

# Reinventing Sodom: Religion, Violence and the Ab/use of Religious Symbols

Reinventando Sodoma: Religião, Violência e o Ab/uso de Símbolos Religiosos

André Sidnei Musskopf<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Sodom is a powerful religious (and political) symbol. Drawing from a biblical narrative – Genesis 19 – theological discourses have constructed it to represent (and condemn) what is called “homosexuality”, both in religious belief and doctrine and in political and juridical practices. Many efforts have been made to re-read the biblical narrative and offer alternative interpretations that contradict the association of its characters and homosexual (or LGBTQIAPN+) people through the image of the “sodomite”, mostly pointing to the issue of hospitality as the center of the narrative. Still, the violence remains as the “sodomites” are portrayed as perpetrators and rapists and god destroys the city. Based on the idea that “our symbols are ill” (Gebara), this article cruises through the “invention” of this specific religious symbol (Jordan) and interrogates the violence that constitutes it from a feminist perspective (Deifelt) offering clues for its reinvention from the religious biodiversity and an epistemology of ordinary life (Gebara). Such a possibility might be offered by the dislocation articulated through the image of God the Sodomite (Althaus-Reid) and through a new narrative that presents Sodom as the place “where colors were born” (Miranda).

**Keywords:** Sodom; Sodomite; Violence; Religious symbols; Biblical narratives.

## RESUMO

Sodoma é um símbolo religioso (e político) poderoso. Desenvolvendo-se a partir de uma narrativa bíblica – Gênesis 19 – discursos teológicos o têm construído para apresentar (e condenar) o que é chamado de “homossexualismo”, tanto na crença e doutrina religiosa, quanto nas práticas políticas e jurídicas. Muitos esforços têm sido empreendidos para reler a narrativa bíblica e oferecer interpretações alternativas que contradigam a associação de seus personagens e pessoas homossexuais (ou LGBTQIAPN+) através da imagem do “sodomita”, majoritariamente apontando para a questão da hospitalidade como o centro da narrativa. A violência ainda permanece, pois os “sodomitas” são retratados como violadores e estupradores e deus destrói a cidade. Baseado na ideia de que “nossos símbolos estão doentes” (Gebara), este artigo percorre a “invenção” desse símbolo religioso específico (Jordan) e interroga a violência que o constitui a partir de uma perspectiva feminista (Deifelt) oferecendo pistas para sua reinvenção a partir da biodiversidade religiosa e de uma epistemologia da vida ordinária (Gebara). Tal possibilidade pode ser oferecida pelo deslocamento articulado na imagem do Deus Sodomita (Althaus-Reid) e através de uma nova narrativa que apresenta Sodoma como o lugar “onde nasceram as cores” (Miranda).

**Palavras-chave:** Sodoma; Sodomita; Violência; Símbolos religiosos; Narrativas bíblicas.

<sup>1</sup> Doutor em Teologia pela Faculdades EST. Professor do Programa de Pós-graduação em Ciência da Religião da Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora. E-mail: [asmusskopf@hotmail.com](mailto:asmusskopf@hotmail.com)

## Introduction

Sodoma! – they screamed  
Gomorra! – they mourned<sup>2</sup>  
(Gabriela Miranda)

It is not uncommon to find preachers screaming and mourning from the pulpits of churches or in public spaces and on the internet about the sins of Sodom and the horrible fate of Sodomites – in the Bible, throughout history and now. Although the kind of sins committed and usually in what such preachers “imagine”<sup>3</sup> to have been the reality of the inhabitants of the Sodom of the biblical narrative varies greatly and can encompass almost anything considered “against God’s will”, the preferred targets, especially in more recent contexts, are most certainly sexual dissidents.<sup>4</sup> Just as in the sermon by a U.S. preacher at a youth gathering of the *Assembleia de Deus* in Brasília, reported by SBT News:

Every homosexual has got a reservation in hell. Every lesbian couple has got a reservation in hell. Every transgender has got a reservation in hell. Every bisexual has a reservation in hell. Every drag queen, and crossdresser, has got a reservation in hell... (SBT News, 2023)<sup>5</sup>

“Sodom”, then, becomes a religious symbol that (almost) speaks for itself, and the “Sodomites” embody all that is considered sinful and wrong (especially in terms of gender and sexuality). In whatever way one looks at the narrative in Genesis 19.1-19 there is no way to escape one key element that structures the narrative: violence. Whether one points to the unjust social and economic relations that are thought to prevail in the city, the supposed lack of hospitality shown by the citizens in relation to the “strangers” visiting, the attempt of gang rape of the visitors (or the offering of the host’s daughters in exchange) or the destruction of the city by God, and even in what follows, violence is written all over the text.

As it will be shown, more inclusive readings and interpretations of the text usually point to the violence of the Sodomites, portrayed as unjust, stingy, and inhospitable (as referred to in other references in the Bible) or just violent “by nature” or evil possession (in

---

<sup>2</sup> All translations for languages other than English are our own.

<sup>3</sup> “Imagination” is not necessarily a problem in biblical interpretation or hermeneutics in general, as feminist and queer scholars have argued extensively (Musskopf, 2003, p. 41). The problem is that some readers and interpreters pretend that how they deal with the biblical texts is not an exercise of imagination, but somehow more faithful to something like a “literal reading” which would be closer to the “real meaning” of the texts – in relation to more imaginative readings (therefore biased and less legitimate).

<sup>4</sup> The expression “sexual dissidents” is used in this article to refer to any form of sexual identity, behavior, expression or perception that is outside what is commonly called “compulsory heterosexuality” or cis-hetero-patriarchy. It includes but is not limited to the various acronyms used to express sexual and gender diversity (such as LGBTQIAPN+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Non-binary and any other).

<sup>5</sup> The quotation is part of the news report that shows the preacher (screaming and mourning) in his performance. The translation to Portuguese (equally performative) does not always follow the preaching and, sometimes, changes, adds or subtracts parts in order not to miss the “flow” of the performance. Those “adaptations” also make explicit some connections and understandings of the translator himself. For example: the term “crossdresser” is translated as “prostitute”. The sermon is reported by the news channel as “homophobic” and classified by a local deputy interviewed in the report as “hate crime” (in opposition to the idea that it could be seen as freedom of speech and religion).

less exegetically committed perspectives). But what is one to make of a god that destroys a whole city and kills her inhabitants – even after a long argument between Abraham and God about saving a city for the sake of 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10 just people (Genesis 18.22-33)? It is challenging to make peace with this image of a violent and revengeful god – or maybe it should be. The religious pedagogy<sup>6</sup> operated by this narrative is based on violence, and it is impossible to avoid it – even when blaming the Sodomites for their fate. And for the sake of this article, that is also a religious pedagogy of gender and sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

The other question, drawn from the examples presented above, is how does this religious symbol, then, become a tool for committing violence against other people – namely LGBTIQAPN+ people? When the deputy in the news report (and the heading of the report itself) refers to the preaching as “hate crime” and “hate speech”, it makes evident how religious language may function as violence itself and contribute to the preservation of systems of prejudice, discrimination, and violence in the name of religion (and god). Even when presented and defended (wrongly) as freedom of expression and religious freedom<sup>8</sup>, the pain inflicted on subjects and social groups directly affected by this kind of discourse (from the immediate audience to the social structures that exclude LGBTIQAPN+ people) is very real and conforms a “pedagogy of cruelty” (Segato, 2018) that seeks to maintain things “the way they are”.

