of 50% women and 50% men. In 2014, the Gender Justice Policy was approved as a normative and strategic document that implements gender justice as a cross-cutting criterion for all dimensions of the FLD's work and for all the projects it promotes or directly executes. The development of this policy was a two-year participative process, with the participation of representatives from

the Deliberative Council, the Executive Board, the Project Evaluation Commission, and the staff.

The Gender Justice Policy of the FLD aims to give visibility to its commitment to the construction of fair social relations, marked by political, diaconal and theological feminist reflection, to build and reflect, on a continuous basis, the support to social organizations and movements, the work with communities, parishes and synods of IECLB, the advocacy in the national and international ecumenical movement, as well as with the governmental spheres.¹⁷

Among the principles are the use of gender inclusive language, continuous formation and sensitization, support to women's protagonism and active promotion of men's involvement in gender justice, transversalization of the Policy, providing the opportunity for a representative balance between women and men in all areas of FLD, overcoming violence, with the development of initiatives to overcome domestic and gender violence, and adopting gender justice as a criterion for project analysis.

The democratic institutional management with gender justice is also materialized in the extended coordination, composed of the executive secretariat, programmatic coordination and administrative coordination, which since 2018 is carried out entirely by women, as well as in the moments of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PMA). The PMA are collective spaces for analysis, preparation and readjustment of planning and verification of results, and count on the participation of the

¹⁷ FUNDAÇÃO LUTERANA DE DIACONIA. *Política de Justiça de Gênero*. Porto Alegre: FLD, 2014. p. 13. Available at: <https://fld.com.br/publicacao/politica-de-justica-de-genero/>. Accessed on: 10 Nov. 2021.

entire team, programmatic and administrative, as well as participation of the executive board. In project and program planning, gender analysis defines outreach indicators for democratic management with gender justice. In 2021, a training process on Gender Justice as Institutional Policy was developed, with participants from the team, governance instances and from diaconal institutions of the Diakonia Network. The elaboration of the Political Pedagogical Project also began, with the involvement of the entire FLD-COMIN-CAPA team, in which the gender analysis and the principles of the Gender Justice Policy occupy an important space.

FLD's concept of democratic management with gender justice was formulated by the team, based on the execution, support, and monitoring of projects of networks, grassroots groups, civil society organizations, and social movements.

Democratic management with gender justice: includes collective processes of effective participation of women and men in strategic and daily decision making, in the definition of a set of commitments and rights and in the construction of wisdoms and knowledge, promoting fair and equal gender relations, generating balanced access to spaces of power and governance.

Transformative Experiences of Democratic Management with Gender Justice in the Small Projects Program

FLD's publication "Transformative Crossings in the Small Projects Program" demonstrates how support for small projects transforms the

lives of people and territories. Transformation takes place through and with the protagonism of people and groups who confront inequality, injustice, and violence. The publication addresses projects in the various thematic areas and their contribution to the defense of rights.

The economic justice area supports popular solidarity economy projects as a strategy for social transformation, committed to forms of fair production and exchange, associated work, fair trade, and responsible consumption. Between 2017 and 2019, projects of solidarity economic enterprises, women's collectives, popular solidarity economy forums and networks were supported. The analysis of reports from these projects showed the creation of new tools and mechanisms, advancing democratic management, such as, internal regulations, participatory diagnoses, economic viability plans, use of virtual platforms for meetings and management council. Most of the projects have contributed to the promotion of gender justice. Among the advances are the active participation of women in the coordination of the enterprises, forums, and networks, and in advocacy processes. The strengthening of sorority and economic autonomy were mentioned as strategies to confront domestic violence. In the supported projects, it is evident the importance of the effective participation of women in advocacy spaces, strengthening their autonomy and qualifying the processes of public policy formulation and social control, including agendas related to women's needs. As challenges, there is the need for training in accountability and to incorporate issues such as masculinities in the discussion about fair gender relations. The practice of collective management of the small project has in many cases resulted in a learning process that has unfolded in other spaces, such as the organization of fairs and management of the enterprises.

The cycle of training meetings on democratic management with gender justice with groups supported by the Small Projects Program, which began in 2021, has sought to contribute to the strengthening of project management. The process provides moments of dialogue about the management of projects executed and in progress, in the interface with the themes of gender justice and anti-racism, focusing on the intersectionality of the concept with race. It also seeks to reflect on the conditions for the implementation of democratic management processes with gender justice in the groups' performance spaces. In the path of transforming actions, the collective construction movements are important spaces for learning, exchanging, and sharing. The effective participation of the groups brings fundamental contributions to advance towards fair, inclusive, and participatory management processes. The meetings are held in partnership with the Center for Studies in Alternative Management of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

Management Councils as spaces for democratic management with gender justice: the experience of the Fair Trade Network

Transformative experiences of democratic management with gender justice are also found in the large projects executed and in the networks supported by the FLD, which have management groups or councils, such as the Diakonia Network and the Committee of Traditional Peoples and Communities of the Pampa. The management groups are made up of people representing institutions, groups, or enterprises that

are part of the project or network. The importance of the management councils can be demonstrated in the Fair Trade Network.

The Fair Trade Network was created in 2012 on the initiative of FLD, based on support from the Small Projects Program for solidarity economic enterprises. Currently, the Network is made up of 40 enterprises, mostly made up of women, working in the segments of Food, Crafts, Clothing, Recycling and Services in the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Paraná. The Network seeks the qualification of the enterprises and aims to establish relationships of trust among enterprises, consumers and institutions, mainly in the context of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), for the promotion of fair trade and responsible consumption. The management of the Network is done by the managing council, composed of representatives of the productive segments, chosen in the general meetings of the Network. The managing council meets at least four times a year for planning, monitoring and evaluation of the Network's actions. In 2015, the Network's internal regulations were approved, which were prepared by the management council, debated and approved at the general meeting of the enterprises, and guide the Network's operation. At the Network's general meeting in September 2018, the Just and Solidarity Fund and its internal regulations were discussed and approved. The Fund aims to strengthen the organicity and sustainability of the Network and support commercialization actions.

The Coronavirus pandemic presented many challenges for the management of the Just and Solidarity Trade Network. The possibilities for commercializing the enterprises' products and services were greatly reduced; fairs were cancelled and stores were

closed. The income of the families decreased drastically. The women of the management council were proactive in raising the needs and demands of the people from the enterprises and proposing new actions, such as the distribution of food baskets to the people most vulnerable to the pandemic, the creation of an Emergency Fund, collective purchasing of supplies, an online marketing course, a virtual psychosocial support group, and the organization of virtual fairs. The baskets were produced by family farming and agro-ecological organizations, and the masks by solidarity economy enterprises. The new actions carried out met the needs of people and their families, strengthened the sustainability of the enterprises, and prevented situations of hunger and food insecurity. The collective management of the women in the management council has strengthened the solidarity and relevance of the Fair Trade Network.

Final considerations

This article has presented contributions to the debate about democratic management with gender justice, from the perspective of FBOs. FBOs have had more visibility as organizations that act in the promotion of transformative development and in the defense of rights. The current political, economic, and social context, with increasing inequalities, hunger, violence, and rights violations, poses great challenges for FBOs to affirm their actions in defense of rights, democracy, and gender justice.

FLD's experience in democratic institutional management with gender justice shows the importance of gender equity in the

instances of governance and participative processes of elaboration and implementation of institutional policies, such as the Gender Justice Policy, as well as pedagogical processes, to promote transformations in all areas of the institution, programs and projects executed, and groups supported. Other lessons learned are that the shared management of projects by grassroots groups with the full participation of women is an effective tool for strengthening the democratic management with gender justice, and that the management councils are spaces that provide empowerment and protagonism of women.

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A THEOLOGY OF CREATIVITY FOR (RE)CREATING MASCULINITY¹

Chad M. Rimmer²

Introduction

It is a distinct privilege to be asked to present this paper for the Seventh Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion, under the theme, Courage, Creativity, Hope. For this round table on masculinity, I will focus on the topic of creativity. I trust this will contribute to our Hope for transforming masculinity, and Courage to do so. But, the paper that I wrote focuses on the role of Creativity in shaping positive masculinity. The paper begins with some biological observations from the field of

behavioural ecology in order to make the case that creativity is part of our nature, which properly channelled promotes non-violence. Secondly, I will sketch a theological frame for understanding creativity as part of our theological anthropology, in order to finally propose creation spirituality as a basis for developing positive masculinity.

Natural creativity: “Why some animals are becoming nicer”

I begin with a question. Can men give birth?

This may sound a silly question if asked from a biological perspective. We would respond correctly that (*dysmorphia, intersexuality and other physiological or morphological realities notwithstanding*) the

¹ Lecture presented at the Thematic Table “Masculinities and gender justice to hope”. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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only biologically male creatures that give birth are seahorses. Inverting the process of sexual reproduction, it is the male who receives an egg from the female, which is fertilized and impregnated within the male body that nurtures and gives birth to its brood.

But if we broaden the concept of *giving birth*, we may arrive at a different set of possible responses. Across many species of various phyla within the animal kingdom, there are multiple examples of males who display life-giving creativity in the process of birthing. Some of the most interesting examples are found within the class of birds. I have sat in groves of Sénégal watching male weavers build intricate nests that are not only practical for securing a clutch of chicks, but are beautiful works of art. And these nests are not there to simply attract females. Once the eggs are laid, the males incubate and raise their chicks until they fledge. The same goes for the American Greater Rhea, the Grey Headed Albatross, and the Emperor Penguin who is the male perhaps most committed to safeguarding birth.

So, if we broaden the definition of “giving birth” to include life-giving creativity, then perhaps we can rethink our response to the question, can men give birth?

From the perspective of evolutionary biology, some may argue that aesthetic displays of beauty and creativity are “naturally” determined behaviours that are selected for their capacity to transmit genes. It is true that some secondary sex characteristics such as feathers or behavioural displays designed to attract mates are phenotypic expressions of genes or epigenetic behaviours. But many of these behaviours are not genetically determined. Many male behaviours represent innovative, imaginative acts of creativity. Recent studies have begun to show that there is a

neurobiological aspect to creativity as culture in more-than-human animals³. Not only are spontaneous acts of creativity and aesthetics observable across the animal kingdom, but evolutionary biologists and behavioural ecologists are realizing that creative behaviour is not evolved due to natural selection, but on the contrary, many natural creative behaviours are the driver of evolutionary change among wild populations of mammals and birds⁴. Bonobos (*relatives of the chimpanzees*) are one example of animals who naturally experiment with creative, non-violent methods of maintaining social cohesion⁵. In the case of the Bonobos, creative behaviours can emerge within a single generational cohort of males, who transmit that learned creativity to their male children. Transmission of learned behaviours is the definition of culture. In other words, Bonobos (*like many other species*) have a culture of creativity that

3 KAUFMAN, Allison B. *et al.* Towards a neurobiology of creativity in nonhuman animals. *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, Washington, v. 125, n. 3, p. 255-272, 2011. DOI: 10.1037/a0023147.

4 MANRIQUE, Héctor Marín; VÖLTER, Christoph J.; CALL, Josep. Repeated innovation in great apes. *Animal Behaviour*, v. 85, n. 1, p. 195-202, 2013.; SAPOLSKY, Robert M.; SHARE, Lisa J. A Pacific Culture among Wild Baboons: Its Emergence and Transmission. *PLOS Biology*, San Francisco; Cambridge, v. 2, n. 4, E106, 2004. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pbio.0020106.; EMERGENCE of a Peaceful Culture in Wild Baboons. *PLOS Biology*, San Francisco; Cambridge, v. 2, n. 4, e124, 2004. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pbio.0020124.; LEFEBVRE, Louis; DUCATEZ, Simon; AUDET, Jean-Nicolas. Feeding innovations in a nested phylogeny of Neotropical passerines. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B.*, v. 371, n. 1690, 2016. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0188>.

5 It is always tempting to focus on the agonistic reasons for non-violence, and no doubt males who behave in non-violent ways have something to gain from improved social stability within a matriarchal society like Bonobos. Sociologists and anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss are quick to demonstrate that even in gift economies that replace war with non-violent gift economies, non-violent means of relating to one another can be self-serving and therefore not altruistic.

imaginatively experiments and intentionally adapts masculine behaviour from one generation to the next to maintain peace and social cohesion.

A recent article summarizing this long-studied phenomenon of “self-domestication” in wild populations was titled “Why Some Animals Are Becoming Nicer”⁶. This title could well serve as a slogan for the creation of positive masculinities among more-than-human creatures. Biologists and behavioural ecologists are beginning to affirm the cultural value of natural creativity. The presence of a natural culture of creativity as the means to reduce violence and improve the quality of life should problematize the popular notion of nature as being “red in tooth and claw”, and point us to the ecological truth that mutuality, cooperative relationships even between species drive evolutionary change. Interestingly, Darwin never committed to a theory about the actual mechanism of “natural selection”. Those who developed Darwin’s theory adopted Malthus’ economic theory of resource competition to explain how individual physical traits provided adaptive advantages. However, these theories overestimated the role that competition, and therefore violence, play in increasing biological fitness. When Darwin’s theory of descent with modification was uncritically mapped onto the Aristotelian idea of a great chain of being, a pseudo-biological economic and political theory about competitive, agonistic and violent behaviours that come “naturally” to male individuals and society as a whole was

born. This kind of “Social Darwinism” was never more than a racist and misogynistic attempt to justify androcentric ideas at their most basic level and justify ethno-nationalist projects of colonialism and genocide at their most systemically sophisticated levels. But this theory of the competitive “survival of the fittest” was not even settled in Darwin’s age.

Russian anthropologist Peter Kropotkin’s theory of *Mutual Aid* demonstrated that creative cooperation was the actual mechanism that drove evolution. European and American philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Alfred North Whitehead, and Merleau-Ponty were already attempting to correct the prevailing materialist perspective with the idea that creativity was the dynamism for sustaining life. Today, process theologians and phenomenologists are finding resonance with many wisdom traditions and the natural sciences in support of an open systems theory of life. These ecological, relational models of cosmogenesis are slowly correcting the theory of survival of the fittest as the “natural” mechanism of evolution. When the scientific gaze is widened from individual organisms or family systems to whole ecologies, we see that mutuality and interdependence are the *dynamism* of the emergence of new ways of life. Creativity is slowly being recognized as the source of sustaining ecologies of life⁷. So, if more-than-human creatures possess “natural” creativity to adapt their cultures of masculinity, what potential lies in claiming creativity as a “natural” part of human masculinity? Reclaiming creativity as a “natural” part of masculinity is a means to re-form gender norms in human culture.

6 KEIM, Brandon. Why Some Wild Animals Are Becoming Nicer. *Wired*, Feb. 7, 2012. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2012/02/self-domestication/>. Access in: 25 Aug. 2021. Frans de Waal has supported this thesis with decades of research on primates, including Bonobos. See de Waal’s work in *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, *Peacemaking among Primates*, *Natural Conflict Resolution*, and *Le Bonobo, Dieu et Nous*.

7 The concept of open systems has been the cornerstone of process philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead, and process theologians John Cobb, Sallie McFague, as well as ecotheologians of several religious traditions.

Via Creativa: a theological frame for creativity

Mexican-American José Arguelles wrote, “when a man is deprived of the power of expression, he will express himself in a drive for power.”⁸ There is a simple psychological truth to this claim that men need to express themselves creatively. For far too long, human being and masculinity in particular have been associated with left brain analytical cognition, instead of right brain creativity. Carl Jung recognized that every human being needs to be creative in order to integrate the known side of oneself with one’s shadow side. Integration unlocks the “cramp of consciousness” that emotionally and intellectually traps people in tragic or unhealthy modes of self-expression. Arguelles rightly intuits that violence is one such tragic expression of human creativity. Where creative outlets are denied or inaccessible for reasons due to psychological or cultural pressure, human agency may be expressed in domineering or violent ways. Hegemonic masculinity has traditionally exerted such psychological and cultural pressure for men to be rational and suppress creativity or emotion. The denial or absence of feeling, *eros* or creativity is asceticism. Carol Christ has observed that asceticism tends to be associated with male spirituality, and largely absent in the spirituality of women⁹. Of course ascetic spiritual practices of *via negativa* are wonderfully fruitful for periods of time such as fasting during liturgical seasons or for health and ecological reasons. But the long term repression of natural creativity and embodied impulses towards expressions of beauty will have negative psychological and sociological impacts. As

8 ARGUELLES, José A. *The Transformative Vision*. Berkley: Shambhala, 1975.

9 CHRIST, Carol. *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1980. p. 17.

Arguelles says, when men are deprived of the opportunity to express their natural creative power in constructive ways, they may tragically express a drive for power that sees violence as an alternative, including sexual and gender based violence.

In order to channel our natural creative energy, men need to practice the opposite of asceticism. The opposite of ascetic is aesthetic. Matthew Fox refers to the path of aesthetic creativity as *via creativa*¹⁰. Rooted in the Trinitarian economy of Divine creativity, the *via creativa* orients us towards a theological ground for understanding this natural creativity.

Theologically, the Holy Trinity has two basic movements: creation and reconciliation. For this essay, let us bracket the ministry of reconciliation that was begun when the creative Word became flesh in Christ Jesus and continues through the church by God’s Spirit, and let us focus on the creative movement of God. The ecumenical creeds and the witness of the Bible both begin with the profession of God as creator. Eckhart famously wrote, “What does God do all day long? God gives birth. From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth.”¹¹ Notice the reference not only to creation, but continual creation (*creatia continua*). The Trinity is a life-giving ecology. The communion of love (*perichoresis*) is the divine energy (*dynamis*) that creates life, which sustains and renews relationships that in turn create new, emergent life. According to philosophers from Heraclitus in ancient Greece to Alfred North Whitehead and Joanna Macy, including process theologians of the Christian tradition such as John Cobb, Sallie McFague, Rosemary

10 FOX, Matthew. *Original Blessing*. New York: Tarcher, 2000. p. 175.

11 FOX, 2000, p. 220.

Radford Reuther, *et.al.*, creativity is the ground for a faithful theology about the divine power of God as Creator and therefore cosmogenesis as such. But creativity is also the ground for theological anthropology.

Many theological treatises have been written on the nature of the image and likeness of God that human beings bear. Fox sees the *via creativa* as “the image of God, the image of the Creator, coming alive and expressing its divine depths and divine fruitfulness.” Therefore, Fox continues, “It is our creativity which is the full meaning of humanity’s being an image of God.”¹² The letter to the Ephesians affirms creativity as the image of God that we bear in the world, stating “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works”¹³. Notice that in this particular passage, the Christological claim is not soteriologically related to our fall and redemption. Rather, Jesus closes the circle of creation theology between God and human beings. In other words, the passage does not merely say that humans need to be redeemed by Christ in order to do good works, but rather, we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works”. Ephesians 2:10 is a reference to the Cosmic Christ, the creative Word of God who (*not merely redeems us from an original sin, but*) created us as the artwork of God, to bear that creative image to the world through our aesthetic creativity.

Claude Tresmontant points to this connection between creation theology and theological anthropology when he writes, “God’s method, the only method [God’s] love would allow, is to create a being that might create himself (*sic*) in order truly to become God, a being in the image

and after the likeness of the Creator.”¹⁴ Or as Dorothy Day put it, “God is our Creator. God made us in His (*sic*) image and likeness. Therefore, we are creators... The joy of creativeness should be ours.”¹⁵

In the course of outlining aesthetic creativity as a fundamental theological anthropology for being fully human, Fox writes that whether we are talking about the plastic/visual arts, literature or poetry, music, building, cooking or love-making, any creativity is “the [creative Word] erupting out of humanity’s imagination.” He calls it “the power of birth itself”¹⁶. Fox recalls us to the mystic Meister Eckhart who wrote, “The soul among all creatures is generative like God is.”¹⁷

Most mystics, particularly Julian of Norwich, Hildegard von Bingen and Mechtild of Magdeburg, are replete with aesthetic and erotic images of Divine creativity. Even their writings about creativity were beautifully, creative works in an age of scholasticism when women were not counted among those who produce theology. However, in order to stick with masculinity as the scope of this essay, I want to stay with Meister Eckhart precisely because he is a man who affirmed that the soul among all creatures (*including the animals with whom I opened this essay*) is generative like God is. Taking the *via creativa* as the image of God that we bear provides us with a theological response to the question, “Can men give birth?”

Meister Eckhart answers with a resounding “yes”. Eckhart records the following dream: “I once had a dream in which I, even though a man,

12 FOX, 2000, p. 175.

13 Ephesians 2:10.

14 TRESEMONT, 1960 *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 179.

15 DAY, 1952 *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 179.

16 FOX, 2000, p. 175.

17 FOX, 2000, p. 178.

was pregnant like a woman with child. I was pregnant with nothingness; and out of this nothingness, God was born.”¹⁸ Fox cites how Eckhart overcomes “excessive stereotypes” about sexuality, birth and gender, but also affirms that from a Christian perspective, birthing must be seen as part of masculinity, precisely because it is a fundamental aspect of being a human (*and a seahorse, evidently*). This is not to appropriate physical childbirth from the women, or the feminine. Rather, the aim is to ground any notion of masculinity in the human call to life-bearing *via creativa*. Just as the Earth and the seas have the generative capacity to “bring forth swarms of living creatures”, all human beings, including men, bear generative capacity to create life, either through biology or myriad poetic, artistic, emotional and relational capacities. The Cosmic Christ, *dynamis*, the Word of God can do no other but create in each human regardless of gender.

Eckhart writes, “We are all meant to be mothers of God. For God is always needing to be born.”¹⁹ Here he does not mean the literal sense of Mary as *Theotokos*. But Eckhart does not refer to Mary in a mere metaphorical sense. Rather, in a very real sense, he means we give birth to whatever the Word, the Spirit, the Trinity is bringing to bear in us. Eckhart exclaims in one sermon, “What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago and I do not also give birth to the son of God in my time and in my culture?”²⁰

18 ECKHART, Meister. *Sermons and Treatises*. Translated and edited by Maurice O’C. Walshe. London: Element Books, 1987. 1 v. p. 157-158 (Sermon 19).

19 FOX, 2000, p. 222.

20 FOX, 2000, p. 221.

When we participate in giving birth to the fruit of God’s creative Word we are blessed to be a blessing. He writes that in the course of birthing this fruit of the Spirit, “you will find all blessing. But neglect this birth and you neglect all blessing.” Whether for psychological or social reasons related to patriarchal or life-denying cultures (including hegemonic masculinity), Fox recalls Eckhart’s lament when we miss this human vocation to give birth to the creative fruit of God at work in us. He writes, “Is your heart troubled? Then you are not yet a mother. You are only on the way to giving birth. You are only near to birth.”²¹

Without any risk of making Mary into a metaphor, Rabbi Abraham Heschel affirms the literal sense of creativity as birthing when he writes:

No man [*sic*] is sterile. Every soul is pregnant with the seed of insight. It is vague and hidden. In some people the seed grows, in others it decays. Some give birth to life. Others miscarry it. Some know how to bear, to nurse, to rear and insight that comes into being. Others do not.²²

According to Alfred North Whitehead’s organic philosophy, the aim of the entire universe is to create beauty. He writes, “The teleology of the universe is directed to the production of Beauty.”²³ Creativity is the nature of God that grounds every human, and creativity is the end to which our becoming is motivated. Following Whitehead’s teleological intuition, Simone Weil writes “Beauty constitutes the only finality here below...Beauty is eternity here below.” From a Christian perspective,

21 FOX, 2000, p. 225.

22 HESCHEL, Abraham J. *The Insecurity of Freedom*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972. p. 125.

23 WHITEHEAD, 1967 *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 210.

William Blake wrote “A Poet, a painter, a musician and architect: the man or woman who is not one of these is not a Christian.”²⁴

Hildegard von Bingen once wrote that “Humankind, full of all creative possibilities, is God’s work. Humankind alone is called to assist God. Humankind is called to co-create. With nature’s help, humankind can set into creation all that is necessary and life-sustaining.”

In our current age of ecological crisis and a crisis in gender-based violence, there is perhaps no more urgent time to heed these words of Hildegard regarding our natural human capacity to co-create the conditions to sustain life. Yet, we know too well that cultures built on nihilism, capitalism, masochism, patriarchy or toxic forms of masculinity deny the creative, mothering *telos* towards which all people, including men, are called. Recalling the words of Arguelles, when human cultures deny men’s creative, aesthetic capacity to bear life, violence becomes the tragic expression of the inherent power that comes with the Divine image and likeness. A theology of creativity is critical to frame positive notions of masculinity, and liberate us from the captivity of death-dealing cultural forms of patriarchy and masculinity.

Thomas Merton affirmed that a “theology of creativity will necessarily be the theology of the Holy Spirit re-forming us in the likeness of Christ, raising us from death to life with the very same power which raised Christ from the dead. The theology of creativity will also be a theology of the image and the likeness of God in humanity.”²⁵ It is for this reason that Matthew Fox calls for the church, and I would add the Tradition as a whole, to take art seriously as spirituality. Not merely,

as he puts it, “art for the sake of art; nor for the sake of making banners or teapots; not art for sale.” But rather: “art as prayer, art as meditation. Only art as meditation allows one to let go of art as production à la capitalism and return to art as process, which is the spiritual experience that creativity is about.”²⁶

Creation spirituality: recovering the Green Man

By urging the church and the Tradition to return to art as prayer, worship and meditation, Fox calls us to implement a theology (*and theological anthropology*) of creativity through creation spirituality to channel our natural, God-given creative energy into life-giving processes. He does this masterfully in his book called, *The Hidden Spirituality of Men, Ten Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine*. Fox outlines ten archetypes of authentic masculinity that have existed within perennial wisdom traditions, Christianity included. Fox “uncovers” these archetypes as a way of re-storying masculinity across time and cultures. These archetypes defy attempts to define masculinity as binary, hetero-normative, rationalist, aggressive or violent. They resist formation through shame or domination. One of the archetypes that is thoroughly intertwined with the Christian tradition is the Green Man.

The Green Man is opposed to the domination of nature²⁷. This is the opposite of the narrative of masculinity as mastery of human nature as expressed in the discourse and experimental methods of

24 BLAKE *apud* ARGUELLES, 1975, p. 165.

25 MERTON, 1981 *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 230.

26 FOX, 2000, p. 192.

27 FOX, Matthew. *The Hidden Spirituality of Men: Ten Metaphors to Awaken the Sacred Masculine*. Novato, California: New World Library, 2008. p. 19.

scientific, medical and technological practices from Aristotle to Francis Bacon to modern extraction industries²⁸. Whether or not violence is specifically referenced, domination is predicated on the disenchantment of land, creatures and racialized or gendered bodies. Newton, Descartes, Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, and other philosophers all played a role in defining nature as material and dualistic. Through the intellectual respectability of the scientific revolution and the enlightenment, the mastery of nature was baptized into western Christianity. The fall and redemption narrative of theologians such as Augustine supported the idea that salvation included moral mastery of our human nature, particularly those aspects associated with the feminine. In the case of men, redemption implied a mastery of eros, the body and emotions through shame and aggression, relegating sexuality to the realm of either taboo or violence. Virility remained a masculine trait, and unsurprisingly remains an aspect of pornographic and sexual violence. Embodied traits related to fecundity were subordinated as feminine (*along with the role of the Holy Spirit*²⁹) in many North Atlantic cultures and ultimately became the objects of shame or sin. Remembering Arguelles' thesis, it is no wonder that a religion or spirituality that shames or represses natural expressions of emotion, embodied creativity, and soul-filled relationality with other creatures results in violence.

28 MERCHANT, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. New York, HarperOne, 1990.

29 MULENGA-KAUNDA, Mutale. 'Transformed and Freed?' African Pentecostalism, Women's Identity and the Subordinated Spirit. In: RIMMER, Chad M.; PETERSON, Cheryl M. (Eds.). *We Believe in the Holy Spirit: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities*. Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, under the auspices of The Lutheran World Federation, Leipzig, Germany, 2021. p. 37-47.

On the contrary, the Green Man is an image of one who relates to nature, and "the essence of nature within our own nature."³⁰ As outlined above, theologically speaking, Divine creativity and the creative *eros* that marks the *via creativa* is part of our own nature. It is the image and likeness of the Creator that all souls bear. Phenomenologically, wisdom traditions of people all over the world have maintained versions of this Truth in their culture and teachings. Fox recalls how many Indigenous traditions view plants as the wisest creatures, and sources of wisdom and life. They can eat the sun and nourish all other animals (including humans). Specifically, trees represent the *axis mundi*, or "sacred antennae" that connect "Father Sky" and "Mother Earth". In so doing, they do not create a hierarchy or duality between masculine and feminine, but rather connect them in nourishing, fruitful creativity that sustains life³¹.

This tradition runs deep within the Jewish and Christian traditions, and not only in the esoteric orders. The Tree of Life is the centre of the garden in the Hebrew narrative of creation ("J" source), as well as the teleological centre of creation as recorded in the 21st chapter of the Revelation to St. John. The Christian tradition features Jesus Christ as the vine that nurtures branches to create fruit. Jesus uses this Green Man metaphor to describe his soteriological role in reconciliation. The fruit of the vine became a sign in Eucharistic spirituality. In churches and cathedrals across Europe and the United Kingdom, religious art and gothic architecture that incorporated vines and plant life as decorative motifs including explicit images of the Green Man saw its apex around the twelfth century. The convergence of art, architecture and spirituality

30 FOX, 2008, p. 19.

31 FOX, 2008, p. 28-29.

is no coincidence. This was the age of mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg, Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, and Hildegard von Bingen.

Hildegard praised the “power that has been since all eternity, and that force and potentiality is green!” She called that greenness *viriditas*, or in Latin, *viriditas*. “*Viriditas* is the natural driving force toward healing and wholeness, the vital power that sustains all life’s greenness.”³² Centuries prior to the intricacies of the modern dualistic mind-body “hard problem”, Hildegard simply professes that *viriditas* is the “wetness” of the Holy Spirit that nourishes the soul to create fruit, as sap gives life to a tree that creates fruit. “Wetness” is the energy that greens life. Sin is associated with drying up. All the narratives and social or religious forces that deny creativity as part of being male (and channel that energy into violence) are sinful. They “dry up” the natural wetness that is the Spirit’s work to “green” the lives of men to nurture and sustain creativity. Creation spirituality for men (and women, of course) is therefore aimed at keeping our lives wet, green, fecund. But this spirituality is not reserved for the mystics among us. In fact, it is quite the contrary. All creative acts are part of a spirituality of life that produces beauty. Evelyn Underhill wrote, “The artist is no more and no less than a contemplative who has learned to express himself, and who tells his love in colour, speech or sound.”³³

But especially for men who are most at risk of being alienated from their wet, green capacity to express their love in colour, speech or sound, there is a need to redefine and democratize art. Japanese poet Kenji

Miyazawa believed that the “idea of ‘professional artist’ should be tossed away. Everyone should feel as an artist does. Everyone should be free to let his or her inner mind speak to her. And everyone is an artist when she does this.”³⁴ Eric Gill who was part of the Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the 19th century writes simply, “Every artist may not be a special type of person, but every person is a special kind of artist.”

A creation spirituality that is part of the *via creativa* that Matthew Fox promotes recognizes that all creativity, and indeed all work, participates in the imagination, caring and creativity that is the immanence of God’s Spirit in our daily lives.

Fox recalls the words of Chilean born psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo who wrote that “The street cleaner has to take his task of sweeping as the starting point for meditation.”³⁵ The task of the Church, and Christian traditions is to reclaim all aspects of daily life including art, work, sexuality, cooking, and family life, as potentially creative and therefore, opportunities to experience the holiness of creativity. Thomas Berry, who knew that our understanding of ecology is our functional cosmology wrote that even “gardening is an active participation in the deepest mysteries of the universe.”³⁶ Instead of interpreting the mundane daily tasks of being in the world as either profane acts that distract us from contemplation of the holy, or as shameful, which is the case with sexuality and care for the body, the Church and our various traditions must revive a creation spirituality that reclaims the holiness of daily life

32 BINGEN, Hildegard. *Scivias*. Brussels, 1978.

33 UNDERHILL, 1915 *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 230.

34 MIYAZAWA, [unpublished] *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 188.

35 NARANJO; ORNSTEIN, 1971 *apud* FOX, 2000, p. 188.

36 BERRY, Thomas. Our Children: Their Future. *The little magazine*, Bear & Company, v. 1, n. 10, 1982. p. 9.

as the aesthetic expression of being created human, from the humus of the Earth. Whether (hu)man or (hu)woman, a baptismal creation spirituality grafts our natural creative capacity to the vine of Divine power that animates us and keeps us wet. The alternative separates and leaves us to the dry sinfulness of tragic expressions of power that manifest in violence.

He finds hope in recovering the Green Man as a way to re-imagine masculinity, restoring it to its full, wet, green, holy creative potential. He writes, “The Green Man represents creativity and generativity, and so, he represents the vocation of the artist.” But even more radical than learning to become artists, Fox writes “We need such energy today in order to sustain our species and live in peace with the rest of nature. And in order to be men again.”³⁷

Conclusion

Returning to the question that began this essay, “Can men give birth?” It does not seem so silly anymore. The answer is, of course we can. In fact, we have to. It is in our nature as humans who bear the image of God to do so. The real question is, to what will those who identify as men give birth? The answer to that question is complicated. In the midst of cultural narratives and human made systems that attempt to shame men to conform to binary, mechanistic, and rationalistic cultures of asceticism, will men be servile to prevailing cultural mores and risk expressing violent forms of will to power? Or will men be courageous

enough to tap into our natural, God given capacity to create new cultures of creativity to transmit to our children?

Creation spirituality can be a source of cosmology, wisdom, and most significantly, liberation from forces and narratives that make us less than human, including hegemonic masculinities³⁸. To that end, the theme of this Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion is an opportunity to call the Churches of the Christian tradition to renew its commitment to nurture creation spirituality among men and provide opportunities to encourage men to follow the *via creativa* that animates the creative image of God that they bear as human beings. Recalling that Jesus is the cosmic Christ who created us to create, the Church has a wonderful promise to proclaim for our time. In baptism, we are grafted to the vine of the Divinely incarnate Green Man, the second Adam (*Earthling*), the firstborn of creation, so that we can bear fruit. Grafted to this vine, men can keep our creativity wet, and be encouraged to nurture our “natural” power to cultivate a positive, life-bearing masculinity. In so doing, men can join Eckhart and all the faithful men and women in giving birth to the Word of God in our time and in our culture.

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³⁷ FOX, 2008, p. 31.

³⁸ FOX, Matthew. *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth*. New York: HarperOne, 1991.

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THE POLITICAL BODY OF GOD:

BRIEF ESSAY ON IMAGES OF GOD AND THE IMAGES OF GOD CREATED BY DISSIDENT BODIES¹

Cris Serra²

First remarks

I begin this text by honoring the memory of Quelly da Silva, murdered in Campinas on January 20, 2019. Quelly da Silva, a transvestite woman, was killed on a Sunday night. After her death, she had her chest cut open with shards of glass and her heart ripped out by the criminal, who wrapped it in a cloth and hid it in her house. On the corpse, the killer left an image of Our Lady of Aparecida.

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Table “Gender relations and ecumenism as signs of hope”. Translated by Marlon Machado Oliveira Rio. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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I start with the memory of Quelly da Silva to evoke the bodies of all women, of all trans people, of all LGBTI+ people, of all sex and gender dissidents. Of all those whose experiences and expressions of gender escape the logic of norms, expectations and stereotypes, and who for that reason have their hearts ripped out and replaced by plaster saints, material or metaphorical – but no less real because of that.

We live in times of necropolitics; times filled with a lot of violence and a lot of death, and not just because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In these times we are going through, destructive forces are gaining power, which work to annihilate all otherness and all dissent from norms, to exterminate any threat of disobedience or subversion of social orders

and hierarchies that, as Gayle Rubin explains³, these standards set. Lesbian, trans, bisexual, pansexual, non-binary, gay, intersex bodies; bodies of women, blacks, indigenous, peripheral; old, fat, disabled bodies; colonized bodies, Latin Americans, Palestinians, Africans; migrant bodies, refugees, exiles, foreigners; and foreign bodies, bodies outside the norm, bodies constructed and read as dissidents, marginalized, excluded; vulnerable bodies, in short – these bodies are being systematically violated. Systematically decimated.

Forces have gained power that authorize and legitimize violence against these bodies, authorize and legitimize the perception that these bodies are “violable”. And, to a large extent, what makes these bodies “violable” is their construction and perception as bodies that are “others” – and, because they are “others”, they are considered inferior and less human – in relation to an ideal of a universal human subject. This ideal of the universal human subject, we know well, is masculine: it is “the Man”⁴. And every difference in relation to this universal ideal is constructed as inferiority and “less-humanity”, if not inhumanity. Violable bodies are those constructed as feminine and subaltern, passive and objectified; bodies subjugated and colonized by the desire and will of the subject “man” thus conceived.

So far, nothing new. Dehumanization based on the construction of otherness and differences has not arisen only now, in these times of escalating necropolitics, violence and death. Mara Viveros quotes Rita

Segato and Aníbal Quijano to remind us how the racialization, for example, of the native Americans and Africans converted them into “others”, allowed them to be attributed “another nature, indelible in the body”, and how this “imposed otherness” was a primordial artifact for colonial expropriation and subjugation⁵.

However, I started with the memory of Quelly da Silva, martyred in January 2019 (and through her, let us remember a multitude of subalternized and wounded bodies), not only to see how a Christian language, Christian symbols, liturgies, communities and aesthetics Christian beliefs have been used to legitimize, endorse, produce and perpetuate certain norms, orders and social hierarchies, certain ways of controlling and subjugating bodies and organizing and managing relationships. But also, and above all, to think about how, in these times we live, Christians and Christianity have been used as weapons of war to promote and multiply violence against bodies that dare to escape such norms and subalternization.

The concrete body of a Christian god

I invite you, who is reading me now, to evoke the images of a Christian god that are used to corroborate so much violence. Although he is a Christian, and is easily activated by actors from all points of the spectrum of Christianity, this powerful god works strategically also outside the religious field, of course. That’s why I’m going to write it like

3 RUBIN, Gayle S. Thinking sex: notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In: PARKER, Richard; AGGLETON, Peter (Eds.). *Culture, society and sexuality: a reader*. Londres/Nova York: Routledge, 2007 (1984). p. 150-187.

4 HARAWAY, Donna. Saberes localizados: A questão da ciência para o feminismo e o privilégio da perspectiva parcial. *Cedernos Pagu*, Campinas, n. 5, p.7-41, 1995.

5 SEGATO; QUIJANO *apud* VIVEROS, Mara. Los colores del antirracismo (en América Latina). *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 36, p. 19-34, dez. 2020, p. 22.

this: god, in lower case, because it's not about the Sacred here, but the idols that are made of him.

This god appears as apparently abstract and disembodied (despite the evident paradox, in light of the scandal of this Word made flesh). But only apparently; because the images of this god, those used to corroborate so much violence, are very clear. First, he is a man. And he is white (white like the Caucasian Christ, blond, blue-eyed). And cis-heterosexual. And generally distant. Often above us. More and more, a god of wrath. A war god, exterminator and genocide. Lord of the Army. A god who makes “a weapon” with his hand. A god at war – and a holy war.

It is quite evident which bodies are sacralized and enthroned by a god with such a body; and which are crushed and decimated. Donna Haraway⁶ calls this maneuver “God’s trick”: the creation of a supposedly abstract disembodied ideal, of a supposedly universal subject, which, in reality, is neither abstract nor universal. On the contrary: he is a very specific subject, who regulates, normalizes and frames bodies not sacralized by his own white and cis-heterosexual body, constructed as virile and masculine. Especially in Latin America, we have witnessed the power of this “universal” subject when fused into a body of a Christian god – a body of god made in the image and likeness of the colonizing binary cis-heterosexual white male; a body of god made in the image and likeness of a vertical, clericalist, authoritarian, totalitarian and anti-pluralist church.

We are before the body of a god created to measure for fascist projects of domination – no wonder Dorothee Sölle already in 1970

warned against the dangers of what she called “Christofascism”⁷. This universal subject-god is superimposed on a multitude of diverse bodies, which are thus amalgamated into an undifferentiated mass of “other” bodies, pushed to the margins, erased and crushed. It is an intrinsically violent and excluding body, and eminently political. Note: if we learn from the feminist maxim that our bodies are political, so is God’s body. The body of god is political because from it the world will be thought, organized and ordered. This is the body that informs us who will be the subject of primordial rights. This is the body that informs for whom public policies will be primarily thought, created and prioritized, as Angelica Tostes commented on the work that gave rise to this text.

The body of god is a project-body; it is a body that produces, reproduces and reflects values and ideals. And this body of a white male-cis-straight Christian god embodies specific worldviews, embodies specific projects of society and projects of power. This body of god provides images that support a certain social order and a very specific hierarchy of power, according to the naturalized patriarchal assumption that whoever is stronger must exercise power and authority over who is weaker, in bell hooks’ definition. It is a very well-defined way of organizing bodies and determining which bodies will live, which bodies will live well and abundantly, which bodies will live in precariousness,

⁶ HARAWAY, 1995.

⁷ Dorothee Sölle, a German liberation theologian, coined the term “Christofascism” in 1970 to refer to authoritarian, totalitarian and imperialist theologies, based on the establishment of an alleged moral authority by certain actors to justify organized violence on a large scale. They would have characterized not only the German Christianity under Nazism, but would remain alive and thriving in the theological scene at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. SÖLLE, Dorothee. *Beyond mere obedience: Reflections on a Christian Ethic for the Future*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970.

misery, subjected to violence, which bodies will suffer and which bodies will die, as described by Judith Butler⁸. This totalitarian, hierarchical and excluding perspective has very concrete political consequences.

The political danger of sacralizing and canonizing the projects of society born from the body of this god is that our theological horizons are narrowed. We learned from André Musskopf⁹ that the narrowing of our capacity for theological imagination leads to the narrowing of our political horizons, of our capacity for political imagination. It is not by chance that the category “imagination” is as dear to theology as it is to political science. It is about our ability and the possibility of imagining other worlds. Other forms, other social places, other representations. It is about our ability and the possibility of imagining and projecting new utopian horizons, that is, conceiving and imagining utopias that are horizons towards which to walk, towards which to build.

It is not by chance that this violent and destructive use of Christian discourse has as one of its central axes the source of “the Tradition”. With a definite article and a capital T, it is a supposedly singular, univocal, unequivocal and eternalized “order”, which intends to paralyze time in order to escape historical transformation. As if it were possible.

The message reinforced by the violence against bodies constructed as “others” is that not only is there no place in this world for these bodies, but there are no other places or other possible worlds. To be a body in this world, when one lives in a world made in the image and likeness of

that god made in the image and likeness of this world; to be a body in this world that was not created for that body is a very violent experience. The body of god, therefore, is very material. It has profoundly concrete and political effects on the organization of our lives, on the incarnation of our bodies, on the experiences of human relationships and social places in this world, and in this life.

Other bodies of god

But there are theologies and experiences of faith, of organization in community, derived from experiences of God, experiences of the divine, experiences of the sacred from different bodies; experiences of god incarnated in different bodies, especially in subaltern ones. Subalternized bodies like black bodies; bodies subalternized in gender orders and dissidents of the norms that intend to restrict and constrain human bodies to a heterosexual experience of sexuality and a cis-binary expression of gender; subalternized bodies like those of women¹⁰. And bodies socialized in family and community experiences of Christian churches; bodies present in ecclesiastical environments at all points of the Christian spectrum, inside and outside churches – because even bodies not inserted in communities can be, and are, crossed and marked by Christian experiences and imaginaries of God, faith and the sacred.

And these bodies, which are our bodies, occupy space. And it is from the materiality of our bodies that we say “we are”. We are here. We have always been – and no one has the authority to separate us

8 BUTLER, Judith. *Quadros de guerra: Quando a vida é passível de luto?* Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2018 (2009).

9 MUSSKOPF, André. *Via(da)gens teológicas: itinerários para uma teologia queer no Brasil*. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2012.

10 When we say “women”, let us be careful not to project the image of the white woman, or the cis-heterosexual-binary woman, as a universal woman.

from God, our faith, the Christ we follow, or our church. Because it was for freedom that Christ set us free, and no earthly authority has the power over us to alienate us from our faith, nor from God, nor from our experience of God in community, nor from our encounter with God in our bodies and in each other's bodies. We celebrate our lives, our beatitudes, the gifts and the divine that live in our human bodies, the gifts and the divine that we embody and bring to our people, to our communities. We are the body of Christ. In us, life is made. Ruah flows in us. The Word of God becomes flesh in us. Our bodies are sanctified by the God who became people. We make ourselves – we *create* ourselves – ecclesial subjects, political subjects, theological subjects. In these hard times, in the darkness that covers the earth, it is more than ever crucial that we walk together, strengthen ties, tear down walls, build bridges that bring us closer to us, foreign bodies in this world and, above all, within Christianity.

Someone once asked whether queer theology is a niche theology. It is a crucial question, because even the bodies at the top of the pyramid of prevailing gender hierarchies, even the supposedly “normal” bodies, the normalized bodies, the framed bodies, *need* to be freed. With our bodies, and in these bodies of ours where we find God, when we say that Christ came to set us free from sin, the reference is not to our individual sins, our faults, our limitations, our worldly and human pettiness. The sin that Christ frees us from is the sin of the powerful, the sin of clerical hierarchies, the sin of hygienist logic, the obsession with asepsis, the pretense of purity, legalistic logic, hypocritical moralism, the paranoia of escaping the dominion of law, the dread of slipping beyond compliance with the rules.

The freedom for which Christ frees us, freedom for us, bodies that are dissident from the norms of sex and gender, we who are subaltern bodies in social and ecclesial orders and who still walk with Jesus, this freedom is lived precisely in the celebration of our outlaw bodies, from our queer bodies; our strange, indecent, crooked, limping, flatulent bodies; bodies that drool, that laugh, that enjoy, that fail; bodies overflowing, convulsive, excessive, faulty, ambiguous, imperfect.

Celebrating our foreign bodies is always reliving the visit of the angel who comes to announce to us that God is coming to impregnate us, come to impregnate us and fertilize us with life in abundance, come to do wonders in us, come to make all things new in us. Celebrating our foreign bodies is saying, like Mary, “yes” to the Good News of Life that is promised to us. It is saying “let it be done” in me, “let it be done” in us, as God says “let it be done” in the primordial moment of creation and light is made, and life is made, and God, and we see that everything is very good¹¹.

To celebrate the life that is incarnated in us, to celebrate the life that is incarnated in a myriad of bodies, is to be sure that we are walking in the path of God of infinite creativity. God who is god of life, the god who conquers death, the god who rises and appears to us – and we do not recognize it, but then we hear our names called by his mouth, like Magdalene facing the resurrection. God calls us by name; God says to Magdalene, “Mary!” and she, and we, we see ourselves as we are seen by his love, we remember who we are, we remember life, and we remember what we were created for. We remember that we are created for life, and

11 CARDOSO, Nancy. Sagrados corpos. Introdução. *Revista de Interpretação Bíblica Latino-Americana/Ribla*, Petrópolis: Vozes, n. 38, p. 5-10, 2001.

that death does not have the last word. We are alive, because God lives in us. Our god is a god who becomes flesh, a god who is incarnated in a thousand bodies, in a multitude of different bodies, bodies sanctified as temples of worshiping God; and, however much they bury us, we sprout, because life is many, life is multiple, life is greater.

I end by joining verses by Geraldo Vandré and Carlos Drummond de Andrade to leave, in times of death, illness and pain, and in the grace of our meeting – I leave these verses, like a mantra: so much life to live. So much life to live. Let's not stray too far. Let us go hand in hand.

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FOR FEMINIST AND ECUMENICAL MASCULINITIES¹

Felipe Gustavo Koch Buttelli²

First remarks

I would like to start my contribution by placing myself within the field of this discussion and establishing, from my place, what I understand are the commitments and the political practice that derive from it. It may seem obvious, but it is necessary that I establish before you the recognition that I am a man. I am a white, heterosexual, middle-class IECLB pastor. That is, I am something very close to

this profile that Grosfoguel³ identifies as the model of colonial society that was implanted in the Americas since the beginning of the colonial process: “A heterosexual, white, patriarchal, Christian, military, capitalist and European man who arrived in the Americas and simultaneously established in time and space different globally entangled hierarchies”.

I understand that, even if we no longer live under a regime of colonialism, we still remain under a regime of coloniality that, as Quijano⁴ establishes, is a pattern of power that continues and constantly recreates itself through the creation of hierarchies that, even after the end of the political regimes of colonialism, they continue to distinguish

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3 GROSFOGUEL, Ramon. The Epistemic Decolonial Turn. Beyond Political-economy Paradigms. In: MIGNOLO, Walter D.; ESCOBAR, Arturo (Eds.). *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. New York: Routledge, 2013. p. 65-77, p. 70. (Tradução própria).

4 QUIJANO, Anibal. Colonialidade do poder e classificação social. In: SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa; MENESES, Maria Paula (Orgs.). *Epistemologias do Sul*. Portugal: Ed. Cortez, 2010.

people according to their class, race and gender. In other words, I am the intersectionality of the different forms of oppression that constitute a regime of continuous coloniality that subjugates not only people who do not fit into this idealized profile of humanity, but all power relations, all forms of being – which also includes our common home – and all the knowledge that is produced outside Eurocentric, patriarchal and heteronormative patterns. Thus, we could really ask ourselves why am I sitting at this table, talking about gender relations and ecumenism. From here I start to talk about the political commitments that arise for me from this identification of what I am in the context of colonial life in which we live and that lead me to recognize the importance and need for someone like me to be sitting here, having this conversation with you today.

First of all, I recognize that my commitment to transforming this reality stems from my faith and my public engagement with the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, which according to Lk 4. 18s, tells us the following: “The Lord has given me his Spirit. He chose me to bring good news to the poor and sent me to announce freedom to the prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free those who are being oppressed and to announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.” Jesus, who in the Sermon on the Mount commits us to justice, when he says that “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled” (Mt 5:6). This Gospel of Jesus that commits us to his commandment of love: “This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). A love that is committed to other people, according to the 1st Epistle of John, which reminds us that true love may only be expressed through love to other people, as he states: “If anyone says: I love God, and hates your brother or sister is a liar; for (s)he who does not love his/her

sister or brother, whom (s)he has seen, cannot love God, whom (s)he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

In virtue of this love that is revealed in the Gospel of Jesus, we can live as new creatures and as a new society, in which, as Paul reminds us, “there can be neither Jew nor Greek; neither slave nor free; neither male nor female; for all people are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3.28). It is because of Jesus’ transforming love that I seek to live as a white, middle-class heterosexual man who allows himself to be transformed and converted, so as not to produce or reproduce this patriarchal, racist, androcentric and heteronormative colonial society. That’s why I identify myself as a feminist man, who seeks to rebuild and transform my own masculine condition into a new way of being and living, that seeks to live according to the invitation that the Gospel offers me.

IECLB: A church of ecumenical nature

It is also important to say that I am an ecumenical Christian. As a Pastor of the IECLB I cannot but be someone inherently ecumenical, since in its Constitution⁵, it recognizes in article 5 that “The ecumenical nature of the IECLB is expressed by the bond of faith with the churches in the world that confess Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior”. But beyond that, the IECLB recognizes as its mission, “to promote peace, justice and love in society” (Article 3). I understand this purpose as a pluralistic way of life in society, which lives in a respectful, inclusive, intercultural way with all religious beliefs and also with those who have no religious

⁵ IGREJA EVANGÉLICA DE CONFISSÃO LUTERANA NO BRASIL – IECLB. *Constituição*. Porto Alegre: IECLB, 2010.

beliefs, when it comes to promoting peace, justice and love in society. Therefore, I am a man, follower of Jesus Christ, feminist, ecumenical and intercultural, committed to a just and loving society that lives in peace.

But why do I say all this? Why do I remember these very basic commitments that are expressly stated in the biblical witness and, in my case, in the constitutive commitment of my church? I need to remember this when I talk about gender relations and ecumenism because precisely in these two areas we are suffering a series of setbacks. I am sure that my presentation, with the foundations for the understanding of ministerial and political action that I have, is capable of generating scandal. In this historical moment when, inside and outside the church, an ideological movement is being raised that wants to criminalize the debate on gender relations and on ecumenism. There are movements that want to make us regress in the scope of ecumenical relations and that attack, in a misogynist way, women in all spheres, but also men who express themselves critically against this colonial matrix with its tangled hierarchies, which intersect gender, race and social class.

Churches and the Construction of Toxic Masculinities

There are strong setbacks within the churches and I would like to bring an image here that describes, in my viewpoint, much of what is happening in various churches, especially with regard to sexuality and tolerance against men who live and express their masculinity in a different way, in relation to the heteronormative and patriarchal view.

This is a scene from the movie *“Boy Erased: A Truth Nullified”*, based on the book by Garrard Conley. A true story narrated by the

protagonist Garrard himself, the son of an American evangelical pastor. The film talks about the passage of this young boy, who, at the first suspicion about his sexuality, is sent to a “gay healing clinic” in his church. It shows in detail all the violence and psychological torture that religious fundamentalism produces, destroying lives under the pretext of recreating men who adapt to the patriarchal and heteronormative vision. The particular scene that comes to mind is not with the protagonist, but with one of his colleagues, who watches his own burial performance while he was still alive. In the end, all members of his family, including his very young sister, are forced to beat the boy with a Bible in his hand. Under the shock and tears of his family and his little sister, the Bible kills the young man, who is not even known if he was actually gay or if he just showed behavior “deviated” from heteronormative masculinity. Evidently, the beating of the Bible did not “cure” his way of being, of living his desires, of loving, of behaving in his evangelical world and the young man committed suicide, due to the impossibility of adapting, forgiving himself, for their suffering, imposed by a violent and inhuman biblical fundamentalism.

Apologizing for the small spoiler of the film, I tell you that this scene for me is symbolic of what is happening today in Brazil and around the world. In a medieval throwback, the Bible is used as a weapon, an instrument of violence that limits discussion about gender. Evidently, an intolerant and anti-ecumenical religious approach, like many of the behaviors that are also mimicked in our churches.

Therefore, dear ones, I believe that my participation here becomes important, since we need to deconstruct this toxic masculinity that always wants to impose itself again in the coloniality regime we live in.

Intersectional coloniality that tortures and kills bodies that do not fit the patriarchal, androcentric, heteronormative, racist and elitist hierarchy, reproduced more and more in many of our churches, but outside of them as well. I think it is necessary for white, straight, Christian and middle-class men like me to recognize their responsibility in the production and reproduction of this toxic and destructive masculinity. Women, in fact, have been living and proposing, already critically reconstructing the patterns of relationships in different areas for a long time. From their collective engagement, their feminist reflection, the constitution of groups, spaces, policies and academic reflections that provide opportunities for change in the reality of many women. However, for this process to occur in a more comprehensive and sustained way, it is necessary that men like me put themselves on the same reflective and transformational path, which makes it possible to accept the most diverse ways of being a man.

Feminism forged the emancipation of women by questioning patriarchal relationships and male domination without eliminating them, however. Women assume civil rights that they actually exercised. However, everyday life goes beyond the laws and it is there that contradictions arise. Conservatively trained men see their social roles shaken, they lose the position they occupied at the top of the hierarchy of the social structure, which leads to tensions and conflicts.⁶

⁶ BLAY, Eva Alterman. Por uma nova masculinidade. Por que os homens continuam a matar as mulheres? *Jornal da USP*, 10 ago. 2021. Available on: https://jornal.usp.br/artigos/por-uma-nova-masculinidade-por-que-os-homens-continuam-a-matar-as-mulheres/?fbclid=IwAR3jUSBPKw8bX2USK96hb3JdueoXoyafCWMrW9s_C07SOWGa8dWaxwuokQg. Retrieved on: 15 Nov. 2021.

Perhaps this sentence by Eva Alterman Blay describes something central in this return of violence against women and men who no longer feel comfortable reproducing that virile, violent, dominating masculinity pattern, which needs to maintain a superior status in the various spheres of social activity, in which women achieve conquests and occupy spaces. This virility and this toxic masculinity are in crisis and in their suffering, men prefer to adopt violence (as well as women who reproduce the patriarchal and androcentric order), while losing the opportunity to talk to each other about their masculinity, looking for ways to live it, in a more harmonious way with themselves, but also with women and other men in a world that has changed and that will not return to that idealized reality of patriarchal culture.

