

Neopentecostalism as a Neoliberal Grammar of Suffering

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Introduction

This article proposes an understanding of Brazilian Neopentecostalism, emerging in the 2000-2019 decades, considering processes related to mass psychology, identifications and ideological fantasies described by psychoanalysis. Such processes engender what we call policies of suffering, mobilizing discourses, signifiers, and enunciations, whereby certain symptoms become more or less tolerable collectively and individually. Suffering becomes a political factor because it engenders modes of recognition within theories of transformation. For example, if the cause of suffering is supposed to be natural or divine, economic or cultural, this sets conditions for different subjective engagements that are fixed in different ideological fantasiesⁱ that in turn dispute different grammars of suffering. There is an interweaving of dimensions to this phenomenon which crosses several matrices, such as theological, sociological, economic, psychoanalytic, among others. Therefore, we do not propose a strictly theological, sociological or psychoanalytic investigation of the Brazilian Neopentecostal phenomenon, although we use elements from the three fields in their discussions. Brand Arenari (2013), in his study on the emergence and deepening of Neopentecostalism throughout the world, considers its worldwide progression, bringing Neopentecostalism closer to the notion of the '*platypus*'ⁱⁱ coined by Chico de Oliveira (2003) in order to describe Brazil, i.e., an accumulation of exceptions:

“(...) underdevelopment, finally, is the exception over the oppressed: the task force is self-construction as the exception of the city, informal labor as the exception of the commodity, patrimonialism as the exception of competition between capitals, state coercion as the exception of private accumulation, Keynesianism *avant la lettre*.”(Oliveira 2003, 131)

In this sense, Neopentecostalism would be another Brazilian exception, dependent on the uncommitted “underdevelopment” of the subordinate classes (Oliveira 2003, 132). Arenari recurrently takes the notion of class, as well as Bourdieu and Weber, to characterize a religiosity on the periphery of the capitalist global project (Oliveira 2003, 151). This is a religiosity which spreads in Brazil in a synchronous way with the absorption and reaction to neoliberalism, i.e., notably since the 1990s and in a close connection with the classes and territories in which the State resigned, stimulating a kind of free-enterprise projected at the desert of capital and to the precariousness of life forms.

The Pentecostal and Neopentecostal expansion made this form of religiosity, which in 1980 had 10% of supporters in Brazil, reach in 2019, 30% of the populationⁱⁱⁱ. Of this Neopentecostal population, it needs to be remembered that 60% are women and 61% are black^{iv}. During this same period there was a worldwide phenomenon of fundamentalist radicalization both within and between the different religions, having in common the return to the plane of the sacred and the strategy of growth by contrast with other religions. In the case of Christianity, the contrast can be made with “Islamic resistance,” but also between Hindus and Muslims in West Asia (Arenari 2013, 10). This also contributed to make the Jewish-Palestinian conflict into a kind of synecdoche for a new religious economy of suffering.

Neopentecostal expansion follows the demographics of “peripheral countries, or [of] those nations that are not part of the founding center of capitalism” (Arenari 2013, 10). Neopentecostalism today is a driving force for the global expansion of Christianity, occupying the role that once belonged to the Catholic Church throughout the colonial expansion and imperialism of the XVIII and XIX centuries, repopulating their “old colonies” with a new faith (Arenari 2013, 11). It is based on the suspicion that the Enlightenment project of secularization of social reality is insufficient to account for unjust social reality and to the daily experience of suffering (Arenari 2013, 26–27). The detachment of religion from people's daily lives, either by the consecration of universal secularization^v or by the exponential growth of scientific narrative as an organizer of social reality resulted in the yearning for “accountability” for its unfulfilled promises and also for the energetic reaction of radicalization against secular hegemonization. Those underprivileged and brutally exploited by capitalist improvement could not consume the same morality of shortened narrative and flexible identity required by neoliberalism. The widening social and economic disparity, especially since the neoliberal crisis of 2008, is a condition for Pentecostal and Neopentecostal expansion.

The social results of the processes of ongoing colonization have resulted in the emergence of new political actors identified by ethnicity and gender. These have caused new tensions and contradictions at the level of material economic outcomes, especially as the impact has been unequal for those outside the transformative promise of neoliberal morality.

“If, on one hand the structure of modern industrial society generated internal contradictions that have been translated into conflicts between

different social classes particularly related to the economic factors related to the position they occupied in terms of production, the process of colonization has created a society with a series of contradictions related to cultural aspects, which has in turn fueled the political struggles of the collective "new identities" (Arenari 2013, 30).

Just as management manuals attempted to teach the tricks and indeterminations of a world based on value flexibility, the Neopentecostal narrative returned to key concepts of *promise* and *magic* to recreate consumer morale in a scenario of brutal inequality of destinies. Hence, as a possible Brazilian symptom of neoliberalism, we have Neopentecostalism^{vi} as a survival response and as reconstruction of social ties in the periphery; but it is also both a theological narrative of justification of social exclusion and a program of social reinsertion.

