

Religious Control and Forms of Agency Regarding Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Control Religioso y Formas de Agencia en Torno a los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos de las Mujeres

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between religion, gender, and the control of the female body in conservative Christian contexts in Latin America. It aims to analyze how doctrinal, symbolic, and community structures within Christian religions function as mechanisms of patriarchal control over women's sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights, as well as to identify the forms of agency and resistance women develop within these restrictive frameworks. The methodology employed is based on a qualitative approach centered on critical documentary review and content analysis. The corpus consists of feminist literature, theological studies, sociological research, normative frameworks, and recent academic documents. From a hermeneutic and intersectional feminist perspective, this allows for an understanding of religion as a cultural device that articulates multiple inequalities. The results show that religious control over female bodies is sustained through five main dimensions: doctrinal, symbolic-liturgical, institutional, community, and subjective-affective. These dimensions operate through discourses of guilt, the exaltation of mandatory motherhood, moral surveillance, and the reproduc-



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tion of hierarchies that exclude women from spiritual authority. However, the study also demonstrates the existence of forms of female agency, expressed in practices such as critical reinterpretation of sacred texts, strategic use of contraceptives, the creation of support networks among women, and the personal re-signification of faith. These everyday acts of resistance show that, although religion reproduces patriarchal structures, it is also a space where symbolic disputes and possibilities for transformation emerge.

Keywords: religion, patriarchy, intersectionality, sexual and reproductive rights.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la relación entre religión, género y control del cuerpo femenino en contextos cristianos conservadores de América Latina. Su objetivo es analizar cómo las estructuras doctrinales, simbólicas y comunitarias de las religiones cristianas operan como mecanismos de control patriarcal sobre la sexualidad y los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mujeres, así como identificar las formas de agencia y resistencia que ellas desarrollan dentro de estos marcos restrictivos. La metodología utilizada se basa en un enfoque cualitativo centrado en la revisión crítica documental y el análisis de contenido. El corpus está compuesto por literatura feminista, estudios teológicos, investigación sociológica, marcos normativos y documentos académicos recientes. Desde una perspectiva hermenéutica y feminista interseccional se entiende la religión como un dispositivo cultural que articula desigualdades múltiples. Los resultados muestran que el control religioso sobre los cuerpos femeninos se sostiene en cinco dimensiones principales: doctrinal, simbólico-litúrgica, institucional, comunitaria y subjetivo-afectiva. Estas dimensiones operan mediante discursos de culpa, la exaltación de la maternidad obligatoria, la vigilancia moral y la reproducción de jerarquías que excluyen a las mujeres de la autoridad espiritual. Sin embargo, el estudio también evidencia la existencia de formas de agencia femenina, expresadas en prácticas como la reinterpretación crítica de textos sagrados, el uso estratégico de anticonceptivos, la creación de redes de apoyo entre mujeres y la resignificación personal de la fe. Estas resistencias cotidianas muestran que, aunque la religión reproduce estructuras patriarcales, también es un espacio donde emergen disputas simbólicas y posibilidades de transformación.

Palabras clave: religión, patriarcado, interseccionalidad, derechos sexuales y reproductivos.

Introduction

Religion, as a cultural institution deeply rooted in Latin American societies, has played a fundamental role in the reproduction of patriarchy. It functions not merely as a reflection of male power, but as an ideological apparatus that naturalizes, moralizes, and sacralizes female subordination (Segato, 2013). Throughout history, Christian belief systems—particularly in their conservative iterations—have exercised both symbolic and material

control over female bodies, regulating sexuality, embodiment, and gender roles (Rodríguez, 2017).

Historically, women's bodies have been represented as territories of either purity or sin, of mandatory motherhood or moral transgression (Federici, 2010). From this perspective, religion operates not only as a source of spiritual meaning but as a normative structure capable of disciplining and

sanctioning, thereby reinforcing gender hierarchies through doctrines, symbols, liturgies, and social imaginaries (Gutiérrez, 2014).

This tension becomes particularly visible in the conflict between faith and the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, especially regarding access to contraceptive methods, the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, comprehensive sexual education, and the construction of diverse family models (Morán, Peñas, Sgró Ruata, & Vaggione, 2012).

