

The Mother Tongue: Textuality, Authority and Community in the Post-Teresian Reform Female Monasticism (ca. 1560-1700)

The main objective of this project is to examine the relevance of early modern religious women's thought in the critical period of the history of the Christianity which saw the threat and subsequent rupture within the Western Church. This turbulent time has its major impact in the Hispanic Monarchy, the self-proclaimed defender of the Roman Catholic Church unity against the Protestant Reformation.

Therefore, the crucial aim of the project is to locate, analyse and interpret religious women's writings along with their influence over the literature, culture, and the Christian spirituality in the early modern Spain and Europe after the Discalced Reform (from the 1560) that responds roughly to the eve and conclusion of the relevant Council of Trent (1545-1563). This goal will be achieved by study of the selected, yet representative corpus consisted of barely known or little studied texts – to a significant extent manuscripts and old prints– created in the milieu of female catholic monasticism in the Spanish Empire. This geopolitical context is understood as the nucleus of the reform of Discalced Carmelites by Teresa de Jesús from Ávila (1515-1582, O. C. D.), and therefore critical for the renewed spirituality that constituted the most original female-authored Catholic answer to the Church's crisis. It will also consider, as important points of reference, those European lands where the discalced reform had major implementation, i.e. Spanish Habsburgs' dependencies, Kingdom of France, and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the mid of the 16th to the end of the 17th century.

The intervention of Teresa de Jesús in the literary, religious, spiritual, and intellectual culture, and her subsequent inclusion in the dynamics of the printed book market, constituted an unprecedented milestone for the formulation of female authorship and religious leadership model within and beyond the convent walls. Also, the immediate processes of Teresa's beatification (1614) and canonization (1622) were used by the Counterreformation cause as urgent claim to strengthen alliances between the monarchical and ecclesial powers. However, while the official politics appealed to an unsullied and orthodox image of the ecstatic Saint, to refer to the Teresian legacy as reformer, theologian and female writer turned out to be a source of authority legitimation especially used by the nuns who led the Carmelite reform just before and immediately after the death of their leader. Taking advantage of the notions of "affective community" by Barbara Rosenwein (2007) and the "matriarchive" coined by Marta Segarra (2014), this research project seeks to analyse and interpret the rich and sometimes conflictive character of the authorial model of writer, thinker and religious leader built upon the reference to Teresa de Jesús. It also aims to display the plethora of meanings the Teresian heritage was given by religious women who sought to legitimize their mystical, literary, and theological endeavours using the figure of "Mother Teresa" as a polysemic symbol in both: the Iberian Peninsula and the vibrant religious reform movement that went far beyond the national borders and the Discalced Carmelites Order formula.

For that reason, I have considered the revision and the inclusion of this forgotten perspective of female religious voices as essential to a profound understanding of what was a key period in Hispanic and European culture and Church history. The project's wider repertoire will bring original bibliographical references to the field and would represent a ground of new enquiries for the research on both: the early modern female religiosity and the first female intellectual traditions of the Iberian world.

In a broad sense, the project combines historical, philosophical and cultural revision with a cultural critique of the contemporary world. Its goal is to restore the traditions of female religious authorship and to analyse the significance their thought had for the dominant discourses in history. At the same time, however, this research clearly points to the present time: it allows to redefine not so much the place as the space of women in the tradition, culture, Church and Christian religion. Since, unlike place, space is a complex system of relations.