

## Article

# Walking Indecently with Marcella Althaus-Reid: Doing Dissident and Liberative Theologies from the South

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**Abstract:** This theological reflection is a motivation to walk in the footsteps of Marcella Althaus-Reid to discover the disruptive principles of Latin American Queer Theology. Between *tangos* and popular music, libertine evocations and dissident stories, prosthetic considerations, and transit strategies, this indecent text indicates some revitalizing ideas that manifest the need to think and inhabit the Global South in a more queer way. The voice of the South is powerfully theological and potentially revolutionary.

**Keywords:** queer theology; Marcella Althaus-Reid; indecent theology; global south; Latin America

*I dedicate this article to Hugo Córdova Quero,  
a great queer professor and indecent guide.*

## 1. Introduction

In 2018, the first publication of *Conexión Queer: Revista Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Teologías Queer* manifested the need within the Latin American theological–pastoral field to formulate and disseminate new theological discourses and queer pastoral practices in the Global South.<sup>1</sup> Hugo Córdova Quero, Jorge A. Aquino, Gloria Careaga, Andre Musskopf, and Saul Serna Segura<sup>2</sup>—the editorial team of the first issue of *Conexión Queer*—indeed recognized that the term *queer* was a notion that in a certain way alluded to universal situations. However, it was necessary to interrogate its equivalent in Spanish, given that this term could be strange for many people in Latin America and the Caribbean because it was a mainly unknown Anglo-Saxon word, especially in the religious contexts of the Global South (Córdova Quero et al. 2018, p. 2).

Since then, “Latin American Queer Theologies” began to present themselves as “Queer theologies”, “Bolleras theologies”, “Mariconas theologies”, “Cuir theologies”, and theologies from/about sex–gender dissidence in the Global South.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, this desire to produce theologies—situated in and enunciated from the Global South—proved to be the beginning of a powerful renewal of the academic and epistemological project undertaken by Teresa de Lauretis. That scholar—in the introduction to a special issue of *Differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*—noted that it was necessary:

[ . . . ] to be willing to examine, make explicit, compare, or confront the respective histories of supposed conceptual frameworks that have characterized the self-representations of lesbian and gay people in North America, people of different races and whites so far: from there, we might then move to the refounding or reinvention of the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual (De Lauretis 1991, p. iv).

*Conexión Queer*’s renewal effort, in effect, sought to shift the research focus away from North America to consider the Global South.<sup>4</sup> Those of us who inhabit the Global South know that queer theoretical formulations born in Anglo-Saxon contexts have been projects that have sought emancipation and dissidence. However, they have often been assumed as projects of emancipation and dissidence while being considered geopolitical understandings from which the Global North has unilaterally imposed itself on the Global South.



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Thus, they have invalidated and minimized popular movements, resistance proposals, and knowledge arising, debated and circulating in the Global South.

The Global South presents a heterogeneous field of creativity and innovation. It is characterized as a plurality of theological discourses transgressing the systems of domination that denounce the constitutive coloniality of cis-heteropatriarchal theology and the coloniality proper to Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon theological narratives.<sup>5</sup> From this transgressive southern trait, new places of theological enunciation have emerged that broaden the repertoire of theological themes and subjects. Built upon the shoulders of Afro-descendant people, women, peasants, indigenous people, LGBTBIQ+ people, mother earth, and others, they incorporate the intersection between different categories of analysis, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality.

In this fashion, “Latin American Queer Theologies” attempted to explore, denounce, and overcome the patterns of domination imposed by the epistemological and *theo(ideo)logical* Eurocentrism that dominates every sphere of social life in a globalized world. By doing so, they demanded the need for situated and contextual theologies<sup>6</sup> to understand the place of dissident socio-political identities, the complexities of cultural processes, and the space for emerging subaltern subjectivities, among other issues (Namaste 1996, p. 83).

A review of some canonical and traditional theological texts evidences the limitation of the voice of constructed otherness relegated to the exoticism of the peripheries. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s famous essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Spivak 1988), presents the inequality of power behind the processes of colonization and how subalternation—both of groups and individuals—promotes their vulnerability and the concealment of the other. Likewise, pastoral theological, academic, and research work must make visible these systematic injustices and atrocious *epistemicides* that have resulted from colonial processes and have tragically infected theological narratives that promote liberation and social justice (Ratuva 2016; Kłos 2017; De Sousa Santos 2014).

Given that the religious have historically gone hand in hand with colonialist processes, “Latin American Queer Theologies”—motivated by decolonial and postcolonial understandings—seek to point out the colonial tricks that are mobilized within religious communities and theological discourses. Thus, even though religious as an object of study has been detailed—primarily through the processes of secularization—it is undeniable that the presence of the religious has been significant in the processes of liberation and revolution but also the movements in favor of civil rights and social justice.

In the famous essay *Marx in a Gay Bar* (Althaus-Reid 2019), Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid<sup>7</sup> recalls how while participating in a congress on theology and globalization organized by a group of European churches, she found among the guests at this conference, predominantly from Europe and the United States, a small delegation of Latin American theologians from the pioneers of the movement now known as “Latin American Liberation Theology” (TLL). Althaus-Reid narrates that she listened to these men who spoke of their memories of struggle in Medellín and Puebla and remembered their experiences of militancy in the 1970s. Suddenly, one of them asked her “And you, Marcella, what is your work, your theology?” (Althaus-Reid 2019, p. 32). Then, she spoke to them about her commitment and militancy with a “Latin American Sexual Theology of Liberation”; faced with this answer, those priests asked “What does sexuality have to do with TLL?” (Althaus-Reid 2019, p. 33).<sup>8</sup>

Evidently, with that question, Althaus-Reid understood that even though the “Latin American Sexual Theology of Liberation”—which can also be called “Latin American Queer Theology”—had many aspects in common with TLL, those who dedicated themselves to such theological work had no commitment to liberation from sexual oppressions and impositions. For the Argentine theologian, it was clear that those theologians, unfortunately, had failed to follow the complex, risky, and disorderly creative route towards a radical theology of liberation since they had left aside a vital part of their materialistic base, such as sexuality.

Identifying herself as “[ . . . ] a scandalous theologian, educated during the military dictatorships. I am accustomed to producing ruptures rather than reconciliations with structures that cannot be reformed”; she creates a theological thought that inquires into the possibility of doing a theology “out of the closet” or “a theology without underwear” (Althaus-Reid 2019, p. 34).

That kind of theology implies two aspects. On the one hand, it is theology done without a supposed sexual theological “neutrality” because such “neutrality” does not exist and never existed in the church or theology. It consists of a theological narrative that openly declares its sexual interests and denounces the sexual indoctrination that predominates in Christianity and its hegemonic theological reflections. On the other hand, it is a theology that questions the role of the theologian and his theological integrity concerning his context of sexuality. It is a theology that broadens and radicalizes the field of suspicion in the hermeneutic circle of liberation theology. This is the Latin American Theology of Sexual Liberation: an incarnated and embodied theology, a theology that feels and thinks the Global South, a theology that resides in the southern territories, a theology that is shameless and courageous, a theology made for and by minorities.

Based on the thought and legacy of Althaus-Reid—Argentine theologian and pioneer in queer theological studies—this article presents some fundamental ideas to advance the exercise of queer inquiry or “queerization” of theology in/from the Global South. To fulfill this purpose, I delve passionately into *The Queer God* (Althaus-Reid 2003), a unique theological work with a very high disruptive, indecent, and liberating power. In that work, Althaus-Reid develops a sexually transgressive theology that becomes a powerful critique of the social, religious, and political systems of the Global South. As the Argentine theologian says in the introduction to her book:

The Queer God introduces a new theology from the margins of sexual deviance and economic exclusion. Its chapters on Bisexual Theology, Sadean holiness, gay worship in Brazil, and Queer sainthood mark the search for a different face of God—the Queer God who challenges the oppressive powers of heterosexual orthodoxy, whiteness, and global capitalism. Inspired by the transgressive spaces of Latin American spirituality, where the experiences of slum children merge with Queer interpretations of grace and holiness, The Queer God seeks to liberate God from the closet of traditional Christian thought and to embrace God’s part in the lives of gays, lesbians, and the poor (Althaus-Reid 2003, n.p).

