

# “Twisting” Faith to Heal: Women, Inclusive Churches, and Psycho-Spiritual Therapeutics

“Torcer” la fe para sanar: mujeres, iglesias incluyentes y terapéuticas psicoespirituales

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**Abstract:** “Twisting the faith” is not merely an exercise in discourse, conducted through critical biblical exegesis, but also involves concrete action aimed at transforming the realities faced by dissenting women believers, who are often subject to discrimination and exclusion. I will demonstrate how, in contrast to the pathologization of homosexuality through methods like “sexual reorientation therapies,” inclusive churches and faith communities have developed a form of *psycho-spiritual therapeutics* focused on healing the souls and bodies of dissenting individuals. This presentation is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted within three inclusive churches/faith communities: Affirmation LGBTQ+ Mormons, Family and Friends in Mexico; Inclusive Christian Mission in CDMX; and Episcopal Church of San Lucas in Merida, Yucatan. This research was carried out during my postdoctoral tenure at IIA-UNAM.

**Key words:** Inclusive churches, healing, psycho-spiritual therapeutics, women believers, gender diversity.

**Resumen:** “Torcer la fe” no sólo se lleva a cabo en el plano discursivo, mediante una exégesis bíblica crítica, sino en la acción concreta con miras a transformar las realidades de las mujeres creyentes disidentes, marcadas por las discriminaciones y exclusiones. Mostraré cómo en contraposición a la patologización de la homosexualidad a través de las llamadas “terapias de reorientación sexual”, las iglesias/comunidades de fe incluyentes han configurado una suerte de *terapéutica psicoespiritual* encaminada a sanar las almas y los cuerpos de las personas disidentes. Lo presentado se basa en mi trabajo de campo etnográfico llevado a cabo con tres iglesias/comunidades de fe incluyentes: Afirmación Mormones LGBTQ+, Familia y Amigos, México; Misión Cristiana Incluyente en CDMX y la Iglesia Episcopal San Lucas de Mérida, Yucatán, en el marco de mi estancia posdoctoral en el IIA-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

**Palabras clave:** Iglesias incluyentes, sanar, terapéuticas psicoespirituales, mujeres creyentes, diversidad sexogenérica.

## Introduction

This text aims to demonstrate that the historical tension between religion and gender nonconformity, while often contentious, can also provide opportunities for transformation that lead to greater respect and recognition of diversity, as well as new perspectives on therapy.<sup>1</sup> This text exposes how the biomedical discourse has contributed to the stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ population. It has also been used by conservative religious groups to justify their actions against this population and to promote the implementation of so-called ‘therapies’ aimed at ‘curing homosexuality’. In response to these practices, inclusive churches<sup>2</sup> develop their own therapeutic approaches to promote physical and emotional healing and recovery for Protestant-Evangelical believers<sup>3</sup> who have experienced discrimination from certain churches, religious groups, or other social spheres. This includes those who have undergone ‘sexual reorientation therapy’ or Efforts to Correct Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (ECOSIG).

This led me to identify the construction of counter-meanings in the interpretation of biblical language in order to come out of the

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1 This research was conducted through the Postdoctoral Fellowship Program at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, during my postdoctoral stay at the Institute of Anthropological Research from September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 to August 31<sup>th</sup>, 2023. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Citlali Quecha Reyna for her guidance and support throughout the process.

2 They are those that accept and recognize gender diverse people among their members; some are led by LGBTQ+ pastors. Although the majority of their members are diverse people, they also accept heterosexual people.

3 Protestant churches are those that recognize the Protestant Reformation of Luther and Calvin in the 16th century. They are mainly defined as historic religions and include various denominations such as Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans. Each denomination places different emphasis on their practice and doctrine. Evangelical denominational churches emerged during the 18th century as a result of the Second Great Awakening, primarily in the United States. These congregations are based on the theses of historic Protestantism, particularly English Methodism. As their name suggests, they promote the gospel and believe in salvation by grace. Ritual practices are based on the experiences of believers. These churches also give rise to Pentecostalism, which believes in the reception of the Holy Spirit and its manifestation through bodily signs such as speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy (visions or dreams), and the gift of healing (prayer and the laying on of hands).

closet and give testimony, both in the church and in the street. This process involves the embodiment of faith in the bodies and emotions of dissident women who reject the frameworks established by heteronormativity and *Christian Supremacy*. These frameworks determine which subjects are deemed worthy of ‘the kingdom of heaven’ and of rights on earth, and which are not. The term ‘queer’ is used in its Spanish translation to describe this process of ‘twisting.’ There is also an appropriation of therapeutic language that, in combination with doctrinal discursive elements, has an impact on believers, leading them to processes of vindication and inviting them to denounce the violence they have experienced.

Contrary to the notion of ‘cure’ that refers to biomedicine and diagnoses elaborated through symptoms that explain or determine a disease and lead to the pathologization of certain human experiences, ‘healing’ refers to a self-agency of health.<sup>4</sup> In other words, emphasis is placed on subjectivity, which attempts to reconcile or repair the body-spirit relationship (Santos and Moya, 2023). Inclusive churches configure an *emotional style* (Illouz, 2010) aimed at processes of corporal, emotional and erotic reappropriation, through the implementation of *psycho-spiritual therapeutics*, whose objective is to heal LGBTQ+ believers from the consequences they have experienced due to discrimination, as well as through ‘sexual reorientation therapies.’ Thus, ‘twisting the faith’ is not only carried out at the discursive level, through a critical biblical exegesis, but also in concrete action with a view to transforming the realities of dissident women believers, marked by discrimination and exclusion.

To provide context, I will start with the section titled ‘From sexual reorientation therapies to inclusive churches and communities.’ I will give a brief history of inclusive churches or communities of faith in relation to the discussion on homosexuality as a disease. I will highlight key moments that led to their formation. In the section titled ‘Twisting the Word, Protesting, and Healing: Towards a Counter-Hegemonic Psycho-Spiritual Therapy,’ I will demonstrate how inclusive churches or communities of faith provide *psycho-spiritual therapy* to heal the souls and bodies of dissident individuals, in contrast to the pathologization of homosexuality. The connection between this therapy and certain activism is central. Finally, I will provide some concluding reflections.

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4 Thanks to Dr. Frida Jacobo Herrera and Ms. Carla Vargas Torices for the exchanges and their feedback to strengthen some of the ideas presented in this text.