Blay points out that:

[...] there is a relative mismatch between the new values and behaviors of women achieved via feminisms and the conservatism still in force in a large part of the male layer. The deconstruction of machismo and misogyny can be achieved through feminist paradigms. Or, as made explicit at the *MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium*: ‘Build a global alliance to transform patriarchal masculinities and engage men and boys for gender equality, social justice and climate justice.’⁷

Final remarks

I would like to conclude this reflection with two propositions, with regard to the debate on ecumenism and gender relations. First, a serene look at the past of construction of conquests that we have already

⁷ BLAY, 2021.

made, much due to the struggle of women. The shadows of this obscure present that we live in cannot erase the commitments we have already made and cannot make us revert from the long path of conquests that we have already taken. An example in the ecumenical environment that I mention about these achievements that we cannot lose is expressed in the Gender Justice Policy of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)⁸, in its 6th principle, which establishes: “Actively promote the involvement of men in the reflection on models of transformed masculinities engaged in gender justice”.

The second proposition is a serene look to the future, which does not allow itself to be intimidated by the growing violence and intolerance of the current moment. This hopeful look to the future cannot be based on the signs of what we live today, but on the foundations of our evangelical, liberating and prophetic faith, expressed in biblical witness, in the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ, in his love given to all people, regardless of how they live their affections, their sexuality, their gender identity.

John (4:18) testifies to us that “There is no fear in love; rather, perfect love casts out fear. Now fear produces torment; therefore, the one who fears is not made perfect in love.” In this vision of the future, we men will have a protagonism in debates about gender, which will certainly include the acceptance of our different masculinities as ways of questioning the imposition of the hegemonic, toxic and violent model of masculinity on us as well. But that, above all, may enable us to be agents of transforming the world into a safer place for women, more

inclusive and fairer for them and for all people, and for that, we will certainly need to give up the privileges that a patriarchal society grants us. It is necessary to look at our pain and suffering as men, building plural visions of our masculinities, more honest and more genuine, in accordance with our affective experience and our desires. But beyond our suffering, we must continually make a commitment not to turn our privileges and pain into violence, death and exclusion for women. This vision of the future needs to start being built in this present, regardless of how dark it seems to be.

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⁸ FEDERAÇÃO LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FLM. *Política de Justiça de Gênero*. Genebra, Suíça: FLM, 2014.

BODIES WITH ORGANS: SEXUALIZING JESUS¹

Hugo Córdova Quero²

Introduction

In 2019, a group of Brazilian comedians released a film called *The first Temptation of Christ*, directed by Rodrigo Van Der Put³. In it, Jesus brings a man to the family Christmas gathering. By the way, this man is Jesus' boyfriend. The film centers on Mary's concern that Jesus was not married and the need to "settle down" and start a family. The advance of right-wing Christian sectors in the Brazilian Congress made the film controversial. Some of them even own television stations where they

broadcast local productions that cater to the right-wing interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Even President Jair Bolsonaro declared that he could ban the exhibition and broadcast in the country, which materialized through a court decision on January 9, 2020 so that the production company and the online service Netflix stopped broadcasting the film⁴. For these sectors, Christianity and the work of gender diversity are incompatible.

Not only that, the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as some wealthy and powerful evangelical churches, go against Jesus' teaching not to expel anyone (John 6:37), denying membership

1 Lecture given at the Thematic Table "Corporeity: discussions of gender and diversities". Translated by Marlon Machado Oliveira Rio. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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3 VAN DER PUT, Rodrigo (Dir.). *A Primeira Tentação do Cristo*. 1 vídeo son. color., 46 min. Rio de Janeiro: Porta dos Fundos, 2019.

4 GAIATO, Kris. Justiça do RJ manda remover especial de Natal do Porta dos Fundos. *TecMundo*, 9 jan. 2020. Available on: <https://www.tecmundo.com.br/cultura-geek/149104-justica-rj-manda-suspender-especial-natal-do-porta-fundos.htm>. Retrieved on: 3 ago. 2021.

in the Christian Church. By contesting this power, neo-Pentecostal and neocharismatic churches also want to participate in accessing hegemonic power in the Brazilian Congress, a dynamic that is replicated in many Latin American countries. At the same time, the creation of inclusive churches in many Latin American countries – such as Brazil – poses problems for *queer* believers when they want to present an image of Jesus that does not resemble the hegemonic conservative “Christ the King” and colonial overtones of the divine.

In this sense, the film *The First Temptation of Christ* also points to other social situations. For example, it presents a Jesus who is not part of the cis-heterosexual hegemony that is taken for granted, both in Brazilian society and in its Latin American counterparts. They do so in defiance of the cis-heteropatriarchal tone that has been imposed throughout history within Christendom. Be that as it may, *The First Temptation of Christ* and *queer* believers go further to also make visible bodily and erotic aspects of Jesus’ humanity, while presenting a non-white Jesus as a possibility. They add other layers to the complex – and complexified – dynamics within the Brazilian religious landscape. Finally, these and other counter-cultural productions and organizations align with other examples of bringing Jesus into the realities of people in the 21st century. Therefore, traversing them in the field of theological reflection implies starting with *queerifying* the religious sphere.

Unveiling humanity

The need for control falls short of what is necessary in the light of bodies, gender, sexuality, pleasure and desire. These are uncontrollable

realms. This is why many religious organizations, like Christianity, are obsessively dedicated to censoring, policing, punishing, controlling and demonizing these areas. The result of this is “identity control”, especially when associated with what I call “colonial performativities”⁵, that is, actions of domination that subjugate the everyday materiality of people.

Religious or spiritual worldviews have influenced almost all societies. Christianity may be the most visible religion affecting modern world-system capitalist societies, but it is not the only one. Beliefs have even influenced societies in remote historical times, some of which do not even exist today; others may be unknown to us. Many people throughout human history have devoted themselves to different religions and shaped their lives around their sacred beliefs and symbols. It is noteworthy that many ancient and current religions – like many branches of Hinduism, for example – have boldly associated sexuality with their religious symbols and deities, without blame or condemnation. Perhaps one should speak of the trauma of monotheistic religions with the sexual realm that is not a reality in any other religious family known to the human species.

Within Christianity, since its earliest history, there has not been a relationship between religion and sexuality. Not only that, those people who dared to relate faith, symbols and sexuality were persecuted and banned. The result of this situation, namely the supposed erosion of bodies, sexuality, symbols and desires, was a betrayal of the ultimate purpose of faith: the salvation of all humanity with all their bodies⁶.

5 CÓRDOVA QUERO, Hugo. *Sin tabú: Diversidad sexual y religiosa en América Latina*. Bogotá/Santiago de Chile: Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe por la Democracia/ GEMRIP Ediciones, 2018.

6 CHENG, Patrick S. Rethinking Sin and Grace for LGBT People Today. In: ELLISON, Marvin M.; DOUGLAS, Kelly Brown (Eds.). *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for*

Therefore, recovering the importance of Jesus' relationship with his body – as the epitome of all human bodies – intertwines the need to sexualize and eroticize him as well. The exercise can be exhausting in a continental context deeply rooted in intolerant and totalitarian theories. However, dissenting voices in societies – such as the aforementioned film – demand such a liberating and counter-cultural theological engagement.

Sexualizing the Incarnate Body of Jesus

Traditionally, the disqualifying element imposed on counter-narrative voices, such as the film *The First Temptation of Christ*, refers to a particular reading of sacred texts. The hegemonic religious powers claim that their interpretation of sacred texts is the ultimate and definitive “truth”. However, a respectful, deep and informed approach reveals that the reality related to these texts is outside this “Great Biblical Narrative” imposed by the cis-heteronormative sectors. It is time to dismantle and deconstruct this hegemony, to desertify the religious and open the faith to all people, without discrimination or dogmatic conditioning⁷.

Bodies, desires, organs, sexuality and power interpret and reify the assumed elements of social constructions within the layers of biblical narratives under the notion of “normality”, which creates a broad category of exclusion, especially when legitimized as “ordained

by God”. Queer people went through this process of normalization in different ways in society and in religious institutions, either through discriminatory attitudes or through labels used to define the diversity of sexuality and gender performances. The problem is not just that labels create or construct someone as “different”, but that people labeled as such come to believe that they are “ontologically different”. This “ontological difference” imposed on people and communities is often based on a narrow and obtuse understanding of religious beliefs. Mark D. Jordan⁸ approaches this situation from a queer perspective, that is, corporeality and sexuality in the body of Jesus.

For centuries – as Jordan discusses in depth – Christianity has invested an inordinate amount of energy in affirming the incarnation, while simultaneously denying the gender and sexuality of Jesus. The issue is significant because queer people have been denied the means of salvation, using Jesus as a moralizing instrument. Jordan's contribution — along with that of other queer theologians — is essential to understanding the incarnation from a queer perspective, a fact that runs against totalizing theologies such as those underlying critiques of the film *The First Temptation of Christ*. For example, building on the work of Judith Butler – especially, *Gender Trouble*⁹ and *Bodies That Matter*¹⁰ – Annika Thiem¹¹ analyzes how bodies, desires, sexuality and power

Theological Reflection. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010. p. 105-118, p. 105.

7 SCHIPPERT, Claudia. Queer Theory and the Study of Religion. *REVER: Revista de Estudos da Religião*, São Paulo, ano 5, n. 4, p. 90-99, 2005.; SCHIPPERT, Claudia. Implications of Queer Theory for the Study of Religion and Gender: Entering the Third Decade. *Religion and Gender*, Utrecht, Nederland, v. 1, n. 1, p. 66-84, 2011.

8 JORDAN, Mark D. God's Body. In: MALDEN, Gerard Loughlin (Ed.). *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*. MA: Blackwell, 2007. p. 281-292.

9 BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1990.

10 BUTLER, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*. London: Routledge, 1993.

11 THIEM, Annika. No Gendered Bodies without Queer Desires: Judith Butler and Biblical Gender Trouble. *Old Testament Essays*, South Africa, v. 20, n. 2, p. 456-470, 2007.

construct and reify assumed elements of social constructions within the interpretive levels of biblical stories.

The incarnation of Jesus reveals the purpose of God's self-communication as a union with all creation. In Christianity, the incarnation of Jesus is the door that made possible the beginning of this union with God, because both humanity and all creation are the ultimate image of God¹². However, the incarnation ends up confronting us with gender and sexuality. A more desexualized incarnate Jesus is a "halfway" Jesus, a "decent" and "dysfunctional" Jesus at the service of theo(ideo)logies that seek to deny or shape in limited and absolutist spaces, everything that escapes their control¹³.

Feminist theologians were the first to criticize this aspect of the classical doctrine of the incarnation by asking, "Can a male savior save women?" as eloquently asked the beloved Rosemary Radford Ruether¹⁴. This question is not intended to deny the evangelical witness to Jesus. Rather, what is underlying is the question about a male cis-heteropatriarchal Christology. Such a narrow Christology oppresses women and those men – cis or trans; heterosexual or queer – who do not fit into this toxic masculinist model. If Jesus' masculinity is vital to his soteriological task, then, by extension, masculinity saves femininity. It is evident – according to Radford Ruether's analysis – that Christianity

chooses this view to understand Christology and, by extension, soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). In doing so, it reduces God's salvific action to a commercial transaction in sex-theological markets where the greatest commodification resides – in the manner of empires – in the desexualized male body as an instrument for the imposition of power¹⁵.

The incarnation of Jesus challenges the assumptions of the entire salvation process linked to his masculinity. The categories of gender, sexuality, power and order are intrinsically related to incarnation and conditioned by culture, political environment, economic relations, historical events and social processes¹⁶. Queer theologians thus approach this situation from a perspective that also takes into account Jesus' sexuality, eroticism, penis and orgasms. His works are an excellent example of the reflections and themes of this debate between the various queer theologies. It also helps us to address the intricate links with other issues such as capitalism, consumerism and body fascism, among others.

God's choice to incarnate a human body is not trivial, but a sublime act to exalt the beauty of every human body, whether heterosexual, transgender, intersex, poor, Latinx, Asian, thin or dark-skinned. In Jesus, God did a distinct act of divine power and opened a world, a sacred world, to all of his creation. To paraphrase what Gregory of Nazianzus

12 GEORGE, K. M. *The Silent Roots: Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, p. 37.

13 CÓRDOVA QUERO, Hugo. Sainly Journeys: Intersections of Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Faith in Alejandro Springall's *Santitos. God's Image*, [S. l.], v. 42, n. 2, p. 71-82, dec. 2015.

14 RUETHER, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993.

15 ALTHAUS-REID, Marcella. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 114.

16 CÓRDOVA QUERO, Hugo *et al.* Desire, Nation and Faith: A Roundtable among Emerging Queer Asian/Pacific Islander Religion Scholars (EQARS). In: CÓRDOVA QUERO, Hugo; GOH, Joseph N.; CAMPOS, Michael Sepidoza (Eds.). *Queering Migrations Towards, From, and Beyond Asia*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014. p. 61-76.

said in the 4th century to both the gnostic and the orthodox sectors: “One must not decide the bodies of whom God will save because the *logos* embodies all the bodies of all humanity”. It is therefore not in line with the teachings of Christianity to punish those people who do not fit into a narrow binary reading of the incarnation as “Jesus with a cis-heterosexual, white, middle-class, physically perfect, decent body.” If divinity embodied the entirety of all creation, then this subversive act of God’s love is expressed in Jesus as a mirror of multiple human bodies. Thus, a transgender Jesus, a fag Jesus, a bisexual Jesus and a Jesus crucified two thousand years ago are not the result of “abominable acts”, but the realization of central elements already contained in the doctrine of the incarnation.

The core of Christian doctrine is anchored in the materiality of bodies. Therefore, institutions bastardize this doctrine whenever they use it to segregate people who believe they should not fit into their fantasy of the cosmic event of incarnation. According to the Gospels – canonical and non-canonical – to deny the genital materiality of Jesus’ body, its sexuality, its desire and its eroticism is to deny the supreme act of God’s love: that in Jesus, God embraced all creation. By making Jesus so holy and thereby dehumanizing, de-eroticizing and de-sexualizing him, Christianity paradoxically denies the core of faith. In other words, by making Jesus so holy, dogmatic statements deny the basis of faith. The return to the core of the Christian faith implies the realization of the rupture evidenced by the queer believers, resulting from a denial and resistance to the cis-heteronormative hegemonic cooptation of Jesus¹⁷.

17 BONG, Sharon A. Not ‘For the Sake of Peace’: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred Body. *Asian Christian Review*, [S. l.], v. 3, n. 1, p. 50-68, 2009, p. 65.

Christianity cannot afford – and indeed never should – privilege one person over another or reject both because they do not conform to a narrow understanding of bodies, gender and sexuality. Queer believers – especially transgender and intersex people – tell us that the incarnation of Jesus is more than a coder of cis-heteropatriarchal taxonomy. On the contrary, it is a cosmic event that embraces multiple and distinct beings in the divine. God’s choice to incarnate a gendered and sexualized human body like Jesus’ is not trivial, but a sublime act to dignify the beauty of each human body, whether heterosexual, transsexual, intersex, poor, Latin, among other categorizations. In Jesus, God did a distinct act of divine power and opened a world, a heavenly world, to all creation, including queer and transgender Jesuses¹⁸.

As theologians and queer Christian believers increasingly address the particular realities of different contexts and spiritualities, the line between what cultures accept or reject in terms of bodies and sexualities comes into play. This is certainly an issue that queer Christian theologies need to address more intentionally. Brazil – and Latin America as a whole – are no exception to this reality. The controversies with the film *The First Temptation of Christ* relate to the image of Jesus as the son of God and push the boundaries for the gendering, sexualization and eroticization of Jesus. One aspect of this threefold process is recognizing the presence of genital organs, which are anatomically male in Jesus.

18 CÓRDOVA QUERO, Hugo. This Body Trans/Forming Me: Indecencies in Transgender/Intersex Bodies, Body Fascism and the Doctrine of the Incarnation. In: ALTHAUS-REID, Marcella; ISHERWOOD, Lisa (Eds.). *Controversies in Body Theology*. London: SCM Press, 2008. p. 80-128, p. 112.

However, the theme of the film *The First Temptation of the Christ* made me think of the racial issue embodied in the representations of the penis of Jesus. I think it is correct to say that the representations of the body and penis of Jesus would be entirely linked to stereotypes rooted in cis-heterosexual and queer human communities: would it be the penis of an Asian Jesus represented as “small” or that of an African Jesus as “huge”?; would the penis of a Latin Jesus be represented as “exotic” or that of a white Jesus as the “most beautiful”? In Jesus’ body – and especially in his penis – we see the interplay of race, culture, bodily fascism, power and coloniality that runs through cis-heterosexual and queer communities around the world. Again, queer Christian theologies should approach this issue more intentionally from an ethnic point of view. I can’t help but think that Jesus almost always appears to be white. But not just any white person, but one capable of being the cover of a fashion magazine or the face and body of an expensive commercial. There are some exclusions: a white Jesus with disabilities, a poor white Jesus, or a trans/male white Jesus. All of them are excluded from this cis-heterosexual white Jesus, physically perfect and with muscles that, on a magazine cover or any LGBTIQ+ Pride parade, would cause envy. This is a Jesus far removed from my reality. He is also very far from my affective reality, as I have only been in love with Asian and Latino men my entire life. Suppose many white people cannot even relate to this stereotypical white Jesus. In this case, it is even more difficult for people of other ethnicities!

These considerations underscore prejudices and adverse reactions to a gay or transgender crucified Jesus. In the film, Jesus as another man’s boyfriend at the family’s Christmas party implies acknowledging that Jesus has genitals because his homosexuality most likely translates

into eroticism and sexuality with his boyfriend. His genitals are probably functional and governed by biology, as in any human being. In fact, the doctrine of the incarnation points to the full humanity of Jesus. It does not intend to empathize with his divinity. By perpetuating prejudice, Christianity has produced not only a dehumanized Jesus but a dysfunctional Messiah, seriously endangering faith and, ultimately, salvation. A de-sexualized, de-gendered and de-eroticized Jesus is a failure.

Conclusion

In today’s pandemic times, bodies constantly protect themselves against stability, signaling and displacement, but their “virtuality” becomes a fundamental place of connection. When bodies are displaced to the virtual, we find a creative performance of alterity. In a sense, this is what Jean Baudrillard describes as “Alterity [which] is basically the other way of thinking, refusing to think in terms of finitude.”¹⁹ Even writing in 2008, he clairvoyantly understood that “technology offers an outlet for the world, for thinking another world, for creating a simulacrum of another world”²⁰.

In a sense, our virtual personality becomes an alterity of our physical self – body and person. At the same time, the technological disincarnation reiterates the trans/palatal connections with other virtual characters who also imitate real bodies. The result is a bending and

19 BAUDRILLARD, Jean; GUILLAUME, Marc. *Radical Alterity*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008, p. 52.

20 BAUDRILLARD; GUILLAUME, 2008, p. 52.

blurring not only of time, but also of space and materiality, creatively infusing dialogue and connection outside the logic of cause-effect relationships. In the midst of this situation, Christianity can really contribute to a more realistic and incarnate vision, precisely honoring the fact of the incarnation of Jesus, even in its sexual, gender and erotic aspects. Paradoxically, virtuality is the last frontier that confronts us with incarnation in all its forms.

Traditionally, Christianity proposed a romanticized description of Jesus that only shows his “agape” love²¹, but never – God forbid – his erotic love. An erotically charged Jesus may represent, for a large majority of Christian people, an abomination. However, eroticism is part of what constitutes humanity. A sexual and an erotic God or Jesus may even agree with biblical texts. However, to deny the eroticism of the Jesus experience can even betray absolutely everything that Christianity stands for.

God’s choice to incarnate a human body is not trivial, but a sublime act to dignify the beauty of all sexual, gendered and erotic human bodies with their multiple orgasms. Does God mutilate human bodies to conform to outdated standards of decency and morality that oppress our everyday reality? This seems to be the logic even of some liberation theologies and some LGBTIQ+ theologies. On the contrary, the fully gendered, sexualized and eroticized body of Jesus is the pleroma, that is, the fullness of humanity. Will we be able to let our own bodies embrace this divine invitation?

21 HEXHAM, Irvin. *Concise Dictionary of Religion*. Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1993.

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GENDER (IN)JUSTICE AND FEMINIST BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS:

SOME GUIDELINES/REFLECTIONS FROM STUDIES OF ACTS OF THE APOSTLES¹

Ivoni Richter Reimer²

I want to present some themes for the study and reflection on gender (in)justice based on research of the Acts of the Apostles in the perspective of feminist exegesis and hermeneutics. I seek to situate the New Testament book in its context, I present some central conflicts that appear in it and I go deeper into some texts that deal with the participation or not of women in the literary and historical context of the beginnings of the church in the perspective of the Lucan work. In this process, I try

to understand whether or not there are signs and expressions of gender (in)justice; if there is (or not), if this was (or not) part of the intention of the authors of Acts.

The Acts of the Apostles is the book of the New Testament that, in the middle of the 2nd century, asserted itself with the name *Práxeis ton Apostolôn*, in dispute with other names and in relation to other *Práxeis* of contemporary literature. As it had no proper title at its origin, Acts 1:1 refers to the “first book” that the same author would have written about what Jesus did until his death, resurrection and ascension. These two pieces of data refer to at least two questions: a) the text was written and circulated among communities around the Mediterranean before the 2nd century, therefore, well before the manuscript copies to which we have

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access today, originating mainly from the 3rd – 4th century³; b) among other literary and theological aspects, Acts 1:1 serves as a basis for there to be a great consensus about the same authorship for the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, as well as in relation to the date around the turn of the 1st century.

As a whole, the Acts report about certain times, events, places and characters, based on the testimony and memory of people from various places, for people and communities of the authorial ‘today’. This authorial ‘today’, however, was not restricted to that past, but reaches us in **our** today, through processes of transmission, canonization and use in the history of the church. What would have been the objective, the intention of this book through its author or the group that organized it, and with what objective do we approach this book? Let’s look at the first part of the question. Among several possibilities, I observe that the purpose of the writing was to show the ‘reconstructed continuity’ of the movement of Jesus, the resurrected, based on the apostolic-disciple community from Jerusalem and the mission carried out in the entire region of “Judea, Samaria, until the ends of the earth” (1.8), through the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit (1.2.5; 2.4.38).

In view of this, therefore, a **first theme** consists of perceiving if and how the praxis of Jesus and his movement had this ‘reconstructed continuity’ in the perspective of gender (in)justice in those new contexts. To this end, it is appropriate to make a heuristic-exegetic and comparative-intertextual approach, in order to understand the text in its literary and historical context. Let us take the text of Acts 1:12-26 as an example, and

from there, observe other texts that present women in the Acts of the Apostles.

To remember: After showing himself and saying goodbye to the “apostles whom he had chosen” (1:2), the resurrected Jesus promised them the power of the Holy Spirit to witness about him, and then he was lifted up, and the apostles stood looking at the sky. They had an apparition, during which they were promised that this Jesus who had been taken to heaven would likewise return from heaven (1:11). With these two promises (power of the Holy Spirit and the return of the resurrected), the “Galilean men” returned to Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives, and there, in an upper room, they (Peter and John and James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas of James) along with women, among them Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brothers of Jesus, who persevered with one accord in prayer. In that place, one day, 120 people gathered around (1:15), Peter got up and began his speech with the expression “Men brothers...” (*ándres adelfoi* 1:16), recalling the betrayal of Judas and the need (1:21 dei) to recompose the complete number of the apostles, saying: “It is therefore necessary that one of the men (*tôn andrôn*) who accompanied us all the time [...] from the baptism performed by John until the day in which he [the Risen One] was lifted up from us, become a witness with us of his resurrection” (1:22). Two names were indicated: Joseph Barsabbas, the righteous, and Matthias, who are not well known in the other texts of the New Testament. Then they prayed, asked God to reveal which of these should “fill the vacancy of this diakonia and the apostolate, abandoned by Judas” (1,25); Then they cast lots among them [referring to Prov 16:33: “the lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is

3 NESTLE/ALAND. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28.rev.Aufl. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

from the Lord”], and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was given a position with the Eleven (1:26)).

In another study⁴, I demonstrated that it is a clearly androcentric discourse and practice, since the issue of “being a man” (*anér*) is superimposed on the other criteria exposed, which are: having been together “in all the time the Lord Jesus came and went out with us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up.” The Gospels themselves (Lk 23:55; 24:1-11,24; Mk 15:40-41,47; 16:1-11; Mt 27:55-56,61; 28:1-10; Jn 19:25-27; 20: 1-2.11-18) testify that women, among them Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary of James, Mary of Joseph, Salome, the wife of Zebedee, the ‘other’ Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Cleopas were disciples who followed and served Jesus from the beginning in Galilee until the resurrection, and Mary Magdalene was even commissioned by the resurrected to announce the resurrection to the other apostles, which earned her the title ‘apostle of the apostles’. These simply ‘disappeared’, were erased from the historiographical record in Acts⁵. Therefore, by putting before and superimposing the criterion “being a man” to the other criteria, choice and luck excluded women from the apostolate of the Twelve. It must be considered that the Twelve fulfill a historical-symbolic

function in Lucan’s work⁶, but simultaneously affirm that historically and theologically the opportunity to preserve a reconstructed continuity of the Jesus movement, in which women fully participated and lived together in the ‘discipleship of equals’ was lost. One can simultaneously record the ambiguity and complexity of this relationship, realizing that if, on the one hand, there is gender justice in the exercise and disciple participation in various forms of ministries/diakonia, on the other hand, there is gender injustice in what refers to the exclusion of women because of their sex.

This implies and reveals relations of power and authority in the existence of the Twelve in the ministry of Jesus and in the discontinuous continuity in the beginnings from Jerusalem; it should also be noted that the tradition of the Twelve has not been preserved in the history of the Church. Even if in the gospels and in Acts there is no unanimity concerning the names of the Twelve, there is unanimity in that they are all men; In any case, for Luke it is important to emphasize that the Twelve are chosen from among the disciple’s group (Lk 6:13) and that his apostolic list in Acts 1 is the same as his list in Lk 6, excluding Judas Iscariot and highlighting the mention of Jude of James, not found in the other gospels, which mention Thaddeus⁷. Even though this is an important fact in the investigation of the Acts of the Apostles, it is

4 See with details, development and bibliography: RICHTER REIMER, Ivoni. Desde Princípios: acuidade historiográfica e injustiça contra mulheres (Atos 1). *Caminhos*, Goiânia, v. 17, n. 1, p. 390-396, 2019. Available at: <http://seer.pucgoias.edu.br/index.php/caminhos/article/view/7101/3994>. Accessed on: 13 Nov. 2020.

5 About the erasing of women and their *práxeis* also through language, see ULRICH, Claudete Beise; STRÖHER, Marga Janete; NÚÑEZ DE LA PAZ, Nivia Ivette. Perseguindo o Inédito Viável: a Pedagogia freiriana, a necessidade da linguagem inclusiva e a denúncia à neolíngua do generismo queer. *Caminhos*, Goiânia, v. 19, Número Especial, 20 p., 2021. [To be published].

6 See, with analysis: SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, Elisabeth. *Discipulado de iguais: uma Ekklesia-logia feminista crítica da libertação*. [Engl: Discipleship of Equals A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy Of Liberation] Translated by Yolanda S. Toledo. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1995, p. 128-131.

7 Here we cannot analyze the reasons for the choice of the Twelve and their history and symbology, as well as the differences in names in the Lucan work, specifically the name of Judas of James.

interesting that the Twelve practically do not play a central role in Acts. There are even those who understand that it is the Acts of Peter and Paul, as these are the two most prominent apostles [Paul as the 13th apostle] in the book: Peter in the first part; Paul in the second part of Acts. Here I emphasize that both work with Jewish and Gentile people, Peter more in the sacred space of the temple and Paul, in the synagogue, but both also enter homes and travel. In the book, the Twelve fade away alongside Peter; James is killed by Herod (12:2) and the others disappear in the narrative, as new characters are added, including Paul himself. The latter appears chiefly as a missionary, teacher, and preacher of the gospel; Luke's work does not designate Paul as "apostle", a title reserved only for the Twelve!

So far, the analysis allows us to make the following thesis: in Acts, women are explicitly excluded from the possibility of 'concurring' for the apostolic title and of acting as apostles. The language, memories and relationships are clearly androcentric and the narratives focus on the action of men. This, however, does not imply the exclusion of women in the actions and narratives in Acts! They are mentioned in the first part of Acts: in 1:14; 5:1-11 (Sapphire and Ananias); explicitly among the crowd (5:14; 8:3 persecution); the widows in the diakonia (6:1); the widows and the disciple Tabitha (9:36-43); Mary mother of John, also known as Mark and the slave Rhode (12:12-17); opposition women (13:50)⁸.

In the second part of Acts many women are mentioned, compared to ancient historiographies. Those that appear most prominently are

⁸ See commentaries in RICHTER REIMER, Ivoni. *Frauen in der Apostelgeschichte des Lukas: eine feministisch-theologische Exegese*. Mit einer Einführung von Luise Schottroff. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1992. [Translated to English in 1995].

found in a wider network of relationships, also in terms of their social, economic and ecclesial function; these women are already within the scope of the missionary action of Paul's group, of which Priscila was also a part, who was a missionary before Paul, for example, in Rome (18:1-3), and Lydia with her group of women (16:13-40). They are women who live in extra-Palestinian geopolitical spaces, mainly around the Mediterranean Sea, specifically in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and Italy. In addition to manufacturers, there are also teachers and philosophers among them (17:34 Damaris in Athens; 18:26-27 Priscilla in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus). We can understand that most of the women mentioned in the second part of Acts, also those related to Judaism as proselytes, were influenced by Hellenic culture. However, they carry with them traditions and customs of their own people of origin, such as Lydia of Thyatira: they circulate between cities, exercise various public professions and profess faith in God *hypsistós* (Hellenized name of the Israelite God), in Jesus Christ and act in the power of his Spirit. They also do so as church leaders who meet in their homes, assuming the role of protecting, providing asylum and supporting people who are in danger and political persecution⁹.

These data quickly listed here are the result of exegetical and historical research, already carried out and publicized¹⁰ by feminist theologians in the last 30-40 years. From this data and information, we

⁹ About extra-biblical tradition of women who worked like this see under the history of Saint Praxedes, in RICHTER REIMER, Ivoni. *Santa Praxedes: uma jovem com funções eclesiais e sociais em Roma*. Goiânia: Ed. da PUC Goiás, 2016.

¹⁰ I remit you here to various published works, among them my dissertation (1990), which, in its turn, influenced much research around the world. See RICHTER REIMER, 1992 [1995].

can now ask: can the author and the group that compiled the oral and written memories that circulated and that organized this material be read in the perspective placed here as a theme, in a perspective of (in)justice of gender? I think feminist exegesis and hermeneutics should first address the issue anachronistically: the interest and aim of the author and his group was not to write a report or a treatise on gender (in)justice. The conceptual issue of gender and gender (in)justice is recent and is part of our world, our work and studies, our conflicts and demands. I cannot transfer our pains and conquests to the text I study, in order to find support for our causes; this would be very simple and would be politically instrumentalizing the text and continuing a power game between right and left fundamentalisms¹¹.

In the dialogues with Ivone Gebara, when it came to studying biblical texts from a feminist perspective, it was always questioned whether we really need the Bible for our struggles, or whether the injured life itself would not be the central reference, in the past and in the present, that authorizes and empowers us to carry out these struggles, which may or may not correspond to what was expressed in sacred texts of the past. The hermeneutic attitude of suspicion, sometimes leveraged by small textual clues, is part of a good practice of reading, studying and interpreting. It can help answer the question posed: in the narratives in which women are mentioned or silenced, within their historical-cultural context, were they harmed, was some right existing at the time taken away from them, was some extra burden

of suffering placed upon them? As far as the Acts of the Apostles is concerned, here I must clearly say NO.

In the Jewish and Hellenistic historical-cultural context of Acts, within the Roman Empire, women did not suffer harm, were not harmed or wronged by the author and his group and by the result of their work, because the objective of this work (Acts) was expressed clearly in the introduction and unfolding narrative of the work: witnessing to the missionary work done after the ascension of Jesus and the empowerment by the Holy Spirit given to men and women, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, starting with the group of the Eleven/Twelve and expanding the exercise of this missionary work to men and women in various places, especially in cities. Each micro narrative is inserted in this greater objective and in the work as a whole. The dynamics of the narrative is to expand spaces, uncover possibilities in the midst of many conflicts, mainly of a political-ideological order, therefore, also religious. And this dynamic allows us to perceive, in the development of the missionary work carried out by men and women, that women are mentioned in their multiple diaconal, missionary, educational, manufacturing functions and activities, usually autonomously, not dependent on any man! I can even see here an important contribution from the author and his group: the work can be considered a rare source for us to better investigate the realities of life.

So, now, we can bring the lens closer and try to observe this macro-narrative and the micro-narratives of Acts through the perspective of what we understand today as gender (in)justice, knowing that this was not the author's objective in the construction of the work. I take as a definition the work carried out by the Lutheran

¹¹ About the pragmatism of biblical readings see: RIBEIRO, Osvaldo Luiz. Estética, Política, Heurística: os jogos pragmáticos de leitura. *Caminhos*, Goiânia, v. 18, p. 603-622, 2020. Available at: <http://seer.pucgoias.edu.br/index.php/caminhos/article/view/8067/4828>. Accessed on: 13 Nov. 2021.

World Federation, also because we are in a theological space linked to that institution:

Gender justice implies the **protection and promotion** of the dignity of women and men who, being created in the image of God, are co-responsible stewards of creation. Gender justice is expressed through equality and **balanced power relations** between women and men and the **elimination of the institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination**.¹²

The formulation is profound, prophetic and deserves attention, and here I highlight human dignity and power systems that are not placed at the service of protecting and promoting that dignity. Ideological, political, economic systems that generate and sustain discrimination that culminates in oppression and domination of various hues must be questioned and “eliminated”. This means fighting the causes that hurt life and affirming a dignified life as a top priority; it means denouncing not only people who dominate and violate, but also institutions that sustain and justify these unbalanced and unjust relationships. Theologically, then, the challenge and effort to build gender equity and justice is our evangelical commitment to the world and the mission to which God calls us. More than a conception, it was part of the ministry of Jesus and of his disciples (Mk 15:40-41; Lk 8:1-3; Jn 8:1-11; Gal 3:26-28; Acts 2:44), and is also manifest in the Acts of the Apostles as an effort and a reality to reconstruct the Jesus movement within another time and other life contexts. In this way, Acts of the Apostles can be understood as a

re-reading and historical re-signification of the movement of Jesus in the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit from Jerusalem and the apostolic authority, which was already part of the ecclesial tradition at the end of the 1st century.

This apostolic tradition is like an institutional foundation, coming from the time of Jesus and the ancestral history of the twelve tribes; it is a representation for Israel from the ministry of Jesus. That is why the number Twelve appears at the beginning of Acts, to guarantee the legitimacy of this historical resignification of the Jesus movement in new times and contexts through the apostolic mission, which is also carried out by other men and women. This androcentric-patriarchal tradition never aimed at female representation in the group of the Twelve. Henceforth, in Acts, women did not have the right to ‘fill the apostolic vacancy’ in the group of the Twelve. If this was the history of the past, this history – revisited from other horizons – has consequences to this day in the history of interpretation and in the history of the church. These consequences are unfair in the construction of gender relations, because they are calcified in the past and do not adapt to the new realities and new challenges of our time. For this reason, I want to express here my joy at being part of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), which for decades has ordained women to the pastoral ministry and which elected a woman pastor to be the president of this church: the first woman, Pastor Sílvia Genz holds the highest position of institutional power in the IECLB, and this is a reason for joy. For this very reason, I want to register here my sadness for realizing that this IECLB, through Faculdades EST, missed the historic opportunity to grant this first president pastor the title *Doctor Honoris Causae*, in

¹² GENDER JUSTICE POLICY. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2014. [Ed. by Elaine Neuenfeldt] p. 7. (Author’s highlights in bold).

the context of this Congress. This would have been a decision and a gesture of impact and theological and political-ecclesiastical relevance in these tragic times, as well as a sign to the world that the IECLB seeks to experience gender relations in a fairer way, honoring this woman pastor who 'put herself to the front' as she assumed the presidency in the midst of mounting theological and sociocultural conflicts...

To conclude: The Acts of the Apostles is based, on the one hand, on the Judeo-Jesus tradition of the Twelve Apostles, men, which prevented the participation of women in the process of filling the apostolic position of Judas. This apostolic authority was important in legitimizing the 'reconstructed continuity' of the Jesus movement in other regions within the Roman Empire, which is highlighted in the conciliar decision and speeches in the course of Pauline missionary work. On the other hand, the missionary project broadens the field and horizon of women's participation and action in strategic places within the Roman Empire (Rome, Corinth, Athens, Ephesus...), which constitutes an important part of the church's history, even though less known: they are teachers, deaconesses, missionaries, ecclesiastical and social leaders who base their practice on faith in Jesus Christ and act in the power of his Spirit. Along with Paul, who is not one of the Twelve, they are witnesses and agents of deliverance through faith and grace! They put their lives, their goods and their abilities at the disposal of the work of proclaiming and implementing the liberating gospel of Jesus the Christ. Thus, the work Acts of the Apostles, even not aiming at this, contributes for us to have access to a part of the history of women in the historical, social and ecclesial context in the early days of the Church.

Conclusion

In this presentation, I demonstrated the importance of the Acts of the Apostles for the history of the church and, thus, also the role of women in this history. I pointed to the anachronistic vulnerability of reading past texts and experiences with theoretical-methodological references and expectations of the present. Each context and epoch will have to express what gender (in)justice consists of, and the participation and protagonism of women and other qualitative minorities cannot be excluded, even if this does not constitute a field and a full legal configuration of gender (in) justice in the context.

In terms of what we have seen, I have no doubt that theology, and specifically biblical research, can contribute positively to the work towards the construction of gender justice, insofar as it functions as a producer of meaning, values and behaviors, all inserted in the field of mentality, culture and imagination

Even though this is not the space to go deeper into the reality and theme of gender violence, specifically against women, and its presence in the Bible, it is important to emphasize that violence and inequality are a phenomenon present throughout the history of humanity.¹³ Violence against women is one of the effects of the unequal, hierarchical and

13 I further indicate readings on this specific theme in: SOUZA, Carolina Bezerra de; RICHTER REIMER, Ivoni. Violência, Bíblia e as Mulheres. In: LELLIS, Nelson; ULRICH, Claudete Beise (Orgs.). *Mulheres em Foco*. São Paulo: Recriar, 2020. p. 33-47.; RICHTER REIMER, Ivoni; REIMER, Haroldo. Sobre Violências que se Multiplicam sobre a Terra: abordagem do fenômeno a partir da Bíblia. In: LELLIS, Nelson; ULRICH, Claudete Beise (Orgs.). *Mulheres em Foco*. São Paulo: Recriar, 2020. p. 63-86.

naturalized gender relationship that gives men the status of representative and women the role of submissive and obedient. In this way, the fight against gender violence is part of the construction of gender justice. Equally important is to affirm that the Bible does not have one voice on the theme of violence and inequality. There are traditions that are diametrically opposed to them. Perhaps it is important, at this moment, to recover one of the objectives established by the Lutheran World Federation with the gender justice policy, the “The intent is to generate creative impulses that contribute for instance to the transformation of social conditions, norms, values or power relations as well as new actions that help ensure gender justice”¹⁴

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14 POLÍTICA DE JUSTIÇA DE GÊNERO, 2014, p. 9.

FUNDAMENTALISMS, CRISIS IN DEMOCRACY AND THREAT TO GENDER RIGHTS¹

Magali do Nascimento Cunha²

Initial considerations

Latin America has gone through socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental transformations in recent decades that correspond to reactions to advances and achievements in the field of

workers', women's and social minorities' rights, followed by setbacks and political obstacles of various types, considered as reflections of different expressions of fundamentalism.

From the observation of this reality, the research plan "Fundamentalisms, the crisis of democracy and the threat to human rights in South America: trends and challenges for action" emerged from the churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs), articulated through the ACT South American Alliance Ecumenical Forum (FESUR). The organizations linked to the FESUR emphasize as part of this observed process, evident political crises, the deepening of inequalities, the reduction of spaces for civil society participation, the increase in the murder of human rights defenders.

The research, coordinated and carried out by the author of this text in the first half of 2020s, indicates a fundamentalist agenda that is shows

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Table "Rights, democracy and religion". Translated by Marlon Machado Oliveira Rio. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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itself effective in the region with great economic and political capital and as the result of its religious capital which has managed to hinder social rights conquered with great difficulty by the people, confront national judicial systems, influence and, in some cases, destabilize democracies.

The Term

Since the 1970s, with the Iranian (Islamic) revolution, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the entry into the 21st century with the new contours of the relationship between Christians and politics in Latin America, the notion of “fundamentalism” has been modified.

The origin of the term “fundamentalism” dates back to the conservative tendency of a Protestant segment in the United States at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. It is rooted in the literal interpretation of the Bible, classified as inerrant, in reaction to modernity (incarnated in liberal theology and contextual biblical studies with the mediation of the human and social sciences) and in defense of the immutable foundations of the Christian faith. Since then, the fundamentalist perspective has been transformed within evangelicalism itself and has gone beyond the borders of religion. It becomes a matrix of thought, a posture, anchored in the defense of certain truths and in its imposition on society.

It is a fact that in recent decades religious and non-religious groups have emerged in the public space in different contexts of the world with actions that might be classified as “fundamentalist” and characterized as reactive and reactionary to social changes. In this sense it is observed that fundamentalism becomes a social phenomenon that goes beyond the religious dimension, gains a more diversified profile and acquires

a political, economic, environmental and cultural character. In these actions, certain “fundamentals” are chosen to persuade society to establish borders and fight against “enemies.” This often results in a polarizing and separatist movement, which denies dialogue, democracy and establishes a single thought that aims to direct actions in the public space.

The most emblematic case in the contemporary period in South America is Brazil, due to the election of the extreme right wing soldier, Jair Bolsonaro, to the Presidency of the Republic, which comes as a result of an intense reactionary process against advances in the field of social, environmental, sexual and social reproductive rights. However, it is observed that in Colombia, Peru and Argentina, countries also prioritized in the FESUR initiative, that there are processes that denote similar situations during this same period, which indicate a kind of fundamentalist pattern of intervention in democracies and in actions for rights on the continent. In 2020, with the Covid-19 pandemic, this situation has been worsened and this whole situation has become more evident.

The agenda

The research offers several discoveries, among them, the concept of the configuration of political-religious fundamentalisms in South America, conceptualizing them, in the plural form, from an historical reconstitution of their different expressions. In this sense, avoiding the use of the term that denotes accusation and label of opposites, the results show that fundamentalisms may be understood as a worldview, an interpretation of reality, with a religious matrix. This worldview is

combined with political actions resulting in the weakening of democratic processes and the weakening of sexual, reproductive and traditional communities' rights, in a mutual conditioning.

It was also identified, as a finding, that the religious matrix of advancing fundamentalisms is not only developed by evangelicals (from the historical branch and the Pentecostals) but also by Roman Catholics, who join forces in an opportunistic unity around agendas and common enemies.

The fundamentalist agendas that unite evangelical and Catholic leaders and segments are based on religious sexual morality and on the demonization and inferiorization of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. They serve the neoliberal economic system by proclaiming the reduction of public policies (therefore, state action), relegating to the "family" the care for education, health, work and retirement, and by facilitating the conquest of lands of traditional populations by agribusiness and by mining companies. Hence the classification "political-religious fundamentalisms." Social movements, unions, parties that seek to defend these rights and these populations are identified as enemies.

The survey report, having heard dozens of human rights activists and academic experts from the four countries, details fundamentalist trends on the continent: reaction to sexual and reproductive rights; the "pro-family" discourse as an economic-political project; moral panic and the permanent clash with elected enemies as food for reactionism; threat to traditional communities; actions coordinated by different groups; the defense of the secular State and religious freedom as "strategic secularization"; advancement of new fundamentalist movements from

the United States in the region (education for politicians, "culture war" and missions among indigenous peoples).

At the end, ten possible response strategies on the part of churches and FBOs are presented to this exposed the reality of political-religious fundamentalisms. Amid all this, the text emphasizes that it is necessary to seriously consider that there is a population for which religion gives meaning and structure life. It is necessary to take this into account in thinking about the future that is knocking at the door, in the midst of a coronavirus pandemic.

Threats to gender justice

The reaction towards sexual and reproductive rights

Opposition to policies related to gender rights is observed in the countries surveyed, particularly those related to abortion and sexual diversity. The denial of rights to women and the LGBTIQ + population is an old phenomenon, but what is new is the need to react to far-reaching actions and strategies with discursive warfare and the emergence of so-called "pro-life" groups.

As a strategy, the term "gender ideology" is disseminated to generate the abject, produce rejection, moral panic. Around it, through political channels, one may see the religious matrix acting on the issue of sex education that would cause "perversion of children" with the motto "let's save our children!"

There are cases in the region where governments have responded to the demands of these movements, and political leaders who share

their ideas are occupying the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary powers implementing actions so that the expectations of these reactionary projects are met.

The “pro-family” discourse as a political-economic project

The question of defending the traditional heterosexual family reveals itself as the “tip of the iceberg” of a wider economic-political project: keeping things as they are, the status quo, the patriarchal order. The issue of gender is fundamental to fundamentalisms because it is linked to different structuring areas of life and knowledge: sexuality, health, economy, culture.

According to this logic, the family acts as a safety net, a repository of discipline and an authority structure. The family is considered a strong barrier to the excesses of democracy and the demands of social minorities. Thus, it is clear that one of the focuses of these fundamentalisms is the destruction of everything that alludes to social justice.

This is the result of a resentful morality, revealing frustrations and the attempt to retake what was once in force guided by the key of religiosity. It is a white and male resentment, felt by individuals and groups who feel weakened by elements produced by democracy and by the rise of the visibility of women and LGBTQ+ in gender rights actions, for being confronted when sexist, homophobic or racist positions are denounced.. That is why the pro-family and anti-gender discourses observed in the cases that motivated the research act through two fronts: Education and Law (Judiciary).

The presence of the market in the structuring of social life (and no longer in religion or in the State) generated a phenomenon not

conditioned by religion, but fundamentally religious. The well-known Prosperity Theology and its derivatives are the theological translations of this religion.

Due to the failure of neoliberal policies and economic crises around the world, there is an appeal to defend the family to make neoliberal discourse and practices more digestible. In the defense of the family, the idea of private production is involved – the family is responsible for the education of children, the elderly and the sick, which guarantees survival, which denotes the irrelevance of public policies, education, health, labor rights.

Moral panic and permanent confrontation with enemies

The construction of these bases and adherence to them are carried out through moral panic, the rhetoric of fear to generate insecurity and promote affection. In the context of the four countries observed in this research, a moral panic developed around the “defense of the family” and the children of families as nuclei of society that would be at risk thanks to the equality and sexual rights agenda. There is also the dissemination of hate speech against social movements and directly against activists.

Actions by fundamentalist groups are coordinated

According to the forms of action of fundamentalist groups, the formation of alliances of movements on the continent was identified with similar and coordinated campaigns and actions that can be seen in the occupation of social networks and the streets. The “*Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas*” movement is an example of how these coalitions establish articulations at the regional level, having started in Peru and expanded

to Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Mexico and Uruguay, with the same slogans and the same aesthetics. A similar movement in Brazil was named “Escola Sem Partido”.

On another front are the anti-gender actors and networks that work in an articulated way at the regional level, especially in the spaces of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. This is classified as a “strategic secularization” (adoption of secular rhetoric to reduce the degree of dogmatism) which enabled anti-gender forces linked to Christian churches to amplify their voices and camouflage their religious motivations for action.

The discourse assumed by actors and networks on international platforms, which take the form of NGOs and are based on science and human rights, allowed them to occupy a wide space previously destined exclusively for secular actors and States. These groups have given prominence to women and young people.

Appropriation of the issues of the secular state and religious freedom

It is common for groups of activists, politicians and academics critical of the advance of fundamentalist expressions in Latin America to put the secularity of the State under threat, with these ongoing actions.

With the characteristics of the fundamentalisms that have been expressed in the region in recent decades, it is clear that, despite being seen by critics as a threat to the secular State, these groups do not deny it. On the contrary, they have redefined the notion of secularism in the State and the agenda of individual and human rights, advancing their actions based on the secular State and the religious freedom that characterizes it.

The argument is that the secular state is not an atheist state, and that Christians are citizens and have the right to act politically and socially in accordance with their nature, which is Christian. This is related to “strategic secularization” which allows anti-rights fundamentalist forces to amplify and diversify their voices and eliminate interreligious tensions.

The new discourse is anchored in science and human rights and in their international platforms which allows these groups to dispute a wider space with secular actors and secular states. The role of fundamentalist groups in the OAS spaces reflects this. The speeches and arguments they present are based on a restrictive interpretation of international human rights instruments, although they take them into account. Many turn to “natural law” in order to promote a new approach to human rights.

There are new fundamentalist movements from the United States operating in South America

With the conservative wave of the 2010s observed in the investigated countries, at this moment new fundamentalist articulations originating from the USA are becoming evident, emerging as soldiers of a “culture war” or a war against “cultural Marxism,” terms that have become widely used by conservative religious and political leaders in the debate on guidelines such as education and sexual rights.

The Dominion Theology of the Reconstructionist fundamentalists manifests itself through movements such as “*Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas*” and the *Escola sem Partido* project, in addition to the homeschooling proposals of the Brazilian government. Additionally, through “Capitol Ministries,” with the support of the Trump administration, the “Discipleship Bible Studies for our Political Leaders” was created. In

Latin America, offices were opened in Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay under the direction of the global director for Latin America, Oscar Zamora, active since 2017, together with nominated local coordinators.

Reform fundamentalism also found bases in South America in groups that work in the areas of artistic production, of literature and of the intelligentsia, based on religious discourse. A strong objective is the training of young people with the L'Abri Institute in Brazil, a gospel cultural movement that represents an important vehicle of the reformist ideology with religious preaching, and various singers and musical groups generate their spaces for religious education. The most recent cultural movement from the United States to reach South America is "The Send" whose objective consists of students from universities and colleges or schools, both considered mission fields, like two others, families and nations. The project has the support of other fundamentalist organizations in the United States.

About possible strategies

The analysis of interviews with specialists and focus groups and of group interviews with human rights activists offers reflections, describes experiences and possible strategies for responding to this reality of political-religious fundamentalisms exposed in the research report.

With regard to gender, faith-based organizations need to recognize that they do not adopt gender justice policies as they should, and sometimes they agree with conservative worldviews on the role of women, thus reinforcing gender inequalities.

It is also necessary to restart the training in critical consciousness with programs of popular education and alternative communication. In this sense, it is important to learn to listen to people at their base and to work on the memory and history of religious groups and social movements and their effects on the present.

In this training it is necessary to give visibility to the economy reflected from the feminist vision, the solidarity economy, and to lay bare the conservative camp and fundamentalisms: what they are and what they do, how their machine works: their history, their developed groups, their alliances, and financing. It is vitally important to identify with whom one may dialogue to build an alternative camp and with whom there is no dialogue.

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INSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT WITH GENDER JUSTICE¹

Márcia Paixão²

It begins thus

*We are struggling every day in the
labor for equality and rights.*

Sonia Guadalajara – *indigenous leader*³.

I greet every person who is here at the Congress who brings their story and experiences to share here and who seeks the construction of just relationships at the place where they are. It is a pleasure to be here (remotely) with you, hoping that the next Congress can be face-to-face, so that we can experience all the possibilities that the encounters offer us when we are on the campus of Faculdades EST.

The axes of our Congress, courage, creativity and hope, indicate that time does not stop, as the Brazilian singer Cazuza used to say, and calls us to reflection and action. In this movement done by the world and life, courage, creativity and hope are responses that we must have to face the daily labor. And I believe that only in collective movements can we have more strength, more courage, creativity and hope to reach the social justice we intensely long for. And, as Sonia Guadalajara challengingly tells us, *We are struggling every day in the labor for equality and rights.*

1 Lecture presented at the Thematic Tables “Democratic Institutional Management with Gender Justice”. Translated by Marie Krahn. This text was originally published in the Dossier “Economia Solidária, Gestão Democrática, Justiça de Gênero”, in the Revista Coisas do Gênero. See: PAIXÃO, Márcia Eliane Leindcker da. Gestão democrática institucional com justiça de gênero. *Coisas do Gênero*, São Leopoldo, v. 7, n. 2, p. 18-25, July./Dec. 2021. Available at: <http://revistas.est.edu.br/index.php/genero/article/view/1267/1060>. Accessed on: 17 Jan. 22.

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3 Opening phrase at the Conversation Circle on Doing Gender 2021, on July 27, 2021, on the indigenous perspective for another world.

Thus, we must reach out to each other and go forward collectively. On this path it is necessary to dialog in order to understand how the systems of domination work, their pervasiveness in our daily lives and how we build strategies of change.

The topic of this roundtable is broad and provocative and has been debated in many areas of science. Management and justice have several theoretical approaches and perspectives. At this occasion I would like to offer some preliminary reflections on two aspects that I think are relevant and are contained in this topic, namely, social justice and inequalities. I establish a dialog with feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser about her view on social justice, since I believe that her considerations converge with the debates that feminist theology has been carrying out over time.

The global map

It is no novelty that “time does not stop” and that we experience economic, social, sanitary and cultural crises that directly affect people’s lives and our planet. The economic system that prevails in the world – capitalism – has dictated the rules of the financial and economic game among the countries and accelerated social inequalities, producing and maintaining persons and nations under the domination of capital, without effective policies designed to face the crises that capital itself has produced. On this platform inequalities grow and these deserve our attention. We know that our Brazilian and Latin-American history has been marked by colonization on all levels. The idea of colonization has long been established in society, fragmenting the social and political

spheres and impacting people’s lives in cruel and unequal ways. This economic system normalizes the idea of hierarchy and submission among the nations and pervades the daily international and social relations. This political model is frightening but unfortunately it is the one in effect. The neoliberal idea of colonial capitalism constructs the concept of meritocracy and recognition in the social field as ways of being in this world. This intensifies inequality and violence and stresses individualism, besides masking the cruelty of colonialism that is present in political and social relations, destabilizing the political actions of social movements and hierarchizing social causes.

At this point we have countless questions to raise. In the wake of this, the questioning of the decolonial feminism advocated by Nancy Fraser and many other feminists points to the urgency of thinking about our colonial matrices installed in daily life in general and specifically in feminism. Debating the personal and collective activism associated with the anti-racist, environmental, labor-related, anti-homophobic, indigenous, disabilities-related activisms... has been the focus of decolonial feminism. Nancy Fraser has called for an epistemological revision of the agenda of feminism today. And this concerns us.

Some considerations from decolonial studies

I believe that intertwining the debate about institutional democratic management with gender justice based on Nancy Fraser’s questions about social justice is relevant in the reflections of this Congress on Gender and Religion.

One of the trends of decolonial feminism invests in the debate about a counter-epistemology to face the “European and North American cognitive empire”⁴. The other trend emphasizes social inequalities and the coloniality of power. These decolonial studies point to the urgency of thinking about local realities and specificities for Brazilian decolonial feminism. The two trends complement each other. When reminding us of Brazil’s colonial process and the need for this reflection in the feminist field, Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda explains that

In 1808, João VI, king of Portugal, moves to the colony to flee from Napoleon’s armies. In other words, our besieged oppressor came to look for shelter among us and was welcomed on Brazilian soil. This proximity between the colonizer and the colonized could not but have left profound marks on the logic of the construction of our power relations, on the ambiguity of the national symbolic figures and on the perception of violence that acquires various shades of simulation. Differently from the peoples of the rest of the continent, we are not fond of or prone to confrontation, which generates unique strategies of struggle⁵.

In the wake of decolonial studies, feminists have been pointing to reflections and questions that have to be made within the feminist movement itself, particularly in the Latin American context. In this sense, in 2019 Cinzia Arruza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser published a manifesto titled *Feminism for the 99%* to promote the debate about “another” feminism in consonance with the issues of our daily

lives. And they ask: “With what women does feminism dialog? What women continue to be on the margin of feminisms? Is feminism really popular?”⁶

Heloisa Buarque highlights the fact that Nancy Fraser has pointed out that the neoliberal thinking is encroaching on the feminist field, hierarchizing the causes and individualizing social groups, weakening the common and collective cause of the guarantee of rights for all women.