In what follows, this article will discuss the “invention of sodomy” [and the sodomites] in a reference to Mark Jordan’s (1997) reflections, presenting the argument of how the narrative of the destruction of Sodom (and Sodom itself) was constructed to refer to sexual dissidents as a religious (and political/judicial) symbol. We will present Wanda Deifelt’s (2015) analysis of the relation between the Cross and the Tree of Life as potential symbols of violence and the possibilities for resignifying them, especially in relation to sexuality. Visiting supposedly more inclusive interpretations of Genesis 19 we will ask if our religious symbols are “ill” and if religious (Gebara, 1997) is able to offer new grounds for an epistemology of ordinary life (Gebara, 2015) that allows for the reinvention of the symbol of Sodom. Finally, we will present Marcella Althaus-Reid’s (2003) reflection on the destruction of Sodom and her claim for God the Sodomite as one expression of the Queer God. In conclusion, we will bring the different elements together, offering a new narrative (Miranda) as a possible new form of Sodomian symbol.

## 1. “The invention of Sodomy” (Mark Jordan) and the creation of a symbol of violence

The term “sodomites” appears in some recent translations of very imprecise Greek terms such as *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* (Lings, 2021, p. 123-132; Hanks, 2011, p. 40-55). *Biblia Online*, for example, presents the following translation for 1 Co 6:9-10:

---

<sup>6</sup> By “religious pedagogy” we understand the ways in which religious language is used to “teach” believers what and how they should be and act even when it is not an explicit order or determination. Symbols, myths, rites and doctrines are constructed, experienced and used to express certain truths in the context of religious experience.

<sup>7</sup> See Muszkopf, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> This is a very contemporary issue, especially considering the impact that online social networks have produced in all areas of social, political and cultural life and there is abundant literature and research on this topic.

<sup>9</sup> Or don't you know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be mistaken: neither the impure, nor the idolatrous, the adulterers, the effeminate, **the sodomites**  
<sup>10</sup> the thieves, the stingy, the drunks, the slanderers, or the robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup> (bold added)

It is known that *malakoi* (literally “soft”) has been manipulated in several ways, including its translation as “masturbators” in the past (Heminiak, 1998, p. 98). But in the case of *arsenokoitai* (literally “man-bed”), maybe because it only appears twice in the Bible and rarely in other sources (Heminiak, 1998, p. 99), it seems to be a big stretch to transform this imprecise term in the geopolitical identity of people born or citizens of a city – the Sodomites. Or maybe it is just explicitly the use of a sexual category anachronically imposed on a term and a text that seeks to “terrorize”<sup>10</sup> and justify condemnation and punishment of people and experiences outside the cis-hetero-patriarchal norms. At this point, one can choose the more suitable option.

The question, then, is how does the collective identity of people connected to a city – Sodom – becomes a sexual category? The best answer to this question is articulated by the thorough and well-documented study by Mark Jordan, *The invention of Sodomy* (1997).<sup>11</sup> According to the author:

“Sodomy” is a medieval artifact. I have found no trace of the term before the eleventh century. It is also a medieval artifact as a category for classifying – for uniting and explaining – desires, dispositions, and acts that had earlier been classified differently and separately. But “Sodomy” is also a judgement. The judgement made in “Sodomy” has been as durable as any medieval artifact. [...] It was the invention that would be decisive for all later Christian theology in the West – hence for European or American legislation, medicine, natural science, and manners. (Jordan, 1997, p. 1).

Mark Jordan sets the discussion of what he calls the “invention of Sodomy” in the connections established between the narrative of Genesis 19 and specific kinds of acts and behaviors considered sinful. He starts with the analysis of the accounts of the “Passions of St. Pelagius” and how the “Christian attitudes oscillating around the figure of Pelagius will be condensed in that invention [of Sodomy]” (Jordan, 1997, p. 28).<sup>12</sup> Then, he moves on to Peter Damian and analyses how he coined the category of “Sodomy” starting with an analogy to *blasphemia* through “long processes of thinning and condensing”<sup>13</sup> (Jordan, 1997, p. 29)

<sup>9</sup> Text in the original language: “Ou não sabeis que os injustos não herdarão o reino de Deus? Não vos enganéis: nem impuros, nem idólatras, nem adúlteros, nem efeminados, nem **sodomitas**”. (bold added)

<sup>10</sup> Reference to the expression “text of terror” as biblical narratives usually used to condemn homosexuality and sexual and gender diversity (see Muszkopf, 2023, p. 25).

<sup>11</sup> The author calls his enterprise a “genealogy of the category of ‘Sodomy’” (Jordan, 1997, p. 28; Lings, 2021, p. 89-98).

<sup>12</sup> According to Jordan (1997, p. 10), Pelagius was a young man of great beauty that was tortured and dismembered in Cordoba for refusing to “succumb to the king’s desire” and became as Christian martyr. It resembles other martyrdom accounts that relate the affirmation of the Christian faith to the refusal of sexual contact, such as St. Sebastian (Muszkopf, 2023b) and St. Agata (Mechler, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> This is how Jordan explains this process: “The credit – or rather, the blame – for inventing the word *sodomia*, “Sodomy” must go, I think, to the eleventh-century theologian Peter Damian. [...] Peter’s coining of the term is the result of long processes of thinning and condensing. These processes, made it almost inevitable that there would be an abstract term for this specific kind of sin, so specifically stigmatized. One process thinned

that resulted in the transformation of acts in essence. So: “The unity of the abstract essence, Sodomy, points back to the unity of the identity in Sodomites. They are no longer individuals who perform a few similar acts from a myriad of motives and in incalculably different circumstances.”<sup>14</sup> (Jordan, 1997, p. 44)

Damian’s articulation of this abstract category is developed in a booklet titled *Book of Gomorrah*, directed to Pope Leo IX, but that also “addresses a higher clergy on the correction and punishment of a vice that is practiced secretly by an unknown number of its members.” (Jordan, 1997, p. 50) So, the development of his interpretation of the Genesis 19 narrative and of his argument is a direct response to what he defines as a widespread practice that takes place inside his own institution (the Church) or to which her leaders (including high-ranking Bishops) have been at least lenient and that must be stopped (Jordan, 1997, p. 45-66).

In the rest of the book, Mark Jordan describes the development of a “theology of Sodomy” by several medieval theologians to end with Thomas Aquinas and the idea of a “sin against nature” – which will also be connected to interpretations of 1 Romans 1.26-27, in which Paul uses the Greek concept of *para physin* (Helminiak, 1998, p. 67-94; Lings, 2021, p. 135-137) to contemporarily condemn same-sex relations or homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> This “theology of Sodomy” will not only affect the religious understandings and practices within ecclesiastical walls, but will also base how other institutional discourses and procedures relate to persons identified as acting or being outside strict sexual norms. This is how “sodomy” enters constitutions and penal codes to typify criminal conducts.<sup>16</sup>

In Brazil, for example, according to João Silvério Trevisan, the Portuguese juridical body in place in the early colonization/conquest process was the *Ordenações Afonsinas*, published in 1446. According to him: “In these Ordenações already appears (Book V, Title 17) the punishment of fire against sodomy – ‘of all the sins the most vile, dirty and dishonest’, because of which ‘God brought the Flood over the Earth’ (Trevisan, 2000, p. 164).<sup>17</sup> The typification of “sodomy” does not appear in later constitutions (as early as the Constitution of the Empire and the 1830 Penal Code), but homosexuality<sup>18</sup> and LGBTIQAPN+ people continued to be “criminalized” under other legal provisions such as “offenses to the moral code and good mores” [*ofensa à moral e aos bons costumes*] or “insult to modesty/decency” [*ultraje ao pudor*]. (Trevisan, 2000, p. 166-169)

This shows how a religious narrative (myth) is weaponized and becomes a powerful symbol that is transmuted not only into religious doctrine, but in “scientific” knowledge and

---

the reading of the Old Testament story of the punishment of Sodom. That complicated and a disturbing story was simplified until it became the story of the punishment of a single sin, a sin that could be called eponymously the sin of the Sodomites. Another process, more difficult but no less important, had to do with grouping together a number of sins under the old Roman category of *luxuria*.” (Jordan, 1997, p. 29)

<sup>14</sup> In another passage the author states: “Sodomy” is not ‘homosexuality’. What it is, we can learn only from medieval texts. We begin to learn it when we recall that ‘Sodomy’ was coined in medieval theology by derivation or deduction from a previous term, the term ‘Sodomite.’ (Jordan, 1997, p. 161)

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion on the development of the concept of “nature” and its use in relation to homosexuality see Boswell, 1980 (especially chapter 11).