To this end, Neopentecostalism manages to bring together four narratives of suffering (Dunker, 2015), providing intelligibility and unity to the experience of helplessness by offering identifications that operate as a simulacrum of the law, but also by a collective functioning to a fantasy of restoration. Furthermore, Neopentecostalism enables the discursive articulation of historically withheld demands. Against the abandonment of the State arises a narrative of the reformulation and re-installation of a new pact of life through conversion and a new beginning. Against the public's intrusion into the private universe of poverty, witnessed by police violence, the misrepresentations and excesses of parastatal powers and aggressive institutionalization, a morality of purity and of the exclusion of intrusive objects presents itself: the things which belong to God, the impurities of alcohol, drugs, and boundless sexuality. Against the impossibility of seeing the moralities of popular origins, of the traditional narrative forms of suffering or the recognized models of community family, stands an interpretation that guides the subject towards a directed and affiliated alienation capable of making him build a sense of historicity and permanence in time. Finally, against the dissolution of the symbolic unity of the spirit, the family, the language, the community, Neopentecostalism offers a working community and a ritual engagement capable of reinstating faith at anytime and anywhere in a supportive network which overcomes the empty institutionality of the State or the extortion of service contractors in condominium structures. It is in this sense that we say that Neopentecostalism creates a grammar that articulates different narratives of suffering, implying the possibility of "a new way of life", capable of integrating desire, work and language in the same perspective of existence.

1. Pentecostal and Neopentecostal

The Marxist tradition, especially that inspired by texts such as *German Ideology* (2007) or the *Holy Family* (2003), marked the critical perspective of religion as a scam for material exploration. The false balm of the 'opium of the people' was also the 'spirit of a spiritless age'^{vii}, a prototype and ideological pattern, with which Marx criticizes the human essence defended by Feuerbach (1843). A critique that recognizes in 'religious sentiment' a social production.

Žižek^{viii}, one of the key heirs of this tradition, argues that the three major versions of Christianity, the Orthodox, the Catholic and the Protestant, form a kind of Hegelian triad, where "each new term is a subdivision, which is separated from an earlier

unity"(Žižek 2009, 28) through the molds of a Universal-Particular-Singular. The Orthodox aspect says that:

"(...)we have the substantial unity of the text and the body of believers, which is why the believers are allowed to interpret the sacred text; the text goes on and lives in them, it is not outside the living history as its exempted standard and model – the substance of religious life is the Christian community itself." (Žižek 2009, 28).

Western Catholics argue for:

"(...)radical alienation: the entity which mediates between the founding sacred text and the body of believers, the Church, the religious Institution, regains its full autonomy. The highest authority resides in the Church, which is why the Church has the right to interpret the text; the text is read during the Mass in Latin, a language which is not understood by ordinary believers, and it is even considered a sin for an ordinary believer to read the text directly, bypassing the priest's guidance." (Žižek 2009, 28)

Whereas for Protestantism:

"(...)the only authority is the text itself, and the wager is on every believer's direct contact with Word of God as delivered in the text; the mediator (the Particular) thus disappears, withdraws into insignificance, enabling the believer to adopt the position of a "universal Singular," the individual in direct contact with the divine Universality, bypassing the mediating role of the particular Institution. This reconciliation, however, becomes possible only after alienation is brought to the extreme: in contrast to the Catholic notion of a caring and loving God with whom one can communicate, negotiate even, Protestantism starts with the notion of God deprived of any "common measure" shared with man, of God as an impenetrable Beyond who distributes grace in a totally contingent way." (Žižek 2009, 28).

The loss or suspension of mediation invites a direct contact with God. And at the same time this implies extreme contingency, the pure omnipotence of God (Žižek 2009, 288) and full predestination (Žižek 2009, 288). However, the lesson between faith and reason (Hegel 2011) inherited by Pentecostalism is already aware of the advent of modernity, the magic of the enchanted universe is already lost for good and reality will be forever gray.

Pentecostalism derives its origin from the biblical passage known as the day of Pentecost^{ix}, an important date in the Jewish religious calendar, as concerns the moment when they would make their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Backed by the biblical passage in *Acts of the Apostles* (ch. 2), where after 50 days of the ascension of Christ coinciding with Jewish Pentecost, the apostles were 'carried' by the Holy Spirit and preached the *gospel* in various languages, so that all pilgrims could hear the 'good news' (Arenari 2013, 53).

In the historical Pentecostalism of Baptist, Adventist, Methodist, or Presbyterian lineage, lies a strong belief that through 'grace' or 'gifts' from the Holy Spirit, people can 'speak in tongues' and perform miracles, for example, healing diseases, casting out of evil spirits and demons, but also distributing spiritual and material blessing. Such administratively calculated non-rationalist discursive power is related to important

social changes. However, this non-rational magical discourse gains new perspective under the Neopentecostal logic that spreads its calculated Manichean narrative, its exorcist spectacles, its blaming of social and psychical ills on supernatural entities. There is a basic mutation here in the allegory of the liturgy that brings it closer to popular music, to local chants (which is why there is the Neopentecostal Christian music industry), and in contrast to the containment of affect, more or less typical of Pentecostalism, there is an appreciation of the expression of affects. This marks paradoxically^x the appropriation of a certain repertoire arising from Afro-Brazilian religions (SILVA, 2007), in addition to the incorporation of Greek *catharsis* as a medical healing practice where Neopentecostalism displaces it to the massive spectacle of staging tragedies. A magic enhanced by Neopentecostal discursivity creates in association with the globalization of capital, giants of the music and publishing markets which are extensions of the active voices of the show of faith. Or as summarized by Arenari (2013):

