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**Thesen zur Dissertation:**

**Colombian Women in the 1920s: Thought, Social Assistance, Work and Struggle.  
Discourse Analysis from a Gender Perspective**

Women were part of the Colombian public sphere during the 1920s. Their presence in it materialized in continuous fluctuation between the private and public spheres. The theme of this dissertation is to show the diverse presence of Colombian women from that period in spaces outside the home which seemed destined only for men, and how the concept of *marianismo* did not only have a “feminizing” function promoted by the Vatican (IX, 1854), but served them equally to attain public agency. What follows is a summary of the most important hypotheses and results.

### **1) *Marianismo* in Latin America**

Research on the concept of *marianismo* tends to focus only on the recognition and propagation of this feminine ideal—highly questionable during our era, but which operated during the period studied in this dissertation (1919-1934)—in the different countries in Latin America; additionally, these studies assert that Latin American women were able to widen their range of action in the work field through *marianismo*, but only through spheres related to maternity (Stevens, 1977). Other studies which try to go beyond this tend to insist on the advantages that patriarchy obtained by submitting women to this ideal (Pastor, 2010) (Potthast, 2010). Both types of research undermine one of the characteristic aspects of this concept, the conscience that Latin American women had of the power they gained by being recognized through this Marian model of being a woman.

The objectives of this study are obtained from this initial situation: it is evident that *marianismo* did not only have a “feminizing” function promoted by the Vatican (IX, 1854) and also propagated in Colombia during the 1920s (Fernández, 1915). By contrast, the study tries to go beyond an essentialist vision implied in the perspective that only considers aspects of domination in the analysis. Throughout this text, supported by writing, speeches and practices which prescribed women’s conduct inside and outside the

home during the 1920s, I show, on the one hand, that *marianismo* served to promote a type of feminine conduct that adjusted to the social structures of the time, but, on the other, that the acceptance of this type of feminine conduct promoted by *marianismo* was used by women voluntarily or not as an instrument of emancipation.

## **2) *Perlaborating the 1920s in Colombia: A Methodological Approach***

To re-write the presence of Colombian women in the 1920s, we have tried to do a new reading of the established discourse on what it meant to be a woman in that era. This *perlaborated* (de Toro, 1997) re-reading and re-writing uses tools from philosophy, history, gender studies and literature; its materials, research techniques, questions and largely its results. We have specifically used Joan Scott's gender category (Scott, 2008), the concepts of *Verkörperung* and *embodiment* by Fischer-Lichte (2011), the later taken from Judith Butler along with her development of the concept of performativity that shows how gender is a cultural construction (Butler J. &, 1998) (Butler J. , 2007), Genevieve Fraisse's theory regarding the separation of public/private spheres (Fraisse, 2003) and Michel Foucault's concepts of power relations and the archive (Foucault, *La arqueología del saber*, 1978) (Foucault, *Microfísica del poder*, 1980). The need for history is evident since we can use it to trace the power of convocation and assembly that women had through the documents they wrote and the speeches they gave. Tools from history are also suitable to trace the discursive uses of notions such as "woman" and thus identify continuities and ruptures in their use and their performative effects in the present. For this reason, our point of departure is empiric work with thorough archival research in order to construct a conceptual framework that guides us through the processes of the *Verkörperung/embodiment* of women "to conceive at any time the relation between actors and spectators—women and state/society/church—(and) which movement possibilities through space actors had and which possibilities of perception the spectators had" (Fischer-Lichte, 2011, pág. 221).

## **3) *The Limits of the Traditional Use of the Concept of Marianismo***

An ancient Western concept (Athens during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) postulated that there was a natural place where women belonged, the *oikos*, a closed quarter which provided food and shelter. In addition to this, it was believed that the tasks that women developed in that "private space" belonged solely to them, and that the men's work was outside in public space (Aristóteles, 1988), (Mirón Pérez, 2010), (Guerra, 1999). However, *marianismo* was able to take advantage of these ideas which had prevailed for

a long time. *Marianismo*, in addition to being an ideal of woman in which “all” women recognized themselves, was a prescriptive model which created patterns of conduct for women through the veneration of the wife, mother and daughter since the historicity of the discourse of being a good woman was a (re)iteration of a repertoire of acts which had become present in the bodies of Colombian women. Thus, to be a good manager, a good mother, welcoming, self-sacrificing etc. was part of their constructed identity. We cannot maintain the idea that *marianismo* only oppressed women, but rather we need to do a perlaborated re-reading and re-writing (de Toro, 1997) of the past. Perlaboration here makes *marianismo* disappear as a determining category and opens to a new idea, through the analysis of women’s writing, that underscores how the concept of *marianismo* allows us to understand the way that ideal affected women in the 1920s in Colombia. It is important to view *marianismo* as a tool that can be used in two ways because, on the one hand, it allows us to see the advantages it gave women to move comfortably in their capacities as mothers or to show male domination, but it can also be used to show the different forms of resistance that characterized feminine action during the studied period and concretely of the feminine writing of the period.