<sup>16</sup> See information on where “consensual same-sex sexual acts” are criminalized at Ilga World Database.

<sup>17</sup> The connection between Sodom and the narrative of the Flood (Genesis 5) is certainly another hermeneutical mystery that will not be dealt with here, but that participates in the potentiation of such symbol.

<sup>18</sup> The same process of construction can be seen in the “invention” of homosexuality (Greenberg, 1988), this contested modern category that in some ways substituted “sodomy” (Foucault, 1988) in a different symbolic system (medical and biological sciences), but with very similar results.

juridical norms that explain and govern the lives of people – especially in colonial contexts framed from a Christian perspective/theology. In more spontaneous ways or in what could be called the social imagery, it operates through a moral panic that also crosses the boundaries of religion and becomes part of the general culture – and a culture of violence for that matter. It is not accidentally that a narrative of violent acts (including god's) becomes, then, a symbol that authorizes violence against others. At the root of such symbol of violence lies, according to Mark Jordan (1997), Christianity's historical problem with sexuality and pleasure.

The irrational force of Christian condemnation of Sodomy is a reminder of Christian theology's failure to think through the problem of erotic desire. [...] To invent sodomy was to invent a pure essence of the erotic without connection to reproduction. It was to isolate the erotic in its pure state, where it could be described in frightening colors and condemned without concession. "Sodomy" is the nervous refusal of theologians to understand how pleasure can survive the preaching of the gospel (Jordan, 1997, p. 176).

Although "Sodom" and the "Sodomite" are taken here as the central object of reflection, the same operation can be seen in other symbols (religious or not) whenever circumscribed by what Marcella Althaus-Reid (2001, 2003) has called "heterosexual ideology". In what follows, another powerful symbol is discussed to further the argument.

## 2. "Tearing the veil" (Wanda Deifelt): symbols of violence and the heterosexual ideology

Marcella Althaus-Reid has extensively shown the connection between sexuality, economics, and theology. Her analysis of how this connection has been materialized in the colonialism experienced in Latin America makes evident the violence that is implicated in this process. According to her: "The need for Grande Narratives always takes with it more cuttings and mutilations in itself. Latin American Theology comes from that, a mutilation of symbolic knowledge such as theology, politics, economics, science, and sexuality" (Althaus-Reid, 2001, p. 12).

In many ways, Christianity has played a decisive role in those (violent) processes of mutilation<sup>19</sup> through the articulation of a heterosexual ideology. In this sense, "Heterosexuality is in part a tool of theological production but also a result of the process. Heterosexuality has been produced by an alignment of elements such as dualist thinking, hierarchization and colonial process of displacement localized in different spaces" (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 91). Thus, "Heterosexuality is not a neutral science and the inner logic of the system works with its own artificially created 'either/or' concepts. It unifies the ambivalence of life into one official version. Per/versions (the different version of a road) are silenced" (Althaus-Reid, 2001, p. 13).

For the sake of this article, it is important to notice how violence is implicated (producing and being produced) in religious symbols such as Sodom and in what ways it is possible to or has been per/verted by different experiences. It is the same questions posed by Wanda Deifelt (2015) in her analysis of the Cross and the Tree of Life. Starting with the Cross, she states: "Christianity ended up becoming a religion whose founding sign is an

<sup>19</sup> See more in Muszkopf, Freire (2023).

instrument of violence: the cross.” And asks: “How can a means of torture and punishment become a religious symbol, and what are the consequences? How is violence inserted in the construction of the theological [and religious] knowledge?” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 17).

Using a five steps method<sup>20</sup> from a feminist hermeneutical perspective, she proposes that:

Through a symbolic analysis of the cross and the tree of life, it is possible to show that what appears to be harmless can be problematic and what is problematic can also be resignified. The cross as well as the tree of life are symbols loaded with meaning, which point beyond themselves and unveil new dimensions of reality. As symbols, the cross, and the tree of life are not mere objects, but establish the connection between reality and the religious grounding, between the symbolic representation and its multiple meanings. (Deifelt, 2015, p. 14).

In order to reflect on the possible “constructive potential of religion”, Deifelt (2015) interrogates the violent discourse of religion through a deconstructive exercise that questions the authority in normative religious discourse, maintained through the “veiling” (separating different spaces of power) as a form of regulation (p. 17). The Cross – and the Crucifixion – are set in their historical context, and it is shown how they went through a process of “domestication” that reflected a particular form of Christology – “expiatory sacrifice, *pro nobis*” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 20) – chosen among others. So, “if before the cross caused indignation, it was coopted and became an object of veneration” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 18).

The cross, a founding sign of scandal, trivializes and absolutizes violence when it becomes part of the normative discourse, and can be used symbolically to perpetuate asymmetric relations of power leading to resignation. Regrettably, this veneration of the cross leads to the idealization of suffering, and not its overcoming. [...] The cross got a value in itself, no longer a sign that points beyond itself. “Carrying the cross” became an ideal that justifies the reality of denial and suffering in which people find themselves (Deifelt, 2015, p. 20, 21).

According to Deifelt, this process had direct implications in the (problematic) understanding of sexuality. Adopting a specific worldview – namely the “dichotomic Greek model of thinking and the Roman hierarchical way of administrating” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 22) – it promoted a “devaluing of the material world, the body, and everything that reproduced the cycles of life” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 22) so that “controlling the body, sexuality and the desires of the flesh became the Christian moral ideal” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 22).

In the exercise of resignifying the cross, Wanda Deifelt (2015) draws on its connection with another symbol: the tree of life. Although she finds “several New Testament passages that identify the cross as a tree (Acts 5.30; 10.39; 13.29; Galatians 3.13; 1 Peter 2.24)” (p. 25), it is in religious art that she looks for examples of how this connection has been made pictorially and what are its implications and results. For her, “The *Tree of Life*, by Pacino di Bonaguada (ca. 1320), exemplifies the transition of the cross as a symbol of death to the new reality of resurrection.” (p. 25). But it is in the “Fresco titled ‘Tree of S. Bonifacio’

<sup>20</sup> “This method requires at least five steps: 1) Suspicion; 2) Recovering memories and traditions who were forgotten or set at the margin; 3) Critique, correction and transformation of concepts; 4) Rethinking the way the academic world operates; 4) Critical self-evaluation.” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 15).