“The most striking general features of this movement... [is its] business logic in the administration [level] of the church and religious goods, prosperity theology as a theological basis, a tendency to use a more intense magical religiosity, a war against the devil in opposition to the traditions of popular religions, the religious faithful predominantly composed of lower social sectors (social base of the pyramid), a strong intra-mundane magical discourse, the use of media and an ability to use the cultural industry (which belongs to the whole gospel movement), organized insertion in politics, and so on (ORO, 1992) (MARIANO, 1995) (MARIANO, 1999).” (Arenari 2013, 90)

Arenari (2013) highlights the colonial geography and the magical point of view of the world in the montage of Brazilian modernity (Arenari 2013, 166), the striking relationship between nature and urban, between the uncivilized and the civilized, seeing in it the mark of the magic in Latin American religiosity, which in its Brazilian tones reflects the Afro-Catholic syncretism (Arenari 2013, 166) not subsumed by reality. In Brazil the radical rejection of the magical in the face of cognitive thinking and institutional rationality did not occur in the same way as in central and European countries (Arenari 2013, 163). It is plausible that Neopentecostal advances emerge from Brazil as a suture in the face of the void inherent to the double experience of alienation in subjectivity to oneself in the face of the mounting of hostile and competitive (social) reality. The project of Latin modernization and specifically the Brazilian one, is crossed by the Catholic religiosity in the mold of the cult of the saints, as for example, in the image of Our Lady:

“(...) that made Catholicism a magical religion in Brazil. In practice, the cult of saints and ancestors turned Christian monotheism into polytheism in practice, and the world, a “magical garden.” (Arenari 2013, 164)

Here, it is not about a 'delay', a lag or a break *per se*, but rather a certain anticipation in relation to the world, especially as regards the sagacity of uncovering the role of the magical narrative that governs global capitalist system today. Here we could use Žižek's maxim (2008, 28) reinterpreting Marx's commentary about Christ's saying: “*They know very well what they are doing when they do it.*” So, no longer “*Father, forgive them because they do not know what they do*” (in crucifying Jesus), but a “*one must know how to make faith happen*”.

The novelty of Neopentecostal movements in their global projection, embeds with its welcoming, layers upon layers of peripheral groupings of the excluded and dispossessed of a global capitalist social project actualizing the new wave of ancient magic (Arenari 2013, 167). We need to understand something from the periphery in order to explain something from the center, or rather, Brazilian Neopentecostalism and its global projection, allows us to affirm the current alignment of global capitalism with the magical, Manichean and vulgar narrative around the financialized world. Here, Arenari and Žižek, from different perspectives, approach each other when addressing the direct mediation of internalized spirituality as "the ideological form that best fits today's global capitalism" (Žižek 2009, 27). In the transition from Pentecostalism to Neopentecostalism, Arenari emphasizes the progressive loss of Christian rationality in three major waves:

"(...) the first movement (Calvinist) was related to the rise of Bourgeoisie and the social changes toward modernity; the second one (Methodism) was related to the proletariat and the changes brought about by the industrial revolution. The last was related to the mass of sub-integrated people and the spread of an urban periphery, namely a second strong urbanization process of modernity." (Arenari 2013, 58).

In each of these moments, the intrusion of non-rational elements into Western Christianity was noted. The North-American Kenneth E. Hagin (2009), regarded as the father of movements such as prosperity theology, word of faith, that blended Christian science, positive confession and new thinking, rests on a kind of nominalism from which words create modes of existence, and therefore, highlighting that a kind of orthopedics of language would be the key to redemptive transformation. The incorporation and appropriation of syncretic elements such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), healing practices, blessings, as well as the incorporation of spiritualist and magical elements, such as the staff of Moses, the strength of salt, among others. The presence of elements linked to the charisma and vocation towards a direct encounter with God, their decisive intercession in the course of daily events, makes Neopentecostalism a form of alienated empowerment or empowerment through alienation where the "decree", the "declaration", the "determination" acquires the force of law. Neopentecostalism also draws upon

"(...) [the] (i)nterest in the occult, in communicating with the spirits, the idea of reincarnation and the "supernatural" powers of the mind that existed in the scientific spiritualism of the nineteenth century" (Arenari 2013, 63).

Hence Neopentecostalism also assimilates aspects of 'New Age' thinking, mesmerism, Kardec's spiritism, positive thinking, mentalism and 'exorcism' by which the act of casting out evil spirits and demons leads to prosperity (Arenari 2013, 63). Another feature of the transition from Pentecostalism to Neopentecostalism reflects religious harmonization with the progression of social disparity in relation to globalized capitalism, in particular with the progressive relation of capitalism in its financialized form. Modern North-American-born Pentecostalism self-interprets its expansionist progression as confirmation of the market of faithful. Thus, it assimilates belief with capitalist logic. The aggregation of adherents, as well as their increase in the number of *views*, congruent with the digital universe being implemented, is proof of their own self-evidence. If in classical Pentecostalism, Baptists or Presbyterianism, we find the listening to and aspirations of recognition of the socially excluded by the universe of labor, in Neopentecostalism, or the third wave of Pentecostalism -, lies a new form of

