THE BUILDING OF HEAVEN BY DEMONS:
FAITH, SEXUALITY, CAPTURE AND RESISTANCE IN THE
RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF INCLUSIVE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT
This study has as its central theme the faith-inspired agonistic trend in the context of sexuality, as seen in the current situation of Inclusive Christian Churches. The general objective was to question, initially, the experiences of Inclusive Christian Churches in the context of regulatory settings related to sex, since the Bible is a moral code historically marked by patriarchal reasoning of a heteronormative and Western nature. In compiling data, it was discussed the difficulties found over the union of Christian practices grounded in the Bible and contesting fluid experiences, especially in the Queer perspective. Although we consider the movements of Inclusive Christian Churches as revolutionary and fundamental, we find it is necessary to continue discussing the experiences that are engendered inside them, so we can go on building liberating faith paths and not new bonds.

KEYWORDS
Faith; Sexuality; Capture; Resistance; Inclusive Christian Churches.

Introduction
It has not always been so, but what we see is that sexuality has increasingly been drawing attention from scholars from various fields, with diverse approaches and interests. No one can escape the many looks that are launched on sexuality and, consequently, on bodies, practices and subjectivities. Anthropological, medical, sociological, psychological, religious (Alves, 2009) looks are common. Powerful looks that in a game of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1972) move gears that, contrary to popular belief, do not discover the hidden sexuality and understands its essence, but produces it, controls it through mechanisms already naturalized with the help of Christian morals and the supposed modern modesty that requires

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that you hide the “shame”, in fact a schizophrenic movement, since it refuses everything that everyone does, including public defenders of this so-called morality (Foucault, 2011).

Therefore, considering the breakthrough phenomenon, always in a growing fashion, and the spreading of the ideals of Inclusive Churches, including their quest in the face of the traditional heteronormative culture (therefore, arbitrary), and believing as Foucault (2010a) did that power generates resistance and this resistance can be caught by a new apparatus of power, leads us to weave questions that aim to supposedly guide the investigative process of this proposal such as: How do Inclusive Churches, considering themselves Christian, break with the “compulsory heterosexuality” established by traditional churches through the notion of sin? How do Inclusive Churches build ideas of norm, if they do? That kind of morality is present or is produced in the context of Inclusive Churches? What family-related settings and representations such as marriage are found within Inclusive Churches?

From these inquiries we elected as a general objective to question the religious experiences of Inclusive Christian Churches in the face of the heteronormative religious culture and, as specific objectives, to identify how the Inclusive Church, intending to become Christian, break with the “compulsory heterosexuality” established by traditional churches, and renew the notion of sin; to verify how Inclusive Churches build normative ideas, if they do; to map morality issues that are present or produced in the context of Inclusive Churches; to determine what settings and family-related representations, including marriage, are found in the Inclusive Churches.

In this research proposal, some theoretical paths are key to guiding the required approaches and the questioning of the field, as the concept of heteronormativity, constituted under Louro (2009, 2004), Pocahy (2012) and Pocahy & Nardi (2007), an arbitrary political system set on determining normative conducts on ways to perform gender and experience sexuality, considering as its foundation the heterosexual drive (in its supposed evidence of character, that is, that everyone is born heterosexual, and related social privileges, given its fashion of something natural and indisputable - from the line of intelligibility amalgamated in body / sex-gender - sexuality / pleasure / desire).

Theoretical and Methodological Settings of the Investigation

We would like to reaffirm that we understand methodology as a way to go, one by which to do research, which will always materialize from a theory to which it is attached, related to its way of shaping the world and the research itself (Meyer & Paradise, 2012). That is why it is important to note that in this work we try to mingle with forms of socio-cultural regulations arising from approaches on gender and sexuality, having as a reference the theoretical and methodological elements of Foucault’s perspectives found in Cultural Studies, Feminist Studies and Queer Studies, which are posted on the border of an epistemological area, in a kind of intersection between postmodernism and post-structuralism (Prysthon, 2003).

This work falls within the qualitative perspective, in a constant process of creation of its own methodological way that does not claim to be rigidly defined. In addition, the researcher’s position in a qualitative research is based on a vision of science which is “relational, heterogeneous, established, political, ideological, non-dogmatic, untied to universal truths, not deterministic, critical, ideographic, therefore, essentially interpretative” (Roratto, 2010,
p. 176), allowing a close relationship with the paradigm developed here that explores the possibilities of innovation in its style of data collection and analysis.

At first we present here a theoretical discussion that seeks to tackle initial hurdles over the seemingly dissonant issues found in the experiences of Inclusive Christian Churches. Hence, we understand this work as descriptive and exploratory. It is descriptive in the extent that it searches “to describe the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon”, (Gil, 1999, p. 45), and exploratory since it is aimed at providing an approximate overview of a certain fact, (id, Ibid).

