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Gay Christian Subjectivities at an *inclusive church* in Fortaleza, Brazil

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Abstract:

Based on my fieldwork, this thesis is an ethnography of an *inclusive church* in Fortaleza, Brazil. Inclusive churches define themselves as churches that welcome LGBT subjects both as adepts and in the church ranks. While most of the inclusive churches existing in Brazil today were created in the country, this ethnographic work focuses on a unique exception the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Fortaleza, Brazil. MCC was founded in the United States, in 1968, in the context of the Gay liberation movement and the Stonewall Revolt. My research question is how religion and homosexuality intersect at MCC Fortaleza. My intention was to answer this question by comprehending how a certain subjectivity (LGBT Christian) is constructed inside MCC. Besides participant-observation methods, I have conduct interviews with the MCC Fortaleza leaders to understand how people construct their sense of selfhood.

To Capivara

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Introduction

One doesn't after all "examine" religion, "investigate" it or even "research" it, as circumambulate it. Skulking about the edge of the grove, one watches it happens (Geertz).

Queer readings of sacred texts and the attempt to include LGBT people at different religious organisations have begun in the 1960s, together with the Stonewall revolt and the LGBT Pride movement (Wilcox, 2001; 2003). These attempts have gained more strength after the HIV-AIDS epidemic in the 1970s and 1980s. The inclusion of dissident sexual and gender identities in interpreting sacred texts and the establishment of autonomous religious institutions is still framed as a form of rewriting and re-interpreting concepts of inclusion/exclusion, love, God, etc. (Musskopf, 2008).

There are two main strategies for queer expressions of faith: trying to be included in established religious institutions and create different and separate institutions. Groups such as „Lutherans Concerned“ belong to the first type of collective action. Churches such as the Metropolitan Community Church belong to the second type (Aburrow, 2009; Grace et al., 2007). These different forms of strategy, however, converge in being concerned with „coming out“ and „acting up“ as forms of openly expressing LGBT identities and fighting for LGBT rights to religious self-expression.

Besides the institutional strategies, another aspect that has attracted me to study the relationship between sexualities and religious organizations is the global reach of the queer religious movements, which brings up the relationship between sexualities, globalization and religious organizations (Peumans, 2014). If the question of a coherent queer spirituality (across different religious organizations) is still in debate, the question of understanding the relationship between local and more globalized ways of expressing people's sexual identities, at different religious

institutions, brings up a way into comparative anthropological studies that needs more research at both local and transnational levels (Altman, 2004).

I chose Brazil as the site of my fieldwork for various reasons. Firstly, at the level of institutional strategies, the religious institutions targeting LGBT subjects have been constructing themselves under the category of „inclusive churches“ and their movement begun in Brazil already in the 1990s. After some 25 years of tradition, there are around 20 institutions such as these nowadays (Weiss de Jesus, 2013).

Secondly, the “inclusive church” as an emic category represents a remarkable object in dispute among religious institutions in Brazil today. While it can be understood as churches that allow LGBT people to be a part of the church ranks and target LGBT subjects as their main group of adepts, it is a category that is constantly in conflict. Because the churches’ messages are usually ecumenical (the “inclusive churches” want to attract LGBT and “heterosexual” people from other religious institutions), the use of “inclusive” as a form of addressing LGBT subjects as their main adepts is sometimes substituted by more universalistic values and messages. Throughout this work, I use the term “inclusive” because it is also a sign of a shifting religious field in Brazil (see Natividade, Pereira and Silva, 2013; Weiss de Jesus, 2013). While Brazil might still be thought as a Roman Catholic country, in the last 30 years, there is a steady growth of Evangelicals (a category that refers mostly to recently created Protestant churches), as well as the emergence of inclusive churches. The number of atheists is also rising, according to official statistics (IBGE, 2010).

Thirdly, the Metropolitan Community Church that I researched is the only „inclusive church“ in Brazil that was created in another country (in the United States). The other „inclusive churches“ present in Brazil, even if their leaders had been in contact with the global religious market, especially through connections established in Europe and the United States, are part of dissident groups from already established religious institutions in Brazil. In this sense, „inclusive churches“ are a part of the dispute over the images and rights of LGBT people in Brazil today. They are interconnected with global religious institutions, at the same

time, they offer both interesting questions on religious and scientific authority, selfhood, sexuality, and globalization, as we shall see.

Within Brazil, I chose Fortaleza as the site of my fieldwork for specific reasons. The Northeast part of Brazil, the region Fortaleza is located, is known for being the most homophobic and transphobic region of Brazil regarding crimes against LGBT people (Grupo Gay da Bahia, 2013/2014). At the local level, I wanted to understand how religion and homosexualities intersect through people's social trajectories. Also, Fortaleza has a dynamic religious market targeting LGBT subjects as there are currently four „inclusive churches“ in Fortaleza. These are the Igreja Apostólica Filhos da Luz, the CCNE (Comunidade Crista Nova Esperança), the Igreja Evangélica Bom Pastor, and MCC. MCC and CCNE were the pioneers among inclusive churches while the Igreja Evangélica Bom Pastor and the Igreja Apostólica Filhos da Luz were created in Fortaleza, and are part of more recently created churches, dissidents from other inclusive churches.

My intention in this Master thesis is to research an *inclusive church* in the city of Fortaleza, Brazil. My research question is how religion and homosexualities intersect at a specific setting: the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) Fortaleza, in the State of Ceará.

The focus of my ethnographic study of MCC in Fortaleza is on the everyday life of MCC as I observed it throughout my fieldwork, together with interviews of the congregation. The interviews aimed to construct the subjects' trajectories through different church organisations, and their sexual experiences, together with the facing of homophobia in their families, schools, and workplaces. In their struggles against machismo *à Brasileira*, the interviewees have shown me their resistance to machismo, and the way they use their faith to negotiate their ethical and political claims.

“Being out” and “acting up” are principles that queer spirituality tends to emphasize, and MCC Fortaleza is not different (Aburrow, 2009). As the literature review will show, questions of narrative, reflexivity, identity and how people negotiate their sexual ethics are prominent in researching the intersections between sexuality and religion. In Brazil, there was no research about the MCC congregation

in Fortaleza, and most of the research on inclusive churches are in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo or Brasília. It has opened the opportunity to understand, by being there, based on participant-observation methods (as I will detail in the theoretical and methodological sections), what was going on at MCC in Fortaleza. It is needless to say that more work needs to be done to construct a better understanding of the relations between religion and sexuality in Brazil. From oral history approaches that have more participants to a comparative analysis of different religious organizations present in the country today. This work aims at being a small contribution to an emergent field of studies in Brazil.

To do so, there are conceptual and methodological questions that should be addressed before the reader delves into this work. The objective of the first chapter is to present contributions to understanding of the phenomenon and, chiefly, to provide to the readers the tools through which I construct my gaze throughout this paper. The first chapter, therefore, deals with my theoretical reflections. Here I demonstrate the concept of queer reflexivity I have come across in my research.

The second chapter analyses the methods I used to answer my research questions. Issues such rapport, ethics and the limits of this study are addressed. In the third chapter, I use the ethnographic descriptions, based on my fieldwork diary, and in the fourth chapter, I follow the social trajectories of my interviewees in different religious organizations and in their struggles to live their sexual identities in public, as well as my ethnographic material. In this chapter I make extensive use of my interviews to give to the readers a sense of what was it like to be at MCC Fortaleza.

1. Theoretical matters

1.1. Literature review

The increasing amount of research in both natural and social sciences on homosexualities and transgender identities has opened room to challenge religious knowledge on LGBT subjectivities. However, the fact that no conclusive answer on homosexualities and trans identities was yet achieved is still a source of polemic and conflict among religious and scientific experts. Today, scientific and religious authorities at times use conflicting and complementary arguments trying to shape attitudes towards the “right” way to express human sexuality and gendered identities (Hunt, 2009).

When I tried to come to terms with the way theological arguments both pro and against LGBT right to self-expression mix with secular discourses, I have found many discourses are currently utilised: human rights, national laws against sex discrimination, scientific hypotheses on human sexuality, the use of other polemic parts of the sacred books that justified, for instance, women’s oppression and slavery (in order to undermine the authority of religion), historically informed analysis of theological arguments, the pointing to possible errors in the translations of sacred books (Yip and Keenan, 2009), and others. The social uses of some of those discourses make up the conflicting maps that we could use to construct an anthropologically rich understanding of the disputes over the meanings attributed to homosexualities and trans forms of embodiment¹.

The aim of this paper is to focus on a Christian institution. And, as the institutional positions on sexual minorities vary at different Christian institutions, I am not in a position to draw a complete synthesis here. However, James B. Nelson (apud Hunt, 2009) has enumerated four types of attitudes regarding homosexuality (that could be extended to LGBT people, I believe) by religious organisations:

¹ Wilcox (2006) points out to the lack of works on transgender people and people with disabilities in intersection with their religious beliefs. Wilcox’s article is also a better guide for people who want to find out more on queer readings of sacred texts in Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

rejecting-punitive (that homosexuality is morally wrong and should not be endorsed); rejecting–non-punitive (that homosexuals are not to be held responsible for their orientation but should lead a chaste lifestyle); qualified acceptance (mostly accepting the legitimacy of gay orientation but insists that gay men should live their lives in an ethically responsible way) and full acceptance.

In practice, we can see an example of how James Nelson’s classification system works, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church. There are official statements such as the ones issued by the Roman Catholic church, in which homosexual Catholics should be chaste to reconcile faith and sexuality (see: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2359). However, the same church that does not support same-sexual acts does not dare to say that homosexual desires are sinful. This middle ground was constructed in order avoid an official advocacy of violence (and official “exclusion”) against Gays and Lesbians. The following statement usually refers the attitude above: “hate the sin, love the sinner”.

In a survey with 109 Gay and Lesbian Catholics in Britain, Andrew Yip (1997) has found that most of the Gays and Lesbians that answered his questionnaire have developed a sense of being proud of their sexual identities and have adapted Church’s teaching to their sense of self and their sexual identities. The same study, however, has shown many debates around the right sexual ethics to follow: anal and oral sex, one-night stands, committed relationships, mutual masturbation, and chastity were heatedly debated among Catholic sexual minorities.

In one sense, questions of agency and reflexivity come to the forefront of Yip’s studies². LGBT people belonging to religious institutions are obliged to negotiate their sexual ethics with different and often conflicting church's teaching. To make their faith and sexual (and gender) identities compatible, queer people of faith have to either reflexively engage themselves in discursive battles at church settings or abstain from them³.

2 Even if based on quantitative data, Yip’s analysis shows the ways Lesbians and Gays reflexively construct a positive self-image at officially hostile church settings.

3 In Yip (1997), the percentage of Lesbians and Gays that were not “out at all” to their religious congregational fellows was the highest (59,4%). In second place came their clergy (44%), followed

In another study with Gay men that belonged to many Christian institutions, Yip (1997b) approached the way Gay men have constructed a positive self-image at hostile religious environments. The respondents' answers could belong to four groups: attacking the stigmatisation of the church, attacking the stigmatiser, using positive personal experience, and using the ontogenetic argument.

By attacking the stigmatisation, Yip means that Gay men in his study re-interpret the Biblical passages that condemn homosexuality (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1: 26-7). The strategies people use to counter the stigmatisation are: (I) Challenge the applicability of Biblical messages in today's contexts (II) Shift the focus from the messages that condemn homosexuality (III) Invalidate the usual interpretation of these Biblical messages. In this work, Yip constructs a way on how to understand the process through which Gay men deal and negotiate their identities within churches' institutional stigmas.

Yip conceptualises Gays and Lesbians in his studies as people who have been able to overcome shame and guilt and felt able to educate the church, reversing the stigmas imposed on them. Especially when they use statements such: "God created me Gay" (ontogenetic argument); or when they contrast the official position of the church with the everyday treatment they face at religious institutions. Or when they attack the hypocrisy present at religious institutions (attacking the stigmatiser). The strategies enumerated above make more sense in approaching Christian churches that do not construct a positive discourse on homosexuality and transgendered subjectivities. Thumma (1991), however, researching an Evangelical group called Good News, has described how these strategies are used in a process of becoming openly Gay and Christian. From acceptance of one's homosexuality to new readings of the Bible up until an integration of both Evangelical faith and homosexuality.

Keenan's (2009) work with Gay Anglican clergymen delves into how ecclesiastical figures of authority reconcile their calling with their sexual

by family members (50%), employers (46,6%), and work colleagues (28,6%). Yip could get the contacts of the respondents because they all belonged to a queer Christian organisation in Britain named "Quest".

orientation. Many of the clergymen interviewed, simply say that it was impossible for God to ignore their sexual orientation when He has called them to become priests. These priests value people's experiences of marginalisation and try to make an effort, so their congregations are more inclusive. The debate whether LGBT people should be able to hold clerical positions in Christian churches is still in the air, as well as the question of allowing LGBT people to hold leadership positions, or the questions of Biblical intolerance, religiously-inspired hate speech⁴, and the possibility of church organisations conducting civil ceremonies⁵(Hunt, 2011).

John Boswell's (1980 [2009]) classic works have opened room for an arena of debates around the history of church's persecution of sexual minorities and the morality and immorality on discussing Christian ethics regarding homosexualities. Boswell uses biological, sexological and historical analysis to undermine accusations on gays and lesbians. Themes such as reproduction, the "unnaturalness" of homosexualities, the parallel situations experienced by sexual minorities and Jews, throughout Western European history, are discussed. One of the peculiarities of Boswell's works is that they have become one of the materials through which Lesbians and Gays Christians have advocated their interpretation of the Bible and relativize religious authority (see Yip, 1997a).

However, different questions emerge when the focus lies on "inclusive churches", as Brazilians call them, or "Gay-positive churches", as Rodríguez and Ouellette (2000) have called the MCC congregation they have researched.

At the MCC congregation in New York, Rodríguez and Ouellette have also tried to understand how people's trajectories and their process of compatibilizing Christian and homosexual identities. This study suggests that MCC members in New York had to go through struggles with their previous religious affiliations to reconcile their faith and sexual identities.

4 Hunt (2009:4) wrote: "In Sweden, Åke Green, a Pentecostal pastor, was sentenced to a one month jail sentence in 2004 for a sermon which preached 'disrespect' against homosexuality. Also in Sweden, Leif Liljeström, the administrator for Bibeltemplet, a Christian web-site, was convicted in 2008 for posting material violating a hate speech law and judged to be offensive toward gay people."