individualism, in which each one is a self-made entrepreneur and manager of his/her own faith (that is, a radical outsourcing to the individual). In denominations such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the International Church of God's Grace, the World Church of God's Power, the Reborn in Christ Church, the Apostolic Church of Source of Life, and the Peace and Life Christian Community, God is no longer the sovereign to whom we must bow in our supreme ignorance, but on the contrary, the word of the believer, the force of human practices command the spiritual battle that draws upon the cosmic battle of Manichean dualism. If in Pentecostalism the impoverished layers of society find symbolic fabric for their local identities, this material effectiveness being an unknown effect such as grace, for Neopentecostalism the mutualism between its adherents broadens the 'collective identities' by evidence of faith based on the effects of success. This indirectly represents a reversal of Catholic morality that there is some expiatory truth in suffering. Neopentecostalism encourages the faithful to "demand their rights before God". If for Pentecostalism there is a separation between the divine world to come and the present secular world, in Neopentecostalism the separation is suspended, everything is both material and sacred, confirming the correlated material organization of the participants (Arenari 2013, 31-33). If for historical Pentecostalism the pastor exercises his power mediated by the assembly, after a solid theological formation, in Neopentecostalism the pastor has the right to decide the fates of the community without any specific preparation. If Pentecostalism has a diffuse leadership, with authority given accordingly with the history of the community, respecting the separation between public practices and private manifestation of the sacred, then with a restriction of the scope and incidence of divine intercession, Neopentecostalism exercises total control over the life of the believers, demanding spectacular donations at the cost of an "investment" in the future prosperity and ostensibly boasting the achievements of "grace" within where the public and private dimensions interpenetrate themselves.

The projection of this new religiosity occurs in the open gaps between the State and Capital, which brings together a class composed of brutally exploited and socially ignored individuals. While Pentecostalism emerged as a religion of the social disinherited or a religion of the poor in Peter Fry (1975), Richard Niebuhr (1992), André Corten (1996), Campos (2005) and Rolim (1995) (Arenari 2013, 37) Neopentecostalism expands as a religion of results and prosperity. The intertwining between religion and material poverty marks the attempt to "...*trying to achieve through divine power that which society refuses them*" (Rolim, 1995: 90 apud GIUMBELLI, 2000) (Arenari 2013, 37). Thus arises a discourse that denounces and offers retained signifiers of unrealized demands for this disadvantaged class. Discourse here encompasses the Lacanian understanding of social bonding around a form of enjoyment given as impossible (Lacan 2007 [1968]). If we take religion as a variation of the discourse of the master – read as the discourse of the unconscious itself – we see that Neopentecostalism operates in the same way: a regulating apparatus of enjoyment, the offer of meaning and protection as it is alienated and submitted in a master-signifier, where faith is anchored in a Father who links the members of a religion by the ties of identification and common Ideals. Although this Father (or Name-of-the-Father, in the Lacanian sense), has full access to enjoyment and knowledge (means of enjoyment): Neopentecostalism appears as a civilizing factor, capable of providing order and discipline, as well as establishing a referential narrative, a

Biblical one as a crucial element of an educational process. Here comes the organizing, welcoming and morally active stance in which pastoral power emerges (Foucault, 1988) in the daily lives of its adherents.

In other words, as a meaning-making machine, religion operates from constant mutations to account for the helplessness of social discourse and the mode of production – from where the Real emerges. Hence, one can speak of Neopentecostalism as more of the same and yet different, in a chimerical effect: it appropriates the religious modalities that preceded it, offering a 'new' form of entanglement and operability of enjoyment that adapts itself to the capitalist forms, acting where these forms do not offer a narrative of suffering. Different and yet more of the same, it can be prognosticating, enabling it to hold itself until another mutation overlaps it with new forms of suffering and helplessness.

One of the most striking features of the religious form embodied by Pentecostal expansion in its Neopentecostal projection is the use of “magic” under new terms, as Arenari (2013) postulates:

“[...] (I) in other words, a renewed magic adapted to the urban peripheries, and distinct from the old magic religiosity of rural life. As they migrated from the country to the cities, the poor peasants immersed in the magic afro-catholic syncretism, in which saints and orixás shared the same space, converted to Pentecostalism, but remained in their magic universe in which God intervenes in the world on a daily basis by “operating miracles” related to their health, to their affective/sex and financial/professional life. Nevertheless, this kind of renewed magic, which inherited the old religious Brazilian tradition, was also able to adapt its promises to the new social reality of its faithful audience. Its main promise is social ascension and, consequently, but not secondarily, access to the consumer market. In this new urban world, of rapid modernization and increasing hegemony of the capitalist discourse, Pentecostalism offers magic-religious means to a population excluded from the benefits of the capitalist promises to have access to that universe.”(Arenari 2013, 167-168).

It is worth noting that the Neopentecostal expansion occurs in solidarity with movements within the Catholic Church itself, such as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which also appeared in the United States in 1967. The return to the family takes place here in a context of liturgical renewal, with singing priests and the active capture of believers as seen in retreat experiences and camps, e.g., *Curadas para Amar* [Healed to Love], or *Por Hoje Não* [Not today], in the context of *Canção Nova* [New Song], participation in television shows and concerts. Contrary to the left represented by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, the Charismatic Renewal is an example of how cheerful, authentic and high-performing conservatism needs to contrast with the rhetoric in which suffering alone saves, giving the measure of such chimerical effect.