From this perspective we should look into the contemporary feminist discourse and realize that the systems of domination (capitalism, patriarchy and racism) must be debated in the light of justice and equality, so that we understand how they are organized and expressed within feminism itself as a form of domination and coloniality. Doing this means undertaking a radical contemporary epistemological revision that we must be willing to face.

Over time we have advanced in many areas to construct women’s citizenship and protagonism. And the accomplishments we have achieved are laudable. But in a time of growing social inequality, with capitalism dictating the ways of being in the world and promoting individualistic protagonisms, it is urgent to think about this.

This brief contextualization warns us that the topics of democracy, social justice and gender justice unveil the social conflicts and inequalities deserving our attention.

4 HOLLANDA, Heloisa Buarque de (Org.). *Pensamento Feminista hoje: perspectivas decoloniais*. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020, p. 13.

5 HOLLANDA, 2020, p. 23.

6 ARRUZA; BHATTACHARYA, FRASER, 2019 *apud* HOLLANDA, 2020, p. 13.

Thinking about the implications of social justice

I refer to Nancy Fraser to offer a few reflections at this thematic roundtable. Joining in decolonial feminism, I agree that the term *social justice* is broader and better enables us to advocate the guarantee of rights in contemporary society.

Fraser's view on the need for social justice is based on her studies about the theory of Recognition⁷ stemming from her view on the idea of parity of participation, cultural reification, a broader view on social justice that are present in her ideas about redistribution and recognition. Fraser⁸ situates her critique and theoretical construction in contemporary society and aims at an economic, social and cultural transformation. In her analysis of the world scenario of globalization, which has a way of being of a political claim, which passes through identity representations and the problem of lack of respect for what is different, promoting the inequalities in the society in which we live, Fraser points to a reflection on social justice which includes reviewing the economic model of the Modern State.

In her broad and profound analysis of the theory of recognition and her focus on social justice, she highlights the risks of displacing the struggles (from redistribution to recognition) in society and within social groups as a mechanism of hierarchies that prevent interaction and parity among social groups and their demands. In her analysis she recognizes

⁷ Nancy Fraser diverges theoretically from the Theory of Recognition defended by Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor.

⁸ FRASER, Nancy. Social Justice in Globalization. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, Coimbra, n. 63, p. 7-20, 2002. Available at: <https://www.eurozine.com/social-justice-in-globalisation/>. Accessed on: Aug. 13 2021.

the principle of parity of participation as an important element for social justice. In her words,

Justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another *as peers*. For participatory parity to be possible, at least two conditions must be satisfied. First, the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' independence and 'voice' [...] the second condition for participatory parity requires that institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem.⁹

This notion of parity pointed out by Fraser is a critique of structural dominations that take place through gender, class and race in the contemporary world and justify individualisms in social struggles. In her theory, she points to other social constructions and offers a long argument about the changes that are necessary in the present model of State so that it can be capable of deconstructing the structural logics of domination and injustice. In her view, these changes are essential for other changes to be made in society and in social relations. Fraser calls the injustices/dominations in our context an evil to be combatted. In her view, social justice has to do with redistribution: egalitarian distribution of resources and goods that ensure social groups' voice in society; and recognition: policies that meet the needs of gender, race/ethnicity and class. In her view, there is no hierarchy between these two elements, between social causes that are manifest through gender, class and race. One needs to broaden the debate of these elements of the theory of recognition. In her words,

⁹ FRASER, 2002, p. 13.

I shall consider the risk that recognition struggles are displacing redistribution struggles... In hopes of defusing this risk, I shall propose an analysis of social justice that is broad enough to house the full range of concerns in globalization... I shall consider the risk that the current focus on cultural politics is reifying social identities... In hopes of defusing this risk, I shall propose a non-identitarian conception of recognition that is appropriate to globalization... I shall examine the risk that globalization is undermining state capacities to redress injustices of both types. In hopes of defusing this risk, I shall propose a multi-tiered conception of sovereignty that decenters the national frame. In every case, the conceptions I propose will be rooted in emancipatory potentials now unfolding in the current constellation.¹⁰

Fraser stresses that social and economic injustices are a hindrance to the full participation of all social groups. The injustices produce and maintain the inequalities which affect people's lives, since they become ingrained in the discourses of culture, of the movements and in politics and dissociate the demands for rights. Fraser's current studies focus on identifying the subordinations imposed by capitalism through the social and economic globalization to get to know the threats and think strategies which aim at social justice.

Fraser's approach with regard to distribution and recognition to overcome the inequalities and consolidate social justice demands a deep analysis of the impacts of economic globalization. Globalization directly affects people's lives when:

[...] social institutions regulate interaction according to cultural norms that impede parity of participation. Examples include marriage laws

that exclude same-sex partnerships as illegitimate and perverse, social-welfare policies that stigmatize single mothers as sexually irresponsible scroungers, and policing practices such as 'racial profiling' that associate racialized persons with criminality. In each of these cases, interaction is regulated by an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that constitutes some categories of social actors as normative and others as deficient or inferior. In each case, the result is to deny some members of society the status of full partners in interaction, capable of participating on a par with the rest.¹¹

In her study, the author emphasizes the urgency of determining which are the "truly" local, national, regional and global causes that we need to address to overcome inequalities. She insists on the importance of naming the problems at these levels, as this means knowing the extent of inequalities, not imposing a hierarchy on the causes and having multiple knowledge to understand and neutralize the threats of economic globalization. This means that intersecting gender, class, race remains the basic premise for the analysis when we name the oppressions and dominations in life in society. And it is in this sense that decolonial feminism emphasizes and reaffirms that there is no hierarchy between oppressions.

Nancy Fraser highlights strategies she considers urgent for social justice to be possible. In this sense, she highlights local, national and global analysis, from everyday issues of different social groups to national and transnational policy issues that impact people's lives around the world. It invites analysis of the local and global simultaneously and constantly.

¹⁰ FRASER, 2002, p. 10.

¹¹ FRASER, 2002, p. 16.

In this sense, we have enormous challenges for feminist theory and for critical theory. Intersecting gender, class and race in the analysis of the domination of economic globalization, which devastates and massacres populations around the world, will require multiple studies with different areas of knowledge and local and global collective actions. And this is no small feat. Mobilizing to transform is extremely complex, but extremely necessary.

Nancy Fraser looks at contemporary feminism and asks questions about the policy implications for reinvigorating feminist theory and practice. She very precisely highlights that understanding the functioning and capillarity of economic globalization and its harmful impacts on people and the world are the elements that contemporary feminism needs to appropriate in order to map domination and seek social justice. Local and global analysis simultaneously and constantly. Her defense for social justice is based on the idea of allying with different national and transnational groups (environmentalists, indigenous people, various social movements) to name injustices and build a policy that integrates the various causes and balances social relations. She recognizes that this policy is not easy. However, Fraser instigates us with her ideas for us to think about the third way to overcome the injustices that world globalization imposes on us.

Her work is extensive and presents a lot of analysis and questions about the lack of social justice and the idea of maintaining inequalities and fissures within social movements that need to be overcome. Without claiming to bring all questions raised by her work, in this reflection I brought some elements for a dialog on our

topic. Obviously, many aspects could be added to this reflection, which seeks a political and humanizing commitment for social and personal relations.

Closing without finishing

This topic deals with various aspects involving feminisms and is not exhausted here. I dealt with one of the aspects shown by decolonial feminism for a more intensive thinking in our various contexts. I believe that the religious field and feminist theology can continue thinking about and elaborating on these elements discussed here. Articulating social justice and gender justice in contemporaneity means reaffirming the theoretical and political commitment that has been an important mark of feminist theory and putting in the center the aspects that contribute to the actual emancipation and equality of rights. Fraser gives us tips to broaden our analyses.

Debating who are the 99% and what are the conditions to which women are exposed in contemporary society is urgent and pertinent. Gender justice is not separate from the analysis of social justice. They are the faces of the same coin. The context of social inequalities that emphasizes meritocracy and has installed itself in feminist discourse has encouraged the “empowerment” of women in the sense of gaining visibility and reaching the top of the market. What about the situation of the 99%? Issues such as affordable housing, public health, climate change, precarious salaries, violence of all sorts are issues that affect most women in the world. The 99% cannot remain unnoticed.

In this sense, decolonial feminism as advocated by Fraser and other feminists invites us to be anticapitalistic, antiracist and anti-homophobic. This perspective is also close to the proposal of well-living advocated by indigenous peoples and the black community. This perspective raises the urgent need for research, for thinking about methodological proposals based on daily demands, for listening to the voices and their suffering, for organizing and joining groups and communities to think about the strategies in order to meet the demands of our context. And undoubtedly this is done by joining forces. Collective actions are our strength, our courage and our hope to look for the best forms for the desired transformation that puts us side by side as (different, diverse and equal) persons.

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ERO-ECO-SOFÍA:

THE FEMINIST STRENGTH AND PROPHETIC COURAGE AS THE ALCHEMY OF STREET MOVEMENTS¹

Marilú Rojas Salazar²

The alchemy of street movements

Alchemy in ancient and medieval times was the science used by hermits, sages, theologians, philosophers, and many women who

1 Lecture given at the Thematic Table “Gender identities, sexual diversity and biblical narratives”. Translated by Heilike Philippsen Mog. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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were considered witches³. It was the art of the experimental study of the chemical phenomena of mixing, it intended to discover the elements that made up the universe, turn metals into gold, discover the elixir of life and eternal youth or how to defeat death, and one of its most coveted objectives was to discover the philosopher’s stone that would turn all metals into gold. Since then, especially the male alchemists had that fixation, because this would give them the entirety of the concentration of power. Female alchemists played with the processes of mixtures of herbs, substances, realities, species and others, for them there was no such ‘purity’, there were no ‘pure’ bodies, but the most diverse possibilities of mixtures. Mixtures of bodies, species, nations, bloods,

3 Part of this work is the result of the discussion held with Dr. Ivone Gebara, Dr. Maricel Mena López and Dr. Marilú Rojas Salazar in the framework of the anniversary of the Baez Camargo chair of the Theological Community of Mexico.

fluids, ideas, subversions, militancies, commitments, political, social, cultural, epistemic and religious realities, and many other mixtures. This is what I today call hybrids, mixtures. And I present it as a quality of street prophetisms that are expressed in street assemblies, marches, rallies and protests as a right to raise the voice that cries out for justice in urban deserts; I mention urban deserts because contradictorily, if we think of the city as a large overpopulated space, the city is also, today, a space where the cries of justice are heard less and less.

I bring this concept of 'feminist alchemy' to this context of hybrid and emergent prophetisms that we are living in the feminist street politics of protests throughout Abya Yala, since that is in my opinion the phenomenon that we are, as feminists, experiencing amongst marches against femicides, protests against the disappearance of many women, young women taking feminism back to the streets and freeing it from the confinement of the academy, networks of cyberfeminist comrades permeating the virtual space of critical gender awareness, women searching for disappeared relatives, who now pass from being victims to being militants of a cause of justice and dignity; women resisting against patriarchal neo-colonialism. Defenders of their land and their body-territory, defenders of water against the neo-colonial patriarchal extractivist logic of devastating capitalism. Undoubtedly, these are the prophetic movements that today denounce with a powerful voice the injustices that cross the bodies, sexualities and eroticisms of every woman. So, I have thought of alchemy as the art of feminists in transforming pain and violence into an exercise in epistemic-corporal subversion and in the art of depatriarchalizing the world through its wisdom, knowledge and sororal interweaving. The art of mixing women's day to day knowledge

through the collective construction of acquiring a critical awareness of gender, mixtures and hybridity is what this rapidly evolving and rapidly mutating society has been talking about. The art of combining the most diverse causes in our daily struggles and in cracking the fundamentalist neocolonial patriarchal system.

Alchemy as the science of the four elements, the search for tinctures and healing medicines that is a central element in community feminisms, lead me to propose 'feminist alchemy', that is, the art of mixing the various feminist causes, where there are no pure feminisms, but there are radical ones, understanding radicality as the art of decolonizing our bodies-territory, minds, affections and feeling-thoughts of racism, sexism and classism. One day one of my students made me see that a line of feminism questions radical feminisms, however, it made me think that certainly there are no pure feminisms, but that radicalism is an integral element of all feminisms, an ingredient which we cannot give up within these alchemies.

I bet on alchemy as a methodology in dialogue with our diversities and daily struggles as the wisdom of mixing as proposed by Ivone Gebara:

Today we are trying to embrace the diversity and the mix that we are, as a challenge and the only condition for life to express itself in its limitless multiplicity. For this reason, many women's organizations are mixed with the many flags that claim human dignity from the multiplicity of situations.⁴

4 GEBARA, Ivone. *Filosofía Feminista*. Brevisima introducción. Montevideo: Doble Clic, 2014. p. 38.

Feminist alchemy is a mixture of corporalities, sexualities, diversities, struggles, territories, realities, and daily lives that are interwoven, following the metaphors of alchemy as a research methodology and new routes for the construction of thought, discourse and the practice of everyday life. Unlike male alchemists, we as women do not seek the philosopher's stone for the concentration of power and to turn metals into gold, but we use alchemy as the art of combining life, knowledge, flavors, our little powers, desires, struggles and daily life as the art of transforming our lives into better livable spaces for the most possible. Alchemy makes me live feminism as a daily struggle, but also as a magic in which it is possible for us to dream, but not with naivety, but to dream and regain faith as confidence in the struggles of our colleagues who will be able to transform their environments into more livable and healthy spaces. However, for Gebara, the contradiction is an essential element of these mixtures⁵, since we are hybrid beings and we remain in contradiction against the patriarchal logic of purities or binarisms in which one is good or bad, coherent or incoherent, of one group or the other, while life is not like that. Contradiction is an ingredient with which feminists coexist as a critical and self-critical epistemic exercise of our own certainties that run through our daily lives, and alchemy is such an ancient science and art revealed in everyday life by women:

In the fourth century, an alchemist from Alexandria, Zosimo of Panopolis, recovered part of the work of a woman who had lived a century or two before him and included it in a collection of ancient knowledge along with other alchemy sages. In the 8th century she is cited by a chronicler from Byzantium and the Arab al-Nadim also immortalized

her name in the 9th century. They all tell us about a woman about whom very little is known of her existence. Mary the Jewess, Mary the Hebrew or Miriam the Prophetess was the first female name related to the knowledge of alchemy. She was the creator of the procedure for heating substances in a uniform way, popularly known as a “double boiler” and which is still used today in chemical laboratories. And in many kitchens.⁶

Because it is in everyday life that we discover and live the mixture, the hybridity and the prophetism, especially when the health of women and the need to feed the body and other bodies emerge as a prevailing demand for survival⁷.

Eco-ero-sofía creative courage and feminist spiritual strength in the streets

When we talk about erotica we are talking about the inner strength that each living being possesses, which we call spirit. And that emerges from the creative courage of the bodies that come together in the streets to protest.

This force is potentially political in the sense that it seeks the greatest possible good for most species, not only the human species but establishes relationships of interdependence since it recognizes

⁵ GEBARA, 2014, p. 36.

⁶ Mary the Jewess was a kind of hermit, healer or ascetic of the desert. Not well looked upon. MARÍA la judía. *Wikipedia*. Available at: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar%C3%ADa_la_Jud%C3%ADa#Ba.C3.B1o_Mar.C3.ADa. Access in: Jul. 6th, 2021.

⁷ A good part of this text has been published at: SOFÍAS. Revista interdisciplinaria de teología feminista. *Profetismos feministas híbridos y emergentes*, México, año 3, v. 1, n. 5, p. 25-34, 2021.

the necessary democratic harmony between all beings in ecosystems. Erotica is completely body-territory because it emerges from our corporality, from our internal caverns, from our porosities and fluids as a force of subversive resistance that opposes the gender mandates, systems of domination, and submissions. This force that emanates from our corporeal sexualities is what allows us to defend abject bodies such as earth-bodies, the water-body, the air-body, the animal-body, and the jungle bodies because we are an integral part of a greater corporeality called oikos. One of the ways of colonization of our bodies, as women, was the mystique without a body, without desires, without pleasure, and without passion, which certainly led in many cases to depression, neurosis, or frustration in the best cases.

Mysticism was the only way that women found for the expression of eroticism, to manifest their desires, recognize their pleasures and record what was happening with their libido. It is through mysticism as an erotic exercise that women recognized orgasm as a value of their own corporality and without having their bodies being colonized or manipulated by men. This force that inhabits our vaginal caves and our senses becomes dangerous when we find in mysticism the path of recovery of erotica as a subversive force, and that is when the daily life of our body becomes political in the search for the greatest good possible, for as many women as possible. The allied bodies which come together to subvert the systems in the public space are the same bodies that enjoy systemic disobedience and that, by coming together, generate policies of change.

Eco-ero-sofía arises from the desire for an immanent divine experience, representing the passionate nuclear force that unites this

trinity: a humanizing eros-oikos-sofía, in opposition to the patriarchal market god that proposes pornography as a material resource for sale, which exhibits fragmented bodies and the obscenity of disposable bodies, especially those of women, children, and migrants.

Erotica

A dangerous word when being interpreted, as it is usually confused or handled from the patriarchal and market interpretation as pornography or prostitution. Christian colonization has been largely responsible for nullifying the eroticism in Afro-American-Indian cultures, “a culture that, in the name of religion, demands the renouncement of natural instincts, which only allows the dominated eros and is built upon violence, is not a healthy culture, but a promoter of disease”⁸.

This also applies to religious instances that, for the sake of morality, have mutilated the vital force of passion and desire that inhabits every living being, which we call erotica. Cultures and religions that disdain eros are spaces that make people sick. An example of this is the double standard of institutions or crimes of pedophilia that clergymen and pastors have committed throughout history, since “Expelling the eroticism from the temple, discarding it and throwing it into darkness and disgrace, tore the heart of indigenous culture. Through the repression of indigenous sexuality, Catholic morality shook Mesoamerican cosmology to its

⁸ SCHAUP, Susanne. *Sofía*. Aspectos de lo divino femenino. Barcelona: Kairos, 1999. p. 57.

foundations”⁹. And not only in Mesoamerica, but also in other cultures, contempt for sex, pleasure and the desire for bodies has caused injuries to people and exiles from religious institutions.

Spirituality in the Mesoamerican world is a sexual spirituality, that is, each living being has a divine masculine and feminine force at the same time that transits between bodies in a fluid way, and this characteristic is preserved in social imaginaries to this day, expressed in its sacred dimension. In this sense, erotica is a trans-theological category, because it is not located in a single deity, but is understood as an accumulation of knowledge, a political force, and a subversive mystical stance that every living being possesses; which emerges from the violated and diasporic bodies that moan for the desire for a more dignified, equitable and just life in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, this said force, attributed to the sacred, transits in the daily imaginary of the people who live these realities, such is the case of the Mexican context in which nine women are murdered every day, and the whole country is a clandestine grave of fragmented, violated, disappeared bodies, in the most brutal and unimagined ways.

Erotica is a tribute to divinity because it is the force that emanates, used to resist injustice, and the force that opposes necrophilic relationships, that is, the extermination of bodies because they are considered disposable.

Erotica has often been misnamed and used against women. For this reason, many times we have moved away from the exploration and consideration of erotica as a source of power and knowledge, confusing

⁹ MARCOS, Sylvia. *Tomado de los labios: género y eros en Mesoamérica*. Quito: Abya Yala; Universidad Politécnica Salesiana, 2011. p. 137.

it with its opposite, pornography. But pornography is the direct negation of erotica, because it represents the suppression of true feelings. Pornography emphasizes the sensation without feelings.¹⁰

Audre Lorde proposes to think of erotica as a vital force, and would add that erotica is a source-force that allows us to resist-oppose violence. From erotica emanates the capacity for transgression of oppressive and violent systems, the vitality to transform the spaces of injustice into equitable and sororal spaces, it is also the capacity to critically analyze the discourses that annul the desires and passion, which emanate from our bodies yearning for other forms of dignified life. Erotica has a deeply political dimension that allows recognizing the pornographic act as the sale of bodies, sexualities, and the exhibition of such bodies to be violated.

Byung Chul Han describes erotica as the inner force that makes us go out of ourselves to meet the other (neighbor), while narcissism, typical of the neoliberal capitalist model, encloses us in a model of the sameness (hell) that depresses us and makes us collapse in on ourselves, because it denies us the loving of those who are different¹¹. Erotica allows us to recognize the different, the otherness, and makes it possible to overcome the fear of the ‘strange’; While capitalist narcissism generates phobias and depression as the impossibility of love, eroticism draws from itself the capacity and strength of love for what is different, strange, or alien.

¹⁰ LORDE, Audre. Lo erótico como poder. *Lesbianas de Bolivia*, ©2002. Available at: http://lesbianas_estadea.tripod.com/lo_erotico_como_poder.htm. Access in: Apr. 21th, 2019.

¹¹ HAN, Byung-Chul. *La agonía del eros*. Barcelona: Herder, 2014. p. 9-18.

Erotica, however, cannot be isolated from its relationship with Sofía because it would fall into the void of naivety or ignorance of not knowing how to direct its strength, passion and desire. In the case of Sofía, it is necessary to relate it to body eroticism in a harmonious union of sensuality and pleasure because without it, Sofía is mutilated, since “The relationship of those who seek wisdom with Sofía is entirely sensual and erotic.”¹² I allow myself to place erosophy as an epistemic category from the oldest Hebrew concept of knowing as a relationship of a passionate, intelligent, critical and audacious love, capable of letting go the fear of the pleasure of recreation of the relationships between all the species that inhabit this common house called oikos.

Oikos

Traditionally, this Greek term has been interpreted as common house, however, this concept, in my opinion, has two underlying epistemic problems; on the one hand, it evokes the patriarchal house and the hierarchical relationships that are established in it from the stratified kyriocentric model up to the slaves, and on the other hand, the house is an object that can be sold or bought through the logic of the market. In other words, it also functioned as an economic-social unit in ancient Greece. In this model, the pater families: a white, rich, Hellenic and free man exercised his sovereign authority as the owner of the oikos, thus generating a patrilineal line from the oldest man to the youngest, always establishing patriarchal hierarchies. The women, the children, and the slaves were a kind of “good” or belonging of the pater families.

Then, in what sense would one have to approach Oikos? I think that it is precisely from feminism, which intends to study how it is that the relationships which are established in the common space Gaia (earth), which constitutes the common habitat of humanity, have been relations of reification and marketing from the model of patri-kyriarchal relationships of domination and exploitation towards those who also inhabit said space: women, children, LGBTQIAP+ communities, indigenous peoples, ecosystems, species, among others.

Recovering the earth (Gaia) as a living being and not as an object leads to an intersubjective co-responsibility with it to transform the relations of domination-oppression-exploitation into relations of equity and right as a living being. In addition to recognizing that there is a political-ideological connection between the domination of women and nature, it also analyzes the crisis situation that the planet is experiencing due to the devastation that comes from the same patriarchal system, which bases itself on the power ‘over’, it intends to deconstruct this ‘naturalization’ and build a proposal in which human beings are placed within the space of creation as part of it and not as the only ones, the best, or those who are above it. To achieve this, according to the ecofeminist proposal, three fundamental changes are needed within theological reflection: 1) a change in anthropology (current patriarchal model) towards the depatriarchalizing of the common habitat, 2) a change in epistemology, understood as another way to build the expression of the sacred, the symbolism, the language and the metaphors about Divinity and creation, as well as the forms of knowledge-wisdom and, finally, 3) a change in the way of understanding love: the body, sexuality, eroticism, desire, and pleasure, especially in women, LGBTQIAP+ communities

12 SCHAUP, 1999, p. 41.

and indigenous peoples. All of this, as one of many ways to overcome phobias (fears) that were installed in the collective imagination originating in Christianity.

Oikos-Gaia (house-earth) is not only a living being with rights, it also has its inner strength (Eros), and its own wisdom (Sofia) of which all beings that inhabit it are participants: eco-ero-Sofía. We locate this prophetic force as a creative, anti-systemic, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, and anti-colonial street courage that is expressed in the collapse of phallogocentric sculptures by young feminists.

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ANCESTRALITY AND WELL LIVING AS GUIDES FOR BLACK WOMEN¹

Nubia Regina Moreira²

My participation is to talk about the concepts Well Living and Ancestrality, which come to the movement of black Brazilian women, which are guiding principles of the March of Black Women against Racism, Violence and Well Living, held in 2015. This was the moment when more than 50,000 black women marched to denounce the feminine anti-blackness racism and violence, which we can translate as feminicide, of which black women have been the biggest victims.

I have been researching black women activists³ and their participation in the world of cultural and educational production. Thus, I will talk about the technologies of creation activated by black women's agency. To work with a sociological bias that focuses on black women's agency is to draw a narrative of critique of the images of control that are imposed upon us. So, I do not intend to regurgitate the narrative of the colonizer/oppressor/society/nation. I take a position here of speaking to the creative potency of black women and their abilities of Rexistences.

The Black Women's March is a milestone for the political platform of the black women's movement. The actions of struggles

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3 MOREIRA, Nubia Regina. *A presença das compositoras no samba carioca: um estudo da trajetória de Teresa Cristina*. 2013. 132 f. Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia) – Instituto De Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, 2013.

against racism and violence are historical and present agendas within the black movements and among black women. The principle of Well Living inaugurates a facet of this movement of return to the notion of a *Latin America*, to reiterate the *amefricanity*⁴ as a territorial identity and a civilizing political project alternative to the capitalist civilizing model.

In fact, Well Living and Ancestrality are two pillars for a civilizing path that has, as management spaces, other ways of living, using and preserving natural resources, an economy that focuses on the human being and not the market, hybrid cultures, and education at the crossroads. We value the knowledge that is born in the kitchens, in the schools, in the native communities, in the *quilombos*, in the schools of the periphery, and in the *terreiros*. It is from this place that black women, in their individual and collective processes of subjectivation, clad in their *amefricanities*, have projected, and made transformations.

To speak from the kitchen, as the author Tais Sant'Anna does when she digs into the trajectory of black female *chefs*, or even when in my research I highlight female authorship in the composition of *sambas*⁵, or in the lyrics of plays by the black female theater of Leda Martins, or even the courage to write scripts for the cinema and audiovisual fields, as black women in the cinema have done, is to emphasize the creative power of black women.

I complete my recollection with the list of black women writers who have invaded the publishing market and flooded us with their

writing experiences and *oral readings*. Here I speak, respectively, of Conceição Evaristo and Leda Maria Martins. I want to look at the movements of transformation in a direction parallel to an activism of the public figure, who presents herself as a persona, a self that enunciates on behalf of a collective, to activate the creative and transformative politics of anonymity. I claim that my talk is about the revolutions/transgressions of everyday black women.

I am used to looking at the daily life. It is an inheritance from a history of small day-to-day things that has been going through me since my undergraduate years. It is also related to my orixality. I am a person guided by an Orixá that has a direct relationship with herbs, with alchemy. An activity that demands attention, a state of presence and a lot of observation, besides confronting an order of the multiprocessing of life, in the form of food, remedies, customs and ways of thinking.

Our Oris (head) are tired of the ultra-processed information that comes to us chopped and edited. Information that tends to conform a style of existence formatted by the dizzying exposure of narratives presented as a guide to life, ways of dressing, living, praying, loving, and eating. In this sphere, we speak only to our own bubbles, we distance ourselves from the different, from the applause and the increase of followers. We want to talk or write madly. Sometimes the same words and meanings are repeated in different profiles. The applause comes in the form of *likes* and *reposts*.

We are faced with a virtualized daily life, synthesized by algorithms that control the characters that hold the expansive words. The Lord of the herbs, Ossain, connects us to the principle of Well Living, of self-healing, of the time to harvest the leaf, with its temperature, with the

4 GONZALEZ, Lélia. A categoria político-cultural de amefricanidade. *Tempo Brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 92-93, p. 69-81, jan./jun. 1988.

5 MOREIRA, 2013.

wisdom learned about it in the experience of the *terreiro*, and also in the awakening of the revival of its curatives for the “ills” of the mind, body, and spirit. The experiences of daily learning with our elders, be they our grandmothers, mothers, aunts, godmothers, teachers, *iyalorixás*, and activists, are eternalized in our memory. Daily life is a successful succession of experiences shared along our trajectory that is transformed into IN-BODY-IED knowledge. It is a knowledge that is in the BODY.

The look at the everyday, at the cracks and the debris is not to speak of pain or exalt suffering. From these places I bring the magic of negotiations, strategic silences, tricks, and plots. I think that transformative moments need the perennial actions that shape a ground that will be trodden by future generations. So, our intention is first to accentuate the agencies of black women who forge, with their tenacity, ways of existence that are generated in confrontation with the adversities arising from the relations of instituted and instituting power of the norms, laws, and intersubjective interactions that cross the existences of black women.

To think based on the agency of black women is to corroborate a reading that these women have the power of self-definition as a survival strategy for themselves and their communities. Self-definition, as Collins⁶ teaches us, is a tactic against the images of control that attempt to define the destiny of black women. The power of having control of the narrative of the self, of narrating oneself, is a movement

of proclaiming our existences outside of the files, scenarios, and roles that try to place on us.

Images of control are ideological justifications of racist and sexist domination used by elite groups in the exercise of power to manipulate ideas about the condition of black women. “Control images are plotted to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice seem natural, normal, and inevitable in everyday life.”⁷ One of the goals of Black feminist thought is to challenge the images of control that restrict Black women’s autonomy. It is important to note that control images are definitions of bodies and behaviours external to black women. Institutions are spheres of reproduction of these images of control, so this includes universities, the media, and government agencies.

The reaction of black women to images of control is part of the construction of the process of creating equipment to resist negative treatment and opening personal and collective processes toward positive self-definition. In considering that control images are not disembodied symbolic ideas, but are designed to make sense of black women’s daily lives, I reiterate Collins’ inquiry, “how do we black women (she says African American) as a cohesive group manage to find the strength to stand up to our objectification as mules of the world?”⁸

Experience as a form of discovery or as a possibility of narrating, inventing, and representing oneself has been and is part of the political grammar of feminists, and particularly of black feminists who have brought into activist practice processes of subjectivation in the public

6 COLLINS, Patricia Hill. *Pensamento feminista negro: conhecimento, consciência e a política do empoderamento*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019.

7 COLLINS, 2019, p. 136.

8 COLLINS, 2019, p. 81.

spheres and in the world of life through their testimonies, pains, and oppressions. Experience is like a political tool that puts them in the game of life negotiations as insurgent, black feminist political subjects.

The act of narrating is to express the process of constant subjectivations and release of our lives, which were preconceived and articulated with poverty, suffering, lack, and pain. For this, in the midst of creating breaches of existences that pass-through self-worth, we access the knowledge, knowledges, and technological innovations that enable modes of feminine and black subjectivations, produced by them, for them, and about them. The political project of black feminism aims to build a society of Well Living for all black and non-black people.

As I defended at the beginning of the text, Well Living as one of the principles of the Brazilian black women's movement defends:

[...] the right to life, the right to humanity, the right to have rights, and the recognition and appreciation of differences. We call for justice, equity, solidarity, and well-being that are non-negotiable values, in the face of the plurality of voices that cohabit the planet and claim the Good Life.⁹

Well Living, according to Acosta, is a social order that differs from capitalism because it is based “on the validity of Human Rights and the Rights of Nature, inspired by reciprocity and solidarity¹⁰. Well Living,

9 ARTICULAÇÃO DAS ORGANIZAÇÕES DE MULHERES NEGRAS BRASILEIRAS – AMNB. *Marcha das mulheres negras contra o racismo e a violência e pelo Bem Viver – o Bem Viver como nova utopia*. Marcha de Mulheres Negras contra o Racismo, a Violência e o Bem Viver. Brasília, 2015, p. 163.

10 ACOSTA, Alberto. *O Bem Viver: uma oportunidade para imaginar outros mundos*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Elefante, 2016, p. 22.

as a community practice, preaches the strengthening of ancestral and local practices that have been disrupted by colonial action. Aware of this disturbance – which altered the ways of doing things of the original peoples, of the black populations in diaspora – Well Living also resides in the perception of the coexistence between practices altered by colonial action and other forms that already exist as a result of technological advances.

Ancestrality calls us to recognize that “we, black women of Brazil, united with the women of the world affected by racism, sexism, lesbophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination, are inspired by our ancestrality that carries a legacy that affirms a new civilizing pact¹¹. Ancestrality is the capacity that we, black women, have developed by learning, from each other, to have the ability to position ourselves as historical subjects who carry in their bodies shared experiences in the process that constitute them in the face of the dimensions of the “I” and the political¹² “we”, in a pluri-racial, deeply colonized society.

A new civilizing pact, based on consensus, requires that the ancestral pain that black women carry be present in history as raw material capable of re-signifying the existence of women marked by racism, sexism, and classism. That said, to articulate the mobilizing force of the black women's movement, expressed in the principles of Well Living and Ancestrality, I realize that these principles guide us toward an ethics of care. The ethics of care is one of the characteristics

11 ARTICULAÇÃO DAS ORGANIZAÇÕES DE MULHERES NEGRAS BRASILEIRAS – AMNB, 2015, p. 163.

12 CESTARI, Mariana Jafet. *Vozes-mulheres negras ou feministas e antirracistas graças às Yabás*. 2015. 264 f. Tese (Doutorado em Linguística) – Instituto de Estudos da Linguagem, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2015.

of Black women's activism. I dare say that care is a form of exercise present in black communities, ruled by the hands of black women – who, impoverished and exposed to the slave production system and later to the capitalist economy – needed to activate care as a source of existence and maintenance of their ethical values.

In the *terreiro* communities, historically under the command of female leaders, such as *iyalorixás* or caretakers, there is the figure of the *ekede*, which is a female category in the hierarchy of *candomblé*.

Being an *Eke* mother is a good example of how motherhood can be conceived in different ways. An *Eke* is respected as a mother, but no children are born from her. In the hierarchical model of the *axé* family, they are indispensable in the initiation and in the process of educating all offspring. They are the ones who take care of the uninitiated, called *abian*, all the way to the elders of the house, known as *egbom*, besides taking care of all the ritualistics.¹³

In dialogue with the proposal of the table, which focuses on the experiences of black women and their effects on transformation movements, I evoke the cross between ancestry and care as the articulating point of the experience of Valdina Oliveira Pinto, Makota Valdina, teacher, community, and religious leader. Makota Valdina's words, about *candomblé* knowledge, remind us of a relationship of coexistence between human and nature. She tells us:

It is the knowledge of our relationship with this natural environment, but also social, human, the environment in which we are. Knowing that

we are in a place, what is essential in this place, as nature, that human beings are there, how we are interacting with this natural world, with human beings. If we refer to the knowledge of these traditions, we should see what this knowledge of African origin teaches us. Then you will see that this essence is common to all *candomblé* nations, human beings with nature. I would say that it teaches this knowledge of Well Living. It is sharing, contemplating, where all are equal and complete each other. When I see the *Orixá*, the *Vodun*, the *Inkisi* as these energies, I see that one completes the other, interacts with the other. None is more or less than the other. And I say that they are teaching this. We revere an *orixá*, in this case *Oxalá*, but *Oxalá* depends on all. My *Inkisi* is *Kavungo*, which is the Earth. He is feared because of diseases. But his essence, of *Kavungo*, of *Obaluaê*, will interact with those of the water. None is greater than the other and he depends on all. This is much of what we should be. This knowledge must be lived. I see the wisdom of life passed on by the *Orixás* as very current.¹⁴

Makota Valdina theorized based on her experience of Well Living and Caring as expressions of the practices of the *terreiro* that transform lives because they deal with *Ori*, our main *Orixá*. *Ori* is our guide, the first to be nurtured to guarantee the physical, emotional, and spiritual integrity of the person. Makota Valdina's care, as a principle, guided her actions in different worlds in which she transited: in politics, in the *terreiro*, at school, in the peripheries, in the universities. She acted anonymously, in her daily life, but she had visibility in the public world as a spokesperson for the fight against religious racism.

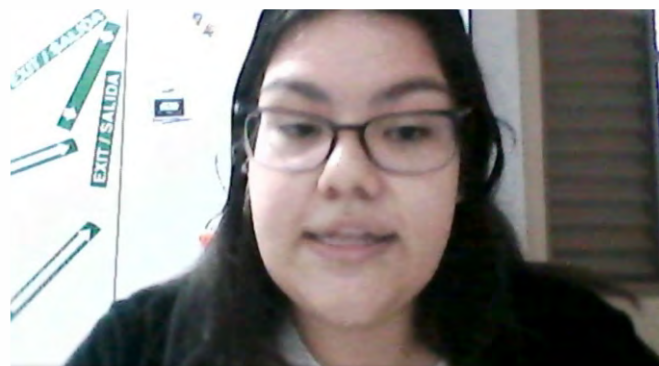
13 SANT'ANNA, Cristiano; SILVA, Isadora Souza. Oxum e ekedis: ancestralidade feminina negra dos terreiros refletido nas redes sociais. *Revista Espaço Acadêmico*, Maringá, v. 20, n. 227, p. 49-61, mar./abr. 2021, p. 57.

14 PINTO, Valdina. "Saberes e viveres de mulher negra: Makota Valdina". Entrevista concedida a Ubiratan Castro de Araújo. *Revista Palmares: cultura afro-brasileira*, Brasília, ano 1, n. 2, p. 75-83, 2005, p. 81.

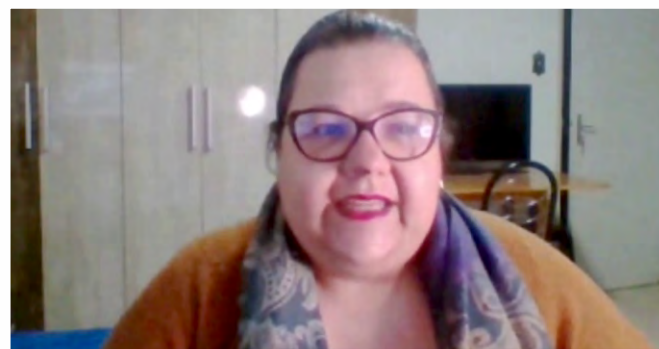
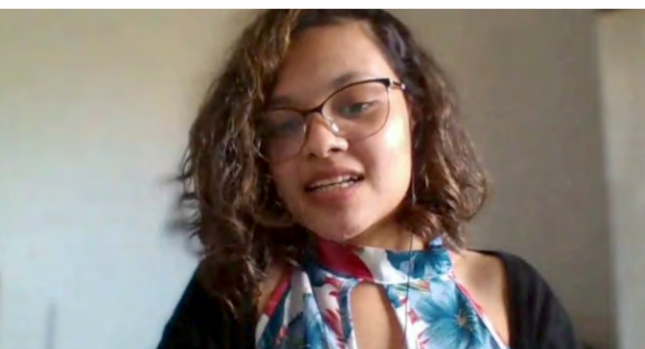
I began my text with the intention of valuing the agency of black women as creators of life technologies. Makota Valdina's experience, as a guide, is to demonstrate that her ability to transit in different worlds is the fruit of a creative energy. The strength of the transformation movements coming from the experiences of black women, anonymous or not, resides in the ability to transit in different worlds, even if each one has its own grammar. These worlds are understood as multidimensionalities of life, which cannot be sectioned.

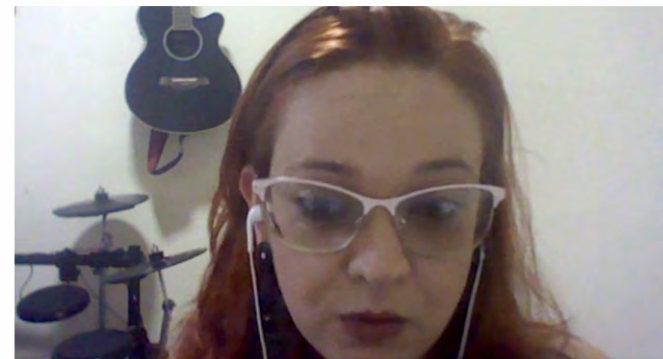
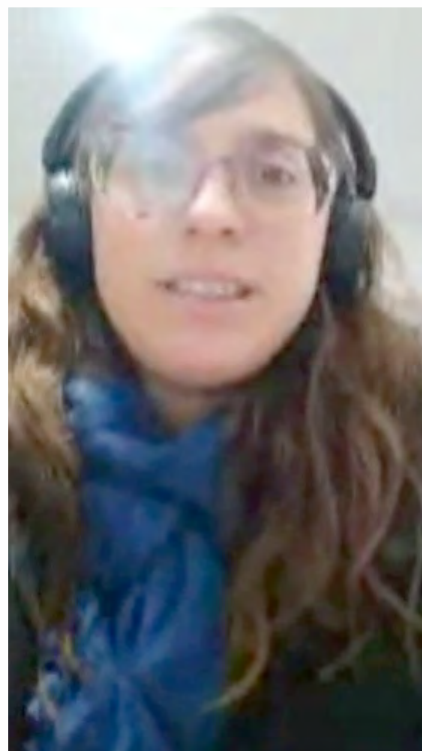
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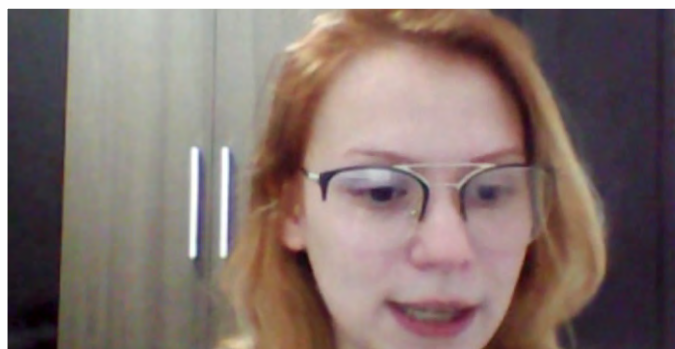


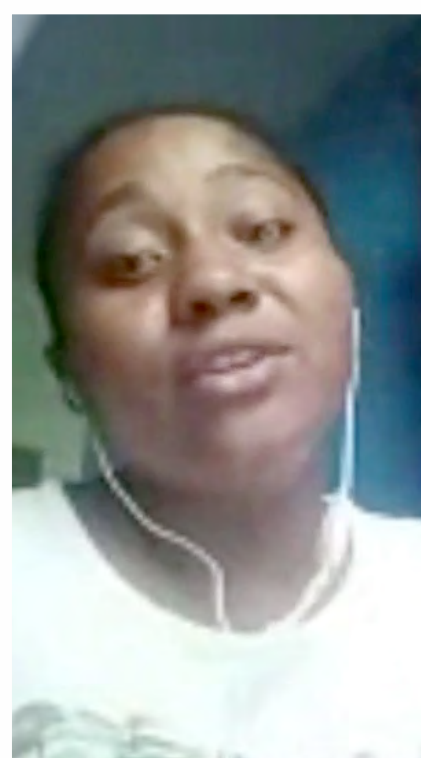
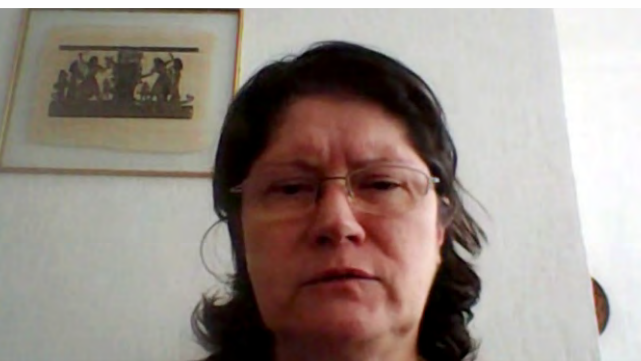
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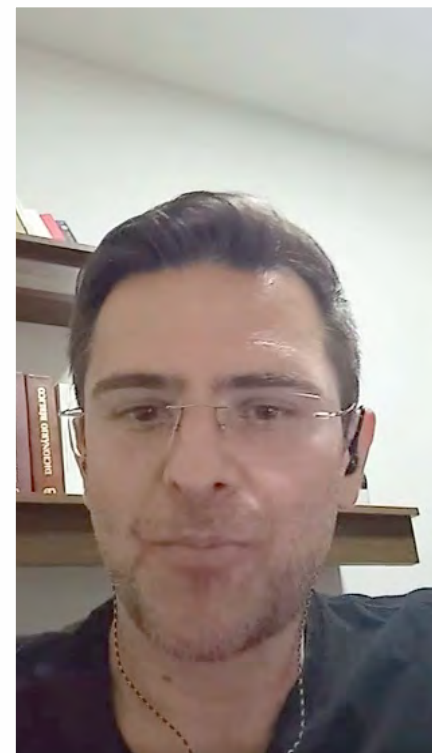
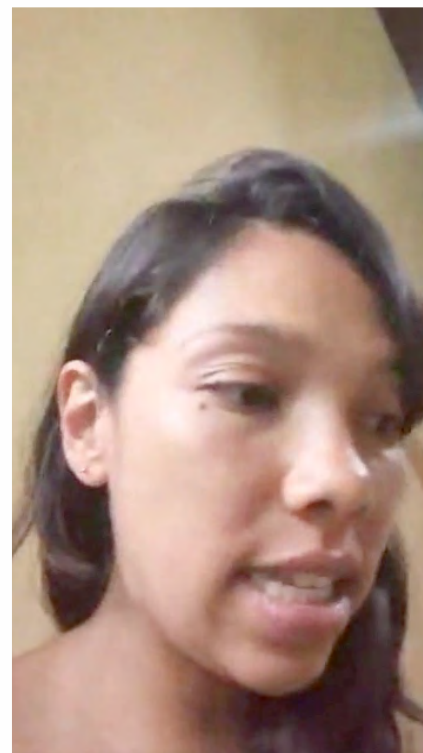
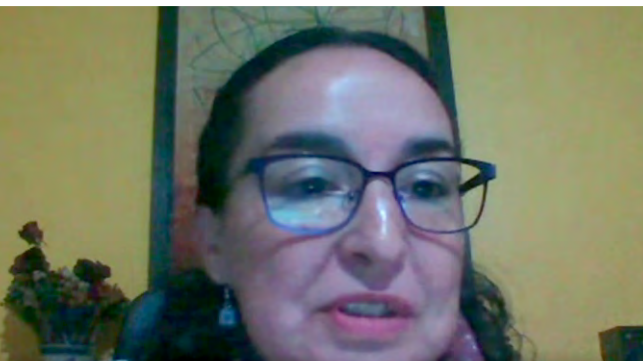
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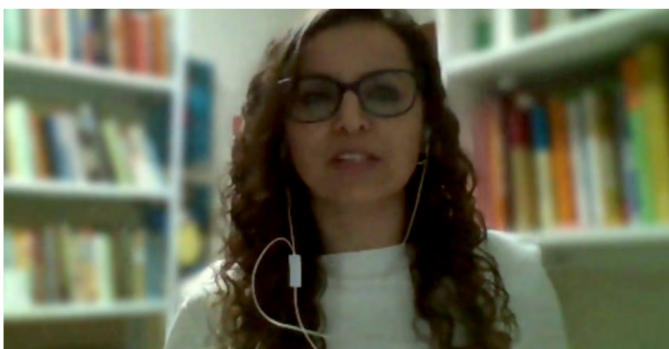


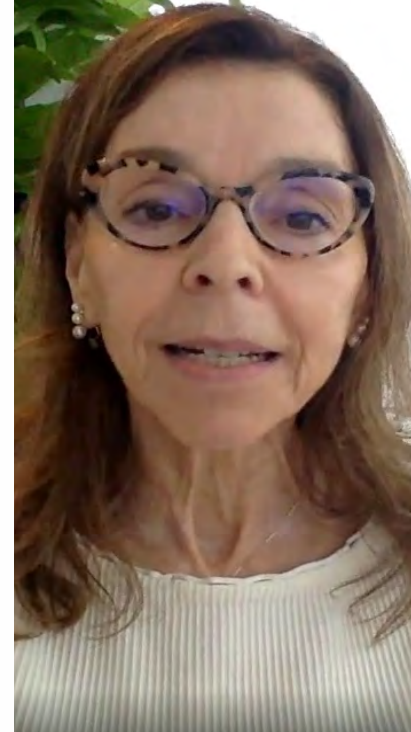
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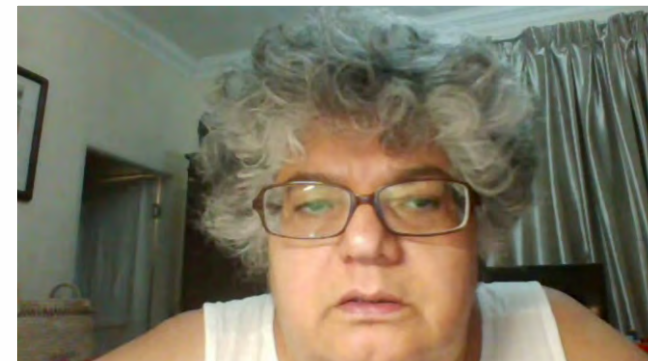
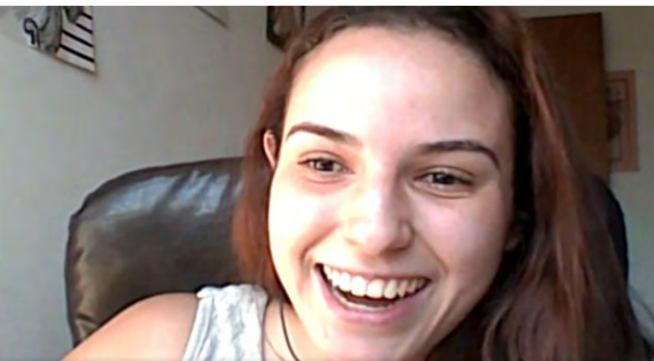
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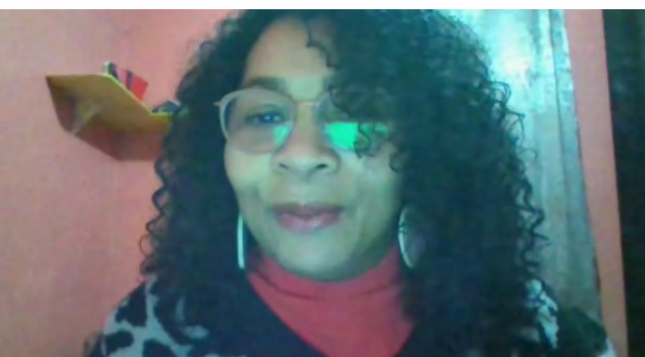


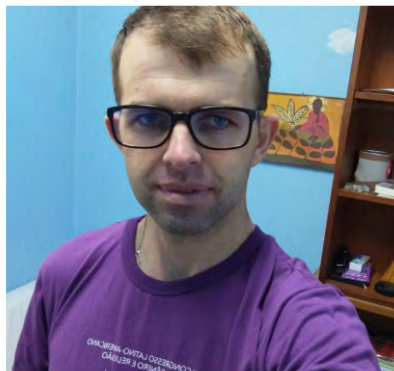
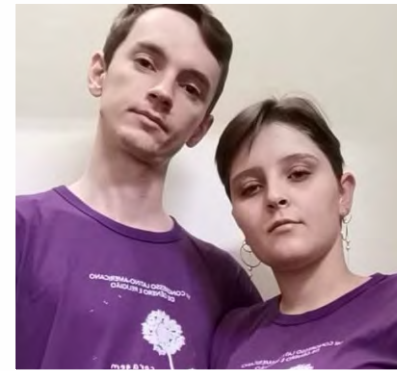
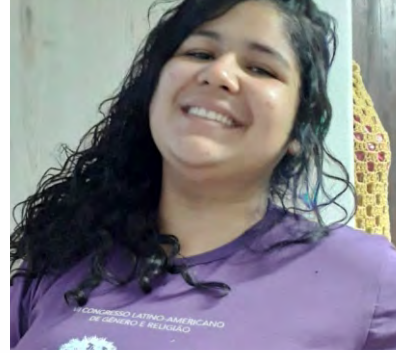
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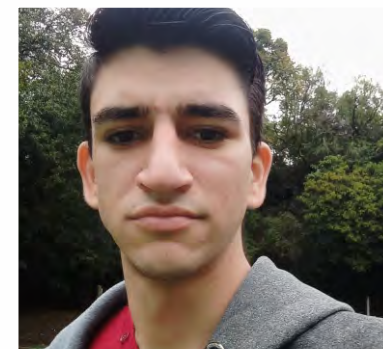
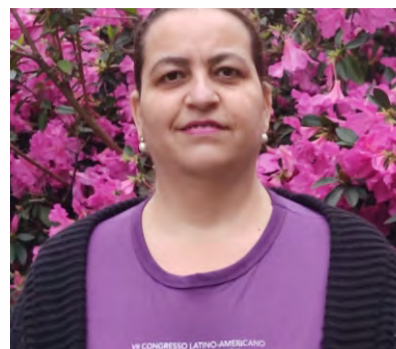
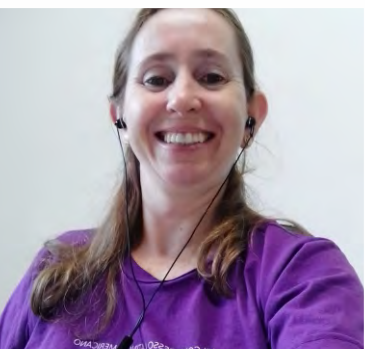


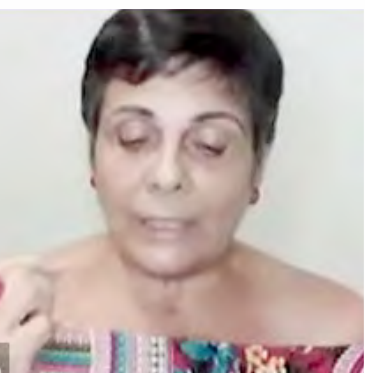
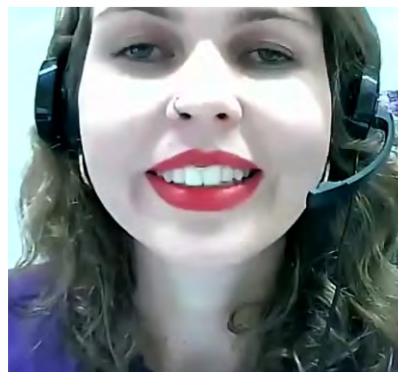
MOMENTS OF THE VII LATIN AMERICAN CONGRESS ON GENDER AND RELIGION





STUDENTS ON SUPPORT TEAM





GRANTING OF THE COLLECTIVE TITLE OF DOCTOR *HONORIS CAUSA*



FINDING COURAGE, CREATIVITY, AND HOPE IN SOME BIBLICAL SISTERHOOD STORIES¹

Mercedes L. García Bachmann²

Initial considerations

In this presentation, I will raise awareness about the lack of references to sisters in the Bible and the lack of creativity with which they are presented when they are named as such. By pointing out an open space that still needs to be filled with feminist research, I hope to make a small contribution to greater gender justice. We will discover that there has not been much use of creativity when it comes to presenting sisters in the Bible.

In Hebrew, as in our own languages, there are several ways to refer to a sister: the term 'ājôt and its plural 'ajyôt are much less common than the corresponding masculine terms 'aj and 'ajim; furthermore, the relationship between sisters is less frequently mentioned, even in other literature from the ancient Near East³. In St. Paul's writings, the most commonly used term to refer to people of the same Christian faith is

1 Lecture given at the Thematic Panel "Gender Justice and Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics". Translated by Heilike Philippsen Mog. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

2 Doctorate (PhD) from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA (1999), Honorary Doctorate from Faculdades EST (2021), Director of the Institute for Contextual Pastoral Ministry of the United Lutheran Church (Argentina-Uruguay). E-mail: mgarciabachmann@yahoo.com

3 The feminine word appears 114 times in 104 verses; the masculine word appears 629 times in 571 verses. An analysis of sisterhood in the Old Testament (including a chapter with my feminist reading) is in preparation; see CASAS, Juan Alberto (coord.). *Fraternidad y sororidad desde la Biblia*. Aproximaciones textuales, contextuales e intertextuales a propósito de Fratelli tutti. Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, en preparación. MARSMAN, Henni. *Women in Ugarit and Israel*. Brill: Leiden, 2003, p. 243, states that there is no evidence in Ugaritic literature of sisters (human), but there is evidence of relationships between brother/sister. Although this "lack of interest in sisterly relationships is probably due to the androcentric viewpoint" of the texts, it could also be attributed to the coincidence of the evidence found.

adelfoi, the plural of *adelfós*, brother⁴. In this Testament, sisters are not mentioned frequently. Some of these *adelfé* include Phoebe (Rom 16:1) and Apphia (Phlm 2). “In Rom 16:15, the reference to [Nereus’s sister] is likely to be to a biological sister,” as is also the mention of Paul’s sister in Acts 23:16, which is hidden in many translations by referring to his nephew⁵. In general, the most frequent mention of sisters in the Old Testament is in genealogies, after their male siblings, starting with Genesis 4:22, which mentions the first sister, Naamah. Their mention often explains some future event, such as the sisters of David, whose sons will later intervene in family struggles (1 Chron 2:16).

