Church on the March: Sexual and gender dissidents in the struggle for embodied political rights

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Sexual and gender dissidents in the struggle for embodied political rights

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Resumen

Las relaciones entre el cristianismo, disidencias sexo-genéricas y derechos civiles de las personas LGBTQ+ constituyen un campo de análisis esencial considerando el auge del conservadurismo religioso brasileño. Las tensiones evocadas por estos actores políticos dentro del espacio público revelan al arte como un mecanismo de visibilidad de disidencias sexo-genéricas. El artivismo —percibido como liturgia política— subvierte la precariedad. Este artículo investiga la participación de la Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte en la «III Marcha contra la LGBTfobia» en Minas Gerais en 2016. La presencia pública de una comunidad cristiana afirmativa revela que el artivismo religioso y político reconfigura el espacio público.

Palabras clave: Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana; Artivismo; Marcha contra la LGBT fobia.

Resumo

As relações entre o cristianismo, pessoas sexo-gênero dissidentes e direitos civis das pessoas LGBTQ+ constituem um campo essencial de análise, principalmente considerando o surgimento do conservadorismo religioso brasileiro. As tensões evocadas por esses atores políticos no espaço público revelam que a arte é um mecanismo para visibilizar as pessoas sexo-gênero dissidentes. O artivismo —percebido como liturgia política— subverte a precariedade. Este artigo investiga a participação da Igreja da Comunidade Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte na «III Marcha contra a LGBTfobia» em Minas Gerais em 2016. A presença pública de uma comunidade cristã afirmativa revela que o artivismo religioso e político reconfiguram o espaço público.

Palavras-chave: Igreja da Comunidade Metropolitana; Artivismo; Marcha contra a LGBT fobia.
Abstract

The relations between Christianity, sexual/gender dissidents, and civil rights of LGBTIQ+ people constitute an essential field of analysis considering Brazilian religious conservatism’s upsurge. The tensions evoked by these political actors within the public space reveal art as a mechanism for sexual /gender dissidents’ visibility. Artivism —perceived as political liturgy— subverts precarity. This article investigates the Metropolitan Community Church of Belo Horizonte’s participation in the «III March against LGBTphobia» in Minas Gerais in 2016. The public presence of an affirming Christian community reveals that religious and political artivism reconfigures the public space.

Keywords: Metropolitan Community Church, Artivism, March against LGBTphobia.

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Introduction

The relationship between Christianity and sexuality is complex and fraught with overlap. One of the perspectives for understanding these relationships is the recognition of marginal, peripheral, minority Christianity that arise from the experiences of individuals and groups that are involved in subverting the hegemonic order of the Christian tradition towards other religious experiences. For example, inclusive churches present themselves as a reconciling alternative between Christianity and sexual and gender differences.

Faced with this scenario, churches emerge as protagonists of new liturgical proposals, which seek not only the reconciliation of faith with sexuality, but also the guarantee of civil rights for the LGBTIQ+ community. The dynamism of the liturgy, as a ritualistic way of presenting oneself, is a fundamental mechanism used to dramatize the world and, also, to subvert the precariousness to which sexual and gender dissidents have been subjected. Thus, church takes place in the temple and in the streets, allowing the concreteness of existence to meet the concrete of the streets reconfiguring religious and political experiences of a faith community traditionally placed on the margins of hegemonic Christianity.

Considering these intersections, this article analyzes the presence of the Metropolitan Community Church of Belo Horizonte in the «III March against LGBTphobia» in the city of Belo Horizonte and its Metropolitan Area. Through participatory observation, I analyze the event through the notion of «Public Theory of Assembly» proposed by Judith Butler (2018 [2015]).
Affirmative Church of Differences

The Metropolitan Community Church of Belo Horizonte—hereinafter cited as «ICM BH» for its acronym in Portuguese—is part of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), founded on October 6, 1968, in Los Angeles, USA. UFMCC is a Christian religious denomination, of Protestant origin, being considered the first inclusive church in the world. Inclusive church, according to Marcelo Tavares Natividade (2010), is a self-identified Christian denomination that presupposes the wide acceptance of sexual and gender dissident people in the experience of religious life. In the case of UFMCC, it was founded by a gay Christian and most of its membership in the world is of sexual and gender dissidents.