2. Neopentecostal and Neoliberal

Several transformations that occurred in Brazil from 1989 to 2019 can be considered here in the historical cut of the expansion of Neopentecostalism, evoking the congruence between this intercession of the theory of the magical in daily life. Note that in this period, the country experienced a kind of mitigated neoliberalism, through which policies of social inclusion and institutionalization, such as the implementation of the

Sistema Único de Saúde [Unified Health System], perfected the application of the 1989 Constitution program, with its emphasis on expanding citizenship. On the other hand, economic management has “neoliberalized” previously restricted areas of the economy, such as telecommunications and university education, shifting direct State control to regulatory agencies, mixed autarchies and other hybrid controlling agencies. With the economic incentive of household consumption, a large social mobility was registered with 42 million people moving from extreme poverty to poverty and from poverty to the working middle class. But, on the other hand, the upper classes concentrated even more income and the middle class was torn between the fear of approaching the popular classes and the progressive distancing of the true rich^{xi}.

Class mobility drastically alters the narratives of suffering. The horizons of desire transform themselves with the approximation of ideals, the narcissism of small and large differences demands new forms of recognition and distinction, the dissolution of the individual in the anonymous mass becomes even more problematic with the entry of digital language, available on a mass scale since 2010. The reconfiguration of the territory, with its non-symmetrical overlapping with the symbolic space, traditionally organized by the geography of the city, with the Church in its center and with the sanctified ephemerides and ritual organizing the time was replaced by a faith permanently available on television, in which the place of worship is contingent. The Neopentecostal groups appropriate television channels, newspapers, publishing houses and digital media. The crucial psychological fact here is that for classes in transition, the smallest experience that it is possible to change their place in the world already promotes an alteration to the bearableness of suffering. Realizing yourself in a new place, for example at the university, an airport, or in a new consumer situation, invites a new world metric and a keener consideration of the conditions under which transformation occurs and when they do not.

Jessé Souza's studies^{xii} have shown that at this point the possibility of planning for the future and orderly investing in it, considering calculated sacrifices in order to obtain a new position, is a crucial element in altering the desiring arc of a family or individual. Neopentecostalism took advantage of this new situation by offering a plausible grammar for this suffering, now considered as a calculated sacrifice. The condemnation of alcohol consumption, the concern for authority and respect within the family environment, the moral observation of everyday decisions, the preferred form of music and body care introduced a new narrative of achievable success by works and faith. It also offered protection against the erratic and dangerous destinies of those who separate themselves from the community to start a solo career in crime or in the adventure of professional growth. The synthesis of this shift in the subjective position of suffering can be found in the motto or slogan of almost all Neopentecostal churches, namely, “*stop suffering!*”

With the gradual change in Catholic politics, which made suffering a point of connection, advocating for a theory of collective transformation, in which shared suffering was a sign of identification, as for example in liberation theology or in basic ecclesial communities, there is a detachment from popular movements and a depoliticization of episcopal action. This creates a kind of hermeneutic vacuum around the experience of suffering. If it loses its expiatory dimension, if the model of love based on the procedures of renunciation and suffering offered by Jesus to men no longer suffices, it would be necessary to create a new grammar that would connect daily

suffering with another grammar of transformation. This grammar no longer bets on collective salvation, through the transcendent power of protection generated by faith, but on an individualization of salvation, in which religiosity is merely a means and support. "*Stop suffering*", as articulation of demand in a significant void, can be translated as: find a love or a job, cure yourself of your illness, recover from drug addiction, free yourself from the condition of lonely oppression via individualized spiritual agency.

The magical narrative, as an effective response to the social ills provoked by the structural contradictions of capitalist society, rests on the effectiveness of this form of life where there is a protective community, with religious workers [*obreiros*] sharing their social and cultural capital and functioning as an economic network of prosperity. In other words: the miracle happens because it is real, here and now, not just a rare, occasional promise or event that touches the elected in a *postmortem* life. Neopentecostalism and neoliberalism connect themselves in the same grammar in which no sacrifice should be made without a tangible prospect of return.

The encapsulation of the magical object, its improvement as a product to be consumed by the faithful, is given by the ostensible promise of enrichment and social ascension, fundamentally aligning itself with the theology of prosperity^{xiii}. The reversal of moral reverence for collective poverty is one of the most salient and contractive features of Neopentecostalism. This also helps to understand why their opponents in the market of faith will be the less-individualistic, more traditionalist, African-based religions.

