

Ti Ochôa

A NON-BINARY READING OF *ANGELS IN AMERICA*

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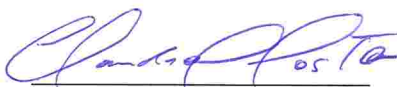
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To all the gender-fucks out there.

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RESUMO

Mesmo que o mundo ocidental categorize as pessoas como homens ou mulheres, há indivíduos cujas materialidades e subjetividades desafiam as normas de gênero e sexualidade. O *cistema* pressupõe que gênero é algo fixo e que existem regras que são impostas baseadas no órgão genital de cada pessoa. Ele também pressupõe que a heterossexualidade é obrigatória, excluindo então qualquer outra forma de expressão de desejo sexual e romântico. Embora o texto de *Angels in America* apresente a maior parte de seus personagens com identidades alinhadas à cisnorma, é possível encontrar personagens que a colocam à prova. De maneira similar, a heterossexualidade não é a única sexualidade encontrada na peça escrita por Tony Kushner. A peça desestabiliza noções de gênero e sexualidade heteronormativas, mas ainda não foi analisada a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero não-binário no Brasil ou nos Estados Unidos - mesmo que seus binários tenha sido pesquisados e analisados extensivamente. Por isso, eu procuro entender quais são os significados que emergem quando a peça é lida através desta perspectiva, buscando compreender como raça, classe, capacitismo, gênero e sexualidade se relacionam. Além disso, esta pesquisa também levanta questões acerca de uma linguagem gênero não-binária, assim como possibilidades que fariam a peça ser mais diversa em relação a questões raciais e questões de gênero. Por fim, também discuto contextos de HIV e AIDS retratados na peça, nos Estados Unidos e no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Não-binário. Queer. Interseccionalidade. HIV e AIDS.

ABSTRACT

Even though the western world is divided into the gender binarism male/female, there are individuals whose materialities and subjectivities challenge the norms of each categorization. This hegemonic understanding of gender brings forth a supposed notion that gender is fixed and regulatory gender norms to be imposed depending on a person's genital sex. It also brings forth a compulsory heterosexuality, excluding, then, other possibilities of expressing sexual and romantic desire. Even though the playtext of *Angels in America* depicts most characters with hegemonic gender identities, it is also possible to find characters that challenge these fixed notions. Similarly, heterosexuality is not the only form of sexual orientation seen in Kushner's work. Even though Kushner's *Angels in America* destabilizes fixed notions of gender and sexuality, the playtext and theatrical performances have not yet been analyzed under a non-binary perspective of gender in Brazil or in the USA – even if many of the binaries of the play have been discussed and scrutinized extensively. I try to understand what meanings emerge when I read *Angels*' playtext under non-binary intersectional lens considering the different social markers the characters have, such as gender, sexuality, race, and disabilities. In addition, this study also addresses questions related to gender diverse language and the use of the singular *they* and possibilities that could make the play a little more diverse in terms of gender and race. Finally, this study also addresses questions regarding HIV and AIDS contexts depicted in the play, as well as an overall description of their current states in the world and in Brazil.

Keywords: Non-binary. Queer. Intersectionality. HIV and AIDS.

How would you feel if
you looked around and found
yourself surrounded
being gazed at by
blind violent eyes that can only see
two opposite directions?

You are either a boy
or a girl. - they say
You are either born with
a masculine or
a feminine genitalia.
A dick or a pussy. - they say
Sex is different
from gender. - many of us say

We can't realize how
in trying to show a difference
they are in fact
construction planted roots.

Blind as they see,
Violent as they go,
they smash
- even kill -
the garden of people filled with
beautifully different flowers that
never cease to grow.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The playtext of *Angels in America* depicts a society embedded with prejudice and discrimination based on race, sexuality, gender, class, and disabilities. Even though it is set back in the 1980s in New York, systems of oppression are still present nowadays, not only in the United States, but also in Brazil, as well as other countries around the world. We, LGBTQI¹, face different forms of violence and micro aggressions on a daily basis and are excluded from and not visible in many public spaces. Much of this exclusion and marginalization is materialized through the social markers imprinted on and carried by our different bodies. We may vary in race, weight, class, gender, able-bodiedness, among other characteristics that many times overlap and shape our existences. LGBTQIphobia does not happen only based on sexuality and gender, it can also be marked by racism, sexism, fatphobia, among other forms of systematic oppressions. To think of the first, it is necessary to consider how it relates to the others and how the others relate to it. In this sense, this research is among the fields of Gender Studies, Queer Theory², and Critical Race Theory.

The consequences and results of LGBTQIphobia as a system of oppressive structures are many and at many times fatal. One LGBTQI person is killed at every 25 hours in Brazil, as found in a research done in 2016 by Grupo Gay da Bahia – GGB (1). Regarding only trans people, according to Brazil’s Association of Travestis and Transexuals – ANTRA –, more than 150 trans people were murdered in 2018, among which 80% of them were black, as their assassination map shows³.

¹ The acronym LGBTQI stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex people, and it is meant to embrace gender diverse individuals, as well as a broader notion of sexual orientations. Even though there are many discussions about the most appropriate acronym to be used towards all the people it covers, like LGBT, LGBTQ+, LGBTQI+, or else, I am here using LGBTQI in order to refer to people whose gender and sexuality fall out of the hegemonic established model.

² The term Queer can be followed by Theory in order to represent a field of knowledge, studies and researches. However, *queer* can be used to refer to individuals who challenge hegemonic standards in terms of gender and sexuality. These are not the only uses of the term, however. I will write about them in Chapter 2.

³ ANTRA’s assassination map is hosted on Google Maps and is constantly being updated. For a current number of deaths access this link: <https://antrabrasil.org/mapa-dos-assassinatos/>.

Among all of these deaths, how does racism relate to them? How does cissexism relate to them? What is their relation to fatphobia? What is their relation to disabilities? How does class relate to them? These are just some of the questions that could also arise while thinking of LGBTQIphobia as a system of intersecting oppressive structures. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to attempt to answer all of these questions, they are indeed central to the present context of this research – namely, the context of reading from which I will develop my analysis of Kushner’s *Angels in America* playtext from a contemporary perspective on non-binary gender. I will lay out further, therefore, the present context which shapes my standpoint of reading.

It cannot be overstated that Brazil leads the ranking of LGBTQI violence in the world. According to GGB, more LGBTQI are killed here than anywhere else, not even in places where there is death penalty or imprisonment for gender and sexual diverse people⁴. Even though it is not a crime to be LGBTQI in Brazil, our government has recently approved a law criminalizing LGBTQIphobia. GGB’s and ANTRA’s findings, mentioned above, relate to the cases that have been identified and therefore registered as homophobia or transphobia, but there are many others that have not – and probably will not – be mapped due to the marginalization and invisibility of our population. As I am a white Brazilian trans non-binary person, I consider it urgent to focus on LGBTQI issues my home country. Even though trans people in Brazil no longer need psychological, medical, and legal approval to be able to access hormonal therapy or change their names and genders on birth certificates and documents, public debates and academic scholarships on these matters are made more urgent by the context of lawfare intensified in recent years. The number of conservative movements and forces against LGBTQI equity has increased substantially in recent years, as has the number of LGBTQI people dying and facing prejudice.

On January 1st of 2019, the new president, Jair Bolsonaro, signed the provisional measure 870/19 which states the changes in many ministries, such as the Agriculture, Economy, International

⁴ You can access ILGA’s map on sexual orientation in the world for more information on countries that seek to protect, recognize or criminalize LGBphobia: <https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws>. The organization also has a report on trans rights around the world: <https://ilga.org/trans-legal-mapping-report>.

Relationships, Human Rights, among others. In relation to the latter, until 2018, the Human Rights Ministry included LGBTQI people; now it does not, as found in *Diário Oficial*. Now this ministry is called The Women, Family, and Human Rights Ministry and is run by Damares Alves, an extreme evangelical politician. On January 2nd, a video was released in which Damares said that a new age was beginning. In this supposed new age, she argues that the color blue is for boys, while pink is for girls. The video went viral and became a *meme* in Brazil. The repercussions were many. On the one hand people discussed that she was wrong, kept arguing that color has no gender and said she was being homophobic. On the other hand, I see this as transphobia apart from gendering colors, because she was not only advocating for the colors, but also for the assumption that people are born either boys or girls.

In relation to the law that criminalizes LGBTphobia in Brazil, even though it was recently approved by the Supreme Court (*Supremo Tribunal Federal, STF*) on May 25, it was approved as being a part of the law that criminalizes racism, that is, law number 7716-89. This is problematic because this law doesn't really help with fighting against discrimination based on race since people could go to prison if they were racist, but they almost never do. Sending people to prison does not help a problem that is rooted in the foundations of our country. There is no effective punishment for racism cases, and drawing from that, I don't think this law against LGBTphobia will have any real effect. This will not happen because the government is not committed to fighting it by creating public policies or investing in education, as we can see from the changes in the Human Rights Ministry and the cuts in education done by Bolsonaro's administration. Another thing that makes this even more problematic is that Brazil is legally a secular state, but churches are places where this new law isn't applicable. If LGBTphobia happens inside churches, the victims will have no legal support because churches have the permission to do that. Unfortunately, the law was approved due to political pressure that said the Supreme Court had been omissive in relation to it for a long time, but not due to the need to fight one of the biggest social problems in this country.

In addition, there is a purportedly apolitical movement called *Escola Sem Partido* in Brazil. It advocates against the politics of egalitarian education under the guise of defending public education to be free of what they call gender ideology, which they vilify as being

doctrinated by the left⁵. Ana Assis⁶ argues that *Escola Sem Partido* advocates schools to be free from this ideology and therefore gender and sexuality should not be matters to be discussed at schools, nor teachers should be allowed to express opinions that challenge the current hegemonic standards as a whole (18). Meanwhile, the movement attempts to elide its own gender ideology among the many diverse gender ideologies which have been thoroughly analyzed for decades now in such fields of knowledge as Philosophy, Psychology, Social Sciences, Political Sciences, Anthropology, History, Critical Discourse Analysis, Literary and Cultural Theory, and Sexuality and Gender Studies.

Even with the critiques on *Escola Sem Partido's* inconsistency, a conservative and right-wing politics has taken over Brazil⁷. There have been certain legal changes in the National Plan for Education (PNE) that are aligned to the program's ideology. Before these changes, this document proposed schools to be places to embrace ethnic-racial, sexual, gender, religious, and disabilities diversities, rather than exclude and marginalize them. Schools should be a democratic and non-discriminatory place where human rights are encouraged, regardless of

⁵ Kavanagh argues that ideology can be understood as "a social process that works on and through every social subject, that, like any other social process, everyone is "in," whether or not they "know" or understand it" (311). Everyone's lives take place being trespassed by ideologies in social, personal, and professional spheres. He also argues it is possible to look at ideology as "a distinctly pejorative term, usually identifying someone who wishes to impose an abstract, extremist, intellectual-political obsession on a "moderate," mainstream political system" (306). On this account, *Escola Sem Partido's* critique on a supposed gender ideology is undermined by the fact that they use discourse in order to vilify what Gender Studies have tried to do: demystify the hegemonic cisgender-sexist gender ideology as the only existing and valuable ideology to propose a different and more diverse gender epistemology.

⁶ The scholar carried out a research in which she argues against *Escola Sem Partido*, analyzing the program's inconsistency, as well as law bills aligned to it.

⁷ As resistance to *Escola Sem Partido*, there is a movement in Brazil called *Escola sem Mordaca*. One of its representatives is Marlene de Fáveri, a History professor at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC) in Florianópolis. She was sued by a former advisee who argued that she was being coerced by the professor's ideologies on gender and diversity. For more information on the matter access: <http://catarinas.info/manifestantes-pedem-escolasemmordaca-em-ato-de-apoio-a-marlene-de-faveri/>;

gender, race, sexual orientation, disabilities, among other social markers (Reis & Eggert 13).

However, in 2014, the approved version of the PNE removed all the instances in which either the word “gender” or “sexual orientation” appeared. In fact, the guideline “promotion of racial, regional, gender and sexual orientation equality” was replaced by “the overcoming of educational inequalities, aiming at the promotion of citizenship and the eradication of all the forms of discrimination” (Brasil 2014, 22, my translation). What does the deliberate removal of these two terms mean towards gender and sexuality social struggles? One could argue that the replacement still covers different forms of discrimination, but since it is related to conservative and right-wing politics, it uses a rather generic language instead.

On the other hand, by the end of 2014 a very important document linked to gender and sexual diversity politics was released. The Conference on National Education (CONAE), which is a democratic space created by the Education National Forum (FNE), represented by members of the Ministry of Education at the senate and the lower house levels, is a conference gathering teachers, students and people interested in or involved with education. This document, called *Documento Final* by FNE published in 2015, differently from the PNE, contains the terms the 2014 PNE had removed, and also encourages inclusive education in terms of gender, race, class, disabilities, sexuality, and human rights in general.

Both documents are regulated by the Brazilian government, but PNE serves as a mandatory regulatory reference nationally, while CONAE’s document serves as a non-mandatory reference point for schools. Having the words *gender* and *sexual orientation* removed from the most important document for schools at a national level represents a large step backwards. It does not only limit teaching of critical thinking, but also limits the advance of public policies in regard to criminalizing LGBTQIphobia, to making schools safe places that embrace difference, and to changing the actual situation of LGBTQI individuals in this country.

