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Article

# Chapter 21: Folding, (Un)Folding, and (Re)Folding the World. An Approach to the Intellectual Itinerary of Darío García Garzón

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**Abstract:** This chapter presents some reflections arising from the approach to the intellectual itinerary of Darío García Garzón. After a brief reconstruction of the biographical profile of this Colombian queer/*marica* theologian, his writings (2004-2012) are studied to point out the exercise of contextualization of the “queer” that he carried out in the Colombian territories, through reflections on the Deleuzian fold (*Le Pli*). The importance of his creole-mestizo-baroque hermeneutic proposal for the critique and reformulation of the “*habitus of theologization*” in the approach to sex-gender dissidence is recognized.

**Keywords:** queer theology; Liberation Theology; Latin American Liberation Theology; LGBTIQ+, queer theologies; Colombia

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## Introduction

Folding the world is an operation that not only (de)organizes chaos but also reveals its internal tensions. Each fold hides within itself a memory, a wound, or a power of the yet unsaid. When we speak of folding the “queer world,” for example, the metaphor is amplified and complexified, for it implies not only recognizing the queer archive but also opening the fissures it contains. Queer —in its genealogy— is often presented as a globalizing category, exported from the centers of academic power to the peripheries and diasporas. (Un)folding its folds and (re)folding them when necessary is a critical action: letting out what has been compressed and what has not been seen. In this process of (de)folding, the “*Marica* [sissy or pansy] world” appears as that which does not seem to fit, nor does it want to fit into the framework of the Anglo-Saxon queer. The folds are not only folds. They are also cracking and jumping. There, we find the fractures that break with the colonial logic that pretends to order bodies and subjectivities. When it breaks, the queer fragments into a thousand pieces that cannot be reabsorbed into the totality. These fragments are the traces of the dissidence that insists, the insistence of the bodies-territory that do not allow themselves to be domesticated.

The work of Colombian theologian and philosopher Hemberg Darío García Garzón is inscribed precisely in this Deleuzian logic of *folding*, *unfolding*, and *refolding*. His intention was not to import foreign theories to impose them in his context but to break them from within, to submit them to the test of the territory. His walk through the Colombian streets, his dialogue with academic spaces, and his listening to subaltern voices allowed him to fold the world of imported theories and unfold them again on his terms. It was not a simple “adapting” but a “folding,” that is, returning the theory to its initial folds, but with the marks of lived experience: (un)folds and (re)folds.

Folding, (un)folding, and (re)folding the world, then, is not only an exercise in understanding but a way of doing epistemic (theo)politics. It is to recognize that there is no homogeneous and linear world but a set of worlds in tension, each with its folds, which are sometimes (un)folding and (re)folding (Conley, 2011). Therefore, to fold, (un)fold, and re(fold) is not to order, nor to define, but to allow the emergence of what was silenced, subway, clandestine, and camouflaged... as happens with that which is folded. It is —ultimately— a way of writing, (un)writing, and (re)writing the collective memory from the perspective of those who have always been closer, next door, although

they have always been called “rare,” “others,” and “strangers.” Thus, the fold becomes a horizon of understanding and a crack where resistance germinates.

Aligned with this horizon, this chapter provides a bibliographical synthesis of the work of García Garzón, recognized as the first queer theologian in Colombia. It begins with an overview of key elements of his biographical profile. Next, it delves into an exploration of his academic output from 2004 to 2012, followed by an analysis of his proposal for creole, mestizo, and bastard hermeneutics as a lens to understand Colombia’s sex-gender dynamics. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the challenges a *Marica* Theology faces.

#### *About Hermsberg Darío García Garzón*

Hemberg Darío García Garzón —he preferred to be called Darío— was born on August 5, 1969. He studied Philosophy at the Major Seminary of Bogotá. He graduated in Philosophy and Religious Sciences at the University of Santo Tomás. He received a degree in Theology from the Pontifical Xavierian University (PUJ). He has two master’s degrees from the National University of Colombia: one in Sociology and the other in Gender Studies. He was a doctoral candidate in Theology at PUJ.

He was a professor-researcher assigned to the Virtual Bachelor’s Degree in Religious Sciences academic unit. He was a member of the research group “Theology and Gender” at the School of Theology, PUJ. He was also a member of the Seminar of Analogical Hermeneutics of the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). In the back covers of *Viaje de emperador a loco* [Journey from Emperor to Madman] (2009b), *Camino del ángel* [Path of The Angel] (2010), and *Mundo de las princesas* [World of Princesses] (2001a), the author presents himself as follows: “philosopher and theologian, pro-feminist, Colombian, and professor-researcher.”

As a queer theologian, he affirms his theoretical positioning in this way:

I place myself in queer theory because since I was initiated in feminism and gender studies, I have assumed a critical stance towards the logics of production and consumption of the gay market, which imposes a dominant identity and generates structures of alienation based on the hegemony of virile capital contained in beauty, youth and genital hyper-anatomy (García Garzón, 2010: 77-78).

Some of the theoretical references most consulted by this Colombian thinker were Mauricio Beuchot, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Oscar Guasch, Rosa María Rodríguez Magda, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and Clodovis Boff, among others.

#### *Behind the Heartbeat of Darío’s Senti-Pensar:<sup>1</sup> His Works, His Thoughts, and His Research*

It was 2022, and my desire to trace my predecessors in Colombian queer theology was growing. I was walking through the same corridors where more than ten years ago, the first person to talk about queer theologies in the country had walked. I had hunches, which were simultaneously profound certainties. I knew that nothing is ever done from scratch — that there are always others walking disruptive paths, resisting toxic and unhealthy logic, leaving testimonial traces, and causing indecent, unforgettable scandals. Without even knowing his name, his face, or his works, I paid attention to the reactions of many people who discovered in me a young *marica* theologian who spoke of transvestites and dissidents.