"These aspects of the formation of the Brazilian society, i.e., the presence of a mass of excluded individuals looking forward to social inclusion, and a strong tradition of magic religiosity in the popular culture, established a solid and fertile ground for the expansion of a Neo-Pentecostal religiosity, one that brought modern answers to modern expectations. Therefore, Pentecostalism and its more dynamic variety, Neo-Pentecostalism, is a religiosity that was adapted and produced within these new and purely modern expectations. In other words, it promised a long-desired inclusion and ascension according to an earthly promise, not an unearthly one in a post-mortem paradise and resulting from a whole life of sacrifices. To promote and "confirm" this promise in a language appreciated by its target audience, it uses the language of magic religiosity." (Arenari 2013, 168)

The Neopentecostal religiosity in its magical narrative spreads and ideologically propagates that the only possible solution is through the exasperated insertion to capitalism. The only possible modality of response is in the deep submission to the economic tormentor and undertaken in the name of its spreading disguised as 'prosperity'. This suspends the Catholic division between the sacred and the mundane. In Neopentecostalism, the divine is everywhere and anywhere at any time without privileged intermediaries. This creates an individualization thrust, as a daily reading process, associated with community management, with low institutionality, pointing to general rules. The Neopentecostal pastor is a manager of testimonies rather than an interpreter of a sacred text. That is why he does not need qualified formation, seminaries or theological disputes. Rather, he has been chosen by the Holy Spirit to manage the results of access to the divine; access which is facilitated by the Spirit. While Catholicism seemed to specialize in qualified university faith, with the reappropriation of the Pontifical Catholic Universities across the country, Neopentecostalism was betting on the free

enterprise of theological knowledge. This fermented the spirit of creationism and the confrontation of authorities as a matter of opinion and power or extension of membership.

The wave of Neopentecostalization has absorbed the rhetoric of numerical success as proof of the strength of faith. According to the call to evangelism, conversion becomes proof of its own success, just as a top-selling product acquires properties that it did not have before (what Marx would term fetishization). A crucial detail here is the low institutionality required to open a Neopentecostal church. No years of seminar and complex permits, votes, or assignments are required. Each one can freely offer his word according to his vocation and *kerigma*, opening his own church or associating himself with those already existing in a system similar to *franchising*.

Many churches have begun to adopt Neopentecostal methods of administration to relate to their audience of believers^{xiv}. Religion assumes itself as a package of services and commitments around a way of life. A way of life that alternatively distinguishes the subject from his or her dilution in the mass by pointing out a path of growth and a career path and offering him/her an identification support in a community. In the case of Brazil, this way of life has reformulated the lost unity between language, desire and work, placing at its center the commandment/promise: "*Stop suffering!*" This phrase indirectly states that suffering is optional and that depends on a subjective choice, but it is in direct contrast to a hitherto dominant Catholic narrative whereby "*love in Christ is shown by imitating his capacity to suffer, for us*".

The vulgar re-enchantment of reality, with a metaphysical restoration adjusted to lifestyles, listened to the new demand pressing for social ascension, which passed decades unheard, not even by a Left perceived as a strange cult that hated money. The horror of religious groups that begin to operate entrepreneurially as businesses and to be managed by administrators within a business chain, demonstrating all the aptitude and business acumen that feedbacks the capitalist project in its typical pursuit of profit, thus becomes a criterion of confirmation of the faith. Millionaire pastors, who portray themselves in the rhetoric of CEOs or bosses, occupying a "coveted" position are only a heresy to ancient religiosity which is still tied to the fetish of suffering. The critique of wealth, greed, and profit becomes confirmation of the "enemy's point of view," which seems to "want" misery, poverty, and vulnerability.

What exactly is the difference between baptism in the Holy Spirit and managerial narratives around executive monks, spiritual laws of success, and miraculous testimonies of life? The same misunderstanding about what drives someone up a path of unexpected gain, or getting rich on the stock market, or betting on the right *start-up*, applies to those who will be saved by faith through erratic conversions and unlikely trajectories. It is necessary to retain the truth criteria of this grammar, primarily concerning success stories and first-person testimonies. Ultimately, this will lead us to misunderstanding who owns the money and power in Brazil, i.e., the difficulty that *this* money has in telling its own story. History is often filled with "miraculous" moments of State favoritism, patrimonialism, nepotism, corruption, clientelism, and the transformation of public vices into private virtues. We have here a confrontation between two unmentionable narratives turned into open testimonies. An open dispute between "folk magic" and "concentration magic," in which both sides hold the same grammar of recognition, in which traits such as exhibitionism, self-truth, and the absence of third

parties capable of exercising institutional authority appear impersonally much like legal determination or university knowledge.

The “pastors-bosses” such as R.R. Soares or Edir Macedo (Almeida 2009 *apud* Arenari 2013, 101) do not only live off from tithing, considered to be an “investment to the cause”, but mainly on the pragmatic self-affirmation of the “divine” manifestation of their wealth. It does not generate shame or embarrassment, as it can generate to those who operate in an outdated grammar of suffering. Hence also that this complaint or criticism is relatively useless. Investing in the cause effectively yields returns in terms of security, protection and “moral infrastructure” works by the Neopentecostal community. Disciplinary practices carried out and undertaken by religious communities have and generate organizing effects on the lives of those involved (Campos 1995). Therefore, the concern and attention to the morals and customs formations, in the practices and habits of the faithful, configures reciprocity (Karatani 2014) groups in their exchanges and not only, but also under, a strictly marketing posture.