The presented information is based on fieldwork conducted in April and May 2023 with Affirmation Mormons<sup>5</sup> LGBTQ+, Family and Friends, Mexico; Inclusive Christian Mission, in Mexico City (MCI); and the Episcopal Church<sup>6</sup> of San Lucas in Merida, Yucatan. Additionally, informative content generated by Theology Without Shame, a group associated with the international organization Soul Force (2023) and the Center for the Study of Spiritual Violence was reviewed. Healing and Social Change and the Network of Women Theologians, Pastors, Activists, and Christian Leaders (Tepali) are both integrated by women believers from Latin America and the United States.

### **From ‘Sexual Reorientation Therapies’ to Inclusive Churches and Communities**

The classification of homosexuality and other sexogenic dissidence as pathological has been a means of controlling emotions, sexuality, and desires (Foucault, 1984; López, 2019; Parrini, 2018). This labeling allows for *interpretations of individuals* as deviant: bodies that, for one or more reasons, do not conform to the biological norms justified in reproduction (Ciccía, 2022: 17). In certain contexts, individuals who do not conform to gender binarism norms have been, and in some cases still are, stigmatized and marginalized. This stigmatization has been perpetuated by certain aspects of conservative Christianity, which has found support from certain agents of the State and sectors such as the biomedical industry in order to maintain power. This is known as *Christian Supremacy*; to explain it, I take up the definition built from the work of theologians and activists of the group Theology

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5 The names of public figures have been explicitly included with their consent. However, to protect the safety of the women who shared their personal experiences with me, their names and any specific identifying information have been altered.

6 There are three branches of Catholicism: Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics, and Anglicans. Anglicans originated from the split with the Church of Rome under Henry VIII. Although Anglicans still refer to themselves as Catholics, they share similarities with Protestant churches, such as not worshipping images, not charging for the sacraments, and emphasizing social work. The Archbishop of Canterbury is the leader of the Anglican Church and the Anglican Communion. This community comprises related churches located in different parts of the world, including the Episcopal Church, which serves as the national church of the United States.

Without Shame/Soul Force, focused on the study and activism against violence within churches and communities of faith, who point out that:

*Christian Supremacy* refers to the parasitic relationship established when certain currents of Christianity are utilized to serve systems of power and domination. The culture, imaginaries, and sacred texts of Christianity are often used to legitimize violent and oppressive measures taken by institutions, governments, individuals, and power groups (Vargas *et al.*, 2022: 8).

Christian Supremacy has operated through the reproduction of the biomedical-psychiatric discourse that catalogued homosexuality as a mental illness in the 1952 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA).<sup>7</sup> Despite this, the 1960s and 1970s were the prelude to a series of mobilizations that took place throughout the Americas. This included the emergence of LGBT<sup>8</sup> activism in the United States, following the *Stonewall* riots in New York, which challenged the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness and denounced mistreatment and repression by state officials. The fight for sexual diversity rights and women’s sexual liberation slogans (Laguarda, 2008) have sparked new dialogues and discussions in response to the dynamic and evolving social reality. The black feminist movement’s increased visibility and strength, along with student and social mobilizations in Latin America, have contributed to this. During this time period, the United States saw the establishment of the first inclusive churches, including the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, founded by openly gay pastor Troy Perry, and the Dignity Group in San Diego, California (Bárceñas, 2020; Andrade, 2022).

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7 Marta Lamas (1986) notes that the psychiatric perspective on gender offers some insight into demystifying or at least questioning certain biologicist theories. Around 1957, John Money and Jean John Haapson stated that sex is biological and gender is social, based on their research at the pediatric endocrinology unit of the University of Baltimore. In his 1968 book *Sex and Gender*, Robert Stoller established that identity is built on the basis of forms of upbringing and socialization, based on a study with infants whose sex was not defined. In the lecture entitled ‘Keys to Understanding Gender’, Lamas (2011) provides further discussion on this topic. The resource can be located in the bibliography.

8 I do not include Q+ in this mention, as it was not yet part of the acronym during those years. Other gender-diverse identities and orientations began to gain visibility around the turn of the millennium.

In 1973, homosexuality was removed from the DSM (Bárceñas, 2020; Andrade in press). However, in contrast to the churches for diversity, that same year an evangelical ex-gay group called Love in Action was formed in the United States. In 1974 the APA ratified the 1973 decision, but the perceptions and discourse on the so-called ‘homosexual disease’<sup>9</sup> had permeated some layers of society and were fed by religious groups that were founded with the aim of ‘curing’ homosexuality or identities that were outside the binary gender norm. A group that had a lot of reach was Exodus International, which emerged from Love in Action, a group created in 1976 and dissolved in 2013 after the statement of its leaders where they asked for forgiveness, acknowledging that for years they carried out a series of practices that affected psychically and emotionally, in some cases causing death, LGBT+ people and believers (Payne, 2013).

Other organizations of this kind were formed in the 1980s, such as the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, Homosexuals Anonymous, People Can Change, and Evergreen International. These organizations developed intervention methods based on the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Additionally, the Catholic organization Courage International was also established. This is how ECOSIG,<sup>10</sup> an organization that offers various therapies including ‘conversion therapy’, ‘sexual reorientation therapy’, and ‘dehomosexualization therapy’, came about. These therapies are carried out by religious leaders, psychologists, and even family members. Some of these procedures are meditative, consisting of long processes where people ‘avoid temptation’. According to Vargas *et al.* (2022), women interviewed reported being invited to

9 Another term mentioned is sexual dimorphism, which refers to the idea that there are two biological forms based on reproductive functions. This concept is often used to legitimize the use of the category ‘sex’ in the biomedical field (Ciccia, 2022: 322). According to Lucía Ciccia (2021: 67), the dichotomous and hierarchical social order that began to take shape in modernity was justified by a dimorphic sexual interpretation of biological differences. This interpretation was influenced by androcentric biases that were present in the scientific discourse on sexual difference.

10 In this regard, you may review Andrade’s works from 2022 and 2023. Specifically, his chapter titled ‘You don’t know how I prayed to God! Understanding homosexuality as sin in people with experience in ECOSIG’ can be found in the book *‘Divino Desafío. Arte: cruce y tensiones entre lo religioso, los feminismos y las disidencias sexo-générica’*, which I am co-editing with René Abel Tec-López. The book is currently in press.

meet boys of their own age with the aim of contracting heterosexual marriages and procreating children. In extreme and cruel cases, physical violence and even sexual abuse are used for ‘corrective’ purposes. During the 1970s and 1980s, the LGBT population in the United States and Mexico was significantly affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in addition to social mobilizations advocating for the rights of social minorities.