Initial challenges appeared after our exploration of websites from some churches, more precisely five: New Hope Christian Community, Metropolitan Christian Church, Contemporary Christian Church, Good Shepherd Evangelical Church and New Life Inclusive Church.

In this work we present an analysis of problems related to our concern arising from the exploration of website contents involving these churches, especially in matters dealing with moral rules and experiences measured according to their perception of sin.

Results

Sexuality / Sex and Religion, and the Judeo-Christian religion in particular, never seem to have been “friends” and that significantly influenced the history of mankind, at least in regard to the two thousand years of the Christian calendar. Traditionally sex is connected (although not officially) to the sin of Adam (Bible of Jerusalem, 2002); sex was a subject that religion seldom considered as a positive asset. While it is legitimate among living beings, in human culture it earned an air of rationality and administration, and religion contributed significantly to this through morality and the theology of sexuality that regulates sex and ties it to the reproduction of the species (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1998. As Stefanuto argues (2013), “the human being is called to the grace of love in bodily and spiritual unity. Femininity and masculinity are complementary gifts, so that human sexuality is an integral part of the concrete capacity for love which God has inscribed in man and woman”, so every sexual experience that does not have the purpose of reproduction cannot be understood as correct.

Reflecting from Pocahy and Dornelles (2010), we see that modern institutions, highlighting especially the churches, are supportive and maintain devices that encourage heterosexist models. To understand that is significantly relevant in order to support the discussions in this study.

It is, therefore, in this context that heteronormativity was/is constructed and/or fortified as the man - woman pair is accepted to be the only and legitimate choice to experience sexuality, so much so that Stefanuto (2013) says that “when love is experienced in marriage, it includes and surpasses friendship and blossoms between man and woman, given in full, respectively according to masculinity and femininity ...”

The concept of heteronormativity is worked by Butler (Prins, B. & Meijer, I. C., 2002), according to her reflection on how western society was legitimizing gender rules from a “heterosexual matrix” as Butler herself puts it. This heterosexual matrix is marked by a binary
model of opposing values, male-female/masculine-feminine, and these dichotomies are mutually attracted like a magnets, crude legitimization of desire as always being heterosexual.

By legitimizing and imposing a “compulsory heterosexuality”, the various apparatus of modernity, and here we emphasize religious gears, put homosexual practices in an abjection condition in such a way that, for centuries, they were associated with nouns such as devil, evil, the beast...

Moreover, the Christian practices eventually elected as a true value the Agape-like love, whose assumption is that one must love beyond material concerns, and exclude any practice of an Eros-kind love, which refers to desire attached to erotic practices. Not to mention that bio-psychological sciences and other health-related disciplines that, as stated by Meyer (2012):

Constitute a privileged discursive field in the process of epistemic meaning of the body, gender, sexuality, human reproduction and parenting, as well as substantive processes of discipline and control that launch these bodies into the everyday life of modern Western cultures (p. 53).

It is within this complex and multifaceted scenario that we see emerge experiences and heterosexist practices that refer to practices and discourses seeking to affirm and legitimize heterosexuality as a superior and legitimate experience in face of other sexual practices, such as homo, bi or transgender (Van de Ven, 1996).

In its historical relationship with hetero/sexist practices, Western religions acted and act rebuilding a heteronormative life style that suffocates bodies and subjectivities by gender norms, where the belt of this collar is one of the effects resulting from repression of sexuality as Foucault (2011) puts it:

(...) it is a name that can be given to a historical device: not related to an underground reality that is learned with difficulty, but the great surface network in which stimulation of bodies, intensification of pleasures, incitement to discourse, formation of knowledge and reinforcement of controls and resistances, interweave according to some major strategies of knowledge and power (p.116-117).

As my thoughts\textsuperscript{9} swarmed with these issues, I kept thinking of my childhood catechetical teachings, especially when I came across a message from an Inclusive Christian Church, while sailing (or wandering) through the Internet. As they were called because they did not exclude gays and lesbians or other people due to color criterion (Nativity, 2008), being a fairly recent phenomenon in Brazil, as Weiss (2013) observes:

This draws the attention to the compatibility of non-heterosexual behavior and Christianity (mainly evangelical). From the early 2000s on one sees the proliferation of various denominations in Brazil, and the two major centers with the highest number of churches are Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. (Weiss of Jesus, 2013, p.1)

\textsuperscript{9} I Write here in the first person to mark influences I had of this heteronormative culture which eventually help to direct my gaze. I feel that this is what justifies my research concerns.
Weiss of Jesus (2013) notes that the term Inclusive Church appeared as a “very controversial term, for it may designate churches in general when the idea is to make compatible non-heterosexual sexuality and Christian religiosity; since said churches are not discriminatory to LGBT” (p. 2).

