

Article

From Religious Diversity to Political Competition: The Differentiation Process of Pentecostalism in Brazil

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Abstract: The growing religious diversity in Brazil has more to do with a differentiation process within Pentecostalism itself than with the presence of very diverse religious groups. Starting with the analysis of such differentiation process, the article aims to discuss the need of terminological improvement and eventually the necessity of Keynesian rules adopted by the State to regulate ultraliberal religious markets. In unequal societies and religious markets such as those in Brazil, Pentecostal leaders' greedy attitudes regarding their own adherents and aggressive intolerance against other religions' followers are coherent with a functionalist religious market conception. In this view, highly aggressive strategies of some Pentecostal churches vis-à-vis other adversaries are seen as belonging to the normal functioning of a (neo-liberal) self-regulated social subsystem. Therefore, reflections on religious diversity inspired on a market model assume neoliberal macro conditions (total deregulation and free competition) as granted or desirable. Religious diversity would appear as the "natural" consequence of religious competition. However, put in Beckford's terms, how can religious pluralism be achieved under terrible conditions of religious diversity? Intolerant attitudes of neo-Pentecostal leaders undermine the very bases of democracy and put the discussion on religious diversity and pluralism under new theoretical and political exigencies.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; religious diversity; intolerance; neoliberalism; Brazil

1. Introduction

The Catholic Church has almost exclusively shaped the Brazilian religious field. The royal patronage system ruled for 389 years during the Portuguese colonial time and the Brazilian empire. The formal separation between Church and State began in 1891 with the first republican constitution. This political and juridical milestone was fundamental for establishing relatively equal competition among the different religions, later reinforced by the socio-economic and cultural modernization process that began in 1930s. Since the second half of the twentieth century, this process has promoted freedom of religion, based on personal religious choice, and the growth of religious diversity. Consequently, there was an increase of religious competition and, as a side effect, the emergence of new conflicts between religious groups and between these groups and the State (Mariano 2013).

However, in spite of 126 years of competition among different religions, the Brazilian society still does not show great religious diversity, if we should consider religious diversity as the presence of quite different religious traditions in the same society. Actually, according to the 2010 Census data, up to 87% of the around 200 million population identified as Christians (64.6% Catholics; 22.2% Protestants including Pentecostals). The remaining 13% were divided among those without religion (8%, most of whom still believing in God or in a higher power), Spiritists (2%), other Christian religiosities (0.7%), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.7%), and Afro-Brazilian religions (0.3%). Buddhists, Mormons, Jews, Muslims, adherents of Ayuhuasca, Native religions, and other groups together reached 1.3%. It is

important to note that 98% declared to believe in God. Even if recent (2016) non-official research (Datafolha 2016) indicates an increase in Pentecostals (22%), a further decrease in Catholics (50%), an increase in those without religion (14%), and probably a slight rise in the number of Muslims, all Christian churches and denominations—not including here strong Christian-inspired Brazilian Spiritualism and Umbanda—would anyway sum up more than 80% of the whole religions scenario. Therefore, considering such high dominance of Christian traditions, religion sociologists, such as Pierucci (2004), show great resistance in identifying real religious diversity in the Brazilian society.

Notwithstanding the data, researchers would affirm that there is a growing religious *diversification* within the Brazilian religious field, since many different options are available, the bonds with traditional religions are weak, and the individuals make pragmatic religious choices based on personal immediate needs. I agree with this view, but I think we must consider that such diversification is dialectically connected with a *differentiation* process taking place within foremost the Pentecostals religious group. Each process reinforces the other. The Pentecostal differentiation is moved by the need and intention to attend special population segments, new potential audiences, or to aggregate qualitative differentials to the Pentecostal religious offer. This helps to grasp the increasing (internal) diversity of Pentecostal groups. The other imbalance factor for the so-called growing religious diversification is the category defined by the Census as people without religion. Both groups, Pentecostals and those without religion, grew fast, are intertwined, and are responsible for important changes in the Brazilian religious field.¹ The great change of the Brazilian religious scenario does not depend on incoming foreign religions or on the expansion of older historical religions, which are almost all already present in the country. The growing diversification is due to a considerable proportion to changes occurring within the Pentecostal religious subgroup. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the differentiation process of Brazilian Pentecostalism to understand the growing religious diversity in the country.