5 In another work, Yip (2002) describes that the LGB people that answered his survey were more likely to put themselves, and their autonomy ahead of religious authorities and dogmas.

Other studies on different MCC congregations across the United States reveal MCC' contradictory aspects in exploring different intersections that religion and sexuality present: Paris and Anderson (2010) have explored the gentrification of Mount Vernon in Washington DC, and have tried to understand how people's narratives on religious beliefs and the urban space converge. This study goes further in trying to map the conflicts between African-Americans and Gays and Lesbians living close by. MCC church building in Mount Vernon is also in dispute with other churches and residents in the same neighborhood.

Sumerau et al. (2015) have constructed a rich ethnographic account on how at one of MCC congregations the arrival of a new pastor re-created patriarchal forms of organisation. Legitimised by his strict views of the Bible, the new pastor drove away dissidents (especially Lesbians and Trans people), and significantly diminished the sexual and gender diversity of a particular MCC congregation. Sumerau's work is important in trying to show that gains to LGBT people do not necessarily mean more gender-equal organisations⁶.

In my interpretation, the narrative trend in studies on homosexuality and religion is due to the fact that sexuality and selfhood are closely connected in the West⁷ (Foucault, 1978 [1990]), and that the combination of religious authority and people's re-interpretations of strict Biblical readings must be heard and confronted.

Interestingly enough, contrary to the United States, in which the relationship between religion and liberation movements have been widely documented, in Brazil, there is only one mention of LGBT religious groups founded at the University of São Paulo in the 1960s by Facchini (2002). And, when *inclusive churches* began to emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was as a completely new social phenomenon was happening (Natividade, 2010). However, through the life trajectories of the interviewees present in this paper, a partial and fragmented

6 A central preoccupation of Sumerau's work is the exclusion of women from MCC religious celebrations. This preoccupation stems from his long-term fieldwork (3 years), in which he could observe different forms of exclusionary practices at the MCC church he studied at.

7 One of the characteristics of the literature on religion and LGBT subjectivities is the proliferation of first-person narratives; especially those concerning religious leaders (see Wilcox, 2006).

oral history of previous religious affiliations emerge. A contemporary LGBT historical relationship with religious institutions still needs more research. The now classic works by James N. Green⁸ (1994; 2001), in spite covering many interesting fields of Brazilian Gay and Lesbian history, do not mention any relationship between religious institutions at all.

However, because the Metropolitan Community Church exists longer in the United States, this country might give us clues to the further development of inclusive churches in Brazil. In the US, the MCC has started with an integration discourse, like the one I heard in Brazil. Reverend Troy Perry (MCC's founder) would come publicly to state that there would be one day in which sexuality would not matter, and Gay and "straight" people would walk side by side. As the years went by, MCC in the United States has become more and more focused on the LGBT community, rather than in an alliance between "straight" and LGBT people (Wilcox, 2001).

Ethnographic research on inclusive churches in Brazil has constructed inclusive churches as a problem of achieving respectability. In his work, Marcelo Natividade (2008; 2010) places the question of being a respectful LGBT person by constructing both a community that shares the "secret" of homosexuality, faces the stigmas of living divergent sexual identities, and disciplines the body of its adepts by encouraging a form of performing "discrete homosexualities". In direct dialogue with machismo, the church researched by Natividade, the CCNE – Comunidade Cristã Nova Esperança does not encourage any gender crossings. Therefore, women should stay "feminine" and man "masculine" inside recognisable and dualistic gendered patterns.

In her Ph.D. thesis, Fatima Weiss de Jesus (2012) has mapped 16 inclusive churches in Brazil. They are facing a rapid growth, and moving towards

⁸ According to Weiss de Jesus (2012) there is continuity between the LGBT movements throughout its different phases. During the military dictatorship in the 1960s; and in a second phase during the AIDS epidemics, in the 1980s and 1990s. And in a third phase, in the 1990s and 2000s, when inclusive churches emerge as central places in which LGBT people can express their faith. To support this view, Weiss de Jesus gets interviews with members from MCC São Paulo that participated in LGBT movements since the 1980s.

internationalisation since most of them were created in Brazil. The number seems to be around 20, according to recent investigations (Weiss de Jesus, 2013). And there are many strategies to be seen globally, from the opening of new churches abroad to the broadcast of religious services online⁹. Actually, only two of them, the Metropolitan Community Church and the Comunidade Cristã Nova Esperança - CCNE¹⁰, are present in different countries, and actively forging Christian LGBT communities around the world.

The most interesting thing about Weiss de Jesus's work (2012) is the attention she gives to one Trans experience inside MCC São Paulo. Later in this work, I will construct an analysis of Natividade's and Weiss de Jesus's works to situate my thesis within the gender and sexual diversity I have witnessed in my fieldwork.

The ethnographic research on Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda has shown, since the 1930s, the participation of Gay men in the celebrations, even taking leadership roles such as priests, and using the religious power they have accumulated in their private relationships (Landes, 1947; Fry, 1986). As a result, an interesting arena of debates around religion and homosexuality has developed around Afro-Brazilian religious traditions in Brazilian social sciences (especially in Social Anthropology).

Afro-Brazilian religious traditions seem to be an important topic to MCC Fortaleza's congregation: there is an Afro-day at MCC, and MCC people are often speaking of religious tolerance. It seems that by staying on the side of Afro-Brazilian religions, MCC's posture is both a call for a more tolerant and open society and a standpoint against more strict religious institutions, who claim not to be tolerant of African (and non-Christian) religious traditions¹¹. There seems to exist an acknowledgement by MCC leaders in Brazil to the role Afro-Brazilian

9 One inclusive church found by Lanna Holder and Rosania Rocha, Jesus Cidade Comunidade de Refúgio, broadcasts its São Paulo religious services online, with viewers from Portugal, United States and Japan (Brazilian immigrants). The names of the viewers appear in the religious services, alive.

10 The CCNE is present in Portugal and Argentina, according to its website.

11 It is often stated around MCC that theirs is a pan-ecumenical church, and that God manifests himself in many different ways. This statement both opens room for religious mixtures and innovation around MCC, and calls for a more tolerant religious field.

religions still play in providing safer spaces for expression of faith by LGBT people, outside Christian traditions.

In this sense, inter-religious dialogues have been playing a part as an institutional discourse at MCC Fortaleza (and in Brazil). But these inter-religious dialogues stay with MCC adepts. Even if there is a discourse on the inclusiveness of other religious traditions, apart from the Afro-day, I could not observe at MCC Fortaleza an explicit dialogue with Afro-Brazilian religious traditions (there is, however, an implicit dialogue with Catholic traditions). MCC Fortaleza members were the ones who construct diverse religious dialogues, as we shall see.

1.2. A Foucauldian approach to MCC Fortaleza

Contrary to the international debate on the inclusion of LGBT people in religious institutions, in Brazil organised LGBT groups inside traditionally institutionalised religions are rare. It is the reason inclusive churches have been spreading around Brazil. The questions of how inclusive in fact these churches can be, and how accepting the other religious organisations are towards inclusive churches is a matter that can only be answered by a comparative work that is opened to hear the forms of hosting LGBT subjects by established religious institutions, and how inclusive churches differ from the other religious organisations in dealing with LGBT subjects. According to Weiss de Jesus (2012), the Lutheran Church in Brazil is one of the few established institutions to discuss the relationship between Christian faith and homosexuality openly, but this attempt is constructed around the idea that homosexuals could be cured.

This work does not offer a comparative framework in dealing with diverse religious institutions in Brazil. This framework could be useful in trying to understand the different forms of acceptance of LGBT subjects at religious institutions. Instead, I focus on how people narrate their subjectivity at a specific inclusive church setting. However, by the subjects' trajectories, we can see what could be the beginning of a comparative approach since most of the people I have

talked to at MCC Fortaleza had had previous experiences with religious institutions that differ from the way they were hosted at MCC.

I must say that when I began my fieldwork, I was in a position that is parallel, and quite different from the one Saba Mahmood found herself, in her fieldwork in Egypt (2011). I was puzzled by the fact that people use religion to push for LGBT rights, and a secular political agenda. In one sense, I found myself in trouble with the fact that a “heteronormative” religious tradition was not simply put aside to advocate for a political subjectivity (LGBT), as the inclusive church I was researching at does. My interviewees were not embracing a strict pious life, as in Mahmood’s work. However, they were also subscribing to a religious tradition that I thought to be “unnecessary” if they wanted to advocate LGBT rights in Brazil.

In this sense, I started to rethink my liberal assumptions about agency and oppression. As the liberal subject constructed itself based on the idea that to be free, an individual must have no obstacle to face to her/his actions. Religion, customs, tradition, are usually referred to the obstacles to be freed from. My participant-observation at MCC and my interview materials, however, have showed me that people at MCC Fortaleza did not see themselves, their lives and their political activism as separate from their religious beliefs. In this sense, ethically guided actions were simply not possible without any resource to religious symbols. It was through immersing myself at MCC’s religious rituals that I gradually became more familiar with the religious symbols people mobilise to construct themselves and their views on their right to express their sexuality, as I hope it will be clearer later in this work.

Often, in narrating their lives, people at MCC Fortaleza use religious categories to refer to their lives, political views and social trajectories. In this sense, I departed from Mahmood’s ideas to think about agency and selfhood (2011:14):

if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes "change" and the means by which it is effected), then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being.

Mahmood's ideas have served me as a guide to understanding agency and the diverse forms of selfhood present at MCC Fortaleza. As she pointed out, in the case of the piety movement in Egypt, a Foucauldian framework can be used to understand agency, subjectivity and ethics, and it might be useful to approach gender, sexuality and religion. In this sense, she states that, according to Foucault, ethics and subjectivity are experienced, contextually (culturally) built. I hope I will make Mahmood's point clearer later in this work when I began my descriptions about MCC Fortaleza.

To approach the cultural contexts, through Foucauldian lenses, I have to state on how I stand about subjectivity and power. It is often misunderstood that, according to Foucault, subjects are both "effects of power" and "modes of subjectivity". In this work, I understand the first aspect, as Mahmood did: the subjects at MCC Fortaleza are mobilizing religious discourses that long preceded them, and this fact are both enabling and constraining them in pursuing the kind of self-work required to act ethically (Faubion, 2001).

Foucault's approach to sexuality as an effect of power is present in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1978 [1990]). In this work, Foucault separates sex from sexuality. Sex has been historically constructed around kinship and alliances. Sexuality, on the other hand, has become more visible in the 18th century as a private, an individual matter, one that was related to the practices of confessions that spread around society. Priests, psychologists, and doctors were some of the characters responsible for the privatization, and individualization of sexuality (see Rabinow and Dreyfus, 1983 [2014]).

The sexuality privatization process came at the cost of constructing sexuality as both an individual instinct, and as a psychological process: that desire could be "healthy" or "inverted" opened room for a whole taxonomy of desires, exposed especially in the 19th century. This process was the beginning of what Foucault has constructed as the sexuality species making. In the West, the process of thinking about oneself closely tied sexuality to systems of power, Foucault says.

Furthermore, these forms of telling about oneself, via these various professionals, and the power relations involved in the act of telling constitute what Foucault calls “technologies of the self”. These technologies, however, entail the construction of an interpreter. This interpreter is the Other who claims to have authority over other people’s accounts to produce “scientific”, “legal” or “religious” analyses. The links between power, repression and knowledge were also scrutinized by Foucault. In pointing out the repressive hypothesis as a trope used to talk about sex (if we talk about sex, we could overcome how repressed we are), Foucault constructs an analytics of how this trope was used by some human and medical sciences, pastoral guidelines, and legal frameworks.

One could say that religious institutions are themselves producers of representations and different technologies of the self in constructing various approaches to deal with LGBT subjects. However, without an understanding on how LGBT people narrate their forms of agreement and disagreement with religious institutions, we could never grasp the ethical aspects invoked by various adepts in constructing a pious life. In Yip’s works, for instance, Anthony Giddens’s theories come to the forefront (1992). Yip uses Giddens to state that in a post-traditional society (late Modern), we would have no obligation but to be “true to ourselves”. This late modern imperative is the background from which Yip conceptualizes LGBT people in his studies. By combining Giddens’s ideas, homophobic church’s teachings, with interviews and questionnaires, Yip constructs an understanding that “the self” has the upper hand over religious authorities.

As I am researching at an *inclusive church*, I am more interested in understanding people’s trajectories, and for this reason, I decided to use a Foucauldian approach, rather than Giddens’s. The other reason for me to leave Giddens ideas behind was the fact that they have an evolutionary taste. There seems to be no explanation why, at a post-traditional society, people still would find religious institutions helpful in constructing their sense of selfhood.

However, Foucault offers not only an analytics of how power relations have shaped our understanding of sexuality, but he goes further in analysing diverse modes of subjectivity. Modes of subjectivity are modalities of self-work, forms of

accepting specific authorities (religious, legal, scientific) that forge specific forms of reflexivity that stand about the powers one is subjected to. Reflexivity here appears not as a universal human attribute (as it is in Giddens), but as a specific form of self-making (Mahmood, 2011). At MCC Fortaleza, these modalities of self-work connect with the acceptance of certain religious precepts that guide people throughout their social trajectories. However, because people at MCC have belonged to different religious institutions, there is some difficulty in trying to find a coherent representation of matters such as sexual experiences, the body, religiously-inspired homophobic discourses, among other themes. I hope that the interviews give the readers a small picture of the diversity present at MCC Fortaleza.

After a whole generation of anthropologists revolted against the limits of classic ethnographies in constructing the intersubjective exchanges present in the field, and exposed the ways anthropologists narrated and constructed “otherness” within disciplinary discourses (Marcus and Cushman, 1982), what it is usually termed now as the “reflexive turn”. It might be simply a common theme to highlight the ethical and political aspects of any ethnographic attempt. In pursuing these ethical reflections, I follow Faubion’s ideas in analysing Foucault’s. I do not mean that all social innovations must be evaluated in terms of good and bad, but that they are ethically relevant (Faubion, 2001). As emergent social institutions, *inclusive churches* try to build innovative ethics, through different ways of compatibilizing Christianity and LGBT subjectivities.