Althaus-Reid begins by recalling how—many years ago—liberation theologies began to be suspicious of ideologically determined definitions, such as what is theology or what is a theologian? In those days, liberationists used to say that the theologian was a worker or a miner seeking to discern the presence of God in a politically and economically oppressed community. Furthermore, in those days, it did not occur to them that it was necessary to dismantle the sexual ideology of theology or that theologians had to come out of their closets and root—embody?—their theology in a praxis of living intellectual honesty and coherence. With this, as Althaus-Reid rightly states, God was kept hidden in the closet. No one would think of doing theology in gay bars, though they are full of theologians. Concurrently, no one would think of discussing drag as a theological device. However, religious images and theological symbols are infused with bodily performances and costumes that dislocate and question gender. Theology was still too “decent” to liberate sexual minorities, prostitutes, and HIV-positive people. Likewise, women theologians kept track of the reflections among poor, cis-heterosexual women in Latin America. Still, they never went to the bars where salsa dancing took place, nor did they meet the “indecent” women they used to talk about in their reflections.

Althaus-Reid’s thesis is that, indeed, the possibility of doing theology for social transformation—as promulgated in the contexts of liberation theology—should lead to a journey of re-discovery and withdrawal of the veil of the true face of God, also as part of a queer theological quest. Undoubtedly, far from leading us towards nihilism, Queer Theologies from the Global South lead contextual theologies towards new limits and

interstices while reflecting on alternatives that are also theological, the more sexual and political, they are assumed.<sup>9</sup> However, where can we begin? Everywhere! No matter where we turn, we can find such traditions of theological-sexual disruption throughout the Latin American and Caribbean context. Althaus-Reid (2003) presents the following example:

If I go, for instance, to the history of the church in Latin America and decide to queer the history of the Jesuitic Missions, I may find that, in many ways, the missions were more sexual than Christian. The point is that Christianity came to my continent more as a sexual project concerned with the praxis of specific heterosexual understandings elevated to a sacred level (as most ideologies are) than to explain Christian theology. However, if Christian theology was challenging to explain to nations of very different cosmological backgrounds, it was more difficult to explain European sexuality. In the complex mixture of oppression that the original countries in South America suffered under the missions (Jesuitic or Franciscan, for instance), their theological revolt was also a political and a sexual one (p. 9).

According to the theological passion and the path followed by Althaus-Reid, this article seeks to present an emancipatory and very queer TLL, which emerges to the rhythm of boleros and tangos. Through some libertine practices, the analysis helps us to consider the possibility of a Latin American queer ecclesiology.

## 2. Latin American Queer Theology among Boleros, Tangos, and Rancheras ...

Popular songs from *tangos*, *rancheras*, and *boleros*, born in Latin America, can be an excellent example of the potentiality of queer narratives. Althaus-Reid realized that sentimental songs are another chapter to be added to the collection of queer ecclesiastical traditions. For her, many of these songs refer to love and oppositional cartographies beyond patriarchal cis-heterosexual marriages. For example, the Argentine theologian delves into the music of singer Chavela Vargas (1919–2012), known for her Mexican *rancheras*.

Vargas confessed her purity as a lesbian and transmitted it through the following message to the youth in Mexico and Spain: “do not feel discouraged but give yourself to the world instead as a pure and honest homosexual, because there is dignity and beauty to share here” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 19). In her songs, Vargas (2000) speaks of exile and of the desire she felt many times in her life to tell her loved one “let us go somewhere else where we can love each other in peace” (p. 20). Undoubtedly, this beautiful and talented indecent singer, in many ways, claimed her lesbian identity and, above all, spoke and sang about love in any form in which it presents itself. By assuming the purity of her lesbian life, Vargas destabilized and dislocated the apparent “purity” of the moral presuppositions of cis-heterosexuality. By doing so, she displaced the categories of moral “contamination” and “sickness” that—according to such cis-heterosexual assumptions—are associated with sex-gender dissidence in Latin America.

Moreover, Althaus-Reid drew attention to the fact that Vargas found a divine origin in her lesbianism, which she called the “gift of her gods”. She destabilized the cis-heterosexual spiritual arguments of many Latin American Christian religious discourses. Vargas’ songs undoubtedly re-signify love in the lives of people who deviate from cis-heteropatriarchal sex and gender norms.

The exact interpretation of Althaus-Reid can be perceived in many other Latin American musical artists. Listening to the enormous discography of Juan Gabriel<sup>10</sup>—the great Mexican composer and singer—we witness a masterful theological exposition.

The renowned “Divo de Juarez” sang insistently of love and God in songs, such as “Qué divino amor, qué divino amor” [What a divine love, what a divine love] (1973), “Si Dios me ayuda” [if God helps me] (1974), and “Jesucristo, dónde estás, tú? ¿Dónde estás, tú?” [Jesus Christ, where are you? where are you?] (1975). He also passionately sang of eternal love, of that love that in his songs seemed to revive and become eternal: “Cómo quisiera, ay, que tú vivieras, que tus ojitos jamás se hubieran cerrado nunca y estar

mirándolos. Amor eterno e inolvidable. Tarde o temprano yo voy a estar contigo para seguir, amándonos” (1990).<sup>11</sup> In the same way, the divo constantly thanked the divinity for giving him the gift of love: “Gracias a Dios” [thanks to God] (1996). That was an intense and deep love: “Que yo te amo, te amo, te amo, amor, te amo” [that I love you, I love, I love you, love, I love you] (2003). Moreover, he recognized that he loved the way he did because the Virgin Mary—in her invocation of the Guadalupe—has loved him first: “La mujer que me ama es de cara muy bella, veo la fe de mi pueblo en su manto de estrellas” (1999).<sup>12</sup>

In this extensive theologizing musicalized to the rhythm of *rancheras* and *boleros*, the “Divo de Juarez” made the language of the divine and the narrative of the sacred mysteries of love his own to compose unique musical pieces. When sung by the voice of a queer man, they are charged with a disruptive and emancipating sense, given that they remain in history as songs of dissident love, of queer love, which liberate and fill with passion those who listen with their hearts. Even in some of Juan Gabriel’s songs, fragments are loaded with a double meaning according to which queer potentiality is perceived. In the song “Eres divina” [you are divine], apparently written between 1991 and 2007, which has been attributed to Juan Gabriel but of which, strangely, there is no record in any listening device, but only its written content can be recovered, we hear the following:

Una mañana llegó María llorando triste a la vecindad. Porque se ha muerto ya su marido, ¿y ahora quién se lo va a enterrar? Los compañeros de algunos años ya se olvidaron de su pesar. Como no tiene quien se lo entierre, viene a que le hagan la caridad. No se preocupe doña María, si su marido ya se murió. Y si no tiene quien se lo entierre, mañana, le hago el entierro yo. No se preocupe doña María, si su marido ya se murió. Y si no tiene quien se lo entierre, mañana le hago el entierro yo. (Juan Gabriel, s.f.)<sup>13</sup>

Several aspects are striking in this song. First, it alludes to the context of the death of a loved one and the burial of the corpse. Secondly, the action of *enterrar* [to bury] takes on a double meaning, given that, although it alludes to the act of burying the body of Maria’s husband, it is also a slam expression used to speak of the coital act—penetration—between Maria and the “Divo de Juarez”. Thirdly, it opens a sexual paradox, since if Maria is a widowed woman and Juan Gabriel is a gay man, there could only be a coital encounter between the two if we assume the possibility that Maria is a heterosexual cuir woman and Juan Gabriel is a homosexual cuir man. This is based on the fact that cis-heterosexual women do not have sexual relations with men who do not comply with patriarchal paradigms, nor do men who follow cis-homonormativity have sexual encounters with women.

With the above, we do not want to force the interpretation of the song of the “Divo de Juarez”, but only to express some issues that are always left aside. Perhaps there is a fourth meaning: Maria’s husband’s sexual organ “died”—erectile dysfunction—and she needs “another” man—another living body with a living sexual organ—to satisfy her coital needs. In addition, we cannot overlook a very queer element of this song that we have already mentioned: although in some music portals that compile lyrics it is attributed to the “Divo de Juarez”, there is not a single record of this song, neither in audio nor in video. We dare to affirm, taking the circumstances in our favor, that this impossibility of the reality of the song becomes a fundamentally queer element. Perhaps, in another world, this song exists and is sung, or it was sung, and continues to be sung, in the queer clandestinity in which the “Divo de Juarez” danced and performed.

In the article *Los imaginarios disruptivos del cuerpo queer: un análisis de la masculinidad disidente en la ilustración mexicana del siglo XXI* [Disruptive imaginaries of the queer body: an analysis of dissident masculinity in Mexican illustration in the 21st century], [Trejo and Ruiz \(2021\)](#) trace some works that problematize the traditional representation of hegemonic masculinity in Mexican national culture by including homosexual desire, feminized bodies, and ethnic diversity in the image of men. In their research, they turn to the artistic work of Gonzalo Angulo, whose illustrations hybridize homosexuality with global culture through his character Pierna Cruzada. Through them, the Mexican illustrator makes connections



between his ideology of queer subjectivities and the repertoire of female icons of Mexican and international pop music.