One day, after a presentation I made, someone said: “It has been a long time since I heard someone talk about theology as Darío did.” After that statement, there was an uncomfortable silence. I did not understand what that meant because I did not know that person. They tell me that he used

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<sup>1</sup> The expression *senti-pensar* is used because it returns to the approach of the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (2009), for whom there is no other way to understand Latin American territories than by feeling and thinking simultaneously. For more information, see the research by Arturo Escobar (2014).

to dress in black, wear cowboy boots and long leather coats, and sometimes let his hair grow long and make a bun. Also, I am told that he used to offer himself as a “symbol,” dressing symbolically and trying to communicate with his body many things that become complex when theoretical language and its limitations enter the scene. Without knowing who that theologian was, I already knew that he walked these paths that I walk in my daily life. This filled me with mixed feelings, questions, suspicions, and desires to know everything these cold walls can know. In Colombia — and throughout Latin America — they say with a tone of mischief, complicity, and satire: “Si las paredes hablaran...” [if the walls could talk...]. What would these walls have to tell me? As a young theologian trying to discover the legacy of his predecessor in queer/*maricas* theologies in Colombia, this interested me.

I asked many people about García Garzón. Immediately, silences and gestures of discomfort appeared, and explicit desires to evade the question and not answer. I noticed a systematic erasure of his history, work, relationships, and faith experience. Someone told me: “In the library, there are some texts that can tell you who he is” because “people around here usually do not talk about him and his things.” This is how I found García Garzón’s intellectual production, written between 2004 and 2012.

I found a small book entitled *Cruzando los umbrales del secreto. Acercamiento a una sociología de la sexualidad* [Crossing the Thresholds of Secrecy. An Approach to a Sociology of Sexuality] (García Garzón, 2004a), which is part of the “Nuevas Cartografías” Series of Instituto Pensar.<sup>2</sup> A text inspired by Darío’s master’s thesis in Sociology. It is a sociological study of the stylistic offerings of men’s bathing houses in Bogotá.<sup>3</sup> In the work, I found a striking sex-cultural ethnography nourished by methodological itineraries experienced by the author himself. Above all, inquiries into fundamental questions about homosexual relations in Colombia, about the *habitus* of the occupants of the saunas and clandestine steam rooms, and all the *symbolic capital* of masculinity and virility that is managed there.

I also found the book edited by him — together with Olga Consuelo Vélez and María del Socorro Vivas Albán — entitled *Reflexiones en torno al feminismo y al género* [Reflections on Feminism and Gender] (García Garzón, and others, 2004). This collective volume compiles several research papers from the academic work of the “Theology and Gender” research group at PUJ, to which the authors belonged. García Garzón contributed two chapters: the first is entitled “Misoginia, expresión antifeminista” [Misogyny, Anti-feminist Expression] (García Garzón, 2004c); the second, “Escenarios, imaginarios y construcciones de los cuerpos” [Scenarios, Imaginaries and Constructions of Bodies] (García Garzón, 2004b). Some of the most relevant ideas developed therein are related to the critique of phallocracy, male domination, and the cis-heterosexual division of labor, with the resistance of sex-gender dissidence to the modes of configuration of corporealities presented from the sex-gender binaries.

In this exercise of “going back to the archive,” to shake it all and sift through the dust of the shelves that are not usually visited, I found an article published in the student journal *Reflexiones Teológicas*, entitled “*Habitus de teologización*” [*Habitus of Theologization*] (García Garzón, 2008a). In that piece, García Garzón unveils one of the epistemo(theo)logical problems of theology in the change of era: the *habitus* of the one who theologizes. It is an exercise of sociological reading of theological work to unmask the symbolic capital of theological knowledge. His methodology is based on “relational thinking,” that is, on associative thinking from a sort of network logic. In his research, García Garzón makes explicit three issues of concern: (i) the “stylistic offer” of theological epistemology, (ii) the socio-symbolic spaces in which theology is theologized, (iii) the theological capital, that is, the symbolic possession and possession of the knowledge of Revelation. In response

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<sup>2</sup> García Garzón’s work was presented in the context of the Ciclo Rosa [Pink Series] of Bogotá from June 26 to July 8, 2004. The 2004 edition was entitled “Para que todos luzcan” [So that everyone shines].

<sup>3</sup> The ethnographic research fieldwork was conducted during 2001 and 2002 in Bogotá (García Garzón, 2010: 43).



to this, he asserts that it is essential to return to a perspective of uncertainty. To achieve this, one must recognize that the theologian stands at the crossroads of the aporia created by multiple epistemological styles, alongside the risks of absolutizing these methods, no matter how eclectic or disruptive they may be. This uncertainty is overcome by embarking on “a nomadic journey through the unsuspected desert of chaos” (García Garzón, 2008a: 64).

I learned that—in 2008—he participated in the I Congress of Latin American and German Women Theologians “Biographies, Institutions and Citizenship. Theology and Society from a Women’s Perspective”, held from March 25 to 27 at the Schools of Philosophy and Theology of San Miguel, Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The book *Sentires teológicos en perspectiva liberadora* [Theological Sentiments in Liberating Perspective] compiled the papers presented by the participants of the research group “Theology and Gender.” The paper presented by García Garzón is entitled “Teología de la masculinidad: Crítica al androcentrismo y transgenerización de la epistemología teológica” [Theology of Masculinity. Critique of Androcentrism and Transgenderization of Theological Epistemology] (García Garzón, 2008b). The text is a reflection on the traditional logic of theological thinking and its practices of *epistemological transvestism*. For the author, it is urgent to recognize the trans becoming of theology—which is metaphorical, symbolic, and literal—because there occurs a particular dynamic phenomenology of theological work about power and domination:

Sometimes, to become masculine, that is, to become “strong” again epistemologically speaking, theology resorts to transvestite itself with the theoretical accessories of the prevailing machismo of the knowledge that comes from the dominant philosophies of empiricism-positivism, or indeed it transsexualizes itself with the reassignment of methods that insist on the objectivity of data and suspect the subjective experience of the occurrence of divine revelation in the human (García Garzón, 2008b: 57-58).