(ca. 1347), anonymously authored” (p. 26), located in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, in St. Bergamo (Italy) and in the “Tree of Life” (1791) by John Haggerty that she finds examples of “imprisoned trees”. Another such example she finds in the work “Tree of Life” (no date) by Mexican plastic artist Guillermina Aguilar, in which she “presents the domestication of the tree-cross as it is transported to the context of the marriage” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 27).<sup>21</sup> After analyzing those examples, Wanda Deifelt states:

The cross, when not resignified, *denies* sexuality. The tree of life, when not resignified, *controls* sexuality. Both idealize the ethereal, the life in spirit and not the continuation of human materiality. The combination of the cross with the tree of life offers only two possibilities: ascetism (sexual continence, as lived out by the monks) or regulation (the sexuality that seeks only procreation). It is true that every symbolic representation (a cross or a tree of life) reflects contexts and is marked by conditioning. However, as a representation, the religious artistic symbology does not only have the pretension of truth. It bestows authority to decide what truth is. It describes what is, what must be and what will be. That is why, also with the tree of life, the resignification is needed (Deifelt, 2015, p. 28).

As an alternative, Wanda Deifelt (2015) analyzes the work “Tree of life” created by Blake Debassige from the Ojibwa indigenous cosmovision (1982)” (p. 29).<sup>22</sup> And concludes: “This way, the cross can stop being an instrument of torture and becomes a tree of life. The tree of life stops being a symbol of hierarchical social organization and once again affirms the expectation of a better world, a world of full life, where potentialities can be actualized already in the present” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 30).

In her exercise of deconstructing and resignifying (reinventing) a symbol of violence (the cross) through an inter pictorial reading with the tree of life, Wanda Deifelt makes explicit the fundamental participation of sexuality in the articulation of any symbolic system that emerges from human experience – including religious experiences. That is as much true for a symbol of violence – such as the cross or Sodom – with the pedagogical end of controlling and regulating bodies in a process of classification and hierarchization that defines what is good and what is evil/bad, what is normal and what is abnormal, what is natural and what is against nature, what is “straight”<sup>23</sup> from what is wrong/sinful.

<sup>21</sup> According to Deifelt: “The normative heterosexuality uses the tree of life to show society’s structure. The social and religious vase is established by the first couple, Adam and Eve. Their sin is overcome through the baby Jesus, in a manger-cradle, having Joseph and Mary by his side. The scene is observed and blessed by an angel. This cycle continues (and has its climax) in the figure of the bride, dressed in white, and the groom, in his traditional attire. Their clothes contrast with the nudity of Adam and Eve and their grapevine leaves. The social order is divinely sanctioned and the conformity of each individual to the role assigned guarantees (or prevents) their access to paradise. The place in society is dictated by the orders of nature, society and religion” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 27).

<sup>22</sup> According to Deifelt: “The Christic figure, in the tree, has characteristics that can be both masculine and feminine. The topography of the trunk can be breasts, the genitals can be male (a penis) or female (ovaries and uterus). But the trunk does not present only a human figure: there are other faces, of different colors. The notion of a salvific community, redeeming, however, does not only entail humanity. The ecological dimension of the tree of life presents a variety of animals (including some not identified by conventional zoology). The whole redeemed creation finds a place under the protective wings of the owl, symbol of divine wisdom (*sofia*). The fine balance kept among the different parts (flora and fauna) remind the care for the totality of creation” (Deifelt, 2015, p. 29). For a reflection on how crosses have been resignified in Latin American see Musskopf, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Straight here is used in its common use to signify “heterosexual” in English speaking contexts.



According to Marcella Althaus-Reid: “Ricouer, in his analysis of living metaphors, has considered how symbolic constructions develop a quasi-biological life. They are born, they develop and flourish, they form alliances with other symbolic systems, and finally die and/or transmutate” (Marcella Althaus-Reid, 2001, p. 23; Ricouer 1967: 17ff). The question whether this is possible (or desirable) with the symbol of Sodom remains open. Any exercise of transmutation would point to the need to consider the “religious biodiversity” as a possibility to overcome the “frustrations of our dreams of love” through the use of an epistemology of ordinary life.

### 3. “The frustration of our dreams of love” (Ivone Gebara): the death of symbols of violence and the possibilities/limits of reinvention

As already mentioned, many readings and interpretations of the Genesis 19.1-9 narrative point to the unjust, stingy, and inhospitable character of the inhabitants of Sodom – the Sodomites. This line of interpretation (most probably closer to the intention of the narrative in its *sitz im Leben*) is grounded in how the symbol of Sodom (maybe more than the narrative itself) is referred to in other biblical passages (Helminiak, 1998, p. 43-45). Ezequiel 16.48-49, for example, states that:

48 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.  
49 Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. (NIV).

The following verse is what may allow for wilder interpretations: “They were haughty and did detestable things [תועבה] before me. Therefore, I did away with them, as you have seen.” The relation established with “homosexuality” by some interpreters lies in the use of the term usually translated as “abomination” (*toevah*), which appears in Leviticus 18.22 referring to those “who lay with another man, as if they were a woman”.<sup>25</sup> Similar stretches are made with the reference in Jude verse 7, where it is written: “Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality (ἐμπρονεύσασαι) and perversion (σαρξὸς ἑτέρας).<sup>26</sup> They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire”. Although there is a reference to *ekporneusasai* (immorality) and *sarkos heteras* (strange flesh), those can hardly be made to refer to “homosexuality” as a specific kind of sin that the text wishes to condemn (see LINGS, 2021, p. 91ff). According to Helminiak (1998, p. 45): “The Bible usually uses Sodom as an example of the worst of sins, never referring simply to sexual acts. And the least important of all is the reference to homogenital acts.”

<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew text is taken from: Ezequiel 16 - Bíblia Hebraica Transliterada - [www.hebraico.pro.br](http://www.hebraico.pro.br)

<sup>25</sup> Lings explores this passage in depth in Chapter 2 Lings (2011). According to Helminiak : “But in the Hebrew Scriptures the word ‘abomination’ is used to designate many things. The abominations in question here are the ones of Jerusalem’s ‘adultery’ and ‘prostitution’, and these words are used symbolically. They do not refer to sexual acts, but to idolatry, Israel’s infidelity to the Lord God, and to the sacrifice and assassination of children” (Helminiak, 1998, p. 44):

<sup>26</sup> The terms in Greek are taken from Jude 1 Study Bible ([biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com)).

This kind of exercise is part of a what can be called an “apologetic” or “defensive” biblical reading strategy<sup>27</sup> that focuses on the deconstruction of the “texts of terror” and “demonstrate that they do not refer to or cannot be anachronically identified with contemporary experiences and understandings in relation to gender and sexual diversity from the text itself” (Musskopf, 2023, p. 26). In order to do so, the intent then is to show what the texts “really want to say”, at the same time distancing them from any reference to homosexuality or turning them around to show that they should be read not only as a way to “accept”, but also to “protect” homosexuals. That is especially the case with the narrative of the destruction of Sodom. According to Helminiak: “Lot refused to expose his guests to the abuse by the men of Sodom. Doing it would mean violating the law of sacred hospitality. [...] Therefore, those who oppress homosexuals because of the supposed ‘sin of Sodom’ might be themselves the real ‘Sodomites’, such as the Bible understands them” (Helminiak, 1998, p. 42, 46).

So, according to Renato Lings:

Modernly, a new theme has been introduced in this context: we read in almost all theological publications of the last decades that Sodom was punished because of the desire of her inhabitants to gang rape the two divine messengers hosted at Lot’s house. According to this perspective, the city’s neighbors were impelled by a desire to humiliate the visitors through anal coitus, whose purpose would be to neutralize the threat represented by their unannounced presence. Nevertheless, other voices state that the primary sin of Sodom was her lack of hospitality (Lings, 2021, p. 95-96).

