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“THE PENTECOSTAL BLACK FAUGHT ANNOYS!”: A TALK ABOUT GENDER, RACE AND RELIGION ¹

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1. This text is the result of my master's research, and may contain excerpts, developments and part of the interviews.

Abstract: In Brazil, for a long time now, most masculinities have been impacted by the figure of the “fag”, gay men who do not conform to the dominant pattern. In contrast, there is the normalized gay, the one who denies the queer. There is a symbolic sense of belonging that limits behaviors and places based on conservative religious and social interpretations, which regulates and controls bodies, sometimes perpetuating inequalities in people who do not fit the heterosexual norm, as is the case of the “Pentecostal black fag”. Religions, including Pentecostal, endorse heterosexuality and whiteness as elements that guarantee an existence in the center, indicating the margin as the appropriate place for effeminate gays, faggots, fags, and also for black Pentecostals. The idea of its existence is rejected by the religious majority. The intersectionality tool (CRENSHAW, 2002) helps to question the rigid axis of the man/white/straight equation, which is the standard of the patriarchal system and which destroys subjectivities outside the norm. The objective is to question the existence of the “Pentecostal black fag” in inclusive churches, through an intersectional look at this “combo” of oppression and subordination. Intercessionality helps to highlight the fissures and marks of these people who are on the margins of society and who insist on persisting in their spaces. In this text, interviews rescue the experience of Pentecostal black faggots from the Nova Esperança Church in São Paulo to shed light on the construction of a “place” for this portion of the Brazilian population.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, inclusive church, race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender.

SPEECH PLACE

My name is Átila Augusto dos Santos and I consider it important to mention it from the beginning, because, paraphrasing Lélia Gonzales (1994), “black people have to have a first and last name, otherwise the whites get a nickname... to their liking”. Nominal and racial protagonism is crucial, as Sueli Carneiro (2017) highlights, when she states that we, black people, are at the forefront of struggles for the full exercise of citizenship, but we are always left behind. We are those for whom there has never been a real and effective project of social integration, but who can no longer be excluded. In this spirit, I intend to tell and write about the experience of the Pentecostal black fag and the discomfort it causes.

When thinking about this Pentecostal black fag, I present my own experience as a member of an inclusive Pentecostal church since 2004. I am 50 years old, I am black, gay and I have a degree in legal sciences from Universidade Cruzeiro do Sul - UNICSUL, Theology from “Universidade Metodista de São Paulo” - UMESP, master’s degree in Science of Religion also from UMESP and now I’m studying for a doctorate at “Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo” - PUC/SP, researching gender and blackness in Brazilian Pentecostalism. I have been in a stable relationship with my partner for 20 years and we are the parents of a two-year-old boy. I have served as a pastor in an inclusive Pentecostal church for over 15 years.

Just as black people have a first and last name, they also have a family and a history. My nuclear family is very similar to many other “traditional” black families of the 1970s: father, mother and four children raised and educated as Pentecostal Christians in the extreme periphery of São Paulo. I was born in Jardim Ângela, a neighborhood in the south of São Paulo, and I am the eldest in the family.

My father, José, and my mother, Lídia, are migrants from Minas Gerais, they arrived in the 70s. My maternal grandfather, Generoso, and my maternal grandmother, Margarida, who was the granddaughter of slaves, were pioneers in the interior of Minas Gerais, opening and inaugurating several Pentecostal Assemblies of God churches in the 60s and 70s. My paternal grandfather, Ângelo, was also the grandson of slaves, and my paternal grandmother, Maria, daughter of Portuguese parents, was a practicing Catholic.

As a cis man, gay, black and from a black, poor and Pentecostal family, I faced and still face a lot of discrimination from the Assembly of God church due to my sexual orientation, which resulted in my exclusion/expulsion in the late 1990s. However, I kept my Christian faith and found in inclusive Pentecostal churches a place to be myself (DIAS, 2022).

THE INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

Inclusive churches do not condemn “dissident” sexuality, but celebrate it as a gift from the creator God. They arise from the political, social and religious struggles of LGBTI+ and, in Brazil, they have been established in the search for an evangelical identity for about 20 years (NATIVIDADE, 2016, 2008; DIAS, NATIVIDADE, 2022; DIAS, 2022; SANTOS, 2022). In other words, these churches have taken a progressive approach to sexual and gender diversity, breaking with conservative religious traditions that have historically excluded and marginalized LGBTI+ people.