With this, García Garzón encourages suspicion of the discourses that validate and legitimize specific epistemological and theological bets of rigid character while rejecting and silencing other perspectives. Likewise, he points out the dangers of structuralist determinisms and theoretical and theological dogmatisms. Thus, he invites us to pursue the paths of nomadic, relational, complex, and rhizomatic thinking.

Simultaneously, I found the conference paper “Exploraciones sobre la diferencia y la diversidad sexual. Hacia una teología transgénero: encrucijada en la teología” [Explorations on Difference and Sexual Diversity. Towards a Transgender Theology: Crossroads in Theology] (García Garzón, 2009a), in which it was proposed to suspect the issue of sexual and gender identity, constitutive of difference and sexual diversity. To this end, García Garzón addressed the bipolarity perceived in (i) the phenomenon of “demasculinization,” understood as the transition that a male can make from masculinity to femininity, and (ii) the process of “hypermasculinization,” understood as the transfer of the male towards the more masculine. This text is understood as a synthetic preview of the postulates that the author will develop in his book *Camino del ángel* (García Garzón, 2010).

However, another work by the Colombian researcher that came into my hands is entitled *Viaje de emperador a loco. Introducción a una hermenéutica analógica de la transmasculinidad* [Journey from Emperor to Madman. Introduction to analogical hermeneutics of transmasculinity] (García Garzón, 2009b). This book can be presented as a journey of metaphors accompanied by the Beuchotian pharmacist towards the hermeneutic threshold, an itinerary through which the imbrication between the question of gender and analogical hermeneutics is progressively approached, suggesting a sort of “transcendental analogical feminism” that makes it possible to speak of trans-masculinities. Borrowing Beuchot’s words, it is sensible to say that,

[...] it is the hermeneutics of the threshold because it stops the chiaroscuro of the confluence between light and shadow, between metonymy and metaphor. Its characteristic of borderline, between the threshold, makes such interpretation suffer from certain indecision or ambiguity, but not so much that it cannot be held with certain clarity and definition [...] Thus, the threshold has the peculiarity of being something partly given and partly built, precisely where the given and the built come together (Beuchot, 2003: 77-79).

Undoubtedly, this is a text that criticizes androcentrism, cis-heterosexism, and the rigid norms of the sex-generic because it recognizes that in such logics of thinking, philosophies have been built –and theologies– destructive.

Together with Luis Mario Sendoya, Ángela María Sierra, Olga Consuelo Vélez, and María del Socorro Vivas, García Garzón published an article entitled “El género en la disciplina teológica” [Gender in the Theological Discipline] in the journal *Theologica Xaveriana* (García Garzón, and others, 2009). It was a systematic examination of the contribution of the gender perspective to the theological work and the academic curricula of some subjects of the Theology program. Recognizing that boldness and determination are needed to advance in the implementation of the gender approach in theological studies, the researchers affirmed that “current theology must be open to these new theological approaches if it wants to maintain its validity and relevance in today’s society” (García Garzón, and others, 2009: 126).

Pursuing his research interest, he published a book chapter entitled “Cruzando los umbrales del varón: Hacia una teología transgénero desde una ontología de la masculinidad” [Crossing the Thresholds of Male: Toward a Transgender Theology from an Ontology of Masculinity] (2009c) in the book *Género y Religión: Pluralismos y disidencias religiosas*, edited by María Angélica Peñas Defagó and María Candelaria Sgró Ruata. In this work, he approached trans and sex-gender transits as “steps of tension” that enable the emergence of fundamental questions in academic disciplines. According to the author, contemporary times evidence the need to seek a way out of the impasse in which we find ourselves, particularly about the struggle of bodies feeling trapped in the binary sex-gender system of female/male identity; this would imply, subsequently, a theologization of the epistemological transits of theology itself (García Garzón, 2009c: 10-19).

Additionally, I found three books that trapped me in the library for several days, afternoons, and evenings: *Camino del ángel: Sendas hacia una hermenéutica de lo transgénero* [Path of The Angel: Pathways to a Hermeneutics of the Transgender] (2010); *El mundo de las princesas: Hermenéutica y teología queer* [World of Princesses: Hermeneutics and Queer Theology] (2011a); *Uróboros. Oficio del analogista en la hermenéutica teológica* [Ouroboros. The Office of the Analogist in Theological Hermeneutics] (2011b). To put it in a heartfelt way, reading García Garzón not only shook my way of inhabiting religion and theology but also motivated me to immerse myself in the existential and historical phenomenology of sex-gender dissidence in Colombia.

In *Camino del ángel* (2010), the reader encounters an exercise of thought that seeks to investigate the paradox of the trans –from the transgender and the androgynous– and the binary polarities of the sex-gender division. From the recourse to the hermeneutics of facticity and analogical hermeneutics, García Garzón offers a reflexive approach to understanding the issue of “trans existentialism,” assumed as “angelic and androgynous existentialism.” The work has seven chapters, which mark the itinerary of the approach: paths, point of view, look at everyday life, questionability, significance, horizon of the gaze, and crossroads. Using Heideggerian thought, this investigative journey seeks to bring to light, discover, and reveal [*Zum Vorschein bringen*] the urgency of propitiating uncoverings [*Unverborgenheit*] that imply deconstructions and reconstructions (García Garzón, 2010: 16).

For its part, *Uróboros* attempts to raise a reflexive inquiry into *alquimia criollizada* [creolized alchemy] within the practice of analogist thinkers in Latin American theological hermeneutics (García Garzón, 2011b). It is structured in two main sections: the epistemological suspicion based on Beuchot’s concept of *pensamiento otro* [other thought]—which aligns with analogical hermeneutics— and the critique of the *Eurocentrism* inherent in Martin Heidegger’s work.