1.1 ANGELS IN AMERICA

Angels in America: a Gay Fantasia on National Themes is a Pulitzer Prize winning two-part play – *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, respectively – written by Tony Kushner, one of the forefront playwrights of American postwar and queer drama

(Muhammed 40). The first part was performed alone when it premiered in 1991, but in 1992, the play was performed entirely. There have also been other productions based on the play, such as the HBO series in 2003 and many theatrical performances that continue to be produced⁸. Even though all these productions could offer great research possibilities, this thesis will focus mainly on the playtext.

The story takes place in New York in the mid-1980s, during Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989), depicting a time of conservative policies that placed people in the margins and ignored social problems, such as the AIDS crisis and homophobia. Amaal Jasim Muhammed states that Kushner's play depicts a country that marginalizes people who carry certain social markers, making these individuals suffer in different ways (43). Such markers are those related to race, sexual orientation, gender, weight, disabilities, class, among other less visible ones. Isabella Mundim argues that the former U.S. president had republican and conservative views regarding family values and the hegemonic American lifestyle, which were supported by fundamentalist religious groups (171). In this sense, instead of supporting research to understand AIDS in the 1980s, or aiding people in need, Reagan's policies further marginalized LGBTQI, racialized, and poor people⁹.

By depicting characters from varied backgrounds, Yvonne Iden Ngwa argues that "Kushner's play brings together characters from different nations, having different sexual inclinations, religious convictions, and political leanings" (46). There are two main couples, one gay and the other heterosexual. The first is Louis Ironson and Prior Walter who had been together until Louis discovered Prior was HIV-positive. In Ngwa's analysis, they do accept their sexuality and Prior can be read as what would – then and today – be understood as an effeminate gay man. The other couple is Joe Pit, a Mormon man who is a closeted gay, and a woman named Harper, whom he marries. Their stories get intertwined as Louis abandons Prior and meets Joe, and as Prior and Harper meet. There is also Belize, a black effeminate nurse

⁸ The last theatrical productions are the ones performed in 2018 at the National Theatre in London, UK and at Broadway. For more information, access: <https://angelsbroadway.com/>.

⁹ Sarah Schulman has written extensively on HIV/AIDS contexts and its political and social implications before, during, and after Reagan's administration. See her *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS, and the Marketing of Gay America* (1998) for more details.

together with whom Prior used to perform as drag queen.

In addition to these, there is also another gay character: Roy Cohn¹⁰, who is an HIV-positive middle-aged man that does not accept his own homosexuality, and thinks that being homosexual is synonymous with being weak and ineffectual. There are also other characters, such as Hannah who at first holds homophobic views and does not understand her son's sexuality, but that changes her opinion about queer people through the play, among other less often – but not less important – characters in the play that either appear as ghosts or hallucinations.

Another implication to understand the context of the play is how its parts are entitled. The title of the first, *Millennium Approaches*, calls attention to the coming of the 2000s and the second, the Russian word *Perestroika*, implies change and transformation. Many of the expectations and worries of people concerning the new century, such as the AIDS crisis, views on gender and sexuality and political inclinations are contrasted in both parts of the play. For Kushner, the titles also highlight a difference in their tone: *Millennium Approaches* involves struggling and surviving, while *Perestroika* – even if also dealing with these matters – is “essentially a comedy, in that issues are resolved, mostly peaceably; growth takes place and loss is, to a certain degree countenanced” (142). Even if in the play there is this change of tone from the first to the second part, in real life, however, we approached the new millennium, but perestroika seems to have been slowly arriving. Even though there have been changes towards LGBTQI, anti-racist, and feminist struggles, we still have a long path to walk towards a world in which people could just be, without facing prejudice or discrimination.

It is also significant to conduct this research considering that there has been no Master's Thesis produced at PPGI on the playtext of *Angels in America*, nor on any of its various theatrical performances, nor on any of its film or TV adaptations since 2013. In relation to Doctoral Dissertations, I was also not able to find any research related to *Angels in America* at the program since 2011. However, it is possible to find other studies done at the program with different corpuses that rely on questions concerning gender, sexuality, race and class, which not

¹⁰ Tony Kushner states in the playwright's notes of *Angels in America* that Roy is based on a real-life Roy Cohn, with imagined lines based on his conservative, closeted homophobic, and racist ideologies and what was known about his life as a public figure (9).

necessarily covered all or only these aspects¹¹. Even though these theses and dissertations are extremely important and deal with topics I will also be dealing with, the only one that relates to my non-binary epistemology is Claudia Mayer's.

Outside of the program, there have been studies done about non-binary gender identities in regard to its definition as an identity category, to prejudice and discrimination faced by non-binary individuals, historical perspectives arguing for the existence of gender non-conforming people at different cultural contexts, and to non-binary gender constructions in film productions to cite a few¹². It is noteworthy that I am one of the few trans students of the program and live in a country where many trans people are out of educational spheres at undergraduate and graduate levels.

Due to the relevance of the playtext as critical literary production that defies some of the holding structures of the hegemonic system, I hope this research will show itself useful in understanding and struggling against oppressions. Bearing this in mind, the relation of the mid-1980s of *Angels in America* to our current time is, in many ways, devastating. Even though the contexts differ, the AIDS crisis – which has received much more public and medical attention since its outbreak – has changed, is far from being over. The same has happened to homophobia, racism, sexism, and other social problems born from oppressive hegemonic structures. Therefore, the emblematic playtext of *Angels in America* can serve as a very important source to scrutinize systematic oppressive systems that have continued for too long. In this sense, even though I am working with a text produced at a different

¹¹Some of them are: Dayane Evellin de Souza Francisco's thesis: *Voices of Resistance: Intersectionality and Agency in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (2016); Leonardo da Silva's thesis: *"A Loser Like Me": Identity and Agency in Ryan Murphy's Glee* (2014); Ana Clarissa Nenev's thesis: *In the Name of God: A Postcolonial Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus* (2018); Claudia Santos Mayer's dissertation: *Troubling Queer Metronormativity in Latin American Contexts: Intersectionality in Madame Satã, XXY, and Pelo Malo* (2017).

¹² Brune Camillo Bonassis's thesis: *Cisnorma: Acordos Societários Sobre o Sexo Binário e Cisgênero* (2017), Mair Cayley's thesis: *Xwhy? Stories of Non-binary Gender Identities* (2016), Hélène Frohard-Dourlent et al's article: *'I would have preferred more options': accounting for non-binary youth in health research* (2017) are some studies that discuss non-binary gender. In chapter 2 I will discuss it more extensively, as well as bring more references and papers.

moment in history, I believe it can help us consider and problematize the current state of gender and sexuality affairs at national and international levels.

On this account, a non-binary reading of *Angels in America* that may challenge a cisgender and heterosexual regime is significant towards imagining and potentializing a broader reality which embraces gender and sexually diverse individuals. The research will also help understand how bodies have been differently marked in matters of race, class, sexuality and gender, and how these differences are represented in Kushner's *Angels in America* as they overlap and shape people's existences.

1.2 HIV AND AIDS

AIDS¹³ has been erroneously perceived as striking only homosexuals because the epidemic first emerged among gay men in the early 1980s and it has also been said to be gay-related as if gays were the ones responsible for it. This is a misconception embedded with discrimination, stigmatization and violence against gay men and differently from what one might think, the syndrome was not always named as we know it today. Before being addressed as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), it had already been referred to as GRID, Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, by scientists and doctors and as the "gay plague" and the "gay cancer" by the media, as Jamal Jones and Laura Salazar argue (22). The emergence of this acronym, followed by the media spreading, and the lack of interest and research shown by Reagan's administration helps us visualize how a group of people was pushed towards pathologization and the margins of society and why many people still link male homosexuality to HIV/AIDS.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNAIDS, which is UN's and WHO's HIV and AIDS program created

¹³ Among society's activism and resistance, a non-governmental organization called ACT UP – AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power – was formed in 1987 to commit direct action to the understanding of HIV and AIDS, as well as standing up against prejudice and misconceptions. The organization aims at helping people who live with HIV and at providing proper information about AIDS. Another concern is to research and distribute medical information, as well as to meet with government and health officials, protest and demonstrate. For more information, access their website <http://www.actupny.org/>, or watch the 2012 documentary *United in Anger: a History of Act Up*.

in 1996, since the 1980s more than 35 million people died of AIDS-related causes, which is close to the number of people living with the virus nowadays, that is, more than 37 million people. While no cure has been found, many people still live with HIV around the world, but they live longer due to what has been researched in the medical area. HIV-positive people may have the virus, but many of them are undetectable, and thus non-transmissible. Many of the people living with HIV nowadays do not develop AIDS. UNAIDS has a goal that they address as *90 90 90*. The organization expects that by 2020, 90% of people living with HIV are diagnosed, that 90% of these people are under treatment and that 90% of them have their viral charge suppressed (01).

WHO published a document in which they address HIV and AIDS generally from 1988 to 2018¹⁴. On December 1st in 1988, WHO celebrated the first World AIDS Day. In relation to the US, the number of AIDS-related deaths was high due to the government's lack of public assistance. Kari Hauge, citing Fujita, argues that Reagan's administration did not bring the AIDS crisis to surface until 25,000 were dead (78). According to data found on Avert, by the end of the decade the number of AIDS-reported cases reached up to 100,000. As alarming as this data sounds, Alfonso Ceballos Muñoz argues that when both parts were premiered almost 200,000 people had died of AIDS-related causes (2). In his view, Kushner's play works as an attempt to tell history differently, tracing a perspective from people who have been marginalized due to being afflicted by the syndrome and for their non-normative desires and bodies (6).

In 1994, the organization estimated that 13-14 million people were living with HIV and projected that this data would reach from 30-40 million people by 2020 - they were right. In 1996, antiretroviral therapy becomes a possibility giving hope fighting HIV and AIDS. By 2005, WHO estimated that only 10% of people with HIV worldwide knew of their diagnosis and in 2007 launched another guideline¹⁵ which detailedly offered information on numbers, on key groups, on how to treat the virus and the disease, on procedures to be taken by medical groups. The document also discussed possible ways to reduce stigmatization and prejudice since HIV and AIDS are not only a

¹⁴ This document can be found on <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/who-and-hiv-30-years.pdf?sfvrsn=33517e566>.

¹⁵ The guideline can be accessed on https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43688/9789241595568_eng.pdf;jsessionid=D8C22FB03526C4B7BC4BFF14BBB56FAC?sequence=1.

problem because of the virus, but also because of the phobic social response in relation to HIV-positive people. By 2014, the world was on track in regard to the Millennium Development Goal target to treat 15 million HIV-positive people by 2015 and the *90 90 90* target was established.

In 2016, WHO launched historic guidelines and recommended treatment for all HIV-positive individuals, including pre-exposure prophylaxis and self-testing. In 2017 UNAIDS published a document called *Live Life Positively* regarding HIV-positive people that know their serology worldwide. According to it, they correspond to 85% of HIV and AIDS cases in North America, Central and West Europe; 73% in the Caribbean; 77% in Latin America; 50% in the Middle East and in North Africa; 48% in Central and West Africa; 81% in South Africa; 73% in East Europe and Central Asia; 74% in Asia-Pacific (02-03).

Going back to the *90 90 90* target, UNAIDS estimated that 75% of people living with HIV around the world knew their status in 2017. 79% of them had access to antiretroviral therapy and that 81% of them were virally suppressed in a world scale. In spite of the advances, it is now estimated that 1.8 million people are newly infected every year. Nonetheless, the world has not been ever closer to the *90 90 90* goal than it is nowadays (01).

1.2.1 HIV and AIDS in Brazil

According to the bulletin on HIV and AIDS Surveillance by the Secretary of Health Surveillance and by the Ministry of Health based mainly on data from SINAN (*Sistema de Informação de Agravos de Notificação*), almost a million AIDS cases were diagnosed from 1980 to June 2018. Among 926.742 cases, 479.989 (51.8%) were in the Southeast, 185.363 (20%) in the South, 146.141 (15.8%) in the Northeast, 59.129 (6.4%) in the North and 56.119 (6.1%) in the Mideast (10). The ranking of capital cities regarding AIDS cases on every 100.000 people is: Porto Alegre (60.8), Florianópolis (55.7) – which is the city where I live and study –, Belém (51.7), Boa Vista (49.9), and Manaus (48.8). As alarming as this data sounds, the number of cases in Brazil has been decreasing since 2012 – from 21.7/100.000 to 18.3/100.000 people.

The Ministry did not estimate the number in relation to HIV cases because by the time the document was released, the data had still been being processed by public health departments (05). Nonetheless, more than 250.000 HIV cases were reported from 2007 to 2018. 117.415 of

them (47.4%) were in the Southeast, 50.890 (20.5%) in the South, 42.215 (17%) in the Northeast, 19.781 (8%) in the North and 17.494 (7.1%) in the Midwest (07).