Lings identifies two different perspectives that arise from the biblical tradition itself. According to him: “If the Hebrew prophetic narrative denounces the social injustice and the violent oppression exercised against the most unfavored social sectors, the Greek-speaking environments adopt a different optic by considering that the sin of Sodom consists of a serious lack of hospitality (Lings, 2021, p. 90). Thus, in the line of what is being called an apologetic perspective, Nancy Wilson states that: “[Sodom] is a story about the abuse of strangers who required hospitality” (Wilson, 2000, p. 145). Also, in a more “offensive” reading (or reading from a social location)<sup>28</sup>, Wilson then reflects on the experience of the LGBTQIAPN+ community broadly and how the Metropolitan Community Churches reacted in the context of the AIDS pandemic specifically to present “hospitality as a queer gift”.<sup>29</sup> Although her reflection is not necessarily an exercise of interpretation of the Genesis 19 narrative, it undoubtedly draws on it to create a new symbolism for the queer community – and a symbolism that resignifies the meaning of Sodom, setting it as a representation of the call for hospitality. Still, we are left with the violence of a god who destroys the city as a punishment for the sin the symbol might point to.

The point here is not to deny interpretations that call for hospitality as a way to practice and live out justice in its broader sense. As in Nancy Wilson’s reference, it can even be understood as a “queer gift” and become/be used as a symbol for justice itself. Then, Sodom, as a denunciation of the lack of hospitality, would become *a symbol of the need for*

<sup>27</sup> In Musskopf different indecent biblical hermeneutics are identified: apologetic or defensive, offensive, rebuilding indecent identities, reading from a specific social location (Musskopf, 2023, p. 24-31).

<sup>28</sup> This perspective is taken from WEST, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> This is the title of Chapter 5. Chapter 4 is titled “Equal to Angels”, which can also be read as a reference to the visitors in the narrative of Genesis 19.

hospitality. But, as stated at the beginning of this article, this strategy does not seem to have changed much how the symbol of Sodom has been triggered in most religious spaces and how it resonates in general culture and religion. Notwithstanding the fact that, although Lot might be showing this kind of virtue (hospitality) in relation to the strangers, in order to carry it out in this particular narrative he is willing to offer his daughters to be abused in their place—and god destroys the whole city afterward, no matter how many just persons were there.

So, even when taking the *lack of hospitality* as an ultimate form of sin and/or violence and injustice (social and economic) to be the main motive of the narrative of Sodom, it would be hard to use it as a *symbol of hospitality*, as the symbol would have to be defined in relation to violence – since violence is central to the narrative and the grounding experience that it reflects. Then, it might be necessary to say that even when focusing on the *need for* hospitality and the *opposition to* violence the symbol of Sodom would still frustrate our (deepest) dreams of love and be deemed ill, as in Ivone Gebara's reflection:

The symbols that signify our dreams are ill and can no longer energize our existence. The symbols that express that of which we do not give up are worn out. It is as if we were no longer able to express through them our deep desires, our dreams of love, our personal and collective hopes. It is as if we were forced to echo command words; it is as if the obedience to this established system became our religion without choice, without discernment (Gebara, 1997, p. 93).

Or who would dare do held up Sodom or claim the Sodomites as their ancestors in a queer community identifying themselves as Sodomites themselves – in the name of hospitality. Maybe some would. But a deeper reinvention process would probably have to take place (as we hope to show below).

Ivone Gebara (1997) is concerned with what she calls a “pseudo-religion” (p. 85), which is characterized as a “patriarchal religion”. In this kind of religion: “the gods made at each one's image and according to their possibilities serve to guarantee this system of protection of ones against the others. Each one produces and is an accomplice of the violence from the social location they occupy. So, the spiral of violence takes its course, most of the time justified by the religions” (p. 89). From her ecofeminist perspective, she describes and connects the “destruction of the green, diversity and our symbols” (Gebara, 1997, p. 91) in order to present her critique of patriarchal religion, whose function has been: “to exorcise the fear through domination and exclusion. This exorcism did not only happen at the symbolic and discursive levels but in concrete practices [...] excluding not only women and the ‘different ones’ [...] but also nature and her energies” (Gebara, 1997, p. 84-85).

Those ideas are constructed through antiepistemologies (Gebara, 2015, p. 47) that enable patriarchal theologies expressed in the “religious institutions [that], in complicity with political fundamentalisms, want to appropriate and legislate the intimacy and spontaneity of our daily life and, in it, our sexuality” (Gebara, 1997, p. 41). In relation to sexuality, she states:

It has something of original, personal and in conjunction with another personhood akin to ours that escapes from the scientific analysis and religious dogmas. [...] Science and religion cannot control this irruption of energies, and cannot even explain all its directions and unpredictable intricacies. When they try to do it, they make room for dissimulation, to

lie, to falsehood in the relationships, to dubiety of feeling, to sick culpability. (Gebara, 2015, p. 36).

Perhaps this can be an important lens through which to look at the symbol of Sodom and the ways in which it is manipulated by religious authorities to continue the spiral of violence starting from the text itself. Its (damaging) consequences in the lives of LGBTQIAPN+ people are very evident. In this sense, Gebara (2015) also presents a way of looking at biblical texts, “not as theology, but as wisdom, as ethical inspiration coming from a group that tried to welcome the marginalized by their communities or that were simply a community of marginalized for different reasons. I don’t affirm these texts as superior to our ordinary life, but as inspiring, as a fruit of our insatiable search for meaning yesterday and today” (p. 38-39). The question, then, remains if the text on the destruction of Sodom has something to inspire and what kind of authority or role it can play in people’s lives and in their search for overcoming violence and making meaning of sexual and gender diversity.

If that is at all possible, in Gebara’s (2015) terms, we would need to exercise an “epistemology or ordinary life” as a “reflection of our ordinary knowledge, not systematized, not acknowledge as scientific knowledge” (Gebara, 2015, p. 33), “a set of processes that interact inside each individual with their environment and lead them to eat bread instead of stones, to doge the fire, to feel the good smell of morning coffee or the vegetable soup at the beginning of a cold night [...] to do things as if they reproduced ancestral gestures...” (Gebara, 2015, p. 33). So,

I believe that it is in these corporal experiences, existential of our daily life, that our beliefs are born and then organize themselves in the form of religion. It is from sexual attraction, birth, death, sharing, and care that the most primitive religious beliefs organized themselves. The officialized religions started, then, to manage the popular creativity and, while managing it, control it. So, the deepest existential intuitions, appropriated by an elite, became doctrine, knowledge of some initiated ones, religious concepts and theories imposed on the so-called lay people and affirmed as God’s will. (Gebara, 2015, p. 37).

If we take only the way Sodom is commonly used as a symbol in hate speech against LGBTQIAPN+ people, it is possible to justify the need to abandon it and declare its death as an expression of patriarchal religion produced through an antiepistemology. It is difficult to maintain that, even with the focus on hospitality (or the lack of it), this narrative grounded in and symbolically dependent on violence can forge a symbolic reality that expresses “our deepest desires, our dreams of love, our personal and collective hopes” born out of our “ordinary lives”. The fact that it keeps being used effectively as a weapon to exercise real and concrete violence against LGBTQIAPN+ people should be enough to prove that it is hard to make a symbol that depends on a narrative of violence symbolize the opposite of that. The ways in which the Cross has been resignified in the Three of Life, as discussed above, express precisely this challenge. The re-imagination of religious (and cultural) symbols does not depend solely on a rational process of “understanding” that “it does not mean what it really means,” since that could mean the denial of religion as a part of ordinary human life and language itself. With Ivone Gebara (1997, p. 82), we should then ask:

How to re-situate religion as a personal, communal and social institution experience? How to capture the aspects and meanings of the daily, informal, non-regulated religion? How can we better understand this

phenomenon, especially when we face it from the life of women [and LGBTQIAPN+ people]?