“Qué importa qué dirán tu padre y tu mamá” [What does it matter what your father and mother would say?] is the lyric of the song “Amor prohibido” [forbidden love] (1994) by Tex-Mex singer Selena Quintanilla. Its metaphorical reading reveals the impossibility of queer relationships in the Mexican context and the prejudice existing in the LGBTIQ+ community against those who decide to practice transvestism or drag. Using this song by Selena, Pierna Cruzada reveals these impossibilities of subjectivity that come not only from the traditional family but also from the members of the LGBTIQ+ community itself and invites the viewer to accept and express themselves as they would like.

To return to Althaus-Reid’s proposal, some questions could be opened for reflection: How much theology can come out of this Selena’s song? What could be theologized from there? Is it a “simple song”? Selena Quintanilla makes the social hierarchy issue visible in her song, according to which segregation and social exclusion are established based on class, ethnicity, sex, gender, and the like. Those are precisely the gaps that emerge in this social hierarchy that catalog love between the two lovers from “distintas sociedades” [different societies] as “prohibido” [forbidden]: “Amor prohibido murmuran por las calles, porque somos de distintas sociedades. Amor prohibido nos dice todo el mundo” (1994).<sup>14</sup> In the face of such social misfortune, the dissident love between the two lovers who inspire the song triumphs. The economic gap is presented as the crucial reason for the social difference between said lovers languishing in the face of revolutionary and powerful love. Thus, “el dinero no importa” [money does not matter], nor “qué importa que dirá también la sociedad” [what does it matter what society will also say] because “solo importa nuestro amor” [only our love matters].

The song by Selena, then, speaks of the revolution of a poor woman who loves with radicality and passion in a society that affirms that her way of loving is *Contra natura* [against nature] and for this reason is “prohibido” [forbidden]. However, it connects with the Christian message. Does this revolution that Selena sings speak of an agapeic love that manages to overcome the love of money, “the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6.10)? Does this song speak of complete and radical love, according to which it is understood that “a person’s life does not depend on the abundance of his goods” (Luke 12.15)? Does the love of the poor woman in the song resemble the love of the poor woman who gave all she had (Mark 12.43–44)? Does the indecency of the love of the lovers have anything in common with the indecency of the love of the woman who entered the house of Simon without being authorized and poured a bottle of costly perfume of pure nard on the head of Jesus Christ (Luke 7.36–8.3)?

Following my analysis, allow me to return to the *tangos* of Argentina. Althaus-Reid (2003, p. 20) argues that when *tangos* are sung, they also tell stormy stories of perpetual displacement that are worth considering in this collection of new sources of theology. Although superficially cis-heterosexual, most *tangos* and Mexican songs also have narratives laden with double meanings that allude to sexual closets, as Córdova Quero (2016, 2022) has also pointed out. In *tangos*, we find two simultaneous processes. On the one hand, there is the displacement of desire: to love those who do not love us or cannot love us in public. On the other, there is the displacement of social locations to diasporas of resistance: as in the processes of impoverishment, race exclusion, and stigmatization based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In general, these two types of displacement are interwoven in *tangos*. In this “interweaving”, poverty and unhappiness meet loneliness and heartbreak, representing the most significant suffering of vulnerable diasporas and the core of social exclusion. Althaus-Reid (2003, p. 20) states that for those who work in pastoral care for the elderly—as in the Metropolitan Community Church in Argentina—that situation implies knowing how fear, poverty, and isolation are the only company of many sexually dissident individuals.

With the narrative constructed here, *tangos* can undoubtedly be argued as another source of Latin American Queer Theology, or at least of a queer theology situated in the

South, an Argentinian queer theology. Following Marta Savigliano, in *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Savigliano 1995), Althaus-Reid asserts that tangos are songs about different forms of “exile” and as such represent the experience of exile abroad or, more generally, the “experience of internal exile” in one’s own country (Althaus-Reid 2003, pp. 20–21). For this reason, *tangos* can be assumed as queer or at least have “something” of queer since they represent the “longing” for home, the “melancholy” of forced displacement, and the “strangeness” of those who feel “stateless” and “abnormal”. As an Argentine queer theologian, Althaus-Reid not only listened to *tangos* but also felt the passion of the stories of exiles, walking lust, or excessive dreams and actions that go beyond borders. In this sense, Savigliano’s ideas about dancing *tango* as a “way of thinking” (Savigliano 1995, p. 16) were taken by Althaus-Reid and transferred to Latin American Queer Theology. Given that southern dissident theologies—dancing to the rhythm of Argentine tangos—result in a ‘provocation’ that immobilizes the logic of traditional theological discourse, it shows an unusual but powerful way of indecently approaching theological questions.

It can be said, then, that whoever does Latin American Queer Theology is a person who lives the reality of exile and is part of the diasporas that make Latin American hegemonic narratives uncomfortable. Precisely because of the above, there are almost no traces of Latin American Queer Theology in the traditional altars and the discourses of the most powerful religious representatives. The same occurs in the traditional universities of conservative ideology and the core of the prevailing hegemonic systems. There is not—nor can there be—any Latin American Queer Theology in those spaces where “liberation” and “sexual” theologies are produced from the standpoint of decency and hegemonic patronage. Latin American Queer Theology is, necessarily, indecent and perverted!<sup>15</sup>

There is Queer Theology in the postcard hidden in a notebook or a Bible and also between the separated hands of many queer couples who cannot hold hands inside the church. There is a rich source of wisdom and theological potentiality in the prostitute who enters the temple—despite not being well received—and kneels with devotion and sings with passion those religious songs that say that God is her beloved and her lover. There is Queer Theology in the *tangos* and ballads but also many of the dances and popular dances, parades, and indecent carnivals in the peripheries. There is Queer Theology in the libraries and gay bars, in the monasteries, and in the areas of sexual tolerance. There is Queer Theology, where nomadic subjects inhabit and transit the lands of exiled people and find their different forms of purity and holiness, discovering divine grace, especially in the lands occupied by sexually excluded people. As happened to Marcella Althaus-Reid and to many queer theologians contemporary to her, the person writing this article was also stigmatized and expelled from “decent” ecclesial places, from “decent” Christian communities, and from academic spaces where only a “decent”, “modest” and full of “shame” theology fits. Latin American Queer Theology and Latin American queer theologians are ‘*sinvergüenzas*’.<sup>16</sup>

Althaus-Reid found out that there is Queer Theology in the act of “dancing *tango*”, given that there are toe-tapping and foot-playing as theological agents of provocation. Some of the rhythmic dynamics of Argentine tango may even be assumed to be theological motifs and generators of theology, given that they allude to a human sadness or longing, but also the capacity for resilience, for “hit and run” as if it were a guerrilla tactic. “Dancing *tango*” can provide a dishonorable way of doing theology by allowing theology to become a spectacular confession, as *tango* does in its “public exposure of intimate miseries, shameful behaviors, and unjustifiable attitudes” (Savigliano 1995, p. 18).

The Argentine theologian invites all queer theologians to recognize that this is the time to theologize indecently, to come out of the closets that make theology a rigorous practice at the service of hegemony. Undoubtedly, the best way to go out of the closet is by opening our hearts with authenticity and recognizing that many of us theologians have encountered Queer Divinity in different spaces. We have found the Queer Divinity in churches and bars while reading the bible or having sexual encounters, singing praises that acknowledge the greatness of God and vogueing the songs of queer emancipation, and wearing the sacred

cassock of the Sunday rites or dressing up as women to go out and march for the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community.

### 3. Walking the Global South and Evoking “*Libertinely*” the Divinity

At a time when a cis-heteropatriarchal society controls religious narratives, restricts freedom of the spirit, and silences dissenting spiritual voices calling for justice and dignity, to speak of sexual liberation theology is to say of “libertine” theology. Yet, why “libertine”? Althaus-Reid asserts that, while for many people the Latin American notion of *libertinaje* alludes to the condition of being libertine and acting “beyond freedom” and using freedom to commit “illicit” acts, for people of her generation in Argentina, the “libertine” memory consisted of “a political memory, which, over a period of centuries, focused on a dualistic split of freedom” (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 24).