In *Mundo de las princesas*, García Garzón concludes the “triptych” of books framed in theological hermeneutics in which he presents relational, repetitive, and recurrent writing.<sup>4</sup> In this work, he

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<sup>4</sup> This is what García Garzón (2011a: 12) states at the beginning of the section “folding”, making a brief synthesis of what was his Creole and mestizo phenomenological project around the critique of the rationality of sexes and genders from Latin America.

continues with his purpose of marking the reflective itinerary with the metaphor, which is why he states that,

[...] the enunciated *world of the princesses* is a *metaphor* that allows us a hermeneutic alloy of the mentioned approach (...) The particular framework of the *world of the princesses* is woven between the brocade of the fold in the Leibnizian style (García Garzón, 2011a: 15).

On this occasion, he used the Deleuzian tern *folding/unfolding/folding*<sup>5</sup> to make his journey through the “world of princesses” in three moments: (i) the consideration of folding and the action of folding, (ii) the analytic of (un)folding; and (iii) the exercise of (re)folding. In this book, the author suggests that the way to approach hermeneutics and *queer* theology is to recognize that it is the “doing of folding”: one fold follows another fold to infinity. García Garzón’s purpose is to invoke metaphors that make it possible to think about the prophetic – denunciation– and the soteriological – liberating– character of emancipatory theology. In this sense, he states:

[...] the triptych folding of the chapters, as we open this book, will allow us to invoke a formula: *hermeneutics and queer theology*, which could be a *poison* if it is apologetic of the gay; or a *remedy* if it is critical and deconstructive of the logics of production and consumption of the gay market” (García Garzón, 2011a: 21).

However, one of García Garzón’s last publications appears in the book *Teorías queer y teologías: estar... en otro lugar* [Queer Theories and Theologies: Being... Somewhere Else], which gathers the papers presented at the First International Symposium on Queer Theology, held at the Ecumenical Research Department (DEI) in San José, Costa Rica. The contribution of the Colombian theologian is entitled “Analogías en teología queer” [Analogies in Queer Theology] (García Garzón, 2012a). It is a retrospective exercise that synthesizes his academic, spiritual, and existential journey up to that point in life. The first section –entitled “Horizonte apología y defensa” [Horizon apology and defense]– goes through the author’s memories of theologizing (1992-1998) and sociologizing (1999-2003). The second section – “Horizonte sospecha y crítica” [Horizon suspicion and critique]– presents some reminiscences of gender studies (2004-2007). Finally, in the third section –called “Horizonte incertidumbres” [Horizon uncertainties]– García Garzón alludes to his return to theology (2008), his exercises of theological inquiry from hermeneutics, metaphor, and analogy (2009-2010), and his itinerary along a new path beyond the sex-gender binarism: queer theology (2011-2012). Regarding this new path, the author affirms:

Queer theology is part of the question about the existential. Still, at the same time, it marks the paths in the *criollismo* of the Colombian context, and particularly in Bogotá, in which I have thought and written my discourses (García Garzón, 2012a: 198).

Amazed by all these written testimonies of García Garzón’s intellectual work, I was motivated to continue my research. I asked many people about his history and his academic path. Thus, a person who asked me to remain anonymous gave me access to a very special and confidential document: García Garzón’s unfinished doctoral dissertation was tentatively titled “De *analogia entis* a *analogia vitae*: Un giro hermenéutico de la comprensión de la analogía en teología fundamental” [From *analogia entis* to *analogia vitae*: A Hermeneutical Turn in Understanding Analogy in Fundamental Theology] (García Garzón, 2012b). This 124-page document explores the transition from *analogia entis* –analogy of being– to *analogia vitae* –analogy of life–, presenting the idea that one of the most profound conclusions of the author’s academic-existential pilgrimage is that the analogies guiding the paths of becoming must be sought within life itself.

No further publications by García Garzón have been documented since 2012. According to collected stories and interviews, this absence is attributed to a worsening of physical, mental, and spiritual ailments that significantly impacted his life. These challenges ultimately led him to discontinue his professional work at the School of Theology at PUJ.

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze (1989) says that “we discover new ways of folding [...] because it is always a matter of folding, unfolding and refolding” (p. 177).

### *Towards a Creole, Mestizo, and Bastard Hermeneutics: To Understand the Sex-Gender Folds of Colombia*

The curious and attentive journey I made through García Garzón's works led me to the conclusion that the great intellectual project he had was the establishment of a Creole- mestizo- baroque phenomenological approach to the critique of sex-gender rationality from Latin America, especially from the territory he inhabited: Bogotá, Colombia (García Garzón, 2011a: 12). His broad theoretical and methodological framework was *folded* by the horizon of the world. He then narrowed his focus to the *(un)fold*ing of his reality, striving to consolidate a "situated knowledge" of queer identity in his country: the *marica*.

The understanding of the Anglo-Saxon verb "to queer," which has been translated into Spanish as *Extrañar* [to miss, to surprise], *Transgredir* [to transgress, to violate], *Desviar* [to divert, to deflect], *Extraviar* [to misplace, to lose], *Dislocar* [to dislocate, to disrupt], alludes to a polysemic dance between meanings, signifiers and uses (Santos Meza, 2023, 2024). The word *queer* raises acute issues of translation into Spanish because although in English it has a substantial charge of insult and insult, it encompasses many diverse sexualities and does not have a specific gender. In contrast, in Spanish, it is presented as an obscure and confusing term. Faced with this, some researchers have argued that the use of the term "queer" operates as a form of linguistic colonialism. In addition, it loses value in its "subversive capital" since, in some areas, it has been translated as *torcido* [twisted or crooked] or *cuir* (Platero and others, 2017).

In this effort to translate the term, discussions arise about how we wish and can be named in Spanish. For example, in Spanish, the expression *cuir* does not lead to adverse reactions provoked by the pejorative enunciation of the term as in Anglo-Saxon contexts. Instead, it seems that the use of *cuir* manifests a kind of "aura of respectability" that makes it seem "better, more sophisticated and international in an academic context" (Mizielinska, 2006: 90) and even harmless in ultraconservative environments (Platero and others, 2017). Some authors point out that the conceptualization of "Latin American queer," *cuir* or *kuir*, is a symptom that —from gender and Latin American studies— it is urgent to look at identities and bodies in a more transversal, creative and strategic way (Falconí Tráves and others, 2013). Indeed, with the presentation of the range of alternate and dissident sex-gender identities —including non-identity— the term *queer/cuir/kuir* is placed out of place, showing "talking bodies" that can be "read" only from the marginalities of what they are expected to be according to our political geolocation (Lanuza and Carrasco, 2015).