The bulletin also brings data on HIV and AIDS in relation to sexuality. In regard to HIV cases from 2007 to June 2018, out of 244.256 people, 167.878 were men: 71.539 (59,4%) of them were gay, 13.683 (9.5%) bisexual and 52.971 (36.9%) heterosexual. 76.378 were women: 65.877 (96,8%) of them were heterosexual, while the rest of them are classified as injection drug users or HIV-positive by vertical transmission¹⁶ (33). Controversially, none of the cases related to trans/cis lesbian or bisexual women. Among 700.203 AIDS cases from 1980 to June 2018, 471.002 of them related to men. 109.890 (28.7%) were gay, 47.456 (12.4%) were bisexual and 162.242 (42.4%) were heterosexual. 229.201 were women: 201.603 (93.2) were heterosexual, while the others were categorized in the same way as in the HIV cases, leaving other women out of it.

It is interesting to note that while AIDS has been perceived as gay-related, the number of heterosexual men with AIDS is bigger than the one about gay men. I see the fact that heterosexual men undergo fewer routine medical exams than gay men as a possible indicator of this data. The same is not true about the HIV cases, which is bigger among gays. In addition, the document tables on sexuality do not have the category race as a part of it, and thus it is impossible to attest their relation. Race is a separate category in the document. The bulletin also does not have any information on transgender people.

Regarding the HIV cases in relation to race and (cis)gender 247.795 cases were registered from 2007 to 2018. The categories the bulletin uses are white, black – which is an umbrella term that covers people who are black and people who are *pardos* –, *amarela* – which is a term that relates to Asian Brazilians –, indigenous, and *ignorado*– a category related to the cases in which race was not marked. Among men, 74.668 (48%) were white, 79.216 (51%) were black, 1.017 (0.7%) were Asian Brazilians, 586 (0.4%) indigenous and 14.445 (8.5) were not racially defined. Among women, 29.866 (41.8%) were white, 40.699 (57.1%) were black, 421 (0.6%) were Asian Brazilians, 276 (0.4) were indigenous and 6.550 (8.4%) were not declared (32).

There were registered 339.756 AIDS cases from 2006 to 2018. Among men, 98.968 were white, 104.859 were black, 1.055 were Asian

¹⁶ It is possible to find information about these two last categories in relation to men in the document too, but I don't think they are central to sexuality.

Brazilians, 605 were indigenous and 17.058 did not declare race. Among women, 48.912 were white, 58.226 were black, 531 were Asian Brazilians, 392 were indigenous and 9.145 were not defined (50). While there is data on the number of HIV and AIDS cases without regard to race since 1980 in Brazil, the bulletin only accounts for race from 2006 on. The number of HIV and AIDS cases is significantly higher among black men and women, which can be related to the lack of governmental and medical assistance in regard to this marginalized population, even though 54,9% of Brazilians are black (IBGE 2016).

Apart from HIV and AIDS data from, Brazil's health care public system SUS (*Sistema Único de Saúde*) – mistakenly criticized by Brazilians, but seen as one of the best public health systems internationally – offers free antiretroviral treatment for people living with HIV and for people who develop AIDS since 2016, as found on GIV website. According to the Ministry of Health, SUS offers free emergency HIV and AIDS care through PEP (Post-Exposure Risk Prophylaxis), which is available for anyone who had a risk of HIV exposure within the first 72 hours. The system also offers PREP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), which is a preventive care before the exposure that is taken to reduce the possibilities of infection. This service, even though free, is available to key-populations, such as gay men, men who have sex with other men, trans people, sex workers, people who have taken PEP more than three times, and for the people who are not HIV-positive, but have a relationship with someone who is.

Near the year established for the 90 90 90 target, the Report on HIV Clinic Monitoring (*Relatório de Monitoramento Clínico do HIV*) Brazil registered until 2017, there were 547.000 people living with HIV in Brazil (79). 84% of HIV cases were diagnosed, 75% of these people were in antiretroviral treatment, and 92% were virally suppressed in 2017. There is no data yet in relation to 2018, but the percentage about the 90 90 90 goal has only risen since 2012 (24).

Even though HIV and AIDS struggles are far from being over and Brazil is close the UNAIDS target, the Bolsonaro's administration has already taken some step backwards. Similar to what has been done to the Human Rights Ministry, the STDs, AIDS and Viral Hepatitis department in Brazil was dismantled and is now a part of the department related to chronic diseases and STDs altogether. Before this, there was a department that invested in research and treatment for HIV and other STDs, now it is closed. Less funding and support will be directed to this context. Nonetheless, I hope Brazil keeps on offering the treatments I have discussed before.

1.3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Published in 1993, Kushner's playtext has been performed since the early 1990s and due to the play's plurality of themes, topics, contents and possibilities of discussions many papers and studies have been carried out. In a broad sense, some of them regard the play's classification, the representation of male homosexuality, the AIDS crisis in the mid-1980s, the disregard of the Reagan government towards marginalized groups of individuals, immigration, and the representation of women¹⁷. Other papers have also analyzed religious aspects of the play, the intersections of race and class among the queer characters depicted, the role of the Angel and its characterization, the ideological constructions that lie behind the play, among others. As *Angels in America*'s researches deal with many different topics and themes, I will not review all of them here, but rather the ones that relate more closely to my research, that is, the ones involving gender, sexuality and race.

Because of its plurality of themes, Kushner's *Angels in America* has been read variously as an epic drama, a gay drama, an AIDS drama, or a historical drama (Muhammed 40). While it has been read as one or a combination of these, the drama critics Frank Rich and John Clum consider this work to be a landmark in the history not only of gay and queer theatre, but also American theatre (Savran 208). They consider Kushner's *Angels in America* to be rich in relation to the variety of characters and their subjectivities, as well as its ability to work as a tool that retells and re-shapes history from the perspective of people who have been placed in the margins of society. In addition, for Savran, the play brought to the stage a type of production that is neither a revival, nor a British import (207); for Sarah Crockarell, it is one of the most popular queer plays ever written (48); for Wanessa Campagna, it is Kushner's opus (01).

Due to its range of subjects and characteristics, Mundim states that the play provides a rich point of interaction among history, memory, and contemporaneity (178). Studies concerning the representation of the United States of America show that the time depicted in the playtext works as a reflection of the mid-1980s. Muhammed argues that the country is left to a state of a conservative decay, bearing racist, sexist

¹⁷ David Savran (1995) argues that Kushner's *Angels in America* marginalized and silenced women. Natalie Meisner (2003) also shares similar arguments on her work. Kari Hauge, on the other hand, considers their critiques, but argues that women have their own and very important trajectories within the play (71).

and homophobic ideologies towards the new century (43). As a response, Muñoz argues that Kushner presents a mixture of different identities based on race, gender, sexuality, political and religious parameters in order to portray what compounds the United States of America. He also argues that the play explores the impact of Ronald Reagan's government on a diversity of characters that subvert normative structures, as well as characters that live according to it (8).

It is possible to see generations of different characters throughout the playtext. They are all adults, but their ages are not the same. This brings a generational difference to the extent that each character is depicted taking their specific backgrounds into consideration, as well as their views on race, gender, and sexuality. In regard to their religions, some of the characters follow Judaism, Christianity, or Mormonism, as well as ones who do not follow any religion, or do not specify it. More than that, the differences and contrasts cover other characters' social markers, such as gender, sexuality, race and class. Mundim states that they can be seen in contrast, but that sometimes their subjectivities are put together, leading the audience to a bigger picture that might – or not – involve one, some, or all of these markers (171). It is also possible to find binary contrasts, such as gay and straight, rich and poor, black and white, closeted and out, conservative and open-minded, man and woman, among others (Crockarell 64).

Even though many of the characters are gay, the playwright does not represent homosexuality homogeneously because they differ in gender, race, religion, politics, behavior, and have ambivalent identities (Ngwa 46, Meisner 184, Crockarell 50, Hauge 72). Both Hauge and Campagna write about the depictions of male homosexuality on stage before Kushner's work. Hauge focuses on male homosexuality on stage – namely, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Boys in the Band*, and *Angels in America*. Similarly, Campagna's article covers gay male depictions from the 1960s to the late 1980s. Both scholars argue that before Kushner's play, the trajectories of the gay characters were mainly related to murder, suicide, or disease.

Even though we can find some of these features in *Angels in America*, they argue that the play was the first to break with the conventions of placing the queer characters at the margins and of othering them. Campagna argues that the play is subversive due to depicting Prior as a survivor of homophobic and HIV struggles who does not assimilate the hegemonic standards and, therefore, states that Kushner queered gay theatre (4). Even though the disease and tragic narratives are seen in the playtext, they do not define the characters, but

are parts of their trajectories instead. Hauge argues that the play is a landmark in representing gay characters as queer diverse individuals and it does not fall into a heterosexist language that describes all gay men as if they all had the same characteristics (63). Therefore, homosexuality is depicted in different ways, varying from very non-normative expressions to heteronormative ones.

In light of this, considering the variety of characters within the playtext can help us understand how the oppressions afflicted upon bodies that carry different social markers take place. For instance, Prior and Belize are marginalized because of their sexuality that falls out of the hegemonic heterosexuality, and they are oppressed due to being people who behave effeminately. However, their gender and sexuality are not the only markers that marginalize them. Prior lives with HIV and Belize is racialized, which critically influences on their exposure to prejudice and discrimination. Even though they are both marginalized, this marginalization happens differently (Campagna 10, Hogan 08). The scholars argue that it is important to see their differences in order to better understand how both Prior and Belize can be seen as social representations of resistance in relation to their – sometimes overlapping – struggles.

There have also been studies related to racial issues, commenting on the state of racism and on the depiction of Belize. Hauge points out that in comparison to other matters and characters analyzed in the play, Belize's character has been often neglected in comparison to studies based on other characters or themes (70). Neglecting the importance of this character to the play within a queer analysis is controversial and racist since he is one of the three black characters of the play.

Controversially, Savran said Kushner avoided queer and racial criticisms by placing a black effeminate gay in the center, instead of in the margin (222). However, this can be understood as tendentious and racist, as it trivializes and seeks to delegitimize the centrality of such a character who prompt us into rethinking race, sexuality, gender, and class, dismissing its political significance as a mere token of political correctness. The playwright later problematized and apologized for this depiction in his work – as if apologizing changed the fact that while trying to break with a racist and white theater, Kushner didn't not go beyond it in fact. Hogan argues that the playtext lacks a racially diverse cast and characters (07). Among 32 characters, there are 4 that are only voices, while all the other 28 characters have human, or angelic characterizations. Most of them are characterized as white, or are not characterized in terms of race, while only 3 are black: Belize, Mr. Lies

and the Angel Oceania. This difference in number is deeply connected to the social inequality faced by black people.

Considering that the number of black characters is a lot fewer than the number of white ones and that not all the characters are characterized in matters of race, there should be more black characters. This would change how history is told in *Angels in America* mid-1980s New York because long before then and even nowadays black people tend to be marginalized by white people. If Reagan's government was bad for LGBTQI white people, for black people – LGBTQI or not – it was a lot worse.

Dedrick Asante-Muhammad argues that the Reagan era represented a series of setbacks in relation to anti-racist struggles and the lives of black people. Reagan was openly against affirmative actions, which he said worked as a form of reverse racism - as if it existed. The former president opposed to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and to the Voting Rights Act, which were established at a national level saying that each state should be responsible for them. He attempted to veto the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988 which related to publicly funded institutions having to comply with civil rights laws, but fortunately, the Congress did not accept it.

Even though he failed in his opposition to these acts, he succeeded in cutting financial support for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the civil rights division of the Justice Department, making the first to file 60% fewer cases and the latter uninvestigate cases of racism, as Asante-Muhammad points out. The cuts also happened in government funding for school lunches, unemployment insurance, child care, subsidized housing, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). Black people during Reagan's administration faced record levels of unemployment, poverty, police violence and incarceration. The Reagan era did not go forward in regard to racial equity; it rather created more problems that have after-effects up to today.

Apart from this, Hogan argues that Belize character is very complex and at the same time that Belize is a continuation of the hegemonic order – because Belize is depicted as a nurse, which is related to the place of black people in the white racist imaginary, that is a servant – Belize is also its rupture. Hogan, then, in light of this argument, has also directed her analysis on Belize and stated that his lines “are grounded in reason, argument, and personal experience as a queer black man in America” and that he can be seen as the voice of

reason in most of his moments in the production (7). Therefore, even though Belize is a nurse, their depiction challenges racism.

While Savran and many others have dwelled on the binary oppositions within the play, I have not been able to find researches that dealt with non-binary gender and sexuality constructions or that provided a non-binary reading of Kushner's *Angels in America*. The closest I was able to reach was Hauge's paper in which she argues that Belize is a character that "is not female, not male, but queer" (70). She draws her analysis on Butler's notions of gender performativity and gender as socially constructed to state that Belize is biologically male¹⁸, but that his body is also female.

Following Hogan's logic in relation to Belize's queerness, Badreddine Othman states Belize dismantles the notions of man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual, and thus, challenges the heterosexual matrix (73). This fluidity Belize embodies and expresses has also been related to the fact that he used to perform as a drag queen. Othman suggests that Belize has a drag persona that is with him even when he is not performing, and thus, this would explain the contrastive behavior regarding cissexist gender notions for a masculine body (72).

Similarly, Meisner argues that Belize and Prior also perform an everyday drag (187). However, if we consider a drag persona to be bonded to them, we might fail to acknowledge the existence of bodies that do not take part in drag performances, but that are not, nonetheless, strictly male or female. Even though I disagree with this point made by Othman and Meisner about an everyday drag – which I discuss more deeply in chapter 2 –, their studies, together with Hauge's and Muñoz's (as we shall see below), have been the closest I could find in regard to non-binary gender constructions within the play; even if not using this terminology – apart from the analysis of the angel that descends from heaven having a different genital formation.