Bárceñas (2020) notes that although ex-gay groups have lost strength due to the diversification of options for diverse believers, they have used HIV/AIDS as another justification for their procedures. Additionally, in 1975, the UN declared it the International Year of Women, and in Mexico, the first National Conference on Women was held, convened by the General Assembly of the United Nations, where the Mexican Lesbian Declaration was presented (Bárceñas, 2020: 90). This declaration urged the search for ways to fight against repression towards sexual diversity:

Raising the consciousness of our sisters who are oppressed by their own concepts of self-denigration is a difficult task. However, it is the first unavoidable step. Unconstitutional police actions, which may be pleasing to a macho society, make organized open action almost impossible. We hope that the tactics of struggle used by our homosexual sisters and brothers in other parts of the world will help us find our own way (Hinojosa, 2001: 179).<sup>11</sup>

That same year the Lesbos group was founded in Mexico City (Bárceñas, 2020). According to Baile (2008), Bárceñas (2020), and Andrade (2022), an important alliance was formed between three organizations at that time: the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria (FHAR), Oikabeth (consisting solely of lesbians), and Lambda de Liberación sexual (Andrade, 2022: 230). According to Laguarda (2008), the gay liberation movement made its first public appearance in Mexico in 1978. However, its boom was short-lived due to the challenges faced by people of diverse sexual orientations in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. These challenges added to the struggle against the pathologization of their identities or orientations, as well as the constant stigmatization and social exclusion. This is evidenced through the use of insulting words such as *maricon*, *joto*, and *puto* (in the case of women: *lencha*, *tortillera*, and *machorra*) (Laguarda, 2008). The author points out that:

<sup>11</sup> The original statement could not be located, therefore this excerpt from Claudia Hinojosa’s 2001 text, *Gritos y susurros: Una historia sobre la presencia pública de las feministas lesbianas*, is being used.

While speaking can perpetrate stigmatization, it can also lead to the transformation of the social milieu. The term 'gay', disseminated from the second half of the 1970s onwards within the Spanish-speaking world, challenged exclusionary linguistic resources that previously disqualified those who participated in homosexual practices. Thus, it made positive self-ascription and allowed for the articulation of various social forces around a new identity (Laguada, 2008: 141-142).

The conflict and contradiction between different actors and discourses, the impact of a new way of naming oneself, the echo of what was happening in Latin America and the mobilizations in Mexico, configured a local episteme that yielded different *conditions of possibility* (Parrini, 2018). These conditions of possibility allow for the examination of the relationship between sex-gender dissidence, religion, and scientific discourses, particularly the biomedical/psychiatric discourse. This examination leads to a reflection on the various identity configurations and the political and social transformations they bring about.

The increased visibility allowed individuals who identified as believers and of diverse sex and gender to come out. Andrade (2022) notes that during the sixth Pride March in 1984, religious groups such as the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) and the Fidelidad group, which was founded in 1983, were present. The MCC had already established churches around the world<sup>12</sup> by the mid-1980s. During the six-year term of Miguel de la Madrid in the 1980s, Mexico established a neoliberal policy that was further strengthened in the 1990s with the signing of the Free Trade Agreement by Salinas de Gortari with the governments of the northern countries.

The aim was to modernize and compete with first-world countries. In the 1990s, a group of Franciscan seminarians organized the first march of silence in favor of the LGBT population and HIV+ people in the Yucatan peninsula, according to social activist Ligia Vera. This was a result of the collaboration of various social sectors to form the Grupo Multisectorial Ciudadano.

[...] Unfortunately, it had a very high cost for these young Franciscans, they were reprimanded, they were moved from their headquarters. But the seed was already there. And a very strong work begins to make these forums to make diversity visible and why the discrimination? First, because you belong to the sexual diversity community, but also because of HIV. In other words, what

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12 For a more detailed review of the history of these groupings, see Bárcenas (2020).



today we call intersectionality, we were already working without that name (Ligia Vera, personal communication, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023).<sup>13</sup>

Ligia Vera’s political and feminist activism has continued to strengthen. In the last three years, there has been an increase in the link between inclusive religious groups and activism. The 1990s saw greater diversification and the founding of various groups comprised of individuals of diverse sexual orientations. According to Bárcenas (2020: 122), the ‘Taller Reflexivo de Mujeres Bisexuales’, founded by Angelica Ramirez-Roa in 1996, is the first recorded group for bisexuals. In the same decade, an unaffiliated group called Affirmation-Mormons LGBTQ, Families and Friends emerged. This group is not officially recognized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During those years, the World Health Organization (WHO) stopped considering homosexuality as a mental illness. This influenced the definitive elimination of homosexuality from the DSM, as there was no scientific evidence to support such a diagnosis. In 2009, *The New York Times* published an article titled ‘Psychologists Reject Gay Therapy’, highlighting that the American Psychological Association (APA) condemned the practice of ‘sexual reorientation therapies’:

In a resolution adopted by the association’s governing council, and in an accompanying report, the association issued its most comprehensive repudiation of so-called reparative therapy, a concept espoused by a small but persistent group of therapists, often allied with religious conservatives, who maintain that gay men and lesbians can change. No solid evidence exists that such a change is likely, says the resolution, adopted by a 125-to-4 vote. The association said some research suggested that efforts to produce change could be harmful, inducing depression and suicidal tendencies. Instead of seeking such change, the association urged therapists to consider multiple options, which could include celibacy and switching churches, for helping clients live spiritually rewarding lives in instances where their sexual orientation and religious faith conflict (*The New York Times*, 2009).

Today, the discussion of these ‘therapies’ is a key issue in the activism of several inclusive religious and civic groups, Yaaj Mexico is one of the most active and visible, who are demanding that states classify

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13 An extended version of this interview is part of my chapter “Behind the white wall, the rainbow. Field notes with religious agents and LGBTQ+ activists in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico”, text included in the book in opinion *Notas de campo: De cuerpos diversos, género y “otras” religiosidades*, coordinated together with Cristina Rodríguez-Reche, edited by the Seminario de Intersecciones de lo Religioso (SEMIR).

these practices as crimes, establishing penalties for religious leaders or ‘parapsychologists’ who practice them, as well as compensation for the victims. Geo Gonzalez and Ricardo Balderas (2023) state on the website of Agencia Presentes that:

Currently, 13 of Mexico’s Penal Codes at the local level criminalize ‘conversion therapies.’ However, none of these reforms hold religious leaders responsible. Furthermore, these laws do not address victims or survivors, nor do they establish measures for reparation of damages, guarantees of non-repetition, or prevention. Additionally, there is no route of attention for victims to access justice.