Paul-Beatriz Preciado (2003) stated that "*queer* knowledge is in itself a theory of the necessity and inevitability of a constant retranslation" (pp. 196-197). The translation of the Anglo- Saxon *queer* to the Latin American cannot consist of a mere question of changing words, nor a transnational linguistic barter, because "the Anglo-Saxon *queer* is not exactly the same as the Latin American *cuir*" (Santos Meza, 2023: 143). Amy Laminsky (2008: 879) proposes using *encuirar* as a possible translation of the verb "to queer," given that this word insinuates a certain air of familiarity with *encuerar*, evokes the act of "undressing," and allows "un- covering" reality by removing the layer of cis-heteronormativity. These new words help a great deal; however, they may prove to be a blunder, at least in terms of the historical and social implications that burden the term "queer."

This issue will be more explicit when recognizing that the exercise of "location" of concepts through "dislocation" is evidenced in the practice of (de)folded carried out by García Garzón.

### *Contextual (Un)Folding: The "Colombian Queer" Is Called Marica*

It is true that in countries such as Colombia, people who are dissident from the sex-gender system are usually related to deviance, indecency, transgressions, and dislocations. Still, when a person is labeled and cataloged in a derogatory way, they may be called *Marica* [sissy or pansy], *Maricón* [faggot], *Mariquita* [sissy or queen], *Mariposo* [fairy], and other words that preserve the "family resemblance" — el *Familienähnlichkeit* de Ludwig Wittgenstein (Weiberg, 2022) — of *maricomprensión* [gay understanding or queer empathy], to use the expression of the Latin American writer Pedro Lemebel (2020). In Latin American countries, this "family resemblance" has been weaponized as a linguistic device to construct a stigmatized subject through humiliating



interpellation (Butler, 2002: 318). However, it is very significant that such expressions have not been used to nominate theoretical, philosophical, and theological reflections as in their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. On the contrary, foreign words continue to be imported for this purpose (Córdova Quero, 2018: 100), thus erasing the counter-cultural potential of those derogatory terms.

In this sense, García Garzón realizes that speaking of “queer” in Colombia is insufficient and counterproductive; moreover, the literal and uncritical importation of this foreign term and its decontextualized use becomes a colonial and classist issue since the vast majority of Colombian *maricas* are not usually bilingual, nor do they have access to advanced professional formalization processes. In addition, the memory of their struggles for resistance to sex-gender control regimes does not seem to be explicitly related to this Anglo-Saxon concept. For instance, “lo mataron por maricón” [they killed him for being *maricón*], “aquí están las maricas resistiendo” [here are the *maricas* resisting], “y no, y no, y no me da la gana de ser una *marica* mercantilizada” [and no, and no, and I don’t feel like being a commodified queer], are some of the phrases most often heard in the streets of Colombia. It is urgent to “infect” (Lemebel, 2020) the word queer with this *mariquismo* [campiness] of the South. Such a Creole-mestizo-baroque “infection” is the application of the hermeneutic-analogical apparatus that the Colombian thinker addresses in his works. The *maricas*, their personal experiences, and the wisdom condensed in their *somatecas* —bodies understood as receptacles and places of knowledge— are unsurpassable. Therefore, the exercise of perceiving the term “queer” in the Colombian *marica* context consists of a much deeper (*un*)folded understanding of the life lived and suffered by the country’s sex-gender dissidences. In his work *Mundo de las princesas*, García Garzón (2011a) states the following:

The *fold* applied in this case allows us to recognize that *queer* has many *folds* and can constitute a kind of *labyrinth* for the critical understanding of sexes and genders (...) we find ourselves inserted in the world as a *fold* (p. 18).

However, García Garzón never distances himself from the theories and approaches of the Global North since there he finds essential knowledge of great value without necessarily uprooting himself from his context. Thus, he manages to propose Latin American hermeneutics that recognizes itself as “baroque”<sup>6</sup> or —in terms of the feminist María Galindo (2022)— “bastard.” For him, it became urgent to recognize the need to develop a Latin American —and Colombian— hermeneutics based on hermeneutics in general, that is, on European and North American hermeneutics, but without being reduced to it (Arriarán, 2006: 26).

For the Colombian author, if his research is intended “to be contextually *queer*,” that is, “to be a *marica* investigation,” it had to have as a starting point of the (*un*)folding a strategic space that summons, year after year, multitudes of LGBTIQ+ people: the annual Pride March. Thus, García Garzón describes his experience on the afternoon of Sunday, June 27, 2010, around three o’clock in the afternoon, when he arrived at Avenue 7 with 33 Street in Bogotá and joined the Pride March (García Garzón, 2011a: 25). He himself confesses that “at the moment of walking among them, I felt perhaps *queerer than ever*, in terms of the *raro* [odd], before the *raro* [queer] happening through the existentialism of the walkers” (García Garzón, 2011a: 29). Moreover, he acknowledges that it was not enough to walk alongside other queer people, but that he had to establish dialogic bridges: “and I proceeded to dialogue briefly with some of them” (García Garzón, 2011a: 30). In these conversations, the author tried to discover what understandings of the term “queer” his interlocutors have, noticing the following: “in the proletariat, the *queer* concept is not yet internalized, not even to associate it with the popular idea of *loca* or *maricón*” (García Garzón, 2011a: 39). Although for García Garzón the relationship between “queer” and *marica* was evident because of his broad knowledge of the *status questionis* in the world, in the conversations he had with the people “on the street”, the people who *pone el cuerpo* [to put one’s body on the line] and march, perceive that this terminological correspondence is dubious and confusing.