If the differentiation process in the Pentecostal subsystem is responsible for most new trends and for the growing diversity in the religious scenario, the main question is: what kind of diversity or new trends are Pentecostals creating? In which direction is Brazilian Pentecostalism transforming itself? How does such growing diversification relate to a desirable religious *pluralism* in the civil society?

2. Restrict Diversity, Broaden Differentiation

Brazilian Pentecostalism has never been homogeneous (Mariano 1999). In fact, the first two churches, the Christian Community in Brazil (CCB 1910) and the Assembly of God (AG 1911), have already presented differences in doctrine, ecclesiastical organization, evangelizing strategies, and liturgical preferences. They also grew in different cultural milieus, the CCB among Italian immigrants in rural areas and small cities in the South, and the AG expanded among lower public workers in the state capitals coming from the North to the Northeast coast and down to the Southwest. Despite this, both of them reached lower social strata, preached radical conversion, believed in the millennium, practiced glossolalia, maintained a rigid sectarian ethos, and rejected mundane values and costumes. The second moment, called by Paul Freston (Freston 1994) *second wave* Pentecostalism, began after the Second World War, and initiated the ever more accelerated denominational fragmentation (Four Square Gospel Church, *Brasil para Cristo*, *Deus é Amor*, *Casa da Bênção*). The churches of this period maintained the same doctrinal basic principles, their strong anti-Catholicism, and the rejection of mundane customs, but stressed and practiced healings and large crowds in stadiums and camps and made their first steps investing in radio programs and supporting independent political candidates.

¹ Different periodization schemas and classification criteria frame the Pentecostal Movement history in Brazil, but in general specialists distinguish more traditional forms (also called first and second Wave Pentecostalism), from the more recent neo-Pentecostalism (also called third wave Pentecostalism), appeared with the Universal Church in the 70ies. As discussed ahead, there are signs we are already facing new forms or a new period, which I call provisional late neo-Pentecostalism. It seems to me that late neo-Pentecostalism will feed at the end the population group defined by the Census as “without religion,” but due to space limits I will not address this issue here.

The *third wave* of Brazilian Pentecostalism (Freston 1994), called neo-Pentecostalism by Mariano (1999), characterizes those Pentecostal churches founded in Brazil in the 1970s. They present some distinguishing features in comparison to previous Pentecostals: abandon the rigid sectarian ethos and the millennium expectation, preach prosperity and the holy war theology, adopt a modern capitalistic managing style in church administration, and make heavy investments in media and well-planned performance in politics. The prototype of this deep shift in Brazilian Pentecostalism is the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), founded in 1977 in Rio de Janeiro. During the last three decades, most of the older Pentecostal churches, especially some Assemblies of God, have gone through a kind of “neopentecostalization” or *aggiornamento* process themselves with different intensities (Costa 2017). Dozens of new Pentecostal denominations appeared in this time, some of them, such as Reborn in Christ, International of God’s Grace, Heal our Land, Videira, Fountain of Life, International Church of God’s Power (ICGP) and the UCKG in the first front, have engaged themselves in international expansion and are now present in many other countries.