Sexual and gender dissidents, generally identified by the acronym LGBTIQ+ —and its variants—, is a concept that gives name to a group of people who do not identify with the heterosexual and cisgender norm of regulation of social relations. Sexual and gender dissidents, sexual minorities, or divergent sex/gender persons, even consider dissident heterosexual practices, such as, for example, BDSM practitioners. After all, heterosexual people who do not reproduce what is expected by the gender determining system, also end up being marginalized under the spectrum of the heterosexual norm.

For these identities officially excluded from the traditional spaces of Christianity, an inclusive church means the possibility of reconciling faith with sexuality. Not only that, but it also is the experience of faith through the claim of egalitarian civil rights. That is how UFMCC was founded, asserting itself as a church in

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1 Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, and transgenders, intersexual and queer folks.

2 bondage, discipline, domination, submission, sadism and masochism. It is an acronym that brings together various practices related to sadomasochism.
the fight for the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people. In this context, ICM BH seeks to promote not only a safe space for the experience of Christian faith to sexual and gender dissidents, but also of alliances with civil society for the purpose of conquering and maintaining rights. For this reason, more than an inclusive church, ICM BH is inserted in the context of Christianity as being an affirmative church of differences, which is both a church and a social movement. One of the actions of ICM BH, together with civil society, is participating in the «III March against LGBTphobia» in Belo Horizonte and Metropolitan Area.

**March against LGBTIQ+phobia**

The March against LGBTphobia is a political act that has been consolidated in Brazil since 2010, and occurs annually on May 17, when, worldwide, people are mobilizing for the International Day Against Homophobia, Lesbophobia and Transphobia. The date was chosen in reference to May 17, 1990, when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD):

The first significant and nationwide achievement of the Brazilian LGBT movement occurred in 1985 and is the result of a decision by the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM), which removed homosexuality as a pathology, as was the case until then in terms prevailing in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO itself began to have the same understanding as of May 17, 1990, a date that became a historic landmark to the point that this day is now internationally recognized as International Day Against Homophobia. This landmark has also recently been endorsed by the Federal Government, which, based on demand from the LGBT movement, instituted, through Presidential Decree of June 4, 2010, May 17 as the National Day Against Homophobia (Mello et al., 2012: 152).
In Belo Horizonte, the March is organized by the Centro de Luta pela Livre Orientação Sexual de Minas Gerais (CELLOS MG, 2016), a non-profit organization also responsible for the LGBT Pride Parade in Minas Gerais, the capital city. The main participation of ICM BH in the March took place in 2016. In it, there was a mobilization of the church members to be actively present. Ten people from ICM BH attended the March. The group was small, but represented almost 50% of the active members of the community (at the time, twenty-two members). Of the participants, some were directly involved with the organization: the pastor, in political coordination, and three members, in the cultural part, through presenting performances.

The «III March against LGBTphobia» in Belo Horizonte and Metropolitan Area took place on May 14, 2016, with a concentration in Praça Sete. That year, the March was held in Belo Horizonte, on the 14th (Saturday), and not the 17th (Tuesday), as the Organizing Committee had preferred that the event would take place on a Saturday so that more people could join the demonstration. The theme chosen for the 2016 was «We exist and deserve respect». According to Natália Oliveira and Gustavo Lameira (2016), about 500 people gathered. The program of the event was: 14h-Concentration in Praça Sete; 16h-March through downtown; 18h-final act at Praça Raul Soares.