The background of this issue can be traced through numerous feminist studies demonstrating how religious institutions—particularly Christian ones—have actively participated in shaping legal, social, and moral frameworks that limit women's bodily autonomy (Carbonelli & Giera, 2016).

However, research has also documented that women of faith are not merely passive victims, but rather active subjects who negotiate, resist, and resignify their religious practices, giving rise to forms of spiritual agency and everyday micropolitics (Lagarde, 2015).

In this context, it is urgent to analyze the mechanisms through which religion acts as a dispositive of control over female bodies and reproductive rights, without losing sight of the forms of resistance emerging from the margins. This article is justified by the need to render visible both the structures of oppression and the situated agencies produced at the intersection of gender, religion, and sexuality, particularly in conservative Christian contexts where patriarchal narratives enjoy significant legitimacy.

The general objective of this work is to analyze how religious control operates over women's bodies and sexuality in conservative Christian contexts, emphasizing its effects on the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights. Based on an intersectional feminist approach and through critical documentary analysis, this article proposes a situated reading that recognizes both the oppression and the transformative potential residing within the bodies and experiences of women of faith.

The Female Body as a Site of Religious Patriarchal Power

Religion, as a cultural institution deeply rooted in Latin American societies, has played a fundamental role in the reproduction of patriarchy. It functions not merely as a reflection of masculine power, but as an ideological apparatus that naturalizes, moralizes, and sacralizes female subordination (Segato, 2013). Historically, Christian belief systems have regulated sexuality, embodiment, and gender roles, with a specific focus on the regulation of women (Rodríguez, 2017).

In this sense, the female body has been regarded as an object of control, a site of either purity or sin, and of reproductivity or transgression (Federici, 2010). Thus, religion acts not only as a spiritual repertoire but also as a cultural institution capable of prescribing norms, disciplining, and sanctioning (Vaggione, 2012).

In Latin America, Christianity across its various denominations occupies a central place in communal life. In this context, the tension between faith and sexual and reproductive rights acquires particular relevance, as many women experience their religiosity as a source of meaning, yet also as a framework that limits access to contraception, abortion, bodily autonomy, or non-normative family models (Morán, Peñas, Sgró Ruata, & Vaggione, 2012).

This tension is clearly manifested when women question religious norms through their everyday experiences, creating spaces for negotiation, agency, and reinterpretation (Cerruti, 2020). Therefore, religion as a normative institution cannot be analyzed in isolation from the socio-political, economic, and cultural fabric that reproduces inequalities (Vázquez, 2019).

The female body has been converted into a site for the inscription of dogmas, controls, and sanctions, but also of resistance, reinterpretation, and struggles for autonomy (Butler, 2002). Through theoretical tools such as the pedagogy of cruel-

ty, patriarchal hegemony, gender performativity, and intersectionality, it is possible to unravel the ways in which religious power is exercised over female bodies and subjectivities (Segato, 2016).

Within this religious framework, Rita Segato (2016) posits that women's bodies have historically been transformed into a territory for the staging of patriarchal power (p. 57). Her concept of the "pedagogy of cruelty" explains how violence against women does not merely seek physical harm but possesses an exemplary character, transmitting messages of domination through corporal punishment. This pedagogy results in the internalization of discourses that associate sexuality with guilt, motherhood with biological destiny, and obedience with virtue (Gutiérrez, 2014).

From this perspective, religious patriarchal power functions as a "mandate of masculinity" exercised over women, but also over men, imposing rigid hierarchies and roles (Connell, 2005). The pedagogy of cruelty is materialized through the stigmatization of women who transgress sexual norms—such as single mothers, those who seek abortions, those who reject motherhood, or those who claim bodily autonomy—thereby reproducing a culture of moral punishment sustained by religious institutions (Morán, Peñas, Sgró Ruata, & Vaggione, 2012).

Divine Legitimations, Normative Bodies, and Masculine Power

From this perspective, patriarchal norms are presented as "natural" or "divine," hindering any questioning and establishing a religious patriarchal hegemonic structure. Through these norms, this structure operates by providing a symbolic legitimation of the gender order. Gramsci (1971) understood hegemony as a form of domination based on consent rather than merely on coercion (pp. 57–58).