The recent and present constellation of Brazilian Pentecostalism became so complex, diverse, and dynamic that it can hardly be further resumed under the neo-Pentecostalism’s label. It is also too early to outline a periodization, but some researchers speak about a *fourth wave* (Passos 2012), or Bronto-pentecostalism (Flores 2016) or post-Pentecostalism (Siepierski 1997), to describe the latest developments in Brazilian Pentecostalism. The new Pentecostal churches introduced many new symbolic, organizational, behavioral, and doctrinal inventions. Specialized skills and recent accommodations coexist or have been mixed with previous patterns of traditional Pentecostalism. Just to give an example of the growing diversity and complexity, consider the Assembly of God (AG) in Brazil. It is not a unique entity. It is rather a *brand*, under which hundreds of very different, small and big churches and ministries gather, often without any relationship. Similar to the marketing world, as a relative prestigious brand, AG works as a model to be copied and hacked in many different versions, whereas UCKG sells its all included franchising packs.

Therefore, I prefer, instead of using internal diversity, to use diversification or pluralization, to speak of a *differentiation process* within Brazilian Pentecostalism, remembering Weber’s differentiation of spheres in social life.² I use the differentiation concept here in a broader sense, without submerging in the functional differentiation debate, as an increasing specialization of the parts of society (e.g., religious institutions and individuals) that leads to greater heterogeneity, interdependence of the parts, greater complexity, and self-reflexivity (Giddens). Applied to the historical development of Pentecostalism in Brazil, the expression “internal differentiation” would maybe sound better. But taking for granted that, in such a process, both internal factors to churches as well as socio-cultural external factors, isolated or in continuous interplay, affect the changes, it is more correct to use simply differentiation of Pentecostalism. The differentiation process produces diversified Pentecostalisms within the same religious tradition. State politics on religion, after declaring in 1891 the end of religious patronage, played here no immediate role, but acted like a guarantee for the broaden change possibility conditions, promoting relatively equal conditions to the hard religious (also inner Pentecostal) competition. Deep changes within the religious field, as well as the weakening of Catholicism and broadening of social-economic processes, fast industrialization, huge internal migration flows, and the urbanization and mediatization of culture, should also be taken into consideration.

The following crucial elements highlight the new forms of diversity within Brazilian Pentecostalism:

² Differentiation meant by Weber (1920), a progressive division of society into different spheres (Economy, Politics, Art, Moral, Right), which were becoming more and more independent from religion, autonomous and specialized. In the *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber developed the different types of rational action as preconditions for the formation of value spheres. According to him, only in Occident there were complete favorable conditions for this specific form of rationalism to express, leading to the social differentiation of modernity (Schimank 1996).

- Pentecostalism in Brazil, as well as in many other Latin America countries, changes or differentiates in a peculiar socio-economic, cultural, and geographical space in the peripheries of large urban centers (Rivera 2016).
- Thousands of new, small Pentecostal denominations have appeared in large urban peripheries in the last 10 years; they work as individual-centered religious *start-ups*; they emerge and disappear and can easily close, move away, and open again under a new name; it is precarious on the one hand, but a dynamic and “prêt-à-porter” Pentecostalism on the other.
- In the peripheries, where rights are denied, the right to religious choice has received growing importance and can be seen as citizenship expression of marginalized people (Rivera 2016).
- There is no immediate or direct correlation between Pentecostalism and poverty (“the poorest, the most Pentecostal”) (Mariano and Moreira 2015).
- Differentiation means also specialization: there are now Pentecostal churches and evangelical products available for every age, preference, social class, cultural background, and gender orientation (churches for gays, lesbians, athletes, beach people, the elderly and the youth, entrepreneurs and the unemployed, low-level public servants, and big farmers; churches playing gospel, traditional country music, new country music, funk, axé (Afro-Brazilian rhythm), samba, hard rock, light rock, and thrash rock).
- Pentecostal churches specialized themselves in attending and satisfying needs of very different social niches.
- There is an absolute lack of control over Bible interpretation, and it takes almost anarchic forms.
- Pentecostalism was rooted and became popular. It became a part of popular culture and lost its hundred years of counter-cultural prestige. It has also been invaded by cultural industry, selling all kinds of religious products (Rivera 2016).
- Young people instead of old pastors (“Pentecostal caciques”) take the initiative to open temples and Pentecostal “start-ups”; evangelical NGOs prosper in the third sector.
- Therefore, the Weber’s and Troeltsch’s ideal-types (church/sect) are totally surpassed because it is possible now in Brazil to buy, for instance, a complete package of one 300-member neo-Pentecostal church, including buildings, benches, addresses and mailing lists of believers. Moreover, social communications technology and rehearsed skills have substituted the old fixation on the founder’s charismatic authority; church founders have no need for previous knowledge or charisma, nor do they even need to believe, as there are well-prepared schemas to overlap all possible situations.
- In the long run, the repeated money and political scandals will probably weaken the self-confidence and the prestige of Pentecostals; Pentecostalism will probably function as a necessary social step on the way to further secularization.
- Possibly associated with a kind of disenchantment, urban peripheries of big Latin-American cities (Mexico City, São Paulo and Buenos Aires) are currently places where the number of Pentecostals and people without religion grows more (Rivera 2016).

