



Feminist mystique: interfaces between religious mystiques and secular mystiques

Mística feminista: interfaces entre místicas religiosas e místicas seculares

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Abstract

This paper addresses the mystique as a present and streamlining element of the feminist movement. One understands mystique as the mystery of preparing and never meeting the whole one intends to achieve. This is the mystery which drives and propels the subject to live his cause and construe his individual and/or collective utopia. One looks at the feminist mystique in two dimensions: the religious and the secular. It's understood that, in the case of women, since the history of Christianity in the West has contributed to the construction of a negative image and identity, the secular mystique contributes the most to construe the project for equity between genders, such as proposed by the feminist movement. However, as the feminist movement is plural, there are, within itself, people and groups seeking to construct a Christian feminist mystique. Through bibliographic information, this paper approaches the following aspects: concept of mystique; women and the religious mystique: a look at history; feminism and the secular mystique; feminism and the religious mystique: a look at the current times.

Keywords: Religious mystiques. Secular mystiques. Christianity. Feminism. Feminist theology.

Resumo

Este artigo trata da mística enquanto elemento presente e dinamizador do movimento feminista. Entende-se a mística como o mistério de preparar-se e jamais se encontrar com a totalidade daquilo que se aspira alcançar. Trata-se do mistério que move e impulsiona o sujeito para viver sua causa e construir sua utopia individual e/ou coletiva. Considera-se a mística feminista em duas dimensões: a religiosa e a secular. Entende-se que, no caso das mulheres, como a história do cristianismo no Ocidente tem contribuído para a construção de uma imagem e de uma identidade negativa, é a mística secular que melhor tem contribuído para a construção do projeto de equidade entre os gêneros, tal como propõe o movimento feminista. No entanto, como o movimento feminista é plural, há, dentro dele mesmo, pessoas e grupos que estão se ocupando com a construção de uma mística feminista cristã. A partir de informações bibliográficas, este artigo aborda os seguintes aspectos: conceito de mística; a mulher e a mística religiosa: um olhar na história; o feminismo e a mística secular; o feminismo e a mística religiosa: um olhar na atualidade.

Palavras-chave: Místicas religiosas. Místicas seculares. Cristianismo. Feminismo. Teologia feminista.

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Introduction

This paper aims to answer to some questions both with regard to the mystique and feminism. Currently, the word mystique is much in vogue. One refers to it attributing the most varied meanings, among which stands out the emotional, affective, cognitive, and religious dimension, which underlie the individual or social actions. This dimension acts as an energy source which drives the subject to action.

Since this word is in vogue, one wonders: is there a mystique in social movements? If yes, with which features does it present itself? And, when it comes to the feminist movement¹, does it have a mystique? If yes, from which fountains does it drink, since the Judeo-Christian tradition, due to its historical androcentric² and patriarchal³ traits, has contributed more towards women's marginalization than liberation? These are the issues with which this paper is concerned.

1 Mystique

The mystique is a theme observed in much of the theological tradition. Regarding the classical theology, it's the "Fides occulata" (PANIKKAR, 2005, p. 53) which includes love to God and respect for the other (MARTY, 2005). In mystique, experiencing God would be a first act (VAZ, 1992; 1994) and, only under the light of such an act, one may speak of knowledge (MOLTMANN, 1981). It would be the "cognitio Dei experimentalis" or the "fruitive experience of the absolute" (MARITAIN, 1975 apud VAZ, 1994, p. 12) the precise manner of living "before the Lord" in solidarity with all men (GUTIERREZ, 1984, p 107), a heightened awareness of the others' suffering (METZ, 1996).

¹ Sociopolitical movement fighting for the defense and expansion of women's rights. It emerged in the first half of the 19th century, in England and the USA, with the main aim of conquering civil rights, such as voting and gaining access to Higher Education. It re-emerges in the 1960s, in the USA, with increased demands, such as the right for sexuality and equality to men in the labor market. In Brazil, it begins, more specifically, in 1910, with the fight for women's vote, but it reached a heighten level from the 1960s and 70s, when the movement followed the fight for resuming democracy in the country (TELES, 1999).

² Androcentrism: the understanding that humankind is centered on the figure of man, the male human being. From this viewpoint, he has the privilege of representing humankind, comprising all genres.

³ Patriarchalism: a conception of society which is based on the ideological definition of the male moral supremacy in the social relations.