Kushner depicts this angel as having eight vaginas and a bouquet of phalli (174-75). In regard to this angel – named the Angel –, more than one analysis was made linking Kushner's Angel to Walter Benjamin's *Angelus Novellus*¹⁹. Some regard their similarities in which

¹⁸ In chapter 2 I will reopen this discussion on whether bodies are "biologically" male or female.

¹⁹ For an in-depth analysis concerning the relation between Walter Benjamin's and Kushner's Angels, see Savran's article *Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How "Angels in America" Reconstructs the Nation* (1995). The researches that draw from this one are: Muñoz's *Tony Kushner's Angels in*

they are both stuck at present, looking at the past unable to progress to the future and how this relates to humanity being (or not) in motion. Others are also about how Walter Benjamin's vision of history relate to Kushner's construction of an ideological background. Other analyses were also made in relation to its depiction and genitalia.

Savran (211) while analyzing the Angel uses *s/he* and not really one pronoun or another, while most researchers – such as Muñoz, Cockrarel, Othman – use only *she*. I would like to take issue with Savran's mode of referencing her. Even though Kushner addresses her as she, and so do the characters within the playtext, Savran finds it somehow difficult to refer to her using only *she*. In his analysis he uses *s/he* and *her/his*. Savran has problems referring to this character that has a different genital formation than the socially expected vagina. I can only understand this as misgendering and transphobia because the characterization of this character is clearly defined as female.

Othman discusses how angels are normally depicted as asexual beings in Christianity, which is different from Kushner's one that is not only sexed, but has multiple genitalia and has sex with a gay man (76). Similarly, Crockarell, Munoz, and Yair Lipshitz also discuss how the Angel blurs gender and sexual identities. I will bring more specific information about this in Chapter 3 where I also analyze the Angel's depiction.

This could have happened because of the binary structure of the play, or maybe because of the binary structure in which our world is divided, which limits possibilities of thinking and researching that would go beyond either male or female existences. On this account, I intend to expand the legibility of gender instability from a perspective of non-binary gender aligned with intersectionality. I will also consider, within the playtext, whether and, if so how, the playwright's notes can be read from a non-binary perspective of gender.

America or How American History Spins Forward (2006), Mundim's *História, Utopia e Contranarrativa da Nação em Angels in America* (2009), and Muhammed's "*Universe of Wounds*": *Visions of Redemptive Apocalypse in Tony Kushner's Angels in America* (2010).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this second chapter, I will recall the role of western colonization in imposing a binary gender system that limits what is intelligible and unintelligible within a cisgender and heteronormative hegemony. With this in mind, I will articulate my view of gender and sex as regulatory norms and as social and psychological constructs that shape our existences and the materiality of our bodies within the ensuing contemporary context of the coloniality of power. I will focus on non-binary gender identities and discuss linguistic changes and challenges proposed by this different understanding of gender, such as the singular *they*, and their relation to my reading of the playtext. The purpose of this section is to present a theoretical framework that can support my analysis of how Kushner's *Angels in America* can be understood from perspectives that see gender as neither binary nor homogeneous (monolithic) – thus non-binary and intersectional. In what follows, therefore, I will articulate the analytical parameters that will guide my analysis based on readings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Nikki Sullivan, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Susan Stryker, and Judith Butler, among others who study gender, sexuality and race.

2.1 WESTERN (BINARY) COLONIZATION

Against the view of binary gender being natural, Hélène Frohard-Dourlent *et al* argue that gender has not always been conceived in the binary way supported by our western cis-heteronormative culture. In fact, they argue that the binary gender division relates to western colonization which erased bodies that did not correspond to this either/or scope (02). Similarly, María Lugones argues that colonization imposed a new gender system that “created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers”. Within these arrangements was the crucial difference that placed the white colonizers as individuals who belonged to an allegedly superior group made of men and women while the colonized – native and enslaved people – were automatically placed as belonging to an inferior racialized group made of males and females (186). Colonization discarded the epistemes and the different arrangements of gender acknowledged by the colonized and divided them into two categories based on genital organs. To understand this new gender system Lugones argues that it is important to think of what Anibal Quijano addresses as coloniality of power. In Lugones’s understanding it is:

The basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of race, a replacing of relations of superiority and inferiority established through domination with naturalized understandings of inferiority and superiority (186).

Lugones draws on Quijano's concept in order to think about what she theorizes as the colonial/modern gender system. The colonial/modern gender system is mutually constitutive of the coloniality of power and divides people in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and race. It considers white cisgender and heterosexual people to be superior to non-cis and trans ones, as well as to people whose sexualities differ from the heterosexual matrix. Thinking of the coloniality of power proposed by Quijano helps understand how society is organized, but she argues that gender is not clearly articulated in this concept. For her, one should look at the coloniality of power through intersectional lens involving gender, race, sexuality, among other social markers. It is only by doing so that we will be able to understand how it takes place without, once again, ignoring epistemes that have been decentered, or placing patriarchy as a homogenous structure that affects all gendered and sexually-diverse bodies in the same way (189).

According to her, to understand the place of gender in precolonial societies it is pivotal to reflect upon "the nature and scope of changes in the social structure that the processes constituting the colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism imposed" and it is also paramount to "understanding the extent and importance of the gender system in disintegrating communal relations, egalitarian relations, ritual thinking, collective decision making and authority, and economies". For her, gender and sexuality were not organizing principles among native North-American societies as they are nowadays. The Eurocentric gender binary (man/woman) imposes a biological difference that determines whether one is a man or a woman based on body parts and fails to acknowledge the existence of other genders that were found prior to colonization – and I add, genders that are found nowadays (201-2).

In regard to other genders different from the binary man/woman, Lugones, citing Michael Horswell, argues that recognizing a third gender is not the same as saying that there are only three genders, but rather that the understanding of gender prior to colonization was not fixed and divided into only two categories (201). According to Rachel Hope Cleves, scholars such as Susan Stryker, Leslie Feinberg, among

others bring data of the existence of gender bending archetypes predating colonization in what is now North America. This data relates to individuals who were neither men nor women as we understand these terms, and individuals whose bodies embraced both genders, such as two-spirit people (460).

The latter, as Estevão Fernandes argues, was understood to have both the female and male spirits within themselves, was seen as spiritually gifted, had places of honor and respect in their communities and was seen as bridges between the spiritual and earthly worlds (14). This does not mean, however, that there was no oppression based on gender and sexuality, but rather that a gender diverse understanding of gender that is different from the Eurocentric gender system has existed and has been, unfortunately, silenced.

If colonization imposed a binary understanding of gender, does it sound impossible to conceive of gender as irreducible to the binary? It is comprehensive why people tend to assume that non-binary gender identities are something new or even how some people cannot conceive this idea today. Maybe it is our internalized and institutionalized binary understanding of gender that does not allow us to think of different gender arrangements. Similarly, it is also understandable why these identities are more frequently found among young people because these categories of identification have more recently resurfaced. Nonetheless, it is paramount that we do not assume these discussions on how western society organizes itself in terms of gender and race to be given. They are taken for granted and are rather distant from the public and mediatic spheres.

2.2 QUEER THEORY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

The term *queer* has been used in different contexts in accordance with different people. Within the groups of people who have been initially called or self-identified as queer are lesbian and gay individuals. Other sexuality and gender identities that fall out of the heteronormative model, such as bisexuality, asexuality, transgender, are also within the realm of its significance. Butler argues that the term *queer* should be open to embrace new meanings and people, because if we use it only in regard to sexuality, or as a fixed term, we will fail to acknowledge the existence of many diverse individuals' realities that the term could cover (*Bodies* 228). *Queer* should be used as a site of an on-going collective contestation.

Even though it was used as a pejorative term towards lesbians

and gays in the 1960s and 1970s, it has been resignified and nowadays it can be used proudly by people who have been called queer. This resignification makes the term be associated with resistance and struggle, even though its meanings are not specifically fixed and it is sometimes still used pejoratively. Once we think about genders and sexualities that differ from the hegemonic cisgender and heterosexual perspective, we are thinking about queer bodies. However, this queering can happen as a response from the hegemonic order that does not consider these bodies to be in the realm of intelligibility, but it can also happen as a form of self-identification of a difference that should be celebrated. Butler argues that identifying as *queer* or with other terms that are under its scope bears a force to resist the insults and accusations to which it was initially – and at many times is – linked to (*Bodies* 226).

One of the studies connected to the emergence of Queer Theory in the academic sphere in the late 1980s is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* in which she reflects about physical and psychological boundaries that *queer* bodies dwell on. Remarkably, Anzaldúa draws attention to the fact that identities are not fixed and uses intersectionality to think of them. The scholar has also analyzed the term *queer* and its meanings, calling attention to its homogenic characteristic and the need to conceive it aligned to an intersectional perspective. For her:

Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences. (250)

When thinking of queer bodies, it is paramount that we do not homogenize them because they vary in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, among other markers. It is by thinking of the differences carried by queer people that we will be able to understand how lives are differently exposed to prejudice and discrimination, and therefore, marginalized. Even though *queer* is used as an umbrella term when it comes to non-heteronormative gender identities and sexualities, the fact that it is an on-going and open site of contestation and reflection should lead us to stop ignoring the subjectivities and singularities among queers and consider them in light of intersectionality.

Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s to discuss how gender and race interact within the structure

of oppressions faced by black women (140). The scholar argues that the relation between racism and sexism cannot be ignored and that it is necessary to conceive how race and ethnicity relate to gender. In this sense, Maria Lugones, drawing from Crenshaw and other feminists of color, argues that the category *woman*, for instance, homogenizes and therefore whitewashes this gender identity. For her, “intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other” (192).

Even though the term arises to problematize racial and gender relations – and the implications within –, this perspective is also useful when considering LGBTQIphobia since it does not only happen in regard to sexuality and gender, but can also be afflicted by other factors, such as race, weight, age, class, and disabilities. LGBTQI individuals carry different social markers and thus it is important for this research to consider the relation of *Angels in America*’s queer characters from the perspective of intersectionality put forth by Crenshaw, Anzaldúa, and others.

On this account, Anzaldúa, Crenshaw, and Butler are important references when thinking of the term *queer* and Queer Theory. Their studies challenge fixed and hegemonic notions, such as the assumption that men and women are naturally born masculine and feminine, that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality deserving recognition, that sex is only biological, that sex and gender are one and the same, or that gender does not exist. For Butler, sex is “not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the one becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (Bodies 02). Bearing this in mind, sex is not only biological, but also a set of changing regulatory norms that qualify and determine who is intelligible or not, what is livable or unlivable. These norms impose a set of possible heteronormative and/or homonormative ways of being either a man/woman.

More than that, Butler’s notions on gender relate to this set of norms that constitute sex and dictate intelligibility. Following the same logic of sex, gender is not what one “is” nor what one “has”. For Butler, therefore, it is the apparatus that produces and normalizes what is masculine and feminine together with “interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes” (*Undoing* 42). It is rather cultural and material at the same time. As its irreducibility to the either/or male/female gaze becomes legible, gender is also a way of destabilizing the binarism and can also be understood as norms that determine intelligibility. In this way, sex and gender, while

working as norms, work in fact as both exclusionary and expansive devices that can produce fixity or change. More than that, if we only consider gender to be either masculine or feminine, we are following the hegemonic perspective that makes bodies that differ from it abject and deviant (*Undoing* 43).

Moreover, Queer Theory is not limited by the contrast between heterosexuality and homosexuality, or by the contrast of masculinity and femininity regulatory norms, nor it is a fixed apparatus with pre-established analytical tools (*Gender* 230). It is all of these contrasts, but it is also an on-going, changeable theoretical perspective that defies the understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, and race bound to different social movements, such as feminisms, LGBTQI and anti-racist struggles. Queer Theory, then, can be used as a lens to contest and problematize sexual and gender identities that are seen as the norm, the ones considered deviant and their relation to race and ethnicity if we follow Gloria Anzaldúa's and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional approach.

As I have mentioned before, sex and gender can be understood as regulatory norms and practices, but they can also be looked at from the perspective of gender performativity as proposed by Butler. She states that it needs no a singular or deliberate act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies* 02). This theorizing helps us understand how gender can be socially constructed. Indeed, gender socializations depend on a reiterative practice that only happens at the expense of an other – a repudiated other serving as a foil for a normative self thus fabricated by contrast within the changeable structures of gender.

Under the hegemonic cisgender and heterosexist perspective, these ideas of gender performativity and gender as norms start even before a person is born because it is believed that genital organs dictate a person's sex and the idea of gender is therefore based on body parts, as Butler argues (*Bodies* 7). If a person is born with a penis, this person will be socialized as a boy/man and if a person is born with a vagina, as a girl/woman. In fact, this binary socialization happens even before the person is born. During the pregnancy, parents tend to have expectations about having a baby girl or a baby boy. This gets increased when they discover the baby's genitalia. If it is a vagina, the clothes, the bedroom, the toys, among other things, will be bought in regard to what is culturally coded as feminine, or masculine if the baby has a penis.