The author's own answer is to look for the "true religion" in other places, namely community life. According to her: "The 'true religion', to use a traditional expression, is where we officially do not look for it. It seems to hide under diverse forms found in small groups or individual persons in their relation with others. This minority presence revests itself of a fundamental importance, since it is from it that spaces for a fuller living of the sense of human life are found" (Gegara, 1997, p. 86). Using an ecological framework she proposes the valuing of "religious biodiversity" as a way to overcome current violent systems, recover living systems that have been shattered or compromised by patriarchy, and create from the existing religious biodiversity new symbolic orders and ways of organizing life and to be and to act in it. The question in relation to Sodom, then, is how (and if) a symbol that is marked by violence can be reinvented through an epistemology or ordinary life to counteract the very violence it implies and promotes and come to express its opposite - even when that may look like hospitality as a representation of peace with justice.

#### 4. "God the Sodomite" (Marcella Althaus-Reid) – dislocating the law of hospitality

If there is any room for Sodom as a symbol in religion and theology in general and from a queer perspective in particular, it will be because it is able to express the religious experience of real people in concrete situations. It does not need to be the only one or the same one for everyone everywhere. And it has to be bold and daring, rising from a religious biodiversity that goes beyond the paradigm of coloniality, its fundamentalisms and monocultural perspectives, as expressed by Ivone Gebara:

The religious biodiversity is the deep welcoming of different tapestries and is an exercise of surpassing our pretensions that only one group should be the bearer of the one truth and therefore, could claim the right to present salvific recipes for all. Biodiversity implies an attitude of humbleness, from which there cannot be absolute powers that command the sense of life or the art of weaving and evoking presences that are so dear to us (Gevara, 1997, p. 108).

Marcella Althaus-Reid presents us with a per/version of Sodom – and God – that might be one way of reinventing that which has been used so much to attack and commit violence against us – in a truly queer movement – and making it dear to us. As we have seen above, even the most promising interpretations of the narrative of Genesis 19 depend on the blaming of the Sodomites and their portrayal as abusers, monsters and the ultimate expression of the force of evil against those who are presented as just and innocent people (Lot and his family) and against a just God represented by His messengers/visitors/angels. This, in turn, would justify the offering of the daughters to be abused as a righteous response to the violence about to be perpetrated, not actually realized because of god's intervention – a violent intervention, nonetheless, that kills and destroys a whole city. It is hard to imagine how that can be a call – and a symbol – for hospitality as the absence of violence and expression of justice outside an imperial and colonial perspective. According to Marcella, "There is no point in denying the fact that this text is saturated with violence. Men from Sodom against these particular visitors; a father against his own daughters, and God against almost everybody and everything, threatening to destroy people and the environment alike."

(Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 91). The question, then, is how to dislocate the issues at stake and find/create new meanings for this symbolic narrative.

The first question is precisely about where to locate the issue of hospitality. According to Marcella: “there is a lack of hospitality. Where to locate that lack is, however, problematic. At the level of a superficial heterosexually centered reading, the Sodomite culture is inhospitable. From a Sadean perspective, it is Lot’s culture that lacks hospitality. Lot’s God is then the one who cannot accept the menace of heterogeneity and transgressive productions in its midst, and who therefore closes the doors of the house of hospitality” (Marcella, 2003, p. 91). In this sense: “In the usual framework of understanding heterosexuality as a given, it is interesting to notice that little has been said of the Sodomites as people with a particular and respectable sexual culture and tradition. By doing that, biblical hermeneuticians have been systematically straightening Sodom, that is, eliminating agency from sexuality” (Marcella, 2003, p. 85). According to Marcella:

Little is known of the origin of the name Sodom, which is linked to an old root meaning “abundance,” especially of water: Sodom, etymologically speaking, is curiously linked to fluids. Yet, we know that Sodom was a Canaanite city. Homosexuality, at least (for little is known about other sexualities), was part of the Canaanite cultural and religious life. This makes Sodom a cultural site where homosexuality was more than a form of sexual behavior, but rather a style of living, of relating, and also of thinking. And of course, it was also a form of spirituality (Marcella, 2003, p. 84).<sup>30</sup>

Marcella is not necessarily interested in “saving” the narrative of Sodom as an authoritative text that functions as an external validation of queer life through an ex/centric theology. In this particular chapter of the book *Queer God*, she elaborates a hermeneutical perspective that will allow finding different faces of such God – one of which is God the Sodomite. In order to accomplish that, she carries out a set of *permutations* using a web of different sources in such a way that one might open up the others for new meanings. According to her, “the sources for what we may call a libertine epistemology in theology come from other canons. They may come from literature [...]; from rituals of pleasure, and, fundamentally, from people’s critical reality of love lives. In them lies the possibility of liberating God from God’s current hostage status to Heterosexual Theology” (Marcella, 2003, p. 34). In this particular exercise, she proposes to “permute intertextualities: Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless* and the biblical story of Sodom [reading] them with Sade’s *Philosophy in the Bedroom* as a hermeneutical clue, or with Klossowski’s *Robert ce soir* [since] queering the biblical texts is basically about destabilizing locations of identity formation” (Marcella, 2003, p. 83).

The identities at question in the narrative are the ones of the Sodomite’s (symbolizing the ultimate sinful behavior), Lot’s (as the just one), the visitors (sent by God) and even god’s (as judge and punisher). The main point here is that traditional readings start with (and depend on) the heterosexual ideological framework assumed in relation to Lot and his god.

In the biblical passage Lot is portrayed as a man and a heterosexual concept that can also be related to a whole patriarchal *voisinage* in itself,

---

<sup>30</sup> Also: “In all probability Sodom was not what we would consider a ‘homosexual city’. Sodom was a city where people probably had a more ample understanding of sexuality and divinity than Lot’s people” (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 90).

organized around what can loosely be described as his heterosexual culture (represented by his family entourage of daughters and wife, plus the symbolic divinity of male visitors). Lot's *voisinage* is a theological entourage of beliefs, conceptual frames and ideas superimposed and mixed in the story. Thus, we have here one of the many creations of the theological concept of the Other in the Bible. (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 90)<sup>31</sup>.

Such a pre-given framework does not take into account that Sodom and its inhabitants may not fit an assumed heterosexual order but express a culture of sexual and gender diversity that is turned into an enemy by a process of Othering. The novel *Robert ce soir*, then, is what helps to dislocate the identities and question a traditional reading of the law of hospitality. In the novel: “Klossowski describes this waiting at the gate for a stranger to appear in order to be able to perpetrate a confusion of identities between the master of the house (himself, the theologian), the host (as the stranger at the gate) and the hostess (Robert, his wife)” (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 63). According to Marcella: “*Robert ce soir* is therefore a story about theological traditions disrupted by the bifurcation strategies of hospitality and a search for a kenosis of God through a sexual encounter with strangers. This is a tale of sharing and giving away gifts with an almost theological condition of grace (or gratuity) in a hospitable economy of sexuality” (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 73-64).