At this point, moral legitimacy, community reciprocity, and the advocacy of entrepreneurship under financialized global capitalism blur themselves as the only possibility (Arenari 2013) within this grammar of suffering. This is due to the obvious reasons represented by the cases of failure that have multiplied since the year 2013. This leads to a growing fragmentation of Neopentecostalism, to the present churches of “*quebradas*” [slums], but also to the phenomenon on which their unity is increasingly dependent more and more on the external enemy. Here is understood its role in the 2018 elections and its strength in spontaneous alliance against PT [Workers Party]. It is the State, with its inefficiency, with its opaque institutionalism and its inauthentic politicians, with its “dirty” women and its demonic intricacies, that prevents the generalization of the miracle. It is the State with its mismanagement over families, children, women, bodies (and their genders), and schools (with their so-called Parties), which is ultimately responsible for the false promise of transformation. Writing straight with crooked lines, this interpretation confirms the limits of consumer-oriented transformation and the perils of showing a hungry population where it is and of what the granary of economic and cultural provisions is made of. Like made-up balance sheets, “rotten” derivatives and stock options, and real estate mortgages, Neopentecostal religiosity depends on a theory of proof that has a high power of pragmatic self-confirmation.

3. Neoliberalism as Management of Neopentecostal Suffering

The relative autonomization movement, which reciprocates in ideological forms in relation to economic forms, particularly when we pay attention to contemporary religiosity, puts the role of suffering at its center. If pre-financialized capitalism made suffering a fate that had to be resignedly accepted, controlled for its unproductive excesses, and project an “emancipation of the economy” capable of overcoming it, neoliberalism reverses the political function of suffering. Suffering is a function of increased productivity and performance. State, nation, governments, and laws integrate religion as discourse and economy of exchange between suffering-sacrifice, making it a homologous counterpart to the investment-return equation. If Benjamin (1936) spoke of the loss of the sacred aura of the artwork in the context of technical reproducibility, and if the value of worship (*kultwert*) in the name of mass publicity was replaced by the value of exposure (*ausstellungswert*) we can speak here of the loss of the aura of the sacred.

The first narrative that Neopentecostalism creates as a management practice involves a very clear definition of who we are and who are the others, the non-evangelicals. For many, apparent signs of faith will be mobilized: ways of dressing, aesthetic dispositions, and especially a way of speaking that will function as signs of recognition for other evangelicals, that is, an evangelical Neopentecostal semiotics. This is decisive for a theory that advocates that evil comes from outside and that is generated by an intrusive object that seeps into our symbolic space: drugs, alcohol, sexuality, foreign beliefs. Such evil-inducing objects are interpreted as endowed with an evil magical aura. It is in relation to them that the family must protect itself, to be constituted (relying on the matchmaking support of the pastors for that). There is a clear and definite boundary between 'what is of God' and 'what is not of God'. This involves aesthetic forms, moral types, races and cultural dispositions.

The second narrative of suffering is based on the hypothesis that suffering depends on a poorly made pact or must be reconstituted. Here come the conversions, public demonstrations of faith, and testimonies that create a new spatial and temporal reality. The contrast here depends on permanent assessments, as in companies. The praise, the thanks specify God's great covenant with His people in small partial contracts, with small gains and eventual bonuses. Misfortunes, on the other hand, are referred to as forms of individual disengagement. Tithing increase and semi-voluntary donations work here within the narrative that if the contract is being respected by both parties the ends will be successfully achieved.

The third narrative mobilized by the neoliberal management of suffering is its dispositif for the creation of new desires. To do so, one must find what one wants, rescue the history of desires, and open an animic appetite from the part of the believer's for new accomplishments. In this case each believer can be understood as a faith multiplier, an agent or entrepreneur of new business, empowered by a more or less guaranteed consumer public. The narrative of alienation and de-alienation imprints the rhythm of authority and discipline we must have with bodies, with our desires and aspirations. Narratives of this kind depend on a sense of historicization, which justifies the desiring position of the subject in relation to the past that authorizes and determines it. Here enters a new biblical hermeneutic, resembling the business manuals of self-help, where the Old and New Testaments are an inexhaustible source of allegories and codes of self-justification.

The fourth narrative involves the production of new symbolic units to replace the decaying ones. Precarious communities, devastated territories with populations living in a state of refuge, or in extreme situations such as Brazilian prisons can find here a territory of belonging. A new language, represented by speaking in tongues, a new healing, a new age, which will come from the ongoing spiritual battle against the "dark" realm [*reino do "trevososo"*]. This battle is transnational and can bring anyone its heroic place in a world of false news and characters who are representatives of these ignored forces. By breaking the dividing wall between the heavenly and the mundane, it is also the mundane that becomes the scene of heavenly clashes. Conspiracy theories, political theological hermeneutics, and direct actions within instituted forms, such as the Bible Stand, in association with the "Bullet Bench" (a rather derogatory and yet popular way to refer to the congressional front that carries the agenda of arming civilians or weaken rules against circulation of guns in Brazil) only make sense in this parallel universe,

promoted by the narrative of the dissolution of symbolic units. If no one else has a place to be naturally loyal to, then we must find out what this superior combat is all about, in which everyone starts off amongst equals. Neither Science, nor the State, nor any constituted power can challenge the new kingdom of faith.