This gender binarism does not only affect cisgender men and women, it also affects trans people, intersex individuals and people who

do not identify under the “cis” or “trans” prefixes. Intersex people – those born with different genitalia formations or chromosomes combinations than the socially regular “penis or vagina”, “XY or XX” – are taken for granted and are not allowed to choose or identify with any gender, but are rather assigned the one that they are “apparently and physically” closer to. This decision, as it also happens with non-intersex people, is not for them to make, but rather for the parents and doctors who decide whether this person will be socialized as a boy or a girl depending on bodily characteristics (Green *et al* 101).

The fact that there has been a mass medicalization involving surgical practices to shape their bodies into a “boy’s” or a “girl’s” only reinforces a binary mode of seeing gender that reduces gender to biology. To reduce gender to a biological trait is to ignore that not only gender, but also sex is socially constructed. Butler, after analyzing how our society understands sex as preceding gender, reflects on what sex is if not always already gender:

If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this "sex" except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that "sex" becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access. (*Bodies* 5)

Even though sex is understood as preceding gender and is based on biological characteristics by the hegemonic culture, Butler argues that there is no direct access to it and that the idea of sex is absorbed by the notion of gender. The binary socialization that starts even before a person is born is one example of how our society does not conceive of sex separate from gender. In this sense, sex does not precede gender; they are, in fact, in an inseparable relation in which sex is an effect of the cultural notion of gender. Sex does not determine gender, nor does gender determine sex. They are in a co-constitutive, mutual relation. This makes sex to always be already gender and gender to always be already sex. Gender and sex are both social constructions and so is our binary understanding of them.

Following Butler’s argument that both sex and gender are constructs, I am trying to criticize and reflect upon how our society is organized within a set of excluding norms based on gender and sex. The insufficiency of the gender binary has been long discussed by feminist

and LGBTQI groups and lived by people whose bodies do not match this system. People can be differently masculine, feminine, or something else. Body parts can also be differently and not compulsorily gendered (Feinberg 207). We need to stop conceiving of body parts as belonging to one specific gender. For instance, the idea that a penis is masculine and a vagina is feminine is excludent and ignores how some trans women have feminine penises and how some trans men have masculine vaginas. In the case of trans non-binary people, non-binary body parts. For Stryker:

(...) our culture today tries to reduce the wide range of livable body types into two and *only* two genders, one of which is subject to greater social control than the other, with both genders being based on genital sex. Lives that do not conform to this dominant pattern are generally treated as human garbage. Breaking apart the forced unity of sex and gender, while increasing the scope of livable lives, is an important goal of transgender feminism and social justice activism. (*Trans Hist* 18)

This idea of livable body types and unlivable ones is related to the set of norms imposed by a cisgender and heteronormative system. As some LGBTQI people challenge cis-heteronormative hegemonic standards, we are not seen as real and are exposed to prejudice, oppression and marginalization. In short, these lives are what Stryker refers to above as “human garbage”. They are only this because they are not intelligible for the heterosexual matrix that dictates how men and women have to be like.

Just as the “fixed” categories of man/woman are unstable, there are many ways to be transgender, there are many ways to be a person. Stryker argues that “what counts as transgender varies as much as gender itself, and it always depends on historical and cultural context” (29). There are people that do not behave accordingly to sex/gender hegemonic norms. This helps us understand that there are not only many ways to be trans, but there are also many ways to be person, cis, trans or none of these two options. It would be amazing if everybody could express themselves the way they want to, but it is true that – and I say this from experience – the more someone challenges the cisgender heterosexual matrix, the furthest this person is from being intelligible and having basic human rights available.

The heterosexual matrix can be related to what Viviane Vergueiro calls *cisgêneridade* in Brazilian Portuguese – *cisgenderity* (my translation) –: a system that makes people live accordingly to the gender they are assigned at birth based on genital organs that dictates what is to be a woman or a man (72). Similarly, Brune Bonassi uses the term *cisnorm* to refer to the same set of rules that are forced upon individuals based on body parts (19). I believe that the two notions, even though differently named, refer to Butler's aforementioned theory of social norms that determine intelligibility or unintelligibility, that is, being recognized as human or not being seen at all, being thrown to places where no one looks: the margins. Finally, I personally like to call this set of norms as *cistem*, as an analogy to *cisgender* and *system*, which had already been addressed by activists and scholars such as Vergueiro.

Apart from hegemonic rules, even though gender is materialized through performativity, gender is also related to psychological aspects. Even if these are also social, they relate more closely to how a person sees themselves in an individual level. It is true that gender encompasses both social inscriptions and symbols and how we perform them, but it also relates to a sense of self, as Mair Cayley argues (64). Thinking of a sense of self is different from saying there is a woman's essence, a man's essence, a trans' essence, and so forth. Thinking of a sense of self is related to how a person identifies themselves regardless of visible body characteristics. There are many people whose gender identities are different from the biological markers inscribed on them. In this sense, gender identity is related to how a person sees themselves and the reiterative practices – consciously and unconsciously – performed by them (*Bodies 2*).

It is dangerous to think of gender only as social ignoring the self-perception of each person about themselves and individual experiences. It is equally dangerous to think of gender only as a matter of self-identification because if we do so, we suppose there is a female or male essence to embody. However, things get more complicated because our sense of self is also based on socially constructed meanings of gender identities. This is why I consider important to understand gender both in a social and a psychological level, because in the end, the psychological level is social and the social, psychological. It makes more sense to me to consider gender under constructionism and essentialism, as co-constitutive, neither precedent nor autonomous from the other. According to Stryker:

For most people, there is a sense of congruence between the category one has been assigned to and trained in, and what one considers oneself to be. Transgender people demonstrate that this is not always the case – that it is possible to form a sense of oneself as *not like* other members of the gender one has been assigned to, or to think of oneself as properly belonging to another gender category. (*Trans Hist* 19)

Therefore, I understand gender psychologically and socially specially because of my self-identification as a trans non-binary person that is many times read as an effeminate gay man, but nonetheless identifies out of the gender binarism. The materiality of my body does not correspond the cultural expectations of what I was “biologically supposed to be”, nor exactly what a trans person is “supposed to look like”. My gender identity differs from people’s reading when they look at me, and it also differs from the only two boxes imposed by our current understanding of gender – even if it is impossible to know how I am exactly read. I make this argument based on moments in which I was taken as a gay man and on moments people were in doubt about my cisgender identification. Being me, then, involves both my non-binary gender performativity and my sense of self when it comes to not being a man or a woman – these two categories are way too limiting for me.

I use myself as an example here, but the same is true for many trans people whose bodies and social readings do not match their gender identities, like trans women that are constantly misgendered as men, and trans men that as seen as women. In the case of cisgender lesbians and gays a similar thing can happen. An effeminate gay cisgender man might be read as a trans woman depending on how far he is from masculine standards, but can, nonetheless, be as a cisgender gay man. Or a masculine lesbian that might be read as a trans man depending on how far she is from feminine standards, but who is as a cisgender lesbian.

While I do believe that social readings are related to how one performs their gender, I also believe it is related to the person that reads. Misgendering and being read depends on the gaze of a supposed other who can be cis or trans. Therefore, these two notions rely on how people understand gender in our society, on the trans people they know and might relate with and on the internalized – at many times intentional – transphobia perpetrated by them.

2.3 TRANS NON-BINARY GENDER

Transgender has had different meanings since it started to be used in the early 1990s. It has not only been used as an umbrella term to represent as many gender variations as possible, but also as a term only to refer to trans women and trans men under a binary perspective, as Avery Tompkins states (27). According to the International Trans Organization Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE) the term is used to refer to people who identify themselves with a different gender than the one assigned at birth, be that binary or not (Eisfeld 109). Susan Stryker argues that the term *Trans* can be politically used to represent many gender-diverse individuals, such as trans women and men, as well as non-binary people, and should be open to transformation (19). Therefore, I will follow Stryker's understanding of the term *trans* as inclusive and representing a bigger diversity of gender identities and expressions, including binary and non-binary ones.

In relation to people who identify out of the gender binary, and here I find myself included since I identify as a non-binary person, there are two broad terms in English that are used to refer to people who neither identify themselves as female nor male: genderqueer and non-binary (Cayley 8; Love 173). *Genderqueer* is a term that started to be used in the mid-1990s and became more popular by the end of the decade to refer to trans people. Marilyn Roxie (2011) points out that Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (1992), Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1994), and Rikki Anne Wilchins' newsletter *In Your Face* (1995) helped create the scholarly foundations for members of a community who had long been challenging the pre-established binary notions of gender.

One might wonder about what a person is if not a man or a woman and not be able to think outside this binary perspective. Unfortunately, since non-binary and other trans lives are often not intelligible to many people, it is rather difficult for us to be recognized in personal relationships and by the law. Richards *et al* argue that the term *non-binary* is used as an umbrella term, and thus other terms that fall under its open scope, such as genderqueer, androgynous, genderless, agender, pangender, bigender, genderfuck, genderfluid, among many others that – even though differing in their characteristics and singularities – relate to individuals who do not identify as men nor

women (95). Similarly, but in a more detailed explanation Benjamin William Vincent says that:

Non-binary individuals may identify as part of an explicit ‘third gender’ category that is static and stable, or they may identify as genderfluid, whereby gender identity can shift over time. Some may identify as bigender, where one identifies as male (or more male) some of the time and female (or more female) at other times. Yet others may identify as agender or neutrois, approximately synonymous terms which may be interpreted either as the absence of gender, or the presence of a neutral gender. Many more community-recognised identity labels exist in addition to these few. However, it is not possible to give an exhaustive account of the language coined in order to negotiate the multitude of personal experiences of gender, not least because of its continual growth and negotiation. (71)

To understand and properly recognize the existence of non-binary individuals is to admit that the gender is not irreducibly binary and that this is not the only intelligible form of existence. Non-binary identities are many, rich, complex and have their own singularities, as Vincent argues. In similar way, the binary gender categories (man/woman) are also complex and have their own singularities if we stop conceiving of them under the current hegemonic perspective of what men and women should be/act like.

Even though I want to develop a non-binary gender reading of *Angels in America*, the conceptualization of non-binary was not intelligible to the hegemony in place at the time of the play production (early 1990s) or at the time of its setting (mid-1980s). This prompts me into thinking of a question made by Butler: “for how can one read a text for what does not appear within its own terms, but which nevertheless constitutes the illegible conditions of its own legibility?” (*Bodies* 37). How can I read *Angels in America* the way I intend to if non-binary gender was intelligible? I think it is possible to look at it through non-binary lens even if the playtext did not organize itself around this concept because the binaries seen in it are many times challenged and destabilized.

Therefore, Butler's theorization on the cultural meanings of sex and gender are paramount when considering non-binary gender because if the illegible is constituted by the legible and vice-versa, the binary structure of *Angels in America* is nonetheless constituted by its non-binary opposite. Considering the growing legibility of non-binary gender, are the apparently binary relations in terms of gender (masculine/feminine) only readable as binary? Is the heterosexuality/homosexuality binary only understood as binary? Can the Angels' identities be discussed through non-binary gender lens? What aspects are there within the playtext that can be related to a non-binary and intersectional understanding of gender? What meanings emerge when the director's notes are read from a non-binary gender perspective?

2.4 GENDER DIVERSE LANGUAGE

Stemming from the questions done in the previous section, there is another element that has a crucial influence on my non-binary reading of the playtext: linguistic possibilities that go beyond a binary understanding of gender. Oppression, prejudice and a binary mode of gender are also manifested through a language and, in English, there are only two legal binary possibilities to refer to the third person in the singular: *he* and *she*. The fact sheet provided by The Society for the Psychological Study of LGBT Issues in 2015 points out that the pronouns are paramount to non-binary and transgender individuals due to the fact it relates to one's gender identity. Similarly, Stryker argues that "one's gender identity could perhaps be best described as how one feels about being referred to by a particular pronoun" (*Trans Hist* 19).

Taking this into consideration – without ignoring how gender can be understood in light of gender performativity – we can then conclude that since non-binary individuals are neither "*hes*" or "*shes*", we are excluded from and not visible in Brazilian Portuguese – which is my mother tongue: the only available possibilities are *ele* for he and *ela* for she. There is not a proper pronoun legally recognized to refer to us and if we do not exist in legal language our existences are even more discredited and taken for granted.

However, this does not prevent us from existing and resisting. It limits us to having to choose between two possibilities in many contexts – such as health and professional ones. If I say my pronoun is *she* and

do not have a feminine passability²⁰, it brings me serious problems related to transphobia. The same is true for non-binary people that prefer *he* and do not have masculine passability. It is not easy to have to choose between only two pronouns, but by only being able to do so, people – normally trans people – are forced to rethink how language is conceived and therefore challenge it.

Two genderqueer scholars and activists that challenged binary language in the 1990s and used gender non-specific pronouns were Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg²¹. Kate used *s/he* and Leslie used more than one pronoun, *s/he* and *hir* (Stryker and Whittle 205, 236). Conceiving this type of language is not easy and it involves linguistic changes that can only take place through a wide social use. Their options helped visualize a world in which binary language could be destabilized and in which non-binary and genderqueer people could find and see themselves as parts of the English language. In addition to *s/he* or *hir*, there are other pronouns that are used by non-binary people, some of them are: *xe*, *ze*, *ey*, *hir*, *fae*, and *hu* (Cayley xii).