The growth of these inclusive churches in Brazil demonstrates the search for a space of religiosity that embraces a larger portion of human experiences, valuing the racial identity and sexual orientation of LGBTI+ people. In addition, it highlights the movement of resistance and empowerment of black LGBTI+ people who find in these churches a

place where they can affirm their faith without denying their identity, overcoming excluding religious narratives and providing a space for belonging and celebrating their identities.

Inclusive churches offer a welcoming environment where the experience of faith and spirituality is not incompatible with LGBTI+ and black identity. In Brazil, most of these churches are Pentecostal and have welcomed a large number of black LGBTI+ people who have chosen to “quilombar” in these religious communities (SANTOS, 2022). Therefore, when talking about “quilombar” in inclusive Pentecostal churches, this implies finding shelter, protection and acceptance in a religious space that values and celebrates not only the sexual identity of black LGBTI+ people, but also their racial identity.

One cannot deny the broad social, psychological and spiritual support that these churches have provided to part of the LGBTI+ community, including black people, who, on the other hand, are the target of intolerance and symbolic violence. However, there is still a long way to go to eliminate some contradictions in these spaces that are intended to be inclusive, with several intersections between race, class, gender and sexuality.

THE PENTECOSTAL BLACK FAGGING IS ANNOYING

Here, I want to focus on the place of being and existing as presented by Tainah Dias (2022) of the Pentecostal LGBTI+ religious subject, which bothers, in this case, Black fag.

The challenge is to reflect and analyze the intersectionality of the lives, experiences and crossings of the person who identifies as “Pentecostal black fag” inside and outside an inclusive church, such as Nova Esperança. In this context, the figure of the fag bothers and disturbs, as it is seen as abject and demonized by society, by evangelicals and Pentecostals.

In Brazil, these bodies are considered a non-place, and are sometimes the target of violence and are not seen (BUTLER, 2019) as habitable.

The fag bothers not only heterosexual cisgender men, but also most dominant masculinities and sexualities, such as normalized gay, those who fit the behavioral standards imposed by society for male behavior. By doing so, he denies the existence of the queer. This dynamic creates a hierarchy (BUTLER, 2015) among homosexual men, transferring a real problem to the LGBTI+ community.

Linguistically analyzing the term “fag black”, we can reflect on the stigmatization, stereotyping, exoticization, sexualization, rejection, invisibility and marginalization of this person. The word “faggot” seems to be an adaptation of the French word “fag”, which means doe, the feminine of “faggot”. Although this adaptation may be true, we must be careful, as the term has several meanings in Brazil, such as intestinal parasite, worm and leech.

Currently, the term “black fag” combined with “Pentecostal” is related to identity, economic, health, political and religious issues. Therefore, I speak from my own experiences about blackness, homosexuality and Pentecostalism as characteristics that, in a white, heteronormative and fundamentalist Christian society, are considered inferior in several dimensions, such as intellect, color, sexuality and gender identity (BUTLER, 2016).

Only recently, black people themselves have adopted nicknames like “black fagot” and other terms to feel more empowered, reversing the negative meaning and transforming it into a feeling of empowerment and black consciousness.

The mere existence of a person who identifies as a “fag black” and Pentecostal

challenges and disturbs the rigid male/white/heterosexual model that is the standard established by the patriarchal system. This pattern is maintained only by erroneously arguing that there are people “out of the norm”, such as indigenous people, women, trans people, black people and LGBTI+ people. This is a form of violence that denies other ways of being, acting as a colonizing effect that destroys subjectivities considered outside the norm.

Cis-heteronormativity perpetuates the violence of the man/white/heterosexual, who proclaims himself “superior” by diminishing the existence and space of the other, just as occurred in the maritime expansion, which boosted the colonization of African native peoples and their cultures. This can help us reflect on why and, in part, slavery, machismo, racism and LGBTI+phobia are social mechanisms of inferiority of the other that insist on remaining and oppressing people, including in religious environments permeated by relations of power (FOUCAULT, 1999).

These mechanisms of oppression lead us to the concept of intersectionality systematized by Kimberly Crenshaw (2002) where gender, race, class, sexuality and religion can be understood as avenues that cross the body. In the body of the Pentecostal black fag, we perceive that these factors influence and establish connections with racism, patriarchy and class subordination, in addition to other oppressions, such as the sexuality of Pentecostal black people. This analytical tool enables interaction between areas of knowledge, such as feminist, gender, sexual diversity, religion and ethnic-racial studies. It helps to illuminate the fissures and marks of these people on the margins, who resist and do not give up occupying their spaces.