It is possible that the Brazilian religious scene changes more rapidly than we may think, with the coming into play of what Tostes & Ribeiro (2019) calls multiple religious belonging. That is, just as neoliberalism seems to be grappling with a crisis that began around 2008, Neopentecostalism seems to be losing the battle against what would be its most basic adversary, i.e., the profoundly national idea of syncretism, which not by chance manifests itself more directly in the religiosity of African matrix. It is for this element, and not for its links with natural magic, that we have here a confrontation of narratives. The drift of conversions, which increasingly characterizes the evangelical course, tends to combine simultaneous modes of worship and "return". Therefore, it seems crucial to turn our attention towards Neopentecostalist narratives and its ties to Neoliberalism.

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ⁱ Žižek, S. (1989) *Hegel, o mais sublime dos históricos*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar.

ⁱⁱ Francisco de Oliveira (2003) accurately prescribes how Marxism in its “formidable critical arsenal” of classical economics has a “theory of capitalist development in the theory of capital’s accumulation itself, but failed to specify concrete historical forms, especially in relation to the periphery”(Oliveira 2003, 126). Another great prescription from the author is from the critique of Marxist “evolutionism” that spawned a “rickety theory about the capitalist periphery, within Stalin’s stages, from primitive pre-class communism to post-class communism. In the Latin American case this “stepping” led to misconceptions of political strategy, and the theory of underdevelopment was considered “reformist” and allied to North-American imperialism”(Oliveira 2003, 126). And as for the platypus, the author describes: “Highly urbanized, with little labor force and population in the countryside, *dundque* no pre-capitalist residue; on the contrary, a strong *agribusiness*... A very diversified service structure at one end, when linked to the stratified high-income strata, more ostensibly wasteful than sophisticated; in another end, extremely primitive, linked exactly to the consumption of the poor strata.”(Oliveira 2003,132-133) In short, it is the ‘primitive accumulation’ before the black hole of financialized capitalism that united Marx and Darwin in the Brazilian periphery, as pointed out by Oliveira (Oliveira 2003, 150).

ⁱⁱⁱ See more in Simas (2018) *Almanaque Brasilidades - Um inventário do Brasil popular*. Rio de Janeiro, Bazar do Tempo.

^{iv} Following the doctoral thesis of Jacqueline Morais Teixeira (2018) *A conduta universal: governo de si e políticas de gênero na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*.

^v In 'Faith and Knowledge' (Habermas 2001) in the text reproducing Jürgen Habermas's speech at the Peace Prize awarded by the German Booksellers Association, we find a valid diagnosis of this problem. Habermas emphasizes that secularization has a "juridical meaning of the compulsory transfer of church property to secular public power. This meaning has been transmuted to the emergence of cultural and social modernity as a whole." (Habermas 2001, 5). From this diagnosis of 'secularization' arises an opposition between those who see it as "now the successful domestication of ecclesiastical authority by worldly power, now the act of illicit appropriation", countering a reading by the '*substitution*' of religious life for 'rational equivalents' but which can also be discredited as illegitimately stolen goods. Finally, both understandings fall into a misconception: "They regard secularization as a zero-sum game between, on the one hand, the productive forces of science and technique released by the capitalist and, on the other, the conservative powers of religion and the Church. One can only win at the other's expense, and this according to the liberal rules of a game that favors the driving forces of modernity." (Habermas 2001, 5-6). Arenari's nuanced sociological argument already points to a deep understanding of this initial opposition.

^{vi} The Neopentecostal dawn takes place in the mid-1970s, when Pentecostalism begins to acquire new theological and expanding characteristics. An exemplary case is that of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), which begins in Brazil and today is in more than 170 countries. The neopentecostal movement "is especially related to the way in which its message is marketed and how it transforms itself into this message for itself." (Arenari 2013, 90)

^{vii} Marx and Engels (1975). *On Religion*.

^{viii} Slavoj Žižek's (2009) '*A monstruosidade de Cristo*'. São Paulo, Brasil.

^{ix} Pentecost is a celebration for the Christian calendar for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The biblical passage that inspires this religious movement is the following: "And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place; and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty and mighty wind, and filled all the house in which they were seated. And they saw by them as divided tongues of fire, which rested upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak in other languages, as the Holy Ghost gave them that speak." (Acts 2: 1-4)

^x Paradoxical because of the strategy of Neopentecostalism to elect Afro-Brazilian religions as one of its focuses of attack, while simultaneously approaching and appropriating it in several aspects.

^{xi} This marking is not made under ingenuity or optimism, but under the clear understanding of Pedro H. G. Ferreira de Souza (2018) discussion in *História Da Desigualdade, Uma A Concentração De Renda Entre Os Ricos No Brasil* about these figures. His study on income taxes and household surveys between 1926-2013, points to more sober scenarios concerning the reduction of inequality in the country. Such an incentive to the consumer economy was offset by the consolidation of Brazil's upper classes (underpinning a historical logic within the country), this was partly due to the high tax burden on consumption but also by the enrichment of the wealthier through bank financial products.

^{xii} Souza, J. et al (2010) *Os Batalhadores Brasileiros: nova classe média ou nova classe trabalhadora*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG.

^{xiii} This is the Christian doctrine concerning the divine is that its adherents will be blessed by the financial welfare. This is largely inspired by interpretations of the Book of Malachi. (Coleman, 2000 28)

^{xiv} (Mariano, 1999) (Souza & Magalhães, 2000) (Arenari 2013, 90-91)