According to Bazán (2002, p. 85-86), it isn't easy to cover with a general definition the several meanings of the adjective *mystikos*: etymologically, the word comes from the Greek verb root *myéo*, which means closing. Lalande (1999, p. 686), in turn, presents the term as a set of beliefs and affective and moral provisions which bind to this belief, enclosed by affection and intellect. This way, mysticism is essentially a life, a movement, the development of a certain character and direction.

Both Bazán and Lalande highlight that the word presents itself almost always linked to the mystical experience and, in most cases, this experience refers to mysticism, as experiences of individual or collective ecstasy. This way, Bazán (2002, p. 86) states:

Although the etymology of the word “mystique” comes from the Greek root *my*, present through different paths in *mystiká* (which refers to certain rites), *hoi mystikoí* (those initiated in such rites) and *mystérion* (secret), but no less in *mythos* and *myéo* (close the lips or eyes), the mystique [...] is closely linked to the very nature of the experience which it seeks to designate, i.e. with a kind of extraordinary and strange human experience and, therefore, indescribable.

The ecstasy referred to by the above mentioned authors is often associated to religious experiences. This way, Mura (1984) states that the etymological/semantic indication of the term “mystique” becomes indispensable, above all because of the multiplicity of meanings which the experience of divine took in the various religious, spiritual, and cultural contexts. From this perspective, the theologian Piero Coda (2003, p. 437) also warns: it involves understanding the way how the term indicates, at the same time, an *analogue* and *convergent* experience, even in different historical and cultural contexts, and a *distinct* and *original* experience according to the “quality” of the experience of Divine and/or God to which it refers.

It's from this perspective that the thought of Leonardo Boff and Frei Betto (2005) stands. For these authors, the word mystique, evoking mystery, incommunicable character of a reality or intent, and spirituality, referring to what

isn't supported on material life, has been associated to the religious experience. However, since the creation of Liberation Theology⁴, which, in the 1970s, paved the way for a closer relationship between faith and politics, mystique, spirituality (and religiosity, in a comprehensive sense), started being regarded as a globalizing experience which doesn't detach spirituality from action, ethics, and responsibility for the human and society's destiny (BOFF; BETTO, 2005).

In a similar perspective to that of Leonardo Boff and Frei Betto, Marcelo Barros (2002, p. 2) states that "mystery", and the word "mystic" comes from it, is the secret motivating the deepest aspect of the believer's life. And this secret, the author says, isn't something just intellectual. This is so because Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth decided to open the deepest mystery of the Kingdom of God for everyone who wants to fall in love with this project in her/his personal life and for the whole universe. This is the core of faith, without which everything else loses sense.

Although these theologians have emphasized the religious experience and, with it, connected the belief in the Judeo-Christian God, since this is the deity preached by the Liberation Theology, it isn't always understood this way by the agents who work in social movements. There're occasions when the mystique isn't associated to the need of belief in some kind of deity, as it occurs in much of the feminist movement.

In these spaces, it's understood much more as the mystery, that incommunicable character of a reality or intent driving people to fight for more justice in gender relations; and transcendence, that which isn't supported on material life, a characteristic of spirituality, not necessarily refers to the Kingdom of God, but to the materialization of more respectful relationships between human beings among themselves and between human beings and nature.

⁴ Löwy (2000) states that Liberation Theology is much deeper and comprehensive than a mere theological trend, as many people see it. According to the author, it's "a broad social movement, which we propose to name 'Liberation Christianity', with far-reaching political consequences" (LÖWY, 2000, p. 8).

The author who, in our opinion, best contributes to think of it according to the secular patterns, as in the feminist mystique case, is Ernst Tugendhat. In his paper entitled “On mystique”, Tugendhat (2005, p. 16) seeks an anthropological justification able to distinguish it from religion. According to the author, unlike the religious attitude, the mystical attitude “is a real possibility based on human essence, an attitude which doesn’t need to resort to a revelation or tradition” (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 16, our translation).

According to the author, there’re two anthropological components of mystique: withdraw into her/himself and simultaneous awareness of the world relativistic with regard to her/himself. Thus, it doesn’t constitute a feeling or an experience, but a “knowledge and a corresponding attitude” (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 17, our translation). In it, the withdraw isn’t immediately aimed at a more accurate knowledge of oneself, but, instead, it leads to a move of oneself towards a relativization of individual consciousness, to the extent that it (consciousness), at the end of a process, diminishes itself before the prospect of the world’s wholeness (*pleroma*). That’s why one of the results of withdrawing is the awareness that one is immersed in the world amid the other things. One’s self, here, isn’t relativized with regard to a totalizing unit (whether a god, the world, or her/his private affairs), but “having in mind the indeterminate universality of many things” (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 18, our translation).