#### **4) State of the Research**

There are many historical studies on the 1920s in Colombia, even though the research on the role of women in Colombia during the period 1920 to 1934 are rare (Álvarez, 2010), (Alvear Farnsworth, 1995), (Vega Cantor R. , 2002) (Vega Cantor, 2004). The great majority of them show, on the one hand, the role of women as caregivers to their children, husbands and the home (in literature, social welfare work, workers struggles and politics), and although it is true that women claim that role, by stating this, on the other hand, they have forgotten to show from the iteration of this mode of being women that women also achieved social changes for the country. Despite the continuous circulation of the Marian discourse during the studied period, other studies question the extension of its effects and assert that this ideal was not equally accepted among working, wealthy or middle-class women (Reyes Cárdenas 1994). One reason for the inadequacy of these studies, on the one hand, may lie in the difficulty of finding records of the way that women participated, for example, in the workers struggles. The vast majority of their speeches were not published, so that there are only oral testimonies or fragments in publications of the era or in interviews that some researchers were able to carry out with the protagonists of these struggles (Luna, 2003; Archila 1995). Additionally, focusing on the Marian discourse as

oppressing does not allow us to see that the image of the caregiver-mother-virtuous woman gave women the possibility to leave the house and have agency.

### 5) The Double Face of *Marianismo*: Results

The chapter entitled “The Double Face of *Marianismo*: Feminine Literature in the Third Decade of the Twentieth Century in Colombia” shows how women gained public visibility through writing in publications targeted at them: feminine magazines and sections in newspapers. Not only were they the main topic and the targeted audience in the mass publication media, women also had an active part in their production: they published articles, founded newspapers, wrote pamphlets and produced literature, among other types of texts. In addition to confirming what other studies using *marianismo* sustain—the restriction of the lives of women to the role of mothers and wives, and their submission to patriarchal discourse using readings and analysis of narratives written by women—it also proposes the concept as a tool that can be used in two ways: On the one hand, to show the advantages the idea of *marianismo* gave women to move comfortably in their roles of mothers, or to show male domination; and, on the other, to show that using this notion the diverse forms of resistance that characterized feminine action in the studied period and concretely of the feminine writing of the period can be rendered visible. This chapter identifies six strategies of acceptance of the mandates of *marianismo* used to resist the social framing contained in them. These strategies were employed by women in their literary production, which is by no means limited to writing diaries, but rather published in newspapers and books: 1. The content of the writing did not place man at the center of the narrations, nor did it praise an immaculate virtuousness, rather, Marian virtues served to justify actions considered impious; 2. Use of masculine pseudonyms and false names to navigate into a domain that “was not theirs”, the public sphere; 3. Taking care of their condition of Marian women also meant that, in some cases, they had to submit to male literary conventions to reach publication; 4. Women who wanted to see their writing printed often had to apologize for abandoning the sphere prescribed to them—the space of the home. In other words, the apologies, as well as the adoption of aesthetic criteria or pseudonyms became a means by which to appear in a space to which they did not “belong”; 5. Some of the women writers did not fear mocking those who doubted female authorship,<sup>1</sup> thus their strategy was to subvert the roles. They showed

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1 In her book *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (2018), Joanna Russ talks about how women's writing is polluted: “An alternative to denying female agency in art is to pollute the agency—that is, to promulgate

themselves as fighting for honor and truth—a chivalrous struggle—and they branded those men as defenseless—an adjective usually assigned to women. Thus, women polluted their masculinity by feminizing them when they polluted female authorship with impunity;<sup>2</sup> 6. Some, like the Black Lady, even proposed an active way to be a woman when they publicly defended their femininity in national circulation newspapers and ridiculed those who had dared doubt that a woman could write. All these forms of resistance have the acceptance of the values of *marianismo* in common. As we can see, the concept of *marianismo* illustrated in the first chapter and applied to the reading of female written production in the 1920s in Colombia has revealed that its use is much more powerful than a mere acceptance of a social space of action or of evidence of patriarchal power.

In the second chapter, “Social Welfare: the Condition to be Caregiver-Mother-Virtuous Woman”, another form of women’s emergence in the public sphere can be seen: the diverse forms of social welfare work that women led with the support of the Catholic Church, the State and, in some cases, private companies. Examples of this type of work are the establishment of schools and kinder gardens in some municipalities of the country, and also the collection of aid for international catastrophes (Melo Lancheros, 1966). The concept of *marianismo* showed how women managed to move in the public sphere of social welfare work while at the same time accepting and promoting Marian virtues.

The possibility of leaving the home and working for a welfare association in Colombia during the studied period meant leaving the domestic domain and participating in the public sphere with the acceptance and recognition of the society, which also meant learning new types of activities such as management of institutions. Thus, women were asked to develop values such as charity, sacrifice, chastity, female decorum, among others. Furthermore, their autoregulation was demanded to achieve such values. Women became responsible for their autoregulation to exemplify themselves as “good women”,

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the idea that women make themselves ridiculous by creating art, or that writing or painting is immodest (just as displaying oneself on the stage is immodest) and hence impossible for any decent woman, or that creating art shows a woman up as abnormal, neurotic, unpleasant and hence unlovable. *She wrote it, all right—but she shouldn’t have*” (Russ, 2018).