Religious patriarchal hegemony manifests not only in the structural exclusion of women from spaces of clerical authority but also in the symbolic legitimation of a hierarchical gender order

that permeates daily life, family relations, public policy, and perceptions of the body, sexuality, and autonomy.

Unlike explicit forms of domination, religious patriarchal hegemony operates within the intimate and communal spheres. It is rooted in doctrinal teaching, discourses on sexual morality, liturgical practices, gender mandates, and the configuration of religious imaginaries that model the "good woman" as submissive, maternal, virginal, obedient, silent, and self-sacrificing. This power does not require direct coercion, as it is reproduced through the internalization of duty, the fear of divine punishment, the promise of salvation, and the moral condemnation of those who deviate. Its efficacy lies precisely in the fact that it presents itself as legitimate, eternal, and transcendent.

This hegemony also manifests in a sexual morality that condemns the use of contraceptives, abortion, or sexual diversity, thereby rendering invisible the right to decide over one's body and reproductive life. Tamayo (2018), in analyzing ecclesiastical structures, notes that these institutions exclude women from decision-making spaces while simultaneously promoting female models centered on passivity, obedience, and sexual restraint (pp. 138, 145–146). Within these religious spaces, Mohanty (2003) criticizes the tendency to homogenize the experience of the "religious woman," emphasizing that practices of faith are intersected by social markers (pp. 221–251).

Religious patriarchal hegemony is manifested not only in the structural exclusion of women from spaces of clerical authority but also in the symbolic legitimation of a hierarchical gender order that permeates daily life, family relations, public policies, and perceptions of the body, sexuality, and autonomy. This is not a timeless or universal phenomenon, but a historical construction that has found in religion one of its most effective platforms for legitimation.

From the invention of the biblical canon to the consolidation of exclusively male ecclesiastical hierarchies, Christianity has institutionalized

a worldview where the masculine represents the sacred, the rational, and the authoritative, while the feminine represents the subordinate, the passionate, the impure, or the secondary. In the religious sphere, this patriarchal culture is reproduced in sermons, prayers, symbols, and narratives that exalt female figures as models of obedience and purity, while condemning women who do not meet these characteristics as symbols of sin and disobedience. This opposition between the saint and the sinner has been key in the production of docile female bodies.

Marcela Lagarde (2015) argues that patriarchy, as a system of oppression, perpetuates itself insofar as it succeeds in configuring itself as a culture—that is, as a way of life that organizes affects, values, and social representations (pp. 117–118). In this regard, Ivone Gebara (2004) notes that while the (Catholic) Church speaks of love and justice, it practices inequality and discrimination, reproducing authoritarian structures in the name of God (p. 113). This structural contradiction is one of the foundations of religious patriarchal hegemony: proclaiming a message of love while reproducing hierarchies that subordinate more than half of humanity.

One of the spheres where religious patriarchal hegemony becomes most evident is in the regulation of sexuality. Christian doctrines—particularly their conservative branches—have constructed a model of sexuality where female pleasure is silenced, compulsory heterosexuality is enforced, virginity becomes a moral virtue, and motherhood is cast as a divine destiny. This sexual morality produces a form of control that is not only symbolic but deeply material, with direct consequences for women’s health, autonomy, and lives (Aquino, 2007; Tamayo, 2018).

The subordination of women extends beyond the doctrinal into the practical; women are formed from birth to obey, to “guard” their bodies, to serve men (fathers, brothers, husbands, pastors), and to accept sexuality as a burden to be managed with guilt and resignation (Pineda, 2019). That is to say, hegemony is constructed within the nuclear fa-

mily, in the intimacy of confession, at spiritual retreats, and in Sunday liturgy. It configures a pedagogical dispositive that produces docile bodies, obedient minds, and denied desires.

Furthermore, this hegemony translates into conservative public policies that restrict access to contraceptives, block comprehensive sexual education, or prevent abortion even in extreme circumstances, operating through consent (Carbonelli & Grier, 2016, p. 19). Women who actively participate in churches, who self-identify as faithful, and who comply with religious mandates without question are not simply passive victims; they are subjects who have internalized the norm as a moral mandate, a spiritual duty, and a divine vocation.