The UN, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, an expert on the subject, and the Pan American Health Organization have stated that ECOSIGs lack medical justification and violate the human rights of their victims (UN, 2020). Additionally, the group of Independent Forensic Experts (IFEG,<sup>14</sup> 2020) has pointed out that these procedures are considered fraudulent, and Gonzalez and Balderas (2023) have described them as ‘equivalent to torture’. According to the National Survey on Sexual and Gender Diversity (ENDISEG) conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2021), 9.8% of the LGBT+ population in Mexico were coerced by their parents to attend sessions with psychologists, doctors, religious authorities, or other individuals or institutions in an attempt to ‘correct’ their sexual orientation. Additionally, 13.9% of the population surveyed reported similar experiences. Out of the total number of women I have talked to so far, 16%, or seven of them, have identified as Trans+ and had the same reaction when expressing their dissident gender identity. Two of them approached ECOSIGs on their own initiative before resigning from their faith communities. These percentages are not insignificant in a country that ranks second in Latin America for transfemicides (Mazariegos and Tec, 2022c).

In 2007, North Star Saints was founded, an organization that absorbed Evergreen International in 2014 and continues to promote ‘sexual reorientation therapies’. However, since the turn of the millennium, several churches promoting diversity have also emerged and are still in operation today. For instance, Comunidad Cristiana de Esperanza (CCE) was founded in 2000, Iglesia de la Reconciliación in 2005, and the Mandala Group in 2009 (Bárceñas, 2020). Casa de Gracia Incluyente (CGI) became an autonomous community in

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14 For its acronym in English: Independent Forensic Expert Group.

2016 after separating from CCE. Mision Cristiana Incluyente (MCI) also separated from CCE and emerged around 12 years ago. The year 2016 ushered in a new political and social era marked by conflict. The former president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, proposed the legalization of equal marriages. This proposal aimed to position himself as a champion of freedom and counteract a mandate full of violence and corruption. However, this proposal faced opposition from conservative Christian churches, including the Catholic Church and some evangelical churches. These churches led a series of mobilizations against such unions. These mobilizations perpetuate a discourse that portrays the LGBTQ+ population as a ‘threat’ to families and humanity. Additionally, they oppose abortion and other sexual and reproductive rights, particularly those related to women’s control over their own bodies and pleasure. This decentralizes the reproductive capacity to gestate, give birth, and raise children as a life project.

The rise of *Christian Supremacy* movements has ignited a fresh discourse within religious communities, particularly concerning gender dynamics, feminist ideologies, and the rights of sexual and gender minorities. Despite the prevailing conservative stance in many quarters, inclusive churches are emerging as resilient bastions, increasingly visible within the public domain. Notably, in recent times, the Episcopal Church of San Lucas, established approximately two years ago, and the Anglican Mission of San Francisco de Asís, inaugurated just a year prior, have become prominent fixtures in Merida, Yucatan. Both institutions stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ activism and advocate for a more inclusive brand of feminism within the region.

Academically, this current situation, along with the ‘anti’ trans stance adopted by certain feminist perspectives, has prompted us to reflect, as Siobhan Guerrero (2019) suggests, on the imperative to challenge gender as ‘a closed and binary construct’, urging us to reformulate our categories in favor of embracing the multiplicity of identities that define us as individuals who identify as heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, transgender, and so forth. Through this assertion, some, guided by their feminist beliefs, while others from alternative dissenting perspectives, such as within religious spaces, question cis-heteronormativity and existing inequalities, aiming to comprehend ‘the root causes of the oppression faced by women and other feminized individuals’ (Guerrero, 2020: 50).

This exploration provides insights into the magnitude of the phenomenon within which the role of dissenting religious women is situated, as well as the potency of inclusive religious practices, feminist or dissenting biblical exegesis, and the connection of LGBTQ+ believers with certain activism efforts aimed at countering discrimination and exclusion. This collective endeavor has engendered a nuanced and situated understanding that has fostered an emotionally critical stance toward religious mandates that reinforce heteronormative norms, shaping a *counter-hegemonic psycho-spiritual therapy*. It elucidates how emotions serve as instruments of political action, transpiring from pulpits to the streets and vice versa.

### **‘Twisting’ Faith, Protesting, and Healing: Toward a Counter-Hegemonic Psycho-Spiritual Therapy**

An important element, especially from decolonial perspectives, is the recognition of the spiritual dimension or religiosity in the processes of women’s struggle and resistance to understand their forms of organization, their positions, conceptions about their bodies, their affections, their sexuality, and sex-gender diversities (Lugones, 2008; Mahmood, 2005; Maielo, 2022; Marcos, 2004; Anzaldúa, 2016). The definition of their gender identity is closely linked to their religious identity.

In recent years, there has been a reappropriation of sacred texts through hermeneutics and reflections with gender, feminist, and *queer* perspectives (Muraro, 2006; Musskopf, 2019; Treviño, 2020; Althaus-Reid, 2020), leading to the naming of God in various ways, such as ‘divinity’, ‘mother goddess’, ‘binary God’, ‘otherness’, ‘Holy Spirit’, ‘trans God’, which prompts the recognition of diverse forms of belief, expression of belief, and practice even within institutionalized religions (Córdova, 2018).

In this context, inclusive churches or faith communities play a central role in questioning and implementing pedagogies aimed at activating their followers in the exercise of information regarding their rights through an emancipatory and critical biblical reading, where notions such as love, and freedom become central in active religious practice. A clear example of this was observed closely during fieldwork with the Episcopal Church of San Lucas in Merida, Yucatan, in April 2023, where the connection between congregation and activism is a strong partnership.