Due to the fact that there are several examples of men speaking of “our sister” (Gen 34:31), I wondered if the term exists in Hebrew, but with a feminine pronominal suffix. I found only two women, and one of them is Rachel, stating that she has prevailed over Leah by having two children through forced surrogacy of her slave (Gen 30:8). In addition to the stereotyped rivalry between co-wives, the most frequent use (seventeen times) of “your/sister/s” or “their/sister/s” occurs in Jeremiah 3 and in Ezekiel 16 and 23, three strikingly violent and misogynistic chapters. In these texts, Jerusalem is accused of following the bad example of her

sister Samaria, which already had been destroyed centuries before. Note that the sororal bond is an aggravating factor in the accusation.

Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. (Ezekiel 16:44-46, ESV)

The use of images of women to refer to political and religious elites, who are basically male, has been denounced by numerous feminists, including Nancy Cardoso⁶. Although this is a slightly different use of the sisterly relationship, Amy Kalmanofsky shows that it betrays all the patriarchal anxiety regarding dangerous sisters. And they belong to the category of dangerous sisters, among other reasons, because they do not compete with each other. The other woman talking about her sister is Rahab, who, when negotiating with the spies, asks for protection for “my brothers and my sister” (Joshua 2:13). In other stories, a sister saves a child, brother, or nephew (Exodus 2; 2 Kings 11:2); here the motive has been reworked because Rahab only had to negotiate the request, not the action. Here the biblical imagination has been put to work. And although it is encouraging to see a sister who cares about her sister, this story also feeds the stereotype of the woman of ill repute in every sense (Canaanite, living alone, perhaps prostituted, poor) who nevertheless, or perhaps for

4 TREBILCO, Paul R. *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 24. “Adelfós” appears 242 times in 317 New Testament verses, and “adelfé” appears 26 times in respective verses. The translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

5 TREBILCO, 2012, p. 24. The use of “hermana” in 2 John 13 to refer to the elect sister is also not literal. Surprisingly, Trebilco does not include Mary and Martha as sisters, but as non-itinerant disciples who offer their home. The rivalry in Luke 10:38-42 seems more like a momentary situation than a permanent one. In John 11 there is no such rivalry, it’s true; however, they never speak directly to each other!

6 PEREIRA, Nancy Cardoso. ...sin perder la ternura: jamás! De hombres mal-amados y mujeres prisioneras en el amor. *RIBLA*, Quito, n. 37, p. 82-94, 2000, p. 93.

that very reason, perceives the action of Yahweh in favor of Israel and against Jericho and remembers to save her family with her⁷.

As we can see, we have many precedents against us when we look for positive models of biblical sisterhood. We can also talk about sisters referring to “daughters of.” Calling them “daughters of a father” feeds the patriarchal presupposition that each member of the family finds their reference in their radial relationship with the patriarch, rather than referencing themselves in a horizontal line with respect to their sisters⁸.

Several “daughters of”

- i) Numbers 27:1 presents us with five daughters of a man whose ancestors are given up to five generations before. And although we are not even told the name of their mother, the five young women, adolescents, notably have their own name: “The daughters of Zelophehad, son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of

Machir, son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph, and their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.” They appear in three other texts, always named as daughters of (and always with their own name, which is notable). They are brave and direct in their claim to Moses and Yahweh, and they are persistent in pursuing their right until they achieve it. They are never presented as sisters, despite having surely talked many times given their orphanhood and even reaching the situations that the biblical texts that name them describe. I have no doubt that they had courage and hope and, without a doubt, a lot of persistence. Persistence is one of the qualities that resistance groups need the most, right?⁹

- ii) The biblical text also portrays other pairs of sisters whose horizontal relationship is diminished. These sisters belong to the category of rivals within the same household. This is a broader description than what is sometimes called “co-wives”¹⁰. Sometimes, they are both sexually involved with the same man (as in the case of Leah and Rachel, the most paradigmatic pair

7 CROWELL, Bradley L. Good Girl, Bad Girl: Foreign Women of the Deuteronomistic History in Postcolonial Perspective. *Biblical Interpretation*, v. 21, n. 1, p. 1-18, 2013; BUTLER, Trent C. Joshua-Judges and Postcolonial Criticism. In: BRENNER, Athalya; YEE, Gale A. (coords.). *Joshua and Judges*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013, p. 27-38; HAWK, L. Daniel Indigenous Helpers and Invader Homelands. In: BRENNER, Athalya; YEE, Gale A. (coords.). *Joshua and Judges*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013, p. 109-122.

8 I think it is an exaggeration to say that women were the property of the patriarch, although he certainly sought control over the sexuality of his wife and daughters, and ideally had it. However, the sheer number of laws and narratives that seek to ensure this ideal indicates resistance not only from the women involved but, above all, from other men. For example, the laws against adultery, the commandment not to covet your neighbor’s wife or house, the ordeal of jealousy, the legislation on marriages and divorces, especially for priests, the adulteress brought before Jesus, etc.

9 Num 26:33; Numbers 27 y 36; Jos 17:1-6. HAMMER, Jill. *Sisters at Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001, p. 138-144 offers a modern midrash where they not only speak to each other, but the other women also celebrate their triumph with a great women’s party.

10 Según SPENCER, F. Scott. *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, And Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose And Persistence in Luke’s Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, p. 96, the tradition (type-scene) that includes Leah and Rachel and also Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42 is characterized by having two women living in a house ruled by an ‘ab (Hebrew for father) or kyrios (Greek for lord), in a hierarchical relationship between them (mother-in-law-daughter-in-law, older-younger sister, mistress-slave), where one complains about a hospitality-related issue that she perceives as unfair, and the lord arbitrates.

of rival sisters), but in other cases, they are mothers of children from the same father without becoming socially recognized as wives (as in the case of Zilpah and Bilhah, slaves of Leah and Rachel, and Sarah and Hagar, who are not sisters). In other cases, more imaginatively, the tradition portrays two sisters vying for Jesus' best discipleship, without showing any anxiety about not being mothers, as in the case of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42; John 11).

To clarify the point, it may seem contradictory to talk about rivalry and at the same time say that the horizontal relationship is taken away from them. However, with the example of Leah and Raquel, except for two occasions, they never speak to each other, so they cannot resolve their conflicts themselves¹¹. Even the law in Leviticus 18:18 is ambiguous: it is

11 One is the negotiation over the mandrakes in Gen 30:14-20 and the other is the decision to leave her father and go with Jacob to Canaan, Gen 31:14-16. KALMANOFSKY, Amy. *Dangerous Sisters of the Hebrew Bible*. 4. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014, Kindle edition, 85 notes that in the exchange of the mandrakes, there is a first mutual cooperation against patriarchal imposition, whereby one obtains the aphrodisiac connotation of the mandrakes and the other, the fertile one. We also have no record of interactions between them and their slave women acting as surrogate mothers, nor of Sarah and Hagar, for that matter. FUCHS, Esther. *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible As a Woman*. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003, p. 200: "The biblical narrative does not deny the existence of relationships between sisters, but often denies those moments the same complexity and depth [as brothers narratives]. There are biblical scholars who have correctly identified the parallels between the stories of Jacob-Esau and Rachel-Leah. But they have missed the fact that, while Jacob and Esau resolve their dispute, conflicts between sisters remain unresolved. Even more importantly, both conflictive and collaborative relationships between sisters are inspired by the predominant interest in giving birth to children, securing the love of a husband, or ensuring the genealogical continuity of the father." VORPAHL, Daniel. *Geschwisterlichkeit als sozioethische Matrix des Volkes Israel in der Tora*. In: SCHNEIDER, Ulrike,

addressed to the man, prohibiting him from taking "a wife and her sister, to create enmity," and at the same time portraying sisters only as enemies competing for the love of their husband¹². Another pair of sisters is Merab and Michal, daughters of Saul, both given to David as wives, both taken away from David by their father Saul (the younger one, Michal, became his wife, then was given by Saul to Paltiel, and finally returned to David)¹³. They never speak to each other or have a common episode in the Bible, and they are not called sisters but rather the firstborn¹⁴ and the youngest daughter of Saul¹⁵.

VÖLKENING, Helga; VORPAHL, Daniel (coords.). *Zwischen Ideal und Ambivalenz: Geschwister-beziehungen in ihren soziokulturellen Kontexten*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015, p. 86 is one of those who see the rivalry between Leah and Rachel in parallel to that of Jacob and Esau (the younger sibling obtains the birthright).

- 12 This infinitive is active and not causative and its subject could be the sisters; however, the recipient of the law is clearly the possible husband.
- 13 2 Samuel 18; 1 Sam 25:43-44; 2 Sam 3:12-16. Other sisters in a similar situation are Samson's wife and her unnamed little sister (Judges 14 and 15:2).
- 14 "The firstborn" is only used for Lot's daughter, for Leah when Laban justifies having exchanged her for Rachel on the wedding night, and for Michal (Gen 19:31-37; 29:26; 1 Sam 14:49). The other term is not consistent, with "the younger" appearing in the first two cases and "the little one" for Michal. And when Samson's father-in-law offers him his other daughter as a replacement for the wife given to his friend, he calls her "his little sister, more beautiful (or better) than her."
- 15 It is also true that there is not much secondary literature exploring this relationship. For example, a collection on Michal published in 1991 offers four articles from biblical dictionaries, three mappings of interpretations, four literary studies, a biblical commentary, seven studies of biblical characters, two Christian sermons, one historical study, five unpublished articles, and two pieces of imaginative writing; in total, around 260 pages including the introduction to the book. In this work, "sister/s" appears only 21 times, of which at least a couple refer to being a sister to a male (Jonathan or Ish-boshet). While there are mentions of sisters, no article explores the sorority between them. The closest thing is the reflection of EXUM, J. Cheryl. *Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative*.

iii) Another pair, also not presented as sisters but as the eldest and youngest daughters of a father, offers one of the few examples of mutual collaboration and that is why I distinguish them. I am referring to the two anonymous daughters of Lot, who agree to become pregnant by their drunken father (Gen 19:30-38). Apart from the difficulties that this text presents regarding incest, the alcoholism that serves as an excuse for the unconsciousness and attributing to the daughters a sexual action of which in most cases they are victims, the text is ambiguous. On the one hand, it discredits the Ammonites and Moabites; on the other hand, the language used by the daughters is that of ensuring life after the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah, which acquired cosmic dimensions in their eyes: “there is not a man on earth to come into us after the manner of all the earth: come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father” (Gen 19:31-32)¹⁶. This

and the two dialogues between Leah and Rachel mentioned earlier are the only dialogues between sisters that we have. This is the one of the three that shows the greatest collaboration between them. On the other hand, once again, the objective is the maternity of the sisters. Looking at the biblical texts, it is difficult to imagine that two sisters had anything more to say to each other over the centuries than “let us have children”.

Final considerations

I think many of these stories highlight women with courage to make important decisions. However, even these brave decisions are still in service to patriarchal values of motherhood or caring for sisters or the most vulnerable in the described situation (as in the case of Rahab, for both men and women). Creativity has been used in biblical authorship in a very patriarchal way. Despite several of these pairs of women sharing the same living space and daily life (“the father’s house” in Hebrew), those who left us these stories chose not to show them in a more compact sororal fabric, and when they do, they are not “sisters”¹⁷. We need more stories.

In: CLINES, David J. A.; ESKENAZI Tamara (coords.). Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, p. 196: “Is it simply a case of confusion between women (who are notoriously difficult to tell apart): the descendants of Saul are annihilated, so what difference does the identity of the mother make?” On the other hand, there is an interesting rabbinical approach, in which they explain this name change not as a textual confusion, but because Mical was so kind-hearted that she raised her five nephews as her own after her sister’s early death. KALMANOFSKY, 2014, p. 49-50 prefers to embrace the ambiguity because, at that point in the story, the only role left for Mical is that of a sister, without a husband or father, and thus the “confusion” in the text combines them.

¹⁶ LOZA, José. *Génesis 12-50*. Bilbao: Desclée De Brouwer, 2007, p. 54: “That suggests that perhaps it is a Transjordanian tradition about a catastrophe comparable to that of the flood [...] The fact that Lot’s eldest daughter speaks of impossibility is the reason why Lot’s daughters are not judged harshly as impure, nor will Tamar be judged for seeking a descendant from her own father-in-law, since he does not give her his

son as he should (see Gen 38). In both cases, a good thing is intended: to ensure a descent.” KALMANOFSKY, 2014, pp. 71-86 sees them as dangerous but useful sisters to the patriarchal ideology: with their incest, they endanger their paternal household and eliminate Lot and his lineage as heirs (and serve as a warning).

¹⁷ KALMANOFSKY, 2014, pp. 119-174, explores sisterhoods of women in the Bible. MEYERS, Carol. “Women of the Neighborhood” (Ruth 4:17): Informal Female Networks in Ancient Israel. *In: BRENNER, Athalya (ed.). Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible. Second Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991, p. 110-127; BAADSGAARD, Aubrey. A Taste of Women’s Sociality: Cooking*

The Bible and the midrash skim over relationships between men and women, and they tell us even less of relationships among women – certainly we rarely hear of women who love each other as relatives, friends, partners, or allies. Nevertheless, these connections are a crucial part of the covenantal web. For the sacred texts to speak to us, the biblical relationship of mother to child, teacher to disciple, spouse to spouse, sister to sister, friend to friend must feel as resonant and complex as our own experience of those relations.¹⁸

And it's not just that we need more stories: we need new stories. And we need biblical research to also look at sorority; we have not finished recovering from patriarchal marks and have not paid due attention to it. As this is a time of hope, mine is that more feminists, academics, artists, popular movements, and others take up the challenge and continue weaving sorority and showing that, despite being ignored, it also existed in the people of God before now.

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¹⁸ HAMMER, 2004, xxiv.

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PEREIRA, Nancy Cardoso. ... Sin perder la ternura: jamás! De hombres mal-amados y mujeres prisioneras en el amor. *RIBLA*, Quito, n. 37, p. 82-94, 2000.

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A STORY OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S STRUGGLES IN THE COLONIALIST CONTEXTS OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY¹

Paula Faustino Sampaio²

Initial Considerations

In recent years I have dedicated my work to reading historical sources and documents produced throughout the 20th century and current times. I asked the documentation made up of newspapers, books, reports, photographs, interviews, among other words and press images, what they say and how they talk about the actions of indigenous women from the organization of the indigenous movement in the 1960s. I also address aspects of the role of indigenous women³ in the struggles of indigenous

peoples in the colonialist context of the 20th century, dialoguing with the thinking of Chinua Achebe in which peace, in this context, is a promise that is not fulfilled.

They are historical facts neglected by historiography and correspond to the types of violence that indigenous women resist fearlessly; synonymous of a story told to provoke historical reflection on the violence perpetrated against indigenous peoples. I also aim at highlighting the actions of indigenous women built while their bodies and their territories were and are marked with the shattering of the known and practiced ways of living.

1 Lecture presented at the Thematic Table "Courage, gender and indigenous emergencies". Translated by Mari Krahn.

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3 The use of the term "indigenous women" concerns the antecedence of ethnicity in conjunction with womanhood in the construction of social movements of

indigenous peoples, which I explain in SAMPAIO, Paula Faustino. *Índigenas mulheres entre colonialismos e resistência de longa duração* – séculos XX e XXI. Teresina, PI: Cancioneiro, 2021, p. 225-227.

Corporealities violated by colonialism

In 2014, Marinalva Kaiowá, along with more indigenous leaders, was in Brasília, the Federal Capital of Brazil, participating in the manifestations of the Kaiowá and Guarani peoples. The purpose of the act was to change the decision of the Second Panel of the Federal Supreme Court (STF) that in 2014 annulled the declaratory ordinance of the Guyraroka Indigenous Land, in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil.

Without listening to the indigenous people, the STF used an argument named “time frame”. According to this argument, indigenous peoples have to prove possession of the lands or action to resist expropriation on October 5, 1988, the date that the Constitution of Brazil was declared in force, in order to have the right to demarcate the territory traditionally belonging to these peoples. Widely contested by indigenous peoples and allies, the “time frame thesis” remains on the agenda, it violates the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples.

In 2014, Marinalva Kaiowá's body was found on the shoulders of the BR-163 [Highway 163], near the Ñu Porã repossession area where she lived with her two children. The Council of “Aty Guasu demanded provisions” from the Federal Public Ministry (MPF), in Dourados and from the 6th Chamber of the Federal Public Ministry, in Brasília

Years before, exactly on January 9, 2007, Xurite Lopes was murdered with a shot in the chest. Xurite Lopes was fighting to remain on her territory. However, she and her relatives were forced to leave the territory that traditionally belonged to the Kaiowá and Guarani. In this violent act the life of Xurite was cut down.

Between 2006 and 2018, considering data from the Violence Reports of the Missionary Indigenous Council, here on designated CIMI, in addition to Marinalva Kaiowá and Xurite Lopes, the murders of leaders Valmireide Zoromará, Maria Amélia Guajajara and Maria da Guia Pereira Silva were associated with the political position of defense of the rights of indigenous peoples⁴. In 2014, one hundred and thirty-eight (138) deaths of indigenous people due to violent aggression were registered. Of this total, seventeen indigenous women were assassinated⁵.

When presenting a reading for this factual situation in another writing⁶ I highlight that of the seventeen cases of murder of indigenous women in 2014 reported by CIMI, five mentioned rape and one referred to sexual abuse. Of the total, in eight cases, the means of violence used was a “blade weapon”. In the others, the indicated means used were: rape, asphyxia and beatings; there was also the use of pieces of wood, stones and firearms as instruments of murder; only in one case the means employed was designated with the term “unknown”⁷.

4 SAMPAIO, 2021, p. 297-304.

5 CONSELHO INDIGENISTA MISSIONÁRIO. *Relatório Violência contra os Povos Indígenas no Brasil – dados de 2014*. Available at: https://CIMI.org.br/pub/relatorio/Relatorio-violencia-contra-povos-indigenas_2014-CIMI.pdf. Accessed on: 13 Jan. 2019.

6 SAMPAIO, Paula Faustino. *Violência de Gênero contra os corpos-territórios indígenas: análise dos Relatórios Violência contra os Povos Indígenas no Brasil*. In: SAMPAIO, Paula Faustino; CAVALCANTE, Thiago L. Vieira (Orgs.). *Povos Indígenas, Gênero e Violências: histórias marginais*. [recurso eletrônico]. Porto Alegre, RS: Editora Fi, 2020. p. 65-84.

7 I analyze the data and typologies presented in the Report on Violence against Indigenous Peoples, focusing on the violence perpetrated against indigenous women. SAMPAIO, 2020.

Thinking with the anthropologist Rita Laura Segato⁸, who proposes an interpretation for the murders of women in *Ciudad Juárez*, on the US-Mexico border, I ask: What “message of violence” is inscribed in these murders? I answer: – The message of the order of domination and exploitation. Both corporealities are marked as fragile and unimportant in the context in which indigenous women, poor black and non-white women see themselves turned into a territory of a war that they did not start, but that, in spite of, this, they confront in the name of their lives and their peoples of ethnic belonging.

Indigenous corporealities of and in resistance struggles

In 1984, four hundred indigenous leaders gathered in Brasília for the “II National Meeting of Indigenous Peoples”. Among them were Quitéria Pankararu and more indigenous women, whose names were not always registered in the photographs of the Porantim newspapers⁹.

During the 1st Potiguara Encounter of Struggle and Resistance, between July 16 and 19, 1989, in the Baía da Traição – PB, bringing together leaders of the Potiguara, Pankararu, Pankararé, Xocó, Xucuru, Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe groups, Quitéria Pankararu discussed the demarcation of indigenous territories. On the last day, in the São

Francisco Village, the “I Woman-Education Meeting” took place, which “had the participation of about 100 indigenous women”, as highlighted by the “Jornal do Grumin” (1989)¹⁰.

The Jornal do Grumin was edited by Grupo Mulher-Educação Indígena (GRUMIN) [Indigenous Woman-Education Group] and was legally established in 1987 with headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. Coordinated by Eliane Potiguara, this is one of the first indigenous organizations led by indigenous people in Brazil¹¹.

The Alto Rio Negro Women’s Association (AMARN) was created in 1984, and became official on March 29, 1987, at the 1st General Assembly; as was the Association of Taracuaá, Rio Uaupés and Tiqué Women (AMITRUIT).

Especially in the 1990s, indigenous women took the lead in the spaces for discussion and deliberation on the policy of demarcating indigenous lands, among other demands on the agenda of the indigenous movement. This leadership has been built on the terms of the gender relations of each ethnic group, but also breaking with the models and roles assigned to women in the ethnic groups. In this way, more and more women assume the dialogue in public spaces on behalf of indigenous peoples¹².

Leader of the struggle for traditional Guarani and Kaiowá territory in Mato Grosso do Sul, Damiana Cavanha denounces evictions from the Apyka’y repossession area, located on the margins of the BR-436

8 SEGATO, Rita Laura. *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez*. Territorio, soberanía y crímenes de segundo estado. Buenos Aires: Tinta limón, 2013. 88 p.

9 The Porantim Journal was created in 1978 by the Indigenous Missionary Council. The Porantim Journal has a digital format, available on the CIMI *homepage*. Its most recent issue is December 431, 2020. This is an important publication focused on indigenous issues and on indigenisms.

10 SAMPAIO, 2021, p. 188.

11 SAMPAIO, 2021, p. 189.

12 SAMPAIO, 2021, p. 203.

[Highway 436], between Dourados and Ponta Porã, Mato Grosso do Sul, as one of the violations that her ethnic collective faces.

The territorial expropriation forced the group led by Dona Damiana, as she is known, to seek another place, as we can see in the narrative of the documentary “Martyrdom – The peaceful and obstinate insurgency of the Guarani Kaiowá peoples” (2016), a production by Vincent Carelli in co-direction with Ernesto de Carvalho and Tita. The history of the reclaims led by Damiana Cavanha is marked by violence¹³.

In view of the documentation I consulted, focusing on the period between 1960 and 2020, it is possible to see in different regional contexts in Brazil the role of indigenous women in the struggle for land of traditional indigenous occupation. They were also active for indigenous lives in urban contexts, such as Marta Guarani's struggle for health, housing and education for the Guarani and Terena peoples in the city of Campo Grande in the 1980s and 1990s, articulated with indigenous mobilizations for land demarcation and presence of women in the struggles¹⁴.

Although the protagonism of indigenous women was initially represented at the margins of indigenous male leadership, from the 1970s onwards it is possible to perceive the role of indigenous women in the struggle for land, such as Fen'Nó of the Kaingang people, and Quitéria Celestino do Xucuru-Kariri people. These two leaders carried

13 To deepen the analysis, I suggest getting to know the study carried out by the anthropologist: CRESPE, Aline Castilho Lutti. *Mobilidade e temporalidade Kaiowá: do tekoha à reserva, do tekoharã ao tekoha*. 2015. 427 f. Dissertation (Doctorate in History) – Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados, Dourados, MS, 2015.

14 SAMPAIO, 2021, p. 156 and 352.

out strategies of struggle together with indigenous and indigenist organizations in the struggle for land.

In 2021, indigenous women leaders organized the II March of Indigenous Women, between September 7th and 11th. The theme of this march was “Indigenous Women: Reforesting Minds for the Cure of the Earth”, mobilizing approximately 4,000 indigenous women from 150 peoples, according to the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil¹⁵.

The first Indigenous Women's March took place in 2019, bringing together indigenous women from different ethnic groups in Brasília in the struggle for territory and indigenous corporealities. It is the indigenous women who make up and lead the struggle of indigenous peoples in the current context marked by violation of the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples. The representation of indigenous peoples in the National Congress, I mention the work of Federal Congress person Joenia Wapishana, which dates back to the tenacious presence of indigenous women in the struggle for their peoples from a long time back¹⁶.

In August 2021, six thousand indigenous people were in Brasília at the Fight for Life Camp.; in September, there was the II March of Indigenous Women. Actions that show the resistance of indigenous

15 ARTICULAÇÃO NACIONAL DAS MULHERES INDÍGENAS GUERREIRAS DA ANCESTRALIDADE – ANMIGA. II Marcha Nacional das Mulheres Indígenas: “Não lutar com a mesma arma do inimigo, não significa que estamos desarmados” [Not Fighting with the same weapon as the enemy does not mean that we are unarmed]. *Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil – APIB*, 7 set. 2021. Available at: <https://apiboficial.org/2021/09/07/ii-marcha-nacional-das-mulheres-indigenas-nao-lutar-com-a-mesma-arma-do-inimigo-nao-significa-que-estamos-desarmados/>. Accessed on: 28 Oct. 2021.

16 SAMPAIO, 2021.

peoples to government policies contrary to the rights of indigenous peoples today.

Indigenous peoples continue to be mobilized against the thesis of the “time frame” and oppose the bills in progress in the National Congress of Brazil, which, to a large extent, seriously affect their rights¹⁷.

Final considerations

Since the colonial invasion, indigenous women have remained in the process of struggle because they know in their bodies of indigenous women that peace lasts almost no time in social and historical contexts in which territories, and bodies, continue to be cruelly violated and taken from the indigenous peoples., I remember here and demand justice for the girls Raissa Guarani Kaiowá (11 years old) and Daiane Kaingang (14 years old), brutally murdered in early August of this year (2021).

While indigenous territories are torn apart by the arrogance of domination of the *commodity* world, and the corporealities of the collectives belonging to different racial and ethnic groups are marked with the rawness of human exploitation, indigenous women lead the daily construction in favor of lasting peace. Because the struggle leads to living well.

¹⁷ To get to know and understand the criticism of the thesis for the “time frame” see: ALMEIDA, Marco A.; AMADO, Luiz H. Eloy; CAVALCANTE, Thiago L. Vieira. *A tese do “marco temporal” e o PL 490: ataques aos direitos constitucionais indígenas*. On-line transmission. Canal Youtube História Indígena e do Indigenismo. 20 Jul. 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBTfEdo5oAc&t=248s>. Accessed on: 27 Oct. 2021.

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CONSPIRING THROUGH NARRATIVES:

“DON’T BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD...”

BECAUSE GOD SAW THAT EVERYTHING WAS BEAUTIFUL¹

Paulo Ueti²

Hello to all of you, a special hello to my dialogue partners here. I wish you the best energies in this journey of dialogue, provocation and pleasure in which we find ourselves. I appreciate the invitation to be in this provocative and intentionally disturbing conversation and sharing. To disturb the established seems to me an intrinsic part of the Christian vocation. As Paul offers us in his letter to the Corinthians:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.³

I come from a mixed, diverse family. The reality of diversities, and of the narratives about it, has been with me since I was born. My mother is of Japanese tradition and my father is Italian. I was born Brazilian in a megalopolis called São Paulo full of mosaics at all levels. My consanguineous family was not religious and I came to know about religion through books and encyclopedias, but also

¹ Lecture presented at the Thematic Table “Identities of gender, sexual diversity and biblical narratives”. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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³ NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION BIBLE. *1 Corinthians 1:27-29*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1989.

because of the influence it had and has on the order of society, on the establishment of norms and even on the legal system in which we are inserted. Relationally, I got to know religion, Christian churches, when I was a teenager, because my mother thought I needed fixing, because I wasn't a person with many social relationships. "Church helps" [sic] a friend of my mother advised and it's free. The last piece of information won my mother over and here I am immersed in that environment. From nuclear physics I moved to philosophy and then to theology. As a teenager I met CEBI, the Ecumenical Center for Biblical Studies. Participating in CEBI activities formed me a militant and a theologian who wants to recognize himself as open, feminist, activist and ecumenical.

I am also a white, cisgender, gay, middle-class male. I was privileged by my social class and skin color. I have always enjoyed studying and have always mixed political activism and study in my life. I took the advice of a bishop friend who told me that 'staying just in the church makes you sick'. From a very early age I was enchanted by the Bible and CEBI, and I was always connected with peasant struggles, along with the Pastoral Land Commission, then the Landless Movement and the International Via Campesina, then my theology course and then also my ecumenical connections at the World Council of Churches, inserted me, or perhaps awakened something that was already there in me, in the curious and persistent journey along the path of possibilities (being curious, being present and always reimagining) and not of stupid and anti-dialogical certainties. I think I was impacted by the call of Paul's Letter to Romans 12:2, not to conform to "this world", but to be constantly transformed in mind (in the way of understanding) and

in the spirit (in the way of acting) to keep trying to do the will of the divinity in which I profess my faith.

In the Book of Common Prayer of my church (the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil) we have a creed that goes like this:

We believe in God; We believe in the strength of poor people, In the audacity of poets, In the boldness of prophets, In the inspiration of artists. We believe in Jesus, We believe in humility to serve, In the courage to transform, In the joy of celebrating, In respect for differences, In bread for every table, In comfort for all sadness, We believe in the Spirit, We believe in the hope of starting over, In the beauty of the solidary gesture, In justice for all oppression, In compassion in the face of pain, In love, a divine-human gift. Amen.⁴

It is not too much to state again that identity always has to be treated in the plural. It is something designed even before we are born, but it is built throughout life by different paths and contexts. And that debate has always existed. Part of humanity, in its social conduct, erotic practices or physiological-sexual conformations, have often challenged and continue to challenge the gender binarism that dominates our system of thought and meaning. Whether we want it or not, whether we accept it or not, reality defies the concept. That is why it is always healthy to understand our concepts and certainties as relative or inserted in the world of possibilities: it may be that way now, but it may be otherwise.

⁴ IGREJA EPISCOPAL ANGLICANA DO BRASIL. *Livro de Oração Comum: Administração dos Sacramentos e Outros Ritos e Cerimônias conforme o uso da Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil com o Saltério e Seleção de Salmos Litúrgicos*. Porto Alegre: Paulus, 2015, p. 122.

As a Latin American biblical scholar and forged in the paths of liberation theologies, and greatly influenced by my feminist friends and colleagues, I understand that history, the experience we have and our bodies (I include here the territory in which we live) are a privileged place of the revelation. We make intentional and localized theology based on our experiences and we do not conform our experiences based on theological practice.

Theology does not come from nowhere or from some neutral position, but is already situated in socio-political contexts which are implicated in structures and strategies of domination or of emancipation. Theology also belongs to rhetorical contexts implicated in the struggle over meaning. Both sociopolitical and rhetorical contexts have implications for people’s struggles for identity and voice, as well as their power to participate in the public domain, where issues are discussed and disputed ‘in public.’⁵

Theology, the language that forms theological narratives, is:

[...] ‘always already implicated’ in multiple discourses and struggles. One aspect of that implication is that ‘what you see depends on where you stand’; that is, theology is done from particular perspectives and should not pretend to be otherwise. Theology produces knowledge which is implicated, situated and perspectival.⁶

And part of the experiences we have is marked by the recognition of the near absence of homogeneity. Life is naturally plural. Diversity

in everything is our daily bread and the water that quenches our thirst. Almost an affirmation of faith.

When we go to the biblical text it is always good to remember that it is a narrative. It is presented as a language about the experience of God and the revelation of this divinity in different moments of history and geographies in the world. Like our bodies, sacred texts are a language, they are an attempt at expression and never the full expression of themselves.

Fiorenza draws attention to the interconnections between knowledge and power at work in academic discourses in general and in theology in particular. She follows Foucault in this, making clear also that language is itself a form of power. Hence: ‘Language is not a mere vehicle for the transmission of social and historical context but the producer of meaning’. Discourse, which includes language as well as practices, “understands the textuality of texts as a construct rather than as a mirror reflection of pre-existent reality.”⁷

It takes place, it has intention, it has a political agenda, it has different impacts and it is in a constant state of mutation. As Maria da Conceição Passeggi has already said, in a text published by *Coisas do Gênero: Revista de Estudos Feministas em Teologia e Religião*:

In the last thirty years, we have seen an increasing interest in narrative emerge in the human and social sciences, albeit as a disconcerting research horizon for the scientific universe. Certainly, the concerns arise from the long tradition of narrative as a sacred/consecrated object of literary and language studies, which evidence aspects related to subjectivity, fiction, aesthetics, and emotion considered averse to

5 MONRO, Anita. *Public Theology and the Challenge of Feminism (Gender, Theology and Spirituality)*. Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition. 2015. p. 36.

6 MONRO, 2015, p. 36.

7 MONRO, 2015, p. 36.

scientificity, but of inestimable value for understanding the human. For Barthes, the narrative 'begins with humanity itself' and its almost infinite diversity is an indication of its unquestionable universality. Biblical, legal, literary, historical, children's, fictional, anecdotal, journalistic, media, romantic, ideological, political, digital, etc. We humans continue to weave the most diverse narratives on a daily basis to make sense of what happens and what happens to us. In the same way, we weave ourselves with them and for them.⁸

In addition to being one (or several, it would be better to say) narrative, the world of biblical writings is a universe in dispute. Many voices that belong to different contexts are confronting each other there. The diversity of bodies and ideotheologies, a concept borrowed from my friend Gerald West, from the Ujamaa Center in South Africa, navigate together in this turbulent sea that is the Bible.

The narratives are there to be found, appreciated, savored and used. They are obviously a mosaic, a patchwork quilt, a world of diverse and not always concordant tones and voices. An approach to conflict is needed as a hermeneutic key to navigate this world of narratives. As literature, they are, at the same time, connected with the reality they talk about/refer to and also with the people who organized them as memory, as a political instrument of influence in their contexts.

I understand that the narratives from their beginning develop as a hermeneutic work. Therefore, they present themselves as a menu

to be tasted, to be read and interpreted. And reading and interpreting is an intentional political act that influences the transformation of the common good.

I try to undress myself from what I learned
I try to forget the way I was taught to remember
and scrape off the paint with which my senses were painted,
to unwrap my true emotions,
unwrap myself and be myself, not Alberto Caieiro,
but a human animal that nature produced,
But this, (sad for us who bring our souls dressed!)
This requires an in-depth study,
A learning of unlearning...
(Alberto Caieiro)

This poem by Alberto Caieiro, one of many people of Fernando Pessoa, explains the process of reading and interpretation, of learning and unlearning. Reading is not just an act of decoding signals, but also a relational act that changes everything when it starts.

Eliana Yunes, a literary thinker, affirms that:

The act of reading does not correspond only to understanding the world of the text, whether written or not. Reading lacks the mobilization of the universe of knowledge of the other – of the reader – to update the universe of the text and make sense of life, which is where the text really is. Learning to read is knowing different texts produced in different social spheres (journalistic, artistic, legal, scientific, didactic-pedagogical, everyday, media, literary, advertising, among others) to develop a critical attitude, that is, of discernment, which leads the

⁸ PASSEGGI, Maria da Conceição. A pesquisa (auto)biográfica: por uma hermenêutica descolonizadora. *Coisas do Gênero*, São Leopoldo, v. 2, n. 2, p. 302-314, ago./dez. 2016, p. 304-305. Available at: <http://est.com.br/periodicos/index.php/genero/article/view/2918/2718>. Accessed on: 20 Aug. 2021.

person to perceive the voices present in the texts and to perceive oneself able to speak in front of them.⁹

When we read, we relate to a vast and complex universe and not simply to a single reality. We never go to the text or reality being innocent and neutral. These qualities do not exist among us when it comes to relating to the fabrics of which we are a part (life and written text). And this order is important: first life, then reality (what we understand by life) and then the written text. I think that reality is not the same thing as what is real. Reality is produced and it is what we are able to narrate and/or understand from what is supposedly real. What we can assimilate or perceive. Always having our perspective and understanding of what we experience, see or read

So we always ask ourselves why do we do theology, for whom do we do theology (certainly not for God)? And what is our political agenda (to influence and order the world)? What is the agenda of narratives, and here we talk about biblical narratives and how do we, political agents of influence and transformation, approach them, in a way that produces life and justice?

Historically, religion, underpinned by its narratives, has been one of the most powerful agents in facilitating change in people’s behavior, social norms, and attitudes. We know that religious actors, those who produced biblical narratives and those who interpret them today, play a strategic role in influencing and establishing (or changing) values,

behaviors and norms in any society. Religious discourse, theologies, are instruments of creating life, as well as oppression and death.

Approaching biblical narratives requires us to recognize that identity is plural and that diversity is intrinsic, and this applies to our sexualities, which are configured in public expressions of our inner being.

And I continue with the challenge that has already been launched here: how to use narratives intentionally to recognize sexual diversities and diverse gender identities in order to destabilize hegemonic systems and hegemonic conceptions of gender and sexuality.

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⁹ YUNES, Eliana. *Tecendo um leitor: uma rede de fios cruzados*. Curitiba: Aymar, 2009, p. 9.

HEALTHY MASCULINITIES¹

When I was about to be born, every now and then I listened. I heard my mother saying: oh my God, how I wish that. That this guy would be a real man, a male goat that makes a lot of trouble. Oh! Mama here I am, mama here I am, I'm a man with a huge M inside, and how I am that!

(Ney Matogrosso)

Rogério Oliveira de Aguiar²

Introduction

The thematic table “**Masculinities and gender justice to hope**” has already become a sign of hope in terms of possibilities for experiencing masculinities. The name of the table, in addition to being

purposeful, points to the need for a structural transformation, as well as to the urgency of involvement and commitment of men in the process that can be arduous for many: deconstruction and reconstruction! Only by going through this process, we men will truly understand and incorporate gender justice as a continuous and permanent process of equity between people, women and men.

Talking about masculinities is touching rigid and at the same time fragile structures, it's putting your finger on the wound. It is destabilizing and disquieting. Talking about masculinities is exposing weaknesses,

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Table “Masculinities and gender justice to hope”. Translated by Marlon Machado Oliveira Rio. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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fears, mistrust, anxieties and the feeling of powerlessness. It is an invitation to get rid of images and coverings.

It is necessary to ask questions: why are men generally reprehended for expressing feelings and frailty in public? Answers such as: “I only know that it is like this” or “it has always been like this” cannot be considered in a process that has as its purpose the effective transformation of structural machismo. The father teaches his son that being a man means to follow some established rules. This son, as a father, will pass the teachings on, because he understands that the legacy needs to be carried forward. There seems to be no reflection on the consequences of receiving a cultural load as if it were hereditary.

After some time, some codes do not need to be verbalized. They are introjected into us, we know exactly what to do and what not to do, what is accepted and what is socially disapproved for men and women. The codes of social interaction are in place, just follow them. If you need help, the guardians of harmful masculinity are always on call. Ready to help those whose expression of masculinity is not within the established standards. A simple crossing of the legs, an expression of affection or some pink clothing accessory can turn on the warning light of structural machismo inspectors.

For Fernanda Lemos: “As a social institution legitimized by biological determinism, masculinity achieves legal and sacred *status*, anchored by social traditions, which fulfill the function of categorizing and normalizing gender relations.”³ Machismo is a historical heritage. It is something structural that precedes our existence and that, therefore, we naturalize as part of our existence as human beings.

If masculinity as we know it is a legitimate and encouraged social construction, proposing new ways of experiencing this masculinity seems, at first, something far from reality. Everything seems to reinforce the toxic male stereotype. In this way, problematizing something so standardized may be interpreted as an attack against the current model.

For many men, having their masculinity challenged or put to the test can mean imminent risk. I cite here some of the most common risks: loss of credibility with other men, a position of inferiority within the group, rejection by friends, aggressiveness in games, violent behavior as a demarcation of space and the constant need to demonstrate virility in the relationship with women. These behaviors may have serious consequences on mental and emotional health. In this way, molding to fit inside a box has been the alternative most used by many men throughout their lives.

The men’s box

The need to belong to a social group, the search for identification and conditioning to the current model pushes one into the **men’s box**. Inside that box are the definitions of how to become an authentic sample of the idealized masculine.

The definition of **men’s box** involves a set of pre-defined behaviors of what it means to be a man in a culture permeated by machismo. Among the attributions are: being heterosexual, strong, aggressive, fearless, hero of the children, always safe, provider, competitive, sexually active, dominating... among so many attributes that cause men to be always in search of an unattainable ideal. The concept emerged in the early 1980s, still with the definition of “Box for Act like a man” – when some

3 LEMOS, Fernanda. *Religião e Masculinidade*. Santo André: Ed. Fortune, 2009, p. 66.

educators, among them Paul Kivel, held a series of training workshops with teenagers and young people from elementary and high school, in the city of San Francisco (USA). The purpose was to promote spaces for the deconstruction of the sexist culture that encouraged male violence, directly associated with cases of domestic and family violence⁴. In 2010, Tony Porter synthesized the term for “Men’s Box”, according to him, a way of simplifying and popularizing the approach to work with adult men of different classes and levels of education⁵. We do not know when this methodology lost strength. However, it is evident that it is still very current and necessary four decades later.

Healthy masculinity

The concept of toxic masculinity needs constant deepening, appropriation and qualification of the term. The researcher and editor of the *Papo de Homem* website, Guilherme Valadares, draws attention to the risk of pathologizing masculinity. He claims that the words *masculinity* and *toxic* cannot be understood as synonyms. Toxic masculinity is a term used to define the behaviors expressed in a violent masculinity, built from social conditioning factors of what it is to be a man in a strongly sexist culture. As Valadares puts it: “This fear-based masculinity, which seeks to prove itself male at all times – stimulating violence, emotional

closure, homophobia and obsession with money, sex and power – is the definition of toxic masculinity.”⁶

For many men, guaranteeing the privileges that machismo provides requires risky behavior. Driving at high speeds, getting into fights, drinking too much alcohol, imposing your will through force, forging a sexuality built on pornography, suffering losses in silence, all this seems to be part of a manual of behaviors to be adopted from a very young age. In these situations, toxic masculinity directly affects the physical and mental health of those who are victims of this behavior, as well as those who exercise it.

Living in permanent opposition is part of the sexist model’s self-affirmation process. It is not discussed what one is, but what one should not be. And in this specific case, one cannot be feminine or aesthetically approach the feminine. Misogyny is one of the pillars that sustains machismo and generates a feeling of corporatism among men, which is extremely dangerous for women and the LGBTQIA+ population.

It is necessary to reaffirm the existence of models of healthy masculinities, as opposed to toxic masculinity. It is difficult for men to abandon the masculine model to which they were introduced without having an alternative to the deteriorated model in force. The expectations placed on young men push them into a system of constant self-affirmation. Getting into the men’s box isn’t a choice for many, it’s

4 KIVEL, Paul. *The Oakland Men’s Project*. Online, 21 fev. 2019. Available on: <http://paulkivel.com/the-oakland-mens-project/>. Accessed on: 4 March. 2022.

5 VALADARES, Guilherme Nascimento. A caixa dos homens: o que é essa ferramenta e como utilizá-la? *Papo de Homem*, 12 maio 2020. Available on: <https://papodehomem.com.br/caixa-dos-homens-definicao-como-utilizar/#origem>. Accessed on: 4 March. 2022.

6 VALADARES, Guilherme Nascimento. Masculinidade tóxica: comportamentos que matam os homens. *Papo de Homem*, 29 set. 2015. Available on: <https://papodehomem.com.br/masculinidade-toxica-comportamentos-que-matam-os-homens>. Accessed on: 4 March. 2022.

an imposition. And those who do not conform to this standard are punished in different ways.

The direct relationship between domestic violence and toxic masculinity is another chapter of this story, built over centuries, built on a patriarchal and sexist culture, justified and petrified by institutions and society. In this sense, religion played a decisive role, acting as a propagator and guardian of a patriarchal culture that has always benefited men to the detriment of women's rights.

Religious conservatism with strong moralistic and body control traits found fertile ground in conservative readings of some biblical texts. Humberto Gonçalves makes a critical reading of the way in which this tradition is made more flexible, showing itself to be more tolerant of crimes/sins committed by men, and more rigid with the imposition of rules on women: "The Judeo-Christian Western society, even if it does not admit officially polygamy, even considering it illegal, coexists relatively well with the fact that a man (especially when rich and powerful) can have several women."⁷ We don't see the same tolerance for women.

This model of society built on a strongly patriarchal base guarantees the maintenance of machismo as a social and cultural structure, not allowing the experience of other expressions of masculinity and femininity. This contributed, and still contributes today, to the permanence of a misogynist, conservative, racist and LGBTphobic culture.

7 GONÇALVES, Humberto M. Uma abordagem teológico-antropológica da sexualidade na Bíblia. In: CALVANI, Carlos E. (Org.). *Bíblia e Sexualidade: Abordagem teológica, pastoral e bíblica*. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2010, p. 13.

According to psychologist Valeska Loyola, there is a high rate of violence in Brazil, with the male public as the main victim, but also as a vector. Faced with this pandemic of violence, whose main propagators are men, it is necessary to work on masculinities with a focus on deconstructing this toxic masculinity, not only with adult men, but also with young people in schools⁸.

According to data presented by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) and the Public Security Forum, through the Atlas of Violence 2020, homicides are the main causes of death for young men in Brazil. In the 15 to 19 age group, homicides account for 55.6% of the cause of death⁹. In this context, it is important to mention the ethnic-racial cut, as 75.7% of the victims in the country are black. Black youth are still the main target of stray bullets and point-blank murders, especially on the outskirts of urban centers.

In relation to women, contrary to what happens with men, who are killed in public spaces, they are murdered in domestic spaces, inside their homes. The perpetrators of these crimes are, in most cases, the husband, boyfriend, partner, ex-partner. They are men within the social life of these women! The same ones that at some point personified the

8 DEBATE "O Silêncio dos Homens". Produção: TV Justiça. Apresentação: Bob de Souza. 1 vídeo (26min42s). Publicado pelo canal TV Justiça Oficial em 8 out. 2019. Available on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHdbajFI714>. Retrieved on: 4 mar. 2022.

9 ATLAS DA VIOLÊNCIA 2020. [Infográfico]. Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Ipea); Fórum de Segurança Pública, 2020. Available on: <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/atlas-da-violencia-2020-infografico.pdf>. Retrieved on: 4 mar. 2022.

figure of the partner, the protector. However, a supposed protection marked by domination and control.

Abusive behaviors, moral and sexual harassment, rape culture, psychological violence, these all are some of the attitudes that men rarely discuss in their dialogue with other men. There is silence and permissiveness among men regarding violations of women's rights. It is not enough to say one is against machismo, it is necessary to confront other men and break the silence in the face of misogynistic and LGBTphobic actions and comments.

Regarding the legislation, I mention the amendment of article 22 of Law 11.340/2006, popularly known as the Maria da Penha Law, making it mandatory to refer male perpetrators of domestic violence to reflexive groups. These groups aim to promote spaces for resocialization and debates on non-violent masculinities. The average of recidivism in these groups is 30%, which shows a good level of effectiveness in the resocialization and awareness of these men about the negative impacts of machismo in their lives and in the lives of the people they live with.

We need to hope in order to continue transforming

Giving visibility to the actions carried out in Brazil and in other countries contributes to the creation of networks. There are many initiatives and efforts by groups that seek to re-signify what is meant by masculine, presenting possibilities for healthy experiences. For this, there is a process of detoxification of this masculinity that, like any cleansing process, can be difficult and take longer than desired. The theme of masculinities has been gaining visibility and prominence in

academic research, transversally in different areas of knowledge, as well as in social movements, collectives and civil society organizations. I mention the Not So Sweet Home methodology here (*Nem tão Doce Lar* in Portuguese)¹⁰, traveling exhibition held by the Lutheran Diaconia Foundation (FLD). This project was responsible for guiding the theme of masculinities in the reflection on gender justice as an institutional policy.

To throw some hope on this issue, we need to have the courage to exercise a prophetic voice in the search for freedom from bonds and boxes. We need to be creative in the processes of raising awareness and welcoming those who managed to break with the current model. And we don't lose hope in the transforming capacity and faith in more just days. Resistance is the watchword! But persistence becomes a methodological tool, since giving up does not seem to be an option. And fighting for gender justice has become a life project, both at an individual and collective level.

I express herein my gratitude for the opportunity to join this table and help identify the challenges that often prevent us from hope. But, similarly, to say that these challenges will not be able to stop us from dreaming, planning and acting in the construction of a more equitable and just world for all people!

10 *Nem So Doce Lar* is a diaconal methodology for overcoming domestic and family violence, carried out by the Lutheran Diaconia Foundation, since 2006. The methodology provides for actions to raise awareness and train teams of government organizations, civil society organizations, collectives, churches and diaconal institutions, in order to strengthen local networks to ensure the effectiveness and applicability of public policies for the defense of rights. See more at: FUNDAÇÃO LUTERANA DE DIACONIA. *Nem Tão Doce Lar*. Available on: <https://fld.com.br/nem-tao-doce-lar/>. Retrieved on: 4 March, 2022.

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DIGNITY AND FREEDOM:

A REREADING OF JOHN 8,31-47 AGAINST THE CRIME OF TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN FOR THE PURPOSE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION¹

Sandra Nancy Mansilla²

Open letter to experts on human trafficking. By Sonia Sánchez

When you talk about “human trafficking”, you don’t say anything about me. You tell me a lot about your double standards, and the way you use and paint us.

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Table “Gender Justice and Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics”. Translated by Heilike Philippsen Mog. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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This big circus you call the “fight against human trafficking,” of which you are the owners, tells me a lot about the creation and strengthening of a new “red-light district” and your efforts to not change anything.

Just as I believe that discussing prostitution only among prostitutes is to uphold our vulnerability and excuse the pimps and the prostituyentes³, I also say this: stop Hollywooding the traffic of women for sexual exploitation. We all know and are aware that:

³ Translators note: Here the original word “*prostituyente*” was kept, because the closest translation of this word to the English language would be client, a translation that strips the original word of its meaning as someone who facilitates prostitution and participates in the violence of it, since “client” could imply a level field between that person and the one who is subject to prostitution.

It is hunger that “trafficks” us, it is the lack of employment that “trafficks” us, it is the lack of a home that “trafficks” us, it is the lack of education that “trafficks” us.

That is why prostitutes do not need more laws, workshops, or forums. We need the existing ones to be enforced. We need a shock of serious social policies, for us, and our families.

We need the prostituyente, torturer, who lives comfortably in his house, to be seen, to be persecuted, and criminalized.

We need you to take your hands off us a little. We need you to work on your hypocrisies and lies. Try.⁴

Introduction

Sonia Sánchez is a woman who has lived some years of her life in prostitution, or better put, the prostitution system has lived off of her. She was able to get out of that reality, and today considers herself a survivor. She currently lives in Buenos Aires and, with the authority her experience gives her, teaches through the story of her own life, bringing awareness to others about the labyrinths and traps of the system that held her captive under an open-air concentration camp, as she puts it.

The square, the street, and the police station continue to be places of torture and silent death for so many companions that Sonia names with their names, nicknames, and anecdotes of terror. She is convinced that just as silence was a weapon for subjugation, now words must be

her ally for denunciation. A word called to be pronounced in public and in a literal sense, without metaphors or dissimulation, in favor of others who cannot do it, those women who are still subdued by a society that ignores them, makes them invisible, forgets them, or that regulates them in protocols, in red zones, and even unionizes them.

Sonia says that being a prostitute is living with the lie of believing that this woman has the power and the freedom of selling her body when the sad truth is that she cannot recognize that someone else buys-sells her: the pimp, the husband, the lover; truthfully nothing belongs to her.

Sonia now talks much about the body, because a woman in a state of prostitution cannot do that. There is a great silence regarding their own body among prostitutes because the word is apart from the body of the prostitute. It is others who name it, who qualify it, and who quote it. And in this schism between the body and the word of the prostituted woman the system operates its domination of exchange, transaction, and prostitution practices with fantasy names: “*media francesa*”, “*una francesa*”, “*un completo*”, fantasies to refer to which part of the body one will have the right to access according to a given price. A body divided into parts stops being a body to be a thing, an artifact. And to that, to the now fragilized body, is now incorporated a corporative system of interchanges and implied agreements about the value, the status, and the power of some bodies over others

From where Sonia speaks, she installs a disruptive voice on the scenario of specialists on trafficking and prostitution. I say disruptive because she has gone through the experience, something that the majority of specialists have not gone through. Her word thunders with

⁴ SANCHEZ, Sonia. *La puta esquina*. Campo de concentración a cielo abierto. Bs.As. Ed. La Minga, 2018, p. 46-47.

authority because she knows well the fabric that supports such a damned system. Through the urgency of her voice we hope! Let us react to it, put in doubt, and suspect everything that we repeat and believe we know about this world that is so alien to us.

Dignity and liberty in Sonia were lessons learned from the body and the word, from the experience and the speech, deconstructed and reconstructed. Her words speak from a truth made bare and from freedom conquered through risk. Sonia's life, like many others, erupts like the woman who stands in the middle of the men in the story of John 8,1-11; as a misplaced, strange, disruptive story, which brings up questions of the hermeneutic possibility of the message of Jesus speaking to the believers, the few of them, in the rest of chapter 8. In that way, with the word of Sonia in the background, we will make an effort to say something new about Dignity and Freedom from the reading of John 8,31-47 in the face of the scandal of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (v.31-32)

The research in the last years has come to the consensus that the gospel of John, like other texts, has not been written at one time, but was a long and complex writing task. The pericope of the adulteress (cf.7,53-8,11), which certainly is not a part of the original text, accounts for the anomalies in sections 7-8 in the Temple of Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. The solutions proposed, from the redaction theory or from multiple sources and editions, are efforts to assess an arduous writing work, and, as Stef van Tilborg concludes, “it is necessary to say that the

gospel shows a great unity of theological inspiration that reflects both the synchronic articulation of the work as well as its global project”⁵.

The curious treatment of this pericope has led us to question something in the history of the interpretation to get to know that this passage is recognized by Papias⁶, disciple of John, so that the story is already known in the s. I. On the other hand, Augustins of Hippo is the greatest defender of the genuineness of the passage⁷. He says “and some of little faith, or, rather, enemies of the true faith, fearing, I believe, that impunity in sin might be granted to their women, ripped from their codices that scene in which the Lord forgave the adulteress.”⁸ As Hendriksen notes, “closely related to this is the fact that asceticism played an important role in the subapostolic era. Hence the suggestion that this section (7:53-8:11) was once part of the gospel of John but was removed from it later.”⁹

That scene, which most of the commentaries consider extrapolated and strange for the gospel of John, because of being omitted in older codices and displaced in others, because *of-it-one does-not-speak*, however, it looks at us from the *textus receptus* and enriches the meaning

5 VAN TILBORG, Stef. *Comentario al Evangelio de Juan*. Navarra: Ed. Verbo Divino, 2005, p. 7.

6 EUSEBIO. *Historia Ecclesia*. III. 39, 17. Available at: <http://escrituras.tripod.com/Textos/HistEcl03.htm>. Access in: Jun. 30th, 2019.

7 AGUSTÍN. *Ioannis Evangelium tractatus*. Tr. 33:4-8. Available at: https://www.augustinus.it/spagnolo/commento_vsg/index2.htm. Access in: Jun. 30th, 2019.

8 AGUSTÍN. *De adulterinis conjugis*, II, 7. Available at: http://www.augustinus.it/spagnolo/connubi_adulterini/connubi_adulterini_2_libro.htm. Access in: Jun. 30th, 2019.

9 HENDRIKSEN, Guillermo. *El evangelio según san Juan*. Subcomisión Literatura Cristiana, Iglesia Reformada. Michigan, USA: Grand Rapids, 1981, p. 299.

of the chapter in its rhetorical aspect. In such a sense, the textual criticism of this passage will not be addressed in this study, but rather a reading of the canonical text in its final redaction will be applied, according to the approach of synchronic analysis, in particular the rhetorical method. In such a way that the dialogue of Jesus in John 8,31-47 also offers a meaning referring to the scene of the woman subjected to judgment in vv 1-11 as a rhetorical situation, that is, a situation that gives rise to such dialogues of Jesus and his interlocutors.