This internalization becomes more robust through educational, community, and affective processes. Women find within the church not only a space for spirituality but also one of belonging, recognition, and emotional support. It is within this affective bond that hegemony takes root; thus, women accept subordinate roles because they believe in them, because they provide meaning, and because they cannot conceive of themselves outside of that framework. As Lagarde (2015) asserts, “women learn to love their own subordination, to see virtue in sacrifice and a form of faith in obedience” (p. 138).

This does not imply a blaming of women of faith, but rather a critical understanding of how hegemonic power operates. Religious patriarchal hegemony is not solely imposed from above; it is reproduced daily in the practices, affects, and narratives that structure women’s symbolic world. Questioning this hegemony, therefore, requires a profound effort of denaturalization and the re-appropriation of spiritual discourse through feminist lenses.

One of the most conflict-ridden terrains between feminism and patriarchal religions has been that of sexual and reproductive rights. The control of the female body has historically been a priority for religious institutions, which have morally legislated on menstruation, childbirth, motherhood,

abortion, pleasure, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This hegemony has prevented millions of women from accessing reproductive health services, sexual education, or the free exercise of their sexuality.

Conservative religious discourse has spearheaded campaigns against legal abortion, comprehensive sexual education, and the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. These campaigns are sustained by a biologicistic and essentialist vision of the body, where the uterus is a symbol of mandatory motherhood and where heterosexuality is the only legitimate form of relationship. In this model, women do not have rights over their bodies; instead, they have duties: to be mothers, to be wives, and to be faithful.

One of the primary challenges for feminism in Latin America is to contest the symbolic hegemony that religions exercise over the body and sexuality (Melgar, 2008). Progressive laws are insufficient if “common sense” remains structured by religious imaginaries that condemn female pleasure, demand chastity from women, and present motherhood as a natural duty. Breaking this hegemony requires the generation of new narratives, new pedagogies, and alternative spiritualities.

Intersectionality and Religious Control

From this perspective, it is essential to conduct an analysis through an intersectional lens, as it reveals how oppression is produced at the intersection of multiple axes of inequality: gender, class, ethnicity, religion, age, and others. In conservative religious contexts, a young, poor, Indigenous woman will face significantly more profound forms of control than a white, urban woman with high educational capital (Crenshaw, 1991).

In Mexico, Christian Indigenous women encounter patriarchal control not only from the clergy but also from within their own communities and families, which legitimize restrictive practices in the name of faith (Espinosa, 2010). In this sense, the intersectional approach allows for an understanding of how sexual and reproductive rights are

denied with varying degrees of intensity depending on the social positions women occupy. Intersectionality also renders visible that the religious control of the female body is not merely symbolic but carries material consequences: the denial of healthcare services, the criminalization of abortion, and social exclusion, among others.

Everyday Resistances and the Resignification of Faith as Signs of Agency

The concept of female agency has gained significant relevance in the analysis of contexts of subordination, especially those marked by patriarchal religious structures. In contrast to narratives that represent women of faith as passive, submissive, or manipulated by dogma, the focus on agency allows us to visualize the multiple ways in which women negotiate, resist, resignify, or subvert the mandates that seek to limit their autonomy. Agency does not necessarily imply an open or confrontational rupture with power; rather, it can be expressed through subtle, silent actions deeply embodied in everyday life (Lagarde, 2015).

In contemporary feminist studies, the concept of agency has been redefined to escape the dichotomous logics that oppose obedience to resistance. Therefore, it is necessary to understand agency not only as a capacity for transgression but also as a way of inhabiting normative frameworks with one's own intentions, creativity, and negotiation (Mahmood, 2005).

This approach invites us to conceive of agency as a situated capacity. Women of faith who choose to remain in their churches, who participate actively in religious communities, or who reproduce certain moral mandates are not necessarily negated as subjects. Often, these practices respond to affective, spiritual, communal, or strategic needs. Agency is thus at play in the way women manage their beliefs, their bodies, and their relationships, even within restrictive normative frameworks (Gebara, 2004).