What I have tried to do was to incorporate this Foucauldian theoretical framework in more practical terms, with methodological principles I will detail in the next chapter. There is no doubt that my “will to knowledge” is involved in constructing this work. I used to think that being an LGBT religious person was something so contradictory that I decided to do this work.

1.3. Research question

I wanted to understand how subjectivities are constructed at MCC Fortaleza, so I departed from a Foucauldian question: given the regimes of truth, what can I become? (see: Butler, 2005). And, to answer this question, I constructed interviews that aimed to capture people's social trajectories (from their previous religious affiliations to their membership at MCC, and their various experiences with their sexuality, at different institutional settings). The main question (how religion and LGBT subjectivities intersect at MCC Fortaleza?) splits up in two: 1. how can I grasp the process of becoming an LGBT Christian? 2. In what way power relations at different institutional settings influence LGBT people to express themselves? Following these two questions, I have tried to construct a methodological approach that was able to answer them.

2. Methodological issues

I researched during June and July, and October and November in the city of Fortaleza, Brazil. While I use the actual name of the church, Metropolitan Community Church Fortaleza, Brazil, I asked interviewees if they wanted their names changed to protect them from any further problems. In all my interviews, they agreed to have their actual names used. In this sense, I have adopted a participant-centred approach (Ogden, 2008). The other people at MCC Fortaleza who did not participate directly at the interviews received pseudonyms. By doing this, I could eventually cause problems for the participants, but I believe that other researchers will directly confront the people at MCC Fortaleza if other research projects were to be done in Fortaleza, much less try to check who the actual people present at my descriptions were.

It is important to notice, however, that people are not merely passive "objects of knowledge": my interviewees actively negotiated their interviewing conditions, and directed me to some important questions to them. After a while at interviewing, I substituted partially my prepared questions by the subjects'

narratives. By doing so, they showed me a way into an attentive listening, rather than sticking with my previously formulated questions.

In my first visit to church services MCC Fortaleza, I realised the difficulties and the possibilities of doing fieldwork there. The theme of the sermon was: "The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed". A Jesus' parable, taken from Mark 4:30-32, it was used for the people to trust God's plans for their lives. Another passage was analysed in the same evening: the choice of David as the King of Israel. In the last passage, God chooses David because he measures human feats and beings by other standards than humans'.

These two passages combined to construct a critique of the gay scene (there were only men at the MCC in that evening). The acceptable gay in society was the one who could consume. The one who is posting his pleasures constantly at social media; in short, a hedonistic gay person. When I came to MCC, I never thought I would hear Jesus' parables as forms of critiques to the consumerism and the gay community.

Another thing that surprised me was that, after the Biblical passages had been presented, the religious celebration looked like a group discussion. People were asked directly if and how they could construct the kingdom of God through their everyday actions. The answers were that we usually think constructing the kingdom of God seems to be a distant task. We don't think of it as an everyday work.

During the religious worship, however, I have noticed people looking at me as if they were trying to guess what I could want from them (or, at least, I thought so). Nevertheless, after the religious celebration, I had the impression that the people were more opened to my presence. After they have heard a reassuring message that God has plans for them (and for me by extension) that they could not control, I was more or less accepted as a fieldworker. The mixture of secular critique and Biblical discourse is present in any Christian church, but at the MCC, as I have heard; there was a use of the biblical message to construct a (more or less) specific gay (or should I say queer?) reflexivity.

This is an excerpt from my fieldwork diary. Its date is the 7th of June. This was an important day for me not only because I started doing my fieldwork. In addition, there was the LGBT Pride 2015 going on in São Paulo. There were not enough people at the religious worship that evening, exactly because many people went to São Paulo to spread MCC's messages, celebrate and protest; I was told.

I have to state here that keeping a fieldwork diary was a form of keeping myself as more reflexively oriented than usual throughout my stay in Fortaleza, and in my constant visits to MCC. In keeping a diary, I constructed the need to situate constantly myself during the research process. In my notes, formal and informal meetings (sometimes we went out for pizza after the religious celebrations), the

gradual acceptance of my virtual persona to MCC groups and forums on social media, the on and offline conversations were reconstructed through my words.

The problems with keeping a diary for me were various: which information was, after all, “right” to use in a master’s thesis. Which ones should be left out? In the months I was only hanging out with the people at the MCC, asking general questions, and keeping a diary, I was often caught in ethical dilemmas such as what to say, and how could I write about the information people gave me informally, without any formal consent. However, these ethical dilemmas were alleviating in my first religious worship, with my promise that I would give back my thesis to the people at MCC Fortaleza. They agreed that I would send them my paper before I presented it in Lund.

2.1. Ethics in ethnography

Prominent ethical issues in this study were constructed in dialogue with anthropological studies of religion. In studying religion, one is confronted by the gap between religious cultural performances and the explanations of believers about their faith. Hence, Geertz (1971: 89) says:

Because religious perception, the actual employment of religious symbols to activate faith, takes place in special settings and in particular rituals, it is clear that it is extremely difficult to get phenomenologically accurate descriptions of religious experience.

If there was any radical gap between my interpretation of the religious celebrations and the people’s perspectives at MCC, I conducted myself as Stacey (1984) taught feminist ethnographers: I showed my interview transcripts to them by email and asked them to look at them to approve them. Before presenting my thesis at Lund, I have also shared a Google drive with the reverend at MCC Fortaleza, Igor Simões, and Ferreira Jr., the MCC Fortaleza deacon. I asked them if they would change anything in the analysis to be presented. This was not an act of pastoral obedience, since I was not an MCC member, from the beginning to the end of my research project there. I rather have faced it as an ethical deed to the

people at the MCC. If they approved my writings about them, my next step was to try to be approved by the Social Anthropology department at Lund University (the power instances involved most closely in my thesis-writing project).

In the interviews, I tried to reach an agreement on any problematic questions to the interviewees so they could choose not to answer any question. I did not let go the practice of asking if the interviewees wanted their identities disclosed, or to search their informed consent, even when we were at our next interview.

It is needless to say that the methods used here are situated at the specific moment in time (diaries, observations, interviews and discourse analysis). I do not intend here to be a spokesperson of MCC Fortaleza, nor do I have the possibility and the authority to do so.

The reflexive turn in anthropology attempts has advocated that the voice of the anthropologists must be placed in relation to the historical and social context. Instead of freezing the ones anthropologists write about in time and space, ethnographers should try to make the readers understand the historical situation in which the subjects of knowledge, and the subjects that participate in the research process build dialogues (O'Reilly, 2009).

To the people at MCC Fortaleza, reflexivity was constructed through a mixture of different religious Christian beliefs and doctrines, and their particular understanding of themselves through their discourses on sexuality. Reflexivity has always involved ethical elements (see Adams and Jones, 2011). And people at MCC Fortaleza seem to use different forms of discourses, in an interesting assemblage, to construct their sense of selfhood and their political subjectivities.

During the interviews, the interviewees also questioned me, and they have assumed a more dialogical approach. In my experience as a researcher, it is simply not possible to ask people about their sexualities and stay in a neutral and comfortable spot. The interaction between the interviewees and me, in the interview, had effects on the "data" collected in this thesis. I assume this not as if it was exclusively a part of a weakness of my work. But this is a condition of all ethnographic-inspired works, that is the impossibility of separating completely the subject of knowledge and the subjects that participate in the research process since

they both construct knowledge in and through an inter-subjective relationship (Scheper-Hughes, 1992).

An attentive listening to other people's discourses about themselves, their faith and sexuality, had helped me to explore people's categories when they talked about themselves. To explore this attentive listening was for me one of the greatest challenges in this research. Since I have set myself to conduct in-depth interviews (see Hesse-Biber, 2007), I had to make an effort to use the categories people also use when referring to their life and their histories. In trying to grasp people's words through an attentive listening, I have relied on Pierre Bourdieu's methodological advice and cautionary concepts: *symbolic violence* and *methodical listening* (Bourdieu et al. 1999).

I have tried to construct the following questions where people had finished their answers at the previous ones. As I selected opened questions, I thought that I would rather not to stick with my previously formulated questions, but try to "tie" my questions to the interviewee's speech acts. My most fortunate moments, when it comes to the interviews, were the ones I could show to the interviewees that I was also interested in LGBT political struggles in general, and our conversation went in various directions, not exposed here. I say these were the best moments because then we could talk more about their sense of selfhood and their religious faith.

Throughout the interviews, it became obvious that my gestures and my bodily posture were also affecting the interviews. I have tried to make the interviewees as comfortable as possible. For example, in my first encounter with Igor Simões, I was told to sit more comfortably. My answer was that I have one leg shorter than the other one (around 10 centimetres) and that I do not know what it means to sit comfortably.

Bourdieu's concepts were useful to me in many ways. They helped me in reading my body language as well as my interviewees' and help them to be as comfortable as possible with the interview process. At interviewing, I also tried to use people's language when asking the next question, as to make a sequence in their argument. Together with the literature on male homoeroticism in Brazil, the methodical listening was a good tool in order to raise questions about problematic

issues, such as MCC's views on other churches, the construction of one's representations on sex roles, the cosmological sense of one's life, and its relation to sexuality.

2.2. Building Rapport

During my fieldwork, I could not escape the question if fieldwork relationships are exploitative. The postcolonial and feminist critique to fieldwork has opened this question as a central characteristic of ethnography (Coffey, 1999). I have to say that during my fieldwork, the relationships I have built were based on a thin middle ground. At MCC, people soon noticed that I was not that religious, they have never suggested that I could "convert" to MCC, as MCC São Paulo adepts have suggested to Fatima Weiss (2012). In fact, many of the MCC Fortaleza avoided talking about an MCC "conversion", since they attend to MCC and other religions. However, I seemed curious about their lives and their ideas. And a more or less ethnographic friendship has established itself. Based on a male identification, and shared understanding that sexuality and religion were important topics for one to write about.

Contrary to Fatima Weiss's work (2012), most of the people who frequently came to MCC Fortaleza had completed a university degree. And my two interviewees, 33 and 35 years old, there were a Religious Studies and History teacher, Ferreira Júnior, and a postdoc in Pharmacy and MCC Reverend, Igor Simões.

To build rapport seemed easier than I thought at first. During the religious celebrations, people often shared important emotional commitments they had to face. New career plans, and developments, the need to care for elderlies in one's family, labour accidents, and other grave emotional issues. The fact that MCC Fortaleza is such a small community helped me to be accepted as a person whom one could share preoccupations without much trouble.

As the time went by, I realised that some of the congregation members were not completely satisfied with my presence. The case of Severino, a police officer, is exemplary. When I first invited Severino for an interview about the church, his answer related to his work (as a defensive discourse against what he termed as “the sociologists’ theories on public safety”). I later thought about not inviting him anymore. And we never touched the subject. Until one day, at a dinner table. He brought up again the subject that sociologists have no idea of what goes on within the police. I was simply going to nod, and agree. But then I said: “Well, the Brazilian police is one of the most violent regarding killing civilians in the world”. The MCC reverend agreed. So he started justifying the police violence pointing out the kinds of weapons criminals carry. As much as I would love to hear Severino’s stories (the fact that he was Gay and police officer was something very intriguing), he was so cautious about the possibility of being interviewed that I had to give up.

2.3. Limitations of this study

However, with all the trouble I had undertaken a short fieldwork, as I became more and more familiar to the people at MCC, I was invited to outside activities such as dinners after the religious celebrations, and I noticed that participating in the church activities, and outside ones, say, “secular ones”, were parts of the same process. In participating in these activities, we, as a group, often shared life projects, work preoccupations, and other issues. For instance, violence in Brazil, and homophobic violence, in particular, was a hot topic, especially when we went out. Because of my limited time in the field, I was only able to get two formal interviews: often, people told me they were busy with their working lives. And arranging the time for interviews was a complicated matter.

In the passage that I’ve quoted from my fieldwork diary, there is also a preoccupation with constructing a queer reflexivity that was based on lives of the people at the MCC, and the ways the Biblical messages are interpreted and represented in their discourse. The concept of a situated queer reflexivity has helped

to answer the question what are the effects of religious belief on people that do not conform to the heteronorm.

By queer reflexivity, I mean how the people at MCC Fortaleza enact texts (sacred and secular) and political activism to produce their moral selves. As Peumans (2014) has argued, one of the strategies LGBT people construct for them to live a religious life is to queer the sacred texts. To see in the texts answers to their personal troubles and difficulties, the act of queering the sacred texts itself is a way to make religion and sexualities compatible. Queer reflexivity is also implicit in MCC's organization (therefore, it is situated) since the Reverend and the other church leaders are obliged to participate in the theology courses, and also to engage in MCC-specific study programme.

In the case of MCC Fortaleza, after taking an undergraduate course in theology, and MCC online courses, one needs to present a theological statement that is going to be judged by a theological commission. It is the final step towards being recognized as a reverend at MCC. However, by no means, queer reflexivity is a uniform act. The use of secular authors, whose way of writing addresses academic audiences in particular, such as Judith Butler, poses questions on the different forms of reflexivity that the adepts and the leadership forge through their belonging to MCC. Therefore, reflexivity serves here as a way of constructing, in variable degrees, a reading of texts that closely relate to one's life ethics. In this sense, there is a deliberate search for a way to construct oneself as both religious and queer; and this requires some reflection work.

The uses of the subjects' narratives are in this way justified. To understand the personal reasons that attracted people to MCC's messages, I had to rely on people's reflections about their religious beliefs and their sexuality. One could use different methodological approaches, but the question of how religion and sexuality intersect, I would argue, requires that the researchers listen to people, because both religious affiliations and sexuality are constructed by subjects' different life circumstances (as other works, such as Yip's have shown).

There are of course gaps in my work: I did not make use of questionnaires, as they were too few members of MCC to sketch a profile of MCC Fortaleza's

members (or at least to have a broad picture of the people at MCC). This methodological gap could have been filled I guess with more time in the field, after a whole set of qualitative approaches were employed. Unfortunately, no profile of MCC Fortaleza's members is drawn here, partly because MCC Fortaleza is a small church (as we will see), and because I had to overcome initial mistrust people had in me as a reliable ethnographer (as the example of Severino shows).