Activist Adelaida Salas told me that her approach to this church was because, rather than engaging in evangelization, they focus on supporting historically marginalized populations. The preaching by the priest is not laden with moral sanctions but rather with reflections on current issues that are part of the public agenda and demands of a segment of the Mexican population. The church remembers the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School who disappeared in 2014, they discuss femicides and gender-based violence. Despite considering herself an atheist and facing criticism from some individuals regarding her engagement with the church, Adelaida remains steadfast. She mentions that in the Episcopal Church, women’s rights and LGBTQ+ rights are respected. It is a church that embraces diversity, developing action projects aimed at literacy, especially for young women, and providing them with information about their rights (Adelaida Salas, personal communication, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023).<sup>15</sup> The relationship between Adelaida and the Episcopal Church mobilizes a series of symbolic and material resources to address populations ignored by the Mexican state, and it constructs a critical discourse towards the colonialist logic with which Christianity arrived in the American continent.<sup>16</sup>

Jose, a Canadian priest of the Episcopal Church who is openly gay, points out that what arrived in Mexico was not Christianity, but rather a project rooted in extraction and racism. He argues that this form of Christianity has been tied to power elites, using religion to subjugate populations representing ethnic, sexual, and class minorities. In his view, the project of Christianity should be different - it should empathize and stand in solidarity with these populations to empower them, restore their dignity, and pursue social justice. Jose states:

15 This testimony is extensively presented in the ethnographic notes from my fieldwork in Merida, Yucatan, which are part of the chapter titled “Behind the White Wall, the Rainbow: Field Notes with Religious Agents and LGBTQ+ Activisms in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico,” in the forthcoming book *“Field Notes: Of Diverse Bodies, Gender, and ‘Other’ Religiosities,”* which I co-edit with Dr. Cristina Rodríguez Reche, published by the Seminar on Intersections of the Religious (SEMIR).

16 A more comprehensive version of this fieldwork is found in the chapter titled “Behind the White Wall, the Rainbow: Field Notes with Religious Agents and LGBTQ+ Activisms in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico,” within the forthcoming book *“Field Notes: Of Diverse Bodies, Gender, and ‘Other’ Religiosities,”* which I co-edit with Dr. Cristina Rodríguez Reche, published by the Seminar on Intersections of the Religious (SEMIR).

We don't have to tolerate all that *machismo*, all that arrogance, all that kind of Christianity from the Christendom era, which we're not really about anymore; we passed through that in the 60s, in the 70s. [The Episcopal Church] is an open church that ordains both male and female priests, a church open to equal marriage; that accepts everyone with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual; we are not only a church that values difference, but also celebrates it (Jose, personal communication, on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

This questioning of the traditional and conservative stances of some religious congregations shapes a *local episteme*, in the words of Rodrigo Parrini (2018):

[...] what this episteme produces, as a platform for social and symbolic transformations, are new conditions of possibility for certain discourses, statements, and subjects. These conditions historically explain the emergence of certain forms of thought and the disappearance of others, the production and use of certain statements or the discarding of others; the emergence of specific subject positions [...] Both feminism and movements of sexual minorities (in their various expressions) have been epistemic currents that have discussed a way of knowing and classifying sexuality, the body, desires, and social relations in general" (Parrini, 2018: 107).

The biblical exegesis carried out within inclusive faith communities leads to "twisting" the word, through a biblical reading aimed at vindicating dissenting and marginalized subjects, based on a narrative that blends different frames of meaning and becomes what Eva Illouz (2010) calls an *emotional style*. The author referred to defines emotional style as:

The combination of modes as a culture begins to "concern" itself with certain emotions and creates specific "techniques", linguistic, scientific, ritual, to apprehend them. An emotional style is established when a new "interpersonal imagination" is formulated, that is, a new way of thinking about the relationship of the self with others, imagining their potentialities and implementing them in practice (Illouz, 2010: 28).

This *emotional style* is derived from the reappropriation of language and practices that discriminate against women by labeling them as 'lenchas', feminists, and believers (Mazariegos, 2021). The history of their churches and their Protestant<sup>17</sup> origins is reclaimed to support their social struggle, first as religious minorities, then as social minorities from marginalized contexts, and as gender minorities. The concept of protest is reinforced. The term 'protest' comes from

<sup>17</sup> Origin marked in the 16th century by the Protestant Reformation of Luther and Calvin, as I mentioned at the beginning of this text.

the Latin word *protestāri*, which means ‘to testify or witness before’. According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) dictionary, *protesting* is defined as: (1) To publicly declare one’s purpose and confess their faith and beliefs, often with vehemence, and express their complaints or disagreements, among other things (RAE, 2023).

There is also an appropriation of therapeutic language that, in combination with doctrinal discursive elements, has an impact on believers, leading them to processes of empowerment that invite them to raise their voices and denounce the violence they experience, forming what I call a *counter-hegemonic psycho-spiritual therapeutics*, which puts in tension two central notions in the processes of health and care: curing and healing. “Curing” refers to the biomedical approach of diagnosing illnesses based on symptoms, which can lead to the pathologization of certain human experiences, such as homosexuality as mentioned in the previous section. It also involves treatments primarily administered by medical specialists to alleviate discomfort. In contrast, healing involves taking control of one’s own health with the assistance of a higher power. The imperative ‘Help yourself and I will help you’ emphasizes subjectivity and attempts to reconcile or repair the body-spirit relationship (Santos and Moya, 2023). Papalini (2014) points out that:

The term ‘sanar’ has its roots in the Latin words ‘sanare’ (to restore health) and ‘sanus’ (meaning sensible, not insane). This origin is shared with the words ‘sanity’, ‘insane’, and ‘sanatorium’. The term ‘healing’ is typically used to refer to the restoration of vital balance in relation to a metaphysical order. The concept reflected in the term is impersonal and involves the recovery of health by linking physical ailments with mental health. It also reflects the subjective impression of improvement (2014: 223).

Prayers, laying on of hands, and religious rituals are fundamental to this healing process. They are often mixed with other resources and are part of what Papalini (2014) defines as ‘therapeutic cultures’:

Amalgams of discourses, lay and expert knowledge, practices, and scientific and religious beliefs conceive subjective discomfort and physical illness as unacceptable suffering or only tolerable at very low levels. Essentially, they are reactive to any form of suffering and propose a series of resources for “being well” permanently. I refer to them as “cultures” in terms of the dissemination and popularization of knowledge, techniques, and immediately available subjective support resources in societies, accessed without the intervention of an expert device. Therapeutic cultures draw on a set of popularized notions from various branches of psychology and neuroscience, as well as a wide variety

of alternative therapies, traditional knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions from the New Age that tend towards self-care (Papalini, 2014: 215).