Spiritual Agency and Autonomy from within Faith

In conservative Christian contexts, female agency can be expressed at various levels: from the critical interpretation of sacred texts to the construction of support networks among women, the choice not to become mothers, the practice of contraception despite religious discourse, or even the creation of alternative faith communities. These forms of agency do not deny spirituality; rather, they resignify it through the body, through experience, and through an ethics of self-care and care for others (Lagarde, 2015).

It has been argued that some women of faith develop a non-institutionalized theology grounded in their own experiences and the pursuit of justice. This vision of feminist spirituality involves reappropriating faith based on values such as dignity, equality, and freedom. Thus, female spiritual agency can be understood as a form of symbolic resistance that challenges clerical authority without abandoning religious affiliation.

Agency can also be expressed in silence, in withdrawal, in intimate questioning, and in the reconfiguration of one's relationship with God outside of institutions. The woman who decides to stop going to confession, who chooses not to baptize her daughters, or who reinterprets the Gospels through her own experience of violence is exercising a form of agency that breaks with automatic obedience and creates fissures in patriarchal hegemony (Lagarde, 2015).

Situated Agency and Intersectionality

From an intersectional perspective, it is fundamental to recognize that agency is not exercised under equal conditions. Indigenous, rural, Afro-descendant, and impoverished women face greater obstacles in resisting patriarchal religious mandates due to their social, economic, and ethnic positions. Nevertheless, specific forms of agency emerge even in these contexts: women who organize prayer circles outside of male con-

trol, who teach sexual education using spiritual language, who accompany abortions through a lens of communal ethics, or who blend ancestral spiritualities with elements of Christianity (Lagarde, 2015).

These practices demonstrate that agency is not a homogeneous category, but rather a diverse and situated one. As Elsa Tamez (1997) posits, religious Latin American women have developed a biblical reading "from below"—one that does not seek institutional permission but originates from life itself, from lived oppressions, and from the desire for transformation (pp. 91-93). This form of theological agency is also a political gesture that challenges the masculine monopoly over religious meaning.

Micropolitical Agencies and Everyday Dissidences

Female resistances are not always inscribed within grand narratives of emancipation. Frequently, they are micropolitical: small decisions, acts of care, affective gestures, and strategic silences. The woman who hides her contraceptive method from her pastor; another who accompanies a friend to an abortion clinic despite her church's condemnation; another who chooses to discuss menstruation and sexuality with her daughters without resorting to the language of guilt—all of these actions are expressions of agency (Lagarde, 2015).

These everyday dissidences possess an enormous transformative potential. This is not because they topple the system immediately, but because they undermine it from within, interrupting it and opening fissures through which the possibility of new meaning enters. As Lagarde (2015) maintains, freedom is not always conquered through a total rupture; it is also constructed through small affirmations of the self and autonomous decisions made in the midst of oppression.

Agency as a Key to Understanding Ambivalences

The concept of female agency allows for a more complex understanding of women of faith. They are neither merely victims nor rebellious heroines. They are subjects within contradictory contexts who negotiate norms, resist through their spirituality, transform their relationships, and frequently contest religious meaning through new practices. To recognize this agency is to acknowledge women's capacity to rewrite their own history, even within structures that subordinate them (Lagarde, 2015).

From this perspective, faith should not be read exclusively as a dispositive of control, but also as a field of possibility. Female agency in conservative religious contexts is an invitation to think in terms of complexity, ambivalence, and embodied hope. Where there is a body, there is history. Where there is oppression, there is resistance.

Research Methods and Techniques

This article was developed using a qualitative approach based on a critical documentary review and content analysis. A hermeneutic and intersectional feminist perspective was adopted to ensure a situated, ethical, and contextualized interpretation of the phenomenon under study.

The corpus of analysis consisted of a set of specialized secondary sources, including academic texts, theological essays, feminist studies, legal frameworks, scientific journal articles, and reports from regional organizations regarding religion, gender, and sexual and reproductive rights in Latin America. Key texts analyzed include the works of authors such as Rita Segato (2013, 2016), Marcela Lagarde (2015), Silvia Federici (2010), Judith Butler (2002), Ivone Gebara (2004), and Saba Mahmood (2005), as well as contemporary studies on intersectionality and female religious agencies.