With the above, Althaus-Reid refers to the famous debate of *libertad* versus *libertinaje* [freedom versus libertinage] that arbitrarily delimited and ordered not only sexual behavior but also was related to the longed-for democratic life. At some point in the 1970s, according to Marcella, campaigning for the democratic vote in Argentina was considered a clear act of debauchery and perversion since the campaigns of a people longing for liberation and justice fractured the limits of the very poor ‘freedom’ granted by the military dictatorship. Even gathering more than three people in a house to celebrate the breaking of bread was considered an act of debauchery punishable by law, as in the time of the Roman persecutions. Córdova Quero (2023) says that at the time, “[...] going to church was not only an act of faith but also of courage”, as military police surrounded his home church. The contextualization in Argentine history is essential because this same exercise of coercion and control, under the pretext of “freedom”, was extended to the religious communities of the Global South. Althaus-Reid—realizing how political and social issues shape ecclesial realities and religious discourses—affirms that:

In Latin America, politically and theologically speaking, the churches, like dictatorial regimes, tend to give the name ‘libertine’ to their fears. They fear the freedom manifested in the praxis of bodies gathering together in rebellious ways, outside the signposts of their opaque and limited discourses. They fear the bodies determined to proceed by interrelating and combining themselves in the small hours, but also the recreation and discovery of new ways of relating to each other as in an act of sabotage, which destabilizes the relationship between God and humanity by questioning human relationships and, by default, God’s relationships too. In our example, other fears were related to the combination of the popular votes and voices shouting in political disagreement. They were also fears of bodies cuddling together to become more bodies as in times of persecution of love and justice (p. 24).

Latin American Queer Theology undoubtedly seeks to evoke that body politic of *libertinaje* in the context of the search for God, given that it is a common ground of theological and political transgression. This transgression goes “beyond” a cultural context of socially accepted sexual covenants, as it leads to all political realms that influence and define theological praxis.

In *Marx in a Gay Bar* (Althaus-Reid 2019), Althaus-Reid asserts that this exercise in *libertinaje*, which takes the form of “go further”, seeks to *decode* the rules according to which traditional morality and canonical theology have been constructed. In this way, one could move from an anecdotal and rigid theology to a contemporary theology that, by its passionate rebelliousness, is committed to praxis in favor of the present and the future (Althaus-Reid 2019, p. 31). It is a question, then, of overcoming that historiography crystallized in the ecclesial councils to assume the irruption of new discourses of justice and emancipation in the ecclesial communities. These new discourses, without a doubt, will allow the identification of other processes of liberation that were not theologically authorized. This is the transformative potential of a “libertine evocation” in theology.



As the *libertinaje* of Latin American Queer Theology breaks the traditional theological canon's framework, it becomes necessary to extend the theological task to "indecent" or "perverted" territories and realities. That could entail going to a gay bar frequented by a group of priests who take off their cassocks to dance to the rhythm of vogue or to a drag queen show, where sexual dissidents transit between identities and shamelessly discover their bodies. It could also imply venturing into a brothel, where women dance erotically to the rhythm of ballads and undress as a strategy to resist extreme poverty or to a techno club where young people get high and dance non-stop but also kiss freely and shout without fear that they love without restriction. It could also require entering the cell of a cloistered convent, where an ecstatic nun feels an orgasm while touching her naked body and thinking about God. Undoubtedly, those who dedicate themselves to producing Latin American Queer Theologies must travel through those diasporic, indecent, and perverted places to find in them a network of knowledge and experiences that also speak of God.

Latin American Queer Theologies deploy a disruptive practice that de-situates and re-situates theological work in other indecent locations and contexts! Thus, it frightens the religious hegemony that has cloistered God in convents and churches, in homes and cis-heterosexual families, and the moralizing logic of the cis-heteronormative system!

In this way, Latin American Queer Theologies distance themselves from one of the great dangers lurking in contemporary theological thought, namely, constructing pretty theologies. Those theologies, instead of rethinking everything in the frames of reference that currently constitute the condition of possibility of all effective meaningfulness, "limit themselves to updating and renewing the vocabulary or changing the name of the adversaries, but leaving intact the underlying schemes" (Torres Queiruga 2000, p. 54).

The exercise of *re-location*, undoubtedly, seeks to move the *locus theologicus* from the institutional strata to the terrain inhabited by those who have not been taken into account in the theological narrative or, better, by those who have only been objectified in that narrative: "[t]he dislocation of theological discourse with respect to its naturalized locus, produces a diversity of other dislocations" (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 29). The person who produces queer theologies in the Global South must, therefore, undertake a process of dislocation that—as Butler mentions in *Undoing Gender* (Butler 2004)—consists of opening the imaginative spectrum of understanding, creating scenarios that allow us to desire, love, and believe freely and fully.

#### 4. Theological Prostheses to Transit towards a Latin American Queer Theology

The previous section evidenced the need to urgently consider those "libertine" bodies that dare to create and re-create a process of mutations through "theological prostheses". From a type of sexual hermeneutics, they provide novel sex-corporal maps enriched by the cartographic art of wild dreams and transgressive movements, according to which radical innovations are sought in the ways of feeling, thinking, and believing (Hitchcock 1999). This must be repeated: *prosthetic tools* are needed to produce multiple dislocations and theological deviations conducive to taking religious discourse out of the narrow framework of "decency" in which cis-heteronormativity holds faith and spirituality, grace and salvation, but also divinity and humanity, body, and soul!

Prosthetic tools are the only way to modify the exclusionary doctrines and discriminatory practices in the ecclesial and community nuclei since,

church dogmatics, heavily relying on the organization of bodies and political and sexual relations, have made of the libertine an alien not only in its reflections on, for instance, God and the Trinity, or the politics of grace and redemption, but in its ecclesiology (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 30).

Moreover, the Argentine theologian recalls that this process of theological fracture-dislocation is vital because traditional dogmatics—the *straight* dogma of Christian heterodoxy—constitutes the *corpus christianorum* that organizes the relations between the body of divine and human knowledge held by theologians and the body of the believing community (Althaus-Reid 2003, p. 114).

To such a degree, ecclesiological reflections become hermeneutical exercises on the church's organizational, hierarchical, and communitarian structures. Nevertheless, the ecclesiological hermeneutics of the Christian Church have been constructed almost entirely considering only the cis-heterosexual life experience. Given that situation, it is necessary and pertinent to undertake this process of de-construction and de-organization to move towards a re-building and re-organization of the Christian Church. That would lead to an inclusive church free of injustices based on nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among others.

The overall process, in effect, will consist of a powerful praxis of theological transformation. With particular interest, it should emerge from the testimony of life and the recognition of the body of human beings who have been removed to the peripheries, silenced, and undervalued in the history of theology and the Christian Church. They are women, indigenous people, trans, and non-binary people, the poor, prostitutes, revolutionary youth, HIV-positive people, people outside the his-heterosexual order or racial hegemony, and neurodivergent people. In other words, all people ever considered *freaks* as not fitting into the rigid—*normal*, and *right*—cis-heteropatriarchal way of life. However, is it possible to live fully with imposed “forms” that crystallize the fluidity of life into a single form? Queer people—despised by hegemony—also create, shape, and embody the queer body of religion and theology. They are responsible for bringing new liberating promises in the face of old theological practices that have systematically segregated and oppressed millions of people.

As “hermeneutical avenues”, the theological prostheses that emerge in the life experience of dissenting people form a “restless” and moving body—doubly moving, moved, and re-moved—that challenges the political and divine contextual constraints of traditional theology. At the same time, they overcome, disprove, and—in many cases—re-move them. In addition, this strangely restless and prosthetic body is a compound of the bodies of non-believers. They form an ensemble of those bodies that have stopped believing in the grand hegemonic divine sexual narratives. Concurrently, it also includes those atheists of cis-heterosexuality-based theologies, who certainly are the ones that most contribute impatience, doubt, irony, and multiple potentialities to destroy those rigid structures that oppress. Including these bodies—permanently excluded and silenced for their dissidence and dissent—is part of constructing a new heuristic device that teaches us to subvert the law. Notwithstanding, that is not entirely “new”, given that the discomfort with the law shown by the Apostle Paul in his Letters is reliable evidence of the tensions and fissures that have always existed in the dominant theology. In this regard, [Althaus-Reid \(2003\)](#) affirms the following: “[t]he law depends on the minuscule twisted ways which in the end allow its continuation only by welcoming scandals or disruption to facilitate new beginnings and permanent growth” (p. 31).