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<sup>6</sup> In this sense, Deleuze (1989) stated that “The Baroque does not refer to an essence, but rather to an operative function, to a feature. It never ceases to make folds” (p. 11).

Similarly, García Garzón (2011a) observes a wide range of diverse experiences in this march. The Colombian researcher describes what his eyes —as a phenomenologist and sociologist— were witnessing in the flow of marchers. Among the expressions used by him are: “very masculine men,” “feminine men,” “masculine women,” “feminine women,” “transvestites who perform femininity,” “transvestites who perform masculinity,” “trans women,” and “androgynous people,” among others. In another of his works, he referred to this sex-gender multiplicity as follows: “the presence of hybrid, eclectic, metamorphosing, revolutionized, changing, transgressive identities, in irruption, in transfer, in transit, in nomadism and in foreignness” (García Garzón, 2010: 72).

Hence, García Garzón recognizes the (re)folders of the “queer world” when he (un)folds the “world of princesses” or the “*marica* world”. Thus, in the case of the event of the march, he notices that “the makeup, the tulle, the glove, and the sequin, accompanied their fictitious, delicate and courtly gestures, which linked them in an imaginary social class in the metaphorical world of the feminine” (García Garzón, 2011a: 32). In that walk in which he has affirmed that he feels *queerer than ever*, perceived a sort of “imaginary of Disney fiction” García Garzón (2011a: 16). That is, *princess* figures stand out and are performed by different marching artists:

I intend to refer to the corporealized feminine metaphor with the term *princess* because, as I went deeper into the walk, I observed that most *transgender* people invoked the imaginary of the princess in their representation of their *bodies*, some representing her dressed and others naked, in the realm of *fairy tales*. Mainly, the dressed princess was repeatedly *observed* as a representation of Snow White (García Garzón, 2011a: 30).

In this sense, the metaphor of the “world of princesses” used by García Garzón is a way of approaching the multiple realities of the diverse and the dissident, according to the existential he evidenced in *Pride*. Realizing the existence of the “world of princesses,” the Colombian observer evidence that in the “world of the march,” there are “other worlds” that coexist with his own or, perhaps, that he makes himself part of “another world” very different from this one (Santos Meza, 2023: 129-162). Along with this idea, several aspects are commonly described: feeling as if one were from “another planet,” sensing that one’s feelings are incomprehensible “on this earth,” and suffering from the condition of indigence. It also involves the dismemberment of one’s own body to force oneself to fit in, disguising oneself to pass the gender test, camouflaging one’s gender identity and sexual orientation, and pretending to be something one is not. Ultimately, it is about knowing oneself to exist in a state of incessant clandestinity in order to cross borders and courageously dwell on the margins, the limits, and the peripheries. The “world of princesses” alludes to the notion of “the abject” referred to by Patricia Soley-Beltrán (2009) when she states, “The abject is precisely this *no man’s land*, a space that defines the outer limits of what is acceptable, outside of which a person is not considered *someone* human” (p. 374).

#### *Among the (Un)Folds, the Presence of (Homo)Normativities*

Already in *Camino del ángel*, García Garzón (2010) warned of the problems that are triggered when some queer people proclaim the “utopia of sexual diversity” (p. 49). For him, it was essential to recognize that, in many cases,

[...] the ludic and hedonic activities of the world of the so-called sexual diversity, in rumba, carnivals, and orgy, lead us unbridledly to the reproduction of the sex/gender duality among males and continue perpetuating patriarchy and androcentrism in the *gay* version (García Garzón, 2010: 50).

Indeed, several aspects should be considered, among which at least two stand out: (i) not everything related to sex-gender diversity should be considered as “revolution” and “liberation”; (ii) we should be suspicious of the spaces and practices that are usually presented as places and actions of sex-gender liberation, because they may be replicating the violent and oppressive logics of cis-heteronormativity.

In this order of ideas, García Garzón proposes an essential difference between “gay homosexuality” and “homosexuality associated with queer”:

Homosexuality associated with *gay* is configured in a structuring strategy of the subjects in such logic determined by neoliberal and globalized capitalism, reproducing a type of hegemonic identity imposed on the same subjects. The strategy can configure an alienating game emphasizing another form of male domination. A possible emancipatory way out of the labyrinths of the logic of gay production and consumption as an alienating structure may be, at the same time, to leave enunciated now the approach of the becoming of the *antigay* as a condition to give way to the formulation of the *transgender* from the *queer* meaning (García Garzón, 2010: 27).<sup>7</sup>

According to the author, cis-homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) is an expression of cis-heteropatriarchy and gay androcentrism, two structures that produce misogyny and homophobia. Misogyny because they repudiate the presence of women in the establishments, but at the same time reserve the right of admission for “effeminate men,” and in case they manage to enter, they are seen as “fake men” (García Garzón, 2010: 45-46). García Garzón evidences this in many places of LGBT socialization, but his research focuses on the phenomenology of relationships in men’s bathhouses (García Garzón, 2004). In such places, it is evident that,

[...] the *illusio* or belief in phallic capital on the part of the occupants determines the *habitus* or behaviors internalized in their lives and disposes them to the taste of the phallus of other males, corresponding to the archetype of male domination, represented simply in a large penis, but which symbolically represents strength and virility (García Garzón, 2010: 45).

Among the many people attending the 2010 pride march, there is also many hyper-masculine bodies, bodies of “real men,” which represent a particular hegemony of gayness.

These “real males” will not be considered *maricas* in the derogatory sense in which the category is used. In the same way that García Garzón does, Lemebel affirms that history gives an account of the countless laughs that disorder the dominant sex-gender assumption, of the dislocated dances that rearrange the world, of the *maricas rites* in which bodies that do not classify in the imported category of “gay man” are contemplated. Nowadays, this category is increasingly exclusive since it has also witnessed a neoliberal and capitalist co-optation of identity, in which only a tiny group of hegemonic homosexual men have a place, with all that being hegemonic implies.