Thus, the mystique constitutes a kind of wisdom which, in all cases, will contribute to the decrease of Ego, the relativization of the first-person singular and annihilation of the isolated singular, and this results from the opening to the world as a larger and more elastic reality (awareness of emptiness, merger with a wholeness, or union with an undetermined universality).

Whereas religion might have a relationship between the subject and a supernatural person which would determine the universe order, in mysticism, the universe order per se is put into question, but there’s a relationship between the

individual and something which is beyond her/himself. Mystique, therefore, is transcending or relativizing the very self-centeredness. In short, it isn't a relative, but a radical, distance from her/himself, from "I want" itself (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 10).

The thought of Bergson (1951, p. 101-102, our translation) points out a similar perspective, by stating that:

[...] The true mystics, confident of themselves, because they feel something better than them, reveal themselves as great action men, for the surprise of those for whom mysticism is nothing but vision, transportation, ecstasy. What they allowed to flow inside themselves is a downward flow which wanted to reach the other men through them: the need to spread around them what they received, they feel like a rush of love. A love which is provided by each of them with the stamp of her/his own personality.

This is the way of understanding the mystique referred to by agents of social movements when addressing it. One takes as the theoretical construct on this theme carried out by agents of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST). One resorts to this construction because it's the social space which, along with the feminist movement, better prepared it and regards it according to their social practices.

According to Caldart (2000, p. 134) this is "a very strong feeling binding people together around common goals". It refers to:

[...] the capacity to produce meanings for reality dimensions which are present, and that generally refer people to the future, to the utopia of what isn't, yet, but that might come to be, with perseverance and sacrifice of each one. It's a personal experience, but necessarily produced in a collectivity, because the feeling it generates is the result of firm beliefs and values constructed through cooperation around common causes (CALDART, 2000, p.134-135).

According to Bogo (2000, p. 71), it refers to the "mystery of preparing her/himself and never meeting with the whole project." It's what "drives and propels us to live such a human cause, so full of accomplishments". This is the

“pleasure of knowing, feeling, and doing”, a “force which moves towards the pursuit of constructing the endless utopia” (BOGO, 2000, p. 71).

Therefore, taking into account the two conceptions of mystique, a religious and another secular, one asks: how does feminism places itself between these two forms of mystique?

2 Women and the religious mystique woven on them: a look at the history of Christianity

Women, in the history of Christianity, find very few positive (in)formation through which they can feed a self-appreciation mystique. In the words of Delumeau (1989, p. 310), “the male attitude with regard to the ‘second sex’ has always been contradictory, ranging from attraction to repulsion, admiration to hostility. The biblical Judaism and the Greek classicism alternately expressed these opposing feelings”.

According to Delumeau (1989, p. 310-314), between the 12th and 18th centuries the Church identified, in women, one of the evil forms on Earth. Both the sacred and unholy literature described them as a superlative of rottenness, a:

[...] Magnificent evil, unfortunate pleasure, a poisonous and treacherous being, women were accused by the other sex of having introduced to Earth the sin, unhappiness, and death. The Greek Pandora or the Jewish Eve, committed the original sin by opening the box with all the evils or by eating the forbidden fruit. Men were looking for someone responsible for suffering, failure, disappearance of the earthly paradise, and they found women. How can't someone suspect of a being whose greatest danger consisted of a smile? Thus, the sexual cave became a slimy pit of hell (DELUMEAU, 1989, p. 314).

The conception of female gender as we have today is, therefore, the result of a long construction pathway, in which one finds many speeches and thought traditions. Among them, one highlights the Judeo-Christian tradition, according to the way how it was constructed in the West.

One of the strong points of this thought is the story of creation and fall in Genesis (2 and 3). One highlights that such a view keeps attributing meanings to the female identity and motherhood nowadays.

Analyzing the use of such a narrative, Monique Alexander (1990, p. 511) quotes Tertullian. This theologian, in “The adornment of women”, indicates how the punishment of Eve reaches the whole female gender:

Thou give birth in pain and anguish, woman; suffer the attraction of your husband, and he's your lord. And do thou ignore thou are Eve? It's still alive, in this world, the God's sentence against thou sex. Live, as it's needed, as accused. Thou are the devil's door. Thou broke the Tree's seal; thou were the first to abandon the divine law; thou deceived the one who wasn't attacked by the devil; thou so easily defeated man, the God's image. It was thou pay, death, which caused the death of the very God's Son (ALEXANDRE, 1990, p. 511).