The selection of the corpus was conducted based on criteria of thematic relevance, theoretical currency, and critical representativeness, prioritizing

materials that address the relationship between religion and the control of the female body through feminist, decolonial, or intersectional lenses. This delimitation allowed for the construction of a robust interpretative analysis aimed at rendering visible the ideological, symbolic, and affective mechanisms of religious power, without losing sight of emerging forms of agency and spiritual resignification.

Although the study did not include fieldwork or interviews, the triangulation of theoretical sources and the analytical systematization of the corpus provide argumentative depth and critical rigor to the findings presented.

Limitations

The research may present limitations insofar as it is based exclusively on secondary sources, which restricts the updating of data and the possibility of delving into direct testimonies. However, the triangulation of sources and critical review allow for the construction of a solid and pertinent analysis aligned with the study's objectives.

Analysis and Discussion

A critical analysis of the literature identified recurring patterns regarding the role of religion in the control of female bodies and the regulation of sexual and reproductive rights, particularly within contexts marked by conservative religious structures. This analysis was articulated through an intersectional feminist reading, revealing that religion—far from being a neutral or purely spiritual sphere—functions as an ideological dispositive. It reproduces gender hierarchies, moralizes sexuality, and legitimizes the subordination of women as a divine mandate (Segato, 2016).

To systematize the mechanisms through which this control operates, an analytical table was developed summarizing the primary dimensions that structure religious power over sexual and reproductive rights. This framework identifies five fundamental axes: doctrinal, symbolic-liturgical, institutional, communal-familial, and subjective-affective.

Each of these dimensions expresses specific ways of norming, sanctioning, or restricting women’s autonomy over their bodies and reproductive decisions. For instance, while the doctrinal level produces discourses associating female sexuality with sin and guilt, the communal sphere reproduces these norms through moral surveillance and social pressure. Simultaneously, subjective control proves especially effective, as it acts from within the individual conscience, promoting guilt, fear, or self-surveillance (Segato, 2016). This table facilitates an understanding of religious control not as a unidimensional phenomenon, but as a complex network of practices and imaginaries interwoven across different levels of social life.

the judgment of the religious community, and to conceive of their bodies as a territory regulated from the outside (Foucault, 1998).

Religious patriarchal hegemony acts as a symbolic order presented as legitimate, eternal, and unquestionable. It is sustained by narratives that exalt submission, obedience, and sacrifice as feminine virtues, while excluding women from spaces of spiritual authority (Butler, 2002). This order is not imposed by force, but through the internalization of duty, the fear of divine punishment, and the promise of redemption. However, these forms of obedience do not negate the possibility of agency (Crenshaw, 1991).

Table 1.
Mechanisms of Religious Control Over Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Dimension of Control	Description	Examples of Operation
Discursive-Doctrinal	Production of religious moral norms re-garding sexuality, reproduction, and gender roles.	Condemnation of abortion; exaltation of virginity; motherhood as a spiritual duty.
Symbolic and Liturgical	Use of symbols, sacred figures, and narratives to reinforce subordinate female models.	Idealization of the Virgin Mary; exclusion of transgressive female biblical figures.
Institutional and Hierarchical	Ecclesiastical organization that excludes women from power and influences restrictive public policies.	Clergy lobbying against legal abortion or comprehensive sexual education (CSE).
Communal and Familial	Reproduction of religious control within the family and local community as a moral surveillance network.	Stigmatization of single mothers; community pressure against the use of contraceptives or abortion.
Affective and Subjective	Emotional internalization of religious mandates, shaping women's moral perception of their bodies and desires.	Guilt regarding sexual pleasure; fear of divine punishment; obedience as a spiritual virtue.

Source: Author’s own elaboration, based on Segato (2016), Foucault (1998), Morán, Peñas, Sgró Ruata, and Vaggione (2012), and Mahmood (2005).