Are not certain disruptive situations in the lives of people, and in particular women victims of trafficking, requiring us to *speaking-about-certain-things*, in time and out of time, as to strengthen our theology in the key of liberation? With this concern, I am going to concentrate on the study of **verses 31-47**, without losing sight of that editorial framework, to return to it later. In this way, the expression “the truth will set you free” will be a promise that fills us with hope and audacity for its entire fulfillment, like a light that struggles not to go out and that carries within itself the strength to continue illuminating us in the worst darkness.

Three dialogues in *crescendo*

The passage takes place at a critical moment in the scene of the gospel. Neither more nor less than that of the presentation of the *I am* of Jesus, the most explicit revelation and at the same time the most controversial. The section that interests us is a dialogue that is preceded by two others, which structure chapter 8, and which continue the great revelation of v. 12 I am the light of the world; Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

8,13-20 Jesus and the Pharisees;

8,21-30 Jesus and the Jews;

8,31-59 Jesus and the Jews who had believed in him;

31-38 from servitude to freedom;

39-47 Is your father Abraham -or Cain-? God or the devil?;

47-59 Jesus is greater than Abraham.

v.31a “So he said to the Jews who had believed in him”

It is possibly those who stayed to listen to him, impressed by his action and his argument. Jesus will put a condition on them, if you keep to my Word, you will really be my disciples (v.31b). For Jesus, it seems, it is not enough to have a receptive attitude towards his word but it is also necessary to put it into practice, that is, to make it one's life and remain in it, which means to ally oneself completely with Jesus, because the verb μένω, to remain, has in John the sense of communion or even of immanence (15,4-7; 1 Jn 4,16). Therefore, it is a question of a full identification, that characterizes the true disciple of Jesus, reinforced by the use of the possessive pronoun “Emo” (lit. My Word). In other words, it is not just any word, but the word of Jesus, the one that He gave them. In that conjunction, the truth that liberates emerges, that is, the prophecy that transforms, the true discipleship of which the guarantee is that you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (v.32). Following Jesus, then, is not an exercise in doctrines, nor laws, nor commandments that must be known or repeated, following Jesus consists in acting with him and like him so that there is no more oppression, neither oppressors nor oppressed.

Faith in Jesus is not a religion, but a personal and integral identification of adherence and follow-through. Thus, truth and freedom nourish each other, since the truth manifests itself and grows when it acts liberating, just as Jesus does. We can say, then, that there is no true Christian theology if that theology does not produce liberation. Surely, we still do not reach the liberation we long for, because we need to understand and live with more intensity and commitment the message of Jesus, making it more real and effective – according to the measure of our faith – in the situations that cry out today for that liberation.

v. 33 They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

It may happen that we take for granted that we have already done our part, thinking like the Jews in the story that we are Abraham’s lineage because we are clear about the causes and powers that intervene in the system of oppression. But that reason becomes dead word if we do not put that dignity into action. It may happen that our dignity as believers is a great stagnant title if it does not become a verb, an action of dignity. Any title loses its legitimacy if it is not translated into action and this can also happen to Christians. In that case, our omission would be exposing our hypocrisy, our corruption; in biblical terms, our sin, because “everyone who works sinfully is a slave” (v.34), who has not even achieved freedom for themselves. It can happen, as expressed in the final sentence preceded by a resounding Amen, Amen, that calmly calling ourselves Christians in a continent marked by oppression, corruption, and indifference turns against us to accuse us, when calling ourselves Christians we do not put into action the truth and the freedom that characterizes our faith. In fact,

the slave can be thrown out of the house at any time, unlike the children who remain, “meno”, in the Word of the Son.

v. 36 If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

True freedom is manifested to us in Jesus and in no one else. In him, we recognize the supreme dignity that we are called to realize and which we must build for all humanity and, in it, for all creation, in Pauline terms. Jesus is, therefore, the guarantee and the entire measure of our dignity and of our freedom, for us and for every creature. In Christ we are freed from all false dignity and adopted as children in the dignity of the Son, that is the truth to which the Christian faith adheres and by which we are definitively freed to operate liberation in his Name.

v. 37 I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Before his interlocutors, who want to kill him, Jesus recognizes, in the historical and physical sense, that they are all descendants of Abraham, which increases the perversity of their purposes and the manifest slavery of a sinful heart, perhaps that is why he does not call them children of Abraham but *σπέρμα* Abraham’s *sperm*. “There is no doubt that they descended from the one in whom the nation of Israel began, but they are not spiritually his descendants because the faith of Abraham is absent from their hearts and they are not led by it.”¹⁰

Those who want to kill Jesus today are those who, from the slavery of their corruption, oppress the Truth, that of a dignity that we have not

¹⁰ PÉREZ MILLOS, Samuel. *Comentario exegético al texto griego del Nuevo Testamento*. Juan. Barcelona: CLIE, 2016, p. 866.

yet achieved, except in promise. We are permanently threatened with death, even by those who, having some power, delay the implementation of the truth, because the Word does not find acceptance. The clamor is urgent and comes from the clandestine basements where oppression is exerted on the weakest, for being poor, migrants, exploited, sold, trafficked, prostituted, forgotten.

v. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

At this moment the sentence of Jesus is radicalized by diversifying two projects, that of the children of God and that of the children of the devil. The devil, murderer from the beginning and to the end. Enemy of life, truth, dignity and freedom that we children of God seek. What more clarity do we need to understand the place that we are called to occupy as true believers in the face of a systematic plan of kidnapping, prostitution exploitation and death of so many brothers and sisters who are victims of the crime of trafficking and sexual exploitation, and in them, all of the selfish domination of many creatures being used as an object of consumption and discard?

Freedom and truth threatened

We recall again the context where all these scenes and dialogues brought by the gospel of John occur, the feast of Tabernacles, the one that recalls the people gathered in the desert, receiving the law that

rescues from slavery to make them children of God, a people free in the service of life. At a party where lights are the main sign, Jesus presents himself as the true Light. The thread of the narrative nevertheless leads to rejection and shows us the adversaries of Jesus looking for a trap to accuse and kill him. Perhaps extremely serious situations such as those, that leave us speechless on a daily basis, situations that reveal the cruelty and dehumanization of a criminal system, do not challenge the tenacity of our studies and reflections in order to leave us without arguments? In the face of each victim, don't we feel the uneasiness of retreating between bumps (v.59) so as not to be completely defeated in order to come back later with other more convincing arguments?

At the level of the facts, as before the trial of the adulterous woman, any solution that is proposed may be harmful to the victim and to the proposer, perhaps that is why Jesus does not address the matter in legal terms, but instead directs the way out by the practical side and that of the interpellation of who would have the power to throw the first stone. Our argument also, as in the case of Jesus, can be palliative, and momentarily efficient as long as we focus on the rescue of the victim, but there is still the scaffolding of the system that will continue to kill, steal, enslave until we can strengthen the liberating power of our dignity and our truth.

Conclusion

The community of John represented in the story has made a clear break and has come into conflict with its own Jewish bases. It has acutely faced its adversaries and knows well what the consequences will be, never less than the fate of its Messiah.

In the same way, Sonia, and what her speech represents, places us in an uncomfortable place, with the mission of also elaborating an uncomfortable thought and a consequent action, permanently provocative to society and especially aimed at those who have the power to change things. Will we be able to remain, $\mu\epsilon\rho\omicron$, in this Word and this attitude, the one that confesses our faith?

The gospel is a humanizing and dignifying announcement for every human being, especially for the poorest and most needy who cannot wait any longer. Sonia's call challenges us, as in the trial of the adulterous woman, the call is for a believing politicism that is less principled and more pragmatic, less religious and more effective. Time is too short and the situation is too dire. The stones are on our head.

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FANNIE LOU HAMER'S INTERSECTIONAL RESISTANCE TO COERCIVE CONTROL¹

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Learning from black activist women's leadership

There are so many ways to learn from religious black women's activist leadership in liberationist social movements. We must take seriously their specific ideas and experiences as we critically engage them in our pursuit of genuinely transformative insights about religion and society. In my own black feminist teaching and research, I am particularly interested in the major source of fuel for gender violence: coercive control. Studying specific dimensions of black women's activist social movement leadership can expand our capacity to identify the

broad tentacles of coercive control in society and enable us to create more adequate forms of resistance to it.

Although I focus here on my own U.S.-American context, I long for more border-crossing conversations where we can compare the differences and similarities in what it means to learn from and about black women leaders in Brazil and from and about black women leaders in the United States. In my experiences of visiting Salvador, Bahia, I have been deeply inspired by the long tradition of black women's activist leadership and the role of religion, particularly Candomblé, as a stalwart resource for that leadership. I hope for more forums to jointly reflect, for example, on the role of blackness in the social transformation work we must do in Brazil and in the United States and how it is a resource for confronting heteropatriarchal coercion in the Christian traditions so influential in both of our contexts.

1 Lecture given at the Thematic Table "Experiences of black women and transformative movements". Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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I find few leaders more inspiring than a black woman activist in mid-20th century United States history named Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977). She was a leader during the 1950s and 1960s U.S. civil rights movement for equality, justice, and freedom. Hamer was an outspoken, Christian, socio-economically poor, sharecropper (farmer) in the rural deep south of the U.S. (Mississippi). She did not have a formal education beyond six years of elementary school when she had to drop out of school to help her family survive economically, doing hard sharecropping labor as a child. Black sharecroppers were notoriously cheated and exploited by whites who owned the land on which they farmed.

Hamer's vast civil rights leadership had two main trajectories. She primarily focused on fighting for black people's political rights such as the right to vote and to be represented in state and national political party decision-making. And, she was dedicated to the development of the economic rights of the rural poor, including a revolutionary vision of a large scale, black-owned cooperative farm. Hamer's leadership always emphasized the inclusion of poor people's perspectives and rights. She insisted on including the socioeconomic needs of her own grassroots community in the formation of a national civil rights agenda. Her style of public leadership frequently incorporated emotional testimony about her life experiences and her singing of Christian spirituals and movement freedom songs at protest demonstrations. Hamer invoked Christian biblical and theological lessons in her public organizing. But she harshly criticized black church political apathy, hypocrisy, and support for the white racist status quo³. Her theological message was always

3 CROZIER, Karen D. *Fannie Lou Hamer's Revolutionary Practical Theology: Racial and Environmental Justice Concerns*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020, p. 39.

contextualized. In one of her speeches, she declared, "God is not pleased at the Negro children in the state of Mississippi suffering malnutrition. God is not pleased because we have to go raggedy each day. God is not pleased because we have to go to the field and work from ten to eleven hours for three lousy dollars."⁴

In part because of the pointedness of these radical commitments that she expressed, she clashed with some of the traditional movement leaders. She had conflicts with leaders ranging from some of the most prominent black civil rights movement organizers (many of whom were middle class, highly educated black male clergy). On one occasion, even the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson, a white southern politician who openly regarded her with disdain tried to block her access to national media coverage. The details of Hamer's persevering, bold leadership are quite extensive, but I mention only two examples below. In her public testimony movement work, she described her forced sterilization and a sexualized beating she endured when jailed for her civil rights movement participation. Our reflections on such details can help to create the kind of agenda we need for learning, imagining, and constructing transformative social change that dismantles varied forms of racist coercive control that reinforce gender injustice and inequality.

Critical self-reflection about our own method of inquiry also has to be incorporated in how we define black women's activist leadership. We must interrogate the assumptions that we bring so that we do not claim their historical legacies with a method that reproduces coercive control. I briefly mention the Episcopal priest, lawyer, black feminist

4 As quoted in CROZIER, 2020, p. 35.

activist Pauli Murray (1910-1985) to note how categorizing her identity as queer and non-binary can aid in constructing a Christian vision of freedom informed by Murray's racial and gender justice activist legacy, but must also embrace expansive and flexible understandings of gender and blackness.

Mind-body-spirit intersectional resistance to coercive control

To study Fannie Lou Hamer's leadership demands attention to black women's embodiment. The intersection of repressive state laws, discriminatory private practices of medical professionals as well as dominant prejudiced cultural attitudes cooperatively denied black women's embodied freedom and equality. Hamer's leadership demonstrates an understanding of how an intersectional resistance approach that attends to mind, body, and spirit is needed to combat intersectional forms of harm.

But, specifically, what is the nature of the harm that must be transformed in the social movement work bequeathed to us by black women activists such as Hamer? The denial of freedom and equality that needs redress in transformative social movement work can be described as coercive control. This term usually refers to abusive behavior patterns in domestic violence. But it can also be applied more expansively to understand the abuser-logic at work in the politics that black women activists such as Hamer confronted and sought to change. As sociologist Evan Stark defines it in his discussion of domestic violence, the goal of coercive control is to victimize by constricting the targeted person's

right to a sense of personal agency. As he explains, "only in coercive control do perpetrators hone their tactics to their special knowledge of everything from a victim's earnings and phone conversations to her medical problems, personal fears, sexual desires..."⁵ This core aspect of coercive control also aptly describes how broader, intersectional collusion by public and private authorities imposes racist and sexist restrictions on the human agency of politically vulnerable members of society. This strategy of enforcing repressive measures of control related to the particular embodied realities and socioeconomic conditions that made poor black women vulnerable was evident in Hamer's political context. She publicly identified this treatment as a civil rights issue in ways no one else did.

In her 1964 public testimony about the nature and consequences of civil rights work in her southern rural community, Hamer spoke out about the routine forced sterilization by doctors in the local hospital of her and of many other rural black women⁶. She and others in that civil rights forum spoke of withheld democratic freedoms such as denial of black voting rights and local town curfews restricting blacks from being out at night. Hamer also testified about the coercive medical procedures that imposed limits on her gendered sexual self, reflecting how, as biographer, Chana Kai Lee explains, "not everyone in the movement regarded sterilization as a political concern of their work in Mississippi. Clearly Hamer did, and she spoke about it."⁷

5 STARK, Evan. *Coercive Control: The Entrapment of Women in Personal Life*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 206.

6 LEE, Chana Kai. *For freedom's sake: The life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 80.

7 LEE, 2000, p. 81.

In this instance, learning from Fannie Lou Hamer's example of leadership means placing sexual reproductive justice and black women's sexual reproductive agency as a priority on the social transformation agenda. Note that I include access to contraception and abortion as part of this agency, though Hamer would not have done so. For many contemporary, antiracist, social transformation church leaders, these embodied, gendered, problems of coercive control do not belong with issues that are seen as most important to black communities such as life endangering white racist policing or the restricting of access to voting in state elections. Engaging Hamer's leadership example prompts us to refuse to be blocked from naming as a contemporary civil rights crisis the unique forms of political collusion coercively preying upon certain black women's combined vulnerability of low socioeconomic status, reproductive health needs and desires, and endangered emotional well-being as a consequence of political restrictions on their embodied agency.

As she had done on other occasions, at that 1964 forum, Hamer also publicly testified about the horrors of her treatment in the Winona jail. She and a group of other activists were arrested for sitting down at a whites only lunch counter as they traveled home from a civil rights training event. Hamer's testimony described the sexualized aspects of the humiliation she experienced when beaten by her jailers. In her 1964 testimony referencing those events, she displayed tears and vulnerability when recounting her helplessness as white state officials had her beaten and of having to listen to the other jailed women activists in her group also being beaten. Hamer mentioned her ongoing physical disabilities that resulted from that beating. As Lee narrates,

she concluded her testimony "in the angry tone that typified her public manner."⁸

The coercive control this testimony named includes state terror meted out by the police who arrested and jailed them for being civil rights activists and openly talked about killing all of them and dumping their bodies in the river⁹, the beatings by black male prisoners ordered to do so by white jailers, and the trauma of sexualized humiliation of how her body was exposed during the beatings combined with anti-black and sexist comments focusing on her body. They collectively comprised intimate and public intersectional assaults on Hamer's mind, body, and spirit, and entitlement to agency and dignity. But the Christian resistance she exhibited at the jail was also multifaceted. Hamer led the black activists in singing spirituals while separated in jail cells and engaged one of the white Christian racists in a discussion of scripture and God's love of all God's children. But I want to call attention to how, in her subsequent testimony, she interpreted that experience and produced it as evidence for the social transformation movement. Her trauma and bodily assault became part of the needed analysis of what kind of dehumanization must not be tolerated and why.

In studying Hamer's leadership, we learn the limitations of an antiracist freedom agenda that focuses only on democratic rights to the exclusion of regard for bodily dignity and gender-based intimate assaults and sexual harassment by state agents and others. We are compelled to reject an antiracist agenda that does not address the gender-based

⁸ LEE, 2000, p. 80.

⁹ MILLS, Kay. *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. University Press of Kentucky, 2007, p. 61.

betrayals by blacks who may assist in the implementation of white supremacist coercive control of black and brown bodies. In its insistent connection of mind-body-spirit consequences and resources, Hamer's legacy teaches us that both tears of pain and unadulterated expressions of anger in response to state brutality and terror are what strong black womanhood looks and sounds like in public testimony that furthers social transformation.

Intersectional transformation movement work expands gender categories

Finally, our method matters. It is always instructive to examine our own assumptions about how to define black womanhood, especially as we learn from religious black women's leadership practices and demand that any social transformation movement include the intersectional experiences of coercive control that impact black women in our societies. I want to note that resistance to coercion in this work has to incorporate resistance to any narrowing or rigid imposition of gender categories. The study of the legacy of another leader, from the 1950s-1970s, Pauli Murray prompts this reminder. Murray was a highly educated black activist leader who deployed her skills as a poet, writer, legal theorist and organizer to address issues of labor rights, gender justice, and racial equality. Later in her life, she was ordained as an Episcopal priest. There are current discussions among activist-scholars about how to categorize Murray's gender and sexual identity, and whether or not or how to apply labels such as transgender that she did not publicly claim. But how do we celebrate the deliberate transgressiveness of gender identity

labels Murray repeatedly privately expressed?¹⁰ Especially within the suffocating environment of a deep commitment to heteropatriarchal and transphobic Christian church practices that dominates the U.S. context, the vision of social transformation Christian activists such as myself pursue must explicitly include an embrace of queerness, lesbian, and gender non-conforming blackness and gender justice. Yet there needs to be fluidity and flexibility in that embrace located directly within the project of making religious black women's activist legacy a central catalyst for social transformation.

Finally, I am thankful for the gift of these inspiring leaders. Especially in this moment of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the disproportionate socioeconomic impact on so many black and brown communities as well as the hidden impacts of intimate abuse and violence for women trapped in isolated situations with their abusers. We must create an expansive, intersectional, mind-body-spirit analysis of the coercive factors that infuse white supremacist control in order to produce an adequately matching movement to dismantle it.

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¹⁰ COOPER, Brittney. *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.; DRURY, Doreen M. Boy-Girl, Imp, Priest: Pauli Murray and the Limits of Identity. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 29, no.1, p. 142-147, 2013.

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FEMINISM, CREATIVITY AND RESISTANCE IN THE WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN¹

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Brazilian Scenario

The word resistance, almost instinctively, or affectively, reminds me of the lives of women during the pandemic. It is impossible, at this moment, to think about feminism, creativity and resistance without having in mind a kind of film with images of how women have been facing the difficulties imposed by Covid-19. Allied to this, a government that since 2019 has been dismantling public policies that supported the lives of women in Brazil. In addition, it has been

implementing and approving bills that take away the rights of male and female workers.

Pension reform increased the time to retirement and removed the possibility of length of service to access entitlement. For domestic female workers, this point is central, as they usually start this profession very early. In addition, very recently their labor rights have been expanded. The reform of the Bolsonaro government regresses in this sense and directly attacks these female workers, but not only them.

Informality, which was already a hallmark of women's work, also grew during the pandemic. Unemployment is at the mark of more than 14 million people³. Hunger is one of the main ailments brought about

1 Lecture presented at the Thematic Table "Feminisms, creativity and resistance". Translated by Marie Krahn.

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3 INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE GEOGRAFIA E ESTATÍSTICA – IBGE. *Desemprego*. Available at: www.ibge.gov.br/explica/desemprego.php. Accessed on: 22 Oct. 2021.

by the lack of work and we know that women are the ones who suffer the pain of not having enough to feed their children. We know that housework and care work is still theirs. In a scenario of unemployment, pandemic and government without effective public policy to guarantee livelihood, women's lives are a continuum of resistance.

However, this scenario is not limited to Brazil. The neoliberal model, the ideology of the patriarchal capitalist model, is hegemonic and the inequalities it produces know no borders. To legitimize inequalities, whether of class, race and/or gender, religion is a powerful ally. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro appointed André Mendonça, who is a pastor, to occupy a vacancy in the Federal Supreme Court, fulfilling his campaign promise to present the nomination of someone "terribly evangelical" to the position. Therefore, we can predict that, when an agenda in favor of women's lives arrives from the Supreme Court, a specific religious perspective, markedly conservative and fundamentalist, will speak in this member's vote.

International Resistance

The interference of religion in the life of women and their rights is not a privilege of Brazil. As highlighted by the analysis of the militant of the World March of Women in Iraq:

Each time, the regime presents several arguments and means to create a suitable ground for the continuation of reactionary laws. Poverty imposes restrictions on human perception and a miserable vision of what the individual can be, especially if religion is used to justify the phenomenon of poverty, as if it were a divine will. Religious reliance

belongs to those who hold power in order to maintain poverty, to keep the poor satisfied with reality by serving capital. It is a crime, an attack against human beings, as some of these aspects become acceptable to women themselves. The phenomenon of oppression of women did not emerge as an emergency and cannot be sustained without an authoritarian class interest and a reflection of this socio-economic system.⁴

In many places, this patriarchal culture reinforces the "right" to take land from working women, based on traditions, many religious, and legislation that prevents them from owning property. In other cases, the religious issue serves to mask the economic and political interest that are in fact the reasons for the withdrawal of women's rights. Access to land is fundamental to the food sovereignty of these populations and women's economic autonomy.

In Morocco, resistance has been organized by Moroccan women. Engaged in this struggle, in various regions, Soulaliyat women are at the forefront. They are part of traditional communities that inhabit vast regions. Land tenure is collective and shared. However, the government passed the title of land to the men, taking away from women the right to property. The political purpose of this fact is to provide, with the political objective, the appropriation of land by companies which, in turn, aim to exploit the impoverishment of families to acquire ownership of these lands. But women are still organized, fighting against this reality and denouncing, through the

⁴ WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN IN IRAQ. An effort to try to break the link between poverty and women. Available at: capiremov.org/analises/separar-a-linha-que-une-a-pobreza-e-as-mulheres-no-iraque/. Accessed on: 22 Oct. 2021 [translator's note – enter this site and click on Sairat Journal to get English version]

WMW and partner social movements, what is happening in the country at this time. In Tunisia the situation is similar to Morocco. There women are fighting for the equal right to inheritance. Although they do not have the right to land, they work on it in a precarious way and without rights.

In Palestine, the Israeli occupation imposes several violations of women's rights. But movements like the World March of Women, in alliance with other popular social movements, find forms of resistance. Every year the movement organizes events on the Palestinian Land Day, on May 30th. The war that the Israeli State imposes on Palestine is directly connected with the struggle for peace and demilitarization and an end to violence against women, in addition to the struggle for common goods. That's because Israel controls water resources in the Gaza Strip, denying access to clean water to the region. At the moment, the construction of a wall in the West Bank, which is planned to be 700 km long, is still underway, separating families and imposing an apartheid regime on the Palestinian people.

In 2020, as it was already in the pandemic period, support actions were carried out virtually. The nucleus of Rio Grande do Sul played a leading role in this theme. It proposed a series of videos by WMW militants from Brazil and Palestinian refugees calling on other social movements to unite not only for the struggle for a free Palestine, but also for other peoples fighting for territories, such as in Western Sahara, the Arab world and the Middle East, in Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras and Kurdistan. The Palestinian women continue denouncing that, in this case, the Israeli occupation is motivated by colonialism and the control of territories and does not have any connection to religious conflict, as the major

international media make it seem⁵. This discourse of conflict between Jews and Muslims covers up the Israeli occupation policy. The existence of Palestinian political groups such as Hamas, which is mentioned as a group of Muslim extremists⁶ while the Mossad is propagated as a defense institute internationally recognized for its warfare techniques. The use of lethal weapons against Palestinians is justified with the discourse of fighting terrorism, explicitly or subliminally implying that Israel only defends itself against attacks by Muslim extremists⁷.

Returning to the Brazilian scenario

But returning to our enclosure, to Brazil, despite the persecution suffered by women, the World March of Women found ways to continue the fight during the pandemic. The movement reinvented itself, podcasts came, the WhatsApp group became more informative and organizational, and lives became constant.

5 G1. G1 explica: o que é o Hamas? *G1*, São Paulo, 31 jul. 2014. Available at: <http://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2014/07/g1-explica-o-que-e-o-hamas.html>. Accessed on: 27 Oct. 2021.; ODEH, Ruba; MARTINS, Vânia. 30 de março: em marcha pela autodeterminação dos povos. *Marcha Mundial das Mulheres*, 30 mar. 2020. Available at: <https://www.marchamundialdasmulheres.org.br/30-de-marco-em-marcha-pela-autodeterminacao-dos-povos/>. Accessed on: 27 Oct. 2021

6 HAMAS: Grupo é considerado um dos mais extremistas do Oriente Médio. *Uol*, São Paulo, [s. d.]. Available at: <https://educacao.uol.com.br/disciplinas/historia/hamas-grupo-e-considerado-um-dos-mais-extremistas-do-oriente-medio.htm>. Accessed on: 4 Jan. 2022

7 BBC. Conflito entre Israel e palestinos: o que está acontecendo e mais 5 perguntas sobre a onda de violência. *G1*, 17 maio 2021. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2021/05/17/conflito-entre-israel-e-palestinos-o-que-esta-acontecendo-e-mais-5-perguntas-sobre-a-onda-de-violencia.ghtml>. Accessed on: 27 Oct. 2021

In 2020, the World March of Women, in Brazil was to carry out the fifth international action in person at a large meeting in the State of Rio Grande do Norte. However, in view of the pandemic, it was necessary to reorganize the entire agenda of the movement. However, the struggle against the Bolsonaro government and its reactionary agenda was thematized throughout the year on the movement's social networks. It continued, as a transnational movement, providing solidarity to peoples in struggle, especially to women who struggle in their countries and territories, as in the cases mentioned above.

At this moment, when many have already received the vaccine, we once again began to occupy the streets, respecting the safety measures, wearing a mask and taking the necessary precautions so that all of us may continue on the march until we are all free. Therefore, creativity is a characteristic of feminism, more than that, it is a historical characteristic of women, it is a form of survival. It is with this creativity that the women's movement, and here we are talking about a women's movement that struggles against capitalism and its forms of oppression, continues to resist and reinvent itself in the struggle for a fairer world for those who make a living from work.

Final considerations

The mistaken idea that women are naturally rivals does not stand up to a historical analysis of the oppressions that women have experienced since the triumph of patriarchy. In that regard:

What would have become of women in the patriarchy without the network of women around, to one side, behind one, ahead, leading the

way, enduring together. What would we be without our friends? What would women be without the love of women?⁸

Women, throughout history, have been each other's refuge and support. The argument that women enslaved other women is valid. There are women who exploit other women's workforce. There are women who morally judge other women. But it is undeniable that the history of oppression to which we are subjected in patriarchal societies demanded and still demands alliance and care between us.

The myth of prostitution as the oldest "profession" in the world is one example of how patriarchy seeks to erase the importance of alliances between women. There is no logic in prostitution being the oldest "profession".

What's more, patriarchal capitalism naturalizes prostitution as 'the oldest profession in the world' and tells this lie so many times until it is understood to be the truth. For the statement to seem true, it disregards a range of millennial jobs and the professions that derive from them. The oldest profession is certainly midwifery. It is through the act of giving birth, it is from the body of women that humanity is born.⁹

This type of myth, among others, creates the separations we mentioned above between women, dividing us between saints and

8 LAGARDE Y DE LOS RÍOS, Marcela. Pacto entre mujeres: sororidad. *Aportes*, Buenos Aires, ed. 25, p. 123-135, [s. d.], p. 124. Available at: <https://www.asociacionag.org.ar/pdfaportes/25/09.pdf>. Accessed on: 27 Oct. 2021.

9 GIL, Vanessa Nesbada da Silva. *Mulheres em movimento mudam o mundo: O educativo na/da marcha mundial das mulheres*. 2015. 117 f. Thesis (Master's in Education) – Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2015, p. 89. Available at: <http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/131020/000979668.pdf?sequence=1>. Accessed on: 24 Oct. 2021.

whores. There are those who benefit from class differences by exploiting other women. But the union of women and critical, anti-capitalist feminism fights for the equality of men and women. It creates alliances, as the World March of Women does at an international level, because it recognizes that oppressions are transnational. It takes into account that oppressions can overlap, as in the case of black and/or lesbian women.

But we are in alliance, resisting, creating fissures in the system. A great example is the organization Catholics for the Right to Decide¹⁰, in which religious women fight for the decriminalization of abortion. There are women theologians who develop feminist theology, questioning machismo in monotheistic religions¹¹.

In view of what has been exposed throughout this text, even if briefly, I sought to highlight the forms of resistance that feminist creativity has been building. I also hope that this article gives visibility to women's struggles that are not seen in the headlines, are not dealt with in international organizations that intend to organize what is or is not a priority in human rights struggles. I am aware that this article does not address the complexity of women's current alliances, but I hope it has managed to show some ways women have found to crack capitalist patriarchy.

10 CATÓLICAS PELO DIREITO DE DECIDIR. © 2020. Available at: <https://catolicas.org.br/>. Accessed on: 24 Oct. 2021.

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THE COURAGE TO DISAGREE: A REFLECTION ABOUT PANDEMICS¹

Wanda Deifelt²

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Covid-19 virus was treated as an equalizer. It was believed that all people could be affected and that humanity would face it with strength and determination. What happened and is happening is the opposite. The pandemic caused by the corona virus has revealed social, racial, economic and gender inequalities that afflicted us before and that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Not everyone can work remotely, qualify for unemployment benefits, access medical care, or even have a roof over their heads where they can isolate themselves.

The pandemic turned out to be a social mirror and, instead of solidarity, Covid-19 worsened vulnerabilities and opened wide the hate speech. Among these, a common strategy to explain the increasing number of infections and deaths is to blame the victims, using personal situations – such as chronic diseases, obesity, age or chemical dependency – to justify deaths. This practice is cruel because it places the onus on the individual, blaming the person who got sick or died without regard for the systemic inequalities that created these adverse conditions in the first place. Vulnerability is labeled as the main culprit, thus exempting the public power and the authorities in power for their neglect and inefficiency.

Instead of naming the social and political abandonment that relegated victims to a marginal social place – or subaltern, as Indian

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Gayatri Spivak would say – the common approach around the pandemic continues to include blaming the most vulnerable people and their inability to face the virus, as if it were “a little flu”. The discourses around the pandemic show unequal and excluding social structures, and the social and political place from which these discourses are enunciated.

Pandemics are times of crisis and crises reveal the best and worst of human behavior. They highlight social rifts and our reaction to them. Pandemics expose the unvarnished truth that systemic injustices are neglected and tolerated, by rationalizing the need for sacrifice. Worldwide, health experts warned that reopening businesses and schools would be premature and risk handing out a “death sentence” to those people who would return to face-to-face work. An American (Texas) politician said that the elderly would rather die than harm the US economy³. With his speech, he exemplified the ill-fated logic that some lives are worth saving while others are expendable.

The triad Boris Johnson (from England), Donald Trump (USA) and Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil) also showed the consequences of a toxic masculinity, which blames victims because they are not strong enough to overcome Covid-19. The idea that, for physically healthy (macho) men, a pandemic-causing virus can be treated like a common cold only confirms gender, race, and class stereotypes. These leaders favor the welfare of the economy and not the people, willing to sacrifice lives to safeguard

their own egos and show that capital – or the market economy – is more important and is above human lives.

All this we already know, but the question is: what does this have to do with religion?

The idealization of sacrifices

The first point is the emphasis on sacrifices. The language of sacrifice in the context of the pandemic is not accidental. Sacrifice is a religious practice, an offering made to the deity in a ceremonial to appease, thank or convince the deity. As Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss explain, a sacrifice is an act of abnegation, depriving the one who makes the sacrifice or is sacrificed. But sacrifice is often imposed as a duty and not as an option⁴. What the pandemic revealed was not the logic of self-sacrifice, the choice of the individual for the good of the community or the voluntary abnegation of privileges in favor of the common good⁵. To the contrary, the pandemic revealed how easy it is to justify the sacrifice of others, these others whose otherness already puts them in an unfavorable social situation.

3 BECKETT, Lois. Older people would rather die than let Covid-19 harm US economy – Texas official. *The Guardian*, 24 mar. 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/older-people-would-rather-die-than-let-covid-19-lockdown-harm-us-economy-texas-official-dan-patrick>. Accessed on: 23 Aug. 2021.

4 HUBERT, Henri; MAUSS, Marcel. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 100.

5 See the reflection about the lack of interest in the common good in favor of one's own interests: HOUSE, Silas. Some Americans No Longer Believe in the Common Good. They now are thinking only of themselves. *The Atlantic*, 22 ago. 2021. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/08/some-americans-no-longer-believe-in-the-common-good/619856/?utm_content=edit-promo&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=the-atlantic&utm_term=2021-08-22T21%3A21%3A34&fbclid=IwAR0-zODiZrfjUfKcCwazqokL4R4c2IzV6o-rZzdVWkqmKV93Mdn5sbN6728. Accessed on: 23 Aug. 2021.

When some politicians voluntarily offer people's lives to ensure businesses and schools stay open, it sends a message that sacrifice is not only acceptable, but mandatory. Who are the people considered expendable? Why are some lives worth more than others?

Among the many revelations brought by the pandemic is the trivialization of suffering and disregard for the pain of others. So, the pandemic brings us back to the most basic theological themes about human nature, evil, and God's role in it all. Historically, the reality of suffering has always required theological reflection, even if the Enlightenment placed more emphasis on human capacity. Still, the question of the why of suffering remains.

Why does God allow evil – like the devastation caused by the Covid-19 virus? Thomas Aquinas replied that good is only possible if evil also exists. We would not know good without evil, just as we would not appreciate the light of day without the darkness of night. Defenders of free will, such as Immanuel Kant, postulate that human beings have the possibility to make choices, to decide between good and evil, right and wrong, based on the categorical imperative of good. Process theology (John Cobb and others) posits that perhaps there are limits to God's powers. Feminist and liberation theologies emphasize ethical deliberation. We become human by being tested against evil, which takes individual and collective forms through structural sin⁶. All these approaches help us understand the human reaction to the pandemic.

The pandemic has opened up the evil that exists in us and among us. The inconvenience of wearing a mask unmasked political prejudice

and lack of compassion for others. The right to refuse vaccines (or profit from their purchase and sale) showed that individual greed and privilege are more important than solidarity. The disproportionate number of black and poor people who fall ill and die from the virus has opened the wounds of racism and classism. The increase in femicides showed that gender violence was exacerbated by the pandemic. Between saving the economy or people's lives, the growing number of Covid-19 cases – and the structural violence that the pandemic has revealed – continues to be described as the lesser of two evils. This sacrificial ideology reveals the social structures that legitimize social exclusion and justify the death of those considered insignificant to maintain the status quo. Some lives can be sacrificed so that others are unaffected.

The idolatry of the market: a god who demands sacrifices

The pandemic has also opened up idolatry – and this is the second point of connection with religion. By idolatry I do not mean just taking the name of God in vain, as in the unreasonable manifestations that we have heard lately, such as “instead of vaccines, we put our trust in God” or “God protects us and what happens to us is God's will.” What the pandemic caused by the corona virus has revealed is a struggle between gods. The God who demands human sacrifices is not a God of love or justice, but Mammon – the material wealth that becomes a god in our lives.

The Hebrew word Mammon (מַמּוֹן) literally means “money”, but it has been used to explain how greed became a god who rules hearts and minds. The term is often translated as wealth, as in Luke 16:13 – “No

⁶ See: PLACHER, William C. (Ed.). *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster Press, 2003, p. 93-101.

servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will unite with the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches.” Or, as the Gospel of Matthew reminds us, where your treasure is, there your heart is (Matthew 6:19-24). In my view, Martin Luther interpreted the text correctly by juxtaposing God and Mammon as two greatneses that struggle to occupy the human heart. On one side is the God incarnate in Jesus Christ, who appeals to love and solidarity, who values the well-being of body and soul, who preaches and practices full inclusion of all people. On the other side is Mammon, who justifies exclusion with the logic of profit, who ignores the well-being of body and soul when they do not serve the interests of consumerist capitalism, who replaces love and solidarity with taking advantage and thinking only of himself⁷.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, faith has always stood against the idolatry of material goods – until the advent of prosperity theology. It teaches that Christians have a right to physical health and economic prosperity. Unlike Lutheran theology, for example, which sees health and well-being as grace, prosperity theology sees it as a right to be traded. Sickness and poverty are seen as a curse that can be overcome through faith and right actions (naturally following the precepts of prosperity theology itself). Among these actions is the tithe, which serves as an

“insurance” that guarantees divine retribution in the form of material wealth. Because God is faithful, he guarantees that he will honor the promise of health and prosperity.

In this logic, health is a merit and illness is a fault. Sickness is evidence of failure and lack of faith. On the one hand, prosperity theology capitalizes on the blessings that come associated with health and prosperity and interprets them as a divine reward. On the other hand, however, health and prosperity are based on social asymmetry: while the wealthy turn their confines into spas, most workers – including those in the medical field – bear the brunt of illness and death⁸. Here, a theology of prosperity reveals itself as a theology of disparity. There is no room for compassion or a minimum requirement of solidarity.

Since wealth is a blessing from God, the means to prosperity are secondary, that is, individual financial well-being is more important than general well-being. There is a principle of trading with God to achieve riches, of using sacrifices in the form of money in exchange for prosperity. In systemic terms, just as God requires individual sacrifices – which translate into financial donations through business transactions – the sacrifice of others is necessary to achieve the prosperity of those who are chosen. The language of the “chosen” is widely used to justify exclusionary social structures, xenophobia, homophobia and holy war

7 This can be illustrated by social inequality and the growth of people in poverty. See the article: REVISTA IHU ON-LINE. *América Latina*. “20 years ago, we did not have this number of people in extreme poverty”. Interview with Maya Takagi. São Leopoldo, 18 Aug. 2021. Available at: http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/78-noticias/612100-america-latina-ha-20-anos-nao-tinhamos-esse-numero-de-pessoas-na-extrema-pobreza-entrevista-com-maya-takagi?fbclid=IwAR31_5tHZk5GtSIXKrtDpmYY1Zy21B98CM7J3JPCYqbD-gBSeUB3GfK7fC8. Accessed on: 23 Aug. 2021.

8 See the data on social inequality in this article: HOLPUCH, Amanda. ‘We can’t go back to normal’: the people left behind in America’s Covid recovery. *The Guardian*, 14 Aug. 2021. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2021/aug/14/women-fighting-covid-recovery-fair?utm_term=3f1ebbd32f67cff73d768f98636bd40&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUS_email. Accessed on: 23 Aug. 2021.

against non-Christians. Based on this, demonizing African or indigenous religions becomes a common practice.

The problem occurs when other people are also Christians. The solution is to create a hierarchy between who is most deserving of this well-being, such as health. This explains, at least in part, the hate speech coming from people who consider themselves “evangelical”. In the logic of *quid pro quo*, showing the sin of others justifies imposing sacrifices and excluding other people from social and religious benefits. In other words, this theology not only places itself in the position of negotiating with God, but also of administering God’s grace, indicating who can or cannot receive it. Prosperity theology is the embodiment of Mammon in our times. It’s like justification by works – but in this case the works are counted financially.

For this reason, the crisis caused by the pandemic is also illustrated by the growth of religious fundamentalism, which not only accepts the privilege of some over others, but justifies hierarchies of class, gender, age, race, etc. through a biblical and theological discourse that incites hate speech and practices.

The courage to disagree

Courage is acting from the heart. The root of the word is *cor* (core, center) and *agere* (to act)⁹. As explained in the program of this congress, courage “is bold, risky and demonstrates desire. It resists the dominance

9 Translator’s note: The word ‘courage’ in Portuguese is ‘coragem’ where you can more plainly see the root ‘*cor*’.

of fear, perseveres in living, experiencing, acting, deciding, confronting, despite risk and self-exposure.”¹⁰ Our times demand courage, including the courage to disagree. Similar to the word courage, to disagree has in it the root *cor*¹¹, heart. But the prefix *dis* indicates divergence, separation, or division into two parts. Disagreeing usually has a negative meaning because it implies taking an adverse position or separation. Not being in agreement alludes to a lack of unity, or that hearts are not united.

The moment in which we live is deeply marked by division. There is a polarization and a lack of dialogue and talking about the courage to disagree can feel like a provocation. In fact, many people face hatred with silence, which seems to be a sign of agreement.

But agreeing is bad and can kill. From an early age, women learn that it’s ugly to fight and that it’s better to keep up appearances in favor of harmony. When we dare to speak, our word is questioned and our testimony discredited¹². Silence and sacrifice are part of gender stereotypes. If there’s one thing we’ve learned, these stereotypes only serve to maintain or worsen the situation because they give the false impression

10 PROGRAMA DE GÊNERO E RELIGIÃO. *Apresentação VII Congresso Latino-Americano de Gênero e Religião*. São Leopoldo, 15 abr. 2021. Available at: <https://programadegeneroereligiao.wordpress.com/2021/04/15/apresentacao-vii-congresso-latino-americano-de-genero-e-religiao/>. Accessed on: 23 Aug. 2021.

11 Translator’s note: The word ‘disagree’ in Portuguese is ‘discordar’ which has the root ‘*cor*’ in it.

12 Statistics show that women’s testimony is not taken seriously or is discredited: KLEIN, Jessica. ‘Women are routinely discredited’: How courts fail mothers and children who have survived abuse. *The Guardian*, 14 ago. 2021. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/aug/14/courts-fail-mothers-children-abuse?utm_term=.3f1ebbd32f67c7ff73d768f98636bd40&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUS_email. Accessed on: 23 Aug. 2021.

that those who are silent consent. Silence is one of the expressions of the structural violence that permeates personal relationships.

For this reason, it is time to disagree, to verbalize the discontent and the unsustainable situation in which we find ourselves. You can't shut up seeing the suffering and deaths, the crying out in pain of those who cannot say goodbye to a loved one, the neglect with which governments treat the health crisis caused by the virus. To be silent in the face of suffering is to silence the prophetic voice that denounces injustices and proclaims that to agree is to die, but to disagree is to resurrect. It takes courage to disagree.

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GENDER JUSTICE AND THE CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT: CHANGES IN CONCEPT AND NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RELATIONS¹

Waneska Bonfim²

I am a Woman of Courage, I can³

Exercising democracy in everyday management is a constant challenge. It requires principles, commitment and courage.

Any relationship between people, be it community, family, school or professional, is based on behaviors and guidelines that guide coexistence and, especially, decision-making. Towards this end, we go to the understanding of democracy as an instrument that must be at the service of fair relationships, which allow broad participation, attention and care for the place occupied by men and women. Realizing and recognizing the differences in the occupation of spaces and in the processes of participation, we have the minimum conditions necessary for change, moving on to changing the conception. A step forward reveals a new perspective: the practice of democratic management with gender justice.

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Table “Institutional democratic management with gender justice”. Translated by Marie Krahn. This text was originally published in the Dossier “Solidary Economy, Democratic Management, Gender Justice”, from the journal *Coisas do Gênero*. See: BONFIM, Waneska. Gender justice and the challenges for democratic management: changes in conception and new directions for relationships. *Coisas de Gênero*, São Leopoldo, v. 7, no. 2, p. 46-55, Jul./Dec. 2021. Available at: <http://revistas.est.edu.br/index.php/genero/article/view/1384>. Accessed on: 1 Apr. 2022

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³ Motto of the Campaign We Are Women of Courage, 6th edition. Diakonia, 2018.

I introduce this reflection with the Campaign ‘We are Women of Courage’⁴, completing ten years of publication in 2022, under the coordination of Diakonia, to demonstrate that ensuring equal conditions for the participation and involvement of women in management processes is a fundamental decision for the practice of democratic management. It is up to women to have the courage to take a step and come out of anonymity; going public and taking a proactive place in relationships; and effectively participate in collective and public spaces, taking an active role in decisions about the reality that surrounds them. It is up to managers to take the initiative to insert and exercise a new approach in management and leadership models, recognizing that relationships between people in any collective environment need to be fair and, therefore, instruments and methodologies are still needed to enable the exercise of inclusive management processes that contemplate and enable the participation of all people, especially women.

This article proposes to expose concepts and reflections that collaborate to demonstrate the possibility of new practices and an analysis of the challenges from a necessary, urgent and, at the same time, innovative perspective, which can ensure men and women healthy experiences in collective environments, based on democratic management and gender justice.

4 The We Are Women of Courage Campaign is coordinated by Diakonia. It is in its 10th edition in 2022 and continues with the purpose of raising awareness, awakening and encouraging women from churches and other religious groups to face the various forms of violence against women and gender injustice, promoting, over the last few years, spaces for reflection, in the light of the Holy Scriptures, on women’s rights, gender justice, spaces of reception and protection.

Democratic Management

Understanding democracy in management practice is a condition for the incorporation of new management tools and experiences, attributed to any collective environment. Even living in a so-called democratic political regime, by itself is not enough to ensure democratic behavior and coexistence. Therefore, it is important to emphasize, so as to never fall into oblivion: “No one makes democracy (or revolution) from the level of concepts. And the real history is the history of the present, the here and now”⁵.

In this sense, the main proposition is related to the understanding and assimilation that a practice is carried out with an awareness of justice and, as a result, in equal conditions of participation and involvement, understanding that society is diverse, and it is in that diversity that leadership processes and respect for differences must be established to ensure fair power relations. This perspective contradicts authoritarian practices and encourages changes in behavior, starting to combine the balance between contestation, demand and direct dialogue. “[...] a new conception of democracy, which emphasizes, real or symbolically, decentralization, popular participation and partnerships”⁶.

The institutional environment does not escape the environment of political struggle where power relations are also established between the different and, therefore, as presented by Weffort⁷, the conquest of

5 WEFFORT, F. C. *Por que democracia?* São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1984, p. 106.

6 SOARES, J. A.; GONDIM, L. Novos modelos de gestão: lições que vêm do poder local. In: SOARES, J. A.; CACCIA-BAVA, S. (Orgs.). *Os Desafios da Gestão Municipal Democrática*. São Paulo: Cortez, 1998, p. 69.

7 WEFFORT, 1984, p. 59.

democracy must be a common objective for all people, thus, democracy becomes a general common objective of the set of political forces.

At home, at school, at work, at church, at the community association, in the group of friends, there is a constant exercise of power relations, demonstrating the possibilities, difficulties and challenges for democratic coexistence. The relationship between the individual and the collective is the mirror for the observation of democratic practices, which require “a level of empowerment of people as people, as individuals and, at the same time, require the transformation of institutions in which these people are inscribed in everyday life.” It is in the collective that the meaning of democracy can be expressed and materialized in which “the people must be the agent of their destiny.”⁸

With this ideology, democracy advocates the image of the human being responsible for the good administration of their world. The task is not just for the few, but for the collective. Clothed with dignity by the creator, people do not lend themselves to being instruments of others. They must be respected as members of human society, equal in value and rights.⁹

Assuming that responsibility for democratic management must be assumed collectively, I present the challenge of rethinking relationships, changing the conception of management and leadership and assuming that changes must be instituted at an institutional/collective level. New

practices will need to be assumed, understanding that, at first and probably for a long period, they will repair years of inequality and gender injustices, which are still causing power struggles, especially between men and women, in very unequal conditions. This must be understood as a process of constant search, in which attention and exercise must be practices so that one day it is assumed naturally and embodied in life experiences.¹⁰ “It is therefore necessary to combat deep-rooted and persistent power relations and discrimination in all spheres of life.”¹¹

The challenges expressed for changes in practices involve changing individual understandings and behaviors, but not only these, and especially changes in managerial approach and institutional practices, which are expressions of the collectivity.

[...] in the reasoning of those who think of democracy as a field of conflict and permanent reconstruction, this can be understood as a transformation of structures that have historically been builders and reproducers of gender inequality. Therefore, it is stated that it is not possible to understand the democratization of social relations without considering the possibility of restructuring some important institutions. It is not possible to think about development without considering the transformation of structures and institutions. This is the permanent process of democratization of institutions.¹²

8 BRAKEMEIER, G. Luteranismo e democracia – contornos de um compromisso. In: KUSS, C. (Org.). *Fé, justiça de gênero e incidência pública: 500 anos da Reforma e Diaconia Transformadora*. Porto Alegre: Fundação Luterana de Diaconia, 2017, p. 131.

9 BRAKEMEIER, 2017, p. 132.

10 MENEZES, M. N.; AGUIAR, R. O. Diaconia institucional em movimentos de reforma. In: KUSS, C. (Org.). *Fé, justiça de gênero e incidência pública: 500 anos da Reforma e Diaconia Transformadora*. Porto Alegre: Fundação Luterana de Diaconia, 2017.

11 ROCHA, A.; ZABATIERO, J. P. T. M.; VILHENA, V. Igualdade de Gênero. In: BARRO, J. H.; ZABATIERO, J. P. T. M.; SILVA, W. P. (Orgs.). *Porque Deus Amou o Mundo: Igreja & ODS*. Londrina: Descoberta, 2018, p. 124.

12 CAMURÇA, 2002, p. 174.

Power Relations and Gender Justice

In order to understand the prerequisite conditions for democratic management, it is important to address the approach to power relations and what has been disseminated as empowerment. For Vasconcelos¹³, this term “means the increase in power and personal and collective autonomy of individuals and social groups in interpersonal and institutional relationships, especially those subjected to relationships of oppression, domination and social discrimination”. Still according to the same author, this is a theoretical, political, social and subjective phenomenon and presents again an old problem in western emancipatory traditions.

It is in this context of relationships of oppression, domination and discrimination that women find themselves. A reflection on society from ancient times to the present explicitly reveals the historical and social challenges established in a persistent relationship of inequality of power experienced by women. All this observation reveals the importance of socializing, disseminating and expanding knowledge about this reality so that it does not fall into oblivion, is not naturalized and can be transformed into fairer conditions and opportunities for participation and involvement in the so-called democratic processes.

The construction of Western democracies was marked by some aspects, but, in relation to gender, it was based on the artificial separation

between the public and private spheres. Women were allocated in the private sphere and men in the public sphere. It also follows from this, in the process of building citizenship, the denial of citizenship to women [...] So, what did this base build? The pillars of a citizenship that was not universal, that excluded certain social groups and women in general. Political representation was masculine, professional activity was masculine and women came in as auxiliaries or support in certain circumstances of need, but as something external to them. When, after struggles, women conquer rights, these spaces were already occupied and were fundamentally male spaces. However, its impact was not only on the public world. The domestic sphere was also defined on the basis of legal patriarchal authority, that is, under the legitimation of the State. Women were unfit for the public sphere, they should stick to the private sphere, but this private sphere was also ruled by patriarchal male authority, legitimized by the power of the State. The impact on family, affective and public relationships, that is, this subordinate condition of women, whether in the public or in the private sphere, was the structuring of a set of unequal and asymmetrical social relations in life in general.¹⁴

Gender inequalities persist today, with women who face difficulties in accessing opportunities for the development of dignity, in addition to personal, social and public fulfillment, suffering the most diverse forms of violence. Within this reality, relations are still marked by oppressive power relations, which permeate class, race, ethnicity and sexuality at the intersection of gender relations. The unequal construction of power generates oppression. The root of this

13 VASCONCELOS, E. M. A perspectiva do empowerment no campo da saúde mental, do serviço social e da luta popular-democrática mais ampla. In: GARCIA, J.; Landim, L.; DAHMER, T. (Orgs.). *Sociedade e Políticas: novos debates entre ONGs e universidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 2003, p. 134.

14 ARAÚJO, C. Políticas públicas e gênero – um breve balanço de sua trajetória e das intervenções no Brasil. In: GARCIA, J.; Landim, L.; DAHMER, T. (Orgs.). *Sociedade e Políticas: novos debates entre ONGs e universidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Revan, 2003, p. 239.

type of oppression is not in power itself, but has its origins in gender discrimination, especially in the logic of male supremacy historically constructed in patriarchal societies.

Therefore, due to all the historical elements that present the inequality of conditions experienced by women, analyzing participation in democratic management implies reflecting on equality or justice. Camurça¹⁵ expressed this approach when she pointed out what equal or fair treatment means. As answers, she indicated equality of opportunity, which is related to free competition between individuals; and the second that is related to the fulfillment of the needs and rights of each person.

The two perspectives that respond about justice reveal a path to be followed. Men and women still remain in unequal conditions. Therefore, the awareness that gender injustice still persists is a significant step towards necessary, urgent and transformative social changes.

The concept of gender is an important analytical tool for us to seek more just and supportive relationships in our families, Christian communities and society. There are differences, yes, among us human beings, but they must be respected and each person must be encouraged to experience humanity in its fullness.¹⁶

Finally, the hypothesis that the potential of gender in the discussion of power lies in the possibility of assuming an emancipatory framework for women's political participation is valued here. In this framework,

the expansion of women's citizenship will only be consolidated if it is articulated with the democratization of the various structuring spaces of social life, transforming power relations.¹⁷

The unfolding of this approach on power relations favors the conceptualization that brings together a fundamental element in the strategy of thinking, questioning, analyzing and practicing democratic management: Gender Justice. The concept is relatively new, still being assimilated and disseminated, therefore requiring visibility to favor the achievement of fair relationships between people, especially men and women.

Gender Justice implies the protection and promotion of the dignity of women and men who, being created in the image of God, are co-responsible caretakers of creation. Gender justice is expressed through equality and through the balance of power relations between men and women and, in the elimination of institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination.¹⁸

15 CAMURÇA, 2002, p. 165.

16 ULRICH, C. B. *Relações de gênero. In: Estudos sobre gênero.* Porto Alegre: Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, 2013, p. 10.

17 FARIA, N.; SILVEIRA, M. L.; NOBRE, M. *Escolhas políticas: desafios para a incorporação de gênero às práticas das ONGs. In: Perspectivas de Gênero: Debates e questões para as ONGs.* Recife: GT Gênero – Plataforma de Contrapartes Novib / SOS CORPO Gênero e Cidadania, 2002, p. 179.

18 NEUENFELDT, E. *Perspectivas críticas sobre o movimento da Reforma e o papel atribuído às mulheres – de protagonismos à superação da violência doméstica. In: KUSS, C. (Org.). Fé, justiça de gênero e incidência pública: 500 anos da Reforma e Diaconia Transformadora.* Porto Alegre: Fundação Luterana de Diaconia, 2017, p. 121.

Initiatives for change

I return to the perspective of the We are Women of Courage Campaign to demarcate encouragement as a condition for the exercise of power, from the courage to expose oneself to participation, to the courage to assume innovative management processes, which present and have instruments and methodologies that enable inclusive participation processes aimed at balance, equality of conditions and fair practices of coexistence between men and women. This is not an easy task, but it is possible and requires initiatives that pay attention to an up-to-date reading of the context; learn from past experiences; and consider with attention and acceptance what society has demanded as new forms of management and relationships between people.

There is resistance to creating new models of leadership and the exercise of power, models that take into account the equal participation of men and women, that respect their voices with the same intentionality; models of power based on discipleship of equals, of the round table of dialogue [...] The process of women's empowerment is long, with advances and setbacks, with runs and stops, but it is, without a doubt, an absolute necessity in the construction of gender justice in the family, church, society and the world.¹⁹

It is important to recognize that most management proposals currently practiced oscillate between market-related standards and alternative forms of management. In this measure between the standards there are numerous difficulties that usually reveal resistance

to new models. But this cannot be seen as an impediment, only as an opportunity to recognize the situation and encourage people to face and overcome outdated management models²⁰.

As discussed above, it is essential that the changes be assimilated into the daily life of coexistence, understood as extremely necessary, being assumed as a life experience. To this end, they will start from the recognition that it is no longer possible to continue with management models and formats that have repercussions and reinforce unequal relationships and unfair processes of participation.