According to this reading of Genesis, at the time of being banished from paradise, the woman receives another name, another domination sign, and she becomes Eve, “the mother of all living ones”. Eve's role in fall is traditionally seen as the most serious: “The woman was the very author of fault for man, and not man for woman” (Aurelius Ambrosius apud DALARUN, 1990, p. 35).

Parallel to Eve's condemnation process, the 12th century saw the big boost increasing the Mary's virtues. The same authors who wrote letters warning of the dangers of getting close to women fervently prayed to Mary, they told her their most unmentionable faults, they dedicated the sweetest poems to the only virgin and mother Mary (DALARUN, 1990, p. 40).

In meditations, speculations are made about the nature, identity, and specific virtues of Mary. There, the four major dogmas by which the Catholic Church addresses her are delineated: divine motherhood, virginity, immaculate conception, and assumption. It's a great speculation on the way how to prove the virgin motherhood of Mary.

Mary was supernatural; she didn't have to fight against the flesh temptation. Thus, "given that the sanctification of the virgin birth contrasted with the experience of real women, the cult of Mary didn't elevate women's position, but provided more bases for their subordination" (SCHOTT, 1996, p. 84).

Thomas Aquinas, having the Aristotelian thought as a basis, suggests that the existence of women is problematic because they're "bastard males"; because they're naturally subdued to men; because they're the occasion of sin. This way, Schott (1996, p. 85) states that, if God's creation is good in everything, it's an enigma to Thomas how such imperfect beings as women could have been done in the original creation act. For Thomas Aquino, Schott (1996) states, there might be a positive value in the existence of women to justify their existence. This value might be only the women's function in biological generation.

It's worth stressing that the way of perceiving women presented above migrated, with the colonizers, to the Brazilian lands. Just to illustrate this phenomenon, one presents this excerpt of the sermons by Antônio da Silva (1763 apud DEL PRIORE, 1995, p. 114): "As the devil's intent is making on Earth all the evil he can, that's why he keeps women, because they're the instrument of all evil".

Jumping up to the current time, another datum which stands out is that, from the viewpoint of the Catholicism's officialty, for instance, little has changed with regard to the role and appreciation of women as religious subject. This perspective is evident when Pope John Paul II (1994) refers to the believers' claim with regard to the possibility of the priestly ordination of women. Here's his answer in the document *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*:

Therefore, in order to exclude any doubt from an issue of paramount importance, which belongs to the Church's divine constitution itself, as my ministry confirms the brothers (Lk 22,32), I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination to women, and that this sentence should be regarded as definitive by all Church's believers.

Benedict XVI, who, in August 2006, granted an interview to the German channels Bayerischer Rundfunk, ZDF, Deutsche Welle, and to the Vatican Radio, showed that the letter by John Paul II will prevail, when he stated: “Our faith, the constitution of the Apostles College, obliges us and doesn’t allow us to confer priestly ordination to women”, and also pointed out that: “One can’t think that, in the Church, the only possibility to play a major role is by being a priest”, and he also states to believe that women themselves, with their preponderance, with their dynamism and spiritual strength, will know how to conquer their space⁵.

Heirs of this thought tradition on women, how do the Brazilian women reacted with regard to what was said of them? How does this thought interact with the feminist mystique?

3 Feminism in Brazil and the secular mystique

Strictly speaking “feminism” could be understood in a broad sense, as any gesture or action resulting in protest against oppression and discrimination of women, or requiring the expansion of their civil and political rights, whether by individual or group initiative” (DUARTE, 2003, p. 3).

At first, feminism shyly enters the Brazilian scene. It begins by claiming the basic right of learning to read and write (then reserved for males). The first women who had access to formal knowledge, aiming to expand this universe, opened schools, published books, faced the current opinion indicating that women didn’t need to know how to read or write (COELHO, 2002, p. 44).

It’s worth highlighting that, since its inception, one can notice characteristic traits of a feminist mystique under the shape of a secular mystique. Whereas “the mystique isn’t a feeling, nor an experience, but a knowledge and a corresponding attitude” (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 16, our translation), to which corresponding knowledge and attitude does the feminist mystique refers to?