3. The Pentecostal Churches Transformation

Brazil conjugates state the deregulation of religious market with no clear and specific legislation or politics to frame religious intolerance, violence, or even religious predation. According to Mariano (2013, p. 11), in a context marked by religious freedom, deep, popular, magic-thaumaturgical religiosity, and cultural and religious diversity, one should expect greater religious mobilization. This would imply success of the most active proselytizing religious groups, greater de-traditionalization and religious conversion, intensive religious individuation, religious innovation, bricolage and syncretism, more heterodox, reflexive and privatizing experiments with religion, more defections, more disputes, polemics, and more cultural, religious and political conflicts. In fact, there is a little of

each when we try to identify the direction in which Pentecostal churches are transforming and being transformed. We have been facing simultaneously the following:

- A *backwards* movement (enrolling tradition and history, and assuming the old vices of Brazilian authoritarianism, corruption culture, and despotism in a Pentecostal format);
- A *downwards* movement (rooting deeper in popular-religious catholic culture);
- An *outwards* movement (being ever more influenced by a globalized information society, international consumer's culture, and individualism);
- An *inwards* movement (a substantial number of pastors and intellectuals producing theories about Pentecostalism increases the movement's reflexivity).

As mentioned above, there are dispersing, converging, and contradictory tendencies. I mention herein only the most relevant ones.

3.1. *Becoming Undistinguishably Brazilian*

In the past, Pentecostals cultivated austere customs, values, vocabulary, and appearance, and the Bible was easily recognized and distinguished from "common" Brazilians. This scenario changed substantially. Pentecostals are rooting more and more in Brazilian popular (Catholic) traditions, assuming popular feasts and giving them new names, sometimes with a slightly different interpretation (June and country feasts, Christmas, carnival and soccer events). In this sense, Pentecostals have become identified with popular culture, assimilating to *average* Brazilians, assuming traditional "Catholic" features.

A recent survey among young Pentecostals³ shows that even one of the most typical traces that distinguished Evangelicals from Catholics in the public sphere—the consumption of alcoholic beverages—has already been made flexible. Popular Pentecostalism follows the inner logic "adapt and negotiate to conquer for Christ"; it operates in many Pentecostal minds, especially by pastors and churches bringing funk parties, MMA combats, night club ambiances, and all kinds of spectacles into the church space. This logic has deep cultural roots; it works substantially like the traditional authoritarian "*jeitinho brasileiro*" ("Brazilian manner"), a cultural disposition to find a way out of every difficult or complicated situation, even closing an eye to certain moral or legal constraints.