Australia's largest youth led organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans youth, Minus 18, launched an app called *Pronouns* in which one can better understand gender diverse pronouns. The app provides sentences that cover all the grammatical aspects in relation to their uses and pronunciation, as well as detailed explanation on when to use them and how often they are used. According to it, even though *they* is the most used gender diverse pronoun nowadays, *xe*, *ze*, *ey*, *hir* are also more often seen than *fae* and *hu*. Regarding their pronunciation, *xe*

²⁰ The concept of passability or being passable relates to physical characteristics. It relates to how close or how far one is from being read according to their gender apart from characteristics that are taken as masculine or feminine. For example, for trans women to be read as such they have to embody hyperfemininity; the same is true for trans men in the sense of hypermasculinity. This is controversial because the notions of what it is to be masculine or feminine have been challenged by many cisgender feminists and gay men and even though they suffer from this, trans people are not allowed to deconstruct these notions. Trans binary people have to perform them with an extra effort because if not they will not be seen as real women or men. Even the ones that try to shake the *cistem* find themselves trapped under the validation of an other.

²¹ I am not saying that they were the first genderqueer people to challenge the language because this is untraceable. They were also not the only individuals who did that. I am just using them as real possibilities of looking at language less binarily.

is pronounced as /zi/, *ze* as /zi/, *eyas* /heɪ/ or /ɛ/, *hiras* /hir/, *faeas* /fə/ or /feɪ/, and *hu* as /hjum/ or /hum/.

It is important to bear in mind that these pronouns might sound unusual, are not fixed, are open to transformation and that non-binary people are not trying to homogenize our whole community and have one best pronoun that covers everybody who is not a *he* or a *she*. What we are trying to conceive is gender diversity in language and that is why different possibilities come up, but none of them are to be understood as better or worse than the other, they are, rather, more or less frequently used and should be used and respected accordingly.

They is a pronoun in the English language that has been resignified in order to refer to non-binary individuals, but it was already used in the singular since the 14th century²² in cases of gender indeterminacy or as a third-person pronoun without highlighting gender, as Darren Lascotte²³ points out (63). Nowadays, apart from being used to refer to the plural, *they* has been used in the singular.

The use is not only restricted to the personal pronoun, but also to object, reflexive and possessive pronouns, as well as possessive adjectives. For instance: *they are Leo*, *they aren't a woman*, *they are a non-binary person*, *Julia loves her partner*, *she loves them*, *Jack loves themselves*, *the book is Andy's*, *the book is theirs*, *this is their book*, etc. Of course one might argue that these linguistic changes do not fit and might be misunderstood in many different contexts, but what happens if we understand the current English language to be binary, limited and a representation of the hegemonic culture? One possible answer to that is to understand language as something flexible and changeable that evolves through time. However, once the regular use for *they* is to refer to the plural of *he*, *she* or *it*, these changes might face adversities and

²² Since analysing linguistics examples from the past is out of the scope of this research, see Ann Bodine's article: *Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: singular 'they', sex-indefinite 'he', and 'he or she'* (1975) for more information.

²³ Lascotte carries out a study in 2016 exploring which pronouns English speakers use when referring to a singular, genderless antecedent, such as the word *student*. Out of 34 participants, he found out that 27 of them have a gender-diverse approach using *he or she*, or singular *they*. The others did not use pronouns, but rather the terms *anybody*, *somebody*, among other gender non-specific words. Some of the participants argued that when using only *he or she* as a gender non-specific possibility people who do not identify as binary are not referenced (62).

take longer to be accepted. Nonetheless, social changes also happen and are materialized through discourse.

These gender diverse possibilities are useful when reading *Angels in America* playtext because I am proposing a non-binary gender reading of it. In trying to do so, I will attempt to write my analysis in a way that does not reinforce gender binarism – unless when it is necessary to show binary difference. I will try to write my analysis using the term *queer* as it is irreducible to the gender binary. Also, I will refer to some of the characters using *they/them/themself* whenever possible.

Therefore, when writing about Belize, I have chosen to use *they* – and its variations – in order to challenge the binaries imposed on bodies based on biological traits. I am not arguing that Belize is not gay, but a trans non-binary person. Instead, I am arguing that Belize's body challenges gender binarism. In fact, using *they* as a gender non-specific pronoun can also be useful when gender difference is not important and to describe and analyze scenes, acts and dialogues of *Angels in America*, together with the gender ambivalent characteristics that some words in English have, such as *actor* and *nurse*.

3 ANALYSIS

After establishing the theoretical framework that grounds this thesis, I have decided to analyze 4 other different elements to be found in the playtext of *Angels in America*. The first is the depiction of Belize, the second is a dialogue between two characters: Roy Cohn and Belize in the 5th scene of the second part of the play, *Perestroika*. The third element of *Angels in America* that I will attempt to non-binarily analyze is the division of the actors and characters since Kushner's directions make multiple-acting possible. Therefore, I will attempt to consider the gender and racial relations when it comes to having a gender and racially diverse cast and characters.

The fourth analytical element is the characterization of the Angel, which Kushner describes as *she* and "being hermaphroditically equipped with a bouquet of phalli and eight vaginas", as well as the other Angels' depictions found within the playtext (174-5). On this account, even though *Angels in America* is a play structured through many binary oppositions involving race, gender, sexual orientation, political inclinations, class and religious beliefs, I will see what happens when we destabilize some of them in light of a non-binary and intersectional perspective of gender.

3.1 NOT MALE NOR FEMALE, BUT QUEER

Belize's subversive characterization in regard to the gender regulatory norms has been related to the fact that they were a drag queen and that now this performative act happens daily (Othman 72; Meisner 187). Othman argues that Belize is comfortable in terms of homosexuality and that the character is constantly performing femininity as part of this identity (72). I do not disagree with the latter, but rather with stating that Belize performs drag daily. My life experience as an effeminate non-binary person tells me that to be constantly performing femininity is different from being an everyday drag.

Although I understand that the researchers possibly make this relation due to drag being a performance of the performativity of femininity, Belize's characterization as highly effeminate might not have been drawn from drag; but rather such gender fluidity might have led them to performing drag. Or it might have been drawn from drag, and if so, re-shaped Belize's existences and self-understanding in terms of gender identity. In the end, an everyday drag would be a drag queen

performing literally daily, not really an effeminate person that might use language subversively and behave in a way that has been said to belong to another gender. To think that effeminate people perform a daily drag is in fact even offensive and disrespectful to the culture of Drag Queen and its art.

Apart from this daily drag – or not – discussion, Belize’s body encompasses characteristics that can be culturally said to belong to both genders. Hauge argues that due to being the most²⁴ effeminate character of the play, he therefore identifies “with the female gender rather than the male gender” (69). It is true that due to being effeminate we are inclined to identify *more* with some (different) features of the female gender, but this does not necessarily – though it may – change how we see our gender identities. Hauge also argues that Belize’s body disrupts the unstable hegemonic gender roles and that they are a character who “is not female, not male, but queer” (70).

The character does not self-identify as genderqueer, non-binary, genderless, but self-identifies as a gay man, a faggot and as queer instead. This can be stated, for instance when he is helping Roy in the hospital. Roy says Belize has little reason to want to help him and then Belize says “Consider it solidarity, one faggot to another” (161). One page earlier in the playtext, Belize uses another word to describe himself, they say they are “queer” (160). On this account, even if Belize says they are gay, they also use a term that can be understood in and out of the either/or scope of gender binarism, that is, queer.

Belize’s characterization challenges the stability of this gender binary and the heterosexual matrix to the extent that their characterization could be along the spectrum of masculine and feminine; closer to what is culturally coded as masculine or feminine, or out of that binary axis altogether. Indeed, within the broad scope of this latter possibility, Othman argues that Kushner depicted the ex-drag queen as a person beyond descriptive categories, in an on-going formation. For the scholar, Belize’s “acts, gestures, dialogues and speeches do not only dismantle all regulatory ideals maintained by normative mentalities, but also call into question the conventional comprehension of sexual

²⁴ Even though I understand Hauge’s argument on Belize being more effeminate in comparison to the other characters in the play, I wonder how one can really state this if not by being based on cisnorm. People are not more or less effeminate than others, people are different and express their gender in different ways, that’s all. The problem is there is the established notion of what it is to be masculine or feminine that makes everybody to be judged according to it.

identity” – and, I add, of gender identities, and of racial supremacy (73).

If Belize is not male, nor female, but queer, it can be also said that this gender identity is open to more than only one or another possibility irreducible to the male/female binary. A genderqueer or a non-binary identification was less frequently seen in the time of the production of the play, or in the time of its setting. This, however, does not undermine the possibility of Belize being gender ambivalent and being read as a character that challenges gender binarism.

Another factor that adds to Belize’s destabilization of gender is their name itself. They are presented as Belize, when in fact, they were assigned a different name: Norman Arriaga. There are many moments throughout the playtext that the name Belize is used, while only a few when Norman is preferred. The first moment it is possible to discover that Belize was actually given another name is in the characters’ list of *Millennium Approaches*. There, Kushner states that “Belize’s name was originally Norman Arriaga” and that “Belize is a drag name that stuck” (11). If it is a drag name that stuck, a name of a feminine performer artist, the usage of this name can suggest that this identity is not constructed only through masculine standards, but also through the ones of when performing drag.

The other moment that the name Norman appears is when Belize is helping Roy through a crisis at the hospital and Roy asks what the name of the nurse is and Belize answers saying “Norman Arriaga. Belize to my friends, but you can call me Norman Arriaga.” Maybe Belize is actually a more intimate name, and/or maybe the name the character properly identifies with since it is “Belize” the most frequent one. Maybe “Norman Arriaga” is left to formal and professional/hospital-like situations.

Even though we still live in a world that divides most names into either masculine or feminine, thinking of names that are irreducible to either of these traits exclusively can enable a non-binary perspective on naming. The fact that the drag name is gender ambivalent while the birth name is only masculine can be understood as a reassurance of gender indeterminacy in Belize’s characterization, at a time when gender indeterminacy in language – as made possible by @, X, or *they*, among other possibilities. Gender indeterminacy was made legible through performance, not language, with some exceptions, such as Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein. Belize’s names could be linked to arguing that Belize is neither male nor female, but rather that the character embodies characteristics of both genders. It could also refer to some other, potentially or actually emergent understanding of gender, that is,

non-binary gender.

3.2 QUEERING GENDER AND HEAVEN

Even though systems of oppressive structures happen in binary oppositions within the playtext, some binaries are blurred and challenged throughout it, leading us towards possible non-binary readings of events. One of the cases in which it happens is when Belize and Roy Cohn interact with one another. It happens because their characterizations contrast in matters of race, as Roy is white and Belize is black, in matters of sexuality, since Roy is closeted and Belize embraces his sexual orientation without shame or negation. They also differ in matters of social position due to Roy being a lawyer and Belize a nurse, and in terms of gender because Roy behaves in accordance with the hegemonic male gender role while Belize is effeminate, wears clothes and behaves in a way culturally coded as feminine. All of these differences show us the hierarchical power of binaries within the cultural context depicted in the playtext: the mid-1980s in New York. On a social level, Roy is almost always in a privileged position in relation to Belize in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality – except for when Roy is dying of AIDS-related causes – because Roy follows hegemonic standards, but Belize does not. Roy is intelligible, while Belize is placed in the margins of society.

Their conversation in the 5th scene of *Perestroika*²⁵ is a moment in which binaries are challenged and destabilized. At this moment Roy is hospitalized due to having HIV implications and Belize is attending to him. Roy asks Belize about the after death and Belize presents him with a portrayal that destabilizes racial and gender binaries. Roy assumes the description to be about hell, when, in fact, Belize is describing heaven. In the beginning of their conversation Roy says “Let me ask you something, sir” and Belize surprisingly answers “Sir?” (209). Belize’s surprise can prompt us towards different analytical directions. One of them is the white supremacy hierarchy that places Belize in a supposed inferior position, and thus being called “sir” by a clearly racist man²⁶ comes out as a shocking paradox. Belize does not see herself as inferior; Roy does (Othman 74).

²⁵ For analytical purposes, I have divided their conversation into several parts.

²⁶ One of the many cases within the playtext that Roy expresses racist ideologies is when he discovers that Belize is the nurse attending to him and says “I want a white nurse” and thinks it is his “constitutional right” (156).

Another direction to follow could be the one related to Belize's behavior: they are extremely effeminate and have already referred to themselves – and been referred by other characters – using feminine pronouns and adjectives, and therefore being addressed as “sir”, a masculine term, might come as a controversial choice of words. Nonetheless, it is impossible to draw a line limiting whether it relates either to a racial or a gender/sexuality binary hierarchy because all these markers intersect. I consider it more productive to think that these binary forces are blurred and challenged to the extent that we cannot achieve one possible answer, but that we can consider them as intersecting analytical possibilities.

As their conversation follows, Roy asks Belize what the after death is like and Belize promptly starts giving details after stating it is “like San Francisco” (209):

Belize: Mmmm. Big city, overgrown with weeds, but flowering weeds. On every corner a wrecking crew and something new and crooked going up catty-corner to that. Windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, fierce gusts of gritty wind, and a gray high sky full of ravens.

ROY: Isaiah.

BELIZE: Prophet birds, Roy.

Belize's initial description of heaven is a mixture of idyllic and flawed elements. This can be seen when the character says that there are “weeds, but flowering weeds”, transforming the idea of a plant that grows out of control and is hard to get rid of into the idea of overgrown flowered plants. Elements that could indicate decay are also seen in the description, for instance, “windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, fierce gusts of gritty wind, and a gray high sky full of ravens”. After this, Roy mentions the name of the Jewish prophet Isaiah and Belize replies him saying that the ravens are “prophet birds”.