Amalgams like these serve as forms of action for dissident women believers. Public testimony, for example, narrates experiences of pain, illness, or 'divine favors', providing an account of lived experiences (Mazariegos, 2022a). This discursive resource is also utilized in the intimacy of the psychiatric couch and is carried out through various ritual practices that have been developed since the beginning of Protestant-Evangelical churches. When it comes to LGBTQ+ pastors, using the pulpit to 'twist the word' and make collective statements sends a message of vindication and restitution for the individual. This was evident in the words of Presbyter Jose and in the excerpt from the sermon given by the MCI pastor in CDMX, which critically responds to conservative discourse and advocates for healing as a means of personal and collective liberation:

Even though they tell us that we cannot approach you, that we are not worthy of you [Lord] here we are praising you. There are no points that man wants to put. You include everyone. [...] That soul is nourished through the senses of the body; it is the food of the Lord that gives us life, [that] comes with all the full properties of God, the gifts of the spirit: love, joy, temperance, meekness, gentleness, kindness, goodness [...] But from the world you come very hurt, with much pain. Have you read the message that is as you enter? This is a safe place for you. Here is a place where you can rest, know that you are a daughter, a child of God, that you feel freedom and peace; empathy for people who are sad, hurt, wounded, to heal. But first you must heal yourself to receive nourishment and help others (MCI, sermon, on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

In this sermon, Pastor Liliana Huerta mentioned that feeling God can be experienced through the body. She emphasized that one can feel grace and the spirit speaking to us. She also pointed out that people of diverse backgrounds have bodies that are equally worthy of receiving grace. Additionally, at MCI, the pastor encourages the faithful to seek therapeutic processes with psychology professionals. According to her: 'As a pastor, I can provide spiritual guidance, but I am not equipped to handle the psychological aspects of the situation. It is important to acknowledge these limitations.'

The church places emphasis on the emotional healing of believers. Some members of the church are trained in psychology or thanatology to provide psycho-spiritual accompaniment, helping individuals recognize themselves in their dissident gender identity.



The wounds referred to stem from exclusion from families and churches, as well as the mental and emotional consequences of undergoing ‘sexual reorientation therapy’. These situations are not unique to any particular congregation.

An example that illustrates the aforementioned characteristics is that of Dulce, a 33-year-old woman who identifies as a lesbian and was raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Dulce was actively involved in her church, leading the group of young singles and young women. She first recognized her sexual orientation when she was 18 years old and began a secret romantic relationship with another girl. However, the bishop of her church discovered her ‘condition’. The bishop questioned the individual and inquired about any sexual activity with another person, which was considered a serious transgression and could result in expulsion. The individual was placed on probation, instructed to end their relationship with their partner, and removed from their leadership position. They underwent a spiritual process that involved prayer and follow-up interviews regarding their behavior. Due to being in this process, she was not allowed to lead the prayer and gradually became marginalized from activities. She had to refuse to teach. Dulce notes that when one declines to participate in an activity, suspicions arise in the church, as it is often assumed that being ‘in the process’ implies a lack of ‘sexual virtue’. She goes on to explain what ‘the process’ entails:

There are ‘processes’ that come into play when, for instance, you’ve transgressed certain standards, such as breaking the word of wisdom by smoking, drinking, or using drugs, or violating the law of chastity in any way. These can also include issues like theft. More serious matters lead to a disciplinary council, where stake leaders convene with the bishop. It’s like a formal inquiry where they ask you what happened, why it happened, and based on their assessment, they may continue with a process or decide that the offense is severe enough to warrant expulsion from the church through excommunication. Previously known as excommunication, it is now referred to as withdrawal of membership. The LGBT community generally views this practice negatively. Within the church, many leaders claim that ‘individuals can control their attraction to the same sex, viewing it as a temptation that can be overcome’. There are some who suggest seeking psychological help in the church to address same-sex attraction. Similarly, individuals who have sexually abused or raped others may be directed to a similar process. An organization in the United States called North Star conducts meetings aimed at helping individuals lose their same-sex attraction and promoting heterosexual relationships and family. The group includes psychologists (Dulce, personal communication, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023).

Dulce was not excommunicated, she decided to stop attending church at the age of 19 years old. With her family it was no different. Her mother was very faithful to her church and took great care of her image, trying to give a testimony of perfection before the religious authorities. Therefore, knowing that her daughter was a lesbian was a great shame for her.

She cared deeply about others' opinions, often resorting to fear tactics in her approach to parenting; phrases like 'if you misbehave, I'll tell so-and-so' were common. This was her way of looking out for us and molding our behavior. However, there were times when she couldn't follow through with this approach because she was more concerned about what our siblings would think. Regardless, she didn't hesitate to voice her concerns loudly in the house, and I suspect the neighbors were aware. My aunt, her sister, and my cousins lived upstairs, but I'm unsure if they were privy to the situation or if they know about it to this day. I made the decision to keep silent about it to protect my family and myself. In her desperation, she turned to one of my uncles who served as a bishop in our neighborhood and implored him, 'This girl is acting out, and she won't stop. Take her away!' (Dulce, personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023).

From there, Dulce went through various processes of violence, enduring mistreatment from her uncle's wife and sometimes going without food, which led her to decide to start living on her own over ten years ago. Currently, she maintains a distant relationship with her family and her church, although she still hopes that one day they will accept her as she is. In religious terms, she identifies herself as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 'although I define myself as an inactive member, since I only go about twice a year, mainly due to this issue regarding the LGBT community, but I go because my family is very attached' (Dulce, personal interview, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023). She learned about the group Affirmation-Mormons LGBTQ, Family, and Friends from a friend she met at a gay bar in Mexico City. It was a great surprise for her to know that there was this group of Mormons who accept people of sexual diversity, and she has integrated into it. She mentions that the group provides support to people who are still in the process of self-recognition, to trans women, to gay men who are drag performers, to women who have come because of their LGBTQ+ relatives, and to people who already have diverse families.

That's the good thing, we welcome all of them and respect their free will, and they all share their testimonies with us, their life experiences, how difficult their transformation was. There are also people who have already

undergone sex reassignment processes, so they also tell us how difficult it was for them to undergo sex reassignment in the church and within their families. [...] I can tell you that 90 percent of them come to the agreement that at the moment they decide to accept themselves or their families accept them, they stop attending church because they know how tough it is to attend church and be judged by everyone, precisely because you're in your process and can't participate, and they notice it, as the song goes, everyone sees you and judges you, so to avoid being seen, you better leave. Then, on the other side, when you decide to come out [of the closet], you get excommunicated, so I believe that 90 percent [of the Mormon LGBTQ+ population] no longer attend, the other 10 percent do attend because they still have feelings for the church, they want to continue participating in the activities. But of that 10 percent, I can tell you that 7 percent suppress their emotions in order to be in the church, and alongside that suppression, they also struggle to find a partner to start a family [...] There are leaders in the church who lead double lives (Dulce, personal communication, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023).