3. MCC Fortaleza

3.1. History of Metropolitan Community Church

Reverend¹² Troy Perry created the Metropolitan Community Church in 1968, in the United States. Perry was then a defrocked minister from the Baptist Church of God. After he disclosed his homosexuality, the Church of God, trying to avoid any scandal, deprived him of his ecclesiastic status. Perry went on and advertised in the gay magazine *The Advocate* his intention of celebrating the first religious service at his house. As a result, twelve people from various religious backgrounds attended. And, already in the tenth week, the "Metropolitan Community Church" was outgrowing Perry's house (Scott and Dorf, 2000). Being influenced by the 1960s civil rights movements in the United States, the Metropolitan Community Church has adopted Catholic influences, such as Liberation Theology, its version of ecumenism, and political activism through Lesbian, Gay and Queer liberation political discourses¹³ (Wilcox, 2001; 2003).

In Brazil, MCC has tried to start its activities in Rio, but Brazilians who were up in the first project differ from the organization's views. The result was a schism between CCNE (Comunidade Crista Nova Esperança) and the MCC. MCC was later founded in Niteroi, a city closed to Rio de Janeiro while CCNE was founded in Rio. The source of disagreement seemed to be the "exclusivist"

12 Reverend is also an emic category. The MCC calls priests as reverends. For this reason, I use the same category throughout the work.

13 The documentary "Call me Troy", directed by Scott Bloom in 2007 tells the history of the early MCC in the United States and it can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eCaJ-xs3Xo>

character of MCC. Founders of CCNE, in their interviews with Marcelo Natividade (2010), often complained that “Americans create separate churches for everyone: to Blacks, to Gays, etc.”. On the other side, MCC members in Fortaleza explain this disagreement as a discordance with doctrinal procedures. MCC members in Fortaleza say that MCC is more opened to Catholic influences than CCNE’s founders.

Weiss de Jesus (2012), comparing her ethnographic experience at MCC with Marcelo Natividade’s works says that, at MCC Sao Paulo, there are more drags, effeminate Gays, and Lesbians than CCNE’s religious celebrations. Natividade’s work in Rio de Janeiro focuses on Gay men attending to CCNE, and at their bodily performativities. At CCNE men are encouraged to construct bodily performativities as traditionally masculine, and women as “feminine” to pass as “straights”. Natividade’s work is much about keeping a secret about adepts’ homosexuality.

My experience at MCC Fortaleza is similar to Natividade in the way that only Gay men attended MCC Fortaleza (occasionally there were Lesbians, but they were not permanent members). And different from his work, since, at MCC Fortaleza, adepts are encouraged to live their sexual identities freely, “without masks”. I can say that the MCC congregation in Fortaleza is not as diverse as MCC São Paulo (one could expect this given that São Paulo is a much bigger city). However, there are also queer religious celebrations at MCC Fortaleza, in which gender crossings are encouraged, as we shall see.

The Reverend mentioned that in Brazil, MCC has been widely successful in establishing itself in big cities. There are now MCC churches in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, João Pessoa, Fortaleza, Vitória, Teresina (capital cities of states). Mariporã, in São Paulo, and Cabedelo, in the state of Paraíba, are situated at metropolitan zones of the cities of São Paulo and João Pessoa, respectively. Maringá in the state of Paraná is the only city with around 350 000 inhabitants to host an MCC church, and a house that hosts one “Casa de missão”, a house of mission, whose primary goal is to host LGBT people who are suffering from homophobic discrimination and drug addiction.

The reason for MCC's establishment was the anonymous character of big cities, in which one could pass as "one more in a multitude of people", I was told by Igor Simões, the priest of MCC Fortaleza. The theme of anonymity in homoerotic relations in Latin America is present in many Social Sciences works. From the classic fieldwork on male homosexuality in Guadalajara, Mexico, by Joseph Carrier (2006) to Richard Parker's ethnography in Rio de Janeiro and Fortaleza, Brazil (1999). The use of anonymous urban spaces, public bathrooms, beaches, bathrooms at parties, and other areas of leisure such as public parks and shopping malls, to have sexual encounters, with people who do not identify themselves as homosexual is a constant feature of homoerotic encounters in Latin America. And for me, it was interesting that an established institution such as an inclusive church relies on the same pattern of anonymity in urban areas. And, at the same time, inside the same church, there is a call to live one's sexuality without masks.

3.2. A brief presentation of MCC Fortaleza

The MCC in Fortaleza is a small church, with around 10 to 20 members, all Gay¹⁴ men. Attempts have been made to establish a mission in Juazeiro do Norte, a city with around 300 000 inhabitants, in the same state, Ceará. This mission has "failed" according to the Reverend of MCC Fortaleza, Igor Simões because people in Juazeiro did not want to be identified with "an LGBT-affirming church"¹⁵.

In fact, when I arrived at the MCC Fortaleza, there seemed to be a code of *discretion* on the outside, combined with a *queer* and upbeat atmosphere on the inside of the church. Since there was no sign at the door, nothing could distinguish the Church building from a commercial one. In fact, the building seemed to have hosted a little shop before. People explained to me that it was due to a recent change of address. They told me there was no time to fix a sign¹⁶.

¹⁴ This is why my sampling problems were solved. The question if the methodology used in this work could be complemented by methods not used here is answered later in this work.

¹⁵At first, Igor told me that people have come to MCC's mission. But MCC has faced the trouble of finding new adepts. People who wouldn't come only one time and leave. The identification with MCC became, in his views, the main problem with MCC's mission in Juazeiro do Norte.

¹⁶ Indeed, by the final part of my fieldwork, there was a sign at MCC's door.

Indeed, at MCC Fortaleza, people seemed to be in “a small community”. There was a careful attention to answer the door, and meeting strangers to the community was somehow “a tense moment”, mediated through specific codes of conduct, names of other adepts, previous contacts. When I knocked on the church’s door for the first time, I had to say my name, and I came to do research there. Then, Joaquim opened the door to me. It was half an hour before the religious worship started. I think at that moment, Joaquim thought I was a journalist (since visits from journalists or journalism students are frequent), and immediately called Igor Simões, the reverend at MCC Fortaleza. After Igor had said he did not know anything about my presence there, even I became puzzled, and the two people present at the church at that moment, Joaquim and Marcos, started asking questions about how I came into contact with the MCC Fortaleza before. After I had said I have sent them an email, they became a bit more relaxed. When Igor went in, he pushed me aside so as to know my intentions in researching the MCC Fortaleza. We started our negotiations to do research there, at that moment.

Later, I realised that these preventive measures were not simply “paranoid behaviours”. On March 31st, the first LGBT collective marriage was performed in the state of Paraíba; the stage was João Pessoa, its capital (around 10 hours south Fortaleza). This collective marriage was composed of 12 Lesbian couples. As a result, of the celebrations and the media attention, this marriage attracted, a reverend at the MCC church of João Pessoa, suffered an attempt of murder. A yet unknown assailant stabbed him. He was already out of danger in a hospital, when I heard the news, in a religious service, at MCC Fortaleza¹⁷.

Even if MCC Fortaleza is a small community, it does not stop its leadership to see them as a part of a global LGBT movement (combined with the religious institutional aspects). The frequent contacts with leaders of the same church, the online activities (including MCC courses), and the international conventions (the next one will be held in Canada in 2016) are a part of the process of exchanges and

¹⁷ An online news on the collective Lesbian marriage in João Pessoa can be accessed here: <http://g1.globo.com/pb/paraiba/noticia/2015/05/casamento-coletivo-lgbt-e-celebrado-em-joao-pessoa.html>

dialogues about religion and sexuality. Here, I am not in the position of mapping these exchanges extensively, since my work has confined itself to Fortaleza.

Being a small church brings everyday problems to MCC. There are frequent complaints about the electricity and water bills' payments. The rent payment of the small place they've rented downtown Fortaleza is also a constant trouble. However, this also creates a sense of pride: all the church leaders at MCC are proud to tell any person who passes by that they all have their jobs and do not live on the money donated by church adepts.

Another central characteristic of MCC Fortaleza is the schedule of activities. Events occur only in some days of the week, on Thursdays and Sundays. During the Thursdays, Ferreira Júnior, the deacon of the church leads a prayer. At the beginning of my fieldwork, these Thursdays proved to be a good occasion to interview Ferreira Júnior without interfering with his schedule, and his daily life.

The Sundays are divided in three throughout the month. The first and the second Sundays of the month, there are regular religious worships. On the third, there is what people call "MCC family". This activity begins in the morning, and people cook one meal, have lunch there, have an educational moment and watch a movie. The movies are either about LGBT-related themes or about religiously inspired stories. The members could vote for movies during the first two weeks of the month, through MCC Fortaleza's Facebook group.

For the MCC Family Sunday to happen, people usually would arrange the food they would bring in, so no one would pay more than others would. Members could also suggest the dishes during the first two religious celebrations, and the best cook volunteered to make the dishes. The food was incontestably delicious. On the last Sunday, there was a queer religious ceremony, in which Ferreira Júnior would preach as a drag, with his alter ego, a "Monaco Princess" called "Louhany".

The political activism was always very present at MCC, with a support group for people with HIV, and many activities outside the church, such as a LGBT Pride Fortaleza and the second collective LGBT marriage, taken place in Fortaleza

on June 26th 2015¹⁸. The HIV support group at MCC was closed for me from the beginning and I still didn't know if I would have stayed longer in the field, the group eventually would open up for me.

Besides the public activism, through the personal stories of those who participated at MCC Fortaleza, I could hear everyday resistances that made their lives more and more interesting, as I will try to show them in the last parts of this work.

There were two privileged spaces for this work: firstly, the religious worships celebrated at MCC, on Thursdays and Sundays and secondly, the pizza place we would go after the religious worships. Both of these spaces provided me with the two sides of any religious institution: the "sacred" and the "profane".

Since at MCC's Pentecostal religious celebrations, a direct connection to God is something to be achieved by its members, there was not much room to talk to the people as one to one, except at "MCC Family" Sundays. The pizza place provided a possibility to get to know people's everyday struggles. It was also a place to laugh and get to know each other, as well as to understand the conflicts my presence was bringing up.

Now, we move on to an example of MCC activism that illustrates many of the points I have raised in this introduction about MCC Fortaleza.

3.3. What can a Trans-Christ do?

The 2015 LGBT pride in São Paulo (the day I started doing fieldwork), one of the biggest in the world, left one powerful polemic. In one of the protests, Viviany Belebani, a transsexual woman, dressed as a crucified Christ to protest against homophobia in Brazil. Her protest caused furious responses on social media

18 See a news on the 2015 LGBT collective marriage in Fortaleza: <https://dialogospoliticos.wordpress.com/2015/06/26/casamento-coletivo-lgbt-reunira-30-casais-neste-sabado-em-fortaleza/>

and many different angles in the press coverage. And it is a symbol of the battles LGBT people have been facing in Brazil, today.¹⁹

The MCC Fortaleza's response was quick. One week after the LGBT São Paulo Pride, they were recording a video²⁰, in which one deacon, Ferreira Júnior, was trying to call trans people to come and visit the church in Fortaleza. Ferreira Júnior himself seemed well fit for the job, since he was sent from Fortaleza to help at the organization of MCC at the LGBT Pride in São Paulo. Throughout the religious celebration, he narrated his experience as gratifying and full of creativeness.

In referring to Viviany Beleboni's protest, Ferreira Júnior said that his reaction was that he felt as he saw Christ himself when he saw Viviane. And feeling like kneeling down was his first thought. The theme of the São Paulo LGBT Pride 2015 was "enough of homophobia". In the front, the mothers of LGBT people marched. The mothers who have lost their sons and daughters came there with pictures and flowers. In the back, Viviany Beleboni's protest closed the LGBT Pride, standing in the last car.

The controversial aspect of Viviane's protest, people, signalled during the religious worship at MCC Fortaleza, was that her body was a "dirty one". In putting herself as a crucified Christ, she was trying to compare herself to Christ, to some people; that seemed to confront other Christians. To others, and to the MCC Fortaleza, her protest was a perfect combination of how Christians should behave when facing any excluded and marginalised human being: they should be accepting and willing to listen to them.

The video recording at the MCC, according to the people there, inaugurated a series of videos to be called "inclusive". This set of videos aims to construct MCC views on sexuality and Christianity on social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube

19 See one journalistic account on the Viviany Beleboni's protest at the LGBT Pride São Paulo 2015. This news is especially important because it was one of the few that actually try to listen to Viviane's ideas, and her intentions with her protest: <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2015/06/representei-dor-que-sentimos-diz-transsexual-crucificada-na-parada-gay.html>

20 At the MCC Fortaleza page on Facebook, the videos can be accessed: <https://www.facebook.com/icmfortaleza>

and Flickr). The video strategy worked for the MCC São Paulo at the LGBT Pride 2015. Due to lack of resources, they focused more on mixing religious symbols with online activism to spread MCC's views.

In the São Paulo Pride, there is an LGBT fair, in which the inclusive churches were all put together side by side. According to Ferreira Júnior and Inácio, the other churches, such as “Jesus Comunidade de Refúgio” had more resources than the MCC São Paulo. They then decided to use a Catholic image of the Merciful Jesus and transform it by painting a rainbow in the emanating light from the heart of the statue. This twist created an aura of awe. As MCC is a Protestant Church, and use of images should, in theory, be forbidden in the religious celebrations. Even if this was more or less against “MCC doctrines”, this gesture was praised as an excellent strategy to attract more public. Since the use of this image has called attention to the public of the LGBT fair, it served to highlight how creative and innovative Gay people are (especially if God inspires them). Together with the video, launched around the same time, the MCC achieved a good visibility throughout the virtual world. MCC Brazil's page on Facebook went from around 70 people to 457 followers²¹.

It was an interesting moment to think through “religious activism” in the MCC Fortaleza. The videos they are launching on social media aim to put people in contact with MCC through the Internet. As they told me, many people around the world follow MCC more through Internet than going to the religious celebrations. The MCC video success also originated in the media coverage of Viviane's protest.

However, the press tune was much ambiguous. Since there were many sides to be covered: some of the religious leaders and congressional representatives, such as Marco Feliciano²² (a federal deputy and a religious leader of the church Assembleia de Deus), also recorded videos in which Viviane's protest is seen an affront to the religious symbols. Feliciano calls for an alliance of religious people

21 MCC Fortaleza Facebook group page had 261 members in October 2015.

22 Marco Feliciano is one of the leaders of the Assembleia de Deus, he is also a Federal Deputy. He is leading a political coalition against LGBT rights. See Feliciano's video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4AKRh35gMj8>

(which he calls “true Christians”) against LGBT “freedom of expression”, because their freedom, according to himself, cannot be placed as more important than other religious people in expressing their faith. He also calls for people to use social media in order to express their disapproval, counterpointing that big media in the country are not interested in helping the “true Christians”.