In hermeneutic terms, these “new” beginnings produced by theological prostheses function as fictitious mirrors that follow a logic of permutations. We can perceive this logic of prosthetic permutations, for example, in the work of Sade, the great indecent and fetishistic inspirer of Althaus-Reid's theological indecencies. His novels—as in the biblical narrative of the book of *Genesis*—once all has been shown and said, the Sadean texts reach a saturation point. A new scene begins as a fresh explanation of a new sexual genesis. Undoubtedly, such permutations, in general, offer material to initiate an *anti-genesis* by creating prosthetic processes in which bodies “embody praxis” by embodying the “scandalous” in their hermeneutic circle: “[t]he body is not the instrument but the embodiment of praxis” ([Hitchcock 1999](#), p. 87).

Theological prostheses—as understood by the Argentine theologian Althaus-Reid—are an effort to “recover” what has been lost because of traditional theological language. That is also a language of genesis and order, written in a dynamic of “transplants”, a critical bi-theological language that deals with the “incommunicable”, according to Derridean expression ([Derrida 1998](#), p. 8; [Althaus-Reid 2003](#), p. 31; [Althaus-Reid 2004a](#), pp. 401–4). Jacques Derrida wrote little about “transplantation”, but it informs his “logic of the *supple-*

ment”,<sup>17</sup> where the prosthetic nature of the “graft” positions it as a necessary element, not of established being, but of becoming. Once we abandon the illusion of an immutable—or at least restored—it becomes possible to think more openly and expansively of the hybridity involved in “transplantation”. Queer Theory operates as a dispositive that allows us to modify the traditional *corpus* of Christian theology and lead it towards a modification of its con-formative elements to make room for the “indecent” issues of sexuality and gender. Accordingly, Latin American Queer Theology emerged when the prosthesis of Queer Theory is incorporated into Latin American Liberation Theology to advocate for the sexual liberation of the people of the Global South. Althaus-Reid realized that when she responded to the question posed by Marxist theologians: “And you, Marcella, what is your work, your theology?” (Althaus-Reid 2019, p. 32). Lucidly, Althaus-Reid understood that her work consisted, fundamentally, of introducing queer prosthetic devices into the traditional theological body. That insertion not only aims to queerize the religious performances and doctrines that make up the ecclesiological magisterium but, above all, to show that the body of Christ, the Christian Church, is queer. It is so because it is made up of human beings who exist and believe despite being constantly treated as strangers and outsiders to the plan wisely established by the Divinity.

### 5. There Is Much Theology That Talks about Queers Living in the Global South . . . but Queers Make Little Southern Theology

Althaus-Reid’s “indecent” path through the academic routes of theology is impossible to summarize, not only because of the tremendous academic production of the Argentine theologian but also because her revolutionary journey is still alive and well.<sup>18</sup> It lives in the hearts, minds, and pens of those of us who approach her texts and find an inexhaustible source of liberating theology for the minorities of the Global South.

The publication of her book *Indecent Theology* (Althaus-Reid 2000) significantly strengthened a path that was already taking shape within feminist and lesbian–gay theologies, shaping and consolidating a new era for Latin American sexual theologies (Córdova Quero 2015). Althaus-Reid’s work has become a beacon of hope and true Latin American Liberation for people dissenting from the cis-heteronormative sex–gender system. For left liberation movements since the 1960s, sexual dissident people and communities in Latin America and the Caribbean were not relevant, valuable, or worthy (Córdova Quero 2023). We had a voice, visibility, and agency when Althaus-Reid turned her eyes towards us, not only because she wanted to talk about us but by becoming part of dissidence by presenting herself as a Latin American queer theologian (Althaus-Reid 2006). Córdova Quero (2023) affirms:

It is essential to make clear that what happened in the theological field was also reproduced with left liberation movements since the 1960s, for whom queer people and communities in Latin America were pariahs with whom no one wanted to relate. Even feminist, indigenous, or Afro-descendant liberation theologies and theologians mostly did not offer solidarity and support to queer people and communities. Thus, these theologies, theologians, and leftist liberation movements often blocked our participation in ecclesiastical spaces, denied us inclusion in groups and research projects, and even—some liberationists—condemned us for «dishonoring» their liberation project. Many of us were forced to abandon our churches, academic or formative goals, and, ultimately, our countries. We became *sexiles* (Guzman 1997) in the social, spiritual, ecclesial, and theological sense (p. 19).

Liberation was taken away from us! We were not worthy to walk the path of justice or to be part of the revolutionary ranks clamoring for freedom for all people. Those liberationist projects were still too decent to advocate for a multitude of faggots and transvestites who prostituted themselves in the streets and had no roof over their heads. *There was no place for “indecent” or “debauchery” in those liberationist utopias.* In 2005, while

the World Forum on Theology and Liberation was being held in Brazil, Marcella describes it as follows:

Liberation theology did not set out chairs for poor women or poor gays—at least it never did so willingly. The inclusive project affirmed itself by exclusion policies which determined the identity of the poor. The poor who were included were conceived of as male, generally peasant, vaguely indigenous, Christian and heterosexual. In fact, militant churches would not have needed many chairs around the table of the Lord if these criteria had been applied. It describes the identity of only a minority of the poor. The poor in Latin America cannot be stereotyped so easily and they include urban poor women, transvestites in poor street neighborhoods and gays everywhere. (Althaus-Reid 2007, p. 25)

As can be seen, Marcella came along and perverted the theological narratives, embedding multiple prostheses that *re-signified* liberationist utopia. She fought for a place for herself and those of us who did not have one. Five years before that forum, with the publication of *Indecent Theology* (Althaus-Reid 2000), she marked a *shift* in the evolution of liberationist theologies within Christianity, especially in the Global South.

Deeply rooted in Latin American liberation theology, Althaus-Reid turned to queer theory to challenge classical theologies and TLL to address issues of gender and sexuality. This disruptive approach evidences a “before” and an “after” (Córdova Quero 2023). Althaus-Reid’s sexual theology has genuinely been a Latin American Theology of Sexual Liberation “[...] that seeks to embody their flavors, delights, dilemmas, ecclesial hopes, and the change of social reality” (Córdova Quero 2019b, p. 171). She not only consolidated a path that was already taking shape in the Global North with feminist and lesbian–gay theologies (Córdova Quero 2023), but she shaped and invigorated a proper Southern and Queer Theology at the same time. Althaus-Reid showed that it was possible, and an urgent necessity, for Latin American Theologies to subvert the cis-heteronormative dictates of dominant societies and religious denominations, but also that it was necessary to break away from colonial narratives<sup>19</sup> that spoke of the Global South only from the perspective of the Global North. Her analysis always kept on the horizon his strong vocation to include in the theological conversation the different Latin American sexual realities, mainly through their histories and, above all, their actors:

For Althaus-Reid, the stories of the daily lives of women and men in Latin America are preponderant. Often, these stories are told and remain skewed by moral judgment, especially when these stories intersect with sexuality and religion. (Córdova Quero 2020, p. 160)

Whoever wishes to follow in Althaus-Reid’s footsteps should read and re-read Gustavo Gutiérrez Goes to Disneyland: Theme Park Theologians and the Diaspora of the Discourse of the Popular Theologian in Liberation Theology (Althaus-Reid 2004b). There, the “indecent” of our theologian is characterized by considering the themes of postcoloniality and Latin American popular theology. In the text, the author resorts to “Disneyland” as an epitome of the world’s amusement parks to show how the theologies of the Global North have exoticized the Global South (Córdova Quero 2023). Following “postcolonial suspicion”, she reveals how the “fantasy land mentality” of the Global North has constructed the Global South as the alien other (Córdova Quero 2023). Thus, queer, trans, and non-binary people of the Global South have been spoken of only as exotic figures who are part of a mythical tale without granting sufficient dignity, let alone meaningful theological agency. As a result of such a process, a series of “Cinderella stories” emerged that kept the people of the Global South in a position of an “object” rather than theological “subject” (Córdova Quero 2023).