Dulce's story illustrates the exercise of what Vargas *et al.* (2022) refer to as *spiritual violence*, which they define as:

Spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm, caused by religious and social ideologies that deny the authenticity and sacred value of the person since Christendom Supremacy. Spiritual violence occurs whenever language about God or religious moralism causes harm, intentionally or unintentionally, to the sacred value or intimate dignity of a person or group. It can be something as small as a negative comment, an unguarded taunt, or as serious as hate crimes, femicide, or systemic marginalization and violence towards entire groups because of their diverse identities [...]. Spiritual Violence shares multiple dimensions with gender and sexual diversity violence [...] It is a widespread practice in the culture, taking what “the Bible says [...] Spiritual Violence and Religious Abuse often emphasize the inferiority and subordination of women to men, which is a characteristic of patriarchal cultures in the Mediterranean that wrote the biblical texts. This is justified as something divinely designed. It is important to avoid subjective evaluations and biased language when discussing this topic. In these ideologies, there is a need to control the body and sexuality. Therefore, it is not surprising that any form of sexuality that does not conform to the heterosexual, monogamous, or reproductive purposes within the institution of marriage is demonized. As a result, any manifestation of affective-sexual bonds that do not meet these requirements will be subject to constant attack and discrimination (Vargas *et al.*, 2022: 28-36).

The above definition questions the positions of religious conservatism, which asserts that individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ promote anti-values and are prone to immorality, depravity, and

pollutants (Nussbaum, 2006). According to conservative beliefs, LGBTQ+ individuals threaten the 'natural' rules of behavior and sex-affective relationships, which are regulated by institutions such as the State, the family, and the school. Criticism and rejection of LGBTQ+ individuals stem from their expression of emotions towards bodies that are considered forbidden to them according to the traditional heterosexual model of sex-affective bonds. This model imposes the relationship between sexual opposites as the only legitimate one, and anything outside of this norm is considered abnormal (Páez and De la Peña, 2019).

In this sense, emotions that are intimately connected to the body, that are signified and enacted through the body, also become mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion. Therefore, for inclusive congregations and especially for women, speaking about love between women and making lesbian bonds explicit and public leads to a path of recognition and visibility that has been forbidden within churches and other social institutions. The naming of affection between people of the same sex becomes a political weapon of justification, legitimized, in their view, by God.

In this regard, Tania Rodriguez (2008) points out that emotions 'have an intentional object', this means that in most cases there is an objective to be fulfilled when they are externalized towards someone or something specific; through them value judgments are made, hence emotions 'presuppose cognition because they presuppose intentionality' (Rodriguez, 2008: 151). Therefore, 'emotions serve as a measure of social 'placement', from which behaviors are evaluated as good or bad; moral and immoral. Therefore, their social weight is unquestionable' (Rodriguez, 2008: 152). Emotions:

Cannot be understood without the practice or discourse in which it is embodied. Or what is the same: it cannot be understood without the particular way in which the emotive is directed towards action. A field that cannot be understood either outside the context of networks woven by and for specific subjects: without the specific actors towards which (or against which) that emotion is directed. Which is equivalent to saying that, as a language and social tool, the emotive is always a way of conveying specific modes of relating (Sirimarco and Spivak, 2018: 12).

The emotions and role of dissident women's bodies in the configuration of sex-affective bonds generate various transformations and rearrangements. It is important to avoid subjective evaluations

and biased language when discussing this topic. By questioning the behavioral and bodily standards demanded by society and their churches, individuals construct a different corporality. This leads them to interpret their faith from a concrete, incarnate experience, establishing psychospiritual mechanisms to confront emotions such as shame or guilt. This recognition of emotions aims to promote liberating actions such as love, peace, or joy, as pointed out by Pastor Huerta in the sermon fragment shared earlier. Therefore, while questioning their duty to exist, they search for spaces and networks that allow them to express their dissident sexuality and religious beliefs.

An example of this is Yaya, a 34-year-old from Mexico City, and Sole, a 40-year-old Uruguayan national, both of whom distanced themselves from their respective religious upbringings, Catholic and Jewish. When they met approximately three years ago, they decided to start a family and considered it necessary to belong to a religious community that would provide them with support. Thus, they began their search on the internet: terms such as ‘inclusive churches’, ‘LGBT churches’, and ‘gay churches in Merida’ were entered into the search engine, leading them to St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, several interviewees have shared that they found their churches or communities through online searches. They began attending and were immediately accepted, got married, and adopted two twins. For Yaya, this decision has meant distancing herself from her family, but she finds in the Episcopal Church a community where she can find support. Yaya points out that:

[...] in the Christian church I did learn, I understood that faith is not a question of a religion, faith is a question of oneself. Then I began to study the word of God, which is the Bible, on my own, and I like to go to San Lucas, because I like to listen on Sundays. Then I like to think about what Jose talks about and that it is not just a church to go to on Sundays [...]. It is not about beating one’s chest, nor saying: ‘Oh, I am the best in the world, because there is no one’, that is, let the one who is not a sinner cast the first stone, that is, and this does not exist, I say that churches are the churches of sinners. Whoever says he is not a sinner and goes to church I give him whatever he wants, but that does not exist, that is a lie [...] A while ago I was reading to Sole that God the Jews told Jesus: ‘Master, you are no respecter of any person’, that’s right, he was no respecter of any person, whatever he was, you were a Christian (Sole and Yaya, personal communication, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

In the various churches and inclusive faith communities with which I have interacted, the faithful are encouraged to share their experiences without shame or hiding. They are invited to be ‘good

people' and being a good person 'has nothing to do with sexual identity or orientation'. The LGBTQ Mormon affirmation group, Family and Friends, like MCI, aims to provide a *safe space* for individuals. They invite experts to discuss emotions, meditation, breathing, and reflective exercises related to childhood and daily problems. Additionally, they discuss the strength of feminine energy and spirituality 'that exists within each individual and emphasize the importance of not denying it. It is acknowledged that everyone possesses both feminine and masculine energy' (virtual meeting, on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023).

This idea has been reflected in the *self-help culture*, which is characteristic of neoliberalism and secular spirituality. It emphasizes personal development, while dissident women's groups and collectives advocate for the power of the collective to effect change and healing. This perspective has permeated ecclesial scenarios and provided new resources to counteract the violence experienced by evangelical women. This culture of self-help, which has been expanded through the media and countless publications, often uses spiritual discourse as a means of healing and progress (Illouz, 2010). In addition, terms such as empathy and resilience, borrowed from psychology, and consensus-building, a feminist empirical category, find resonance in their biblical interpretation of Christ's love and care for others (Mazariegos, 2022a and 2022b).