The fact is that there is a symbolic feeling of belonging that dictates and limits

behaviors and places. This can also be seen in the religious environment. Based on conservative biblical, theological and social interpretations that refer to the control and regulation of bodies, religious discourse sometimes ends up perpetuating inequalities in people who do not have “docile bodies” and do not fit into heteronormativity. This is the case of Pentecostal black fag. The situation is aggravated by the racial component. Therefore, we can deduce that control over sexualities and racial belongings comes from several places and is often endorsed by conservative religions, including Pentecostals, through speeches and actions that legitimize heterosexuality and whiteness as elements that guarantee an existence in the center, indicating the margin as the proper place for effeminate gays, for queers, for Pentecostal black queers.

Through an intersectional look at this set of oppressions and subalternities, Pentecostal black fag is uncomfortable because it questions this “non-place”, with the possibility of existing and (r)existing in inclusive churches. Even within these churches, as well as in other institutions and traditions, there are expectations regarding gender roles, such as, for example, a much more feminine body is sometimes what is expected of a Pentecostal believer (SANTOS, 2022).

THE ANCESTRALITY OF THE PENTECOSTAL BLACK FAGGING

The fag is often associated with femininity, because “fag”, in addition to a doe, is also a reference to a young woman in France. Feminization is seen as a criterion for someone becoming a queer. Peter Fry and Edward Mac Rae (1985) state that, in the social context, the fag can only be female, that is, it is always inferior. To be considered a queer, it is not enough to have relations with other men, it is necessary to have feminine

behavior.

However, this hierarchy appears to be fragile and questionable. Oyeronke Oyewumi (2021), in his work “A Invenção da Mulher”, presents a profound analysis that can be significantly related to the experience of the black fag. She questions the indiscriminate application of Western gender theories to other cultures, arguing that gender is not a universal and timeless social construction, but rather a historically and culturally specific construction, she points out that women as a social category did not exist in Yoruba society, in pre-colonial times, for example.

Oyewumi describes a worldview that adds an African meaning to Western gender discourses and that draws attention to the role that cultural and linguistic translation played in the processes of colonization and gender insertion in Yoruba society that is gender-free compared to another that would be structured around the genre, English. If in the English language there is already a strong presence of the colonial logic to the senses of the genre, in Portuguese, the phenomenon is even more intense and structuring of oppressions.

We emphasize that, even though Yoruba society was hierarchical, this relationship between individuals was organized based on ancestry or age and not gender. The Atlantic slave trade sparked a shift in Yoruba society from an age-based social structure to a gender-based hierarchy. This reveals how the Western narrative of sexist corporeality, which places the body as the basis for defining social roles, is intrinsically linked to the cultural hegemony and dominance of European and more recently American cultures in the global system.

This critical perspective resonates with the experience of the Pentecostal black fag, who often find themselves marginalized and stereotyped inside and outside their

religious community. The imposition of cis-heteronormative and gender binary ideals can create a hostile and excluding environment, denying the experiences and identities of people with dissident sexualities.

Oyewumi's (2021) analysis also leads us to question the biological foundations of gender and the ideology of biological determinism that permeates Western systems of knowledge. The conception of gender as a historical and cultural construction challenges the notion that there is a fixed and universal biological essence that determines a person's gender identity. This is especially relevant for understanding the peripheral Pentecostal black fag, whose existence defies established gender and sexuality norms.

By relating Oyewumi's (2021) ideas to the experience of the Pentecostal black fag, we can recognize the importance of rebuilding gender narratives that are more inclusive and sensitive to cultural diversity. This involves challenging the imposition of cis-heteronormative standards and valuing individual experiences and identities, allowing for a deeper and more compassionate understanding of the experience of these marginalized individuals.

Thinking about new narratives, we want to inaugurate a new form of linguistic appropriation here. Thinking about the "black people" coined by Lélia Gonzalez (1988) we assume in the title of the next topic the "black gays" language, typical of the communication of gay people and which is also used in inclusive churches.