⁵ Benedict XVI. Interview granted to the German channels Bayerischer Rundfunk, ZDF, Deutsche Welle, and to the Vatican Radio. Text available at: <http://old.verbumdei.org/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=467>; accessed on: Apr. 30, 2012.

Firstly, this is a knowing to be a person, and, as such, the woman has human rights as anybody else. This is placing oneself in the world, according to the meaning proposed by the author (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 16, our translation), that perceiving oneself in the world means perceiving oneself “in the midst of everything else”. In this perceiving oneself, “the self isn’t relativized having something unified in mind, one names God the world and, naturally, it also doesn’t have in mind her/his particular issues and goals, but, indeed, it has in mind the indeterminate universality of the many other things” (TUGENDHAT, 2005, p. 17, our translation).

This way, feminism in Brazil, since its origins, presents these characteristics: perceiving oneself and investing on oneself (the struggle for access to formal knowledge) which is intended to the transformation of a universal: the woman.

Through this mystique, feminism constructs an entire symbolic system in which and through which it’s condensed and, then, it constitutes itself as true source of inspiration and support of the struggles which came. The feminist meetings constitute one of the spaces where such construction can be checked. From the perspective of Adrião, Toneli e Maluf (2011, p. 1), “this space is regarded as an important cultivated field for constituting the thoughts and actions of the feminist movement in Brazil and in Latin America”. According to Alvarez et al. (2003, p. 543), through the analysis of meetings, “it’s possible to understand the pathways that feminisms in the southern Americas have been going through”.

By analyzing these meetings, one can realize that the political agendas and the internal and external perspectives on the political subject(s) of feminism, have an interface with notions of democracy and autonomy, inclusion and expansion of the movement. Such notions have been costly to the feminist movement, constituting genuine guiding and motivating slogans of the movement’s struggles. They’re the main components of the feminist mystique.

As parts of this symbolic system, some slogans started standing out as “Women’s rights and men’s injustice”, which eventually became the title of the first book in Brazil to address women’s rights to education and work, and claim they were regarded as intelligent and worthy of respect (FLORESTA, 1989). The founding inspiration of such mystique is the “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen”, by Olympe de Gouges (DUARTE, 2003, p. 5).

Among the main slogans constructed at this time stand out: “Men and women are different with regard to the body, but this doesn’t mean differences in the *soul*” (FLORESTA, 1989, p. 35); or the inequalities resulting in inferiority “come from education and life circumstances” (FLORESTA, 1989, p. 44).

The fight for women’s citizenship, as a platform of feminism, becomes more mature in the second half of the 20th century, when the struggle for women’s vote becomes more explicit. An icon of that period, with regard to the construction of a secular feminist mystique, is the “Feminist Manifesto”, which is signed by renowned feminists, such as Bertha Lutz, Jerônima Mesquita, and Maria Eugênia Celso, among many others from important political families, such as Clotilde de Mello Vianna, wife of the Vice-President of the Republic. In this manifesto, the following ideas are highlighted:

Women, like men, are born as free and independent members of humankind, endowed with equivalent abilities and equally called to practice, without chains, their individual rights and duties, the sexes are interdependent and they must, to each other, their cooperation [...]. The autonomy constitutes the fundamental right of every adult individual; denial of this right to women is a social, legal, and economic injustice with unfavorable effects on the collectivity’s life, slowing the overall progress [...]. Women have the right to voter registration (CARDOSO, 1981, p. 34).

The culminating point in the construction of secular feminist mystique lies on the last decades of the 20th century, whose key idea is women’s autonomy. This perspective is synthesized in the slogan “our bodies belong to us” (TELES, 1999). This conception, surely, doesn’t drink only from religious sources, but rather from other sources such as the conception of social justice, for instance, so dear to social

and also religious movements.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the feminist mystique has been strengthened by the continued feminist meetings, spaces where one constructs a genuine “city of women”. From the perspective of Adrião, Toneli e Maluf (2011, p. 4), this is a city:

[...] where women from the lesbian, black, indigenous movements, from political parties, public management, national and international feminist networks, funders, academic centers, popular movements, and, now, young feminists met and sought to discuss agendas for getting closer or not. Tensions and reconfigurations are constructed and reconstructed in these concrete spaces.

In these meetings there're group works, plenum sessions, one presents motion letters for support or claims (ADRIÃO; TONELI; MALUF, 2011). They're the space where one defines the movement's priorities, social ties are strengthened, and a strong emotion is observed.