In this process of adopting and combining different therapeutic modes and techniques, dissident believers are repositioning themselves in the public and private space. This repositioning is achieved through what I call 'pedagogies of disobedience'. These pedagogies challenge the religious normativity based on obedience, especially as it pertains to women and people who do not conform to heteronormative discourse (Hooks, 2021; Ahmed, 2021). These *pedagogies of disobedience* aim to construct a local episteme with new frameworks of meaning that allow for the reconfiguration of affective bonds. Female eroticism is highlighted as a place of vindication and liberation of their bodies (Hooks, 2000; Rojas, 2021). In this manner, certain groups, or organizations of women of faith are encouraging others to 'raise their voices' by sharing the teachings and slogans of theologians such as Nancy Cardoso, Angelica Tostes, and Odja Barros. The Network of Christian Women Theologians, Pastors, Activists, and Leaders (Tepali) (2022) has circulated the following captions within their networks in the context of the 25N of 2022:

Feminist theologies are expressions of protest against the normalization of violence against women worldwide. They are also expressions of pleasure,

of religious ecstasy, of ‘doing theology for pleasure, because it is good, because it liberates and dignifies life.’ This is why discussions about guilt and pleasure, sex and power, sexuality and politics, production and reproduction are important in feminist theologies. They are prophetic expressions! (Red Tepali, Facebook, 2022).<sup>18</sup>

Another example of this is the collective Mujeres Ruaj, mainly composed of Methodist women who are not recognized by the official structure of the Methodist Church of Mexico. I have been following them since 2020. Additionally, I accompanied Mision DF, an evangelical church that is open to gender diversity, during the 8M 2023 march. These young women carried a banner of approximately three meters with the slogan: ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,’ as well as others with different messages. ‘Patriarchy is not divine will.’ These words resonate with women who have experienced discrimination and exclusion. The cries are heard in temples, on the streets, and on social media, and they help to build networks and strategies that go beyond individual churches or faith communities.

This is an important characteristic of inclusive churches and their political action. It is not only thought in terms of evangelical work directed to the LGBTQ+ population, but also in the creation of transnational networks such as the First Latin American Meeting of Inclusive and Dissenting Churches and Ministries, held from August 1<sup>st</sup>, to 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023 in Bogota, Colombia, which, due to the length of the document, I will not talk about in depth. What I do find relevant to highlight is that these meetings strengthen alliances and social projects aimed at marginalized populations such as migrant populations, sex workers, people with HIV+, communities in the defense of their territories and in peace building processes in countries such as Colombia. In addition to this, inclusive churches exercise a progressive activism whose characteristic is ecumenism, interreligious and intergenerational dialogue (Pérez-Vela, 2021).

The struggle of diverse women believers cannot be considered in isolation from the collective processes of their churches or communities of faith. Even those who are influenced by feminism do not necessarily have a separatist logic, but rather a relation to non-feminine or feminized subjects, with the awareness that being diverse women implies a situated and concrete experience. The above leads individuals to form

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<sup>18</sup> Infographics related to this excerpt can be viewed on Red Tepali’s Facebook page: Tepali: <https://www.facebook.com/RedTEPALI>

*transnational emotional communities* where faith serves as a tool for liberation and healing (Mazariegos, 2019 and 2020).

Emotional communities allow the linking of historically violated women actors in a network of political alliances that enables them to find alternative forms of participation, which implies awareness, registration and analysis of the movements and constant transformations of the collectives, which also become spaces of containment, care and support (Rosenwein, 2006; Jimeno, 2007; Peláez, 2020; Mazariegos, 2022b). When I talk about the solidarity and support among women believers.

[...] I am referring to a specific logic based on biblical and theological principles for the accompaniment and support of women. The purpose is to reflect on the different realities, needs, and violence they experience. The agreements that evangelical women initiate do not always include women who agree on all issues, such as abortion. The union between individuals does not always stem from an atmosphere of total harmony. However, in this case, it is rooted in their common objective, which is to incarnate love in Christ (Mazariegos, 2022b: 203).

For many individuals, embodying love in Christ translates into political activism both inside and outside of their religious communities. This results in networks of care and support that extend beyond religious affiliation and the home. This mutual support is part of the ethics of care, which, as Mari Luz Esteban (2017) explains, is linked to recognizing differences and involves exchanging opinions and ideas while actively listening as a means of mutual recognition and knowledge.

## Concluding Remarks

The study of LGBTQ+ women believers and their recognition in both their faith communities and the public sphere is a complex process. This text aims to portray how inclusive churches or faith communities construct new frameworks of meaning to navigate processes that have affected their congregants emotionally and psychologically. To provide context for the emergence of these churches and faith communities, it is important to consider the pathologization of homosexuality and the implementation of 'sexual reorientation therapies' as control measures based on the binary order of gender, which were supported by conservative religious positions. To address the impact of historical and ongoing procedures, churches and inclusive faith communities



develop *counter-hegemonic psycho-spiritual therapies*. These aim to heal the bodies and souls of LGBTQ+ believers through rituals and procedures that incorporate diverse traditions and cultural elements. These practices also critique the biomedical approach and the heteronormative system. Given the diversity and intersections between religion, activism, and gender and sexual identity, it is important to further explore the experiences of women and feminized individuals, as well as the concept of healing. This includes the healing of both physical and emotional wounds.

In the context of the growth of religious conservatism in Latin America, it is important to examine believers who advocate for progressive positions to illustrate the various aspects of the religious phenomenon and its impact on different social spheres. The emotional dimension is crucial for understanding macro processes such as religious activism and the struggle for the rights of the LGBTQ+ population and women.

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### **Ethnographic interviews:**

- Dulce, personal communication, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, Mexico City.
- Jose, personal communication, on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Merida, Yucatan.
- Sole and Yaya, personal communication, on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Merida, Yucatan.
- Salas, Adelaida, personal communication, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Merida, Yucatan.
- Vera, Ligia, on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, Merida, Yucatan.

### **Field notes**

- Affirmation Mormons LGBTQ, Family, and Friends, Mexico, virtual meeting, on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
- Inclusive Christian Mission (MCI), Mexico City, Sermon by Pastor Liliana Huerta, on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
- Episcopal Church of San Lucas, Merida, Yucatan, on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

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