The starting point was Praça Sete, a milestone representing militancy and resistance in the downtown of the capital of Minas Gerais and the symbolic city center of Belo Horizonte’s main political activities. Traditionally, Praça Sete in Belo Horizonte has been the stage for dissonant voices, attracting diverse audiences, both for its easy access and for its symbolical, political and historical character. Regarding the dynamics of this public space, Juliana Gonzaga Jayme and Magda de Almeida Neves (2010) state that «Praça Sete is a space for interactions and coexistence between strangers and, also, an identity place, which has vitality» (p. 610).
The March against LGBTphobia is a plural, non-violent political action that presupposes a variety of dissident bodies and sexualities representing their positions. The central issue is the visibility of violence against LGBTIQ+ people, in the sense of mobilizing society in the struggle to maintain already acquired rights and to obtain new rights, such as, for example, the approval of Bill 5002/2013, known as «João W. Nery Bill» or «Gender Identity Law». João Nery was a trans man who pioneered claims about the rights to gender identity. Part of his career can be found in his biography Viagem solitária [lonely travel]» (2011).³ The Bill —authored by former federal deputy Jean Willys (PSOL Party) and federal deputy Erika Kokay (PT Party)— was filed on January 31, 2019 by the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Congressmen, pursuant to article 105 of the Internal Rules (Câmara dos Deputados, 2019).⁴

The March advocates for embodied collective rights. It defends against precarity, from singular and plural perspectives, that is, from the experiences of individuals and the community. According

³ There is a new edition of this book, which was published in 2018. The book is a reinterpretation of the work by the same author, Erro de pessoa (the mistake of a person) (1984).

⁴ The text of the articule reads:

Art. 105. After the end of the legislature, all proposals that in the course of the year have been submitted to the Chamber’s deliberation and are still in process, as well as those that open supplementary credit, with opinions or without them, shall be filed, except: I - with favorable opinions from all Commissions; II - already approved in a single shift, in the first or second shift; III - that have passed through the Senate, or originated from it; IV - popular initiative; V - on the initiative of another branch or the Attorney General. The proposal may be unarchived at the request of the Author, or Authors, within the first one hundred and eighty days of the first ordinary legislative session of the subsequent legislature, resuming the process from the stage it was in (Câmara dos Deputados, 2019).
to Butler (2018 [2015]), «even a life devoid of rights is still within the sphere of the political and, therefore, is not reduced to mere existence, but is often angry, indignant, revolted and opposing resistance» (p. 89). It is the vocalization of «anger» and «indignation», which, according to the philosopher, takes people to the streets. The bodies that come out in assembly are sexualized bodies, which persist in taking over the public space, even though they are the target of the eradication of the State. Going out on the streets is, according to Butler (2018 [2015]), a performative break in the status quo. It is the representation of a gesture that is, at the same time, a movement in the corporal and political sense.

Going to the streets is a plural and performative exercise to appear, when the meeting itself means persistence and resistance. The March begins when people start gathering in Praça Sete, which Butler (2018 [2015]) calls «public assembly.» This is a mass demonstration, in which people come together in a public space to demand one or more specific outcomes. In an exercise of freedom of assembly, these mass demonstrations occur as a collective rejection of socially and economically induced precarity. According to Butler (2018 [2015]),

the assembly is already speaking before any word is spoken, meeting in assembly is already a representation of popular will; this representation means, quite differently, the way in which a singular and unified subject declares his/her desire through a vocalized proposition (p. 173).

Thus, there is no need for a claiming vocalization for the assembly to take place. The right to freedom of assembly is different from the right to free expression:

If we consider why freedom of assembly is different from freedom of expression, we will see that it is precisely because the power that people have to come together is itself an important political prerogative, quite different from
the right to say whatever they have to say once people are gathered. The meeting means beyond what is said, and this mode of signification is a concerted corporeal representation, a plural form of performativity (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 14).

Acting together does not mean acting in concert, after all, as it happens in the March, different agendas can be raised. However, there is a desire prior to a demand for a political agenda that unites them: to create forms of coexistence characterized by equality and minimized precarity, through alliances that are formed. There is a linguistic performativity and a bodily performativity in the assemblies, which in addition to uniting around an agenda, perform the right to appear, which is a bodily demand for a set of more livable lives. Thus, going to the streets is a plural and performative exercise of appearance. Appearance of their bodies, their common goals, their resistance to precarity.