Althaus-Reid (2004b) argues that such exoticization processes trigger the value of the Global South, such as a visit to a “botanical garden” or an “amusement park”, becoming dependent on “visitors” from the Global North:

It is the theme park visitor who gives meaning to the product. Moreover, the fact of presenting itself as a theme park accentuates the imaginary aspect of the construction of regional theologies. They highlight by their mere autochthonous presence the fact that the real theologies are elsewhere and, as such, can be called ‘theologies of the margins’ in more than one sense. (Althaus-Reid 2004b, p. 129)

To resolve this tension that has produced this global capitalism of theology, Althaus-Reid argues that it is necessary to trace the origins of popular theology to the sacred histories of the Global South and the multiple southern engagements and interpretations of sacred texts. The aim is, above all, that the colonized mentality of Latin American theologians breaks with any mimetics of European and North American theologies to recover a “( . . . ) phantasmatic nature of a crucial site of subversion” (Althaus-Reid 2004b, p. 141). In this “recovery” of Southern roots, in which the testimonial roots of Latin American queers also reside, lies the revolutionary “indecent” of which Althaus-Reid speaks. Returning to “situated knowledge” in the Global South, we can discover the theological language of the *Queer Other* (*Queer God*)<sup>20</sup>. This foreign language—*alien*, if you will—can lead Latin American Sexual Theologies to take new leaps of indecency by taking the—methodological—path most *alien* to Christian hermeneutical options. It is a matter of going via *rupta*, through paths without repetition—or without return—that can, paraphrasing Derrida, “reinvent without following a pre-established route” (Derrida 1998, p. 58). Althaus-Reid’s indecent itinerary resembles cruising experiences more than rigid monogamous experiences, orgies of orgasmic pleasure more than marital relations aimed merely at cis-heterosexual reproduction. It reaches dialogical and erotic banquets more than single-sender lecture sessions.

The person who wishes to walk indecently—such as Marcella—must recognize herself as a nomadic body, as an unsatisfied body in transit, carrying with her the oddities of the journey. This is how Queer Theologies are done in the Global South, or at least that is what the Argentine queer theologian teaches us. To begin this “indecent” journey, we must look back to recognize that—in Latin America—just as people were forced to hide our faith and our deities under Christian names and rituals, we were forced to inscribe ourselves according to Western and European binary sex–gender categories. We must urgently reclaim the agency of our voice, even if this exercise involves exclusion and the stigma of “indecent”. Although there is still a long way to go, there is one piece of good news:

Increasingly, members of this people of God excluded for centuries have made themselves visible as persons and communities active in theological work and have succeeded in making many of their beliefs, when re-signified, liberating and emancipating. Likewise, they have denounced and mobilized against those unjust social and ecclesial orders, reviving in religion its essential character of equality and social justice (Santos Meza 2021, p. 93).

The queer utopia that seeks the liberation of dissident minorities in the Global South is still underway, not only in the political and social spheres, but also in the ecclesial and theological scenarios. Our future depends on continuing the indecent path of liberation begun by Althaus-Reid. Although in 2009, Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid travelled to his definitive encounter with Queer Divinity, the prophetic potency of his disruptive theology has not ceased. Although the purpose of this text pulls us in many directions and there is so much left to say, *in memory of her*, I would like to mention here many of the Latin American theologians who walked with her as she walked through this land of the South and so many others, such the writer of this text, who continue to walk with her, thanks to her invaluable legacy.

We remember those who participated in the anthology *Liberation Theology and Sexuality*, a text that gathers the academic work of the first generation of queer theologians in Latin America. Edited by Althaus-Reid (2006), this collection made visible the work of eleven authors who made their proposal of Latin American queer theologies: Hugo Córdova



Quero, Otto Maduro, Ivan Petrella, Claudio Carvalhaes, Nancy Cardoso Pereira, Frederico Pieper Pires, Mario Ribas, Elina Vuola, Jaci Maraschin, Roberto González y Norberto D'Amico. According to Althaus-Reid, this collection of essays not only came from the reflections of Latin American theologians, but was the result of some years of sharing and discussing issues of Liberation Theology and sexuality among the contributors, both personally and through the Internet (Althaus-Reid 2006, pp. 2–3). Informally, Marcella and her indecent friends created a group called “La Virtual QTL” (*The Virtual Queer Liberation Theology Group*). This informal network produced unique collective reflections on Liberation Theology and sexual dissidence. *To all those mentioned, thank you for walking the walk!*

One year after Marcella Althaus-Reid's death and in tribute to her legacy, Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan edited the anthology *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots* (Isherwood and Jordan 2010). A wide range of internationally renowned theologians show the breadth and depth of the impact she made in her all-too-short academic life.

The authors come to the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid from a wide range of interests, disciplines, and locations: Robert Shore-Goss, Mary E. Hunt, Kwok Pui-lan, Kathleen M. Sands, Emily M. Townes, Mayra Rivera Rivera, Susannah Cornwall, Elizabeth Stuart, Alistair Kee, Lea D. Brown, Jay Emerson Johnson, Graham Ward, Natalie K. Watson, Ivan Petrella, Hugo Córdova Quero, Mario I. Aguilar, Andre S. Musskopf, Nancy Cardoso Pereira and Claudio Carvalhaes, Rosemary Radford Ruether. Resembling a *Summa Theologicae*, the authors of this book, in homage to Althaus-Reid, recognize the richness and fecundity of his legacy: they talk about incarnation and radical inclusion, surreal feminist liberation theology, postcolonial theology of the body and pleasure, civil unions and sexual indecency, strategies of indecentation, reflections on the strange queer divinity that dwells in our midst, queer liturgy and ecclesiology, liberationist ontologies, erotic liberation and sado-masochism (SM), humanly divine loves, libertarian hermeneutics, and sexual theological struggles. *To all of the above, thank you for walking the walk and preserving the indecent legacy!*

In 2019, Lisa Isherwood and Hugo Córdova Quero organized a symposium at the University of Winchester under the title *Fetish Boots and Running Shoes 2: Latin American and Asian Perspectives*. The aim of the event was to bring together eight scholars, four from Asia and four from Latin America, working at the forefront of the Althaus-Reid legacy. As a result of that symposium, Isherwood and Córdova Quero edited *The Indecent Theologies of Marcella Althaus-Reid: Voices from Asia and Latin America* (Córdova Quero and Isherwood 2021), a collection of papers presented at the symposium. On this occasion, we not only talk about Althaus-Reid's impact in Latin America, but also in Asia. This academic volume has the special intention of giving visibility to Althaus-Reid's work, but also to the work of many intellectuals from the global South, who are not usually considered in English-speaking contexts. That is why Córdova Quero and Isherwood say the following:

On the other hand, another aspect of Marcella's work is also uncharted, and this book aims to contribute towards solving that situation. Namely, Marcella's work has inspired and continues to inspire scholars in the Global South. The case is the same as with Marcella's written works: the work of these scholars from the South does not reach the Global North and feed their discussions. As emerging queer theologians struggle to get their work published in their original languages, the dominance of English in the academy makes it almost impossible for their voices to join the “important” conversations. Yet, their struggles reveal exactly the convoluted and dis-jointed power dynamics of academic work between the Global North and South. Scholars who are not English-speakers have to do triple work to get their work heard in the Global North. Namely, they have to write in a foreign language—English, in a logic that is not always their own—Western thought, and in a different “garment”—Anglo-Saxon culture—that makes it harder to produce original work. Yet, after doing all that, their voices for most of the time are ignored by the academic centers of knowledge production in the Global North. The situation is very discouraging (Córdova Quero and Isherwood 2021, p. 3).<sup>21</sup>

This may be a good summary for those who do not know this book: Brazilian Ana Ester Pádua drinks a “Dirty Martini” on behalf of Marcella; Lai-Shan Teresa Yip narrates queer perversions in Hong Kong; Hugo Córdova Quero updates Althaus-Reid’s reflection on the “lemon sellers” in order to dialogue with the reality of African immigration; Joseph N. Goh discusses indecent interweavings and healing spaces in contemporary Malaysian trans and queer theo-pastoralities; Damián De la Puente takes theological indecency to the alleys of La Rioja, Argentina; Reina Ueno explores the dialectical relationship body–nation to introduce the potentiality of queer corporeality to the loving search for social justice; Beatriz Febus Perez questions the implications of the sexual subject in liberationist theologies and proposes some lucid ideas to confront the psychotic obsession that traditional religions have with controlling the body and human pleasure; Juswantori Ichwan takes us to Indonesia to illustrate the panorama and challenges of the sexual liberation process in this Southeast Asian territory; finally, Carlos-Alejandra Beltrán uses powerful metaphors of agriculture to show the need to conserve, re-sow, and germinate the seeds of queer theology.

This voluminous and cross-cultural book of homage, no doubt, has a clear testimony: “any theology going forward from Marcella’s work must, above all, be creative-and indeed brave!” (Córdova Quero and Isherwood 2021, p. 180).

From 2–6 August 2022, the II International Symposium of Queer Theories and Theologies was held in San José, Costa Rica. This was, without a doubt, a magnificent opportunity to bring together in one place, in person and virtually, many Latin American queer theologians of the second generation. This meeting, which was attended both in person and virtually, ratified the liveliness of Latin American Queer Theology, as new names of “walkers with Althaus-Reid” appeared: Miguel H. Diaz, Bob Botelho Cordeiro, Alba Onofrio, Anderson Santos, Merci Aguilar, Cristian Castro, among others.