In the video recording at the MCC, Ferreira Júnior’s message was that religious intolerance against Christians is not an issue in Brazil, as Feliciano and other religious leaders wanted “the true Christians” to believe. Viviane’s protest was seen in the video as a metaphor for the marginal character of Jesus in his lifetime, and a form of calling attention to the deaths caused by homophobia in Brazil²³. By constructing a contrastive message, MCC Fortaleza then shows itself as a more opened and tolerant church than others in the country. They construct themselves publicly as a completely tolerant organization.

Throughout the debate at MCC Fortaleza on Viviane’s protest, I felt like the religious disputes, in a strict sense of the term, were enacted through the deployment of sacred symbols, in and out of the virtual world. People at the MCC Fortaleza often construct a particular instance on Feliciano’s speech because his church does not use the cross in their religious worships (meaning that the cross is not important in his daily life at the *Assembléia de Deus*). His complaints against the “blasphemy” in the LGBT Pride in São Paulo were “useless” in this sense. Igor Simões, the reverend at the MCC Fortaleza, has also said that in his theological studies at one Catholic University (The Piranha Seminar, one of the oldest seminars in Fortaleza), one of his teachers has applauded Viviane’s performance.

If Viviane embodied a metonymic representation, connected to Christ, as one of his daughters; and called attention to the universalistic ideals of Christ himself. Or literally, tried to embody his suffering (as Feliciano and other religious leaders interpreted), and constructed her pain as an equivalent to the Christ’s was the central point of the polemics and debates, in the religious sense. The most

23 In 2013/2014, there were 312 murders in Brazil motivated by homophobia. The Northeast, the region in which Fortaleza is situated, is the most homophobic region in Brazil, registering 43% of homophobic murders (see Grupo Gay da Bahia, 2014).

important questions around Viviane were that religious symbols are not only opened to different interpretations, they are also enmeshed with various discourses on “rights” and “freedoms”, often evoked in the religious disputes to disqualify the opponents.

No one at the MCC Fortaleza, or in the media coverage asked Viviane if she was religious, and how she felt by embodying Christ as a symbol. The questions the press asked her focused only on her intentions in her performance. The fact that she explicitly said that she was protesting did not seem to alleviate the fact that religious institutions interpreted the usage of Christ as a symbol in different ways, through their lenses. Another controversial aspect of the following debates seemed to be the manoeuvre of sacred symbols by sexual minorities, in a “party-like” context.

The religious disputes around Viviane’s protest bring up the issues I have raised in the introduction. The main dilemma, faced by LGBT people when constructing MCC as a religious organization in Brazil, is not only to face religious intolerance and homophobia (by other religious groups), but also to build itself as “respectful organization” (respectful and queer) to face theological conflicts, manipulate religious symbols in appropriate manners, and actively search for more adepts.

Viviane’s case was one of the few moments in which I saw people at MCC engage in religious disputes as such. At moments, there were comments at other religious institutions, but they were never as heated as the comments I heard when Viviane’s case was happening.

However, to understand why I say that Viviane’s bodily performativity is subversive, I have to clarify what I mean by that. I explain Butler’s concept of subversion in following part so that the reader might have a clearer view on this subject.

3.4. Is there subversion at MCC?

In one of the “educative moments” at MCC, in the third Sundays of the month, people were asked to sit in a circle (there were around 10 persons). Then we were invited to imagine an anthropomorphic figure of God. People then talked about Jesus or the virtues of God. But most of them said it was difficult to imagine God as an earthly figure.

Then, Ferreira Júnior, the deacon of MCC Fortaleza, spoke at the end. Quoting Corinthians 15:10, he mentioned one passage in the Bible in which it is written: “By the Grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect”. From that quote, Ferreira Júnior then said that God could be imagined as a drag. Since the drags escape any of the categories created to fix humans. Drags were neither “men” nor “women”. And, at the same time, drags open up the room for a world in which these categories are not even needed. The fact that binary systems of classification carry in them hierarchical forms: “men” and “women” are not equivalent, but always positioned differently²⁴.

The Biblical message: “By the Grace of God, I am what I am”, in conjunction with the image of drags, signals to the possibility of constructing gender and sexuality as not fixed by a heterosexist and normative discourses. In constructing oneself as a drag, one can simply be (and be blessed by God), as one performs a different gender.

The possibility of playing with gender rules (and playing with power itself), and Ferreira Júnior’s Biblical interpretation come together to open room for subverting the continuum established by heteronormativity: a continuum in which one’s biological body is framed according to the presupposition of a heterosexual desire.

24 Later Ferreira Júnior explained to me: “Judith Butler herself works on these issues. She says that feminist theology is more advanced than queer theology, or inclusive theology. Feminist theology began at the end of 19th century in the United States. And people started realising that gender issues on the Bible are problematic. And they started deconstructing a God that supports machismo. This is a deep question; we do not even deal with that at MCC religious worships. That was an educative moment. This is a deep question that involves lots of study. To make a long story short: God did not create gendered identities. When God created Adam and Eve, He did not create “a man” and “a woman”. He created a relationship, between two people, from different sexes. He created one kind of affective relationship among other kinds of affective relationships that exist in the Bible”.

The drag, in Ferreira Júnior's speech, and the drag in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990 [1999]) have the same goal: to de-stabilise the system of power that pose the naturalization of heterosexuality as the norm. However, in comparing the contexts of Ferreira Júnior and Judith Butler, I have concluded that their audiences, their authoritative resources and their aims are different. In what follows, I call the use of texts, religious and secular, together with political activism, *situated queer reflexivity*. Now, however, it is enough to say that Ferreira Júnior's interpretations show how "gender theories" can be enacted on the ground, and obey different social objectives.

In this sense, drags as figures of subversive bodily performativities, together with the Biblical messages, construct MCC's strategies to build a sense of morals among its members (by educating them). However, to go deeper into this subject, I thought about searching for a concept of subversion that is present in both Butler and MCC Fortaleza's discourses, and try to understand in what ways MCC might be subversive.

At MCC Fortaleza, not only God is a drag, but also there are queer religious worships in which one of the leaders of MCC, Ferreira Júnior, uses drag performativities in order to preach the liberation of its members from oppressive gender norms (often calling to a world in which homophobia will no longer exist). These religious worships usually occur on the fourth Sundays of the month. The justification for these queer religious worships was that the last Sundays at MCCs' congregations were dedicated to women's empowerment and participation. And since there was no woman at the leadership of MCC Fortaleza, queering the religious rituals was an institutional answer to this question. Hence, there is another "ambiguity" of the queer religious worships at MCC Fortaleza: on the one hand, the drag figures as the earthy image of God itself, and on the other hand, it seemed that doing drag was simply a celebration of femininity and an institutional answer.

In *Bodies that matter* (1993 [2011]), Judith Butler gives a further conceptualization of bodily subversive acts. Her main questions are: are there circumstances in which the subjects can re-work the rules and power relations they

have been historically involved with, throughout their lives? Is the very possibility of re-working or parodying the norms enough to displace them?

Butler (1993 [2011]) argues that, when it comes to gender, the question of subversion is closely connected to the question of ambivalence²⁵. It is by constructing an ambivalent gendered performativity, as drags do that we can see the discontinuities in bodies, gender, and sexualities in action²⁶. The use of drag's ambiguity might be thought as MCC's deliberate strategy to gain terrain among other inclusive churches in the religious market (or even a plan to attract more LBT women). But it can also be thought as a way to subvert both religious and gender norms in order to establish ambiguity as a characteristic of MCC's religious worships, and preach tolerance among sexual minorities themselves²⁷ (at queer religious celebrations, the question of internalised self-hatred is often treated).

In trying to come to terms with MCC's leadership that establishes ambiguous gender performativities, in and through religious rituals, one cannot reduce MCC's drag performances to an instrumental goal (getting more adepts to the church). We are not in a context of drag shows in which an audience pays and leaves (the point is to engage the "audience" for as long as possible). Furthermore, the context of Pentecostal Christianity encourages one to find a direct connection to God. And I must say that I had to face adverse reactions whenever I mentioned queer religious celebrations to people who belong to sexual minorities that were not part of MCC, and that I happened to meet around Fortaleza. Their reaction to the idea of seeing

25 In this sense, the concept of subversion to Butler is temporarily defined. There is in Butler's argument no way so that the social and symbolic order to be completely subverted. A series of temporarily defined resistances can and are set up, constantly. But by no means I am here referring to a "revolution". This character of subversion would explain gendered continuities and resistances.

26 As Butler (1993 [2011]) says: "Or one might be tempted to argue that drag is not related to the ridicule or degradation or appropriation of women: when it is men in drag as women, what we have is the destabilization of gender itself, a destabilization that is denaturalizing and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate".

27 In her ethnography at MCC São Paulo, Fátima Weiss de Jesus (2012) points out to the political activism of MCC members in order to construct a pious life. In MCC's discourse, spreading its views is not about getting more adepts, but changing their consciousness (in fact, there were frequent comments on other inclusive churches in Fortaleza which seem to attract more adepts than MCC did).

drags preaching at a church and manipulating religious (sacred) symbols was sometimes even derogatory.

The following statement illustrates how Ferreira Júnior refers to his drag performance in the religious services:

José: Você se monta? [The meaning of “montar-se” is something like building oneself up, so as to refer to a constructing oneself as a drag. The question is like how do you do your drag performativity?]

Ferreira Júnior: Well, I can't say I am doing a whole drag performance. I am not a trans person. I don't have this vocation to be a “travesty”, but I do admire them a lot. I do it as a militant act. All the times that you see me here with lipstick on, with my high heels, with a big earring, I am doing it as a matter of politics. It's the community's discourse. We don't believe as Augustine did; that human beings are divided in three. For him, there was a material substance, and how can I put it... A material, a spiritual substance and. How can I put it? And the soul, he used to call the soul another substance. Anyway, we don't believe in these three parts: soul, spirit and body. We believe that human beings are one, unique and inseparable. When a person is excluded and she/he goes hungry, it's not the soul or the spirit of this person that goes hungry. It's not. When a person is excluded, she/he is entirely excluded. We believe that people can find God in their homosexual relations [meaning having sex]. At a peak of a sexual relationship, God manifests Himself. It is a divine manifestation because those two, three or I don't know how many bodies are there are experiencing a living manifestation of God. Is it a religion that emphasises sex? No, it's not. We hear a lot from other inclusive churches that MCC is a large door church, which we are subversive, that it is a libertine church. We emphasise living our sexuality freely because we believe it's a gift, and of course, one has to live her/his sexuality with responsibility, it's a gift.

One could say that it is I, the author of this work, who is trying to establish “coherence” to the drag performativities present at MCC. The fact that there are different interpretations, by the same person, about the queer religious celebrations puzzled me for a while. Ferreira Júnior said God might be thought as a drag. But then denies he might be doing a “whole” drag performance (because he is not a travesti²⁸), and later supports his views on gender and relationships on a mix of Butler's ideas with Saint Augustine's. In his speech however, what I found at first confusing was this mixing between bodily performativities, and trans identities. When Ferreira Jr. says he is not doing a whole performance, he is evoking the

28 See Kulick, 1998.

possibility of doing an excellent performance, one that would threaten heteronormativity (as Butler would support, the closer drags get to acting “natural”, the more they expose the contingent “nature” of heteronormativity).

For some time, although I have thought that I was navigating in “chaotic” interpretations and that doing fieldwork at MCC Fortaleza was nearly impossible. The problem of coherence becomes more and more complicated when we are working with LGBT religious people. As Peumans (2014: 624), working with queer Muslim migrants to Belgium remarks:

In light of this and other narratives we should perhaps wonder, together with McGuire and Schielke, whether we are ‘mistaken in our expectation of cognitive consistency between individuals’ religion, as institutionally framed, and a person’s actual religion, as lived. It may be only (academic) intellectuals who care about rational coherence in religious ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting’

According to my interpretation, Ferreira Júnior’s act of “building” himself a drag alter ego and use her as part of a religious celebration to call for a more tolerant world follows Butler and Mahmood’s works. Resistance to a naturalised view of gender is locally and temporarily constructed, and cannot set up a revolution. What these multiple resistances can do is to allow us to experience gender as part of our daily rituals that create their efficacy, which makes us think about gender identities in different ways. But that does not stop people at MCC Fortaleza to use the drag as an example of the spiritual and political work (a self-work) one could go through to reveal a de-naturalised view on gender, sexualities and bodies in general. This self-work entails the possibility of a more tolerant world because it reveals the performative character of society, as a whole. The drag, as God is at all places at all times, since enacting social rules might be thought as forms of everyday performances: the clothes one uses, the gestures, the way one acts (and the ethics rituals entail).

In this sense, I must say that in the case of MCC Fortaleza, the question of sexual tolerance (within the LGBT community itself) is firmly tied to this de-naturalized view of bodies and gender performativities.

3.5. A religious service at MCC Fortaleza²⁹

Severino: Good night brothers and sisters. We are here to celebrate the 7th Sunday after Pentecost. The theme of this celebration is “The Lord is my Shepherd and He loves me as I am”. Today’s liturgy is about love and guidance of God to the lost sheep. This love translates into an offer of a new and fulfilling life that Jesus makes to all people. As MCC, we are here to be guided by God himself, and also guide other in our life. As we are here to include others in radical ways [meaning that MCC works to include all the (sexual) diversity]. Let’s get up and stand to sing the following songs.

[There are several religious hymns]

Igor Simões: To the Holy Spirit that makes our hearts full with a new life. Reopening in us the flame of life. [The Holy Spirit] That guides us that feeds us. That guides us to the arms of our Lord. This God is the one upon whom we can put all our miseries. Because we are sure of one thing about our God: He is forgiving. That means that his heart is kind and can get into other’s miseries. And in getting there, it rescues the other from these miseries. This is what Jesus constantly does with us. With each and every one of us. And this is what He wants to do, each time we need him. Let’s put in our forgiving Lord’s hands all that in our hearts are miseries. So that all in us gets stronger in the hands of the good shepherd.