Prcarity is the biopolitical situation to which populations are subject. It is a situation of insecurity and hopelessness, which is usually induced and produced by the government and economic institutions. It is a non-viable way of life and «implies an increased feeling of being expendable or being discarded that is not evenly distributed in society» (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 21). It is a condition imputed to the human being by the oppressive relations of political and economic control, in which, in a maximum requirement for personal accountability, responsibility is redefined as «the requirement to become an entrepreneur of oneself in conditions that make a dubious vocation impossible» (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 21). After all, individualizing morality requires unattainable self-sufficiency.

Thus, in a singularity of its purposes in the March, ICM BH does not go to the streets just to talk about itself, but to coexist in an ethical exercise in relationality. Relationships that were once banned are a mark that touches stigmatized lives, like those of
sexual dissidents. Many LGBTIQ+ people experience relational exclusion in their families because they are not accepted by them; in their work environment because they are stigmatized; in their affective life for trying to live a celibate life; in their religious life for not believing they are worthy of a relationship with the Sacred. Leaving the temple to the city center, takes ICM BH to a relational encounter with others who share emancipatory ideals, which go through the claim of maintaining acquired rights and new civilian protections. Thus, individual responsibility is replaced by an ethos of solidarity (Butler, 2018 [2015]).

The ethics demanded by solidarity is a fundamental issue for Butler. As she states,

I suggest that the life that a person has to live is always a social life, implying a more comprehensive social, economic and infrastructure world, which goes beyond our perspective and the modality of ethical questioning in the first person (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 29).

Positively, precarity exposes sociability.

**Performance and liturgy**

The March expresses precarity that, for LGBTIQ+ people, must be considered from an intersectional perspective, which does not disregard gender, class, age, race, among other possible social markers. Access to the public space by ICM BH takes place in two unique ways. First, as already mentioned, it is through an alliance with civil society — in the specific case, with CELLOS MG. Another way is by art. Historically, art has been a means of breaking with the boundaries of public space (Rubino, 2009), being, therefore, an instrument of resistance and an ally in political militancy. In this sense, ICM BH makes use of aesthetics, through performances, in order to give visibility to what it has
considered its struggle for Human Rights. «Performance» is an important concept to understand the presence of ICM BH in the public space, as it presents itself as a possible religious and political liturgy.

According to Marvin Carlson (2010), one of the emphases of performance is the body:

Typical performance art is solo art, and the typical performance artist makes little use of the scenic surroundings created by the traditional stage; but sometimes it uses a few elements and some furniture; any garment (sometimes even nudity) is more appropriate for the performance situation (p. 17).

Performance, in this article, presents itself as an operative concept, which communicates with a greater number of people about what happens with the presence of ICM BH on the streets. It is possible to affirm that if an analysis were required from an artistic perspective, the best concept for the actions of the church would be a happening. A happening is an impromptu artistic expression, marked by spontaneity, with less aesthetic and more ordinary importance. Nevertheless, still, it is art, albeit with a language of experimentation (Carlson, 2010).

ICM BH itself when explaining its interaction in the streets and its militancy uses the performance concept. The union between art and activism has been being called artivism. According to Paulo Raposo (2015), artivism is an «unstable» neologism, due to the lack of consensual definition. Some art historians would not even allow the concept to be freely used due to the criteria that art would require to be considered as art, as recognition of peers, its value, and the like. However, considering art based on its etymology —from the Greek tékne, in the sense of creative elaboration— the aesthetic dimension of art is appropriated by politics as a potentializing tool for demonstrations of an activist nature. Thus, the aesthetic and symbolic nature of art,
sensitizes, reflects and interrogates themes and situations in a given historical and social context aiming at change or resistance. Artivism is thus consolidated as a cause and social claim, and simultaneously as an artistic rupture - namely, by proposing alternative scenarios, landscapes and ecologies of fruition, participation and artistic creation (Raposo, 2015: 5; emphasis in the original).

According to Raposo (2015), the first use of the word artivism in the academy was with Chela Sandoval and Gisela Latorre (2008), when the authors explained that «[t]he term artivism is a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism» (p. 82). Art and activism, despite being in a new concept, were already crossing over from a performance perspective, as, for example, in political performance.