Roy's racist claims in different moments of the playtext could serve as reference for thinking that when he says “Isaiah”, it is a mockery in relation to what Belize is describing, as if it were possible to Belize be a real prophet, or be given any credit. Roy saying “Isaiah” could also be related to the fact that he was not mentally stable – he was going in and out of hallucinations while at the hospital – and was seeing something that was not really there.

Nonetheless, Belize continues to portray heaven, saying that there

are “piles of trash, but lapidary like rubies and obsidian, and diamond-colored cowspit streamers in the wind. And voting booths.” (209). The mixture of idyllic and flawed features continues to appear in “piles of trash” that are gem-like and in “diamond-colored cowspit streamers”. These initial descriptions show a paradox indicating that this heaven is different from a safe and sound idea of the Christian one. The fact that there are also “voting booths” is another indicator that things are not fixed and are open to transformation there. Belize’s paradoxical heaven challenges the binary notion of the Christian heaven/hell and contains a mixture of elements that can be found in both places.

Hegemonic binaries continue to be challenged as Belize and Roy interact. When the nurse says that there everyone is “in Balenciaga gowns with red corsages”, that there are “big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion” and “all the deities are Creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers”, Belize is using terms that challenge the binaries of gender and race as we know them today (209-10). Belize is also challenging the binary notion that “good” people go to heaven and “bad” people go to hell. Belize blurs them not only because everyone is wearing flamboyant outfits, but also because of embodying characteristics that can be considered racially impure and/or gender confusing under cisgendered racist lens. While the racial binary is destabilized in a way that undermines white people’s supposed superiority, the gender binary exceeds its binary perspective by the term of “gender confusion”.

“Racial impurity” is a problematic term if we consider the perspective of Critical Race Studies, an extensive and heterogenous field highly critical of racial purity ideologies. By saying that “all the deities are Creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers” Belize breaks with the Christian and white imaginary that only depicts god, saints, and angels as having white skin. This has happened in all the stage productions of *Angels in America* so far, apart from the *Angel Oceania* that is played by Belize. If one angel can be black, why can’t the main Angel in the play also be? Normally, stage productions cut the Scene 5 of Act 5 because that is one of the only moments in which cutting is allowed by Kushner (142). Therefore, stage productions tend to fail to break with the white angel imaginary, while the playtext does offer this possibility,

In addition, by portraying deities of color, the character demarginalizes them and destabilizes racial hierarchy. In a similar way, Belize is a character that is considered impure by white-hegemony groups, but they defy and destabilize racist structures by placing

marginalized groups in the center of his idyllic heaven. Due to the fact that Belize's body comprises different social markers – those of a queer black person that used to perform as a drag – it also serves as a symbol for minorities representing resistance and pride, as well as the individuals portrayed in their heaven (Snauwaert 62).

In addition, Belize's heavenly portrayal of "gender confusion" opens up different perspectives about queer bodies. Is "gender confusion" related to individuals who embody both feminine and masculine traits? Is "gender confusion" related to not being able to tell one's genitalia? Is it related to not needing to conceive of gender separate from sex and vice-versa? Is it related to people who do not fit the categories that they were assigned at birth? Is it related to the sense of not being sure of which box to check? Is it related to those bodies that do not fit the categories of either being a man or a woman? Is "gender confusion", in fact, no confusion at all, but rather a comfortable place that is neither solely male nor female?

Even though I do not have answers to all of these questions, "gender confusion" is troublesome and cisheterosexist in light of Gender, Queer and Trans Studies that have discussed and problematized in the last two decades the phenomenon of *gender trouble*, conservatively called *gender chaos* or *gender confusion*. It relates to the fact that people do not fit into normative gender roles, and that the heterosexual matrix is unstable. How people identify themselves and the materialities of their bodies challenge imposed norms and show that these are insufficient. Our bodies vary in so many ways and in so many traits coded as masculine or feminine that, in fact, the confusion is not us and our bodies, but the very own notion of strict and binary gender roles.

Butler, already queering the notions of gender, draws a critique on this binarily imposed perspective of gender:

To assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the "masculine" and "feminine" is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance. (*Undoing* 42)

What Butler refers to as "permutations of gender which do not fit

the binary” can be related to the people Belize is referring to by saying “gender confusion”. Therefore, the individuals Belize idealizes in heaven are intelligible, even if gender transgressors bodies and identities are seen as abject or out of the norms – not only in the mid-1980s, but also today. While thinking of non-normative bodies, *gender trouble* can be related to any individual that does not perform gender norms accordingly, which is only a problem in light of the heterosexual matrix. On the other hand, Belize’s portrayal of heaven welcomes marginalized lives without a problem.

More than that, near the end of the description, Belize says that “race, taste and history” are “finally overcome. And you ain’t there”. Since Roy assumes that Belize was describing hell not heaven, he ironically asks “(*Happily shaking his head "no" in agreement*)²⁷: And Heaven?” to which Belize replies “That was Heaven, Roy”. Their vision of heaven breaks the expectations of a Christian heaven and the people that are in its center are not the ones placed and supported by the heterosexual matrix. Roy does not have a place in this queer version of heaven, in which, according to Belize race, taste and history are finally overcome and Roy is not there. This statement, however, does not mean that white people are not a part of it, but rather that those who are prejudiced and inflict discrimination do not have a place there. Violence based on gender, race, sexuality, as well as one hegemonic version of history are not the pillars of this place. The notions of a superior white race, of white and standard bodies as the only desirable ones and the notion of history being written by white men do not have space to exist in Belize’s heaven. They are replied, however, with Roy’s arrogance, disbelief and mockery saying “The fuck it was” which comes as no surprise due to his racist and homophobic ideologies (210).

Considering that Belize’s heaven is filled with gender non-conforming and non-white bodies, this paradoxically idyllic heaven is a place where queer and racialized identities are to be embraced, not refused. Gender and racial diversity are celebrated. Belize demarginalizes racialized and LGBTQI people and places them in the center, as a crucial part of heaven. In this logic, “Belize becomes not only an embodiment of Otherness, but a mouthpiece for a queer future where gender and race do not follow the earthly, hetero-normative hegemonic discourse”. For Hauge, this queer future happens through Belize’s words that tend to be associated with negative notions, but that are given new and positive meanings (69). Belize does not only

²⁷ Director’s note. (210)

challenge language by using "gender confusion" and "racial impurity", but also the very own gender and racial binaries.

3.3 MULTIPLE-ACTING

According to Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* character list, the plays have more characters than the number of actors to be hired. This means that one actor plays more than one character, characterizing what Savran has referred to as "doubling" and Hauge "double-acting" (216; 71). Throughout the analysis, though, I will refer to it as multiple-acting, since some of the actors take on more than only two characters. Kushner states on the character's list which actor should play each character, but does not state the actor's gender, and this decision, then, is left to the producer to make.

In *Millennium Approaches*, the playwright states that the professional playing Roy Cohn also gives life to Prior 2, and the actor playing Joe Pitt also plays Prior I and the Eskimo. The person playing Harper also plays Martin Heller, the actor playing Prior also acts out as the Man in the Park. The one playing Hanna plays the Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz, Henry, and Ethel Rosenberg, while the actor playing Belize also plays Mr. Lies. The actor playing the Angel also acts out as The Voice, Sister Ella Chapter and the Woman in the South Bronx. Finally, in the first part of the play, the actor playing Louis performs only as this character (11-12).

In *Perestroika*, even though the actors continue to multiple-act the characters just mentioned, there are characters that only appear in the second part of the play. The actor playing Hanna also plays Aleksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov and the Angel Asiatica. The one playing Joe also plays the Mormon Father and the Angel Europa, while the one playing Belize also plays the Offstage Voice of Caleb and the Angel Oceania. The Angel Africani is played by the actor playing Harper, the Angel Australia and Sarah Ironson by the actor playing Louis, and the Angel Antarctica by the one playing Roy. The actor performing the Angel also plays Emily, the Offstage Voice of Orrin, the Mormon Mother and the Taped Voice (137-139).

Due to this multiple-acting feature and Kushner's directions on the actors to play specific characters, the playtext allows cross-gender performances in a way that both female and male characters can be played by the same actor. This, however, has been criticized to the extent in which it apparently happens only in regard to female actors. Savran and Meisner, for instance, argue that this crossing of genders

only works in one direction: the actors playing Hannah, Harper and the Angel play both female and male roles, while the actors playing Joe, Roy, Prior, Belize, and Louis only double male characters (216; 188). As a direct response to Savran's critique, Hauge argues that Kushner himself never stated in the playwright's notes which should be the actors' genders to perform each character (71). Hauge thus concludes that the actors acting out as Hanna, Harper and the Angel could be played by either men or women, as well as the actors playing Joe, Roy, Prior, Belize, and Louis.

On the account of the Angel destabilized depiction, Meisner has also drawn a critique arguing that if the Angel is supposed to be gender-blended due to the bouquet of phalli and the 8 vaginas, then why does Kushner state that the character has to be performed by a female actor (188)? Even if not directed to Meisner, Hauge's counter argument on Kushner not stating the actor's genders also undermines her critique in a way that it is not possible to find, not in the playwright's notes of *Millennium Approaches* nor *Perestroika*, any instruction stating what she had claimed. The Angel's characterization as *she* does not mean that the character has to be played by a woman, but rather that it is characterized having a female gender identity that challenges cisheterosexism and that could be performed by a person – cis, trans or intersex.

Maybe it was part of the cultural imaginary in which the production of the play takes place that female characters are to be played by women, while male ones by men. It is noteworthy that the distinction between *actor* and *actress* were not in place in the playtext, and only *actor* was used to refer to both male and female actors. This makes multiple-acting possible without specifying gender, adding another gender ambivalent element to *Angels in America*. However, the alignment to the gender binary roles is expected if we consider that the plays were first performed in the early 1990s. Since Kushner does not specify the actors' gender, it is left to the producers of the theatrical productions to audition the professionals. Even though there is a tendency that follows this pattern, this cultural imaginary of gender does not strictly define it as an obligation – but rather as an imposition – to be followed in theater, nor is necessarily combined with Kushner's notes.

Going back to Savran's and Meisner's researches, even though they are working with the playtext, they fail to acknowledge Hauge's counter argument, as well as a very important detail to be found on the characters' list of *Perestroika*. It is true that most Kushner's directions in regard to the actors' multiple-acting are in fact supported by Savran's

and Meisner's critique. Even though most of it happens indeed in the direction they argue, one of them happens in the opposite direction. As Kushner states "Sarah Ironson, Louis's dead grandma, whom Rabbi Chemelwitz inters in Act One of *Millennium*, played by the actor playing Louis" (140). Therefore, the actor playing Louis does not only multiple-act as the Angel Australia – normally characterized as male on stage performances –, he also plays Sarah Ironson, a woman.

The reason why this multiple acting has not been noticed neither by Meisner nor Savran may be related to the fact that it only happens twice in the play. The first she is dead, inside of a coffin in her funeral, with no spotlights on her, but rather on the Rabi, who is spreading a message about migration and history and therefore this might not have been considered relevant enough in *Millennium Approaches*. The second moment is when Prior visits heaven and meets her there in *Perestroika*²⁸. This encounter happens very fast and does not have a crucial impact on the narrative, but rather help us visualize people that are in *Angels in America*'s heaven while Prior heads to meet the Continental Principalities.

Even if it has been left out of their analysis, when Prior meets Sarah, he tells her "You look just like your grandson, Louis" (268). This genetic trait could indicate why Sarah should be played by the same actor playing Louis, but it does not undermine the multiple-acting, gender-crossing feature of Kushner's *Angels in America*. For the playtext, this provides and enables a different reading of the actors' multiple-acting. If we consider theatrical performances of *Angels in America* and their playtexts, the multiple-acting done by female actors acting out as female and male characters happen more frequently than the one done by male actors. This, however, does not limit nor close the playtext possibility to enable a cross-gender multiple-acting that could go towards different directions in terms of the actors' and the characters' genders.

3.4 ANGELS

Among the many characters within the playtext, most of them are characterized as human beings, while some of them are angels – beings

²⁸ Kushner's notes in the playtext state that scene 5 of *Perestroika* can be cut – (142). This may also be a reason why Meisner and Savran argue that the multiple-acting in *Angels in America* only happen in one direction.

that embody human and non-human physical features. They look like humans, but they also have wings, celestial powers, different genital formation and sexualities from humans. The Angels within Kushner's playtext are: the Angel, who appears to Prior and discloses his prophetic role in *Millennium Approaches*. This Angel is described as "four divine emanations, Fluor, Phospor, Lumen and Candle; manifest in One: The Continental Principality of America. She has magnificent steel-gray wings" (11). The other angels that are found only in *Perestroika* Act 5, Scene 5 are: the Angel Europa, the Angel Africani, the Angel Oceania, the Angel Asiatica, the Angel Australia, and the Angel Antarctica²⁹. In light of the playtext lack of delimitation in regard to the actors' gender, they could be easily performed by men, women or non-binary people. Kushner states which actors are responsible for each character, but he does not give us a clear characterization of all the angels' genders or race, only some.