Undoubtedly, cis-homonormativity has become one of the new segregation devices since we no longer only face the normative cis-heterosexual logics that are based on the petro-sexual- racial system. Still, within what is called “sex-gender diversity,” there are countless phobic, exclusionary, and violent practices. The *maricas* of the South know we are doubly bastardized; we are not only wounded but *too* wounded (Lemebel, 2020: 13-68). Paraphrasing the “bastard feminist” María Galindo (2022: 41) —as she describes herself— we have numerous reliable testimonies. These testimonies emphasize that the goal is not for LGBTIQ+ people to occupy positions of power, such as leadership roles in churches, police departments, armies, universities, parliaments, mayor’s offices, governments, or sports organizations. These numerous wounds highlight that the real challenge lies in the ability to question the structures, logic, and meanings underpinning each of these cis-heteropatriarchal institutions. This requires acknowledging that “the arena of interrelations between civil society and the State continues to be key to the processing of social contradictions” (Cadahia and Coronel, 2021: 60). This is what Pedro Lemebel (2020) recalls in his *Crónicas de sidario* [Chronicles of a “poz”]:

Perhaps, affluent homosexuality was never a subversive problem that altered their neat morals. Perhaps there were too many right-wing nuts who supported the regime. Possibly their corpse-like stench was muffled by the French perfume of the barrio alto queers. But even so, the death stench of the dictatorship was a foretaste of AIDS, which made its debut in the early 1980 (p. 22).

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<sup>7</sup> For more information, see Córdova Quero’s (2023: 222-223) synthetic approach to García Garzón’s thought.

Due to the cis-normativities that emerge in the unfolding of gender diversity, we need to *maricomprendernos* (Lemebel, 2020: 163). Amid all that others say we are and all they claim we should be, we face an identity, socio-cultural, political, and religious crisis. This crisis is triggered by several factors, among which two stand out:

1. Structural violence, which mobilizes forces of control and oppression over our dissident existences.
2. Endless clichés and neoliberal practices that fragment our existence and impose new asphyxiating binarisms, erasing any difference.

We need to *maricomprendernos*, to transform the political, epistemic, and symbolic coordinates, and to be able to dispute the common meanings established in the spaces of legitimization of knowledge and political-religious practices (Cadahia, 2024: 22). We should strive to *maricomprendernos* to contaminate the academy, the companies, the churches and the streets with our *marica* bastardism. We must go beyond the identitarian and the nominalist, beyond that sort of *naive voluntarism of nomination* (Cadahia, 2024: 28), because it is not the deliberate self-denomination that will allow us to find the way out of “the prison of phallogocentric language” (Braidotti, 2004: 91-92). Enunciating ourselves as dissidents of the sex-gender system does not imply an automatic transformation of the material structures of power. To liberate our subjectivity, we need more than mere acts of nomination; we must free ourselves from socio-historical constraints through tropes rooted in the popular collective imagination. These tropes should enable genuine socio-symbolic interventions. To achieve this, however, we need to *maricomprendernos*.

Assuming the *marica* life experience, Lemebel presented himself from an “old reality with a new, incisive, challenging light, and from an extremely marginal condition. I am *maricón* and poor, my two noble titles... [As well as] Indian and poorly dressed” (Checa-Montúfar, 2016: 164). According to Fernando Checa-Montúfar (2016), Lemebel made visible a collective that represents the dispute against the construction of a geocultural, political, and racial subalternation, which:

[...] privileges and values logocentric metropolitan western knowledge and rejects knowledge that does not correspond to its epistemological parameters and that has ways of knowing and knowing with different logics and cultural dynamics structured in popular cultures configured by the crossing of the traditional and the modern, the historical and the new, the massive and the popular... and prevents seeing those who produce that alternative knowledge as legitimate agents, “only sees them as informal” of the cultural market (p. 163).

That is why, in his literary narrative, we find *la maricada* [nonsense queer stuff], *el loquerío* [madness or craziness], and *el mariconaje* [sissy effeminacy]. These expressions are accompanied by terminological mutations that share some syllables or simple euphony, as with *maricomprenderse* or *depre-sidas* [AIDSpair]. On the other hand, combinations appear that seek to resignify the available lexicon from the formulation of new substantive construction. Some examples are: *Lágrimas de maricocodrilo* [queer crocodile tears], *sidadas hermanas sidadas* [AIDS-stricken sisters], *loca sidada* [AIDS-stricken queen], *paranoia sidática* [AIDS-related paranoia], *complicidad maricueca* [sissy complicity], *bambolear homosexualizado* [homoeffeminate swaying], *amancebado culeo* [cohabiting hookup], *el control ciudad-ano* [citizen-anus control] (Paredes, 2023). These “linguistic infections” (Lemebel, 2020) were not simple nominative acts. Nevertheless, disruptive political actions were mobilized through them, such as those executed by *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* [The Mares of the Apocalypse], a collective founded by Lemebel that was active from 1987 to 1993. They engaged in a form of *maricomprensión*, aimed at dismantling unilateral truths, shattering social determinism, and compelling the imagination to turn inward. All of this was achieved by resorting to the margins, folds, and interstices that allowed for critical questioning through “*loca* homosexuality” as a vital hypothesis. Such a questioning functioned as,

[...] a brilliant way of perceiving and perceiving herself, of constantly reassembling her imaginary according to survival strategies. The *loca* is continuously zigzagging in her



political becoming, she is always thinking about how to subsist, how to get by, perhaps without being noticed, or very much noticed. And it is a wandering way of thinking, it is not the fixed and solid form of the male. The *loca* is a hypothesis, a question about herself (Risco, 1995: 16).