According to Carlson (2010), the roots of political performance were highlighted in the 1980s, when social and political concerns became one of the main themes of the activity. The «Teatro de Guerrilha» [guerrilla theater], from the 1960s, was the great influencer of this type of art also called «resistance performance». That is, they were popular performances that, using popular theater and public space, brought a political message to a wider audience.

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5 This is from a performance perspective. It is not the intend here to enter into a discussion about the political ontological character of art.

6 It is not the intention of this article to have a deeper discussion about the political character of art. It should be noted, however, that the issue is complex, because while one can think of a specific art for political action, it is possible to affirm —as Jacques Rancière (2005) analyzes— the existence of a politics of art more than a political art. For the philosopher, the politics of art emancipates just by looking.
For Carlson (2010), in the resistance performance,

the subject's identities and positions become markers of an ironic play whose objective is really to question the representation process, to ask what is at stake in the performance (social and theatrical) in terms of ethnicity, gender or sexuality — for whom, by whom and with whom the representation is happening (Carlson, 2010: 207).

Carlson (2010) explains that engaged critical art emerged in the 1990s and brought visibility to its agenda for those excluded by race, class or gender. Impacted by feminist theories, socially oriented performance sought to give voice and action to historically oppressed groups. In the specific case of ICM BH, it is reasonable to propose that the political resistance of its message would be, in principle, in a «crossdressing» of religious bodies, challenging what would be expected from a representation of traditional Christian morality. The performance would then begin when the political-religious bodies of ICM BH go to the streets.

The performances of ICM BH are of gay men performing as women, then being crossed by the political dimension of the relationship between the art of performance and identity. According to Carlson (2010), the roots of this subversion of traditional gender roles in the field of performance art lie in Susan Sontag's *Camp* concept. According to the author, Camp-type performance is commonly associated with the performance of a female persona by a man of the drag tradition. For Tamsin Spargo (2017), Camp is often associated with queer culture due to its questioning of moral and aesthetic standards. The concept of drag queen does not refer to a gender identity, but to a scenic language. According to Igor Amanajás (2015), the main objective of drag art is strangeness. Its reach is artistic and political, as it is conceptually situated in a sociosexual territory.
The use of Camp exaggerates a performance through parody, which, according to Spargo (2017), is a serious criticism. Regarding its relationship with the criticism of religion, Spargo (2017), states that «much of the parodic game with the religious was not serious only in intention, but indicated the fragility or even the illusory nature of the foundations on which were built the prohibitions and injunctions of culture» (p. 62).

ICM BH performed at the March with a performance by Simone Star, the name given to the drag queen performed by Marcelo Oliveira, husband of the current pastor of ICM BH. This drag queen is present all the times that the church declares to be carrying out some queer action, such as the Queer Service and the Queer Ministry. In addition, she was present in all the Marches from 2016 to 2018. At the «III March against LGBTphobia» she performed at the concentration of the action, more specifically in the closed block of Praça Sete, between Rio de Janeiro and Tamoios, streets of the capital of Minas Gerais.

Sexuality and embodiment that could be considered protected through a «ghetto» church that «hides» LGBTIQ+ people would, in reality, be giving visibility to its members. It is what Christine de Alencar Chaves (2002) calls the «sounding board». The term is used by the author to address the Marcha Nacional dos Sem-terra [national march of the landless], which took place in 1997. According to De Alencar Chaves (2002), the National March having become prominent in the media, with the creation of facts and news, has become a resonance box of the clashes with the State. In this sense, the «III March against LGBTphobia», through its political agenda that generates mobilization and news, would function as this sounding board, giving visibility to ICM BH with regard to the affirmation of its sexuality and embodiment.

Simone Star (Figure 1) was among the performances shown and public manifestations of civil and collective movements of political articulation. Lying on a kind of stage that exists on that
block, with a mesh that hid raw pieces of meat that would be used later, with a butcher's apron, fallen between barbed wires and photos of murdered transvestites, Simone Star, as dead, remained there while the concentration was gathering. According to Butler (2018), the bodies speak even though in silence, through body representations. That is why the performance already communicated and interacted with the people who were gathering in the assembly. The name of the performance presented was «Abject Bodies», a criticism of society’s indifference to the bodies of transvestites and transgender people.