SPEECH: "BEE", "CONA!"²: ENÉAS, ANDRÉ AND JANDEIRSON

Through the reports of my interviewees, Eneas, André and Jandeirson, black Pentecostal fags who attend the inclusive church Nova Esperança, we can understand the complexity of their experiences within this religious context. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to talk to them at my home, on an afternoon in May 2022, after the pandemic period.

Eneas, a 53-year-old single black Brazilian gay man, was the first worship minister of an inclusive Pentecostal church. When asked about his lack of romantic relationships or marriage with inclusive church men, Eneas responded that he never had the opportunity to be happy in that regard. He mentioned that most people in the inclusive church find partners outside the church due to criteria such as appearance, financial situation and academic status. He attributed his lack of luck and opportunity to issues related to his geographic location and his professional background, in his words:

[...] because an opportunity never arose, I was not lucky and happy to have that happiness... most people from the inclusive church get partners outside the church, because of appearance, financial and academic situation... only with educated people... because of where he lives and the college he studied and the professional issue (Field Journal, May 2022).

André's love story is not very different. He is a single salesman and one of the first blacks to be baptized in the inclusive ``Nova Esperança church``, during a retreat in the interior of São Paulo. It is noteworthy that André came to the inclusive church due to a relationship with a boyfriend, an experience shared by many gay men. It is important to

2. "Bee", it is a sweet name for a gay friend and "Cona" is a derivative of mariconas, which is the oldest homosexual, in some places over 40 years old (ALBUQUERQUE, 2015, s/p). All respondents are aged 40 years or older.

highlight that only white men sought him out to date, which reveals the sexualization of the black gay body.

Jandeirson, in turn, is a single professor who began his journey of inclusive Christian faith in Nova Esperança, but also had experiences in African-based religions, where he managed to establish affective relationships with other black gay men. The article: “The black fag diasporas”: about being black and gay in Brazil”, written by Lucas Veiga (2018), offers a significant analysis on the issue of belonging and exclusion. The author discusses the experiences of individuals who face prejudice for being black, homosexual and, sometimes, religious. This situation is related to the intersections with the figure of the white man, heterosexual and considered standard by the patriarchal society, while black and gay men are outside this standard. The exclusion of the cis-heterosexual way of life results in various forms of violence against subjectivities and bodies considered “deviant”, which do not submit to colonization.

Western masculinity is built on the violent logic of the white male and the patriarchal system. For the black man, who cannot stop being black to stay alive, assuming the white “alpha-male” moral codes and conduct is a way of seeking acceptance and recognition within a heteronormative pattern. However, this often leads to the exclusion of women and LGBTI+ people, perpetuating violence and oppression.

Veiga (2018) uses the metaphor of a “second diaspora” to describe the suffering faced by young black homosexuals, who are forced to deny their sexuality in order to be integrated and accepted. This violence and suffering are even more intense when they occur in the “quilombos” themselves, spaces that must offer protection, such as the family, the neighborhood, spaces of faith and even the black movement. This results in a condition

of “affection-diaspora”, in which sexuality is denied and the person lives protected, or it is assumed and is left unprotected.

It is important to remember that, every 23 minutes, a young black person is murdered and, every 28 minutes, an LGBTI+ individual is killed, in an allusion to “necropolitics”. According to Mbembe (2018), necropolitics is not just about using life as an instrument, but also about destroying bodies. In the Brazilian case, it is not just a matter of allowing people to die, but, instrumentalized by state power, of causing death also in the large Brazilian urban peripheries.

The intersection of these data makes black gay men even more vulnerable to physical, psychological and affective violence. Many black gay men seek refuge in Protestant and Pentecostal Christian churches to escape this violence and overcome family and social rejection. However, most do not feel welcome in these traditional churches, which do not recognize homosexuality as a gift from God.

Leaving the church is not always a voluntary option, as many believers do not do it because they lose their faith, but because the institution forces them to do so, subtly or violently. Those who play prominent roles, such as worship ministry leaders or theater troupes, often end up leaving the pulpit due to the scorn and abuse suffered by those who call themselves Christians. This loss of membership weakens the church and makes Christianity meaningless.

In this context, inclusive churches play a beneficial religious role, welcoming LGBTI+ “rejected” by traditional churches, as is the case of the Pentecostal black fags Eneas, André and Jandeirson, despite the challenges they face within these churches in an attempt to reduce the number of black gays who suffer from the multifaceted Brazilian racism.