And it is precisely this attempt to unite Christian and non-heterosexual behavior that draws more attention to the study perspectives glimpsed by us, since the union between the Christian faith and homosexuality, for example, brings to the surface dogmatic and theological problems arising from the moral and sexual theology that was established and widespread. Inclusion churches, in our view, need, therefore, more than the name - inclusive: They need to break with tradition over sexuality that overtook us after years of dissemination.

Some studies have already been proposed in this direction, such as the one developed by Musskopf (2003), which advances a theological twist by announcing a Gay Theology or Inclusive Theology, although both appear so different.

Some Brazilian scholars have already been poring over this phenomenon and have even foreseen problems, including possible norms that arise from this movement of resistance related to Inclusive Churches. Among these findings we highlight Musskopf’s (2004), who in his master’s work, developed a didactic, historical and systematic study on the ministerial ordination of homosexuals, and Natividade’s (2004) who discussed through a literature review about homosexuals’ careers and Pentecostalism.

Four years later Natividade (2008) defended her thesis with the Graduate Program in Sociology and Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), evaluating the dispute over the meaning of homosexuality among evangelicals in Brazil. And more recently Rodrigues (2009) developed psychological studies about inclusive churches, based on the perspective of theirs pastors.

All these pioneering studies point to the revolution that was and is to propose a new form of religious life, where sexuality is not a problem, but is welcomed as something of God. However, in the game of power and resistance, it is necessary that we stay alert to movements that seek to capture the resistance, as well as to identify where resistance suffers cracks, although we cannot escape the recaptures, since it is in this sinuous game that we find ourselves.

In our initial research, we were surprised with the churches’ sites churches, which were loaded with determined moral rules, which, although they are among advanced religious developments according to Western sexuality, still seemed too marked by heteronormative logic. Currently Inclusive Christian Churches, or at least part of them (since we could not evaluate all the sites and some do not list links to related actual rules), establish conditions as stable union of two years in order to accept marriage, and do not consider, for example, the possibility of conjugal experiences between three or more people.

Undeniably there are still rules dating back to traditional practices of marital and sexual practices that aim at adjusting the experiences of members to biblical requirements.

**Discussions**

In the face of historical, cultural and religious contingencies that determined that naturalized way to see men and women and their sexuality, it is interesting to examine this sup-
posed evidence and naturalness, especially when one sees this as a production, as stated by Louro (2008):

Construction of gender and sexuality takes place through numerous learning processes and practices, insinuating itself in very diverse situations; it is carried out explicitly or covertly by an endless series of social and cultural configurations. It is a painstaking process, subtle, always unfinished. Family, school, church, legal and medical institutions remain, of course, as important instances in this constitutive process (P. 18).

And the articulations that we intend to mount here are directly connected to the idea that both gender and sexuality are concepts constructed (Louro, 2012) by pedagogies of gender and sexuality, which refer to a variety of educational work carried out by several instances of society such as churches, media and schools (Louro, 2010).

These new discursive articulations over gender and sexuality and, consequently, over forms of general social regulation are and were strikingly felt, and certainly produced effects as a resistance effort against a natural way to see/realize/make one man or woman perceive sexuality.

So, we start from the “principle” that discursive articulations over sexuality are configured as restricting molds so much so as ongoing gender and sexual pedagogies seen in modern society proved immensely creative in their regulation technologies of bodies and lives of human subjects, marking out the ways to experience pleasure and sexuality (Louro, 2007, p. 204) by attracting, managing, capturing, in many different forms, the subjects and their experiences (Foucault, 2010b).

Evaluations of feminist and queer issues (Louro, 2004) on gender and sexuality play an important role here in the displacement of those representations, and it is from some of the assumptions and suspicions that those epistemological postures produce that we affirm (or not) our investigative look.

Final Considerations

Our evaluation of this study is that what is proposed here is not necessarily true, since we did not start it from universals, but from early probing investigations of the field. However, we could not help but notice the great challenge of re-territorializing the Christian religious matrix in order to meet its inclusive claims. Although we find in Jesus an inclusive posture, Christianity as a culture rooted in history, and the biblical configuration itself proposed through the apostles, engendered certain realities that still mark out and shape experiences, especially sexual ones, and this is clearly shown by the rules of Inclusive Christian Churches, since they do not yet fully consider the possibility of moving freely to promote their own cause.

At this time, we reaffirm our desire to continue approaching this fascinating and necessary universe, where we also find the Inclusive Christian Churches, but paying close attention to heteronormative and standard-setting speeches that can permeate the sexual practices of their members, as well as to resistances that arise in this context.
References