**Figure 1: Simone Star**

Source: Pádua Freire, 2016.

The plasticity of the photo and abject representation of the body exemplifies the queer activism of the community, which takes to the streets the uniqueness of its Christian experience. By leaving the temple to the city center, that is, from the church to the public space, the members of ICM BH build their political identity. The political nature of ICM BH takes place through community relations, thus, the political subject of the church is formed both in the temple and in its exit to the city center. To the subject who
was accused of distancing oneself from hegemonic religion is given the possibility of spontaneity (Arendt, 2005), that is, the right to action, to the beginning of something with his own resources and talents, as a dimension that dignifies them.

Spontaneity is an expression of human behavior, a condition analogous to freedom that enables human beings to act politically and gives birth something new in the world. This perspective suggests that ICM BH, through the spontaneity that artistic performance and rites—both religious and political—provide, builds a unique political liturgy that inaugurates its own political bodies in the world.

The March was marked by a certain initial tension, as the date coincided with the passing of the Olympic Torch in Belo Horizonte. For this reason, CELLOS MG was notified by the Belo Horizonte City Hall, which requested the date of the event to be changed. However, the Organizing Committee decided to keep the date and, therefore, there was only clearance to leave the March after the passage of the Torch through Avenida Afonso Pena, one of the main avenues of the capital. While this issue was resolved, Simone Star developed her performance. Lying, standing, smoking, she continued silently waiting almost two hours, until she received the microphone and the right to speak (Figure 2).

The photo shows Simone Star with a microphone in hand. The sound quality was poor. Her speech volume was low, and often cut off for technical reasons. What she said on stage came out in a sound truck provided by Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), which was located a few meters ahead. In front of her, still on stage, on a red sheet that referred to the idea of blood, were posters printed with photographs and names of LGBTIQ+ people murdered by LGBTphobia. Below, crosses in a row marked this memorial for victims of LGBTphobic violence. While Simone Star read a text opposing the deaths of transvestites and transgender
people, she threw the pieces of raw meat that were in her body on viewers. Meat, mutilation, precariousness.

Figure 2: Abject bodies

Around them, some people gathered trying almost unsuccessfully to hear what was being said on the microphone. With cell phones in hand, the performance was recorded by people who were there to follow the March. Curious people also stopped, listened to a little of what was being said and continued, since Praça Sete is a transit point, due to its local commerce and the countless public transportation lines that merge there.

Some passers went by without being interested in what was happening. Running, they crossed the small group that gathered there and ignored the performance. Some people who would march with the group also did not pay attention to what was being presented, continuing to talk in their small groups, laughing, hugging and taking selfies. Other people sat on the stage, with their backs turned to Simone Star, disinterested in what was happening there.
According to Butler (2018 [2015]),

any photograph or any series of images would undoubtedly have a frame or a set of frames, and these frames would function as a potentially exclusive designation, including what is captured by establishing a zone of what is not likely to be captured (p. 182).

This perspective can be analyzed from the point of view of Roland Barthes’ punctum. The concept is in opposition to another, namely, the studium. Barthes —in his classic work «Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography» (1980)— coined the terms studium and punctum in the context of photographic theory. Jose Cavaco (2015) explains that studium is the objective and punctum is the subjective of photography. According to Rodrigo Fontanari (2015), «punctum comes from the Latin verb pungere, ‘prick’, ‘drill’, ‘perforate’. What is poignant, that cuts, hurts, pricks, pins and amortises» (p. 66). Fontanari (2015) explains that the punctum is the invisible that is in the photo, it is what is not seen, the intentionality. Punctum can be the detail, the drama, the supplement.

As Butler (2018 [2015]) stated, the photographic framing includes and excludes at the same time. There is an intentionality in what is registered objectively. The image of a drag queen in the center of the city, in a demonstration against LGBTphobia, is something that breaks with what is expected, creating a favorable space for breaks and continuities. As an example of continuity here, we can see the location chosen for the demonstration, the use of a sound car, slogans, a march that crosses the city center.

