

CALL FOR PAPERS

Motherhood(s) and Monotheisms

This edited volume is intended as a follow-up to *Motherhood(s) and Polytheisms*, which analyzed the modalities through which polytheist systems construct and represent themselves, with a focus on the topic of divine maternity. The construction of motherhood of the divinities has an influence on the concrete practices of motherhood (whether biological or social). We have, on the one hand, “woman as symbol” and, on the other, “women as agents,” a distinction made by Susan Starr Sered that echoes that made by Adrienne Rich between “motherhood as an institution” and mothering, as a feminine experience and a woman’s relationship with her own powers of reproductions. Both distinctions are relevant. Sources suggest a certain gap between the representations and constructions of motherhood and its effective practice.

The purpose of this new edited volume is to analyze how the maternal paradigm is constructed for believers (men, including members of the clergy, and women, including those who are not mothers) in monotheist religions, in spite of the limits of this type of classifications (Judaism, Christianity, and not only Catholicism, Islam, but also Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and other systems). We also aim at examining which were the constraints of maternal practices, from antiquity until today, that often have turned the new status of mother a problematic and contradictory moment for women, often divided between what she is told is the *right* thing to do and what she would feel like doing for her child. Pope Luciani, during his very short mandate, affirmed that “God is mother,” a concept reclaimed and made even more “familiar” but at the same time attenuated, by the Pope Francis, according to whom God loves *like* a mom. But who, exactly, is a “good mother”? Through which ways, by whom and why was such a paradigm constructed? Can a woman be a good believer without being a mother? Is it necessary cancelling femininity or sexuality in the name of motherhood? To which extent has religion influenced the lasting stereotype of the total abnegation of the mother?

We will investigate issues that are strikingly relevant for contemporary times, among others:

-religious perspectives on family planning and the construction of gendered roles in procreation and parenting, especially those that are conditioned by religion, with particular references to surrogacy (surrogate pregnancy); motherhood outside wedlock; the role of mothers-in-law; the absence or negation of paternity;

- symbolical or social mothers such as figures like the godmother or the abbess;

- motherhood denied to saints, martyrs, nuns, and, perhaps figures of the feminine clergy;

- motherhood denigrated or, the opposite, exalted in the figure of the Virgin Mary or Mother of the Lord, for instance;

- motherhood of various Virgins (are they all “maternal”? In which ways?);

- (biological) motherhood denied to the wet-nurse, most often a victim of moral condemnation, and milk-kinship;

- the moment of childbirth and, in general, female bodies as sources of contamination;

- the negation or absence of paternity and symbolic or spiritual paternity of the clergy (borrowing Sara Ruddick’s terminology, can we say that these figures engage in “maternal thinking”?)

- motherhood in Islam and the lexical fields of motherhood and maternal embodiment to designate God and the maternal aspects of the divine

- motherhood in Judaism, and especially the traditional notion that a child must be born of a Jewish mother in order to be recognized as Jewish, as well as the humoristic representations of the stereotypical “Jewish mother” in cinema and literature, from Woody Allen to Moni Ovadia?

In an attempt to evidence the interdisciplinary potential between motherhood studies and the study of religions, and to think about new lines of research, the principal *focus* of this work will be placed not only on isolated analysis of feminine figures in various sacred texts (Virgin Mary, saints, Fatima daughter of the Prophet and mother of Hasan and Husayn, *in primis*), but the use of these figures in the study of ritual or cultural practices that have influenced the religious experience of women as mothers, especially the attitude of women towards the religiously codified norm of “good mother”. We also welcome contributions that consider the construction of motherhood in political religions or parareligions.

Proposals, no longer than 500 words, should be sent by January 31, 2016 to the following e-mail address: giulia.pedrucci@unibo.it. Selected contributors will be invited to hand in their final chapter before September 2017, with final formatting. The final contents of the chapters will be subject to peer-review. Acceptance into the volume depends on the originality, strength, and fit of the chapter within the volume. Proposals and chapters will be accepted in Italian, English, French, and Spanish.

Please contact giulia.pedrucci@unibo.it for any further inquiry.