3.2. *Developing Intolerant and Fundamentalist Currents*

Pentecostals have traditionally sustained a strong anti-Catholic and anti-ecumenical attitude. Until recently, it was part of their self-image to belong to a god's chosen persecuted religious minority, in the midst of an ignorant Bible and half-Pagan Catholic majority. As a small and active Christian minority, they had to evangelize and convert the others and therefore had no particular interest in ecumenical dialogue or in common projects with other churches, including the classical Protestants, from which they received in the past the same disdain as that of the dominant Catholics. In this sense, distancing from other religions remains the same. Nevertheless, because of a new self-image of proud and power, due to their growing importance and visibility in Brazilian society and to an aggressive and irresponsible demonizing campaign, initiated by the UCKG against Afro-Brazilian religions, an attitude of intolerance or even practical violence against other religious groups spread among Pentecostals. Statistics has shown an acute increase in religious intolerance denouncements in Brazil in the last few years: there were only 15 cases in 2011, but in 2016 there were 776, a significant part of which were against Afro-Brazilian religions (Umbanda and Candomblé) and Spiritist Centers.⁴ There have also

³ *Folha de São Paulo*, 25/12/2016. Four in ten young Pentecostals (up to 25 years) admitted not to follow their church's alcohol restrictions: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2016/12/1844387-nova-geracao-de-evangelicos-ocupa-metade-dos-bancos-das-igrejas.shtml>.

⁴ <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/diversidade/a-intolerancia-religiosa-nao-vai-calar-os-nossos-tambores> (accessed on 21 October 2017).

been attacks coming from fundamentalists in other religions, but Pentecostals are responsible for most of the violence against Afro-Brazilian religions and traditional Catholicism. People have been injured and humiliated.⁵ In 2016, such occurrences became well known in social networks. The aggressors made a film and posted it on the Internet: a Candomblé priestess was forced to destroy her place of worship, including all its objects and images. During the scene, the criminals shouted “Shame,” “Jesus blood has power!” and other Pentecostal refrains. In some slums of Rio and São Paulo, priests and priestesses of Candomblé and Umbanda were frequently threatened with guns by Pentecostal drug trafficking gangs to close their worship places and leave the district. Many service spaces have been burned and destroyed, especially in poorer and peripheral areas. Researchers have documented cases of drug dealer gangs that operate in close cooperation with Pentecostal local leaders, exchanging favors and protection or themselves becoming Pentecostal (Medrado 2016; Cunha 2015).

3.3. Fragmenting and Basing on Individual Initiative

Rivera (2016) has identified a consistent and accelerated fragmentation of institutionalized Pentecostal churches, above all in large urban peripheries. Fajardo (2016) counted 70,000 inhabitants and 174 Pentecostal churches affiliated with 60 different denominations in 2010 in Perú, a peripheral area of São Paulo. Such small denominations, classified by the Census as “other Pentecostal churches,” spread in urban peripheries, taking name, reputation, doctrine, managing techniques, and adherents from the older Pentecostal churches. Around 5 million Pentecostal believers took part in this emergent category (Fajardo 2016).

This pulverized, decentered, individual-based Pentecostalism lays on the initiative of a young generation of new religious leaders, who no longer come as converts from the Catholic Church, as usual in the past, but from a pre-existing, larger Pentecostal church (Datafolha 2016). They also direct their evangelizing work to young believers and are very active, mobile, quick in setting up small service spaces (“garage churches”), and creative in order to fit and satisfy the religious, existential needs of their audiences. Opening a new temple or Pentecostal start-up becomes a challenging, highly evaluated personal task in which evangelizing activity and entrepreneur initiative are closely mixed.

3.4. Becoming More Consumer Oriented, Aestheticized and Market Syncretic

Pentecostal churches are generally very efficient in addressing and responding to believers’ needs. Some well-established middle class Pentecostal churches, such as Videira, Fountain of Life, Heal our Land, and others, besides their services and worship, offer technical capacitation courses, psychological and financial orientation, workshops on conflict resolution, initiatives on garbage recycling, and seminars on administration techniques. They also have job and incubator agencies and develop and sell church managing material and even computer programs. These churches practice a kind and “light Pentecostalism”; they see and treat their members explicitly as partners. The Universal Church (UCKG) and its clone, the World Church of God’s Power, are more poor-class-oriented and offer intense services and exorcisms, love and family therapies, and job and religious orientation. Most Pentecostal churches, not different from Catholics and other religious groups, have a strong presence on the Internet and maintain an electronic commerce that sells a myriad of religious products. The UCKG aggressive pattern of collecting compulsorily money from the membership persists, especially from the poor. Manipulation, extortion, piracy, and self-consented misinformation occur daily. The cases are reported via WhatsApp by the victims themselves or, in some cases, brought to judges from the Consumer’s Protection Agencies Courts.