It's with such a feeding that feminists fight against maternal mortality, discrimination against black women, and body politics, as well as fight for the right to breastfeeding and female labor. They denounce the exploitation condition underwent by working women and women from the outskirts of large cities and, especially, the domestic violence faced by women. In the political sphere, the fight for women's election to the most varied spaces and jobs stood out (ALVAREZ et. al., 2003, p. 543).

Nowadays, besides the persistence of previous flags, another theme is incorporated to the feminist struggles. This is caring for the planet. Feminists name the theology produced on ecology as ecofeminist theology. The closer relationship between feminism and ecology is due to the awareness that the domination of women is based on the same grounds and impulses which led to the exploitation of nature and peoples. Both the environment and women are seen by patriarchal capitalism as “useful thing”, which must be subject to the alleged human needs, whether as a consumption object or as a production or exploitation means

(ANGELIN, 2006; CAMPOS, 2008). Under this form of perception, the specific moral development of women led them to follow an “ethics of caring for others” (REUTHER, 2000; GEBARA, 2000b); as nature is a goddess, immanent in all living creatures, women participate in its essence (OTTERMANN, 2005; GEBARA, 1997).

In addition to ecology, another claim is included in the feminist struggles. This is the right of bringing into scene the diversity of sexual options. It was addressed in the 10th Feminist Meeting, which took place in 2005. The theme deserved such a space at the meeting that a new slogan comes to join and feed the feminist mystique. To the expression “feminist women” one added “feminist bodies”, whose meaning implies the perception that “the transsexuals also ‘constitute themselves as women’, so, they can be self-defined as feminists, if they wish so”. One reached such a perception through the finding that feminism “is faced with the dimensions that were opened through the utopia of a life without inequalities, through social transformation for all and, therefore, also for transgenders” (ADRIÃO; TONELI; MALUF, 2011, p. 7).

One stresses that the keywords guiding and providing the feminist mystique with meanings are expressed in various forms, thus constituting genuine meaning deposits, source to which each particular agent, and the movement as a whole, can resort. The most common forms are buttons, colors (predominantly the white, lilac, and, more recently, the rainbow), t-shirts, editorial cartoons, images, photo panels, ribbons, flags, banners. There’re also moments of particular rituals, with songs, hymns, applauses, shouts of support or rejection, parties, dances.

The presence of such symbols confirms the viewpoint of mystique conception presented by Tugendhat (2005, p. 19, our translation), by stating:

I think that one shouldn’t intend nothing but showing the way how the mystique, in its various ramifications, springs from certain fundamental human traits, the reason why it remains as a realizable possibility, for us, unlike the attitudes as the religious which, in my opinion, are no longer compatible with intellectual honesty.

Therefore, the author believes there's a possibility of existing communities where individuals have autonomy to drive their action having in mind what is regarded as "good" by everyone. Through the diagnosis of duality existing in human beings between the aspect "egocentric" and the concept of "collective", the mystique emerges as an alternative to the collective aspect and, hence, also for the "personhood".

4 Feminism and the religious mystique: a look for today

Liberation Theology⁶, although somewhat problematic and with strong androcentric marks with regard to its thought, didn't disregard the presence of female in its preparation. When addressing, about all, Mariology, it incorporated elements for reflection, divulged in the fields of Psychology and Anthropology. An example of this concern may be noticed in Boff (1997), in the work entitled "The maternal face of God: interdisciplinary essay on the female and its religious forms", where the author highlights several features of Mary which would allow one to state she's a deity.

In the Mariology constructed in the context of Liberation Theology, Mary is presented as a woman of faith, believer and a perfect disciple, a concrete expression of God's preferential love for the poor people (TABORDA, 1992), the poor woman, the people's woman (MESTERS, 1978), the God's Mother.

The feminist theology, in turn, has been asserting itself as a group of female theologians in abundant and qualified theological production, among which stand out Gebara (1994; 1997; 2000a; 2000b), Gebara and Bingemer (1987), Tierny (1975), Tamez (1986; 2001; 2004; 2005), Tepedino (2007), Tepedino and Brandão (1990), Bingemer (1990b). Aiming to highlight the women's role, they state that at the core of the releasing proposal by Jesus favoring the poor and marginalized ones

⁶ Trend of the theological thought whose thematic axis is the statement of a preferential option for the poor people, both by the Christian churches and the theological reflections produced there.

there's the woman, because she's doubly oppressed, as poor and woman. They warn that the woman, one understanding herself as that who starts to "ignore her place", will break the silence (BINGEMER, 1990a; 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b).