The Angel first appears as voices that Prior hears while having hallucinations due to fever and medical treatment. Then, she descends from heaven to tell him that he is a prophet and that his great work has begun. As the story follows, the Angel not only meets and talks to Prior, but they also fight and have sex. When Prior is telling Belize about their sexual encounter, he says he had sex and that "it was a woman" and that it was "not a conventional woman" to which Belize promptly answers "Grace Jones?" (153). It is interesting to note, as Othman has already done, that when Prior says it was not a conventional woman, Belize asks him if it was a worldwide famous artist well-known not only for her performances, talent, but also for her androgynous voice and appearance (72).

As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, Muñoz has argued that the Angel blurs sexual boundaries due to having sex with a gay man and due to her unconventional biology, that is, being depicted having a bouquet of phalli and 8 vaginas (06). Their intercourse blurs sexual orientation identities, as well as gender identities. The fact that the Angel is depicted as female, but is sexually characterized differently from what is culturally coded to be a biological female sex – having 8 vaginas and many penises³⁰, instead of only a vagina – destabilizes the

²⁹ Unfortunately, the scene they appear can be cut – Act 5, Scene 5 – according to Kushner's notes (142). Much of the discussions I make in the next paragraphs are not possible when stage performances remove this scene.

³⁰ The terms Kushner uses to describe her "hermaphroditically equipped" (174) are troublesome in light of the Intersex movement that argue that calling

notions grounded on the heterosexual matrix of what it is to be woman. In a similar way, Prior blurs what it is to be gay because he gets an erection at many times when the Angel is approaching him. For instance, when he is telling Belize about the voices he is hearing he says “You know what happens? When I hear it, I get hard” (66). He also cums while sleeping because he has a wet dream with the Angel: “First goddam orgasm in months and I slept through it” (153). Or when he says he has “an infallible barometer of her proximity. And it’s rising” referring to his penis (237). The Angel also destabilizes sexual binaries because as a Christian angel, she is supposed to be asexed. Not only she has sex with Prior, but she also kisses Hannah – Joe’s Mormon mother – “on the forehead and then the lips—a long, hot kiss” (252).

This destabilization is not clear about all the other angels, however, since they only appear in Act 5 of *Perestroika* and there is not as much to discover about themselves as there is for the Angel. The Continental Principalities’ characterizations are a little more difficult to be assessed in terms of gender and race since we only know which actors should play them, but we do not have a lot of textual evidence. This gets a little more complicated if we stick to Hauge’s argument in regard to Kushner not establishing the actors’ genders. The playtext itself provides fewer details about the Continental Principalities in comparison to the Angel, who is mentioned and described more than one time. At the only moment they are depicted, not all the Continental Principalities can be understood to have female or male characterizations.

After Prior and Harper meet in heaven, the Angel comes and takes him to the other angels. When he gets there, they are listening to a radio and basically talking about humankind. They do not say anything using pronouns to refer to each other that could indicate a feminine or a masculine characterization. There are two direction notes that give away, however, the gender identity of two of the Continental Principalities: “she looks inside the radio” (262) talking about the Angel Africanii, and “he brandishes an astrolable” (262), about the Angel Oceania. In the whole scene and in the rest of the playtext, there are no other notes or terms that could serve as reference points for this discussion on whether their characterizations are masculine, feminine or irreducible to this binary scope.

Since the playtext does not delimitate all the angels’

someone hermaphrodite is offensive and should be no longer used.

characterizations, they are therefore open to a gender diverse depiction, as well as a gender diverse multiple-acting. If we follow the binary cultural imaginary, they will probably be characterized as male or female depending on the actors' genders playing them. However, it is possible to imagine that the actor playing Joe, even if a man, could play the Angel Europa as a female character. In the same way, the actor playing Hannah could give life to a masculine Angel Asiatica, the one playing Louis to a feminine Angel Australia, and the one playing Roy to a feminine Angel Antarctica. These assumptions all rely on a binary gender model, but which possibilities open up if we consider that Kushner's authority in not specifying the actors' genders nor many of the angels'? Could the actors play the Continental Principalities with non-binary identities and thus perform angels that are not only differently sexually equipped – taking into consideration the 8 vaginas and the bouquet of phalli that the Angel embodies, because the same is true for the other Angels depicted, as we will see in the next paragraph – but also in terms of a characterization that is not strictly masculine nor feminine, something different from the imposed gender binarism? Probably yes.

Even though the only Angel we have a deep and clear characterization is the Angel, all the others are also probably equipped with a bouquet of phalli and eight vaginas. I say probably because it is clear that all the angels under god creation had different genitalia than rather only a vagina or a penis. This can be stated when the Angel is talking to Prior in Act Two, Scene Two. She says that after creating the angels, god, “seeking something New...” to what he replies “God split the World in Two” and “made YOU:” she says”. Then, together they say “Human Beings: Uni-Genitaled: Female. Male.” (75). On this account, we can infer that all the angels of the play have a different genitalia formation than what is culturally and erroneously coded as the only two possibilities: a penis or a vagina; that before humans, angels were not uni-genitaled. We can also infer that, similar to the Angel, maybe all the other angels in the play apart from having a bouquet of phalli and 8 vaginas – or much more/fewer –, also have a sexual orientation that destabilizes heterosexuality.

Another thing that comes to my mind is the relation between Western colonization – which I discussed in Chapter 2 – and the creation of Angels and Humans in the playtext of *Angels in America*. Western Colonization discarded the different gender arrangements of the people whose lands were invaded and destroyed. It also divided them only into men or women, ignoring and erasing gender identities

that did not fit the binary man/woman, as well as sexualities that did not correspond to heterosexuality. Similarly, in the playtext, god had first created beings that were not uni-genitaled, but rather multiply-genitaled with different sexual orientations, and then created people under a binary gender perspective. I consider this extract of the playtext extremely important because it allows me to read these events and understand them as if before human creation in the playtext, gender was not necessarily binary; prior to colonization it also wasn't. The angels' creation could be analogously linked to the diversity of genders found prior to colonization. The humans' creation could be similarly linked to the Eurocentric colonizer – which would still be god in the playtext – that did not conceive of gender apart from genitalia nor of genitalia apart from either one penis or a vagina.

4 FINAL REMARKS

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 I outlined central questions to develop my non-binary reading of *Angels in America*. I have tried to show how Brazil is currently far from being LGBTQI forward in the sense of providing aid and support to gender and sexuality minoritized groups and how our politics and education have been taken over by conservative and fundamentalist groups. I have discussed about how the specific context depicted in the playtext relates to our actual moment in matters of prejudice and discrimination regarding LGBTQI individuals. I have also outlined how this study relates to Gender, Sexuality and Racial fields of knowledge and research in order to establish the pillars that ground it. As I proposed a non-binary reading of *Angels in America* that trespasses all of these fields, I considered crucial to reflect on some of what had already been researched in terms of gender bending and gender subversive characteristics of Kushner's work, as well as sexuality depictions and racial discussions in regard to it.

The studies, discussions, and concepts brought up in the previous chapters are paramount because I used them to support and guide my analysis of the playtext. It was by understanding the role of western colonization in imposing a binary and racist gender system that still influences and determines what is livable or not, what is safe to be or not that I could reach the discussions related to gender and sex as a set of norms and as constructs at a psychological and social level. It was also by thinking and arguing about what it is to be a trans non-binary person that I could look at the playtext and read it through non-binary lens. It was by thinking about the way gender, race, and sexuality oppressive relations work through our society as something natural and somehow given that I could analyze the playtext accordingly. I also wanted to reflect upon our response to people who live outside the two insufficient gender boxes (man/woman) and on gender diverse linguistic possibilities in the English language.

When I proposed a non-binary reading of it, I was not trying to see which character could be understood as non-binary, nor impose any gender on them. What I wanted to do was to see whether the playtext was open to a more diverse understanding of gender even if most characters are characterized as either men or women at a time when non-binary gender was not intelligible, but existed though. Most characters are cisgender, but not all of them are characterized in accordance with current gender norms – such as Belize and Prior that break up with the conventions of being a man and some characters which are not gendered

in the playtext. Even the main angel and the ghosts that appear are apparently characterized as having binary gender identities. I say apparently because, as I've discussed in chapter 3, the depictions of the angels might look binary, but are not in fact.

Regarding Belize, they are not only a representation of a queer future, as some scholars suggested, but also a representation of a person that has been harassed by a terrible present perfect discrimination based on skin color, gender, sexuality and class. In relation to Roy and Belize, due to a still-in-place and racist hegemony that privileges white people and marginalizes – in different ways – everybody that is not white, it is important to consider the intersectionalities between Roy and Belize that also happen regarding Belize and the other characters. Roy occupies a privileged social position because he is white and belongs to the upper-class, while Belize is black and is a part of the working class. These, however, are not the only contrasts that critically influence on their exposure to prejudice. When Roy is hospitalized Belize occupies a privileged position in relation to the first because the latter is not sick.

They express their gender and sexual identities in very different ways: Roy is a masculine closeted gay man, while Belize is effeminate and out of the closet. These differences certainly shape their existences, making them uneven and unfair in terms of human rights. White people are not marginalized due to the color of their skin and do not suffer racism. Black people have to deal with it daily in micro and macro levels while many white people still refuse to see it as a problem that comes from whiteness and/or supposedly believe in the myth of racial democracy. Masculine gay men are less frequently marginalized and have fewer places denied to them than effeminate ones, than lesbians, drag queens, or trans people. Upper-class people do not starve and do not face the financial problems faced by the working-class. If these people are racialized, they even have more things to deal with. Belize is exposed to many of these problems not only in regard to race, but also to class, sexuality and gender.

Belize's characterization exceeds gender binarism because of the way they talk, walk, laugh, live, work, dress, etc. In short, Belize's characterization as highly effeminate shows that gender binarism and its norms are able to be shaken, destabilized, challenged and broken. Belize and Prior subvert gender binarism through language once they use feminine pronouns and names to address themselves. Belize, who is also named Norman, gives the playtext another gender bending characteristic: their name. Even if it still is a name that is normally given either to a man or a woman, it could also be given to non-binary people

or be understood as an indicator of the insufficiency of gender binarism in relation to Belize. In addition, Belize's heaven portrays non-binary gender and blackness as central parts of it, completely opposite to the way our society and the playtext are organized.

Considering that the playtext is open to – at least to some extent – possible non-binary readings, the Angel in the playtext is a character that breaks with gender binarism because she has eight vaginas and a bouquet of phalli, but is, nonetheless, depicted as *she*. She can be looked at as one way of proving the idea of biological sex wrong. The same could also be true for the other angels that appear, but are not as detailedly characterized as her. In regard to hegemonic notions of sexuality, Prior and the Angel challenge them once Prior as a gay man shouldn't feel attracted to women and once the Angel as an angel "shouldn't" have sex, much less genitalia like hers. The Angel also kisses Hannah on the forehead making the latter have an orgasm. All of these bring forth understandings of how sexuality categories (heterosexuality/homosexuality) can be unstable, not fixed, sometimes fluid and thus bisexual or pansexual.

4.1 INSIGHTS ON MAKING THE PLAY A LITTLE MORE DIVERSE

In this last section, I would like to write some insights in relation to making it more gender and racially diverse. The decision of choosing actors – cis or trans – is left for the producers to make, since Kushner's notes do not argue for the gender of the actor to perform each character, but rather for which actor will play each character. Kushner did not characterize all the characters in terms of gender, race or sexuality.

There are only 3 black characters (Belize, Mr Lies, and the Angel Oceania and they are played by the same actor), but there are many characters that are not characterized in matters of race or gender, for instance all the other Angels. Therefore, the characters that are not racialized, end up being so in accordance with the actor that plays other white/black characters. In this sense, if producers were interested in making a spectacle that relates not only to New York mid-1980s, but also to contemporaneity, this lack of characterization could be used as a tool to explore the characters depictions in terms of gender, race, and sexuality.

One might argue that this would change the original playtext – and I agree –, but I think it doesn't change it in a way that the play becomes something totally different. The play has already been written,

it is not possible to change its narrative, but it is possible to change Kushner's instructions on the characters' and actors' in order to have a gender and racially diverse cast..

Even if this happened, the play would continue to have white characters as protagonists, while Belize would be the only black centralized character. I am sure there would be an impact on hegemonic culture imaginary if more angels were black. The problem of Kushner depicting a mostly white mid-1980s in New York unfortunately cannot be changed, unless the producers decided to have a different production of *Angels in America* focusing on the experiences of black people in the mid-1980s. Nonetheless, if the people responsible for the plays stagings invested in changing the multiple-acting feature, there would be more black and gender diverse characters.

Therefore, the producers of stage productions should stop normalizing hegemonic structures that are many times racist and sexist. They should also critically think about the actors who play different characters and if it would be possible to change them. If not all the characters' genders, nor race, are defined, why not have them played by people that tend to be marginalized by the same system that *Angels in America* takes issue with? Why not have more black people playing different characters that did not come out as white from Kushner's work? Why not explore more the angels' ambivalent depictions that are normally taken for granted and naturalized as they either have male or female characterizations? If the people behind the play are really socially engaged in fighting against sexism, racism, and LGBTQIphobia, they should explore the play's possibilities that allow a more racially and gender diverse cast and characters, and also have black directors and producers, and other black people being in charge of what happens off-stage. The same could also be done for trans people.

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