A good way to glimpse the vast road ahead can be condensed by paraphrasing some of the concluding words spoken on the last day of the symposium by Hugo Córdova Quero: we need to continue to raise the voices of Queer Divinity, which queerify our assumptions of control over the divine. Queer divinity resists being locked up in our temples and imprisoned in our narrow decent buildings. Queer divinity sends us to work for the liberation of queer people. That is where we are going; on that march, we build our queer future in the community.

## 6. Conclusions

The world is sober, society is locked in the labyrinth of cis-heteronormativity, and traditional religion smells of mold and putrefaction. Only a brave group of queers, eternally libertine, will be able to walk indecently through the streets, opening the “closets” in which decadence is gestated. In the meantime, let us believe in the utopia of liberation while dancing tangos and listening to boleros. Let us evoke political, sexual, and theological perversions. Let us use prostheses and dildos for satisfaction and pleasure. Finally, let us continue to exist and resist in the queerest way possible, as Althaus-Reid taught us. *The Queer God (de Amor) makes all things new.*

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Approaching the Global South is not an easy task, as there may be different ways of representing the subject, depending also on the place of enunciation or the political, social, economic, or cultural intentionality that accompanies the person carrying out this task. These are three of the main forms that allude to the Global South: *a geographical and socioeconomic aggregate of certain countries, a metaphorical or allegorical territory and a condensing framework of its own thinking.* It is worth noting that here, we conceive that the three forms of representation are historically intertwined and in tension. In this paper, it is obviously impossible to encompass the totality of what ‘fits’ within the logic of the Global South, so when we use this expression, we are referring, above all, to Latin America and the Caribbean (De Sousa Santos 2009, 2011; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Dados and Connell 2012).

- 2 In 2015, several ministers, academics, and activists of sexual diversity decided to found a Network of Queer Theologies and Pastorals (REDLACQueer) to connect the theological and pastoral work carried out by people, ministries, and organizations of sexual diversity in Latin America and the Caribbean. As a result of that REDLACQueer, this first publication of *Conexión Queer* is the result of a joint effort with the Grupo de Estudios Multidisciplinarios en Religión e Incidencia Pública (GEMRIP) and the University of San Francisco. In addition, this collaboration was later extended to the Center for Theological Collaborations at the University of Winchester in the United Kingdom, the Academy of Queer Theology in Hong Kong, and the Global Interfaith Network (GIN). Undoubtedly, this is a valuable work, the only one of its kind, of people in Asia, Latin America, and North America (Córdova Quero et al. 2018).
- 3 Many scholars have pointed out the need to use the local and situated terminology of each territory in order to theologize about it. In the great majority of Latin American and Caribbean contexts, using the term “queer”, even today, continues to be difficult, given that in our communities, this Anglo-Saxon word does not exist; in some countries “bollera” is used, in others “marica”, in others “torta”, in others “loca”, etc. As Córdova Quero and De Pascual (2020, p. 41) state the following: “That is why we are here, ( . . . ) *tortas, gays, queers, travas/trans no binaries*—proud in the radical love of Jesus—to mark what has been achieved and what is still lacking”.
- 4 The main purpose of those who worked in the construction of *Conexión Queer* was to offer a space for queer theological reflection that would be Latin American in at least three aspects: it would be written preferably in Spanish, Portuguese, or French and other languages spoken in different ways in Latin America and the Caribbean; it would be a space conducive to making Latin American and Caribbean culture visible, given that the negotiations of gender and sexuality are intimately linked to very particular socio-cultural contexts that condition the ways in which these issues are represented to us; and, finally, it would present the testimony, the voice, and the very agency of individuals and collectives of sexual diversity in Latin America and the Caribbean (Córdova Quero et al. 2018).
- 5 This vision of the Global South allows us to recognize that the “view of the world” transcends the “Western understanding of the world”, that the world is not only Europe, nor only North America. When the gaze descends towards the South, it reveals a “diversity of ways of being, thinking, feeling, conceiving time, looking at the past and the future, collectively organizing life, coexistence and interaction with the world” (De Sousa Santos 2011, p. 50). In this new lens of representation, the accent is placed on the geopolitics of domination and insubordination. Indeed, the Global South to which we refer boasts a double metaphorical condition: on the one hand “suffering”, on the other hand “resistance” (Vuola 2006; Merry 2006; Jaramillo and Vera 2013). With the first metaphor, we evoke all those expropriated from the South or located in the South by global logics of capital accumulation, such as immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia, and racism, but also, the producers and reproducers of the logics and processes of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003), and therefore, those who are the object of these logics, such as landless peasants, those who have been dispossessed by force, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, women, children, ethnic and sexual minorities, victims of armed conflict, exiles, and refugees, among many others (De Sousa Santos 2009, 2011). The second metaphor condenses the articulation of countless demands and historical struggles of all these sectors that seek to position spaces to locally reverse and resist exclusionary globalizations and global political orders, as well as structural, systematic, and selective violence. Following Malaysian sociologist Syed Farid Alatas, these condensing frameworks from and about the global South could be defined as alternative frameworks characterized by “being authentic non-Western systems of thought, with theories and ideas, based on non-Western practices and cultures. They can be defined as discourses based on indigenous historical experiences, philosophical and cultural practices that can be used as sources for alternative theories and concepts in the social sciences. Alternative discourses are relevant to their environment, creative, non-imitative and original, non-essentialist, counter to Eu-centrism and autonomous from the state or other trans-national or national groupings” (Alatas 2011).
- 6 As Shore-Goss states, in his introductory text “Angels in human drag: alternative queer orthodoxies”, Queer Theologies have used diverse theological strategies and perspectives in the form of transgression and dissidence (Mark D. Jordan, Robert E. Shore-Goss, Marcella Althaus-Reid, Lisa Isherwood, Gabriela González Ortuño, Hugo Córdova Quero, André Sidnei Musskopf), breaking any series of dualisms by opting for a radical love (Patrick S. Cheng); also, affirming inclusive hybridity, intersectionality and borderline liminality (Patrick S. Cheng, Justin Sabia-Tanis, Susannah Cornwall, Nicolas Panotto, Adriaan van Klinken, Michael Sepidoza Campos, Ana Ester Freire); also, they have opted for an exercise of radical deepening (Gerard Loughlin, Elizabeth Leung, Jill Cox, Lai-shan Yip, Melissa Wilcox), which has sought to present a queer theology with radical inclusivity (Michael Bernard Kelly, Joseph N. Goh, Chris Greenough, Miguel H. Diaz), or make theologically indecent, obscene, and perverted transgressions (Marcella Althaus-Reid, Robyn Henderson Espinoza, Anderson F. Santos Meza) (Shore-Goss 2020, p. 9). Undoubtedly, there are many more authors in the list of theologians who have bet on the queerization of theology, but here we only wanted to mention some of them.
- 7 Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid was born in Rosario, Province of Santa Fe, Argentina, on 11 May 1952. Although she grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition, as a teenager she became acquainted with the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina. Inspired by that tradition, she studied theology at the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She then completed her doctorate at the University of St. Andrews in Fife, Scotland ( . . . ) Marcella’s death on 20 February 2009 in Edinburgh, Scotland, left a deep void both in her family and those who knew her and in the academic world where her prophetic voice emerged as an icon of queer theologies (Córdova Quero 2019a, pp. 13–15).