The difficulty in love relationships for black homosexuals is related to low self-

esteem and the feeling of rejection and insecurity caused by racism and capitalism (FANON, 2008). According to Fanon (2008), overcoming occurs when recovering a sense of self-esteem as a black person, without the influence of the white colonizer, recognizing the value as a descendant of a people who had already been working gold and silver for more than two thousand years.

Thinking about the affections and spaces of affections, as well as in other spheres of society that until today are sustained through the work of black bodies, inclusive churches emerged based on the knowledge, spiritualities and contributions of black gay men and/or black Pentecostal fags (SANTOS, 2022), as well as black lesbian women, who gave rise to several Pentecostal denominations that continue to multiply.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The experiences of these stigmatized peripheral Pentecostal black fagots show the discomfort that their presence causes in society and in some religious spheres, including Christian religions. They challenge heteronormative standards and hegemonic notions of masculinity and spirituality present in evangelical churches. Western masculinity, built from the violent logic of the white man and the patriarchal system, is imposed as a norm and marginalizes those who are outside this pattern, such as blacks, gays and queers.

This marginalization is even more intense in black communities (quilombos), in families, in spaces of faith and even in black movements, where homosexuality is denied and rejected. The loneliness and suffering faced by these individuals are reflections of a society marked by racism, sexism and LGBTI+phobia.

Oyewumi also points to the imposition of Western gender categories on other cultures, showing how the idea of “woman”

did not exist in Yoruba culture, for example. This reflection invites us to rethink social categories and to question the imposition of binary standards of gender and sexuality.

The presence of Pentecostal black fagots in inclusive churches challenges the established order and exposes the contradictions and oppressions present in these religious institutions. These black Pentecostal fagots, through their existence and resistance, question the norms of gender, sexuality and spirituality that are universally imposed.

However, these inclusive churches still face internal challenges in the quest to reduce the number of single black gay men who suffer from Brazilian multifaceted racism. There is still a predominance of the figure of the white man, including in the leadership of these churches. It is necessary to recognize and value the contribution of the Pentecostal black queues that paved the way for the expansion of these religious denominations.

The existence of the Pentecostal black queue is uncomfortable, but it also represents resistance within evangelical religious spaces permeated by power dynamics. Through their experiences, the Pentecostal black fagots question and destabilize the power structures and devices that try to standardize masculinities and spiritualities inspired by the hegemonic white cis-heteronormativity. Amidst the violence and oppression they face, the Pentecostal black fagots resist. This resistance is a reminder that the struggle for existence and recognition continues, even in the face of adversity.

The intersectionality of gender, race and religion, based on the concept coined by Kimberly Crenshaw (2002), helps us to try to understand the complexity and discomfort that the figure of the Pentecostal black fag causes in society and religious institutions. This figure challenges heteronormative norms and standards, as well as the patriarchal and

racist structures present in these spheres. This is not surprising, considering the thinking of Lélia Gonzales (1994) and Sueli Carneiro (2017) that, in Brazil, race has structured class since “abolition”.

The Pentecostal black fag represents the intersection of multiple oppressions and subalternities. She faces racial discrimination, LGBTI+phobia and marginalization within religious institutions, which often reinforce heterosexuality and whiteness as central elements of existence.

The existence of the Pentecostal black fag is uncomfortable because it challenges and disturbs the established order. By asserting her identity and spirituality, she questions the hegemonic notions of masculinity, sexuality and spirituality imposed by society and conservative religions. Its presence exposes the contradictions and oppressions present in religious institutions, which need to face internal challenges and recognize the importance of diversity of experiences and identities.

Intersectionality helps us understand the complexity of the Pentecostal black fag

experiences, recognizing the influences and mutual influences between race, gender, sexuality and religion. She shows us that the fight for equality and justice cannot be limited to a single form of oppression, but rather encompass all forms of inequality and inequality that they have suffered as marginalized people.

By respecting the voices and experiences of Pentecostal black fag, we recognize the resistance and resilience of those individuals who insist on occupying their spaces and claiming their existence. Their experiences invite us to rethink imposed social and religious norms (NATIVIDADE, 2016; promoting a more inclusive society that welcomes and celebrates the diversity of identities and expressions.

Therefore, the figure of Pentecostal black fagreminds us of the importance of building religious and social spaces that welcome and value diversity, challenging oppressive structures and working towards security and justice for all people, regardless of their race, gender, sexuality or religion.

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