Now, it is worth exposing definitions about management to facilitate the understanding and construction of paths for change, at the same time that it makes it possible to recognize the value of learning and organizational processes to enable innovative practices that ensure the conditions for the involvement of women as well as men. "Management consists of the combination and coordination of decision and execution, in the short, medium and long term, in order to maximize the product of all the organization's resources over a period of time."²¹ In this way and with this understanding, it is presented as:

[...] a constantly changing landscape. Good management, like a good organization, is therefore a moving target and difficult to achieve. Perhaps this is why it is difficult to define it. We start from the assumption that management is the state of the art of thinking, deciding and acting, in the sense of implementing our actions to obtain results

¹⁹ BLASI, M. Gênero e Poder. In: *Estudos sobre gênero*. Porto Alegre: Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, 2013, p. 22.

²⁰ BONFIM, W. *Sustentabilidade nas ONGs: da militância política ao desenvolvimento institucional*. Curitiba: Editora Prismas, 2015.

²¹ PRADO, C. R.; NETO, J. C. S.; CERONI, M. R. *Filantropia, ética e gestão nas ONGs*. São Paulo: Expressão e Arte Editora, 2007, p. 45.

that allow prediction, analysis and evaluation. Such results depend on the process of relationship and interaction of people and physical and financial resources.²²

In this way, I introduce the relationship between democratic management and gender justice, as the possibility that needs to be assumed in the present to soon express equitable, egalitarian and fair relationships between men and women, assuming the constant search for a democratic management with gender justice. This is the challenge currently proposed.

A new management model depends on innovative initiatives that will bring differentiated processes, which recognize diversity and the needs for equal conditions of participation and involvement. Innovation depends on a management model that encourages initiatives and values individual and group learning²³. Learning is any change in behavior resulting from an experience, and therefore a change in behavior indicates that learning has taken place²⁴. “For now, it can be said that an innovative organization is one that introduces novelties of any kind on a systematic basis and reaps the expected results. The expression ‘systematic basis’ means carrying out innovations with autonomy, intentionality and proactivity”²⁵.

22 MOTTA, 1998 *apud* PRADO; NETO; CERONI, 2007, p. 45.

23 VASCONCELLOS, M. A.; SIMANTOB, M. A.; AGUIAR, S. P. Introdução. In: BARBIERI, J. C.; SIMANTOB, M. A. (Org.). *Organizações Inovadoras Sustentáveis: uma reflexão sobre o futuro das organizações*. São Paulo: Atlas, 2007.

24 ROBBINS, S. P. *Comportamento Organizacional*. São Paulo: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005.

25 BARBIERI, J. C. Organizações Inovadoras Sustentáveis. In: BARBIERI, J. C.; SIMANTOB, M. A. (Orgs.). *Organizações Inovadoras Sustentáveis: uma reflexão sobre o futuro das organizações*. São Paulo: Atlas, 2007, p. 88.

Innovations are cultural facts like any other related to social life, as they result from the sharing of ideas, beliefs, values, interests and standards of conduct, explicit or not, of the social groups that conceive, support, implement and use them. They reflect the way of thinking and acting of these groups, dialoguing or opposing that of other social groups.²⁶

Changes in practices: the construction of a gender justice policy

The perception of inequalities in power relations is the starting point for the awareness that relations between people need to be fair, especially between men and women. In this sense, the incorporation of gender in the institutional approach will be relevant insofar as it is equal as a central issue to the other social and economic dimensions. This entry must be understood as a process of innovation, which requires intentionality and methodology to ensure the maintenance of fair relationships that become naturalized in collective environments.

Therefore, in everyday life, one question must have a systematic presence: where are the women? What do women do? These questions should support process changes and reveal a fundamental change in conception to influence fairer relationships, whether in the domestic, community, institutional, professional space... Any interpersonal relationship. All require reorganization of internal and external relations practices, which initially demonstrate a breakdown, because no one is prepared to experience formats that face structures rooted in the formation of social relations, such as patriarchy and the place

26 BARBIERI, 2007, p. 89.

of submission destined for women. The suggested questions help us to keep our attention on relationships and the ways in which they are established. Constantly, “[...] it is necessary to observe whether the gender arrangements on the different fronts of action are really challenging or consolidating the existing power structures based on the sexes.”²⁷

In the last two decades, these provocations began to generate initiatives in some organizations, provoked by the analysis of social relations and systematic readings about the context and the conjuncture, also reinforced by the:

[...] conquest of organized movements, which demanded attention to their cultural specificities, respect for their identities and differences, and policies that considered the subjective side of human actions – their desires, feelings, dreams and emotions, and not just their material needs, rescuing self-esteem of individuals and the sense of belonging to a given community.²⁸

All this has been reaffirming and consolidating the understanding that inequalities need to be faced so that society can live with dignity for all people; more equitably and in fairer conditions of social, political and economic participation.

As a response to fighting inequalities and innovating in democratic management models in search of gender justice, some national and

international organizations have decided to develop Gender Justice policies, giving intentionality and creating instruments for new relationship practices, also contributing to stimulate other groups or institutions that begin to question themselves about reality, but do not yet know where to start to change processes and experiment with innovative attitudes.

More than reflecting and debating, it is creating platforms that allow concrete actions, with defined implementation plans. Gender justice must lead to gender policies, which are the institutional guidelines and regulatory frameworks of an organization that define the organic intention of practicing the inclusion of men and women in an egalitarian and fair way.²⁹

The Lutheran World Federation was one of the precursors in this process, questioning structures and innovating in possibilities of coexistence and in instruments that facilitate, demand, monitor and evaluate changes in attitude.

This gender justice policy³⁰ marks a trajectory, it is a path that points towards inclusion practices. It is above all a response to God’s call for relationships permeated by justice between the genders, and the hope of building tangible signs of making these relationships effective in the daily lives of people, the faithful, in communities.³¹

27 FARIA; SILVEIRA; NOBRE, 2002, p. 189.

28 GOHN, M. G. M. Modelos de Gestão Participativa no Brasil. In: CHAMON, E. M. Q. O. (Org.). *Gestão de Organizações Públicas e Privadas: uma abordagem interdisciplinar*. Rio de Janeiro: Brasport, 2007, p. 2.

29 NEUENFELDT, E. Justiça de Gênero. In: *Estudos sobre gênero*. Porto Alegre: Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, 2013, p. 18.

30 The Gender Justice Policy of the LWF – Lutheran World Federation was published in 2014 and is available at: https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-wicas_gender_justice-pt.pdf

31 NEUENFELDT, 2017, p. 120.

From this experience of the Lutheran World Federation, other organizations have learned from this innovative initiative, feeling stimulated and “charged” by new management parameters that correspond to the social need and what the current context presents: women need to leave their invisibility and find recognition as part of collective structures, whether domestic or institutional. The Faculdades EST³²; the Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia³³; and the Diakonia³⁴ are examples of institutions that were willing to face inequalities between men and women through internal policies that point out strategies for interpersonal relationships and between institutional partnerships. Gender Justice policies effectively contribute to changes in management and relationship practices, as well as to provoke other organizations to question and encourage the inclusion of innovative actions in the scope of relationship management.

This is an issue that refers to the path of building a gender policy as an essential part of a general policy for NGOs and their multiple subjects. Engagement in this long-term task depends on political decisions that also define the scope of the transformations that one wants to imprint on the horizon of social development.³⁵

32 The Faculdades EST approved the Gender Justice Policy in 2015. The document is available at: http://www.est.edu.br/ouvidoria/template/docs/Politica_Justica_de_Genero-final.pdf

33 The LFD – Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia was created by a decision of the Council of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil – IECLB (founded in 2000). Its headquarters are in Porto Alegre (RS) and it supports groups and projects within the whole territory of Brazil. It elaborated its Gender Justice Policy in 2013. It's available at: <https://fld.com.br/publicacao/politica-de-justica-de-genero/>

34 Diakonia elaborated its Gender Justice Policy in 2017. It's available at: <https://bemvindo.diaconia.org.br/pt/transparencia>

35 FARIA; SILVEIRA; NOBRE, 2002, p. 190.

For Diakonia, the institutional position assumed in 2016 was fundamental to establish a constant training process in the organization that boosted the collective construction of a Gender Justice Policy. More than obtaining a guiding document, it is essential to assimilate institutional principles and objectives in this field that lead to changes in management practices and can be a reference for other organizations that are willing to innovate in the field of management. They are:

- i) With regard to overcoming gender inequalities, Diakonia understands that it is essential to **implement public policies for women** and that these be based on a socio-educational concept of training and social emancipation of people as historical subjects, to be operationalized through the integrality and intersectionality of public policies, as well as participation and social control.
- ii) Another principle that should guide the elaboration and implementation of these and any public policy is the **secularity of the State**, which cannot be guided or constrained by any religious order or discriminate against any of its expressions.
- iii) Concomitantly, **public policies must have intersectional analysis as a reference element**. Diakonia recognizes the intersectionality of gender, social class, race and ethnicity, generations, disability, sexuality and religiosity in the constructions of social injustice that oppress women and men, with women suffering the most from this inequality.

As a conclusion of this reflection and stimulus to new questions and innovations, I affirm that **there is no democratic management**

without Gender Justice. Therefore, it is more urgent than ever to understand that new parameters need to be instituted in management models so that fair relationships can be lived and assumed as a natural part of life experiences. Thus, new practices reflect positivity and influence changes with innovative practices that favor and facilitate the inclusion, participation and visibility of women.

The experiences with Gender Justice Policies are innovative practices in the management environment that are presented as instruments capable of generating effective changes in relationships and, especially, in women's lives. In this way, with them and with the lessons learned from them, we are moving towards the transformation of society based on fair and egalitarian relationships, expressed in democratic management with gender justice.

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RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL SURVEY ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN COLOMBIA 2019¹

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Initial considerations

Like other Latin American countries, Colombia is undergoing an accelerated process of religious transformation. Although throughout the 20th century the country was characterized by its

fidelity to catholic tradition, the Catholic Church has experienced in recent decades desertion of believers, who now feed into a new, more plural, religious landscape. Considering the importance of providing information that allows us to understand religious change at the national and territorial level, this research seeks to fill the information gap that exists around the religious phenomenon.

For this purpose, some of the results of the National Survey of Religious Diversity [*Encuesta Nacional sobre Diversidad religiosa en Colombia*] (ENDR 2019) are presented here, which consulted the opinion of 11,034 Colombian citizens over 18 years of age, from all departments of Colombia. Thanks to this survey data can be offered on the current state of religious diversity in Colombia, religious beliefs and practices, and positions on gender issues, among other aspects.

¹ Lecture given at the Thematic Roundtable “Rights, democracy and religion”. Translated by Heilike Philippsen Mog. Reviewed by Marie Krahn. This document presents some of the findings and reflections published in the book: BELTRÁN, William Mauricio; LAROTTA SILVA, Sonia Patricia. *Diversidad religiosa, valores y participación política en Colombia*. Resultados de la encuesta nacional sobre diversidad religiosa 2019. [S. l.]: Act Iglesia Sueca; World Vision; Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2020. Available at: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/34555608-8b30-4aec-9d33-2c0511345e65.pdf>. Access in: Jan. 7th, 2022.

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This document presents some of the main findings of the research, concentrating on three themes: the first one consists of presenting a general panorama of religious diversity in Colombia, accounting for the current religious composition of the country and the importance of religion in people's lives; the second theme is related to the religious practices of the Colombian population. Finally, an analysis is offered on some of the ethical and moral positions of Colombians, especially those that are related to issues of the first order on the public agenda, for example, the recognition of women's equality and the rights of LGBT people, the legalization of voluntary euthanasia, and the decriminalization of abortion.

The first aspect to be highlighted is that the results of the survey indicate that, in Colombia, Catholicism remains the predominant religion, although it has been on a decreasing trend. Approximately six in ten surveyed people identified themselves as Catholic, two in ten recognized themselves as Evangelical/Pentecostal, one in ten reported being a believer but not affiliated with a religion, and one in twenty recognized themselves as agnostics or atheist. The groups that have shown the greatest increase in the last decade are those of Evangelicals/Pentecostals, although they present a slower growth rate compared to that between the 1990s and the beginning years of 2000, and of believers, but not affiliated with any religion, which has grown almost fourfold since 2010.

Religious identity varies with respect to sociodemographic variables. It stands out, for example, that identification with any religion is slightly higher in women than in men. Thus, in almost all religions, female membership is the majority. Men, for their part, have a

percentage share among believers but not affiliated, atheists or agnostics. On the other hand, the significant increase in the percentage of atheists and of believers but not affiliated with a religion among the LGBTIQ population is striking; only two out of 10 LGBTIQ people identified as Catholic.

Another aspect that is important in the analysis of religious dynamics in Colombia is that of practices and beliefs. To account for this aspect, among other issues, the importance of religion in people's lives and the frequency of attendance at services or masses was investigated. The results of the survey indicate that, for the vast majority of the Colombian population, religion is an important issue; about eight out of ten say that religion is important or very important. A higher percentage of women say that religion is important or very important in their lives. On the other hand, the percentage of LGBTIQ people who consider religion as important or very important in their lives is less than 30%.

Regarding religious commitment, analyzed through people's attendance at religious services, the survey shows that less than half of the Colombian population, 48.9% of Colombians attend weekly or monthly services or masses, while 41.9% indicate that they attend occasionally or only in special ceremonies, and 7.8% of Colombians state that they never attend this type of ritual. Women attend services or masses more frequently than men: while 53.1% of women attend these activities weekly or monthly, in men this figure drops to 43.7%. The LGBTIQ population participates less frequently in services or masses compared to the rest of the population, 45.5% stated that they never participate in this type of activity.

The survey also inquired about various issues related to the values and moral positions of Colombians regarding topics such as family, gender roles, sexuality and sexual diversity. To formulate the questions, issues of first order on the public agenda were chosen: the recognition of the equality of women and the rights of the LGBTIQ population, among others.

The results indicate that slightly more than a third of Colombians (35.9%) approve of same-sex marriage, while more than half of Colombians (56.2%) disapprove. The results according to religious identity indicate that among atheists, agnostics, and believers not affiliated with any religion, the highest percentages of approval of marriage between same-sex couples are registered, while the vast majority of believers pertaining to Christian minorities (Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals/Pentecostals, Adventists, and Protestants) consider this initiative inconvenient.

Regarding the adoption of boys and girls by same-sex couples, a little less than a third of Colombians (29.9%) agree. This proportion is six percentage points lower than that of citizens who approve of homosexual marriage. According to religious identity, it is observed that among atheists, agnostics, and believers not affiliated with any religion, the highest percentages of approval for the adoption of boys and girls by same-sex couples are registered. For their part, the vast majority of believers pertaining to Christian minorities (Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals/Pentecostals, Adventists, and Protestants) consider the adoption of children by same-sex couples inconvenient.

About a quarter of Colombians (23.6%) agree with the phrase "boys and girls who spend a lot of time with homosexuals become

homosexuals." It also stands out that 15.9% of those consulted abstained from answering this question. According to religious identity, the survey results indicate that among Jehovah's Witnesses and Evangelicals/Pentecostals there are the highest percentages of citizens who consider that boys and girls who spend a lot of time with homosexuals become homosexual. Among atheists and agnostics, the approval of this postulate is below 6%.

15.5% of Colombians consider homosexuality to be a disease. Results by religious identity indicate that, with the exception of Protestants, Christian minorities (Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, Evangelicals/Pentecostals) have the highest percentages of people who consider homosexuality to be a disease.

Regarding positions concerning the family and gender roles, a little less than half of Colombians (45.2%) agree that "the man is the head of the household". The results according to religious identity indicate that the imaginary according to which the man is the head of the household is shared by the vast majority of the believers pertaining to Christian minorities (Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals/Pentecostals, Adventists, and Protestants). For example, 90.8% of Jehovah's Witnesses share this idea. For their part, only a minority percentage of agnostics and atheists identify with this position (12.9% and 8.5%, respectively).

Finally, two out of every three Colombians (66.1%) agree with the phrase "an optimal family is made up of a father, a mother, and children". The results according to religious identity indicate that the vast majority of Christians, in their various currents, agree with the statement "an optimal family is made up of a father, a mother, and children." However,

among Christian minorities, this statement is more widely accepted than among Catholics. Finally, among agnostics and atheists, this statement is only agreed on by a minority (18.4% and 14.6%, respectively).

Final considerations

It is a fact that the defection of believers from the Catholic Church continues, currently, only 57% of Colombians identify themselves as Catholic. This panorama coincides with what is currently happening in Latin America, however, the speed with which this change is taking place is surprising: apparently the desertion of Catholics from their church is occurring more rapidly than other surveys have indicated⁴. The data presented offer a percentage of Catholics very close to that presented in the World Values Survey⁵, which reports that 61.3% of Colombians identified themselves as Catholics. In the last decade (2010 and 2019)

around 13% of Colombians stopped recognizing themselves as Catholics and began to identify themselves as believers of other religions, or even assumed positions such as belief without affiliation, atheism, or agnosticism.

In the analysis of religious change, it is worth emphasizing that some research has indicated that, although the country is undergoing a process of change, far from being framed in a dynamic of secularization as is the case of Chile or Uruguay, to mention a few cases in Latin America, it is related to pluralization or religious migration⁶. Thus, the majority of the Colombian population continues to feel Christian and maintains beliefs typical of a Christian tradition, but exhibits greater mobility between religious groups⁷.

Religious identity varies according to sociodemographic variables, an example of this is evidenced by the fact that, among the various branches of Christianity, female membership is in the majority. On the other hand, the proportion of men who identify themselves as believers but not affiliated with any religion, as atheists, or as agnostics, is higher compared to women. The difference between men and women in terms of religious participation and commitment is an issue that has been widely debated without the hypotheses being considered conclusive. It has been suggested, for example, in some studies that women are more devout than men in all societies, cultures, and religions⁸.

4 See: PEW RESEARCH CENTER. *Religion in Latin America*. Widespread change in a Historically Catholic Region. Washington, USA, 13 nov. 2014. Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>. Access in: Jan. 7th, 2022.; CIFRAS Y CONCEPTOS S.A. *Polimétrica: Instituciones – Política – Economía – Sociedad*. Colombia: Alianza Red Más Noticias; Caracol Radio; Cifras y Conceptos S.A., nov. 2017. Available at: <http://cifrasyconceptos.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Presentación-final-Polimétrica-noviembre-Religión.pdf>. Access in: Jan. 7th, 2022.; and LATINOBARÓMETRO – Opinión Pública Latinoamericana. *El papa Francisco y la religión en Chile y América Latina*. Latinobarómetro 1995-2017. Comunicado de prensa – encuesta, 12 ene. 2018. Available at: https://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/site/artic/20180112/asocfile/20180112124342/f00006494_religion_chile_america_latina_2017.pdf. Access in: Jan. 7th 2022.

5 INGLEHART, R. *et al* (eds.). *World Values Survey: Round Six (2010-2014) – Country-Pooled Datafile Version*. 2014. Available at: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>. Access in: Jan. 7th, 2022.

6 LATINOBARÓMETRO, 2018.

7 BELTRÁN; LAROTTA, 2020.

8 PEW RESEARCH CENTER. *The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World*. Washington, USA, 22 mar. 2019. Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/22/the-gender-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>. Access in: Jan. 7th, 2022.

Approximately half of Colombians attend religious services weekly or monthly. Participation in this type of activity is related to sociodemographic variables such as gender, educational level, and age. Among the population groups with greater participation of this type are women and people with low levels of education. It was also shown that, as age increases, the participation of people in such activities increases, so that higher percentages of attendance at services and masses are recorded among older adults than among young people.

Colombian society continues to be more conservative in terms of its values and moral positions. Most of the population maintains traditional values of Christianity, which is particularly noticeable in matters such as marriage between same-sex couples, the adoption of children by same-sex couples, and the complete decriminalization of abortion, a matter with which most people disagree. However, these positions also change with the age, educational level, and socioeconomic status of Colombians. Among young people, there is greater acceptance of these issues, as well as among people with higher educational levels or those from higher strata.

Christian women are more conservative than the rest of the population in ethical and moral matters, which explains the fact that, among this population, opposition to the recognition of the rights of the LGBTIQ population, the decriminalization of abortion, and the legalization of euthanasia, among other aspects, is higher. In addition, among them, it is more frequent that imaginaries are perpetuated such as: “the man is the head of the household”, “an optimal family is made up of a father, a mother and children”, “boys and girls who spend a lot of time with homosexuals become homosexuals”, “sexual relations have

the sole purpose of reproducing the human being”. Likewise, with the exception of those who identified themselves as Protestants (mostly historical Protestants), beliefs that conceive homosexuality as a disease are more frequent in this sector of the population. This conservative trend of Christian minorities has been confirmed by other research⁹.

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⁹ See, as an example, POUHTER, Jacob; KENT, Nicholas. The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists. *Pew Research Center*, Washington, USA, 25 June 2020. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/>. Access in: Jan 7th, 2022.

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SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND GENDER JUSTICE:

THE REFLECTIONS OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE RESISTANCE OF WOMEN IN THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN THE TERRITORIES¹

Angelique J. W. M. van Zeeland²

Renate Gierus³

The VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion took place from August 24-27, 2021, virtually, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The thematic axes of this meeting were Courage, Creativity, Hope. Among the various options for participating in the Congress, one of them was Working Groups (WGs), defined as “a special space for self-

organized activities that express research, reflections and themes that challenge the context in which we live.”⁴

The WG Solidarity Economy and Gender Justice: the reflexes of the pandemic and women’s resistance in the Solidarity Economy in the territories (WG4) was coordinated by Angelique van Zeeland and Renate Gierus, FLD-COMIN-CAPA program advisor and project advisor, Aline Mendonça, coordinator of the Graduate Program in

¹ Translated by Marie Krahn.

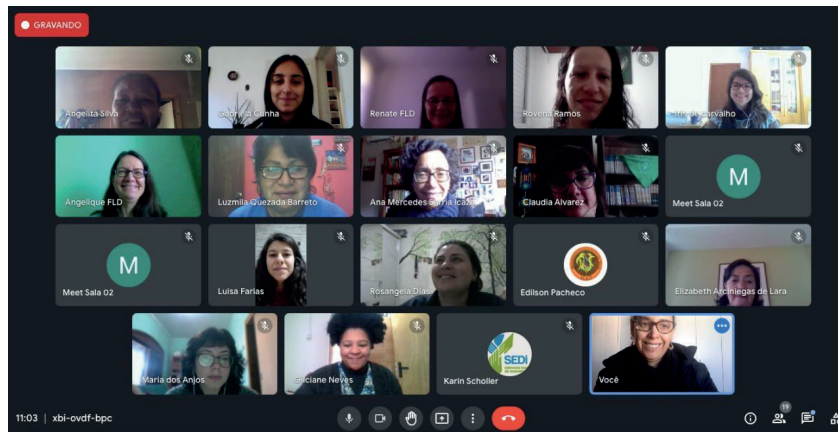
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⁴ Cf. CHAMADA PARA GRUPOS de Trabalhos (GT). *Programa de Gênero e Religião*, 2 mar. 2021. Available at: <https://programadegeneroereligiao.wordpress.com/2021/03/02/chamada-para-grupos-de-trabalhos-gt>. Accessed on: 18 Feb. 2022.

Social Policy and Human Rights at the Catholic University of Pelotas, Claudia Alvarez, from Universidad del Buen Vivir, Argentina, and Sueli Angelita da Silva, from the managing board of the Just and Solidary Trade Network. 16 innovative experiences and initiatives from other economies were shared, produced by solidarity networks in rural and urban territories, led by women from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Peru.

WG4: Solidarity Economy and Gender Justice: the reflexes of the pandemic and the resistance of women in the Solidarity Economy in the territories



Source: Authors' file.

WG4 was born in the context of Covid-19 and, on August 24, 2021, the day before the opening of its work, Brazil accounted for 575,000 deaths. Today, February 18, 2022, we have 642 thousand deaths, with a weekly average of 831 deaths. It is important to recover and update these numbers, bearing in mind that the pandemic is not over yet, despite the

slow ongoing vaccination, despite an apparent “normal” pace on the streets. Thus, the health and sanitary consequences of the pandemic are still being verified today and continue to generate unemployment, misery and hunger. The inequalities became very evident, especially when thinking about the daily lives of women. They are the hardest hit in times of crisis. In this context of vulnerabilities and violence, solidarity networks are highlighted, as they show that there are other possibilities for producing and living, and that take into account the Solidarity Economy and gender justice.

The economies that ceaselessly produce life have not stopped. These continue to function to protect, feed, shelter, heal, care, produce food, clean, support and love. In most of these experiences, women are at the forefront of the care economy, emphasizing a logic of solidarity in facing the adversities presented by the dominant logic. And, on the other hand, evidencing the overload that entails this responsibility, placed on them.

Thus, this WG proposed to reflect and discuss solidarity, democratic management, collective organization processes, gender justice, creativity and hope as strategies for coping with the pandemic. It also proposed to make visible the lack of appreciation of the economy of care, due to the absence of public policies that structure care beyond the family space. Make visible the lack of dignified remuneration for the various work periods imposed on women. Make women's resistance visible in the Solidarity Economy on a material, symbolic and spiritual level. Make visible innovative experiences and initiatives from other economies, mainly those produced by solidarity networks in rural or urban territories, led by women.

The WG was a very rich space, with a lot of exchange, a lot of knowledge and expertise, and it was bilingual. Several people presented their communications in Spanish and support was sought with translation, in case there were difficulties in understanding what was being said or if someone was unable to express themselves and convey what they would like to say.

Already from the first day of activities, the WG coordination proposed the publication of the communications of the different works in two journals, both accepting the texts in the languages in which they were elaborated. They are: 1- Revista Educación y Economía Social, do Observatorio Decolonial y Transdisciplinario de la Economía Social y Solidaria, with the theme “Solidarity Social Economy and Gender Justice”⁵; and 2- Revista Coisas do Gênero, of the Gender Research Nucleus and the Gender and Religion Program of the Faculdades EST, with the theme “Solidarity Economy, Democratic Management, Gender Justice”⁶.

The WG4 schedule was organized as follows: 9:40-10:40: presentation of works and debate; 10:40-11:00: break; 11h-12h: presentation of works and debate. Below is the schedule:

5 REVISTA ES – Economía Social Solidaria y Justicia de Género, Año 11, n. 17, dez. 2021. Available at: <https://www.educacionyeconomiasocial.org/revista-es-n%C3%BAmero-17/>. Accessed on: 18 Feb. 2022.

6 REVISTA COISAS DO GÊNERO – Economia Solidária, Gestão Democrática, Justiça de Género, v. 7, n. 2, jul./dez. 2021. Available at: <http://revistas.est.edu.br/index.php/genero>. Accessed on: 18 Feb. 2022.

GT4: Solidarity economy and gender justice: the reflexes of the pandemic and the resistance of women in the solidarity economy in the territories

Themes	Authors	Days and times
Community health and women in the context of the pandemic	Grasiela Michels; Liliane Driemeier	25 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Experience of the Women United to Win Group, from the 1º de Maio Settlement, in the municipality of Caraúbas – RN	Risoneide Lima Bezerra	25 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Case: Raúl Peña’s women’s committees, Alto Paraná, Paraguay	Pilar Cancelo; Karin Schöller	25 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Black woman from Angola who carries a rattle tied to her shin: reflections on black women in Solidarity Economy in RS	Gilciane Neves; Daniela Oliveira	25 of August 11h – 12h
Indigenous women in an urban context: the indigenous economy of sustenance and care in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic	Maria das Graças Costa Silva; Ana Patrícia Chaves Ferreira	25 of August 11h – 12h
Body, Territory and Feminist Theology: the crossroads between the ownership of the bodies and the empowerment of the nobodies	Luzmila Quezada Barreto	25 of August 11h – 12h
Solidary and Feminist Economy Network – RESF	Ana Célia Vital Batista; Francisca Eliane de Lima (Neneide); Varínia Lado	26 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Women of the Popular Economy as an engine of cultural transformations in territories	María Emilia de la Iglesia	26 of August 9h40 – 10h40

When the Solidarity Network builds resistance in times of a pandemic	Sueli Angelita da Silva; Marcia Teresinha de Melo Souza; Gení Rosangela Dias	26 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Women, Education and Solidarity Social Economy	Marta Mendez; Silvia Callejas; Cecilia Porciel	26 of August 11h – 12h
Feminist and Solidarity Economy actions to strengthen women's economic autonomy	Maria Fernanda Marcelino	26 of August 11h – 12h
Community Banks and Popular Economy in urban peripheries: paths of interpretation and resignification	Ana Mercedes Sarria Icaza; Luisa Nunes Farias; Luciana de Almeida Darol	27 of August 9h40 – 10h40
The educational experience of women in the Solidarity Economy mediated by Popular Education	Íris de Carvalho	27 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Solidarity Economy and Patriarchy: a look from the Bem da Terra Association of Producers of Pelotas/RS	Rovena Lima; Luana Fernandes Ribeiro; Aline Mendonça	27 of August 9h40 – 10h40
Women and Solidarity Economy: resistance in everyday life	Helena Bonumá	27 of August 11h – 12h
Popular Feminism Alliance for Territorial Empowerment through Justice-Based Recovery after COVID19	Gabriela Cunha	27 of August 11h – 12h

People were invited to participate in the three mornings of the event. If they were unable to do so, they were encouraged to participate in the full shift on the day their work was presented, in order to promote, in all cases, the exchange of ideas and experiences.

On the first day, August 25th, there were 28 people present; on the 26th, 20 people and, on the last day, 21 people. The presentations and dialogues held during these three mornings were very enriching. Here are some highlights of the conversations held at these meetings:

“Capitalism would have given up everything by now, but the Solidarity Economy has been a support and option in times of hunger and unemployment.”

“In community, sorrows diminish, and joys increase.”

“Feminism anchored in the territory.”

“Surrounding trade.”

“Problems are common and solutions must be built collectively.”

“Solidarity and Feminist Economy.”

“Amplified reproduction of life and not of capital.”

“At the cost of what does life put itself at the center?”

“Women are in the Solidarity Economy because they are the first to lose their jobs, the formal market does not want women, capital wants their full time.”

“Solidarity Economy as an alternative way to face capitalism, call women to their political conscience.”

During the Congress, the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair was also promoted. The opening of the Fair was marked by the launch live on August 20, 2021, through social networks⁷. *The invitation to the fair was presented in video format at all GTs and thematic tables⁸. Artisans and women from solidarity economic enterprises exhibited their handicraft, food and clothing products. People participating in the Congress were able to virtually walk around the Solidarity Economy fair and practice responsible consumption.*

The FLD – Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia already has a long journey working with economic justice. In 2014, it published the book “Solidarity Economy, Diakonia and Transforming Development – For significant and lasting changes”. This publication was born from the process of practices and reflections experienced by the FLD, in the support and exchange of knowledge in Solidarity Economy, from the Small Projects Program that, during the period from 2000 to 2013,

supported 154 projects in the area of economic justice throughout Brazil. The life stories of people and groups committed to the notion of transformative development and Solidarity Economy projects, territorialized in this country of continental geographic dimensions and unequal in rights, inspired the publication, which wants to intertwine diaconal and solidary complicity for a political impact, where hardworking people and natural resources are not subjugated by the capitalist market.

In 2020, the FLD published the book “Transforming Crossings in the Small Projects Program”, presenting how supporting small projects transforms the lives of people and territories. Between 2017 and 2019, 182 projects were supported in five thematic areas, namely Diaconia, Rights, Economic Justice, Socio-environmental Justice and Humanitarian Aid. Economic Justice supports solidarity economic enterprise projects, women’s collectives, forums and solidarity popular economy networks. Many groups created new tools and new mechanisms for collective management and promoted gender justice through the active participation of women in the coordination of projects and groups, as well as in advocacy processes.

The differentials of women’s projects in the Solidarity Economy are democratic management and the construction of emancipatory work relationships that generate gender equality. In this sense, we work with the concept of democratic management with gender justice.

Democratic management has to do with democratic practices, which need to take place in all structural spaces of groups, institutions and movements, strengthening the effective participation of all people in

7 Cf. OPENING LIVE of the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair at the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion at the Faculdades EST. Published by the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair, on 20 Aug. 2021. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/FeiravirtualRCJS/videos/906662926610847>. Accessed on: 10 Nov. 2021.

8 Invitation in Spanish, with sign language: COME TO THE Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair at the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion! Published by the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair, on 20 Aug. 2021. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/FeiravirtualRCJS/videos/366273735056312>. Accessed on: 10 Nov. 2021. Invitation of an entrepreneur of São Paulo, who was also present at the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair: COME TO THE Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair at the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion! Published by the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair, on 20 Aug. 2021. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/FeiravirtualRCJS/videos/953016082155278>. Accessed on: 10 Nov. 2021.

decision-making processes. For this, it is important to respect people's different knowledge and experiences; ensure that all people can express themselves; promote the democratization of knowledge and information; establish relationships of trust and promote fair power relations and collectively build commitments and rights.

In 2014, the FLD-COMIN-CAPA Gender Justice Policy was constituted⁹. The Policy is a normative and strategic document that implements gender justice as a cross-cutting criterion for all dimensions of the institution's work and for all projects fostered or directly executed by it. It aims to promote the exercise of fair and egalitarian gender relations, recognizing in them a transforming potential of social relations.

Thus, gender justice is much more than a concept and must be achieved in all organizational spheres, promoting fair relations between women and men, who recognize themselves as equal people; generating a representative balance in decision-making spaces and overcoming gender violence.

Therefore, democratic management with gender justice comprises collective processes of effective participation of women and men, in making strategic and daily decisions, in defining a set of commitments and rights and in building knowledge and expertise, promoting relationships of fair and egalitarian gender equality, generating balanced access to spaces of power and governance.

9 FUNDAÇÃO LUTERANA DE DIACONIA. *Política de Justiça de Gênero*. Porto Alegre: Fundação Luterana de Diaconia (FLD), 2014. Available at: <https://fld.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Política-de-Justiça-de-Gênero.pdf>. Accessed on: 10 Nov. 2021.

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GENDER, RELIGION, POLITICS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES AND THE (IN)EXISTENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS¹

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Introduction

Debating connections between gender, religion, politics and social justice was the focus of the challenge posed during the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion: Courage, Creativity and Hope. In this sense, the intertwining of these themes in political-religious discourses was problematized as a neuralgic point in the secular path and in the Brazilian democratic process, as well as its reflections on the social problems experienced in the country.

At first, the debate focuses on realities experienced in Latin America and challenges for the construction of social justice. Then, through research with a quantitative and qualitative approach, the reflection migrates to the fight against the extermination of women, exacerbating the urgent and historical challenge to be followed.

Thus, the third topic addressed deals with the importance of secularism in the construction of social policies and defense of rights. Faced with the violation of human rights, there is an uprising of political-religious discourses that break with the laic sense of the Latin republics, justifying the debate about secularities and the defense of non-universal human rights.

Factors that violate rights or limit the potential for development and social well-being of the population

Social justice and the fight against inequalities require the fulfillment of goals established as priorities by international organizations, in order to benefit and protect vulnerable groups. However, little progress has been

made, as diverse economic interests that are antagonistic to the ideals of building social policies continue to impede the promotion of a more just and inclusive society. Failure to meet these social demands causes socioeconomic disparity, clearly and evidently harming development in Latin American countries, as widely revealed in the reports of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean⁷.

To overcome this gap, it is essential to understand that thinking about development requires improvements in the general quality of life indices and the systemic fight against discrimination (racial, social, class, gender, political, among others). This guarantees the opportunity for all in an egalitarian and equitable way, recognizing and facing social exclusion and making access increasingly inclusive, forming societies that value and put into effect collective, individual and social guarantees, actions to combat misery and lack of fair and sustainable opportunities.

The health, social and economic crisis that affects countries disproportionately will require that new developmental and rights protection strategies be implemented in order to minimize the resulting impacts. “The consequences of the health pandemic combined with a global recession will be catastrophic for many developing countries and impede progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”⁸

The 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, divided into 169 goals to be developed by 2030, are an indispensable tool

7 CEPAL. Comissão Econômica para a América Latina e o Caribe. *La matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina*. 2016. Available at: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/matriz_de_la_desigualdad.pdf. Accessed on: 9 Oct. 2021.

8 ONU. Organização das Nações Unidas. *Transformando nosso mundo: a Agenda 2030 para o desenvolvimento sustentável*. Available at: <https://nacoesunidas.org/pos2015/agenda2030/>. Accessed on: 20 March 2020.

for the sustainable inclusion of society, as they clearly aim to eradicate poverty and promote a dignified life for all the inhabitants of the planet. The clear goals encourage all countries to adopt, according to their priority agendas, in a spirit of global partnership, effective actions seeking to improve people's lives, including in the near future.

With this ideal, the 2030 Agenda is based on objectives and goals that aim to reach fundamental points that guide government actions and develop, from their planning, actions to guarantee and search for effectiveness, as defined by its text. It makes each country responsible for guaranteeing the implementation of the SDGs, adapting them to the social and economic policies of each of its signatories, understanding that the efforts seek precisely to improve the quality of life and reduce inequalities within each country.

More than an ideological agenda, with goals to be (possibly) pursued, it is a commitment to a common ideal for the improvement of the human condition in all its aspects, thought collectively, with coherence and interaction, in favor not only of the present, but especially of future generations in respect for the environment in which we live, leveraging the economy in a sustainable way and reducing the inequalities experienced by the vast majority of Nations.

However, so that the document does not only hover in empty and ineffective normativity, a radical change is necessary in the understanding that the commitments assumed and ratified by government entities are carried out through government programs that include policies aimed at well-being and social improvement for all. In Brazil, especially, it is essential that the 2030 Agenda transcends the partisan planning of governments and becomes a tool for strong and continuous government

action, characterized as a State policy that lasts throughout the alternation of governments and continues to have the expected effects in valuing society, as well as integrating social justice⁹.

To foster policies that provide greater incentives for sustainable social and economic growth, seeking to meet those who, historically, have been socially relegated with new agreements between the most diverse actors in society, this is the objective of the 2030 Agenda to break with the historical process of oppression.

Combating the extermination of women, a historical and social urgency!

The phenomenon of violence against women is not a new fact, on the contrary, it is as old as humanity itself. In fact, the question regarding the maximum subjugation of the female sex, through extermination, has its roots linked to different matrices of tradition of Western thought, that is, women have always been treated as an object, which men could use, enjoy, and dispose of. This means that gender-based violence is recognized as a serious violation of human rights and not the result of episodic disagreements, or even disruptions in affective and sexual relationships motivated by jealousy.

What is new and very recent in the history of Brazil is, therefore, the attention to overcoming the indicators of this violence, as a *sine qua non* condition for the better construction of our humanity. And even

⁹ ONU. Organização das Nações Unidas. *Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável*. Disponível em: <https://nacoesunidas.org/pos2015/>. Acesso em: 2 abr. 2020.

more recent is its judicialization, the criminalization of the problem, not only by the letter of the laws, but fundamentally, by the consolidation of structures, through which the police and/or legal apparatus can be mobilized to protect victims and/or punish aggressors.

Considering, therefore, the emergence of the theme “femicide” in the Brazilian present, in the face of the advance of the rates of violence, as well as its scientific relevance, the treatment of the same is glimpsed in the perspective of its historical urgency, being, therefore, a resource for the necessary and essential discussions (on the part of civil society, State apparatuses, social movements, human rights organizations and law enforcement officers), on the understanding of the right to life as a fundamental good and without which no other right is possible. Preserving it, therefore, is our obligation!

Recover the values of the feminine and guarantee the full life of women in cities. This is what we are treating as essential. To carry out such a task, which is already complex by nature, governments, municipal, commercial and industrial associations, companies, unions, cooperatives, parties, churches, schools and universities, among others, have responsibilities and must therefore include this agenda in their work agendas, organizing training processes and creating groups to elaborate policies aimed at empowering women and combating the extermination of the female sex, motivated by femicide.

The growth of femicide crimes thus represents a social and economic issue with substantive impacts, in terms of intangible results, such as: women’s reproductive health, professional life and children’s well-being. This means that, in addition to the human costs, violence against women represents an immense burden, in terms of lost productivity

and increased use of social services, as they can suffer various types of disability – transient or not – with regard to work, loss of wages, isolation, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for self, children and other family members.

In this way, it is possible to understand that femicides are considered preventable deaths, that is, that they would not happen without institutional and social connivance to discrimination and violence against women. There is, therefore, a large part of the responsibility of the State that, by action or omission, agrees with the perpetuation of these deaths. In this sense, advances in studies on the subject, qualifying data and information, combined with the expansion and improvement of the women’s care network and the creation of multisectoral and multidisciplinary programs, are fundamental conditions, not only for better monitoring of victims of domestic violence and their families, but also for the preventive role they play in cases of femicide. An important point is also the need for this network to be accessed by the health system and not only by the criminal justice system, because most women go through the health system several times before arriving at a police station or court and most never even get there.

Therefore, it is urgent to understand that its causes go beyond the apparent passion, affectivity, occasionality and personality. They are manifestations of the deep inequalities of power between men and women, who remain subject to schemes of domination and exploitation and end up reproducing, in the micro space – of intimate relationships, the hegemonic matrix of a more comprehensive and structural social order, of a public and political nature.

Secularism, democracy and political-religious discourse

The secular character of the State has been present in national discussions since the beginning of the republican regime in Brazil. Although not always evident, the relevance of the secularity of the State has, at times, been at the center of the political debate. The secular State is essential to prevent political articulations from preventing full freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as proclaimed in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which is fundamental for the discussion about religious freedom. Each individual must preserve the possibility of decision in intimate spheres, so that they can freely decide on issues that are exclusively related to their sphere of responsibility, in no way concerning others.

Arenhart, Arenhart and Hahn¹⁰ argue that in contempt of scientific knowledge, society has returned to valuing common sense and the search for religion, especially from the 1960s onwards, due to the economic crises experienced. The eschatological interpretations of our time and the economic difficulties lead human beings to seek transcendental solutions. However, the authors point out that the main problem is not religious or social, but political. Freston¹¹, in the same sense, states that the return of religion to the public sphere normally occurs in market

10 ARENHART, Lívio Osvaldo; ARENHART, Amabilia B. Portela; HAHN, Noli Bernardo. Poderes macabros ameaçam a hermenêutica como abordagem epistemológico-metodológica. In: BEDIN, Gilmar Antonio; ANGELIN, Rosângela. *Diálogo e entendimento: Direito e multiculturalismo e políticas de cidadania e resolução de conflitos*. Tomo 10. Santo Ângelo: FuRI, 2019.

11 FRESTON, Paul. *Protestantismo e Política no Brasil: Da Constituinte ao impeachment*. 1993. 303 f. Tese (Doutorado em Ciências Sociais) – Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas. 1993.

societies when the system, even functioning, leads to an impasse and debates about ends resurface (ecological crisis), and when it is incapable of generating the necessary “disinterested goodwill”¹².

The totalitarian experiences lived by humanity in the 20th century showed the horror of action based on the treatment of human beings as disposable¹³. A secular state represents the result of a political and social struggle to build a democracy. However, the influence of the hegemonic positions of religious institutions is present in everyday social life and plays an important role in the construction of common sense. It is necessary to think about the cultural dimension of the idea of secularism. In Brazil, for example, the attempt to destroy religious diversity, intolerance of diversity, from a religious point of view, is part of our colonization, which extended to the field of culture as a whole, creating precisely a conflict between cultures of different peoples and the hegemonic culture of the colonizer, fully supported by the religious order as a field of legitimation.

With the resumption of the religious discourse in the public space, such institutions are marked by a religious morality, and they deviate from the republican and democratic objectives. In addition, the agendas defended by religious parliamentarians do not always have a religious purpose, many are elected using religious discourse to reach the masses, but when analyzed, the discourses they give are not even in line with those defended by their faith. Thus, in addition to paying attention to the observance of the principle of secularism, it is

12 FRESTON, 1993, p. 3.

13 ARENDT, Hannah. *Origens do totalitarismo*. 3. reimpr. Tradução de Roberto Raposo. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1998.

necessary to challenge the extent to which the use of faith for electoral purposes is valid.

Conclusion

Through the activities and debates proposed by the Working Group, it was possible to discuss connections between gender, religion, politics and social justice, especially about secularism, religious freedoms, terrorisms, nationalisms, populisms, militarisms, feminisms, reproductive and sexual rights, gender violence, emergences and recognition of new sexual and gender identities, democracy, citizenship and human rights, among others. Specifically, the intertwining of these themes in political-religious discourses was outlined and how they cause tensions in the process of the construction of secularism and the Brazilian democratic process, as well as their reflections on the social problems experienced in the country.

In this sense, at first and in a broader sense, the direction of the debate about realities experienced in Latin America and challenges for the construction of social justice, linked to the various commitments signed, guide the discussion. In a second moment, through a panel that showed cartographies of femicide in Brazil, through research with a quantitative and qualitative approach, the long way to go in the defense of women's rights is verified, when even the right to life has not been truly protected.

Therefore, from a third perspective on secularism and political-religious discourses, it is possible to perceive how public debates are

important in the construction of social policies and defense of rights. It is in a context of strong violation of human rights that we can see the growth of nationalist discourses that break with the laic sense of the Latin republics. It is in this context that it is necessary to discuss secularism and emphasize the defense of human rights, not only aimed at a universal subject, but that guarantee the difference.

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PASTORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING

GENDER AND SEXUALITY¹

Nilton Eliseu Herbes²

Lia Dauber³

Clarissa Peres Sanchez⁴

Introduction

Gender and Sexuality have been constant themes in both Pastoral Counseling and Psychology. This Working Group (GT2) set out to work on themes about gender and sexuality at the interface between the two areas, seeking to discuss the issues in relation to research and work. Both in psychology work, in its various areas of activity, as in

pastoral work, counseling, chaplaincies, gender and sexuality determine care and assistance actions. It takes courage to talk about sexuality, creativity to find alternatives and there will always be hope that we can change, do different and better.

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There is research being carried out, but the visibility, especially regarding the topic of sexuality, is still low. The WG proposed to open space for this discussion and did so in an interdisciplinary and dialogic way, covering the areas of Psychology and Theology, from a perspective of Practical Theology, challenging to reflect from the perspective of “Courage, Creativity and Hope” in contemporaneity. The dynamics of discussion took place in the form of round tables, with guest researchers, addressing different aspects of the topic, based on their experiences in the academic area and their daily lives. The speakers were asked to write something relevant to their participation and the texts sent were used to compose this article.

Development

In order to share experiences lived during the Congress, regarding the proposed theme, below are some excerpts from the themes presented and discussed.

Sandra Duarte de Souza⁵ was one of our guests and spoke on the topic: Women who tell (about themselves) and support each other: sexuality of evangelical women from the periphery. Sandra says:

“In religious communities, I have found women who teach each other the power of telling and, in telling themselves, they perceive themselves to be immersed in a violent reality often considered invisible and

⁵ Doctor in Sciences of Religion, professor of the Postgraduate Program in Sciences of Religion at the Methodist University of São Paulo and coordinator of the Mandrake-Netmal Study Group on Gender and Religion.

unspeakable. Hence the title of my presentation: ‘Women who tell and support each other’. My participation in conversation circles in religious communities about violence against women allowed me to meet many women who suffer physical, psychological, patrimonial, moral and sexual violence. Women raped at home, at school, at work and in religions. It is in the church that many of them socialize, celebrate birthdays, births, economic achievements, share family problems and mourn their dead. It is also there that they find a space of recognition. Recognition in several ways, including recognizing oneself in the other. Despite the many restrictions imposed on women in religious environments, the constant surveillance and the mistrust strategically produced to facilitate monitoring, even so, it is in these spaces that they tell of themselves. I say, they continue telling of themselves, because there is a movement there. They don’t tell everything at once, or maybe they never tell everything, because they select what is tellable, but as they tell each other, as they narrate, they also understand each other, recognize the other and recognize themselves in it. The religious social space has proved to be important for women as a space of meaning and sociability. It is this space for sharing experiences and complicity that translates into a space for healing/resurrection for women in situations of violence, including sexual violence.”

Raquel Moreno Garcia⁶, in her speech on Psychoanalysis and Sexualities, aimed to:

⁶ Psychoanalyst. Founding partner, scientific director, supervisor, coordinator of the Gender/Sex Nucleus of Constructo Instituto Psicanalítico; Teaching coordinator, supervisor of the Psychoanalysis Training Course at Espaço Criação; Organizer and co-author of the book “On the infantilism of sexuality”; Organizer of the book “The disorders of life” – Jacques André; Postgraduate course in Psychoanalysis and Gender-APBA/UK, Buenos Aires.

“[...] approach the issues of sexual diversities, gender identity from psychoanalysis, starting from Freud’s pre-psychoanalytic writings that provide foundations for the post-Freudian developments in relation to the constitution of the psyche. With a view to this complex process articulated by contemporary psychoanalytic thinking about dissident sexualities in their unique manifestations, we propose a reflection on the inaugural moments of the child’s psyche, opening a step towards the understanding of the hasty identification processes that sustain the various existentials today, constituting a necessary approach in the face of the risk of pathologization of sexualities outside the prevailing heteronorms in the culture.”

Luciana Codognoto⁷, with women vagrants, prostitutes and sexuality, intended with this study to:

“[...] discuss gender issues related to mobility and prostitution, through reports of experiences of women who lived in prostitution and roaming conditions in a small town, located in the interior of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS). We will seek to examine how these women lived the various facets of femininity in a space radically opposed to that environment of confinement and subalternity, traditionally reserved for women in society and culture. Through cartography, we conducted open interviews with homeless women, who sought shelter in the municipality’s Migrant’s House and with women who occupied the spaces of streets, bars and prostitution

houses in the city. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and authorized by the participants, by signing the Informed Consent Form. We believe that an isolated event, however exhausting it may be, was not, by itself, the condition for desertion nor for prostitution. Specifically in the case of these women, we observed that their life stories were marked by conflicts and important family differences and ruptures with gender issues.”

Carolina Neumann de Barros Falcão⁸ brings her experience from the Laboratory of Sexuality, Gender and Psychoanalysis and her listening to dissident sexualities and genders (PUCRS):

“Psychoanalysis was born from the subversion of the hegemonic logics existing at the time of Freud. However, it was forged in a modern, patriarchal and cis-heterosexual context and, due to the perpetuation of these paradigms, it has been questioned for its limited view of sexualities and genders. The Laboratory of Sexuality, Gender and Psychoanalysis (PUCRS) was created in 2018, with the aim of offering a space for listening – as non-pathologizing as possible – to dissident sexualities and genders. The premise referred to listening, recognizing that the expertise belongs to the subject and not to the ‘listening psi’ and sustaining the place of otherness as central to the analytic scene, so as not to (re)produce alterizations. The listening experiences have that Psychoanalysis can guarantee spaces of alterity and recognize the possible multiplicities of subjectivations. The construction of gender, the identificatory plots, the vicissitudes of desire are not sentenced

⁷ Psychologist, master’s in history from the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD). Doctor with Post-Doctorate in Psychology from the Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP/Assis). Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS/CPNA). Develops research in the areas of clinical and social psychology, with an emphasis on gender studies and women’s history.

⁸ Psychoanalyst, full member of the Sigmund Freud Psychoanalytic Association. Psychologist, Doctor in Psychology, she is a professor of the Psychology Course at PUCRS. She is co-founder of the Laboratory of Sexuality, Gender and Psychoanalysis at PUCRS, which offers a space for individual and collective reception and listening to the demands of Sexuality and Gender to the LGBTQIA+ population.

by anatomical logic, they are not reducible to genitality, nor are they organized in a fixed and immutable way. Furthermore, the position of a politically implicated psychoanalysis, which includes gender, race and class as psychoanalytic categories, allows the construction of new parameters of intelligibility⁹, transforming the clinical practice towards a post-patriarchal, post-cis-heteronormative and decolonial listening¹⁰.”

Sergio Ariel López¹¹ with the theme: New challenges of Pastoral Work – new people and identities, helps us to reflect on some new challenges for the reality of the church in contemporary times:

“Our Church has a long history in dealing with gender issues, evidenced by the articles that the then Parish Magazine mentioned and addressed, issues such as diversity, sexuality, gender and a practice in ecclesial life that has also been going on for years. For more than 30 years we have recognized and Ordained the Diaconal and Pastoral Ministry of women. That marked an important moment in the life of the Church. Regarding the Ordained Ministry of people of sexual diversity, there is still no synodal decision, but there is also no law that prohibits it; therefore, in the absence of law, the Board of Directors of the Church interprets in a positive way that there is no impediment to Ministerial Ordination. That is the

reality and the present situation of the Institution that is present in three countries and that tries to respect each place, as well as the process of the local Congregations. It is not the same reality in Paraguay as in Buenos Aires, for example. In 2010 in Argentina, the State legalized the civil marriage of same-sex persons (egalitarian marriage) and shortly after it did the same by legalizing gender identity. Therefore, these laws caused a high impact on society and also on the life of the Churches. In the big cities where we are present, reality is much more demanding of answers and spaces where the church and the congregations challenge each other to be inclusive churches. A rereading of Scripture and of texts always used in terms of gender is necessary. That is, a positive reading that goes beyond the apologetic reading where an explanation and an exegesis of the texts is necessary to clarify that the Bible is not a homophobic book. We began to receive requests for a marriage blessing and therefore a pastoral practice where an appropriate liturgy with appropriate prayers and texts is necessary. Baptisms of children of two mothers or two fathers... and the full participation in church activities of families that break with the heteronormative model. But one topic in particular is still challenging me and causing questions and that is about Baptism. On this topic I have many questions and few answers. If when baptizing a child whose parents come to church we mention their names, are we baptizing a person on their genitalia and assigning a gender to this child? And if this person in adulthood perceives themselves to be diverse, is it necessary to baptize that new person again? Is it the same person? Is it someone else? If we respect their identity by name, should we change the baptism formula and stop mentioning the name? Or stop baptizing children and only do it when that adult decides to do it and is mature about their gender? Taking into account that we accept in our personal identity, a new one: the identity of Christians. Why is it so difficult for us to recognize and accept a new self-perceived gender identity?

9 AYOUGH, Thamy. *Psicanálise e hibridez: gênero, colonialidade e subjetivações*. Curitiba: Calligraphie Editora, 2019.

10 TAJER, Débora. *Psicoanálisis para todos*. Buenos Aires: Topía Editorial, 2020.

11 Bachelor's (licenciado) in Theology at the Pontifical Universidad Gregoriana, Rome; in Systematic Theology and bachelor's (licenciado) in Theology at ISEDET, Buenos Aires; Master's degree in Sacred Scripture with orientation in HIV-AIDS issues at ISEDET, Buenos Aires. Pastor of the Evangelical Church of the Rio de la Plata. Currently pastor in the San Lucas Community, Castelar, the German Evangelical Congregation in Buenos Aires (CEABA).

And in that case, celebrate Baptism again since we are facing a new reality? Or should we think of a rite that is equivalent to baptism for people who in the process of their life have assumed themselves different and wish to be recognized as such in the records, in the life of the church and in the community?”

Ernani Röpke¹², based on his experience in the community where he works pastorally, addresses the issue of Accompaniment with LGBTQIA+ youth at the Cantareira Parish– São Paulo, this accompaniment takes place within the context of the local ecclesial community:

“In John 15:16 Jesus says, ‘You didn’t choose me; on the contrary, it was I who chose you so that you would go and bear fruit and that this fruit would not perish.’ Jesus is no respecter of persons. He welcomes and sends everyone to produce the fruits of his love. Graced by the love of Jesus, the community welcomes each person who visits it. In recent years, many gay people have visited us. Here they were welcomed in their way of being and loving. They had the opportunity to actively participate with their gifts, especially in the youth group. Many became members by profession of faith. As one person said: ‘- I cried when I heard in the service that God loves me as I am’. I share two concerns: 1) The more we condemn and hide the presence of LGBTQIA+ people in our communities, the more we cooperate in increasing violence, depression and suicide attempts. Being open to dialogue on the subject in the community is essential so that prejudices and discrimination can

be overcome. A testimony that marked me was: ‘We are not there to destroy family, but to be family’. 2) The neutrality of the IECLB is a no for gay people. In recent years, the IECLB unfortunately did not go deeper into the topic.”

Conclusion

The Pastoral Counseling and Psychology research group, following its proposal to discuss themes in an interdisciplinary and dialogic way, did so, also in this space, within the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion, seeking to support itself in the motto of this congress: “Courage, Creativity and Hope” in contemporary times. The theme “Gender and Sexualities” was conducted by our guests, specialists in their work, whether psychologists-psychoanalysts, researchers and pastors who work within communities.