From this framework, the question about hospitality in the narrative of Sodom has to be posed to the other characters in the plot and how they are abiding or breaking it. Again, according to Marcella:

Like many other visitors before them, they had apparently chosen to spend the night sleeping in the town square. That place was a site of hospitality in itself, since it was common for travelers to sleep there if there was no other place to stay. However, Lot, who happened to be at the gate when these men arrived, observed the law of hospitality by insisting that they come to his home. He broke one rule of hospitality (town hospitality) to impose his own (Marcella, 2003, p. 84).

This extends to the visitors and to God Himself, leading to the conclusion that: “the lack of hospitality came from Lot’s divine messengers, involved in a mission of policing sexuality in the neighborhood. The evil gestures also come from Lot’s God, the gesture of the destruction of the sexual culture of the Other. [...] The destruction of Sodom functions then as a colonially minded epopee of annihilation in which everything needs to be destroyed to start a new (although ‘same’) genesis” (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 92). In this sense, the god of the narrative is not God, but an idol of heterosexual ideology. God and God’s revelation (a libertine and queer revelation) must then be situated in the Sodomites, and queer people can claim to be made in the image and likeness of God, the Sodomite.

According to Marcella: “in theology sodomy belongs to the space of the non-procreative, or subversive pleasure. [...] If (biological) reproduction is what distinguishes sodomy from the idealized sexual practices of the heterosexual (vaginal penetration) then God in the Hebrew Scriptures is a Sodomite”. And a “Sodomite God, following the Sadean epistemology, is a courageous God, who dares to commit suicide (an ultimate kenosis) and stand free of theological (reproductive) expectations while announcing the death of the

---

<sup>31</sup> In this process of *othering* “a Sodomite would be the person who refused to have a guest room at home and that it is this practice (rather than a sexual culture) which defines the biblical meaning of ‘a Sodomite’” (Althaus-Reid, 2003, p. 84)

biological (reproductor) God” (Marcella, 2003, p. 87). Finally: “The Sodomite God, like a libertine Sadean body, is a far more complex God whose pleasure may be to engage in multiple combinations and exchanges reflecting that face of the Queer God which can be seen amidst the Queer people of God at the margins of the church and T-Theology” (Marcella, 2003, p. 88).

Following Marcella’s steps, in concluding, “It is in the same Queer way that we want to re-read the Bible, rewriting other stories alongside our own and re-creating the mythical in our lives, as if meeting strangers at the gate” (Marcella, 2003, p. 83) and reinvent Sodom as the place where “colors were born”. By reclaiming the ordinary life of queer people as a theological *locus*, Marcella articulates a biodiverse body of sources and experiences that opens um to imagine the unimaginable or just reinvent a symbol that we can call our own.

##### 5. “Where the colors are born” (Miranda): concluding with a new Sodomian symbol

This article started with the acknowledgement that Sodom is still a powerful religious and cultural symbol articulated in relation to gender and sexual dissidents. While it can be considered a violent symbol itself, it is also used to promote and justify violence that goes beyond the symbolic and is experienced in physical forms of violence inflicted by LGBTQIAPN+ people on themselves and, mostly, through others in personal and communal relations but also in the systemic expressions of homophobia. To understand how a symbol that is constructed on the expression of violence through the narrative that supports it is resignified and invented to exercise violence against the LGBTQIAPN+ community in the current times, we revisited the process of the “invention of Sodomy,” led by the work of Mark Jordan. This revisitation allowed to show the hermeneutical process that transformed a geopolitical identity into a sexual category employed in a pedagogy of violence against those considered sexual dissidents or any behavior or practice that might resemble and/or open the possibility of imagining the world beyond fixed, hierarchical, and binary norms.

To discuss and exemplify further how gender and sexuality are an intrinsic part of any system based on and which promotes violence we joined Wanda Deifelt in “tearing the veil” and reveling how another religious symbol – central to Christianity – has been turned into a way of controlling bodies and sexualities. Even its transmutation into the Tree of Life, as expressed through pictorial examples, does not guarantee that the Cross becomes a symbol of justice and life in abundance. The pervasiveness of the heterosexual ideology that frames the interpretations of either symbol can turn them into reifications of approved and sanctioned forms of violence – in religion, in the State or in culture in general.

The symbols may become ill and frustrate our dreams of love, as in Ivone Gebara’s questioning of patriarchal religion. This can be experienced in our own ways of trying to reinterpret such symbols all the while running the risk or reinforcing their violent pedagogies, which can be the case with the more recent (queer) interpretations that reframe the sin of Sodom as the lack of hospitality, while not necessarily questioning, for example, the violence perpetrated by Lot in offering his daughters to be abused and the violence perpetrated by God Himself by destroying the whole city and everything in it. The final statement, especially since it seems to have been mostly ineffective, that the text/symbol is not intended to or expresses the condemnation of homosexuality (and gender and sexual diversity in general) since it does not talk about “homosexuality” as adult consensual same-sex relations, might



just not be enough to overcome the blatant violence that is the very thread that runs through the narrative and constitutes the symbol.

Or what are we to make of the destruction of Sodom as an act of violence against the people and the territory? Is that not a typical form of colonialism that we can easily see when we look around at current social and environmental issues and wars? This is where Marcella Althaus-Reid takes us to darker alleys to meet the Sodomites and a different sexual culture that enables us to dislocate our readings and position ourselves in relation to God differently. In this reading, the lack of hospitality is expressed in God's messengers that do not acknowledge the queer hospitality of the Sodomites, in Lot's assumption that his hospitality is better or the real one, and, finally, in God's act of violence destroying the city – despite His previous argument in relation to saving a city in the name of just people. The true revelation (and religion, to use a traditional term), then, is not where we usually look for it – in the Powerful, Judgmental and Punisher god – but in the experience of the Sodomites made vulnerable because of their sexual dissidence. And God, themselves, becomes a Sodomite among Sodomites experiencing, maybe for the first time, other ways of being, relating and believing.

If that is possible, then Gabriela Miranda's poetry may offer a new way of imagining Sodom as the place “where colors were born; among the wreckage in Gomorrah the battle of love,<sup>32</sup> entering the biodiverse web of life and exercising an epistemology of ordinary life. The mention of the city/ies (and their destruction) makes explicit the reference to the Genesis 19 narrative, building on its powerful symbolism. The God of the poem acts differently than the one in the biblical text: “God got closer, peered through the windows, found the tables full of breadcrumbs, looked at the lovers' eyes, and attended to their tender words”. Maybe this God has a voyeuristic urge and/or is searching for some company. Or maybe they are responding to someone's policing request, to which they answer: “No, really, their actions are neither worse nor better than anyone else's”. In any case, “God got closer, peered through the windows” and what they saw was the real concrete and material life of people.

The destruction of the cities, which took place after “the sunset, is attributed to the men who “insisted: Sodom! They screamed; Gomorrah! – they mourned”. Furthermore, it does not refer to the killing of anyone or anything but, as will be mentioned later on, to the falling down of walls – that were no longer in Sodom nor in Gomorrah. And the destruction does not have the last word, but is immediately followed by God's sending of “a shower of rainbows”. According to Gabriela: “it rained birds, feathers, and sequins, and all the forms of passion wet the stones. The rain and the rainbows open up the way for something new, perhaps totally different from what was before, since in the poem there is no reference to anyone who escaped or that the initial story will continue somewhere else. It is in Sodom (and Gomorrah) that “the weight of the love and the sequins were such that the stones collapsed”, perhaps even any statue representative of old colonial powers that remained after the catastrophe. And the consequence is that “there were no more walls in Sodom nor walls in Gomorrah; only an open sky; and nobody was dust nor ashes”. Sodom as a place of inhospitality, injustice and oppression is reimagined as the place of origin of all forms of passion that come about through the very queer symbols of rainbows, feathers and sequins. God the Sodomite and his Sodomite partners/lovers found a new reality of freedom and

---

<sup>32</sup> Gabriela Miranda's poem was kindly sent to me by the author through Larry Jose Madrigal Rajo, from Centro Bartolomé de las Casas in El Salvador, after her reading during the Closing Concert of the XXIII Assembly of the Revista de Interpretação Bíblica Latino-Americana, which took place online. A recent publication by the author is Miranda (2020).

equality. And if we need a story of origins or re-beginnings, this one may just be the one I choose.