However, the drinking fountain where the mystique observed in feminist theology doesn't necessarily come from the official spaces of the Christian churches, as evidenced, for instance, in papers by renowned female theologians published in 2000 in the an number 288 of the journal *Concillium*, entitled "On the strength of wisdom: spirituality". This number of the journal is organized into three parts, and the first of them, titled "Fight is a name for Hope", gathers papers which highlight the relationship between spiritualities from the most varied ways of religious expression and the concrete struggles for the liberation of women in many parts of the world. In the second part, titled "Bless the one from whom all blessings flow", the reflection revolves around various key aspects for the feminist theology. The number of the journal ends with a piece titled reflections and critiques, where one finds the paper by María Pilar Aquino: "The path to a new world in the power of Wisdom".

Another work regarded as indicative of the content making or supporting the feminist mystique, besides the Christian ideas, is the journal *Mandrágora*, in its various numbers. In this case, one highlights the number 11, published in 2005, because it contains several papers with regard to the "deity's imaginary".

Regarding the feminist mystique content, Nunes (2006, p. 4), presenting the thought of the feminist theologian Ivone Gebara, states that:

The largest contribution to the Brazilian feminist theology surely comes from the feminist movement and, Ivone evaluates, when this theology follows the daily issues of women, it produces a break which keeps it away from the institutional thought and also separates it from Liberation Theology, which is still patriarchal and full of male images of God.

This way, the feminist theology seeks to break with the dichotomies between the secular and religious mystique, because, as stated by Nunes (2006, p. 5), according to Gebara, “the need for ethical coherence doesn’t belong only to the religious sectors”.

As a reflection of what occurs in the field of social relationships, there’re different attitudes in the field of theological productions on women. However, in addition to semantic discussions, which reflect the different political positions, the feminist theology is tied to the feminist movement, in response to a patriarchal, androcentric, and sexist society in search of a new society where reign reciprocity and mutuality relationships between men and women, without discriminated and oppressed ones. For this, in the Latin America case, it has deepened the reflection on woman’s body emancipation, through the life and work experience with poor women in their struggle for survival (GEBARA, 1987; 2000a; 2000b). Other productions by theologians as Bingemer (1990b; 2010b, 2011c; 2012), Brandão (1990), Deifelt (2004), Neuenfeldt (2000; 2005), Buscemi (2005), Stroher (2005), Otterman (2005), among others, follow the same direction.

In that theology, the Bible acquires a singular centrality, studying in a particular manner the women’s role in the movement of Jesus and in the early Church, and stand out, this way, the productions by Tepedino (1988; 1990; 2007), Cavalcanti (1986; 1988; 1990), Weiler (1990), and Neuenfeldt (2005).

Through the theological propositions of the feminist theology, the woman emphasizes a particular way of getting closer to God’s mystery, to believe and invoke God in the female, to know the female characteristics of God in the very revelation. For such a theology, the Trinity is the last possibility for integrating the male to the female (BINGEMER, 1986; 1990b; 1991) and there’re different possibilities to think of God in the female, as highlighted by Buscemi (2005), Christ (2005), Ottermann (2005), Neunfeldt (2005), Stroher (2005), Lopes (2005), Tamez (2005), and Ventura (2005).

In it (the feminist theology) one emphasizes as characteristic of the female mystique the connection, in an integrated manner, of experience and praxis, of what one feels and what one does, of the rational and the affection, of love and oneself surrender to Kingdom. One proposes to women the practice of a theology in community, in a joint effort, so that the final product isn't one person's work, but the entire group's work (CAVALCANTI, 1988; GEBARA, 2000b; FIORENZA, 2009; DEIFELT, 2004).

The figure of Mary has occupied a central place in the feminist theology. Regarding the traditional reading which has been done of it, the feminists present a new hermeneutics. Criticizing the traditional readings on Mary, Gebara (1987, p. 67) states that:

We have often seen in the Church a preaching and a devotion to Mary which are, actually, more Jewish than Christian. Introducing Mary as the prototype of soft and acquiescent woman, passive and willing, who always says "YES", we're surely very close to the Jewish woman's condition [...], but we aren't, surely, assimilating and following all the novelty that Christianity brings.