The texts described here dealt with Sexualities, considering the legitimacy of the singular choices of sexuality and subjectivations to be constituted with the other individual, who can allow themselves to be, without giving up or eliminating the other person. They brought instigating, courageous problematizations and, due to their power and truth, difficult to ignore. Some structures, from both disciplines that support us, were “prodded”.

Being able to welcome shared experiences in encounters with another human being confronts us with inexorable transformations that are going far beyond what is already known. And now, unsettled, we need courage and creativity to follow and keep the search activated for a deeper understanding of the theme.

¹² Bachelor’s in theology from the Higher School of Theology – EST – (currently Faculdades EST) of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil. Recognition by MEC of the Bachelor’s Degree in Theology from the Methodist University of São Bernardo do Campo in 2007. He is currently a pastor at the Cantareira Parish – São Paulo/SP.

We found that we are called to put in practice the premises of continent care, in close contact, in the delicacy of respectful and differentiated listening, as relational beings that we are, seeking strength in this condition. Sharing frees and brings the belief, faith and hope that there can be a horizon through a potential space of creative tension that can build a sense of being and existing for those who come to us for help.

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NOTIONS AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF CARE FROM RELIGIOUS SPACES¹

Sandra Villalobos Nájera²

Noé Alejandro Torres³

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the table has undoubtedly been the urgent need to reflect on the way in which we have related to the environment and the

type of relationships we have established with whom we inhabit; the relationship with the environment and between the different human groups must be strongly questioned in the face of the results that the devastation of the planet gives us and the deep inequalities from which thousands of human beings perish every day.

The great deficiencies and precariousness of health, food, housing and work became more present than ever within a context such as that of the pandemic and forced confinement. Not because they were new or a product of this, but because the world had to stop in a certain way, so that we could realize that what we were experiencing was a consequence

1 Thematic Table presented by María de la Luz Estrada, Noé Alejandro Torres, Rebeca Montemayor López and Sandra Villalobos Nájera, in the Working Group “Gender and religion: notions and constructions of care from religious spaces”, coordinated by Sandra Villalobos Nájera, Noé Alejandro Torres and Karina García Carmona. Translated by Marlon Machado Oliveira Rio. Reviewed by Marie Krahn.

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3 PhD student at the University of Guadalajara in the Doctoral Program in Social Sciences of the University Center for Social Sciences and Humanities. Her lines of research are: Religious field, masculinities among the secular clergy and secularism.
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of the lack of attention and individualization of problems that should be addressed collectively.

This led us to ask ourselves about the importance of care and self-care, not only in our immediate contexts, but also in the future, from each of our spaces and in each of our relationships. Therefore, we ask ourselves: how to understand and attend to care and self-care from the various religious spaces and multiple spiritualities?

In the following pages you will find the result of our reflections around 3 axes of reflection: a) Relevance of images of God and their relationship with care practices; b) Some approaches about the conception of the body and care from men and support groups from the religious space; and c) The experience of care from the resistance, activism and theology of women.

The relevance of images of God and their relationship with care practices

Care is a fundamental task for life, and for a full life. The representations that are made about care in all spaces are fundamental for its understanding. The role that religious representations and images have in this, as models to structure conceptions and practices, is a relevant aspect for its understanding and analysis.

Regarding this, Sandra Villalobos Nájera's presentation leads us to reflect on the role that images constructed from a patriarchal model have in relation to certain expressions of care. For her, care has traditionally been considered a priority responsibility associated with women, not

only within family spaces, but also within multiple specialized work spaces. These notions of care associated with the sexual division of labor and a series of gender mandates have contributed in a very acute way to its naturalization, as part of a feminine essence; which favor, among other things, the constant reinforcement of patterns, in which inequality and violence are generated within relationships.

Sandra mentioned that care is not always chosen, but it has been historically assigned. The ideas that from within some traditional religious spaces, such as those of the father-all-powerful, omnipotent and omnipresent, immediately refer to vertical relationships associated with power, "he who can do everything" is masculine; a control that reproduces everyday models of hegemonic masculinity. Or that of the all-encompassing mother, the same one that reaffirms, both in the religious space, as well as in the social and cultural one, the idea of care associated with sacrifice, dispossession or permanent unconditionality. A powerful image for welcoming, for the unconditional relief of the underprivileged; but also, a reinforcing image of a motherhood model that has cost women and girls so much. For this reason, she considers that as long as care continues to be thought of as it has been up to now, as a task that should be assumed primarily by women, we will continue to observe and experience numerous inequalities and asymmetries.

She mentioned that care is essential and no one can survive without it. A form of relationship and action that allows us to feel and resist in company. And that care must be a collective task, based on equal relationships, for well-being and survival, seeking the development of all. "The spaces of religiosity and spirituality are called to contribute to the construction of care based on ethics and justice."

Following this same axis of reflection, according to the presentation by Liria A. Suárez Preciado, thinking about the feminine image of God is a necessary task in the creation of a broader conception of divinity, which allows us to see the human being in a more comprehensive and non-subordinate way, as expressed in the following lines. For Liria, speaking of God in Christianity affirms the reality of the divinity as a spirit, a spirit without sex. However, when talking about God, the statements made about him, the images and the names are masculine, thus showing a predominantly androcentric cultural and religious context. Such is the naturalization of this androcentrism in Christianity that even speaking of a feminine form of God causes scandal.

Liria mentioned how Western Christianity throughout its history has been predominantly Christomonist, this means that the theological affirmations and emphases are based on the recurring affirmations of Christ and his saving work, his being and grace. This leads to forgetting the assertions of the Triune God that is typical of Christianity, mainly, led and leads to forgetting the Holy Spirit.

So, the challenge that can be found is to be able to have some biblical and theological references that can help to see that reality a little broader about God, the triune God. It is here that characteristics are found in the biblical texts of the Spirit as a driving force that manifests itself and is represented in metaphors, such as a hen, a dove, the presence of God, the breath of life. Also, in the history of theology in ancient times, the Holy Spirit was seen as mother and protector.

Finally, she concludes by highlighting the importance of taking into account what the sacred texts themselves show about the images of the Holy Spirit, and that the study of pneumatology must be recovered, in

order to have a comprehensive vision of the Trinity; and see the human being in a more integrated way, and not subordinate, remembering the image and likeness mentioned in Gn 1: 26-27, because having a broader and more integrated conception of divinity has practical implications in the anthropological vision and in the ecclesiological experience, which would help one to have more inclusive arguments and spaces of respect.

Some approaches about the conception of the body and the care of oneself: men and support groups

The spaces, from which the religious sphere provide shelter and tools to go through the different mourning processes, recovering the importance of accompaniment from the body and self-care, as opposed to the ideas of domination, training, control and chastity, is an obligatory task in these times in which we live; reflection to which Zarái Gonzalía Polanco led us through her presentation. For her, the accelerated time in which we live, as well as the dynamics that go through it, have led to states of abandonment, suffering and crisis.

Zarái considers that it is necessary to reflect, propose and create spaces and materials that contribute to overcoming these states. That care for crises and mourning are elements that can offer tools and inputs that help reflect on whether the actions carried out to date, with the aim of helping people to process losses, are adequate for crises of global nature.

Based on the above, Zarái considered the importance of thinking and wondering about forms, materials and reflections, on how accompaniment is carried out from the religious field. Likewise, the role played by the body, caring for oneself against the still valid

ideas of domination, training, control, chastity. In any case, yes, in the accompaniment practices there is room for care, rituality, cultic responses. As well as, yes, from religious spaces, accompaniment, community formation and care for the environment are invited. For her, the certainty of reflection from the material, but also from the experience of the religious, promoting help and accompaniment to people who are going through moments of loss and personal crisis, who join the global ones, giving the opportunity to look to the future with courage, appealing to creativity and living in hope.

On the other hand, Noé Alejandro Torres Álvarez led us to think about the bodies that matter (have mattered), following the arguments of Judith Butler⁴ and that on many occasions have led to endorse what is already known about men and the importance they have in all spaces, institutions and times. In the case of religions, in some of the Churches and even more, in the Catholic Church, those bodies are the ones that have been placed above all the others. The division between the clergy and the laity, coming from the Gregorian reform, resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on the bodies of men sacralized through the vows or promises that being part of the clergy imposed on them. This division has included multiple benefits and privileges, which in some texts have already been explored or denounced.

From the pandemic caused by COVID and the convening of EST's VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion, the strategies of self-mastery were taken into consideration, the ones that the candidates for the priesthood imposed on those bodies that matter in order to be

able to make effective the symbols that a sacred body requires. However, these self-control strategies also shed light on the weaknesses of this state and the obligations that it entails.

In this sense, the pandemic gave rise to some thought about the tactics that the priests that he was able to interview employ and that they implemented throughout their priestly careers: how to form community with other congeners, translate the theology of liberation into their immediate reality, think about a care of oneself and no longer so much about dominion of oneself. These tactics became necessary as a result of the distancing measures imposed by the transmission and vulnerability to which SARS-CoV-2 exposes us. The demands that believers continue to have, as well as by the priests who were unable to escape the reality of the pandemic and have died in their ecclesiastical functions, leaving the functions of that sacralized and bureaucratic state in question, exposing the vulnerability of the bodies of men who have few tools for effective self-care.

The experience of care from the resistance, activism and theology of women

Resisting against the attacks of dehumanization, accompanying those who suffer the absence of beings that were taken from them in the cruelest ways, is a task that reflects a deep love for those who suffer, and an enormous commitment to dignity and justice. A small reflection of the great work that women do to carry out this work, we can find in the following two presentations in which, from theology and accompaniment, Rebeca invites us to reflect on care as a space of

4 BUTLER, Judith. *Cuerpos que importan: sobre límites materiales y discursos del "sexo"*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2012.

sacredness and Maria de la Luz from the defense of women victims of femicide.

What violates is not sacred, and it is necessary to build an accompaniment for new times, here, a paraphrase of the participation of Rebeca Montemayor López.

Rebecca referring to Mircea Eliade⁵: the *sacred and the profane*, starts from the question *where are the women?* Because yes, for Eliade, the sacred space remains immovable or untouchable and the profane represents the unknown, the invisible. So it is that she mentions that women, from religions or spiritualities, are diminished and excluded from these constructions of sacred spaces in their narratives – tradition, dogmas, confessions – And how, based on this discourse, the consequences continue to be “terrifying” in violence against girls, young women, women, and that this far exceeds the “religious” principles (sacred texts) because cultural, social and even political factors are also integrated, in the maintenance of a patriarchal system that decides “places”. If the sacred in religions/spiritualities disrespect freedom, autonomy, plurality and diversity and life for women... it is violence. And everything that violates life is not sacred. Everything that violates life is *profane*.

And precisely the theme of this table, is what led her to reflect on the urgency with which this pandemic has confronted us: discover other sacred spaces in care and rituals for new times, from a feminist approach, as freedom and as a right.

Thus, for Rebeca, the appropriation-body-territory of sacred spaces, from feminism, has to be built, decolonial and depatriarchal,

as a form of resistance against the attacks of isolation and demobilization. This is where religious spaces, with their multiple faces, have to recreate sacred spaces of care with rituals open to: a holistic spirituality, an integral corporality, a proximity and an ecumenicity, as recreation and renewal of a voice and a face of feminist faith: sororal and supportive.

From Mexico, she shared with us two examples that make visible women who work for peace and justice, from their losses/griefs: *the Women of Juárez* and the mothers searching for their disappeared children; both, sacred spaces of resilience and resistance, of hope.

And from a personal pastoral practice, the experience of a Baptist community in CDMX, which, since the pandemic, is committed to accompanying for new times, from urgency to emergency: what should we keep on doing? What will we change? What shall we do? And the challenge to recreate rituals and care, from and towards women: in contention, in the liturgical, in the cultivation of sisterhood and mercy towards other women; as well as in ties with other social and ecumenical spaces; in networks and alliances in Latin America. *Creativity, courage and hope!*

At the end of our work in this group, we had the presence of María de la Luz Estrada, Coordinator of the National Observatory of Femicide in Mexico, a Catholic woman, activist and companion of relatives of women victims of femicide.

Accompanying those who suffer and caring for them is a central task of the moment we live in, it is a task of resistance against indifference and pain, as well as a construction of hope. In Luz's experience, care is

⁵ ELIADE, Mircea. *Lo sagrado y lo Profano*. España: Guadarrama, 1985.

a challenge for those of us who are defenders. Well, it generates conflict and is a permanent questioning.

She clarifies that a defender is not just a lawyer, a litigant, as it is thought sometimes; and it is necessary to understand the context and the situation that defenders face. She shared how they work on violence against women – sexual violence, femicide and forced disappearance – and that they not only accompany the victims, or promote public policies; but also, they have had to generate tools to support them; for it is not possible to remain in pain, but it is necessary to also move on to hope. She spoke about how they accompany emotional processes, and the impact that a femicide or disappearance has:

Many women are (we) defenders and we don't even consider ourselves as defenders, and by not considering ourselves that way, their (our) work is left unprotected. It is necessary to recognize ourselves in our social struggle in defense of human rights; and that this puts us at risk. It is not only the authorities, but also the criminal networks, the spouses, etc., against whom we are at risk, this becomes more complex. It is necessary to understand the diversity of actors that put the integrity of defenders at risk. I never thought that I would be threatened with murder for defending reproductive rights. We are very involved in achieving justice so that the victim gets ahead, that sometimes leads us to forgetting and abandoning ourselves. We were raised in a patriarchal culture and a denial of caring for ourselves. This is serious, it kills us defenders.

For Luz, the context of the pandemic made them reflect on how vulnerable they are; and how it is not pleasant to feel vulnerable, for it is difficult to them to understand that they are fragile and that they must be strengthened if they want to continue in the social struggle. That this is

complicated, because they are simply generating spaces, which were not there before. “We feel the suffering, the pain of those we accompany. We are faced with the challenge of deep pain in women’s lives. How do we help that mother who will never have her daughter again be able to keep on walking? Because she is alive and she cannot be dead in life”.

Luz comments that alternative and spiritual contention spaces are being generated to fuel the struggle. That spaces have been built for the victims, but not yet for the defenders. She reflects on how we have been taught to take care of others, to take responsibility; and that this is how we radical feminists are, it is difficult for us to break with that, because we really admire and recognize those who give themselves, even their lives for the cause and that sometimes it bothers us to have to put limits on the pain we see, because we want to be up to the problem. “We forbid ourselves to feel. As feminists we are not exempt from reproducing these roles”. She invited us to reflect on the fact that self-care has to do with a health and protection issue, and that it is necessary not to remain only in protection; which is hard work. When asked “who takes care of the defenders?”, this is the answer: Nobody takes care of us. “We must guarantee the quality of life, the environment and the working conditions of defenders. It is us, this alliance, the sorority, we take care of each other...”

Final Remarks

Reflecting on care requires considering, on the one hand, the inequalities associated with its distribution, in relation to the subjects and the ways in which it has been assigned to them; and at the same time,

thinking of it as a fundamental task that must be reconsidered from the collective resistance of caring to take care of ourselves and to do it as part of the construction of a full life.

The pandemic and the actions undertaken from the different spaces and networks have taught us other forms of care, ways of building community, of caring for oneself, and of the importance of transforming both practices, representations and the ways in which we name them.

Reflection from the different feminisms is necessary to think about the sacred and the profane, about pain and hope, about the importance of generating new names and representations to transform people's lives and to build other routes to new realities.

The reflection generated in our group “Notions and Constructions of Care from Religious Spaces”, accounts for the ways in which people reinvent themselves and remake themselves on a daily basis, to transform themselves and their contexts. Transformations that could not be carried out without *Courage, Creativity and Hope*.

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ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE OF BLACK WOMEN OF RELIGION¹

Sandrali de Campos Bueno²

Denise Botelho³

Lilian Conceição da Silva⁴

Janine Nina Fola Cunha⁵

The Round Table “Ancestral Knowledge of Black Women of Religion” presents at the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion the particular, but not the only, perspective of women who have circulated through the academy and the spaces of afro-religious belonging in very different ways. In this dialogical effort, the narratives

made at that moment project the need for speech and, consequently, for listening, in order to expand the potential for debate and understanding of the different possible ways of black belonging.

Thus, Iyá Sandrali begins the circularity narrating the following myth from the Yoruba tradition:

“The people of the Yoruba tradition say that when Olodumare, the Supreme Lord of the existence of the universe created the truth, he made it like a great sacred mirror between Orum and Aiê. And he entrusted its care to an Omo de Oxum. Every day she took care of

1 This text is a review of the Round Table of the same name from WG 11: “Black Feminist Afrotheologies and Theologies”, from the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion: Courage – Creativity – Hope, held in 2021. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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the truth with the care of someone who recognizes the beauty and the sacred that exists in herself, in the other and in all living and non-living beings. One day, due to carelessness the type of which is not conscious, but which originates from the intrinsic desire for new possibilities and discoveries, the mirror broke and shattered into thousands of pieces, as many as there are existing beings in the universe. Worried, understanding that she had caused a change, because once the mirror was broken there would be no way to rebuild it, she went to Olodumare fearfully. Olodumare in his infinite wisdom, of whom the seat exists because the error provokes, said to her: – ‘Now the truth has been divided into thousands of pieces, and has spread everywhere and to all people. This will make each person say, ‘Here is the truth, I have it’”

Faced with the moment, referencing the lines from a myth of Yoruba cosmology, mobilizes the need to tell not only the truth, but your truth. And how not to tell the truth based on what the Yoruba myth mobilizes, which is its truth? How not to assume that your truth somehow differs from the truth of my closest [neighbor]?

This is how each one presented herself, based on what most identifies her: her matrilineality, her bloodline and religious line, showing that orality as a technology of black ancestry is fully preserved and valued, being epistemologically the most appropriate way to place herself as truth in a context that oppresses us.

Therefore, the wheel began with the oldest – the one who, in the face of the truth with the mythical involvement, has been with it the longest – which is Iyá Sandrali. She presents to us, not only her own history, but also that of the women who preceded her and who, united in their mythical-social formation, collectivize their existences.

In the narrative of Iyá Sandrali, her legacy is also added, that which still in life appears as continuity, in the daughters and granddaughter, whether of saint or bloodlines. Therefore, and immediately, we find ourselves with what the teaching in *sankofa*⁶ makes us meditate on, where past, present and future are entangled, constituting life and permanence with perpetuity of the existential memory of women and men who, in situations of slavery, guarded freedom and subject to multiple oppressions, have built the black journey in Brazil and in Afro-Diasporic America with dignity.

Iyá Sandrali speaks of the extreme south of the country, of Pelotas, a city where the wave of blacks also arrived by water and which currently secretly guards much of what this black community has. Religiosity is one of these treasures and, along with it, all the wisdom coming from Africa.

This ancestral wisdom imprints a critical view on the social development of racism in black minds. How it configures itself in the political spheres, a space of strong discussion of this woman who presents herself as a woman of *axé*, or in her words: civilizing authority of the African matrix. With the expertise of someone who, in times of electoral politics, throws herself into the disputes, she offers in her narrative the knowledge of her location. From a black woman, social activist, psychologist, thinker, community caregiver as a civilizing authority and party politics that she is. Thus, in this localized complexity, she promotes critical debates on how to think about the people. Black people, poor, living with the rest of the population. Changing the point of view in which

⁶ African symbology of the Ghanaian Adinkra Group which means that it is necessary to look to the past to project the future.

we usually put it from top to bottom, Iyá Sandrali, as Lelia Gonzalez already said, speaks from bottom to top.

Evoking the pantheon of African deities, the Iyalorixá ends her speech with a complex desire for black, intellectual, traditional and matricentric permanence. What she means and wants to perpetuate is that, in a counterpoint to the patriarchal society, women should be the center, potency and life, maintaining the millenary proposal of society coming from African origins.

Iyá Denise, who is also Professor Denise, reveres the energies of the day and evokes, following the paths opened by Iyá Sandrali, the iyabas, those mother women and the multiple motherhoods that these mythological beings teach us. Liberating motherhood, caring motherhood, biological and mythological, as well as religious motherhood. Perceiving this function of multiple motherhood is also questioning the single way that the white heteronormative world understands family, thus promoting a tough questioning in the face of patriarchy.

It promotes thinking directly about other forms of relationships between people, in a collective way, in favor of a collectivity of differences and demonstrates to men and women that there are always alternatives of affective existences, even if oppression always tries to tell us the opposite.

From this perspective of difference, of the beauty that is difference, Iyá Denise updates myths when she thinks about the Brazilian political situation. She denounces the effort to transform the country into a nation with a single way of relating to God, or into a single religious nation, which, steeped in this ideology, thinks it will govern the country based on these unifying criteria. How to accomplish this in a country of

continental dimensions and a huge variety of cultures and ethnicities? Iyá Sandrali's proposition of truth is updated in Iyá Denise's narrative, especially when she takes the words of Audre Lorde to justify that this type of political behavior can only be that of ignorant people.

Ignorance will end when we start looking for knowledge within ourselves and trusting in it. When we dare to dive into the chaos that precedes understanding and come back with new tools for action and change. For, within this deep knowledge, our visions are fueled and they are what establish the foundations for our actions and for our future.⁷

Thus, Iyá Denise replies that only with the ancestral intelligence of the iyabás can we combat this ignorance. This wisdom that knows that we are not yet in the spheres of power, of decision-making. That knows that we are not in the place where physical strength prevails. That we are not in the place of this romantic love that extrapolates and can kill! Where women only have space for subjugation. This ancestral wisdom is the place for perspicacity, perseverance, solidarity, which is the revolutionary principle of life, with equality, fraternity.

Lilian Silva begins her narrative by contextualizing herself with the pandemic moment and in which she celebrates her 50th birthday. Year in which so many lives were lost and she finds herself celebrating this very significant passage of her time. In addition, she goes through the family path to make herself understood as an Afro-indigenous woman of Christian confession and who, within the institution from which a black

7 LORDE, Audre. "When will the ignorance end? Keynote speech at the National Third World Gay and Lesbian Conference, October 13, 1979 207. In: LORDE, Audre. *I am your sister essays and speeches*. New York: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984. p. 207–211

woman is understood, she finds it important to reinforce the eminent black and feminine strength and presence as also a protagonist in the history of Christianity.

The paths which this faith and practice pass through make thought organized also in the face of Afrocentric paradigms of collectivity. Where one perceives the schemes of oppression, coming from the shared formation that Christianity has with the violent scheme of modernity.

Therefore, studying, deepening and philosophizing about these paradigms that are shown to be opposite, overloads those who submit to do so. Aware of this, Lilian continues to narrate her experiences inside the Anglican Church, and reveals to us the double belonging, where in her black female trajectory, she finds in the African matrix ancestry rest and welcome.

At this crossroads, Lilian's waters meet, who says:

“It is in this place that I have found the opportunity to live the accumulation of experiences and ancestral wisdom in dialogue with each one of you, for whom I have special respect and affection and with so many other people that these 50 years, and especially the second half of the other 50 years, have given me the opportunity to meet.”

At this crossroads of Anglican priestess and abian of candomblé, following references from black women theologians and the iyás present, is that Lilian thinks how her philosophical and theological work is possible. How can this trajectory take place. But that, in fact, is not the most important in this discussion. The most important thing, of course, is how the understanding of truths in solidarity and

sharing can take place. And that this is nothing more than the essence of human existence.

It would be less complex if humanity were not laden with wounds, such as racism is. The one that is institutionalized in Christian churches and that deny the historical and social contribution of the black community. Therefore, within a discussion with axé women, the acceptance of the theme is differentiated, as well as the understanding of this displacement that Reverend Lilian gives us the opportunity to look at.

She reiterates that her existence, transversalized by the existences of other women, is synthesized in being of great responsibility, which requires a lot of awareness, because honoring those who came before, it is necessary to follow a totally and daily anti-racist, feminist and socially inclusive posture.

Thus, with this learning, it is always necessary to be in the place of apprentice, where one is always through another, as the ubuntu philosophy says, even recognizing oneself as a priestess, as the Ruah also teaches, because humility builds great knowledge.

Nina Fola spends her life in the city of Porto Alegre. She situates the black population from which she descends, giving the importance of this process not only in her personal life, but mainly in her religious life. Recovering the family history for Nina is also recovering the history that denies its black men and women, its Batuque tradition, erasing narratives such as that of her family in the context of the metropolis.

Currently, Nina also sees herself as a researcher, being a woman who was born and raised within axé. Therefore, awareness coming from

the historical, social and political knowledge that religious communities in Porto Alegre have established is fundamental.

The awareness of one's place, where one speaks and to whom one directs what one produces is the synthesis of what Nina Fola brings in her narrative. Politically, one more posture that weaves the closing of this wheel that, provocatively being with black women, coming from different cities and regions of the country, bring convergences and also forks in the paths. Where is the richness of these differentiations perceived?

In the circle with these women, the political debate takes place in existence. The political elaboration on ancestry, on territoriality and on belonging, highlights the power and inherent political strength of women, not only those in the wheel of knowledge, but certainly, the

women who share this social and collective conscience with those who here were able to use the opportunity to present themselves.

The invisibility of black women's thinking means that we can still cause surprises about this potential that is not yet considered a driving force for the development of possibilities effectively capable of transforming Brazilian society into a fairer space, egalitarian in rights and respectful of existential diversity of its people.

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A CONVENTION OF MATRISTIC THOUGHT: BIRTHING AND BIRTHS, ECOFEMINISM AND AGROECOLOGY¹

Thayane Cazallas do Nascimento²

Matristics is not matriarchy, for it is not domination and power exercised by the mother figure rather than the father figure. Matristics is not simply society thought of matrilineally in terms of heredity and kinship. Matristics is not a utopia, nor is it a throwback to a state of ‘wild nature’. Matristics is paradoxically something we haven’t seen or experienced with our bodies, but at the same time it’s the natural

condition of our bodies, when we finally know we’re safe and can breathe a sigh of relief.³

This excerpt by Spanish author Casilda Rodrigáñez Bustos was translated in Brazil for the first time in 2020, by the independent publisher Editora Luas. And it translates a feeling that I have sought several times, and in so many other companions in writing, in performance, in activism, in militancy, in research, in the classroom, in the experiences of daily life, which is this sense of a place, both of physical space, as well as the immanence of welcoming this woman’s body in the world that not only wants to exist where it is allowed by our culture, and placed in

1 Article produced from the sharing and reflections of the Working Group “Ecofeminisms, agroecology and ways of birthing and being born”, coordinated by Daniéli Busanello Krob, Natalia Monge Zuñiga, Thayane Cazallas do Nascimento and Vanessa de Vasconcellos L. França. Translated by Marie Krahn.

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3 BUSTOS, Casilda Rodrigáñez. *A Matristica: aqui e agora*. Translation and presentation by Nádia Recio. Belo Horizonte: Editora Luas, 2020a, p. 9.

the roles socially imposed in a compulsory way, but in a state of constant freedom: in the practices of life socially, collectively and imaginatively.

In this trajectory of seeking that this body can move freely, many movements are triggered, which justify the proposal of the working group, of GT9. The first is the search for a safe place to exist, given the contemporary patriarchal context, in the construction of science and knowledge built by the vision of women scientists, women thinkers, in carrying out a movement of joining the various fields of knowledge.

The goal is, in fact, aimed at a body that can “breathe relieved” and that is in a safe sharing [space]. It was not by chance that the working group GT9 “Ecofeminisms, agroecology and ways of birthing and being born” was composed of women researchers, midwives, women theologians, women educators, and women agronomists. This encounter was due to the configuration of the fragmented parts that patriarchal Science deconstructed and built through the exclusion of this woman’s body⁴, or female body, which seeks to be historically denaturalized. Neither in the public sphere or in the domestic sphere, not just maternity or sterility, but through the knowledge in the world, of being integrated in their nature as a social individual and in their science of multiple, deep and embedded wisdoms of living the woman’s body without being dictated by patriarchy, which limits the interpretation of being a woman at social, cultural and political levels, as well as references and protagonisms to an ancestral memory.

As proposed within the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion, the work group Ecofeminisms, agroecology and ways of

birthing and birth was coordinated by Dr. in Theology Daniéli Busanello Krob⁵, by the MA in Family Agriculture Gabriela Monge Zúñiga⁶, by MA in Law and Ecofeminism Vanessa Lemgruber⁷ and by me, Dr. in Education and specialist in labor and birth pedagogy, Thayane Cazallas do Nascimento⁸. The work group’s proposal focused on thematic discussions and productions in their respective fields of knowledge, that is, works that could only address ecofeminism, agroecology, birthing, but in a final proposal for a meeting through the internal Thematic Table of the aforementioned Work Group.

When thinking about the themes, the idea was to create a meeting of love for Sophia, that is, for philosophical thought, to promote this debate as a central multidisciplinary meeting for the composition of the Working Group, as it will not take long before there will be the permanent

4 ANGELI, Daniela. Uma breve história das representações do corpo feminino na sociedade. *Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, v. 12, n. 2, p. 243-245, maio/ago. 2004.

5 KROB, Daniéli Busanello. *Violência doméstica contra mulheres e ações de enfrentamento de igrejas: um estudo de caso*. 2017. 175 f. Tese (Doctorate in Theology) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Teologia, Faculdades EST, São Leopoldo, 2017. Available at: http://dspace.est.edu.br:8080/jspui/bitstream/BR-SIFE/765/1/krob_db_td158.pdf. Accessed on: 20 Oct. 2021.

6 ZÚNIGA, Natalia Monge. “O dom não se ensina, a gente nasce com ele...!” Saberes, práticas e histórias de vida de parteiras tradicionais da RESEX Mapuá, Ilha do Marajó. 2017. Dissertação (Master’s in Family Agriculture and Sustainable Development) – Universidade Federal do Pará/EMBRAPA Amazônia Oriental, Belém, 2017.

7 LEMGRUBER, Vanessa. *Guia Ecofeminista: Mulheres, Direito, Ecologia*. Rio de Janeiro: Ape’Ku, 2020.

8 NASCIMENTO, Thayane Cazallas do. *Das cosmologias de partos/nascimentos: um estudo sobre saberes relacionados às concepções de parteria contemporânea*. 2018. 174 f. Tese (Doctorate in Education) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, São Leopoldo, 2018a. Available at: http://www.repositorio.jesuita.org.br/bitstream/handle/UNISINOS/7095/Thayane%20Cazallas%20do%20Nascimento_.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y. Accessed on: 20 Oct. 2021.

meeting of the themes that speak about social and environmental changes, taking into account the scarcity of food production, damages and what the solutions are for the environment and, finally, the consequences of how to gestate, give birth and be born in a society of scarcity or, still, in transformation. In this way, these knowledges will establish constant dialogues. This statement is based on the social context and on environmental issues, and in the recognition that science and power need to be on the constant agenda.

Our approaches and proposed readings used the theorists that approach and justify the thematic intertwining, with the same themes worked, as in Ivone Gebara⁹, Michel Odent¹⁰, Vandana Shiva¹¹, Casilda Rodríguez Bustos¹² and with perspectives that collide, and are directed towards the same horizon: What will be the future of humanity on Earth? Both authors face the questioning and talk about the future. They are contemporary authors. They also turn to a critique of how we relate to the physical space of the Earth and how the mentality that we have lived until now, necessarily, will confront us with radical changes in history.

It is up to us to have a critical sense and get out of the type of exploitation of nature, because we already need to realize that it is

unsustainable to continue to practice the economy of consumption, both of nature and of the living beings that inhabit it.

We love life and we don't want to see it perish because of our whims and our destructive capacity. We are in this fight because we can no longer put up with the system of discrimination and exclusion and because this fight for dignity and beauty is the meaning of our existence.¹³

Motivated by this meeting, we know that we are also referring to other great women producing knowledge, such as Ivone Gebara, on Ecofeminist Theology, where the author reads reality and recognizes the paradoxes of the androcentric science model that confronts us in the construction of knowledge. And as a proposal, we start from an epistemology of ecofeminism to intertwine ourselves in a journey about science, which fits us in the construct of knowledge: “the question that interests us is to open perception in order to capture the fundamental aspects of life, hidden from our cognitive field”¹⁴, and that enters our bodies in such a dominant way that we do not realize¹⁵, about our social justification: “ecofeminism opens us to other connections, denouncing the ideological character of much of patriarchal science”¹⁶.

9 GEBARA, Ivone. *Teologia Ecofeminista: ensaio para repensar o Conhecimento e a Religião*. São Paulo: Olho d'Água, 1997.

10 ODENT, Michel. *O camponês e a parteira: uma alternativa à industrialização da agricultura e do parto*. Tradução de Sarah Bauley. São Paulo: Ground, 2003.

11 SHIVA, Vandana. *Biopirataria: a pilhagem da natureza e do conhecimento*. Tradução de Laura Cardellini B. de Oliveira. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001.; SHIVA, Vandana. *Monoculturas da mente: perspectivas da biodiversidade e da biotecnologia*. Tradução de Daniela de Abreu Azevedo. São Paulo: Gaia, 2003.

12 BUSTOS, 2020a.; BUSTOS, Casilda Rodríguez. *Pariremos com Prazer*. Tradução de Carolina Caires Coelho. Belo Horizonte: Editora Luas, 2020b.

13 GEBARA, 1997, p. 24.

14 GEBARA, 1997, p. 56.

15 Even in the atypical experience of living in a pandemic as experienced by COVID-19 since 2020, we experienced grief, the fear of death, and yet, we demanded of ourselves a rhythm to the body, to thought and to intellectual doing in these molds of a production that were out of this context, that is, we had difficulties to think outside the box, to understand a different way of creating, a difficulty in breaking with old models necessary in the cycle of life, life and death break cycles, scientific thinking too needs to fervently embrace this logic, with double weight for women.

16 GEBARA, 1997, p. 56.

Connections interrupted in recognizing the limitations of knowledge production from the experience of a body in the world. It is necessary to rethink some fragmentary patterns, our difficulty in being and seeing ourselves in integration with nature, so we neglect the exposed data about the reality of the planet: What is our relationship with the environment in which we are inserted?

A young traditional midwife and her echoing voice: The Internal Table “Agroecology, birthing and births: the consequences of the seed¹⁷ which we plant”

Who gave birth to the midwife? It was the wise woman who, in the walk of life, talked with her body, with the pain, with mistakes and successes, and especially with her soul. Who gave birth to the midwife? It was the black woman, the indigenous woman, the woman in the history of birthing. Who gives birth to the midwife? Except for herself, through her footprints in the experiences of being a woman. Who remembers the midwife?¹⁸

The Thematic Table was composed by Samara Simões, traditional midwife, Natalia Monge Zúñiga, from Costa Rica, and myself, Thayane C. do Nascimento. One of the central guests, without a doubt, was Samara, a traditional midwife who leads, in Cariri do Sertão¹⁹, the Roda Sear, and

the circle as a space for reception, monitoring and care for pregnant women and those who are midwifing.

Natalia Monge Zúñiga developed a master’s thesis with Traditional Midwives in the Extractive Reserve in Auto Mapuá, on Marajó Island, Brazil. She recognizes the value of traditional midwifery knowledge as women of the land and holders of good living practices. In the composition of the table, she made this connection between the work of an agronomist which she develops in her country, Costa Rica, and carries in her speech the experience of the woman who dedicates herself to the seed, to the plants, but also of the woman who gave birth with a midwife, who researched traditional midwifery, and that of those who carry in their research practice the intertwinings of Latin America.

Her contribution at the table passes through all these notes, the recognition of the role of the woman of the land, who maintains the seeds, and the importance of creating this bridge between an understanding of production and maintenance carried out by women, which is a composition of sorority. From women to women, and from women midwives and their knowledge in service to the community of women and to the habitat they occupy.

I bring here some of the discussions held in the past by the author, and which were also mentioned in her contribution made at the table of GT9:

Between midwives: relationships between women: Another fundamental element observed in the relationship between midwives and women is sisterhood, characterized by a deep and complex relationship between women, which emerges in moments and situations of extreme anguish. It is the woman-woman solidarity that is manifested through

¹⁷ The idea of the seed takes on the connotation of the seed of plants, but also a metaphor for knowledge, wisdoms and concern for tomorrow.

¹⁸ NASCIMENTO, Thayane Cazallas do. Published on January 20, 2022, National Day of the Traditional Midwife. Published as a poem narrated on Instagram by the *Coletivo de Educação do Parterias Latinas*. And, despite the poem saying ‘woman’, we know that birthing crosses this gender identity.

¹⁹ Cariri do Sertão is located in Juazeiro do Norte-CE, in the northeast region of Brazil.

offering company, care or help in a disinterested way, with a deep feeling of sisterhood. The word 'soror' comes from Latin and means 'sister'. Therefore, sorority would be an equivalent of the word fraternity, of the union between brothers, the members of a society.²⁰

This is the practical sisterhood of a midwife's life, and, also, of those who protect, preserve and expand knowledge arising from the practice performed by traditional midwives. This was the dimension of the exchanges we carried out at the proposed table, considering approaches to changes in contemporary reading.

From the reflexive exercise carried out by me, part of my training as a social scientist and as a researcher in the field of education, the following question [arises]: Why would the traditional midwife's profession end, if they continue to exist and to be born? This is the seed that Natalia and I, as researchers, want to plant: The need to know how to ask the seed questions.

From the exercise based on the thesis "On the cosmologies of birthing/births: a study on knowledge related to the conceptions of contemporary midwifery", which points to a unique scenario, globally and locally, in the emergence of women interested in the traditional midwifery profession as a unique moment that we are living, in the possibility of ensuring attention to the philosophical importance of

20 ZÚÑIGA, Natalia Monge; PINTO, Benedita C. de Moraes; BARROS, Flávio Bezerra. Parteiros e o Ofício de "pegar criança" e "cortar umbigo" na Reserva Extrativista Mapuá, Ilha do Marajó. *Coisas do Gênero*, São Leopoldo, v. 6, n. 1, p. 154-170, jan./jun. 2020. p. 159. Available at: <http://periodicos.est.edu.br/index.php/genero/article/view/3992/3543>. Accessed on: 07 Sept. 2022.

education in committing to insert the themes of birthing / birth to read the context of social transformations.

From the experience of the doctoral thesis emerges the Education Collective of Parterias LatinAsAmericanas²¹, a space dedicated to research, dissemination and established exchanges of knowledge produced by researchers, midwives, doulas, activists, artists, in the commitment to the "planting of seed questions" about traditional midwifery.

Samara has a strong, direct and critical speech about the oppressive look built and still present in the social imaginary that is presented in the discourses and analysis in some research works, where it is insisted that the role of the midwife is ending and being replaced by medical or humanized knowledge of obstetric medicine, but this is a contradictory speech, and at the same time oppressive, where it locates the traditional midwife as a knowledge surpassed, or even replaced by medical knowledge, which is not a reality, since there are young women who are traditional midwives and learn the craft of midwifery through the family tradition of midwives grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, aunts... and another group for the interest of learning through birthing schools.

As a young midwife, she deconstructs this place where midwives were placed, this static midwife's body, the midwife as the old woman in the community, and which is only present in remote places and allowed because of the place of the absence of medical, hospital knowledge. Being in a territory far from the city and, also, from the

21 Designed and coordinated by Thayane. C. do Nascimento in a collective of diverse activities and partnerships of social movements, researchers, artists, midwives, doulas and teachers.

romanticized look that the traditional midwife occupies, the one who completely abdicates her personal life and generously gives herself to the midwife's work, she does not charge for the exercise of coming and going. And the most disturbing thing is that the midwife would have her days numbered to end.

In this field of discussion, the role of men and women researchers is critical and responsible for the contemporary reading of midwifery, different practices in Brazil, as well as the intersection of many social factors, at the intersection of class, race and gender, and the patriarchal power through some optics of Science. And although we have not addressed the topic at this table, we consider that the topic of birthing and birth is part of the discussions and dimensions of a reading of sexual and reproductive rights in Latin America.

The discussion about traditional midwifery may have fallen into a kind of crystallization of the theme, as if we were only referring to the memory of midwives when, in fact, they exercise other crafts, knowledge, and learning and even other summations of techniques. That is, to speak of midwifery in tradition, it is not enough to read the culture around memory, at the same time they are in the activity of making themselves tradition, because it continues to be born and to be inserted in the culture. Thus, she is being born and living. In short, midwifery does not end, it is in the present and will be in the future.

Contrary to the vision of the end of the traditional midwife, Samara, as a midwife – and a traditional midwife – is neither obstetrician nor humanized. And so, it locates a place and a posture in the face of the understanding of the traditional and the place it occupies for an active

generation of women, in knowledge and awareness of the knowledge they exercise.

In Samara's speech, I also highlight one of the slides presented, as it is a reference to the field of faith, and to the markers of the spiritualities that transit the universe of midwifery, the so-called Kosmos-Beliefs: "Using God first...", and as points for the construction of this knowledge are the indigenous, African and Catholic influences, and there is also the influence of the "powers of the forest". Midwifery is the teaching of the divine, and accompanied by respect and belief in prayers as those to Santa Margarida, Nossa Senhora do Bom Parto, São Raimundo and São Benedito.

This composition of the Table with Natalia marks this meeting, through the practices of family farming at Coletivo Chaperno, and, also, on the issue of birthing, through the master's research on midwives at Resex Mapuá, Ilha do Marajó, here in Brazil²². Her speech brings her experience with agroecology and the master's research as the field of this deep look at nature and the elderly, older midwives.

The Corpus-Saberes, a set of knowledge that reveals that for traditional midwives, traditional medicine presents the recognition of this nature of midwifery, and the nature of the forest: "this traditional medicine is ours, and our role is to give it its value...", and brought as we pointed out: Medicinal plants and forest resources; create breast milk; cephalic position; strengthen mother's body; illnesses; body or

²² Midwives working in the communities of São Sebastião, Bom Jesus and São Benedito. I work with eight stories of midwives in this locality, emblematic for being "the holder of a rich and complex knowledge", which motivates most researchers on midwifery to build spaces that can dialogue about traditional midwifery. ZÚÑIGA, 2017.

spirit; brokenness, evil eye; dietary restrictions and the transmission of knowledge.

From the transmission of knowledge there is a system that looks to the future, agroecology. And agroecology cannot be done without women or midwives, because they are responsible, in a large part of their communities, for taking care of plants, people, children and “catching the baby” (being a midwife at a birth). Women midwives are responsible for a system of knowledge, and together with the land, they are responsible for processes of collective maintenance and healing, a reality designed in many corners of Brazil and Latin America. This is an association of the role of midwives, as well as the composition of an agroecological system.

As a changing and agroecological system, traditional midwives and young traditional midwives have different attitudes and speak for themselves. They recognize the importance of discussing the profession and the craft, they are willing by their very existence to have the freedom of expression of faith, their spirituality, their politics, and they understand the political meaning of calling themselves a traditional midwife in contemporary society.

These were the junctions of a dialogue between the areas, focused on a common horizon, as there is recognition of social and environmental transformation. The roles played as an educator, agronomist and traditional midwife echo the new movements arising from deep processes in the way we relate to life, the environment, food and the production of social, political and spiritual knowledge. Birthing and birth will be at the center of the discussions.

Final considerations

As a researcher in the field of education and focused on a pedagogy of birthing and birth, I very clearly identify the need to insist on the centrality of Education. It is through education and a pedagogy of birthing and births that we will be able to enter a philosophy of thinking from experience, including the theme of spirituality and existing politics and contributing to a map of the discussion of birthing and birth that considers the changes in time and insertion.

It starts from the experience of the body, of birthing and being born, of the individual desire and of the social coercion to which we are configured in the collective scope. In these aspects of sociological reading, culture and contemporaneity, no personal choice is outside this social disposition.

In this way, it is directed to the field of experiences and encounters of these thematic perspectives for the changing Earth, as we are also interested in morphic fields, and thus ecofeminisms, agroecology and ways of birthing and being born in society are what we configure as idea of the future as humanity, and in this clipping the question is: What about us women? And traditional midwives, how are they?

Reproductive technologies may play a moderate, or controlling role, as the debate progresses. We identified the topics that need more space for debate, since it is not very far to think that there are many diseases resulting from the consumption of pesticides, generating reproductive problems such as prostate and uterine cancer, congenital malformations, etc., and within a problem added to the environment, also the global socioeconomic issue.

On the other hand, the erasure of the role of young traditional midwives, with a transitory purpose, that is, their replacement by obstetrics is not even in line with Odent's vision²³, in chapter 15, "The future of the relationship between midwifery and obstetrics". It reminds us of this risk we take in removing the midwife's role in the future²⁴.

The future of the debate needs to rethink this place of "young" and "traditional midwife", as obstetrics is not the evolution of the midwife's craft. Thus, it does not allow questioning this place of trade, time, space, trajectories and location: Brazil is inserted in a different way from some debates. For this question, to decentralize the idea of what a birth will be like, of how to be born, or not to be born, and about which conditions of these actions will speak much more with interest about us as humanity, we walk toward thinking together with Michel Odent, in "The peasant and the midwife"²⁵, but with reservations from a country like ours – Brazil, and also from Costa Rica, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico.

We've gotten to a deep difficulty in the reading. And how will we allow ourselves to think about birthing and births?²⁶ The most impressive

23 ODENT, 2003.

24 I add a question of perspective as a Brazilian researcher: in this case, it is necessary to pay attention to the role of the young traditional midwife.

25 ODENT, 2003.

26 The questions set out here are part of an exercise that I adopted as a methodology in the workshop practice offered at the XIII Meeting of Feminist Theology of Theology Institutes of RS-Theology in Dialogue with Public Policies in 2018, held at Faculdades EST. The methodology consists of relating the experiences of our stories in common with the individual ones, until we can locate the pedagogical question that should be central to us human beings: How were we born? And it is in the text not yet published: NASCIMENTO, Thayane C. do. The descent to the basement: The search for stories of birthing and births as a reflection of obstetric violence practices, 2018b. [at the press].

thing is the distance with which we treat the subject, as if it were distant from a practice of feminist studies, or even secondary, because we incorporate the separation of integral reading. And who gains from this fragmented reading?

For example, when we are going to address compulsory motherhood in society, how can we not bring up this issue? When we are going to talk about the decriminalization of abortion, how do we allow internalized violence to continue to propagate in the absence of a reading of this body in its entirety with its sexuality, its desires, and the role it chooses to play? Who chooses what is most important?

I had this impact when reading Casilda Rodríguez Bustos, in "Pariremos com Prazer" [We will give birth with pleasure], making the connection between knowing oneself through the functioning of sexuality, pleasure, orgasm and birthing as a space for a body event, which distances itself from libido revitalization.

[...] childbirth with pain is part of patriarchal motherhood, of the farce about which Saú says, of the false mother who is presented to us as the true mother. True motherhood is not slavery, burden or disease, but a pleasurable option for the development of our sexuality and our lives. It's not just about ending the unnecessary pain of childbirth, which as Leboyer says, doesn't satisfy any god.²⁷

The author works with a conception of motherhood that reminds us a lot of the image of Power, of this beginning of the empathic, but not submissive, treatment. And embracing the topic of birthing and birth affects the structures, namely: "**After the destruction of sexuality and**

27 BUSTOS, 2020b, p. 37.

the paralysis of the uterus, spiritual ‘maternal love’ is built, destined, above all, to neutralize and restore the impulses and desires that can prevent the repression and training of creatures.”²⁸ This repressed drive leads us socially to a religious illusion of life, and the arrangements made in the appropriation of these bodies, in which it is allowed in the performance of pain, speciation.

In the book of Genesis, a passage always mentioned for scholars and researchers is: “I will greatly multiply your pain and your conception; in pain you will bring forth children [...]” (Genesis 3:16), as an imperative of this body spied on by sin, this birth is still understood today as a place of suffering. The pain of childbirth, said by those who went through this experience, that there is pain, but that it is not the same, and cannot be equated in the social justification for generating the suffering of women during childbirth, that is, it is not just about an individual issue, but from an attentive and critical look at the collective understood as human, and from this return to what is necessary for us.

For us researchers of ecofeminism, agroecology and education as a field of transformation to study a philosophy contained in the importance that midwifery is for humanity,

The term ‘midwifery’, which refers to the set of knowledge and learning around the knowledge of birthing, refers to different forms of appropriation and to the dialogue that favors the meeting of scientific knowledge with popular knowledge and the exchange between them that can promote the transversality of this knowledge.²⁹

²⁸ BUSTOS, 2020b, p. 109. [Original highlights].

²⁹ NASCIMENTO, 2018a, p. 17.

Of the possible transversalities, I attribute this success in embracing the other trajectories of the women present in the coordination, their personal and intellectual choices and insistencies to compose the meeting of these themes in an innovative way, although late in my view, because there is a link between the themes of ecofeminism, on the topic of agroecology and on birthing and births that speak directly about the eminence of the Earth’s treatment, and our annihilation as a human race, that is, the evidence and need to implement solutions. Both themes are in dialogue which needed the realization of the meeting.

And without losing the dimension of the work that goes into going beyond the existing limits, we created a circle, and within it there was a happy achievement, we escaped the dominant obviousness and took on the place of liberating thinking: breaking chains of a plastered, protocolized and limiting thinking.

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GRANTING OF THE COLLECTIVE TITLE OF *DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA*:

A CELEBRATION OF GENDER JUSTICE¹

Organizing Commission²

Introduction – initial Greeting

In this edition of the Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion we had, for the first time, the granting of the collective title of doctor *honoris causa*, granted to Wanda Deifelt, Nancy Cardoso, Lori Altmann, Maricel Mena-López and Mercedes García Bachmann. The ceremony, like the entire event, was online and took place on August 26, 2021. The ceremonialist was the theology student Samira Rossmann Ramlow.

Despite the physical distance imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused and still causes so much pain and suffering, this was a

special moment of the Congress to warm the hearts of those who accompanied it. We celebrated and rejoiced in the achievements and advances promoted by feminist theology through the lives and work of these five women, honored with the collective title of doctor *honoris causa*. Together, we also announced the construction of gender justice and the dream of new worlds marked by peace and love.

This activity marked the seventy-five years since the founding of Faculdades EST and the thirty years of implementation of the Chair of Feminist Theology at that institution. Over these three decades, the activities carried out through the Chair have had an impact on the theological training of undergraduate and graduate students, on the life of the Church and its communities, and on the political and social sphere in Brazil and internationally. Several studies show these impacts and account for a solid and respected production that, today, is part of

¹ Translated by Marie Krahn.

² The organizing Commission was made up of members of the Gender Research Nucleus and the Gender and Religion Program of Faculdades EST: Dr. André S. Muszkopf, Dr. Edla Eggert, Dr. Marcia Blasi, Dr. Marli Brun, MA. Sabrina Senger, MA. Selenir Corrêa Gonçalves Kronbauer. Text was edited by Dr. Daniéli Busanello Krob.

the identity of Faculdades EST and the IECLB³. Through the Gender and Religion Program and the Gender Research Nucleus, this heritage continues to live and renew itself in the face of transformations and changes, proving to be relevant.

We thank all the people who worked, contributed and were willing to build this moment that was so meaningful for all of us. Many people and organizations were present at the ceremony: Faculdades EST Board of Directors; Representatives of the Swedish Church Act; LWF – Lutheran World Federation; IECLB – Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil; ACT Alliance; Lutheran Women’s Forum; National Association of Oase; Network of Women and Gender Justice in Latin America and the Caribbean; Lutheran Foundation of Diakonia – COMIN – CAPA; Solidarity and Fair Trade Network; Northeast Diakonia; Editora Sinodal [Sinodal Publisher]; DEI – Ecumenical Research Department; Colégio Sinodal; Synodical Education Network; ISAEC – Synodical Institution for Assistance, Education and Culture; Rio dos Sinos Synod; Northeast Gaucho Synod; IFSUL – Federal Institute of Education of Sapucaia do Sul; PPL – Popular Lutheran Ministry; SEPOM – Secretariat of Policies for Women of São Leopoldo; COMDIM – São Leopoldo Municipal Council of Policies for Women; CPT – Pastoral Land Commission; CEBI – Ecumenical Center for Biblical Studies; Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago; Department of Anthropology and Archeology of the Institute of Human Sciences of the Graduate Program in Anthropology (PPGANT) of the Federal University of Pelotas; Brazilian Association of Anthropology; Theological Seminary of the Methodist University of

Angola; Latin America and Caribbean Coordination of the South Jubilee Network; Universidad Santo Tomás, Colombia, Division of Philosophy and Theology; Luther College; and sister churches in Latin America.

Composition of the space of honor

The ceremony’s space of honor was composed of the following authorities: Wilhelm Wachholz – Rector of Faculdades EST; Marli Brun and Sabrina Senger – coordinators of the Gender and Religion Program at Faculdades EST; Silvia Beatrice Genz – Pastor President of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil – IECLB; Marcia Blasi – Executive of the Women’s Justice and Empowerment Program of the Lutheran World Federation and leader of the Gender Research Nucleus at Faculdades EST; and Adriana Gastellu – representative of the Swedish Church.

Welcoming moment

Pastor Doctor Marli Brun, from the Coordination of the Gender and Religion Program, hosted the event. In the words of Marli:

“[...] At the opening of the VII Congress, we said that the word courage encourages us to tell our story with all our hearts. My question for you is: What is your story? Or rather, your stories? What is your history of communal resistance to oppressive powers? In 2016, 2017, even earlier, we held many Cafés with Katharina. Through them we told stories of women from the Protestant Reformation movement in the 16th and 17th centuries. In fact, together with the ladies of OASE, we recorded

³ See more in: MUSSKOPF, André S. *Teologia feminista e de gênero na Faculdades EST. A construção de uma área do conhecimento*. São Leopoldo: CEBI, 2014.

in a book, in written and embroidered form, the stories we learned and told. In one of the cafés, after the theatrical performance, a lady said: ‘First, we learned from you that in the Bible there are many stories of women. And now you help us get to know the women of the Reformation. The only one we knew a little bit was Katharina von Bora.’ This speech shows the contribution that the feminist movement and feminist theology are making in the life of faith in communities. Now they know that in the Bible, in different movements, at all times, women are present and make history. And we tell these stories and ours to celebrate, transform and generate movements for justice and love. Feminist theology provokes us to stop to listen to the stories and learn about the experiences of people who suffer prejudice and discrimination, as well as to perceive the presence of God where we did not see it before. I conclude by remembering that on a certain occasion Jesus was not arrested because the guards who went to him to arrest him did not, because they discovered that Jesus was in favor of life. This story is written in the Gospel of John, chapter 7. Today, we are here to celebrate stories of life, of sharing knowledge, courage, creativity and faith. In their stories, our stories [...]”

Presentation of the honorees

In the spirit of feminist theology, the honorary doctorate was awarded collectively to Wanda Deifelt, Nancy Cardoso, Lori Altmann, Maricel Mena-López and Mercedes García Bachmann. Master in Theology Selenir Corrêa Gonçalves Kronbauer introduced the honorees.

Wanda Deifelt was the first professor responsible for the Chair of Feminist Theology at Faculdades EST. Her solid academic background

and her pastoral experience, together with her inviting teaching attitude and her epistemological curiosity focused on the themes of feminist theology, helped to consolidate what theology students of the 1980s carried out when they demanded the Chair of Feminist Theology. She led the creation of the Gender Research Nucleus in 1999, one of the oldest groups in the Graduate Program in Theology at Faculdades EST linked to CNPq and which has organized, since 2004, the Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion. She served as theological advisor to the National Council of Christian Churches during the Ecumenical Decade of Solidarity of Churches with Women, the World Council of Churches, and the Lutheran World Federation. Wanda is currently a professor in the Department of Religion at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, USA..

Lori Altmann wrote the first student-produced work on feminist theology available in the Faculdades EST Library. She began her undergraduate studies in Theology at Escola Superior de Teologia – EST, after completing the undergraduate program in Language Studies (Licenciate). At the time (1974), there were no ordained women in the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil. She was a member of the Women’s Group at Faculdades EST and promoter of studies on women in ordained ministry. She was the first EST student to articulate and carry out the Theology internship among indigenous peoples, in 1977. She graduated in Theology in 1982 and was ordained pastor of the IECLB in 1990, which took place during a meeting of the Mission Council among Indigenous Peoples. She worked for the IECLB among the Suruí (Paiter) of Rondônia and among the Kulina (Madija) of Acre and, for COMIN, on the Urban Indigenous Project. She holds a master’s

degree in Sciences of Religion from the Instituto Metodista de Ensino Superior, a Master's degree in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and a Ph.D. in Theology from the Graduate Program at Faculdades EST. Currently, she is a professor at the Federal University of Pelotas and leader and researcher of the Nucleus of Amerindian Ethnology – NETA.