Undoubtedly, when García Garzón speaks of the “men of lies,” he is not alluding to the gay, modern, and whitewashed version of homosexual identity, that which benefits from bourgeois acquiescence for filling the quota of tolerance, inclusion, and diversity. *Mariquismo* [campiness] does not fit in such quotas because it is part of the old popular homosexualities marginalized by this integration, and precisely for this reason, the *marica* has a potential of “deterritorializing subversion.” Its power lies in its constitution as becoming, as a process, as flow, and —in this way— it claims its world, knowledge, corporealities, and culture. Doing so gives them legitimacy and summons them to a more organic and widespread political practice, to a “politicizing practice to *maricomprenderse*” (Sandoval Álvarez, 2018). Thus, it fights against biopolitics and the coloniality of power (Checa-Montúfar, 1996).

From the descriptions I managed to gather about García Garzón, the most repeated is that he was not a *gay* man. Indeed, some people close to him recognize that he always positioned himself as *anti-gay* (García Garzón, 2010: 27). In his existential development, in the struggles he faced amid the *macho* and phallogocentric Colombian society, he always tried to present himself as *loca* and *marica*, that is, as a person who “se le moja la canoa” [gets their vagina wet] (García Garzón, 2010: 36-40), taking the expression of a Vallenato popular song. This song describes *mariquismo* as the testimony that birds leave when they fly by the *pluma*. And the tracing of feathers implies, then, a recognition of the contextual (re)folders and of the infinite territorial ambiguities that make “in our Latin American context, different from the Anglo-Saxon one, *queer* is even weirder and stranger” (García Garzón, 2011a: 63).<sup>8</sup>

#### *Towards a Marica Theology: (Re)Folding the Sex-Gender System in the “Habitus of Theologization”*

The exploration of García Garzón’s works has immersed me in numerous questions that cannot be postponed and demand an answer from anyone who seeks to theologize to *maricomprenderse*. As a *marica*, I have become a theological question —a theological object—, a theological subject —a subject who does theology—, and a theological space —a generator of theology. García Garzón’s reflections act as stings, compelling me to confront the question of my own “*habitus* of theologization” (García Garzón, 2008a: 55-65).

I continue my walk through the corridors of the School of Theology through which my fellow Colombian *marica* theologian once walked. My heart is anguished because I find the panorama of theology for those of us who declare ourselves as *maricas* in Colombia and all of Latin America to be hopeless. After researching in the archive the work done by this Colombian dissident theologian in the past and returning to the present, I feel a profound nausea. My body, my head, heart, legs, hands, blood, and, in a word, everything I am, shudders with pain. I wish I had many answers and lights to illuminate the future. However, I do not see them. I long to embrace García Garzón wherever he may be — because no matter how much I searched, I could not confirm if he is still alive, has passed, or is here or somewhere else. I yearn to hold him and his immunodeficiency close, to kiss his wounds, and to comfort his vulnerability. I ache to weep with him and tell him that I am here, that I am another queer theologian like him. I want to assure him that I am striving to follow his path and confront the profound loneliness that accompanies the work of queer/*cuir* theologies in Colombia, a loneliness that deeply wounds me. If I feel all these emotions now, I cannot even fathom what García Garzón endured and suffered in his own time.

I am currently pursuing my doctoral studies in Theology. Studying theology as a *marica* is complex, challenging, and painful. Moreover, trying it is already revolutionary, dissident, and emancipating. Perhaps the failure of *maricas* in theology symbolizes the failure and death of theology

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze (1989) points out about the Baroque, “it is the fold that goes to infinity” (p. 11).

itself, its liberation project and its utopias of justice. This may be so. However, I want to keep trying, even when strength feels lacking. The feeling of abandonment is constant, and the necessary economic resources are scarce. Month after month, I must grapple with how I will manage to continue. I am caught in “epistemological limbos” and subjected to ongoing epistemic injustices. The incomprehension and violence I face make it all deeply difficult and painful. I try to coexist with the uncertainty that appears with every small act of resistance within the cis-heteropatriarchal academy and its theological conditioning. I do it because I resist stepping aside, and I hope to withstand even more the colonial efforts to silence the *mariquismo* and hide the *plumas* [feathers].

The research presented in this chapter has compelled me to decenter myself from the answers and return to García Garzón’s questions, which remain highly relevant to the Colombian context. Still, I extend them to all of Latin America: What thresholds of secrecy must be crossed in Theology? What is the *habitus* of theologization that predominates today? What theological sentiments do I perceive in myself and those around me? What advances and/or setbacks are evident in the theological hermeneutics that addresses the trans and queer/ *maricas*? How is analogy applied in Theology? Are we aware of everything that remains undeveloped? Where is the pen in Latin American Theology? Where is *mariquismo* in Latin American Theology?

If I want to follow in the “*maricas* footsteps” of García Garzón, I must recognize that his queer/*marica* theology consists of “a retracing of steps” (García Garzón, 2011a: 110). Thus, in the existential questions that emerge repeatedly lies a prophetic force (denunciation) that can be transformed into a soteriological —liberation— flow — or not. Raising these questions incessantly requires the daring of the *loca*, the theological cry of the *marica* because “daring in itself is an abject behavior that generates a transgression or an irruption” (García Garzón, 2010: 76). Among the tears that writing this research has caused me, I want to conclude with this passage from García Garzón, where he makes explicit one of his greatest desires: “to place this issue on the table of theologians in dialogue with activists, LGBTI scholars, and social scientists is of vital importance” (García Garzón, 2011a: 31). Only in this way will it be possible to “say a word about faith through rare and incomprehensible statements” (García Garzón, 2011a: 64).

Reflecting on García Garzón’s life and work, I am filled with awe and find myself compelled to affirm: “Y miré la noche y ya no era oscura... era de lentejuelas!” [And I looked at the night, and it was no longer dark... it was sequined] (Trevi, 2006). This metaphor encapsulates the transformative power of García Garzón’s contributions to *Marica* theology, shedding light on the previously unspoken and turning darkness into a celebration of brilliance and resilience. His legacy inspires and challenges us to reimagine *Marica* theology in all its complexity and beauty, urging us to find —even in the darkest alleys— the sequins that make it shine.

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