One of the study’s primary findings relates to the exemplary and pedagogical nature of religious doctrines regarding the female body, as posited by anthropologist Rita Segato (2016). Her description of the “pedagogy of cruelty” refers to a form of ritualized violence that acts upon bodies to reproduce gender hierarchies and discipline women through symbolic and material punishments. This pedagogy operates beyond physical violence, functioning through discourses and symbols that associate desire with sin, pleasure with guilt, and autonomy with transgression (p. 11). Thus, women learn to exercise self-control, to fear

In this sense, many women of faith exercise a silent, everyday, and strategic spiritual agency that allows them to live their faith through a logic of dignity, care, and autonomy. This form of agency is key to understanding how, even in contexts of powerful symbolic control, practices of embodied resistance emerge (Rivera, 2019).

From an intersectional perspective, the analysis also demonstrated that religious patriarchal hegemony, though powerful, is not monolithic. The internalization of religious duty is accompanied by processes of negotiation, creative interpre-

tation, and the construction of alternative spaces. Women of faith—especially those situated in conditions of multiple vulnerability (such as Indigenous, young, rural, or impoverished women)—exercise their agency within contexts marked by the tension between tradition and personal dignity (Rivera Garza, 2019). This embodied, spiritual, and political agency constitutes a form of resistance that interrupts the automatic reproduction of the patriarchal order (Segato, 2016).

Furthermore, female agency is not homogeneous. In contexts marked by social inequalities, women exercise their agency from differentiated positions. Indigenous Christian women, for example, face a double subordination: by ecclesiastical structures and by communal cultural norms (Morán, Peñas, Sgró Ruata, & Vaggione, 2012). Nevertheless, even in these scenarios, acts of resistance are recorded, such as the organization of women-led prayer circles, the critique of moralizing discourse, or the defense of the right to choose through spiritual lenses (Rivera, 2019).

In sum, agency constitutes a fundamental interpretive key for reading the ambivalences of patriarchal religious power. It is not enough to point out the mechanisms of control; it is also necessary to recognize the fissures, resistances, and symbolic re-appropriations. The female body, though disciplined, is also a site of knowledge, decision-making, and spirituality. Recognizing female agency in conservative religious contexts is an indispensable step toward legitimizing women's sexual and reproductive rights in a free, plural, and emancipatory manner (Segato, 2016).

Conclusions

This article demonstrates that religion, within conservative Christian contexts in Latin America, functions as a normative institution that legitimizes, naturalizes, and reproduces patriarchal control over women's bodies and lives. Through symbolic, moral, and material mechanisms, religious doctrines have consolidated a hierarchical gender order that imposes limits on sexuality, bodily

autonomy, and sexual and reproductive rights.

The analysis based on the notion of the “pedagogy of cruelty” made it possible to visualize how violence against women—far from being isolated incidents—constitutes exemplary practices that discipline through the body. Religious patriarchal hegemony, for its part, is articulated as a framework of beliefs and practices presented as legitimate due to their perceived anchoring in the divine. This symbolic power is reproduced daily and affects not only ecclesiastical structures but also intimate, familial, and communal relationships.

Furthermore, the study shows that female religious subjectivities are configured through the performative reiteration of prescribed gender roles. However, this repetition does not imply absolute passivity. From a situated reading, female agency emerged as a central axis of the analysis, revealing the capacity of many women of faith to resignify their spirituality, negotiate religious mandates, and exercise autonomy within the structures that subordinate them.

The intersectional approach recognized that religious control does not affect all women equally; rather, it intensifies according to other forms of inequality such as class, ethnicity, territory, or age. In particular, Indigenous, impoverished, or rural women face greater obstacles in accessing their sexual and reproductive rights, reinforcing the urgency for public policies integrated with gender, cultural, and human rights perspectives.

In light of this panorama, the article underscores that religion should not be approached solely as a field of oppression, but also as a space for symbolic contestation. Within the fissures of dogma, many women are creating alternative forms of spirituality, feminist theologies, and faith communities that are more inclusive and liberating. These practices constitute acts of embodied resistance, dignity, and the struggle for a full and meaningful life.

In conclusion, depatriarchalizing religion is a fundamental ethical, political, and epistemological task necessary to advance toward the full gua-

rantee of women's sexual and reproductive rights. This process involves not only confronting ecclesiastical structures but also recognizing and em-

powering the voices of women of faith who, from their own contexts, are transforming the relationship between faith, the body, and autonomy.

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