Aware of the force which represents a certain conception of Mary favoring the male dominance, Gebara (1987, p. 12) states that:

The traditional Mariology speaks of Mary with female terms, idealizing her from certain so-called female qualities, however, seen from the male viewpoint. Thus, Mary is retrieved through an anthropological/theological view and this starts justifying as a product of that view. Therefore, Mary, Jesus' mother, God's mother, as she's presented by the androcentric and patriarchal world, doesn't cause conflicts, but rather strengthens the cultural foundations of this world, as she also became its great mother.

In the same way of Gebara's criticism on the androcentric conception of Mary, there's the thought of Reimer (2003, p. 35), according to whom there's an urgent need for "re-reading and rescuing a part of Mary's history to reconstruct its meaning within the God's history with the people". The author states that She (Mary) was announced in the Gospels as a great servant of the Lord. The Lukean construction of the *Magnificat* was used as a powerful ideological instrument of

reverence to the role of motherhood, of the women subject to a mister, faithful and obedient to male desires. The worldview becomes narrow for the woman.

Likewise, one presents the Marian conception of Gebara (1987, p. 87), when referring to Mary and states that:

Mary's song is a war song, a song to struggle for God in human history, the struggle for establishing a world with egalitarian relationships, with deep respect for every being, where the deity dwells. Thus, one speaks of dispersion of the proud ones, overthrow of the powerful ones, excuse of the empty-handed rich ones for the glory of God. It was from a woman's mouth that came this war song against evil, as if it was only from a woman's breast that a new people could be born. The image of a pregnant woman, able to give birth to something new, is the image of God who, through the power of his Spirit, gives birth to men and women delivered to justice, living the relationship with God through the loving relationship with her/his peers. Mary's song is the program of the Kingdom of God.

The author establishes, therefore, a historical/theological female look at the female force of Mary. She attributes vigor and free will determination to it. Mary's humility focus changes, it's broadened under the view of his attitude, to the fighting force in defense of the poor ones and, perhaps, also in defense of gender equality.

One understands that this feminist hermeneutics proposal on Maria allows a new understanding of the role of such an important character of Christian theology. By making explicit Mary's courage and strength, one demystifies the idea that the woman is the devil. Maria is re-thought as a woman who accepts her task with the same determination of Eve, knowing the upsets she would undergo due to her decision. From the feminist perspective of annunciation, Mary becomes a sign of fearlessness and bravery, such as Eve, by eating the forbidden tree's fruit. These elements highlighted in the feminist theology favor theological means which feed the mystique on feminist patterns.

Final remarks

In the construction process of this paper, one realizes that the feminist mystique has an ambiguous relationship with religion, presenting itself as a border space between the religious and the secular. Women, historically, haven't been well treated by the official religions, more particularly in the case of our culture, by Christianity.

In this tradition, when it comes to the official positions, keeping up the intensity differences between a period and a region and another, the woman is seen not as a symbol or vehicle of evil, but, at least, as second-rate being.

On the other hand, in their daily life spaces, the women construct their own beliefs, or react in their own way to the beliefs produced about them in the official media, even though, because of this, they pay high prices throughout history.

The result of this complex relationship between the daily life needs of women, which leads them to create their own beliefs or react in their own way to the beliefs constructed about them, is that, for the feminist movement, the religious ideology presents itself only as one of the mystique's reference sources. Nevertheless, such a movement needs to conduct a rigorous selection of religious (in)formation, in order to discover in them the potentialities of providing the feminist propositions with vigor and dynamism.

However, feminism isn't a way of conceiving the woman and the society born in the religious environments. As a result of the secular environments, this way of conceiving the woman presents her own mystique in these environments. In these cases, the source which provides such a fountainhead are keywords dear to contemporary culture, such as autonomy, freedom, human rights, democracy, justice.

In this way of mystique, generally, the mention a deity doesn't appear, but the belief in something which is beyond the group becomes visible. Its themes involve the movement's history, the key events, the sad and happy ones, flags, fighting slogans. The words are usually few, and the music, poetry, and stagings gain a larger space, as a way of saying the word, expressing the feeling, and filling the participants with force.

Although many of these words have a religious framework in the composition of their meanings, they have autonomy with regard to religion. They have their own content, constructed by different collectivities, in different social spaces. They're based on Philosophy, Law, Politics, Sociology, Psychology, and other sciences.

However, the major difference between the religious and secular source with regard to these keywords, concerning feminism, is the collective production of them, made by women in their many different spaces, and the feminist meetings constitute privileged spaces. Perhaps, it's because of this reason that these words become genuine mystical references for feminism.

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