We may not want to resignify or reinvent the symbol of Sodom. Actually, we don't need it. But for those to whom symbols such as this one have been weaponized and used as a violent tool in a pedagogy of cruelty and who seek ways to reconcile their sexual and religious experiences, this might be a way of healing and imagining (creating images of) other possible worlds. Or, for those who do not feel the need to confront religion and culture in this way, but enjoy finding new ways to just talk and imagine per/versions of the assumed truths, this might be a pleasurable exercise and/or a way of creating a new language to express their experiences – as religion or not. It is not about saving Sodom or the biblical narrative but, out of an exercise of imagination, reinvent and reclaim a powerful symbol from the living experience of sexual dissidents; our own narrative of Sodom and what it tells us about our experience with the sacred. We, the Sodomites.

Queer politics and scholarship have reclaimed, resignified and reinvented different words, narratives, and symbols, creating traditions of our own (Deifelt, 2003). Part of this strategy is to stop the citationality/repetition that reinforces the violence as an expression of hate (in speech and in action) (see Butler, 1997). Starting from queer experiences, it has enabled the queer community and beyond to re-imagine life and the language to express it (including symbols – such as the pink triangle or the word “queer” itself). In order to overcome the violence perpetrated against the LGBTQIPAN+ community, from a religious or theological perspective, perhaps the best way to deconstruct the pernicious effects of the symbol of Sodom is to reinvent the idea of what Sodom and the Sodomites are about and embrace a new narrative that does not depend on the exercise of violence and its repetition as a pedagogy that is doomed to perpetuate the cycles of violence. Imagining Sodom as a place and a reality where “colors were/are born” and “nobody was/is dust and ashes” might open that door. And it does not have to be the only one; just one more among many others in a religiously, politically and culturally biodiverse reality.

## References

ALTHAUS-REID, Marcella. **Indecent theology** – Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics. London: Routledge, 2001.

ALTHAUS-REID, Marcella. **The Queer God**. London: Routledge, 2003.

BÍBLIA ONLINE. Available at: <https://www.biblionline.com.br/ara/1co/6>. Accessed on November 2023.

BOSWELL, John. **Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality**. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

BUTLER, Judith. **Language, poder e identidade**. Madrid: Síntesis, 1997.

DEIFELT, Wanda. Da cruz à árvore da vida: epistemologia, violência e sexualidade. In: NEUENFELDT, Elaine; BERGESCH, Karen; PARLOW, Mara (org.). **Epistemologia, violência, sexualidade** – Olhares do II Congresso Latino-Americano de Gênero e Religião. São Leopoldo: Sinodal, EST, 2015. p. 13-30.

DEIFELT, Wanda. Temas e metodologias da Teologia Feminista. *In*: SOTER (org.) **Gênero e teologia**. São Paulo, Belo Horizonte: Paulinas, SOTER, Loyola, 2003. p. 171-186.

FOUCAULT Michel. **História da sexualidade I**. A vontade de saber. Trad. Maria Thereza da Costa Albuquerque e J. A. Guilhon Albuquerque. Rio de Janeiro, Graal, 1988.

GEBARA, Ivone. As epistemologias teológicas e suas consequências. *In*: NEUENFELDT, Elaine; BERGESCH, Karen; PARLOW, Mara (org.). **Epistemologia, violência, sexualidade** – Olhares do II Congresso Latino-Americano de Gênero e Religião. São Leopoldo: Sinodal, EST, 2015. p. 31-50.

GEBARA, Ivone. **Teologia ecofeminista** – Ensaio para repensar o conhecimento e a religião. São Paulo: Olho d'água, 1997.

GRENNEBERG, David F. **The construction of homosexuality**. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

HANKS, Tom. **Bíblia y prejuicios: 40 mitos**. Crítica a la manipulación homofóbica de textos usualmente citados – Análisis y exégesis. Buenos Aires: Epifanía, 2011.

HELMINIÁK, Daniel A. **O que a Bíblia realmente diz sobre a homossexualidade**. Trad. Eduardo Teixeira Nunes. São Paulo, Edições GLS, 1998.

ILGA WORLD DATABASE. <https://database.ilga.org/criminalisation-consensual-same-sex-sexual-acts>. Accessed on December 2, 2023.

JORDAN, Mark. **The invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology**. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

LINGS, Renato. **Amores bíblicos bajo censura** – Sexualidad, género y traducciones erróneas. Madrid: Dykinson, 2021.

LINGS, Renato. **Bíblia y homosexualidad** – ¿Se equivocaron los traductores? San José, Costa Rica: UBL, 2011.

MECHLER, Ana Luiza Eiterer. A teologia pervertida de Santa Ágata: erotização do corpo e domesticação da violência. *In*: MUSSKOPF, André S.; FREIRES, Ana Ester Pádua (org.). **Religião e indecência** – Diálogos com Marcella Althaus-Reid. Rio de Janeiro: Metanoia, 2021. p. 47-64.

MIRANDA, Gabriela. **En las piedras de Sodoma**. Poem. Personal file.

MIRANDA, Gabriela. **Si vuelves y no estamos**. Ciudad de Guatemala: Parutz' Editorial, 2020.

MUSSKOPF, André S. **“Veadagens teológicas”** – Fazendo pegação com Frida Kahlo. Série Ensaios Teológicos Indecentes Vol. 6. Rio de Janeiro: Metanoia, 2023b.

MUSSKOPF, André S. Cuerpo, gracia y placer para teologías no-sacrificiales. *In*: MENDOZA-ÁLVAREZ, Carlos; RUBIO, Héctor Conde (orgs.). **Arqueología de la violencia**. México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2017. p. 167-180.

MUSSKOPF, André S. Narrativas bíblicas como pedagogias de gênero e sexualidade. *In*: KROB, Daniéli B.; BRUN, Marli; SENGER, Sabrina (org.). **Coragem, criatividade, esperança** – VII Congresso Latino-Americano de Gênero e Religião. São Leopoldo: CEBI, 2022. p. 49-60.

MUSSKOPF, André S. **Que comece a festa** – O filho pródigo e os homens gays. Série Ensaio Teológicos Indecentes Vol. 2. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Metanoia, 2023.

MUSSKOPF, André S.; FREIRE, Ana Ester Pádua. Divinas tetas: Doing Theology from Mutilated Bodies. **Religions**, 14: 191, 2023.

SBT NEWS. **Pregação homofóbica de pastor americano em Brasília viraliza nas redes sociais**. Published on February 23, 2023. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPZWWNQTEaY>. Accessed on November 21, 2023.

SEGATO, Rita. **Contra-pedagogías de la crueldad**. 2. ed. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2018.

TREVISAN, João Silvério. **Devassos no paraíso**. Ed. Revisada e ampliada. 4ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000.

WEST, Mona. Reading the Bible as Queer Americans. **Theology and Sexuality**, n. 10, sept. 1999.

WILSON, Nancy. **Our Tribe** – Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible. Millennium Edition. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000.

Recebido em 17/07/2024

Aceito em 22/01/2025