2 The strategy used by the writers “[...] adapted to the patterns of street protests by women identified by historians in a great variety of contexts. Jaqueline Hall and Temma Kaplan, in particular, have drawn attention to the manipulation of signs charged with gender implications used by the female workers, and to the frequently creative ways in which their protests mock male authority. Here I show an inversion of gender roles where women writers suggest that men are “feminine” for taking the place of female writers, the mockery centers on assigning them a female name. Women make a call on masculinity” (Alvear Farnsworth, 1995, pág. 75).

“good Christians” and, thus, good Marian women. Hence, although the social class they belonged to determined access to discourses on “how to be a woman”, beyond the classes, these condensed into an asceticism of femininity:<sup>3</sup> the discourse of the woman who is chaste, obedient, humble, pious and charitable transcended social classes to engage with different forms of acceptance among a great part of Colombian women. In this way, by accepting and constantly propagating only one model of being a woman, *marianismo* stated through constant iteration that they could only be like the virgin Mary—to be only one way—and the opposite would mean becoming a “public woman”.

Chapter three entitled “Generic Femininity in the Heart of the Working Woman” shows that women’s struggles connected with the workers movement (Jaramillo Salgado, 1997), and their entrance into the textile industry was among the first ways in which they slowly gained presence in the public sphere in the 1920s in Colombia. One of the objectives of this chapter is to show the mechanisms of domination in the *domain of work* and to reveal them through the movement of working women between the public and private spheres. Another objective is to show how the presence of Catholic discourse strengthened the asceticism of femininity in the work field, erasing any kind of divergent femininity.<sup>4</sup> To achieve both objectives, the chapter explains how the Marian discourse operated in the factories and additionally, it shows that a generic “transclass”<sup>5</sup> femininity existed. The iterability of this type of femininity meant the effacement of an emerging femininity, of the one produced as women verbally appropriated public spaces; it was the female workers that won a fight (increased salary, reduced working hours and respect from their immediate bosses).

The fourth chapter, “Demanding Rights: Collective Social Actions”, explains how women were a recurring theme among intellectuals of the 1920s in Colombia, as well as the way in which the preeminence they achieved, *as educators of values*, allowed them to fight for new feminine initiatives such as entrance to university education. The strategy of this struggle and its relative success, in addition to feminine intervention in public

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3 This concept can be seen as a way of being a woman that implied, on the one hand, that women had the power to become (habits, practices and “processes of embodiment”) by themselves under the idea of womanhood that was promoted, but, on the other, such an ideal gave them no other options but to be married women.

4 I call divergent femininity those women who did not fit into the Marian discourse, among whom were some of the working women, those who yelled, went out at night etc., things which a “virtuous woman should not do”.

5 I call generic “transclass” femininity the discourse of caregiver-mother-virtuous woman that reached Colombian women independently of their social class, a discourse which created specific habits and values with the purpose of strengthening the idea that women could only be virtuous mothers.

administration, must be understood in light of the stated objectives, which are here differentiated according to the temporal closeness between them into some that were long-term and other short-term ones. The first of these had to do with the struggles for better social and civil conditions for women or, in other words, to obtain the same rights as men, and the second, the short-term goals, had to do with attaining specific objectives such as entrance to higher education. The struggles toward the first type of objectives—suffrage and civil equality—were denied by the State in 1923 and again in 1928. This last rejection was the tipping point for women to reorganize their strategy in search of short-term objectives. Part of the strategy used by the women I have chosen to call feminists<sup>6</sup> was to appear before society in public spaces, go where legislation was carried out and promote changes to existing laws that justified inequality between men and women by means of written briefs. The IV International Feminine Congress that took place in 1930<sup>7</sup> was also part of the accomplishments of the political struggles undertaken by these women.

The participation of Colombian women in the public sphere materialized in continuous fluctuation between the private and public spheres. There are four areas in which this fluctuation can be understood using empiric material: the intellectual world, the universe of charity work, the labor field and the spaces where politics was done from the street to the senate. It was only possible to identify the double face of *marianismo* through the revision of an enormous volume of sources located in Colombia and Germany. These sources were comprised of magazines, reports, thesis, newspapers, short stories etc., that gathered the voices of men and women of the period regarding what was expected a woman should be: her behavior in public, her dress, her treatment of less fortunate people, her place in society—specially within the family—and her labor opportunities. What is surprising about the evidence of the participation of these Colombian women in the public sphere in the 1920s is that this space was generally assumed to be the exclusively the domain of men. Nevertheless, the consulted materials show that they were able to access it from a discourse that motivated, demanded and created one or various ways of being a woman; a discourse which, as already mentioned, was accepted due to the double face of

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6 According to the sources consulted and analyzed for this studied period, we can see that the women who undertook these political struggles called themselves feminists.

7 International congress that sought to promote the cause of women and at the same time to honor Simon Bolivar, patriot of the Americas, in the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.

*marianismo*. Hence, the previous struggles, allowed women to widen their space of action.

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