[There is another religious hymn]

So we will begin our reading today [of the Bible], and the first reading, that is going to be read by our brother Joaquim is in Jeremiah 23 from one to six.

Joaquim reads: “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. 2 Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord. 3 “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. 4 I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord” [fragment].

After these beautiful words of inclusion, we’ll read now the Psalm 23rd. The psalm is going to be read by our brother Zé (it is the short version for José).

²⁹ This was the only religious service that I recorded. I only did this after, at a dinner table, when I was formally authorized to record the religious services at MCC Fortaleza.

I read: “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, [a] I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”.

The second reading is in Ephesians from 11. Until 22. Our brother Kant will read it for us:

Kant reads: “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [...].”

Severino: All rise so we can sing a song. [a religious song]

A Gay couple arrives late, and people start a lively conversation with them. Saying that their presence is a blessing. And commenting on certain curious aspects of their life together, such as the number of dogs and cats they have at home.

Then Ferreira says: “let’s look at these empty chairs. They are sending us a message. And we need to put ourselves in the presence of God, and before the Lord make an analysis of our lives. Is it easy? It’s not. But MCC has this characteristic. It’s a church that is constantly innovating. It is extremely important for us to sit before the Lord and put our goals on His hands. Reevaluating our purposes and take on new ways so we can more and more shelter and include people with our lives. May this preaching arrive to all brothers and sisters that couldn’t be here tonight. May the peace of our Lord arrive to them.

Let’s begin with the first reading. I dedicate, in the name of Jesus. I would like to come back to the Pentecostal preacher that I was for fourteen years. And in the name of Jesus from Nazareth, I claim the following prophecy. Let’s go back to Jeremiah, and I claim, in the name of Jesus, that the fundamentalist and homophobic Congressmen (as they say they are Christians, and occupy the seats of the National Congress). I dedicate the reading of these Words and this prophecy to Eduardo Cunha [Cunha is the president of the Congress and has been attacking LGBT people’s rights]. And I claim his destruction! This is a divine decree. Am I exaggerating? No, no! It is written. All of them, they are an alliance against LGBT people. “Destruction!” [Ferreira is referring to the Jeremiah passage in the Bible: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord].

Ferreira Júnior continues: We know we live in a country that we sometimes wonder where are things going. And we see on social media Christian people wondering about their lives and the country. And when I was preparing this religious celebration, and I saw this passage I thought that God's timeline [a reference to Facebook] was so full with people posting their troubles that He decided to post this quote. We need to understand that our God has eyes and see, has ears and hears, has hands and acts. God is not a million-year dinosaur. Our God is alive, and He is among us. [Ferreira reads the quote again]. It gives me chills. There are only a few times in which we can see God personified in a direct quote for us: "Look, I am watching you: you think you are governing, but I have the control". As a History teacher [Ferreira teaches Religious Studies and History to basic level schools], I have come to realize that the scenarios change, but the characters remain the same. Jesus' context was not different from ours: there was religious elite who was allying with the Roman Empire. And God sent a message to them, and also sent a message to Brazil.

I have to tell you all that we have a God, a God that is our shepherd and He takes care of us. And looking at the situation of our nation, believe me, we are not going to perish. And the Lord's declaration is this one. Oh, isn't it too strong to say that Eduardo Cunha is going to be destroyed? I am not saying he is going to die at a plane crash. I am saying that his power might be taken.

Igor Simões breaks in and says: In Ezekiel it says that God doesn't enjoy the death of the sinner, but He wants the sinner to think about his sins and regret. As far as the prophecy goes, it doesn't mean that God wants to destroy people. God wants to destroy situations of oppression at specific moments. And what God would like to do with those who oppress is that they can think again with their hearts and come back to the way the Lord sees as right.

Ferreira comes back and says: He says I am watching you. I am registering this deviant behavior [he reads the same passage again]. And after reading this I want to remind you the thousands of LGBT people who were humiliated and marked as sinners by religion. The word of the Lord says they were dispersed, but they will return to the place they belong. The other passage says that God will establish a rightful kingdom. A ruler who will try his best to keep peace and justice, Judah will feel safe again, so will Israel. Brothers with joy I claim. God has said, and He has done it. The prophecy of Jeremiah is already fulfilled. In 1968 when God called a prophet of this generation named Troy Perry. Perry's rise has helped to gather the dispersed flock.

Igor Simões breaks in and says: It has been fulfilled many times. It has been fulfilled in Jesus, in Francis of Assisi, in Mother Teresa of Calcutta, in Luther, in Martin Luther King. This prophecy has been achieving itself throughout the times because God helps his flock.

Ferreira Júnior: And this shows that we can have what God has promised us. Look at the brother who is on your side and say: "brother God has a promise to your life, and I need you to know what He promised you, He will fulfill it". And we who are privileged to be here at MCC, we know that the [Protestant] Reformation is not over. We reform ourselves everyday to better serve you, to better host you. Let's sing this chorus [Ferreira sings part of a Gospel song]. After the

song, he continues: “Let us believe in that. Our God is a shepherd. Jesus always uses this image. The shepherd is the one who takes care of the sheep. And Hallelujah when in the first part of the passage, the prophet says he will take control and gather the flock. That is why we are here tonight. Let us take a look into our lives for one moment. Let’s let God take the control of our life. And let us see, with my hermeneutical reading, in a simple and plain language, in these dispersed flock, let’s see our dreams. Let’s deliver the control of our life to God and let’s let him give back our dreams. Those that are the most hidden ones... Those that we think will not come true. I don’t know which ones are yours, I don’t even know if I can remember mine, but I do know that when God takes care of our lives he will gather the flock, our dreams, and this is His promise, and He will make it.

And the flock will no longer live in fear nor in panic. All of the dispersed flocks will be reunited. It is the Lord’s words. And his word is all about reunion. And the Psalm we’ve read says that God has a green and wonderful place for us. Well, brothers, we need to understand that we have a shepherd, and that when we let this shepherd take care of our lives, he takes us to a green pastures places and calm waters. And I like when we have also read that the Lord will prepare a dinner in front of our enemies. God will honor you in the face of your enemies. Oh, but I don’t have enemies? Thank Lord, He will also honor you, at you place. At times, our biggest enemy is ourselves who do not believe in us. God honors you. This is what he does. Because you are God’s priority.

This Gospel is very simple. This Gospel is very simple. The Mark Gospel has as one of its central symbols the sea, as Igor has told us last week. The sea symbolizes what was negative, what was bad. And Jesus at times crosses the sea, calms the sea. To tell us that he is the Lord of those troubling circumstances.

Igor Simões breaks in: This is why Jesus is always on the boat. The boat is Jesus community. Which is always in a dangerous place. The sea for ancient civilizations was the symbol of what is evil because many people would go into the sea and never come back. And we can see the sea as evil until recently, up until the 16th century, with the Portuguese and Spanish conquests. People used to think that dragons populated the sea, gigantic snakes, that the sea ended and that the boats would fall and the dragons, the snakes would eat them all. This vision of the sea is not that old. We know that up until the beginning of modernity, the sea is seen as a dangerous place. And Mark wants to say this, that Jesus controls all the things. Including the worst situations. Which are symbolically represented as the sea.

Severino breaks in: this is also to say that the servitude to God is a never-ending task. There are passages in which Jesus and his disciples want to rest, but they can’t, people want to follow them and they have to get to action all the time.

Ferreira Júnior says: When Jesus was in mission, we have been in mission, and we know how tired we have felt.

Igor Simões says: We needed two weeks to get back on our feet.

Ferreira Júnior says: After a mission, we are... destroyed [meaning tired]. Really dead. And Jesus is all the time going from one place to the other without having any time to eat properly, or to rest. And he has said: “to me, you are my priority”. He was all the time working because the people who wanted to follow him touched him. Certainly his disciples have said things about their mission.

Probably it was Peter. Peter is known for his unwelcoming comments at certain moments, right? But what was Jesus' answer: "these people are like sheep without shepherd". In Mark's gospel the disciples ask Jesus if he won't stop for eating and he says: "I have food that you do not know". Then comes this night's question: what is your food? What has been touching you? Your bank account? When it's on red, we get a bit touched.

Igor Simões: The red on your bank account is not a sign either of Jesus or the devil [people laugh].

Ferreira Júnior: Does this touch you? I wonder if it isn't the people who are around us and do not know the word of radical inclusion make us feel touched? Last week, I was really touched. I have met a family, a Catholic family, and I showed them some places around Fortaleza. They are from the church, but they are like the lost flock. They have this fundamentalist view on society. And in what I could do, I have tried to change their minds with my attitudes. What the Lord is telling us that we are His priority, and we should also prioritize the making of the rightful law with our actions. Let's go to Ephesians and we'll finish this religious celebration.

This is a fantastic reading, I recommend that you do it before sleeping. [Ferreira reads the passage I quoted before]. And says: I have been wondering around without any destiny when I was expelled from my first church. And before coming to MCC, I wondered without destiny. Went to different churches, and at the third or fourth week, the priests would called me because I wanted to serve the community. I have always served my previous religious communities.

And all the priests would come and ask me: how old are you? I would say 30. Where is your wife? Well, I would love to get to know where my husband is. I am Gay. Then you cannot serve in the church. You will be here, and stay quiet, you cannot serve in the church. And I would say to the priest that he would never see my donations to his church. And as I went, from church to church until the hand of God guided me here, and today, I live here. [Ferreira reads the rest of the passage]. May our little community, our little chapel be in fact the temple of God. And may we look to our community and see the little bricks that each of us are. And do the best you can to not miss the religious celebrations. Because when you miss, there is one less little brick in this church. And our walls get weaker. For our community to stand in safety, it is necessary that each little brick stays in its place. And may the Holy Spirit be the cement that gathers us together. And let us thank the Lord and do our final prayer [Ferreira begins a prayer].

[There is a moment for people to offer donations, while religious songs play on the back. After that moment, there is one moment to share wine and bread.]

[End of the religious celebration, June 21st]

Previous studies have tried to disqualify MCC as a religion (see Stewart, 2008) on the basis that MCC is rooted in LGBT subculture, and, therefore, could not be granted the status of "religion". This discussion ignores the previous experiences

of Blacks and Women in reinterpreting the Biblical canon and creating their institutions.

When I participated at MCC's religious celebrations, I could see that, at these rituals, we can see what I have called here queer reflexivity in action. Examples of Ferreira Júnior's life (he works as a History teacher) are put together with more metaphorical interpretations of the Mark's gospel (the image of the sea), and also mixed with more literal interpretations of Jeremiah prophecies (since they are applied to the Brazilian political situation concerning LGBT rights).

However, these rituals aimed, as the rituals described by Mahmood in Egypt to establish a continuum of daily life and the ritual moments themselves. The continuum is the reason the rituals at MCC Fortaleza are participative. People share their problems and their fears, the troubles of being Gay in a heteronormative society: sharing stories of overcoming religiously inspired hate speech are also very common at MCC Fortaleza. These stories aim to construct the religious rituals as spaces for inner transformation. The religious celebrations are also forms of technologies of the self, in which specific forms of self-disclosure is at the heart of the celebration itself. By making a self-disclosure at the religious celebrations, people would feel more opened to feel the presence of God in their lives, and more ready to face their routines through the coming week.

As Marais and Stobie (2014) have put it, queer people of faith often feel alienated from God, and the dominant patterns of belief. Religious celebrations at MCC are often targeted against these forms of alienation, by alluding to self-observation and a direct connection to God. A characteristic that many of the participants of MCC Fortaleza share, a high religiosity that, at times in their lives, did not need an institutional support, as we shall see later.

To be fully recognised as a Christian church, MCC has not only reinterpreted what is usually referred to "clobber passages" or "texts of terror" (Biblical passages that in theory condemn homosexualities) to a more allegorical interpretation of the Bible as a whole. MCC has been able to constitute itself as a community of interpreters that has tried to push away the accusations of not being "a real church"

(Stewart, 2008). In this sense, there is a reflexive appropriation of the Bible and an acceptance of the whole Bible (as with other Christian denominations).

We can see that in this queer reflexive appropriation, at MCC Fortaleza, the presupposition of heterosexuality of Biblical characters is lost. Many characters such as Joseph and David are framed as engaged in homosexual acts (MCC does support a historical and critical view on labelling as “Gay” some of the Biblical characters). If the characters are not framed as Gay in the stories themselves, the use of images (classic painting, especially) helps MCC members to search for a material “proof” of Biblical characters’ queerness. The story of the young rich man, to whom Jesus says, “sell all your possession and follow me” (Matthew 19:16-22) was one of the stories in which the use of images helped people to see the young rich as a possible queer character (because of the way he was represented in the classical paintings used during the religious celebration).

This use of images, the inclusion of queer readings of the biblical texts, and the continuum established between ritual and daily life are all used in order for LGBT people see themselves as parts of the kingdom of God or feel the presence of the Holy spirit (as I quoted earlier in the methodological part), and help to construct it (the kingdom of God) in their daily lives.

Biblical allegories populate the various interpretations that target LGBT people at MCC Fortaleza. For example, one of the central aspects of LGBT identities: people’s struggles to publicly express their sexual identities are also constructed within Biblical metaphors. And, in one of the educative moments I have mentioned above, I heard that “getting out of the closet” could be portrayed as a difficult situation in one’s life, and compared with the Jewish way out of the Egypt (guided by a figure inspired by God, such as Moses).

The other aspect that is highly interesting at the religious celebrations is the participatory character of the religious celebrations. They are frequently opened for the adepts’ intervention. These responses apply the scriptures to people’s lives (private matters, the political situation of LGBT rights in Brazil, homophobia, the economic conditions of the adepts are all publicised). This aspect has to do with the ties MCC has with the Protestant Reformation, as the religious celebration

recording has shown. The other aspect is the construction of a community. These forms of addressing both the scriptures and people's participation construct the way of communicating with God that must touch people's personal troubles, and share them with the whole community.

The Bible has a central space in this dynamic re-interpretation, but there are other sources, such as LGBT-related movies, everyday sharing of troubles, sociability constructed at MCC Fortaleza, and "secular" sources, such as academic gender studies texts (as I have tried to show with the queer religious celebrations example). Reflexivity in this way operates with different discursive possibilities. It is an open field, constructed by many factors, for both the leadership and MCC members, and it is always contextually built. And, to understand how these forms of reflexivity are grounded in people's life stories, I will analyse my interview materials in the following chapter.