Nancy Cardoso is co-founder of the Mandrágora Gender and Religion Study Group/NETMAL, created in 1989 at the Methodist University of São Paulo. She holds a degree in Theology from Faculdades Integradas Benett (1987) and a Licentiate degree in Philosophy from the Methodist University of Piracicaba. She is a Master and Doctor in Religious Sciences from UMESP and has a postdoctoral degree in Ancient History from Unicamp. She is one of the formulators of the Popular and Feminist Reading of the Bible, working at the Ecumenical Center for Biblical Studies / CEBI and at the Revista de Interpretação Bíblica Latino-Americana, as well as at the Pastoral Land Commission / CPT. From her work with landless, peasant, riverine, quilombola and indigenous groups and communities, she has formulated a feminist agro-ecothology. She has collaborated with Faculdades EST over the years in various activities and has participated in all editions of the Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion. She is a professor in the Graduate Program of Studies in Religion at the Methodist University of Angola.

Maricel Mena-López is the first black theologian to receive the title of Doctor of Theology in Latin America. She carried out her first studies in Colombia and, at the age of 19, began her Licentiate in Religious Sciences at the Pontifical Javeriana University. In Brazil, she did a Master's

and Doctorate in Religious Sciences at the Methodist University of São Paulo. She obtained her post-doctoral internship at Faculdades EST, working with the Grupo Identidade and at the Gender Research Nucleus, and contributed greatly to the Latin American Congresses of Gender and Religion. She was a member of the Atabaque Teologia Negra group and was coordinator for Latin America of the Feminist Theology Program of the Ecumenical Association of Theologians of the Third World. She currently lives in Colombia, working as a Professor at Universidad Santo Tomás, in Bogotá. She is a Senior Conciencias researcher and leader of the research group Gustavo Gutiérrez – Teología Latinoamericana at Universidad Santo Tomás.

Mercedes Garcia Bachmann was the second ordained pastor of the United Evangelical Church (IELU) in Argentina. She received a degree in Theology from the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos-ISEDET and a Doctorate in Bible from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. She preached at the closing service of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly, in Curitiba, in 1990, in which she was a youth delegate, and participated in a hermeneutic study group that prepared the LWF Assembly in Namibia, in 2017. She is the only woman with a doctorate in Bible teaching at a training center of one of the LWF member Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean, and is director of the Institute for Contextual Ministry, which trains lay and ordained leaders of her church. She was a professor at ISEDET from 1999 to 2016 and her work has been recognized by training institutions in the United States and Europe, where she has been a visiting professor. She is a great supporter and collaborator of the Women's Network of Lutheran Churches part of the LWF and is a reference in the ecumenical world

for her formation deeply rooted and contextualized in the base of faith communities in Latin America.

Greetings

The rector of Faculdades EST, Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Wachholz, gave a greeting on behalf of the institution. In the words of Wachholz:

“[...] Even though times are tough, faith helps us keep hope alive. In Brazil, according to official figures, around 600,000 people lost their lives due to the coronavirus pandemic. The spread of denialist ideas contributes to Brazil being the epicenter of the world pandemic. Another reason that saddens us is the strengthening of Christian fundamentalism, as it happens in Brazil and throughout Latin America, and also of Islamic fundamentalism, as we see in Afghanistan. Where fundamentalism prevails, women’s rights as well as human rights are denied. Faculdades EST bases its educational action on the gospel of Jesus Christ, which articulates the Lutheran confessionality in an ecumenical perspective. Therefore, it is an institution that excels in cultivating a spirituality in which people are freely invited to live God’s love in their personal, professional and social relationships. Based on its philosophical, theological and educational assumptions, it contributes to a democratic, pluralist and solidary society with all people, especially those who are in a situation of greater social vulnerability [...] In 1952, the first woman began her studies at the institution. However, it was only from the 1970s onwards that a greater number of women began to study theology. In this context, women themselves began to research the presence of women in the Bible, recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. These and other studies and research carried out in Brazil and abroad, based on the experience of women, give rise to Feminist Theology. That

is, women, from their theological work, in the Lutheran and ecumenical context, among other issues, understood that being a person justified by faith makes it possible to assume the vocation both in the general priesthood of all believing people, as well as in the ordained ministry. Thanks to the women’s movement, in the ecclesial and social sphere, in 1982, for the first time, a woman was ordained as a minister of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil. Pastor Edna Moga Ramminger, whom we remember in memoriam, graduated from Faculdades EST and was ordained in the Community in Colorado do Oeste, Rondônia. Today’s celebration is beautiful because it’s a celebration of life, built through a joint effort. It is a festivity that celebrates knowledge and the contribution of feminist theology in the defense and affirmation of women’s rights and in the construction of just gender relations. It is a celebration that recognizes that no form of prejudice and discrimination should prevent baptized people from assuming their vocation to which they were called by God. [...]”

Master in Theology, Sabrina Senger spoke on behalf of the Gender and Religion Program, the Gender Research Nucleus and the Coordination of the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion at Faculdades EST:

“[...] What a joy to meet together on this night of witness and proclamation. Through this ceremony, we affirm the power of diversity. In the construction of Feminist Theology, we were and are students, readers, poets, housewives, activists, lovers, researchers, ministers, prophetesses. Each one in her own way... And several times we disagree, argue, provoke, celebrate in an intense movement of commitment to a dignified and just life. This diversity marks us. It marks our individual experiences, but it also marks our collective experience in building the history of these 30 years of Feminist Theology. Wanda, Lori, Nancy,

Maricel and Mercedes! Companions! We continue together and it is an honor and a pleasure to walk with you!”

The *honoris causa* Doctorate title, according to article 136, item III, of the Faculdades EST Regulation, is offered to imminent personalities who have distinguished themselves for their activities in favor of knowledge, the human cause or better understanding between peoples. Its purpose is to publicly recognize the contribution of people in the exercise of their profession, service provided to the community or engagement and defense of a cause in a meaningful and lasting way.

Considering that the year 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of the implementation of the Chair of Feminist Theology, and in view of the persistent and worrying gender inequalities, Faculdades EST collectively grants the title of honorary doctorate. Feminist theology recognizes that women’s experiences are diverse and determined by various issues such as origin, social class, race and ethnicity, religious affiliation. Historically, it has been built with different theoretical and methodological contributions that emerge both from women’s concrete experiences and from their diversity.

All those honored with the collective title of honorary doctorate were and are related to Faculdades EST, contributing to the consolidation of this area of knowledge and its implications for life in society and in the Church. To celebrate and honor feminist theology at EST is to celebrate the multiple contributions these women represent. The collective project that these women represent is a feminist theology that recognizes individual and specific perspectives and crosses these borders to articulate a theological production that reflects not only individualities,

but the possibility of dialogue between them and the construction of alternatives from this dialogue.

Laudatio

Prof. Dr. Edla Eggert read the *Laudatio*:

“We would like to thank Dr. Wanda Deifelt for her life, for the inviting learnings and the epistemological challenges focused on research topics with women. We praise the many fruits of research, classes and extension courses, in the commitment to a dignified life for women and for all people. We are grateful for the life of Dr. Lori Altmann, who directed her strength and creativity and life into communal interaction and pastoral and scientific work, and continues to work, along with themes related to indigenous, Brazilian and Latin American peoples. We bless the life of Dr. Nancy Cardoso and ask that she remain firm in her boldness and insight in the fight for land for peasant and quilombola people and for an environment that is cared for with dignity. May the popular and feminist reading of the Bible remain firm and strong. We commend the life of Dr. Maricel Mena Lopes, who with her background in theological studies puts her creative energy into producing Black, Afro-Caribbean Theology, including a popular, Black feminist reading of the Bible. We thank God for the life of Dr. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann who, with her studies and research, encourages the network of women in Lutheran churches for an ecumenical world and a magisterium deeply rooted and contextualized at the base of faith communities in Latin America. We bless and ask God: Guide these doctors on the creative paths of a dignified and decolonized life of the Afro-Caribbean and Latin American people. May peace, sharing and a dignified life accompany you all. In the name of the Mother and

Father who cares, of the Spirit who blows wherever it wants and of the Son who fought for a dignified life.”

Discourse of the honorees

The honorees also spoke, in a beautiful gesture, one to the other. Wanda Deifelt said to Lori Altmann:

“In 1980, when I was 17 years old and just beginning my studies at the Theological Seminary in São Leopoldo, Lori Altmann was already an icon. At the time, she and her husband Roberto Zwetsch were working as missionaries among the Suruí (Paíter) people. I read the reflections with great enthusiasm and admired the images of the work report published by her and Roberto. My eyes were opened to a concept of mission that is not imposition, but communal interaction, and a reading of Christianity that does not reduce God to the European and Western world but finds the sacred in the midst of daily and community struggles. In my naive view, mission was conversion and, among indigenous peoples, this could only mean submission to European Christianity. What a paradigm shift it was to realize that the pastoral and missionary task was not to bring God to the village because God was already there, present, but that the task was to live God, discovering (as in unveiling and revealing) this God in other languages and cultures. Lori was the first EST student to carry out her internship among indigenous peoples (1977) and worked for the IECLB among the Suruí (Paíter) of Rondônia, among the Kulina (Madija) of Acre and for COMIN in the Urban Indigenous Project. More recently, as a professor at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPel), she is a researcher at the Nucleus of Amerindian Ethnology – NETA (DAA, ICH, UFPel). Along with Roberto, Pama, Binô and Daniel (who is no longer among us), Lori’s family has always personified for me the commitment to justice, solidarity and

tenderness. If I had to sum up Lori’s commitment to work and life in one word, it would be communal interaction. It may seem peculiar, given that my relationship with Lori has always been marked by transience, between our many comings and goings. That’s why I say communal interaction in the sense of having a life in common and being close (instead of being physically close). Lori is an anthropologist with whom I share many interests, including a passion for other languages (see the beautiful work ‘Kulina interpretations on health/disease processes’ in the collection *À flor da pele*, published by NPG). We worked together in 2013 at the Making Gender International Seminar, with a thematic symposium on Gender and Religion: spaces, displacements and construction of identity. I always learn from her again and again that what is different is not exotic, that alterity is not hierarchical, and that the personal is not dissociated from the cultural. In her academic, personal and family trajectory, Lori is characterized by integrity, collegiality, intellectual curiosity and altruism. I am grateful for the impact she had and continues to have on my life.”

Lori Altmann, in turn, said to Nancy Cardoso:

“Colleagues, friends, people who, through this virtual medium, accompany us from near and far. This collective title of Doctor Honoris Causa, as I understand it, is a tribute not only to us: Nancy, Maricel, Wanda, Mercedes and me. It is more collective and involves a multitude of women and some men who studied at Faculdades EST and who followed different paths. It was women who fought for the implementation of the Chair of Feminist Theology, which has already completed 30 years in this Institution, and who built the Gender Research Nucleus (NPG). They also created the Gender and Religion Program (PGR) and participated in the organization and holding of the Latin American Congresses on Gender and Religion. They are women who helped build and qualify, through their research and practices, Feminist

Theologies and Gender Studies in this institution, as well as contributing to gender justice in the church and society. I mention some of them: Marga, Mara, Claudete, Anete, Nívia, Edla, Márcia, Marli, Elaine, Selenir, Sabrina, Rosânela, Renate, Cledes, Daniéli, Zarái, Luciana, Carolina, Regene, Marla and many others that I will not mention so as not to commit the gaffe of forgetting someone. It fell to me to talk about my dear Nancy. I met her at the Ecumenical Postgraduate Institute (IEPG), at the Methodist University, in São Bernardo do Campo / SP, when she was studying for her Master's in Religious Sciences. We participated together in the creation of NETMAL – Nucleus of Theological Studies of Women in Latin America and Mandrágora Journal. I met up with her, after some time, providing consulting for our National Meeting of Women of the PPL – Popular Lutheran Ministry. It was a remarkable consultancy, where she made us reflect singing and dancing to the song 'Malandragem' by Cássia Eller. I think that irreverence and conviction are two words that express Nancy's characteristics well and that I identified in her action and in her texts. What impresses me about her performance is precisely her commitment and how she is always immersed in the life and movements of women and the struggle for land with peasant, indigenous, quilombola, riverside communities through her engagement in the CPT – Pastoral Land Commission. Much of her work is not seen, as it does not circulate in conventional academic circles. A lot of people don't understand what she writes, because they don't know her tireless effort of reflection based on practice. In institutional and academic terms, her passion has always been to work with the Bible and Theology. It was not by chance that she became famous as a 'Bible teacher', both in academia and in popular and grassroots movements, here and abroad. The dimension of denunciation is very present in Nancy. She has identified and denounced the polarization that has recently installed itself in Brazilian society with the current Bolsonaro government and that so much damage has caused to the most vulnerable social groups. She did her Master's and Doctorate in

Sciences of Religion. She has been a Methodist pastor for 35 years. For the past 25 years, she has been a member of the Pastoral Land Commission, a commission linked to the CNBB of the Catholic Church, but which has an enviable ecumenical openness. The CPT assumes, as an organ of churches, the issue of conflicts related to land, always in defense of the rights of small and landless people. There she forged her experience with peasant movements in Brazil, especially with peasant women and their specific demands. For Nancy, feminist theology is this personal and collective voice of groups of women, whether in society or in churches. She understands that feminism in Latin America is always plural. According to her, the feminist movement has the vision and perception that there is a task of popular education, of massification and of having a tie to class. For this reason, she has been pointing out the intersectionalities of gender, class, race, with the emphasis expressed in the motto: 'Diverse, but not dispersed'. Nancy, friend and journeying partner, it is a joy to be with you and our colleagues on this very special night.!"

Nancy Cardoso said to Maricel Mena-López:

"The first text I read by Maricel when we were still students at the Methodist [University] of São Paulo was a text about the book of Ruth in the 1995 *Mosaicos da Bíblia* journal – a black feminist reading... Maricel spoke of the resistance of the cimarronas [runaway enslaved women]. She articulated the resistance of the book of Ruth with the cimarronaje – a process of resistance against the colonial system that is still updated today in the struggle of black women in Colombia. Maricel says that enslaved women became cimarrons when, alone or accompanied, they left the masters' farm in the fight against mistreatment, exploitation and punishment. The Cimarron women – like the quilombolas in Brazil – carried out various functions – agricultural work, mining and all the work in the house. In the religious field, they

were worthy of admiration and credibility because of their powers and links with their ancestors: they manufactured fetishes that served as religious protectors in cases of danger... thus conserving and recreating the African spirituality: they are healers and mothers of saint, becoming, in this way, the fundamental element of identity conservation. Maricel's exegetical, political and poetic study marked me and accompanied me in my work with peasant women: I always saw myself – in the CPT, in land conflicts – face to face with black women and their mistreatment, their powers, their fetishes and spirituality of healing, of santería, of multiple knowledge. And this text by Maricel has always accompanied me and illuminated the path. This is Maricel's theology and her life story: woman theologian, teacher, popular educator, articulator of spaces for popular reading of the Bible and black theology. Woman of fetishes and santerías! Resistant, Powerful: Cimarronous Theology for the Struggle and Honor of Black Women. Memory of the ancestors, courage made rebelliousness and hope. Maricel's theology is intellectual resistance, it is based on ancestral knowledge and other epistemologies that are so important in anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-fascist feminist struggles in Colombia, Brazil and Latin America and the Caribbean... Always remembering that we feminists: we are many and diverse, still unequal, but not dispersed! That's why it's a joy to celebrate Maricel's life in this collective, all of us repeating almost as if it were 2 Corinthians 6: For honor or for dishonor, very badly reputed or of good fame; as deceitful but being bold and true; unknown, but being well known; time and again they almost kill us, but we're still alive; saddened sometimes, but always happy; poor, but sharing what we are; we have nothing, but we share everything! I'll say like Ruth: Maricel, let me go with you!"

Maricel Mena-López spoke the following words to Mercedes García Bachmann:

"Thanks Nancy. I don't know with what words I'm going to introduce Mercedes after these marvelous words you spoke. First of all, I would like to say that I am a disciple of all of you. I'm here because you, at some point in life, believed in me. Thank you. Gratitude to the deities who accompany us. But now I will present Mercedes in Spanish: When I met Mercedes in 2003 during one of the annual meetings of the *Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latinoamericana*, I confess that my joy was immense because until then I only knew her writings, and that was the first time I participated in this space of select Latin American Biblical scholars. I came across her works during my postgraduate studies in Sao Paulo, in the 1990s, and at that time she was already an important reference for Latin American biblical and feminist exegesis. News reached there of her important work as one of the co-founders of the ISEDET Gender and Theology Forum, a space that quickly became an umbrella for various activities with cutting-edge themes on feminism, gender including masculinities, queer studies, ecofeminism. Three years after meeting her, I had the opportunity to finally arrive at ISEDET and participate in one of the Carnahan chairs. I was surprised by her ant-like work in event logistics and I soon understood that, in addition to being academic, another of her strengths was generating spaces. participation and empowerment of other people, especially women and young theologians. I also felt like one of her disciples whom she empowered, on some occasions she invited me to events where Mercedes was positioned as one more student. I was greatly surprised by her generosity and I soon understood that this was part of her being as a woman, that it was the female sorority made flesh. She also invited me to participate in publications in the United States, knowing the limitation that Latin Americans have in writing a good quality text in English, and generously translated the texts, with the hope that other Latin Americans would begin to be known beyond the Spanish speaking world. From her writings, I highlight her originality, her capacity for autonomy in the face of traditional biblical studies carried out by

men from other continents. She undoubtedly left traces as a teacher of Biblical Hebrew and the Old Testament in her disciples who love and admire her and continue her legacy as theologians or feminist biblical scholars in Argentina and in other parts of the world.”

Finally, Mercedes García Bachmann spoke to Wanda Deifelt:

“Not long ago, the Gender and Religion Program and the Gender Research Nucleus of the Faculdades EST invented a measure for solidary human warmth, with a gender and class perspective. Since they didn’t announce it that way, I don’t know what you would call it in São Leopoldo, although we know that they generate it daily. I named it Solifem, for feminist solidarity. With this honorable distinction, which I am very grateful for, you have sent each of us a huge measure of Solifem. Thank you, Faculdades EST! These weeks I have also thought and thanked God for the thousands of Solifem shared throughout life, without which we would not be here today. Apparently, we have passed many of these same Solifem to other people as well, publishing, researching, creating spaces and chairs, tutoring, teaching, conversing—even swallowing frogs (do you know the expression?); sometimes it is necessary to leave in order to return renewed, other times it is necessary to stay and resist obstinately, as we heard at the opening of this congress. I learned a lot of this from you, Wanda. I am going to tell you about some of the teachings of Dr. Wanda Deifelt. I still remember when she told me that the first year of academic management she stopped writing, the second year she stopped reading... I’ll just say that she was right. Not being able to do things halfway—we wouldn’t be allowed either—we have left a lot behind for our ministries, because along with the management and teaching that we committed to at some point in our academic life, we continue to accompany other women in their feminist processes. And it’s a good dose of Solifem when someone recognizes not the achievements, but the price paid. The Carnahan Lectures sponsored by

ISEDET for decades were crowned by Wanda’s Lectures on Women in 16th-Century Reformation, which not only gave us the opportunity to exchange Solifem (or weave webs, if you like it better), but also gave us the chance to learn quality feminist Lutheran theology. Furthermore, for many women in the churches they were an important source of reaffirmation, of Solifem. Finally, I have been able to get to know another side of Wanda, related to her pastoral work at Luther College. Not long ago, teaching for the Lutheran School in Theology in Chicago, LSTC, I learned of a couple of students today preparing for the ministry thanks to Wanda’s encouragement and her respective pastoral vocation. This marriage bears witness to Wanda’s role as a youth tutor. Wanda Deifelt is a woman and a theologian to whom Divine Wisdom has given abundant gifts. I thank you Wanda. And I thank you, Lori, Maricel, Nancy and so many people who generate Solifem at Faculdades EST for being able to walk with you a part of my life.”

After the pronouncements of the honorees, we still had the transmission of a video with various expressions and congratulations, from dear people and impacted by the life and work of Lori, Maricel, Wanda, Nancy and Mercedes. The ceremony is available, in its entirety, on the official channel of Faculdades EST, on YouTube⁴.

Thanks and best wishes (blessing)

We close this brief report with the words of Pastor Dr. Marcia Blasi, Executive of the Women’s Justice and Empowerment Program

⁴ Access: GRANTING OF THE collective title of Doctorate Honoris Causa | Outorga de Doutorado Honoris Causa. Published by Faculdades EST OFICIAL, São Leopoldo, 26 Aug. 2021. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6NoAAA_9oM&ab_channel=FaculdadesESTOFICIAL. Accessed on: 3 Oct. 2022.

at the Lutheran World Federation and leader of the Gender Research Nucleus at Faculdades EST:

“May Divine Wisdom blow and carry you through the spirals of life like a dandelion. May it sometimes blow hard and inspire the courage needed to resist, resist, resist. May Divine Wisdom gently blow colors, smells, flavors, inspiring creativity, afternoon rest in the hammock. And may you feel light and dance, dreaming and creating new worlds. May Divine Wisdom surround you with affection, with care, with hope. You are blessed, may you be blessed, you will be blessed every day by God who is life and justice. Amen.”

Despite the limitations of technology and social distancing, this was a very meaningful night for all of us. We thank all the people who

accompanied us and congratulate Wanda Deifelt, Lori Altmann, Nancy Cardoso, Maricel Mena-López and Mercedes Garcia Bachmann for the recognition expressed in this collective title of doctor *honoris causa*.

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MOMENTS OF SPIRITUALITY AT THE VII LATIN AMERICAN CONGRESS ON GENDER AND RELIGION¹

Samira Rossmann Ramlow²

Felipe Hobus Vollrath³

With the isolation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, other forms of spirituality had to emerge. In this Congress we had the opportunity to experience being in communion at a distance, virtually. Our challenge was to have a moment when we could celebrate life, strengthen the faith and inspire our feminist theological work with Courage, Creativity and Hope.

An opportunity brought by digital media was the integration of people from far away in the team that organized these moments. Just as our Latin America is plural, these moments of spirituality were able to

encompass other faces and other ways of celebrating and living the faith. Therefore, in a prophetic way, the themes were chosen from the example of biblical women who inspired us to look at our contexts and reaffirm our commitment to justice and liberation from all forms of oppression.

So that these moments could happen, we gathered, from Brazil: Ketlin Laís Schuchardt, P. Antônio Carlos Oliveira, Eriksson Mateus Tomaselli, Felipe Hobus Vollrath, Cat. Louis Marcelo Illenseer and Samira Rossmann Ramlow; from Mexico: P. Ángela Trejo Haager and Liturgist Betty Hernández; from Honduras: Musician Soraya Heinrich Eberle; and from Germany: P. Agnes Müller-Gruenwedel, to reflect on the themes and propose liturgies. After jointly defining the framework and deliberating on technical and media issues, the team was divided into three groups to design and conduct each day's meditations.

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In this way, we brought aspirations, experiences, stories, and we were connected – through the internet – and through the Divine Ruah, which has driven us and continues to drive us to do feminist theology in collective work. Like the Dandelion, from near or far we continue to spread the seeds of peace and justice, in the hope of new times.

The general coordination of the “Moments of Spirituality” of the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion was carried out by Samira Rossmann Ramlow, Felipe Hobus Vollrath and Soraya Heinrich Eberle. Video editing was done by Felipe Hobus Vollrath.

LITURGY OF THE FIRST DAY

Liturgical team: P. Agnes Müller-Gruenwedel, P. Antonio Carlos Oliveira, MA. Ketlin Laís Schuchardt

Welcome

Welcome!

With great joy and gratitude, we welcome you and greet you to experience with us the moments of spirituality of the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion. This year, in a different way.

The year 2021 arrived with emergencies, changes, needs, dreams and desires. In everyday life, we experienced the worst health crisis in recent times: the Covid-19 pandemic and, along with it, we experienced the pain of deaths, the growth of cases of different types of violence and the widening of inequalities. In an act of love and care for life, we

needed to cancel our meetings and reinvent ourselves into the virtual world.

Today it is not possible for us to feel the warmth of hugs, walk through the EST Campus and feel the breeze as we head towards the spaces where people, flavors and knowledge meet. On the other hand, networks of support, reception, solidarity, denunciation and resistance were created, strengthened and expanded, building new possibilities for social, cultural and religious organization, reaching people and places that were previously unimaginable.

We invite you to take part in joint walks that help us to nourish and reinvigorate our commitment to justice, respect and a dignified life. That here we may meet, strengthen ourselves and dream with courage, creativity and hope.

Prayer⁴

Let us bow our hearts to God in this moment of prayer: God of love and goodness, we thank you for the life and sustenance we receive from you. We thank you because our paths and ways of following life are different, but the blessing of being able to draw close to you is shared in the certainty that you welcome us, listen to, free and save us. We begin, O God, a trajectory here. God bless our activities, may this be a time of courage, creativity and hope for us. Stay with us, touch our hearts, open our minds, reform our actions. Through Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns today and for all eternity. Amen!

⁴ Daniela Christ, Bachelor student in Theology of the Faculdades EST – Brazil.

Biblical-theological reflection

Jesus had left Galilee and was on his way to Tyre and Sidon, lands that belonged to Syria, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. He and the disciples were in foreign lands, where because of the high taxes levied by the authorities, peasant people survived in conditions of poverty and hunger. A Canaanite woman, that is, a woman who did not belong to the Jewish tradition, a foreigner, a Gentile, came to Jesus, crying out. Perhaps taken by despair and hope, fear and trust, the woman had the courage to speak and express the situation that caused her pain and suffering.

Let's hear the Canaanite woman's voice: *I had heard a lot about this Jesus. I knew that he had already helped many people, that he had healed sick people, demoniacs... I also knew that he was telling people about God and that he was caring about people, even those who were being left out by the other people. I knew that only he could help me and my daughter, Jesus the Lord, the Son of David. I knew I needed to talk to him to save my daughter. And at the same time I was so scared. But fear and courage are closely related. I felt the fear and at the same time had the courage to overcome it. I left home, I looked for Jesus on his way, I spoke to him for help.*

To reflect: Why are you on the way? What makes you keep walking? What are your requests for Jesus?

Jesus, at first, hears the woman and is silent. Bothered and embarrassed by the silence of Jesus and the unceasing cries, the disciples asked: Send her away! Jesus then initiates a theological

conversation with the woman and answers her harshly: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". This speech by Jesus seems to reiterate the perspective, very present at the time, of the exclusivity of Jesus' attention to a single people. It seems that the message of a universal kingdom was still too revolutionary and too frightening. However, with courage and daring, the woman was not discouraged. She then knelt before Jesus and cried out for help. Faced with the woman's action, Jesus responds even more harshly. He used an offensive metaphor to convince her to let them go their way without further fanfare. Jesus says: It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

Let's hear the voice of the Canaanite woman: *Jesus didn't want to help me. He refused to help me. I had so much hope in him. And now? "Lord, help me!" I cried. And he? He humiliated me, compared me to a dog, an unclean animal! It wasn't what I expected from him. At first, I felt powerless. But suddenly I felt a great strength within me. I felt like I had to fight for my daughter. I didn't want him to humiliate me. I felt he wasn't right, that God had sent him to me too, to help my daughter. Thinking about dogs, a thought came to me, and I said: But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall under their owners' table.*

To reflect: How are we organizing or how do we want to organize ourselves to resist hard answers and fight privileges? How do we announce and witness that justice, love and the right to a dignified life are for all people?

Proving to be the bearer of a remarkable and transforming faith, the woman, even humiliated, recreated the speech and reacted with

her argumentative power. She knew her origin and her condition. She didn't expect to be a part of the feast, but she trusted and hoped that even the crumbs of God's blessings were enough to save her daughter. She then reasoned: But the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables. Even under the table, the little dogs also share in the abundance of the house. The woman's argument convinces Jesus and she receives what she asks: O woman, great is your faith. Be done to you as you wish.

Let's hear the voice of the Canaanite woman: *But the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables. Even under the table the little dogs also participate in the abundance of the house. I spoke these words. And at the same moment I couldn't even breathe. What was going to happen now? Something happened to Jesus. I saw it in his eyes. And what happened next I didn't think was going to be possible. He took me seriously, agreed with me, changed his mind. I felt a lightness, I knew that my daughter was saved. And I was full of hope: if a master listens to me like this, to me, a simple woman, a foreigner, a gentile, if he lets himself be convinced by me, takes me seriously... then a change is possible. If we follow his example, we can change our relationships. So there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews, between slaves and free people, between men and women: they are all one because they are united with Christ Jesus* (cf. Gal 3.28).

To reflect: Changing concepts, ideas and thoughts broaden horizons, and Jesus wasn't afraid to do that. What changes have been a

sign of hope for your trajectory? The encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman was transformative for both the woman and Jesus. What transformative encounters did you seek at this Congress?

Blessing

Dandelion

Humble majesty

Resistant, powerful, independent

it crowns the streets yellowing them

the wind carries the seeds

flying, spreading, seeking

new paths

in a breath

God bless you

God strengthen you with resistance and independence

May the divine breath take you on new paths

May the divine breath make your thoughts fly, spread, in freedom.

Amen

LITURGY OF THE SECOND DAY

Liturgical team: Musician Soraya Eberle, Liturgist Betty Hernández, Pastor Ángela Trejo Haager, Catechist Louis Marcelo Illenseer

Welcome⁵

Welcome to this second day of our congress. We continue to meditate on how difficult it has been to live for a year, eight months, with a virus that has changed our dynamics of life. For a few months humanity stayed practically still trying to mitigate the advance of such an aggressive virus. But such a situation could not be sustained for a long time, not everyone has the same chances of staying at home resisting, the lack of work to cover essential needs has forced them to leave home, the country. In the case of migrants, the pandemic found many on the road, thousands of kilometers from their families, totally unprotected. Can we imagine the anguish, the fear that thousands of migrants have experienced during this long time? How many of them will have gotten sick or, perhaps, died during the journey? Maybe we'll never know.

The first day we were invited to carry out a “joint walk” during these days of the congress. Today we want to invite you to take that walk with the migrants. We invite you to put on your shoes or your sandals, or walk completely barefoot; with the desire to, even from a distance, be in solidarity with them, strengthen and give hope to their lives.

⁵ Musician Soraya Eberle.

The story of a migrant, Rogelia⁶

It was a cold Saturday morning. It was winter, that winter so characteristic of a city located near the sea, with winds so intense that they manage to topple palm trees, with light rain but, with the wind, it hits hard; and the tremendous humidity that penetrates to the bones. On a Saturday when you felt like staying home, going outside was not a good option. At that time we lived in the pastoral house located on the temple grounds. It was there that my husband and I had our first encounter with the issue of migrants.

That morning, when we opened the door of the house, we found a woman sitting on one of the steps of the main entrance, she was wearing very light clothes, it was obvious that they did not give her the necessary heat to withstand the storm. We observed that she was carrying in her arms a small bundle wrapped in her shawl. We asked her if we could help her with something, she asked if we would allow her to stay there while the rain calmed down, to which we answered yes, but that it was better for her to go inside. As soon as she entered the house we realized that the woman's face looked very tired, exhausted, and that the “bulge” that she covered with her shawl was a small baby. Immediately, I invited her to breakfast, she quickly answered yes. While she ate breakfast, my daughter offered to watch the little girl. After breakfast, she recovered her strength and began to tell part of her story.

Her name was Rogelia, she was from a country in Central America, she was on her way to the United States of America (USA), where her brother lived with whom she would meet at the border.

⁶ Liturgist Betty Hernández.

She was undocumented just like her brother. She had been traveling for many months, sometimes accompanied by others but most of the time alone. She had given birth to her child somewhere along the way a month ago. Without having the opportunity to recover from the birth she followed her journey, she had not eaten for three days. At that point in the conversation I asked her if she wanted to take a warm bath and rest so she could get her strength back, she said yes. After taking a bath, she and her little girl slept for the rest of the day.

While they rested, we talked to some members of our church, asking for their support to help Rogelia. During the day the families brought clothes for the mother; diapers, clothes and other things for the baby. We thanked God for the generosity of the congregation.

After a week, Rogelia said she would continue on her way to the US. We were worried that the baby did not have a birth certificate, the road was long and uncertain and someone might think that the girl had been stolen, so we proposed that she stay a little longer to get the birth certificate, she accepted. The first thing we had to do was find a doctor and a clinic that wanted to issue the birth certificate; then find a judge and witnesses who would not mind signing the birth certificate. It was not easy to find them (two judges said no) because who would want to give their signature for something that was illegal? During the process, the church prayed and supported in everything. After two months, little Ester's birth certificate was obtained.

Rogelia stayed with us for half a year. During that time she found jobs cleaning houses, during the hours she worked I took care of her little girl. Little by little, in those months, we learned about Rogelia's story; a migrant who left her country to go after the "American dream", she

had started the trip alone, on the way she was raped, her baby was the product of that rape, now she had to continue on her way and with a little girl in arms. She also told us that she was a Christian, in her country she congregated in a Pentecostal church. That morning that we found her, she had seen our church and that is why she went to take refuge at the door.

After six months, one day Rogelia told us that she had collected a little money and that she would continue on her way to the United States. The next day we said goodbye to her with a blessing and bread for the journey. We cried as we said goodbye to her and her baby, who was already seven months old and beautiful. We never heard from Rogelia and Ester again. For several months, our family and the church prayed for them to make it to the US and meet her brother.

Thirty years ago we lived this experience. Migration has been increasing since then. I can imagine that stories like Rogelia's have been repeated and with increasing violence against women. Throughout our ministry we have had the opportunity to support migrant families from Central America, some managed to stay in Mexico, others are living in Canada, USA or Australia; but the experience with Rogelia and Ester marked our lives.

Guided Meditation⁷

To begin our meditation, let's close our eyes. Let's sit comfortably. We invite everyone to take a trip. Let's take a deep breath. Once, in the background (time). Now let's start our walk. Let's imagine our homes.

⁷ Catechist Louis Marcelo Illenseer.

The warmth of our beds. If it is summer where you are, imagine a sheet that covers you; if it's winter where you are, imagine a warm blanket that covers you and protects you from the cold.

But let's get out of our houses. Let's travel. However, we do not have cars or other means of transportation. We have our feet. And we have nothing else.

If we have our children with us, let's take them too. But we feel for everything we leave behind: perhaps children, family, friends and sisters, our home and our belongings. There is a lot of pain in parting.

We're walking. And we keep walking. We cannot stop. We look back and there are no more homes. We are migrants. We have no home. We have no place to rest. There is no more consolation. Just our feet. Our shoes are worn. We don't have the resources to buy new ones.

We have no water or food. We ate what we found on the street. Sometimes someone feeds us. The rest of a fast food sandwich. Women are harassed every time we walk. Handsome gentlemen in their imported cars look at us with eyes of desire and contempt.

We keep walking, looking for a break under the canopies of the buildings. However, under the marquises stones and iron points were cemented. We cannot welcome ourselves. It's raining. It's cold. (weather) It's windy. There is a lot of crying everywhere. The dogs bark at us. We are invaders in our own land.

We walk and the pains increase. Our children are crying. They are hungry. And thirsty. We don't have water to drink. And our goal is too far. There are many dangers. Do you hear the police? They are chasing us. We can't walk where we are. But we keep walking. We have arrived.

Not where we want. We don't know where we want to go. But we hit the walls. Walls, men armed to the teeth. They insult us. We are not people. We have no other place to go. Where will we go? Who is going to receive us and give us some welcome?

Lord have mercy on us, have mercy on us, Christ have mercy on us, have mercy on us, Lord have mercy on us, have mercy on us Kyrie Eleison!

Kyrie song⁸

Oh, God, we walk, we walk with wounded feet.

Our steps, already tired, drag.

Oh, God, we walk, we walk with wounded feet.

Our steps, already tired, drag.

Hear, O God, our cry,

we are men and women who seek peace and justice.

Walk with us, oh God, walk with us, oh God.

Walk with your people, O God.

Walk with us, oh God, walk with us, oh God.

Walk with your people, oh God.

⁸ Catechist Louis Marcelo Illenseer.

Biblical-theological reflection⁹

Today's biblical reflection tells us the story of two women who walked from one region to another in search of food. Naomi and her family leave Bethlehem for Moab, because there was nothing to eat, and on the way her husband and her two children die. When Naomi is left without a family, she only has the company of Ruth, her daughter-in-law who was also a widow and thus desolate, they once again face a path that takes them back to Bethlehem.

But their return was not easy, since they had nothing, no land, no livelihood, everything had been lost. When Naomi left Bethlehem in search of the promised land and did not achieve her goal, she faced death and hunger, and when she returned to her land she realized that she had lost everything.

Between the two women they begin to think about how to recover the land and manage to connect with Boaz, who finally marries Ruth and allows them to recover a family and have descendants. This narrative leads us to wonder how much suffering Naomi and Ruth must have gone through along the way?

It is a story of migrant women, who alone face situations of hunger, poverty, humiliation and fear. How many women today migrate through our countries? Do we know their stories? What happens to women who decide to move to other countries, walking in search of a better world for themselves and their children? We invite you today to reflect on this word.

⁹ Pastora Ángela Trejo Haager.

General prayer

In the face of so many situations, we need to pray: let us give thanks and pray to God. Each person, as usual, can find a comfortable position and follow the requests. These will be carried out by people from all over Latin America, somehow involved in the migratory processes and working with women. (Musician Soraya Eberle – Brazil/Honduras)

Oh God, we're on our way. And on our pilgrimage around the world you accompany us. Our steps are guided by your light. We feel your care in the breeze that relieves the scorching heat, in the cool water that quenches our thirst, in the hospitable arms of those who welcome us. You are warmth and strength in the walk, the God who gives us courage to continue! Thank you, oh, God! (Pastor Suyapa Ordóñez, Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras)

You saw Hagar and her son in the desert. You accompanied Ruth and Naomi on their journey. So you also accompanied our mothers to reach these lands that we inhabit today, you made them persist despite all the adverse conditions, misery and fear. And we know that you also see us today, and that is the reason for our hope. Thank you, oh, God! (Pastor Blanca Irma Rodríguez, Pastoral Care for Migrants, Salvadoran Lutheran Synod)

In the midst of the anguish of life, the ineffectiveness of oppressive and malicious systems, you are the God who gives us new perspectives, teaches us new paths and new ways to seek liberation. Oh God, you are the creative spirit that permeates history and our personal stories, also presenting us with everyday creativity to survive. Thank you, oh, God! (Migrant woman living in the United States)

We also bring you our pleas in the face of so much pain. Look at our world, the fragile populations, the peoples who are neither free nor capable of resisting the looting of mercenaries, and who are cornered and forced to leave everything, like fugitives. Encourage these people to have the strength to resist and remain in their territories. We raise our prayer to you. (Noé Martínez – Regional Director World Vision Tijuana – Mexico)

You are just, and so we beg you to transform the hearts of the powerful people who rule this world. That they may learn to serve with justice, responsibility and ethics, defending the rights of the most vulnerable people. Reverse the logic that dominates our governments, of profit, accumulation of power and evil conspiracies, so that we may see signs of your Kingdom among us. We raise our prayer to you. (Pastor Moises Pérez Espino. Coordinator of the Migration Ministry, Mexican Lutheran Church)

Encourage your church and people of faith to be supportive of those who are lost on the dusty roads of life and on ships adrift on the oceans. Make sure that your church does not abandon its prophetic voice in the world, so that we can never pretend that we do not hear the pleas of those who need shelter, hospitality, bread, work and protection. Give strength back to the communities and people who are already engaged in the work of accompanying and supporting migrants, and to those who strive so that people do not have to migrate. We raise our prayer to you. (Zaraí Gonzalía Polanco – Colombian – Doctoral Student at Faculdades EST – São Leopoldo, Brazil)

We know that crossings are not easy for anyone. They involve decisions, challenges, goodbyes, uncertainties and deprivations of all kinds. But especially women suffer. If they stay, they suffer abandonment, lack of news and perspectives. If they go, they suffer from fear, violence, invisibility or their bodies being used as currency. They are like fugitives, always about to be returned. If they reach their destination, they are again oppressed by systems that do not consider them worthy. Underemployment, stigmatization and homesickness are all they find. If they don't make it, they experience even greater misery, as well as a terrible sense of failure. Come with your consolation to these fallen, wounded and frightened women. May they find the courage to survive, and networks of trust. We raise our prayer to you. (Hellen Ríos Carrillo, ELCA Regional Representative for the Caribbean and coordinator of Gender Justice initiatives, living in Costa Rica)

Boys and girls on the roads, so in need of protection, are also used as currency; they are handed over to strangers, who do not consider them as people. Listen to the cries of the little ones, listen to their pain and act with force, protecting them from all the dangers on the roads. We are tired and perplexed to see the death, and even the living death, of children on the crosses. We raise our prayer to you. (Silvia Correa – Mexico)

We trust that you will listen to us, and see each person who needs your loving and just action. Accept now the prayers of our hearts, which we bring to you. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen! (Musician Soraya Heinrich Eberle – Brazil/Honduras)

Blessing¹⁰

Let us receive the blessing:

May your feet be filled with courage to walk the paths before you;
may your hands be creative to weave networks of solidarity and
friendship;

may your eyes, full of hope, always see beyond.

May God, the eternal walker, protect your walk.

And now let us go, may the same Breath of God send us, to fly
freely and dance life, sowing seeds of justice and peace. Amen.

LITURGY OF THE THIRD DAY

Liturgical team: Bachelor of Theology Eriksson Mateus Tomaselli,
Bachelor of Theology Felipe Hobus Vollrath and student of the Bachelor's
program of Theology Samira Rossmann Ramlow.

Welcome

Welcome to this last moment of spirituality of the VII Latin
American Congress on Gender and Religion. This week we had the
opportunity to exercise our courage, creativity and hope by listening to
and contributing to critical reflections on diverse and necessary topics
that broaden our horizons and help us dream of a more just, welcoming
and supportive world. We are pleased with the granting of the collective

title of an honorary doctorate, with the exchange of experiences in
Working Groups, Workshops and Thematic Tables, with the life stories
shared in moments of spirituality, with the contribution of each person to
make this congress possible. We are nearing the end of our congress, but
we still have many activities ahead. During these days we were invited to
walk together among ourselves and also with those who migrate. Today
we want to invite you to join the journey with the prophetess Miriam,
may her story inspire us to celebrate and resist in the midst of adversity,
may it make us see God's grace even in the most difficult moments and
remind us that we are together and that we can dance, sing and celebrate
our ways, our voices and our lives.

Prayer¹¹

God of life! You who saw the suffering of your people and went
to help them, we beg you: see us too and help us in our anguish. Free us
from the situations that separated us from your love and give us a grateful
heart that celebrates the liberation and life offered by Jesus Christ.

In this VII Latin American Congress of Gender and Religion we
met and shared stories, reflections, discoveries and dreams. But each
person also brings with them the weariness and wounds of arduous
and long journeys. We praise you, O God, for creating this space of
welcome, affirmation and motivation. Surround us with your peace and
encourage us to transform situations of vulnerability into opportunities
for boldness, care, love, resilience and faith.

¹⁰ Musician Soraya Heinrich Eberle.

¹¹ Lohan Schulz Tesch, Candidate to the Pastoral Ministry in the IECLB – Brazil.

Your hands are our hands; kindle in us the desire to serve. Drive us to face the structures that promote division, hatred and death. Warm our hearts with the flame of hope. May your Word be daily food and source of creativity. May the Divine Ruah be our companion and inspiration. Today and always. Amen.

Biblical-theological reflection

We will hear the story of a very courageous character, who used her courage and creativity and had hope... For this we transport ourselves in time and space, we leave the place where we find ourselves, we go back 3 thousand years, cross lands and seas and arrive in Egypt. It's hot, we're hungry, we're thirsty. Here in Egypt we find the Hebrew people, enslaved. The Pharaoh, King of Egypt, was afraid of the fertility of the Hebrew people, he feared a revolution of the people demanding their liberation.

"Hello, nice to meet you, I'm Miriam, you may have heard of me as a prophetess, as someone who sings, dances, plays the tambourine and especially as the sister of Moses.

There are days when all we want is for the day to come to an end. Some days are very difficult. It was very difficult to grow up in a context in which we were enslaved. We had scarcity to spare, we didn't have freedom of choice and we couldn't even express ourselves freely about what we believed. We were held back by so many things. Have you ever felt like that? Not being able to do what you want and be who you really are, feeling so many limitations surrounding you? I have.

It was very difficult having to hide my little brother so he wouldn't be murdered by the Egyptians. Each day, each noise, was a different fear that we would be discovered. Until one day it was no longer possible to hide him. Damn, what a tough day. It all happened so fast... And suddenly there was my little brother in a basket going down the river. Losing control of things is horrible! All I could do was follow him along the shore asking God to have mercy. And he did. My brother Moses was saved and by the hand of an Egyptian. A chill went through me! What if they killed him because he was a worthless Hebrew?

Moses gained her favor and, when I saw it, I was already there offering the princess an outlet to breastfeed and take care of the boy. It was wonderful for mom to be able to be close to him all this time, it softened our longing. However, I don't deny it, it was horrible after weaning, we lost even more contact with him. We saw Moses from a distance growing up so different from our culture and belief. Then he ran away, and we didn't hear from him for many years. It was indeed very difficult to experience and wait for the story to unfold.

Wait, be patient, believe, persist. Persisting is something beyond complicated. To persist in believing, waiting, having patience and still doing what is right every day: seriously, it's very difficult, very laborious. More work than running away from soldiers. Finally, God gave us the grace to see him when our eyes were clouded over and the days were dark. God constantly reminded us that he was with us, giving us clues, all we asked was for him to help us stay alert about the signs he gave us and his love. We cried out for mercy, for deliverance. We asked God to inspire us with courage, creativity and active hope to return to the land that

was promised to us. And He in His infinite goodness heard our cries. Pharaoh had no more power over us, for God was our strength.

I remember it as if it were today: We ran away from slavery. We were free, we took our belongings with us. What we could carry in our hands. We had some carriages. I took a tambourine with me, I knew it would be useful, I had hope... God guided us. His kind hand carried us. His spirit showed us the way. We crossed the sea, a corridor, walls of water on both sides. My people are crossing. The land is dry. The Egyptians persecute us, the land is no longer dry. They become stubborn, enter the sea, their carriages bog down. sink like stones.

We arrived on the other side, we celebrated, God set us free. I remembered everything we went through. Now we're free. With my tambourine, I play, and that's why I dance, dance with all my strength, sing with all my voice. My eyes beheld the favor of God. He made it rain in the desert of our hearts. I sing, not because everything was always easy and good, but because he never left us alone..."

Poem¹²

Sing and dance – with the prophetess Miriam (Exodus 1:2; 15:20-21; Num 12)

Sing and dance, it's a time of liberation

Beat your drums, it's a time of salvation

Through the hands of midwives God saved the children

Made the people stronger, renewed hope

Miriam saved Moses and together they go with the people

Singing and dancing towards a new world

When crossing the Red Sea, Miriam enjoys the crossing

Singing with the women, giving life to the poem

With Moses and Aaron she shared leadership

Halfway, injustice and insecurity

Miriam got sick and went into isolation

Without her the people did not leave the camp

Sing and dance, it's a time of liberation

Beat your drums, it's a time of salvation

Blessing

The Dandelion, symbol of our Congress, wants to serve as an inspiration right now as we leave here. We know the fragility of the flower. With a simple puff, its seeds are detached and spread with the wind. This week, even at a distance, we have gathered together. We shared experiences, knowledge, desires and stories. We met friends again. We strengthened ourselves in the network. But above all, with courage and creativity, we fed hope for more just, solidary days. May everything we have learned and experienced this week become seeds scattered by the breath of the divine RUAH to the four corners of the world. May we let ourselves be inspired and encouraged by the love of God and so, too, receive his blessing.

¹² P. Dr. Marli Brun, coordenadora do Programa de Gênero e Religião da Faculdades EST – Brasil.

May the God of life encourage you in the quest for a dignified and just life for all people. May the divine RUAH grant you creativity to find paths to transformation. May She inspire you to seek communion, create bridges to share pains, struggles, dreams and joys; May Jesus Christ be an example of active hope in the love of God. That creates, transforms, welcomes and frees. May we live diversity, peace and a full life, precepts

of the Kingdom of God, already in our days. So, may our God, Father-Mother, Son and Holy Spirit bless you. Amen!

Go in peace, encouraged by the divine RUAH and spread good seeds of justice, union, love and freedom. Amen!

A PERSPECTIVE OF HOPE:

BEHIND THE VIRTUAL FAIR OF THE VII LATIN AMERICAN CONGRESS ON GENDER AND RELIGION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC¹

Geni Rosângela Dias²

Silvia Santana³

The Virtual Fair of the VII Latin American Congress of Gender and Religion was an important milestone of dissemination and visibility in this current scenario of the covid-19 pandemic, where many found themselves without income or space for commercialization, not

only for Solidary Economic Enterprises (EES) from the southern region, but for all of Brazil and abroad, who were used to exhibiting in the physical environment of Faculdades EST, in São Leopoldo/RS, together with the discussion and experiences that always encompass the congress. They saw themselves at this moment sharing a virtual space to which many were not used to or had never lived this experience.

The Just and Solidary Trade Network (RJCS) has been working with enterprises in the southern region on this virtual fair methodology since 2020. Since the beginning of the pandemic, virtual marketing training has been carried out, qualifying and dialoguing with the EES. The virtual fair takes place on the Facebook platform, where the enterprises have

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³ Graduated in Arts and Social Education. She works with crafts at the Art and Resistance EES, associated with CEPESI and affiliated with RCJS. From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, she has been an articulator of the EES of SC and PR with the Network, facilitating spaces for commercialization and promotion of the activities of the groups. E-mail: silvianabel@gmail.com

been placing their products. Consumers dialogue directly with the EES through thematic virtual fairs. The RCJS has had a partnership with the Gender and Religion Program of Faculdades EST presentially at previous congresses.

The organization of the VII Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion came to invite and challenge us to think together about a space for commercialization, this time virtual, without losing the essence of the solidary economy and its principles and being able to integrate other people who also marketed face-to-face.

Fair at Faculdades EST, at the VI Latin American Congress on Gender and Religion, in 2019.



Source: personal file of the authors.

The virtual fair space was designed and created with great care and affection by two women, EES members from the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, participants of the Just and Solidary Trade Network, who coordinated the material received and organized its dissemination on the fair's Facebook page, as well as organizing the participation of cultural artistic groups in the opening live of the virtual fair of the VII Latin American Congress of Gender and Religion.

We had a week in which the virtual space somehow replaced what was customary, even without the warm physical contact, it was possible to give warmth and a humanized presence to the spaces in networks, through the interaction between consumers and producers, providing this chain of communication and exchange without intermediaries.

The virtual fair took place from the 20th to the 27th of August 2021, on the Facebook platform⁴.

Cover of the virtual fair and guidelines for consumers



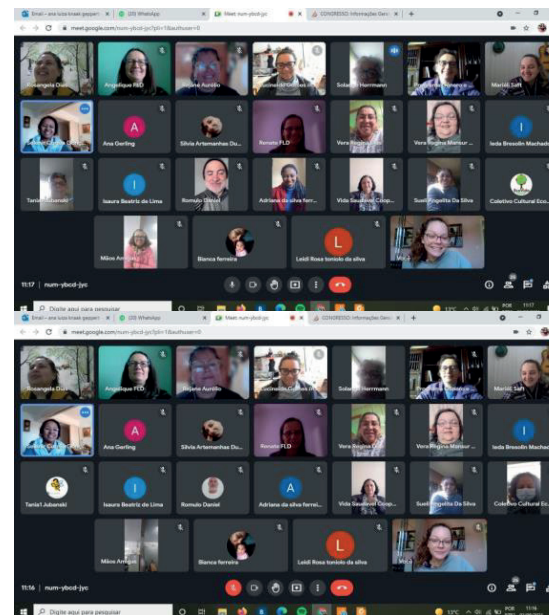
Source: Facebook page of the Just and Solidary Trade Network Virtual Fair.

4 FEIRA VIRTUAL DA REDE DE COMÉRCIO JUSTO E SOLIDÁRIO. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/FeiravirtualRCJS>. Accessed on: 7 April. 2022.

The entire organization of the fair, training for people and exhibiting enterprises and the opening live took place through virtual meetings and two WhatsApp groups, a fair management group and a group with the exhibiting groups to help with posts and clear up doubts. Registration to participate in the virtual fair took place through an online questionnaire, with basic information being filled in and photos of products or services being sent for the first posts. The participating people also received a letter of good conviviality and a guide with guidelines for accessing and how to post during the fair. Some meetings were held with small groups virtually, to invite and explain how to participate in the fair and registration process. Invitations to exhibit or attend the fair were also sent via e-mail to all people registered for the congress.

During the registration period, some groups had difficulties filling out the form, sending data and photos via WhatsApp, thus not failing to participate in the virtual fair. There were more than seventy entries from enterprises in the solidary economy, collectives, individual artisans, among others, from various places in Brazil and Latin America.

Training workshop and question answering with exhibitors, held on Aug.3, 2021.



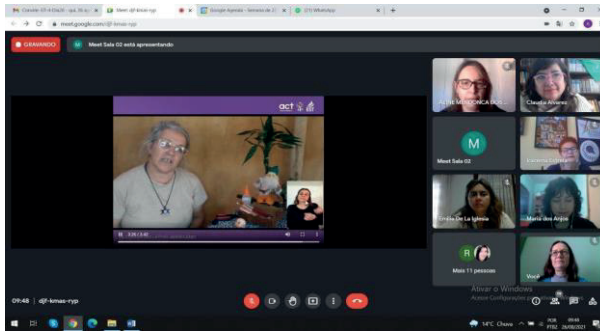
Source: personal files of the authors.

Before the fair, a training workshop was held. During this training, a collaborative fair emerged, with many suggestions, tips and incentives for an unforgettable virtual fair.

For publicity, short videos were created with the exhibitors at the fair telling their stories and inviting them to honor the fair and the congress, in Portuguese and Spanish, in addition to having the translation in sign language also in these two languages. They were produced with the intention that all people feel welcomed, even if virtually. A video was also produced with a recipe, using the congress symbol flower, the

dandelion. The videos were released on social networks and were shown at different moments of the congress, such as the opening, thematic tables and the working groups.

Video being broadcast in Working Group during the Congress.



Source: personal file of the authors.

During the fair, the exhibitors not only publicized their products, but also those of each other on their profiles and pages on social networks, thus enabling more people to access the fair. Links with invitations also circulated in WhatsApp groups.

In a virtual space, people from the EES were able to publicize their works and productions of arts and crafts in the Lutheran community and in the spaces of the Solidary Economy, in addition to food from ecological and organic family farming. Products of all kinds were offered, such as: creative sewing, manual arts such as crochet, knitting and loom; painting, modeling, food, macramé, and various types of art and crafts from indigenous peoples and communities and traditional peoples.

In the area of food, there was the participation of people and EES who carry out a work of valuing ecological family farming with foods processed by these producers.

Some of the products sold at the Virtual Fair



Source: personal file of the authors.

It also had the offer of various services, such as a psychologist and financial educator, who brought their knowledge to offer people who got to know and take a virtual “tour” through the fair. Purchases were made directly between producers and consumers, as well as deliveries.

The exhibitors made their posts daily on the page or, when necessary, there was help for people who had little contact with this virtual world. The virtual fair served not only for marketing, but also for publicity, becoming a great showcase, since it would be very difficult to be in the physical space of the fair as in previous congresses.

This experience, both for the fair organizers and for those who came to exhibit, acquire or see the works during the virtual fair, was

something incredible not only for learning and sharing, but mainly for the people who somehow managed to sell, produce and bring a little hope in such a delicate moment that we are experiencing. The virtual fair also made it possible for products and services as well as a bit of art, to arrive to those people, unable to have access due to this pandemic, bringing a little hope to hearts even if virtually.

Even after the end of the fair, reports of commercialization and publicity still continue to arrive, demonstrating how well this fair worked

and continues to bear fruit for those who exhibited and who attended the virtual fair of the VII Latin American Congress of Gender and Religion.

References

FEIRA VIRTUAL DA REDE DE COMÉRCIO JUSTO E SOLIDÁRIO. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/FeiravirtualRCJS>. Accessed on: 7 April 2022.



REALIZATION



SUPPORT