On the other hand, there are important ruptures that must be perceived from the point of view of the punctum, that is, the subjective that appears in the photo and beyond. The political role of a Christian church on the streets generates noise in the idea of laicité, which is often understood as secularism. The presence of
the church in the streets —even though this was a previous movement in Brazil during the struggles against the 1964 coup— carries a sense of tension in the assembly. But, it is on the streets that the identity of the nation is formed (DaMatta, 1997).

Although the church opts for an artistic language, its body is still a religious body, which goes to the streets in attention to a Christian ethical call to defend minorities. And not just a religious body, but a religious and LGBTIQ+ body. Herein lies a fundamental tension to understand the activism of ICM BH. Its political-religious-sexual body breaks the expected structural norms, creating a competitive space for other voices that seek to appear (Arendt, 2005) and break with precarity (Butler, 2018 [2015]).

In addition, there is a break from the moralist religious voices that to maintain the invisibility of the inclusive churches and set those churches apart from Christianity. However, the appearance exercise (Arendt, 2005) allows the existence of these churches to be noticed — even if not approved. Although they did not fly the church flag or present a proselytizing speech, it was known that those people were members of ICM BH, as they were presented as such and have already achieved recognition status with civil society.

Considering the punctum as the detail, the analysis of this manifestation of ICM BH in the March «says a lot for what is not said.» In other words, when they choose not to become uniform, not to present themselves as a church, this unspoken reveals a behavior of seeking acceptance by the church in civil society. It is possible to suggest that ICM BH chooses to manifest itself through performances because art has easier access to civil activism than religion. Art creates connections, through the already presented artivism, creating a space of intersections with social movements and collectives. In this sense, ICM BH would
use this language to break the borders that leave it out of public debates.

Gender performance uses the body as an alternative to the symbolic order of language. In principle, one can think of Simone Star’s performance as a Camp performance. However, more than interpreting a drag queen, ICM BH’s queer activism proposal goes through a subversion of gender identities in a Butlerian perspective of discursive emancipation, due to the emancipatory political effect of performance.

Drag queen Simone Star’s body exposure is part of possible discussions about political resistance. According to Butler (2018 [2015]),

> it is not a matter of asserting that bodily exposure is always a political good or even the most successful strategy for an emancipatory movement. Sometimes the objective of a political struggle is exactly to overcome the unwanted conditions of corporal exploitation. Other times, the deliberate exposure of the body to possible violence is part of the very meaning of political resistance (p. 140).

Butler (2018 [2015]) is not dealing here with the specifics of drag art or other artistic specificities of bodies in a space of political controversy. For her, the presence of any body in the assemblies is already body exposure. In the specific case of ICM BH, performance highlights the body and places it in a situation of control. This is a tool found by the church for her speech to be heard and for her body to be seen.

**Performativity**

Even though ICM BH presents itself in the March through performance, it is possible to affirm that there is performativity in its action. According to Butler (2018 [2015]), performativity is a concept of the theory of speech acts, that is, a characteristic of
linguistic utterances, which at the moment of utterance, brings about something. Using the concept from John Langshaw Austin, the philosopher claims that a statement gives existence to what it declares,

First, it seems, performativity is a way of naming a power that language has to produce a new situation or trigger a set of effects. It is no accident that God generally receives credit for the first performing act: “Let there be light,” and then suddenly light comes into existence (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 35).

In Butler, the performative theory of speech acts becomes a performative theory of gender, that is, not only are linguistic utterances performative, but also bodily acts. According to Butler (2018 [2015]), there is a graphic event that opens the genre, when, for example, a doctor says: «it’s a boy!». Thus,

to say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain type of representation; the “appearance” of the genre is often mistaken for a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is driven by mandatory standards that require us to become one gender or another (usually within a strictly binary framework); reproduction of the genre is, therefore, always a negotiation with the power; and, finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of the norms which, in the course of their repeated representations, runs the risk of undoing or remaking the norms in unexpected ways, opening the possibility of reconstructing the reality of gender according to new orientations (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 39).