4. Interviews

4.1. Ferreira Jr.

Ferreira Júnior, 33 years old, is a Philosopher and Journalist. He also has a undergraduate degree in Theology. He is now a Religious Studies teacher to 8th and 9th-grade students, at a school in Iracema Beach neighbourhood, Fortaleza. He is preparing for a public career as a teacher; he will soon take the tests to be able to do so. He grew up in a Catholic family. But in his lifetime, he has participated in a Catholic dissident group that became a Neo-Pentecostal church. He has also been pushed to conform to the heteronorm in many ways by different church institutions, as we will see.

Me: You've said you've always had a religious vocation? Has religion always been important in your life? Are your parents religious?

Ferreira Júnior: My family has a Catholic origin. Then from the beginning, I thought I would be a clergy of the Catholic Church. Since my adolescence, I saw myself as a priest. But also, I saw myself as gay. Then, going out of the childhood into the adolescence, I thought "well..." when you start to see your friends getting

their little girlfriends in school; I thought, “Well, I am going to become a priest because this pressure [the pressure to get a girlfriend] is going to end. I am going to the seminar, and this will soon be over and there I am going to live my religiosity. But my great love to my mother wouldn’t let me do it. So what happened? I entered in a Catholic Community that after two years broke up with the Catholic Church, and I came there when I was 12 years old. They moved away from the Catholic Church to become a Christian Church that later on became a Neo-Pentecostal Church. There, at this church, I’ve spent 16 years.

Every since I came there, the pastor knew I was gay, homosexual, I saw myself in that way. And he guided me in the following way: “It is not a sin to feel desire [for the same sex], it is a sin to practice it [to have sex]”. And then what did I do? As I was there from 12 to 28 years old, I had a castration. I had a mental castration. Nobody forced me, but I did it. I did it out of fear, out of cowardice. Talking a bit about psychology, my cathexis, my libidinal drive, I dedicated all to my studies, to my studies and my scholarship at the University. But even there, without any sexual practice, I could sublimate, let’s say, for about ten years, I could redirect this question of sexuality

Faith is as constant as sexuality in Ferreira Júnior’s narrative. Faith was, even more, valued than sexuality since it was through a pastoral guidance that he has “chosen” to live ten years of his life. Both his faith and his sexuality enmesh when he mentions his way of talking to God. As he continued:

Ferreira Júnior: But when things went out of hand, I used to talk to God, and I was always very close to God. I knew that He made me as I am. I even believe that homosexuality is a gift from God. And that He had a mission for me. I knew that my mission is to announce to all the people that He loves them the way they are and that at His house there are rooms for everyone. And I kept thinking: “My God, how could I do it? Am I going to leave this church? And what about my home? Nobody knows about me.” [meaning that nobody knew that he was gay at his place]. And in my heart, MCC existed even before I knew about its existence.

The “closet” as an important aspect of gay identity is re-signified in Ferreira Júnior’s narrative because only with God, he could be truthful from the beginning. He finds some passages in the Bible which he identifies as metaphors for his coming out, as with the passage about Moses’ conduction of the Israelites through the desert. Even if nobody knew at his place about his sexuality, and he’s suffered pressures to appear with a girlfriend publicly, he constructs his narrative around an all-loving God, and his “converting” to MCC is framed as a part of a long and painful trajectory. Ferreira Júnior’s construction of his life as a God’s mission

assumes that his homosexuality has found at MCC a place in which religion and sexuality can be professed *in harmony*.

He narrates his process of becoming an MCC member as a curing and relieving process, a therapeutic process of healing his self-hatred. He also mentions learning to value the gendered and sexual diversity as part of his way at MCC and calls for an alliance with heterosexual people in a way that they could face homophobia. His experiences with other Churches are varied. He was a leader of the dissident Catholic community that later become a Neo-Pentecostal Church. He was a part of it for 16 years.

Me: But were you a “priest” in this community?

Ferreira Junior: Yes, I was a pastor. I was a leader of the presbyter’s ministry. I was a leader of the Gospel ministry. I was an important person in the Church. When it started, we had 13 people. And when I left, there were 3000 persons. I have always been... I have always been very coherent. If in the place I was the practice of homosexuality was not permitted, I wouldn’t practice it. But from my 26th to my 28th birthday, it has begun to get out of hand. So to be coherent to myself and the Church, I disclosed my sexuality from the beginning. The pastor has always known that I was gay. And I told him I was grateful for these 16 years that I’ve lived in the Church. But I was leaving to live my sexuality.

To leave this Church, in which he was an important person was an important step to Ferreira Júnior’s trajectory. It was then that he came out, and he could live his sexuality. The trouble was that he could only live, as Gay person, with his disclosed sexuality, without a religious affiliation. The importance of MCC to Ferreira Júnior is the reconciling of these two interrelated spheres of his life. In Ferreira Júnior’s narrative about himself, religion and sexuality are reconciled at a person level from the beginning (in his talks to God), but not at an institutional one.

These excerpts of Ferreira Júnior’s interview are intriguing because during one religious celebration he said that he didn’t believe in the concept of sexual orientation because, according to him, nobody is oriented to be gay. By refusing sexual orientation as a valid notion, Ferreira Júnior highlights his idea of homosexuality as a divine gift. My impression is that his queerness is situated within religious discourse; and, therefore, produces what I called queer reflexivity. The divine gift is a lived construction, in which his trajectory of leadership is

presented. Instead of emphasizing the queer deconstruction of sexual identities, he prefers to say that queer is a negotiation of sexual diversity that aims to take everyone out of their boxes.

He narrates his encounter with MCC as follows:

Ferreira Jr.: When I was 30 years old, I was told to write news on religion and homosexuality. It was during a course at the University. The theme of the newspaper at this course was about religion. And people came up with the idea to talk about religion and homosexuality. I had already heard about inclusive churches. And I had a team working with me, right? And I believe in God's ways, right? And a boy in my group said: "Look, there is MCC, at Benfica [the former address of MCC Fortaleza]. And I said: "Ok, I will go to MCC, you go to others, we'll gather the material later and make one text. And it happened that I searched online: "MCC, Gay church", and I could find the address. And the contact with Reverend Igor Simões. And I made an appointment with him and went to interview him. It was on April 14th if I am not mistaken. And I arrived before the religious celebration. It was around 4 o'clock. And when the interview was over, I asked him."Pastor, can I stay over and see the religious celebration, to take some pictures?". And he replied: "Ok". Later I just left my camera and the recordings, and I have felt God speaking to me: "Look, this is your place". And I knew I had found that church, the one in which the idea of preaching the Gospels to everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, the one I had imagined during my crises in my adolescent years. I found it, and it was the way I imagined before. At the end of the religious celebration, I went to Igor, hugged him, and asked him if I could come back on the next Sunday. And he asked me: "But couldn't you get enough material for the news?" And I said: "Yes, but next Sunday I will come back as a member of the church". And since April 2013, I am a member of MCC. In April now, 2015, it has been two years already. But these two years are worth 20. I became free from lots of things. I became more healed. From my self-hatred to my self-esteem. And today I am happily living my sexuality before the eyes of God. In April 2014, I became a deacon of this community, I did the process to become a deacon. Now I am in a process to become a clergy. I am still taking the online MCC courses, and I am in the final steps to present a theological writing to MCC theologians. And I can be ordered as a clergy 2015, or the beginning of next year.

It is interesting to notice in his narrative about his conversion to MCC. From an assignment to a university course, he happened to meet his place, an imagined institution (since his adolescent years). This coincidence is the proof of God's will to him, so Ferreira could come back to a pious life. In this sense, his narrative of conversion matches some of the conversions analysed by Milton (2013), in the light of the conversion studies. People usually refer to their conversions as a construction

guided by a whole set of experiences in their social trajectories. His sexuality and his attempts to participate in other churches seem to be the key point to the multiple exclusions Ferreira Jr. experienced before, at the churches he went to. His desire to be fully part of a religious institution is only met when he and MCC Fortaleza finally came together.

About experiencing homophobia, Ferreira Jr. narrates his experiences of discrimination as follows:

I was always a victim of homophobia. Even before I knew, I was gay. Homophobia began at my place (my house), in my childhood. People would tell me not to be effeminate; they tried to regulate my body movements, my hands, my hips, my voice. People at home would tell me to play soccer with other boys on the street. They would insist that reading was not a thing that boys should do. And when I turned 12 (thank God I lived my childhood to the last minute). When I was 12, I was a boy in a big body. I used to walk around wearing shorts, no shirts, and flip flops. And one day my brother-in-law called me up and told me that he had a gift for me. But he said, "I won't be able to take you there to see your gift. A friend of mine is going to take you there". (he was at a bar when he called me). And he continued: "Get in his car, and he'll take you there". So I went, the way I was, no shirt, shorts and flip flops. And then he took me to a motel. When we arrived there, I asked him: "What is it? Do you need to get anything here?". And he replied: "Boy, there are women inside. You can pick and choose the woman you want. Your brother-in-law is going to pay it for you". At that moment, I felt violated. I have this wound in my heart. It is a healed wound, but it is a wound. After that, my brother-in-law asked me: "Didn't you want to go with the women?". And I just replied: "No". And he did not touch the subject again. (...) So homophobia started at my place, and at my school, I also suffered because of homophobia. Until my 4th grade, I used to take my food with me, and I would stay close to the teacher's offices because it was not safe for me there. So I spent a lot of time alone. Because I did not have any male friends, and I did not want to play soccer with other boys, I did not wish to do anything that the boys used to do. At that time, if any boy was my friend, he was accused of being my "little boyfriend". The only reason boys would approach me was when they were interested in my female friends. At my place, within my family, I am a victim of homophobia until today.

We see in Ferreira Jr. speech his early experiences with homophobia, and his need to heal his self-hatred through his commitment to MCC's vision. His coming out is followed by a career change that significantly influences his sense of masculinity: Ferreira left his job as a journalist, and became a teacher at a public school. His new engagement with education has left him (at least it is how I

interpreted) with a bittersweet taste. On the one hand, he feels fulfilled by the job he is doing, on the other hand, he had to face homophobia from his students. He has been accused of being a rapist by an anonymous student. He had to stand up and defend his position until the students could accept him.

Ferreira Jr: I suffer homophobia at school, too, from students as well as teachers. The students created a legend that I was an ex-convicted rapist. As people can tell by the way I speak that I am gay (in fact I couldn't tell). And if any student comes and asks me, I don't deny it. I am completely open about it. The worst case was at Futuro Beach; I was moved from there. Because no parents thought that a Religion Studies teacher could be gay. There [at Futuro Beach] people created a story that I showed my genital organs to the students, and that I touched the students' genital parts (boy's genitalia). And that I was offering myself to masturbate the students. People used to say that I wanted to know how many times they masturbate per day. Horrible things. In this school that I am working now, I also suffered a lot. When the students see that the teacher is gay, they go to the principal's office. They think they are going to be in charge if the teacher is gay. Because they think they are the big machos. Most of them are also from strict evangelical communities. And when you show them that you are the teacher, but you are also a macho, and you are in charge, they enter into a crisis. And then they come and complain to the principal's office. And they have to create stories because they don't have anything against me. And the director called me on my first day. That people said I was touching the students. And I only replied: "Look, I have never done that, I demand a proof of it. Call one student here that was touched by me". At classrooms, and breaks I always have my hands on my back, so I can't touch anyone. As there was no witness to me touching anybody. And one week later, the principal called me, and told me that many classrooms were happy with my work, and they even gather signatures so you can stay here in the school. And I asked her (the principal): "How could I be so bad at a classroom and so good at another?" [meaning that students at specific class have had homophobic reasons to spread false rumours about Ferreira]. Including the students that came there to ask me to leave the school later told the principal that it was a bad impression, that they did not want me to go the school anymore. I was teaching there in 13 classrooms. 12 classrooms I taught History and one class of religion studies.

There are two things that I find most intriguing in Ferreira Jr.' account: the first is his experience of his teaching authority. He sees that the students would use homophobic rumours to destabilize his authority in class. They expect him to act as a weak person and give up the control. When he does not, they pull back. In referring on how he manages the adverse situation with his students, Ferreira Jr. says that he is also macho. His masculinity should not be doubted in classrooms.

However, the students' gossips also discipline his behavior; he has to walk around the school with his hands on his back not to touch any student. As with his previous school experiences, Ferreira seems to be a living proof that schools function to discipline student's and teacher's bodies.

Ferreira Jr.'s speech about homophobia narrates the sense that any proximity with a gay person would "contaminate" the people in contact with them. For him to be accepted as a gay and a religion studies teacher, Ferreira Jr. has to exercise consistently his capacity in educating his students when they make homophobic jokes or comments. As he notes:

There is a lot of homophobia at the school I work. Especially against the gay teachers that are opened about their sexuality. I got this from my membership here at MCC. Here we like to deconstruct [people's homophobic reaction]. It is difficult for people to accept a gay person teaching religious studies. In people's heads religious studies at school is a way of catechism [catholic or Christian, which in theory would exclude Afro-Brazilian religions]. So people often ask: "how could you teach these kids?". Here in Northeast [the Northeast region] people think that gays are pedophiles. They believe that all gay people want in life is to have sex. In my classes, I tell the students I am gay so they can have a different example. What they know as gay and as a lesbian is a very caricatured example, one from a patriarchal society. It is the effeminate homosexual, the one that has sex with "the straight" [faz os héteros]. The lesbian girls are the "truck driver" girls, they are butch lesbians. I try to deconstruct that and work with them this question of sexuality from a queer perspective. Because our flag has many colours, and the reunion of these colours is white. We know that white is queer is the reunion of all these colours [he points to the rainbow flag at MCC].

Previous research on homoeroticism in Brazil has divided the country in two different ways of experiencing homoeroticism: one in which the relationships are more egalitarian and another one, based on what Richard Parker called the "plantation sexual model", or Peter Fry has termed "the bicha-bofe model". This is the model to which Ferreira Jr. is alluding. A model in which the penetrator and the penetrated play different roles (the first being the "male" and the "female"). In this model, the one who penetrates can still retain his masculine identity while the one who is penetrated is caricatured as effeminate. Research on transgender prostitutes

in Brazil has also shown how this model might motivate different forms of transgender embodiment.