- 8 Marcella Althaus-Reid, with surprise and at the same time with disappointment, fails to understand why most liberationist theologians, who were concerned with eradicating inequalities and social injustices, maintained a sullen silence in the face of sexually diverse people. It seems, then, that such theologians had a liberation project in which non-hegemonic sexuality was left without a place. Although in the popular carnivals of the Latin American poor, of which the liberationists spoke so much, disruptive figures, queers, and transvestites were always visible, Althaus-Reid insists that in the TLL, silence reigned in the face of such life experiences: “Anybody who has been in Latin America during the yearly carnival celebrations knows that carnivals are the festivity of the poor and sexual indecency: *‘the revolt of the Queers’* (Lancaster 1997, pp. 19–20). Political and sexual transgressions are the agenda of carnivals, yet the subject of carnivals, the poor, have been obliterated in Liberation Theology. What happens then is that if the shanty townspeople go in procession carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary and demanding jobs, they seem to become God’s option for the poor. However, when the same shanty townspeople mount a carnival centred on a transvestite Christ accompanied by a Drag Queen Mary Magdalene kissing his wounds, singing songs of political criticism, they are not anymore God’s option for the poor. Carnivals in Latin America are the Christmas of the indecent, and yet they are invisible in theological discourse” (Althaus-Reid 2000, p. 25; 2004a, p. 401).
- 9 Elina Vuola, in her article “*Seriously Harmful for Your Health? Religion, Feminism and Sexuality in Latin America*” (Vuola 2006), shows two fundamental aspects to consider in the consideration of Latin American Queer Theologies: *Vaticancentrism* and *the absence* (or minimal presence) *of the theological voices of the South*. On the one hand, how traditional Christian-Catholic Theology, under the misunderstood premise of apostolic succession, has become radically “*Vaticancentric*” and, moreover, has been controlled/dominated by the European and colonial gaze; for this reason, liberation theology (TLL), born in the South, was silenced and expelled from that European–Vatican canon. On the other hand, how an institution that claims to represent the weak, the poor, the people of the South, both nationally and internationally, ignores, sometimes through ignorance and sometimes through voluntary omission, the theologizations born in the South, especially those that have to do with the sexual and affective dimension. This passage from Vuola is very lucid: “Especially during the reign of the late Pope, John Paul II, the Vatican became a strange mixture of one of the most imperialist (Eurocentric, or rather ‘Vati(can)centric’) institutions in strictly Church-related issues in which, on the one hand, all the orders come from above, from Europe (for example, the nomination of conservative bishops against the preference of the local churches in Latin America; the silencing and expulsion of Liberation Theologians; a direct open political pressure on national governments, especially on issues of sexual ethics) and, on the other hand, of an institution which pretends to represent the weak, the poor, the South, in the larger society, both nationally and internationally. Obviously, the lacking bridge between these two faces of contemporary Catholicism would be seeing the poor also as reproductive, gendered and sexual beings. It is poverty and lack of power that makes sexual relations, reproduction and mothering deadly for so many women” (Vuola 2006, p. 140).
- 10 In this text, Juan Gabriel’s songs will be quoted and accompanied by the year of release. We will not add the time stamp of the quoted verse, since most of the Mexican artist’s songs have countless versions. In addition, since the verses are sung in Spanish and are composed in that language, the translation of the lyrics into English will be added at the bottom of the page when the verses quoted are long; when they are short, the translation will be inserted in the body of the text.
- 11 How I wish, oh, that you were alive, that your eyes had never closed, and I could be looking at them. Eternal and unforgettable love. Sooner or later, I will be with you to continue, loving each other.
- 12 The woman who loves me has a very beautiful face; I see the faith of my people in her mantle of stars.
- 13 One morning Maria came to the neighborhood crying sadly. Because her husband has already died, and now who is going to bury him? The companions of some years have already forgotten her grief. As she has no one to bury him, she comes to have charity done for her. Don’t worry, Mrs. Maria, her husband has already died. And if she has no one to bury him, I will bury him tomorrow. Don’t worry, Mrs. Maria, if your husband has already died. And if you don’t have someone to bury him, I’ll bury him tomorrow.
- 14 Forbidden love whispers in the streets, because we are from different societies. Forbidden love, all the world tells us.
- 15 In this regard it is worth emphasizing that to speak of Gay and Lesbian Theology is not the same as speaking of Queer Theology. Although there are important points of intersection between the two theologies, they are substantially different. Precisely, the current contemporary contexts account for this: just as every day the number of gays and lesbians who assume a certain *hegemonic homonormativity* that standardizes the “way of being” grows, there is also many gay and lesbian theologians who reproduce this *hegemonic homonorm* in their theological productions, loading their texts and research with patriarchal traces that serve to control the diverse bodies, affectivity, and pleasure of LGBT people (Córdova Quero 2020). It is necessary to remember this: Latin American Queer Theology, which has been called “*Indecent Theology*” by Althaus-Reid, is perverted and subversive, uncomfortable and critical, and anti-hegemonic and anti-patriarchal. As Córdova Quero has said, Queer/Indecent Theologies seek to be “*versatile theologies*” that break with the binarisms and the confinement in which Classical Theology and Christian denominations have confined them; perhaps they are even “*swinger theologies*”. For PhD. Córdova Quero, these “*third spaces*” are not always welcome, as seen in the case of bisexual people, who cannot be pushed into a disjunctive within the “this/that” mentality or those who act as drag-queens, who embrace and disrupt the cis-heteropatriarchal binarism by hyper-interpreting it. However, Queer Theologies are not only the contestation of dominant *theo(ideo)logical* discourses, but also the recovery of the discourses of those who have been ostracized because of those discourses (Córdova Quero 2021, pp. 128–29). To expand on



this, it is necessary to return to the reflections of Preciado (2003); Althaus-Reid (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2008); Kalbian (2005); LeFranc (2018); Henderson-Espinoza (2018); McGeoch (2018); Greenough (2020); and Hugo Córdova Quero (2020).

- 16 One of the most widely disseminated Latin American indecent theological projects of this era is, precisely, “Teología Sin Vergüenza”, a digital project that seeks to amplify the voices of people who are unabashedly Christian or theologians and unabashedly activist, feminist, and/or queer. These people give theological language to the cuir feminist resistance that has been excluded from hegemonic and patriarchal Christian discourses. More information is here: <https://soulforce.org/teosinvergüenza/>.
- 17 Carlos-Alejandra Beltrán returns to this Derridean idea to speak of “God as a supplement”. Undoubtedly, Beltrán recognizes that in both Derrida’s and Althaus-Reid’s thought there is a strong connection, since both authors strongly point out the fetishistic character of Christianity (Córdova Quero and Isherwood 2021, pp. 176–77).
- 18 This is a summary of Althaus-Reid’s academic production: “A prolific writer, teacher and lecturer, Marcella published two books of her own, edited eight collections where she gave new and emerging thinkers the opportunity to make their academic output known, and published more than fifty articles and chapters in academic journals and books. However, despite her tireless academic dedication, Marcella always had time to nurture her spirituality and cultivate her friendships” (Córdova Quero 2019a, p. 14). Likewise, Robert E. Shore-Goss (2020), in his introductory article “Angels in human drag: alternative queer orthodoxies”, follows Mark Jordan and describes M. Althaus-Reid, and her thought, in a remarkable way: “Jordan picks up the queer theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid, who understands queer theology as “the challenge of a theology where sexuality and loving relationships are not only important theological issues but experiences (that) unshape Totalitarian Theology . . . while re-shaping theologians”. She asserts that queer theology is “a first-person theology, diasporic, self-disclosing, autobiographical and responsible for its own words”. Althaus-Reid understands that the queer theologian is a “villain-theologian”, whose transgressive writing exposes outside the boundary experiences what hetero-normative theology eliminates from its orthodox praxis. The villainous queer theologian breaks the silence imposed by the orthodox theological praxis but surfaces human, albeit, excluded diasporic experiences. She writes, “Borders of thinking are crossed. Body-Borders, God may cross God’s own borders too”. She observes, “Queer theology does theology with impunity”. For her, queer theology stages excluded life experiences, which she variously describes as “indecent”, “obscene”, and “libertine” (Shore-Goss 2020, p. 1).
- 19 Undoubtedly, following H. Córdova Quero (2020), “Althaus-Reid’s book *Indecent Theology* showed how queer theologies subvert the dictates of society and their concomitant alliance with legitimate religious institutions dating back to the Spanish colonial times, as in the case of Latin America” (p. 160).
- 20 In tune with this idea, it is appropriate to recall Marie Cartier’s interpretation of the cover of the book *The Queer God* by Althaus-Reid: “When Marcella Althaus-Reid chose merely to put a picture of the statue of Jesus with the sacred heart blazing as the provocative cover on her 2003 text *The Queer God*, one understands how radical the idea and visualization of God as a God for queer people is, or the notion of God as a “Queer God”. Coleman writes that the Savior can be a black woman or a lesbian—God can be different from what the dominant culture imagines ( . . . ) That “Queer God”/accepting God was not, however, to be found in the 1950s gay bars, except as a gay person might be able to see God in the other, the *you*” (Cartier 2013, p. 195).
- 21 One of the most powerful ideas in this volume, according to the perspective of the author of this article, is that which recognizes the need to listen to the voices of the global South, as a counter-hegemonic response to the naturalized muting of these ‘subalterns’ in the prevailing theological narratives: “The scholars in this book go one step beyond and even inquire if the voice is heard even in the event of the subaltern speaking. It seems that the tortuous world of queer theologies may be a place where the cacophony does prevent the pollination of other contexts. No matter how much the subaltern of the Global South makes efforts to speak, it seems that the voice may not be Heard” (Córdova Quero and Isherwood 2021, p. 183).

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