Butler (2018 [2015]) explains that when she says that gender is performative, it means that it is a certain type of representation. «A person is not his/her gender first and then, later, decides how and when to represent it. The representation is part of its own ontology, it is a way to rethink the ontological mode of the genre» (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 68). According to Butler (2018 [2015]), it is necessary to observe two dimensions when it comes to performativity: 1) the process of being the object of an action; 2) the conditions and possibilities for the action. Therefore, the genre makes and is made, builds and is built.
Thus, the March is an assembly of bodies represented performatively, which is a recognition tool. The March creates space for a new form of sociability, because this movement or inertia, this parking of my body in the middle of the other's action, is not an act of me or others, but something that happens due to the relationship between us, arising from this relationship, using equivocal phrases between the self and the we, seeking at once to preserve and disseminate the generative value of this misunderstanding, an active and deliberately sustained relationship, a collaboration distinct from the fusion or hallucinatory confusion (Butler, 2018 [2015]: 15).

In this sense, the assembly that the March proposes is a relational action. In this light, it is possible to say that, on its way from the temple to the city center, ICM BH relates to civil society through social movements and collectives. In addition, this outlet promotes the relationality between religion and politics, creating a space in which a political and religious liturgy is characterized by the spoken and unspoken rites that present themselves both in performance and in performativity. In this sense, in the liturgical act the sacred «is and is made», and in the religious liturgical act, politics also «is and is made».

The «sacred and the urban» (Rosendahl, 1993-2008), the temple and the city center, religion and politics are intertwined in a complex relationship, in which, in principle, the desecration of the rite is not perceived. On the contrary, performed by discursive bodies, the rites bring new meanings to the religion of the LGBTIQ+ community. The exit of members of the temple, through performances in the city center, also implies an «exit from the closet» of their religion.

The uniqueness of ICM BH’s queer activism lies precisely in how religion and sexuality go through its political action. Upon leaving the temple to the city center, members bring their faith, hope and idea of justice from the construction of the Kingdom of
God. Religiosity is an inseparable condition of the lives of these LGBTIQ+ people who transform the public space through the affirmation of identity categories that do not dissociate faith, politics and sexuality.

The purpose of the March is to ask: What are the possible lives to be lived? There is a need to know, first, the conditions of interdependence that will guarantee the struggle for the achievement of political goals. It is the construction of the idea of community and community life that enables interdependence between people who collectively build their sense of meaning (Berger and Luckmann, 2018). The ideal of solidarity is what moves this community of faith from the temple to the city center. However, it is important to note that collectivity, solidarity and interdependence are also built on the path between the temple and the city center. After all, Butler (2018 [2015]) explains that,

sometimes it is not a question of first having the power and then being able to act; sometimes it is a matter of acting, and in action claiming the power you need. This is performativity as I understand it and it is also a way of acting out of precariousness and against it (p. 65).

Thus, precariousness is understood not as an identity, but as a condition through which it is possible to find paths of resistance.

Conclusion

The article presented the liturgical rearrangements of the Metropolitan Community Church of Belo Horizonte when it left for the public space in the fight for embodied political rights. It can be realized that the queer activism of this faith community ritualizes its religious and political liturgy through art. Artistic language communicates the experience of faith, as well as political intention, allowing the religious body to present itself as the city center of discourse in this space of biopolitical disputes.
Through the analysis of the presence of ICM BH in the «III March against LGBTphobia», it was shown that the precarization, to which the members of this faith community were placed by hegemonic Christianity, did not become a condition of destiny, but a propulsion to the creation of resistance even in the midst of a precarization. Butler’s Public Theory of Assembly (2018 [2015]) helped to understand the phenomenon insofar as assemblies are perceived in the public space precisely as a place of performance and recognition. It is in this gathering that identity guidelines are constructed and reformulated according to the experiences of precarity.

Thus, the experiences of sexual and gender dissidents within traditional and hegemonic Christianity are subverted by political encounters and desires that reconfigure religion by affirming differences and allowing precarity to become a reality conducive to resistance.

Referencias bibliográficas