In Fry's (1986) classic work, this model was more predominant in the North and Northeast part of Brazil, while a more egalitarian model was more present in the Southeast and South. Richard Parker's empirical materials show that many gay people that migrate to the most developed regions of Brazil (precisely the Southeast and the South) came back to Fortaleza searching for "male-like" partners. However, Ferreira Jr. use of this dualistic and hierarchical model of homo-eroticism is conditional: it aims to construct a contrast between his understanding of himself (and his sexuality), and his students'. By showing another example, he says he stands out as a queer gay. In his daily life, we can see he is also struggling with the theme of the queer religious celebrations he performs as a drag: more tolerance inside the LGBT community and "straight" people by constructing different body performativities. As my next step, I will present my other interview with Igor Simões, the reverend at MCC Fortaleza.

4.2. Igor Simões

Igor Simões, 35, is the founder of MCC in Fortaleza (MCC exists for nine years in Fortaleza). He is a Pharmacy postdoc student and a university lecturer. Igor was one of the people who hosted me at MCC Fortaleza. Igor often says that he has to make up for MCC bills (water, electricity and rent) when the financial balance is not met by the end of the months. Igor's trajectory through religious institutions has some similarities with Ferreira Jr.'s. However, their differences are also prominent. If Ferreira Jr. saw his Catholic community transformed into a Neo-Pentecostal one, Igor was a member of a Charismatic Catholic Community (The Shalom Community).

At Shalom, Igor exercised leadership roles, and when he refers to his previous belonging to this community as a preparatory phase to the foundation of the MCC Fortaleza. With Igor, there is no narrative of a calling, but a gradual detachment to the Catholic teachings.

When I asked him how old he was and how was his trajectory at the Shalom community, at one pizza dinner, he answered that the Shalom community functioned as a seminar. They had a rigid discipline, during the days, with schedules to perform daily tasks, pray and eat. He further clarified that the Shalom community lives on donations, and while he was a secondary school student, they were also responsible for the payment of courses so he could prepare better for the public universities exams (the public universities are tax-funded, and there are no tuition fees. But the process of admission is a very competitive one). I immediately asked him if he had plans for becoming a Catholic priest. However, he said they, in the community, were opened about his future, and if he wanted to, he could have become one. It was more a form of preparing himself to humble and disciplined life.

Igor: In my case, my family is a religious one, they are Catholic, Roman Catholics. And I always had religious teachings from my parents. This is something always present in my life: faith. From my childhood until now.

Me: But did you have any calling to a pastoral life?

Igor: Yeah, every since I was little, I always enjoyed these church things. The community that is formed around the church. And when I was a teenager, I became a member of the Shalom community. I spent ten years there. I got in when I was 14, and I left when I was 24. I spent ten years there; I had a long communitarian life there. It was positive in some aspects, but negative in others. In general, it was a very positive time in my life. They were not wasted years there. They have helped me. Inside the Shalom community, I became a leader, I took responsibilities over ministries. I was a leader of prayer groups. This all put me on the road. It gave me a feeling of a calling. This kind of calling was always present in my life until I've met MCC. And after my encounter with MCC, I went deeper and deeper [with the possibility of becoming a priest]. As I begun the MCC community here in Fortaleza, I became its leader.

Me: what were the good and the bad parts of the Shalom community?

Igor: Well, I guess the good part was the humanistic teachings. It taught me humility. The bad part was the institutional hierarchy.

So on the one hand, Igor's life trajectory cannot be completely detached from this previous involvement with the Shalom community. There he acquired not only a humanistic training, and the possibility to exercise humility, but also the possibility to access the public and the most prestigious university in Ceará, as he

told me in one dinner. The Shalom community, therefore, prepared him for “a secular” life. With more economic independence, after finishing his studies, he breaks up with his Catholic community and spends two years without a religious affiliation, until he joins the MCC. In his narrative, however, looking for a religious institution that accepts him as a Gay person is something always present.

Me: How did you meet MCC?

Igor: It was through the internet, in 2006. I left the Shalom community in 2004 when I was 24 years old. And then I spent two years coming in and getting out of churches. I thought about living my faith alone. But it was then that I realised that I couldn't live faith alone. You can't do anything in life alone. I had an urge of being in a community. It doesn't matter if the community is composed of a thousand people or if it is a small one. This urge of being in a community was bigger than anything else. So in 2006, I found MCC online. I searched for info on them. We started gathering people here in Fortaleza in August 2006. I got to know MCC at the beginning of 2006. In April 2006, Reverend Darlene Garner came to visit us. She was our bishop at the time. She was responsible for the Latin American region. And people started an MCC group in Teresina at that time. She came to Teresina. I met her there. She and the Reverend Hector Gutierrez, and they came to present what was MCC to us. And I fell in love with MCC. In August 2006, I met Ed [Ed is out of the church right now, taking his Masters in Music], he also was one of the pioneers here in Fortaleza. In October 2006, I went to the first meeting for MCC leadership in Brazil. MCC had tried to come to Brazil before, but they had failed [the slip up with CCNE]. So the World Council decided that it was better to train people locally (in Brazil). It was in Sao Paulo. It was where I met Reverend Cristiano Valerio, Reverend Eliana Vilela [the MCC Vitoria leader], Sandro, Silas from Belo Horizonte. It was there that we all met. People that are still working at MCC. From Northeast region, there was me, and Reverend Cristiano Leite. The Teresina community started at the same time as ours. But they couldn't continue their work for a while. But now they're up on their feet again

So when I got back from this meeting, I got what was MCC all about. Up until that time, I thought MCC rituals were pretty, but I had no deeper knowledge of the organization. But to put your hand on, and work for MCC, how could I do that? So from October this year [2006], we came together to organize our meetings. More and more frequently. We found a place for us to meet. We gradually structured the whole thing, our reunion, our style of religious celebration. We build a team to implement MCC here. And we started our walk. We grew bigger, but the church has always had this pendulum movement: people come, stay a while, and go away. Maybe they come back; maybe they don't. Anyway. It is a pendulum movement. Inside this movement, some people consolidated their presence here. In 2010, we were recognized as a church, affiliated with the Universal Fellowship of MCC's (UFMCC). And in 2011, I was ordered a reverend at MCC. In 2009, I became a deacon. Every since it has been happiness, despite all pain [he laughs].

Igor does not participate in the queer religious celebrations as a drag. Instead, his main critique is the celibacy at the Catholic church. The same night he gave me this interview, he and the people at MCC started listing all the Gay sexually active Catholic priests they know in Fortaleza. And because of his Catholic influences, I could see he respects some sectors of the Catholic Church, such as the Jesuits (because of their views on homosexuality, and their long-lasting educational training). Jesuits are even quoted at some MCC religious celebrations that Igor is the pastor. In these celebrations, it was Ferreira Jr. and his “assistant” André (fictional name) who blurred gender lines. André would only wear make-up while Ferreira Jr. would dress up as his alter-ego, the Monaco Princess, “Louhany”.

In the last parts of my fieldwork, a couple, Mauricio and Pedro (fictional names) came to join MCC Fortaleza. That fact that Mauricio belonged to a Jesuit seminary before his coming out has helped me observing the way Igor joked about the Catholic Church as an institution. While figures such as St. Francis of Assisi were admired, the everyday life of the Roman Catholic Church was seen through the lenses that people search the celibacy because they want to run away from their sexuality.

In this sense, the similarities between Ferreira Jr. and Igor are striking. Both of them could not conform to church's' teachings on sexuality. However, they did not rest in their spiritual quest until they found MCC. It might not be the end of the line for them, but at MCC Fortaleza, they seem comfortable now. When I asked Igor about MCC's sexual ethics, he answered:

In the case of MCC, the only ones who follow a sexual ethics are the priests. Leaders cannot fool around with the congregation. We should follow a didactic relationship with them. But inside, on a personal level, each one, inside the church, MCC doesn't bother anybody's intimacy. We also do not stipulate strict rule on how people will construct their relationships. We understand that people just build relationships. And they should orient their whole body, the exercise of their sexuality, their whole emotional life to a more balanced life. A balanced life that would make people happy. If people are happy with a monogamous relationship, with some rules, that's fine. If it is a polygamous relationship, it's fine too. Nobody will say to people how they should behave in their most private sphere. It something

personal, as long as it makes people happy. If it's not making people happy, then the church can come and help them. If there is any problem, anything, if the individual doesn't feel entirely happy, (and ask for our help) then we can come in. But as long as people establish interpersonal and free relationships, and inside this freedom they are happy, it is all fine. And if this doesn't come in the way in the relationship between people and God, it's even better. [...] This is even stated in MCC's guidelines, that the experiences of our bodies do not put us in a distant position from God.

In other ethnographies at MCC's congregations in the United States, the question of sexual ethics connects closely to the leadership (Thomas and Olson, 2012). When the leaders adopt a stricter view on sexual ethics, they nonetheless have to combine it with a more individualized approach; the one Igor is taking now. In my view, Igor's more individualistic approach is due to his previous experiences within the Shalom community and his constant irony to the Catholic celibacy.

The point that morality is learned through the body is made by many contemporary authors (Wacquant, 2004; Mahmood, 2011; Butler, 1999). In the case of MCC Fortaleza, I have tried to understand how learning through the body is constructed in people's narratives, what I have called situated queer reflexivity. I argue that investigating inclusive churches, ethnographers should take care in relating the inclusive with the wider religious market, through an approach that highlights how queer people of faith deal with homophobic and transphobic churches' teachings, and how they have "converted" to inclusive churches. The cases of Ferreira Jr. and Igor Simões highlight the diversity of intersections between religion and homosexuality.

Final remarks

In his diagnostics of “Anthropology of religion”, Clifford Geertz (2005) enumerates what he saw as crucial conditions for studying religion in the 21st century. Geertz highlights the globalisation of religious identities. It does not mean that some religions were not always global in their character. However, in the contemporary world conditions, talking about a “centre” and a “periphery”, as an older model of diffusion of world religions put it, is more and more complicated. Mass migration has changed the possibilities of displacement, and the conditions of building religious communities, as well as the possibilities of constituting a spiritual self. The globalisation of religion, according to Geertz, could also bring up more ecumenical ways of combining different religious traditions and doctrines.

These conditions could be combined with a whole set of social differences (racial, gender, location, sexualities, etc.) that would be translated into various religious idioms. As I have demonstrated, there is a rapid growth in inclusive churches in Brazil. At the same time, researchers have been careful in predicting the ways inclusive churches could affect Brazilian society in the future. Fatima Weiss de Jesus (2012) has one of the boldest hypothesis about the political possibilities of inclusive churches. According to her, inclusive churches could influence the electoral choices of its adepts, and one day be responsible for the election of politicians from these churches.

While this is a possible outcome, and this possibility would sure be an interesting social change, in the sense that people from inclusive churches in theory would be in favor of sexual diversity and LGBT rights; I can say that there is no indication that this is an outcome to happen soon. Throughout my fieldwork at MCC Fortaleza, people openly discussed their electoral choices, particularly in the pizza place we went after the religious services, and there was no unifying position among MCC members, since some of the adepts at MCC Fortaleza would disagree with people at MCC São Paulo concerning electoral choices.

Even if it is difficult to predict the future of MCC Fortaleza, there is something that I find most interesting in this congregation. Most of the

congregation is composed of Gay men either single or in stable relationships. At one dinner table, I asked all of them if they would like to have children, and only two of the six people present at the pizza place answered affirmatively (only one member at MCC Fortaleza is actively trying to adopt a child right now). However, after a closer contact with the MCC congregation in João Pessoa, after a regional meeting, people at MCC Fortaleza started commenting on the children circulating around the MCC João Pessoa church.

I suppose that even if its members invested in building families, this gesture would not necessarily mean a turn inward. Because LGBT families are an extremely controversial topic, open to many public debates in Brazil. So “acting up” is a strong side of MCC and might be that way for a long time. During the pizza dinners, there was a constant mentioning of the challenges MCC Fortaleza had to face: and the most challenging aspect was to bring in more sexual and gendered diversity to the church.

MCC Fortaleza’s adepts are middle-class gay people (White and Black), and they never mentioned breaking with class barriers as an “obligation” to bring more people in. For example, they often said that they would love to attract more Trans people to MCC Fortaleza, and other ethnographic works (see Kulick, 1998) showed that Transgender people have a personal faith that finds no institutional support. The possibility of finding support at MCC depends on how MCC Fortaleza will approach Trans people in the future. However, right now, MCC Fortaleza’s members pay little attention to the intersections that follow gender and sexuality because the question of actively searching for Trans is not combined with any class awareness. Trans people in Brazil have the formal labour market closed to them (Benedetti, 2005) and most of them are working as sex workers. People at MCC Fortaleza never address these themes when they mention their desire to bring Trans people in.

In trying to grasp the intersections between religion and sexual identities, I have arrived at the endless task of tracing more and more aspects that could intersect within the context of MCC Fortaleza. Throughout my fieldwork experience, not only sexual diversity was a topic, but also gender diversity. There were no women

(LBT) at MCC Fortaleza. Women were referred as “people who come and go”. There were often prayers for women to “come back”. I could not find out more about the fact that women were not attending MCC Fortaleza.

MCC Fortaleza’s main technology of the self, as Foucault put it, ties the self, the act of telling about oneself with a relationship that is liberating with a specific institution. The possibility of comparing diverse ways that these technologies work is something that only more research is able to answer. Another central aspect should be noticed; contrary to Fátima Weiss de Jesus (2012), I could not find people who were inside the LGBT movement since the 1980s at MCC Fortaleza. I would say that question of generation should play a bigger role in drawing comparisons of inclusive churches for future works.

The fact that there is an effective growth of inclusive churches in Brazil, comparative research on these churches is still in its initial phase. Their growth is faster than researchers can follow. And comparisons to the available works (most of them examined congregations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) are limited. Even though some of these churches (such as CCNE, studied by Marcelo Natividade) play a decisive role in disciplining the bodies of their adepts should not lead us to believe that performing “discrete” homosexualities is a form of getting away from political battles. At CCNE (as well as at MCC Fortaleza) there is a strong advocacy towards LGBT family rights.

Overall, I conclude that the notion of queer reflexivity and the interview materials might be another way of constructing future comparisons about inclusive churches in Brazil.

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