The structural need to please and to fit expectations of the believers, present in all religions but especially acute in new forms of individual-based entrepreneurship-oriented, late neo-Pentecostalism,

⁵ Concrete testimonies can be found in a report produced by Brazilian Senate TV of a public audience against religious intolerance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arn1YD5RXVk>.

acts as a permanent, hidden, driving mechanism formatting the religious offer. We have been facing an aestheticization of religion (Moreira 2015), to which Pentecostal religion seems to be especially responsive. Religious services have turned into planned spectacles, even in the minimal details. Especially in urban peripheries, where the State doesn't establish pleasant green parks and embellishment measures, people seek religious Pentecostal services that are beautiful, cheerful, happy, funny, and in both senses sensational. This corresponds perfectly to the need for joyful, energetic, strong emotional and delightful experiences sought by the youth.

Today, the real, seemingly inexhaustible source of symbolical resources to be adopted and syncretized with is the market—not other religions. In this sense, Pentecostal churches in Brazil, the old ones as well as the brand new, offer an excellent laboratory and experimentation field to link religion and capitalism.

3.5. Supporting the Political Establishment

Pentecostalism established itself in Brazil in the beginning in close contact and near the popular milieus and working classes. However, possibly due to its North American origins, without contact with European revolution, Pentecostalism never developed contestation potentials and socially critical characteristics in Brazil. But the main reason for this historical right wing propensity could be different. The most important Pentecostal traditional churches, such as the Christian Congregation and the Assembly of God, as well as the most important neo-Pentecostal (third wave) churches, such as the Universal, and with them almost all other churches, assimilated plainly the Brazilian old authoritarian, oligarchical, and patriarchal *caudillo-colonel* political culture:

“... Pastors and bishops are more *caudillos* than clerics ... the organizational model requirements they impose themselves in an authoritarian way, making that the relationship between leader and followers assume respectively the forms of tutelage and dependency. The Pentecostal organization assimilated indeed, the despotic pattern of Brazilian political boss ... An authoritarian organization, which excludes the believer from participating in all decisions ... Such environment develops an antidemocratic character-building and a culture against collective well-being” (Baptista 2009, p. 383).

According to Baptista, Pentecostalism has a peculiar attraction to authoritarian regimes, because of the affinities among them and their ecclesiastical structures. When the Pentecostal churches AG and UCKG entered into the political arena in 1986, they did it in a corporatist way, adopting a populist behavior of manipulating faithful people to obtain electoral benefits, according to the church's ruling staff's previously determined goals. In doing so, they repeated and actualized an old authoritarian pattern of political strategy: the “electoral corrals” (*curral eleitoral*) (Baptista 2009). The power of Pentecostals in politics, especially in Federal parliament through their representative, well-organized, never-coherent lobby (*bancada evangélica*), is based on such manipulating practices as Evangelical votes.

A serious problem, full of further consequences, arose as Pentecostal churches, especially AG and UCKG, engaged in political campaigns and connected the church's internal structures with the electoral machine and its calendar. The political mandate became an extension of the pastor's ministry (Fajardo 2016). It further enhanced the power of the small ruling pastor groups over their congregations. They clearly sustained and bargained their political capital with other political forces, counting on such bases. On the other hand, candidates acted as representatives of their churches. Pentecostal politicians are not worse than other Brazilian politicians (Baptista 2009), but once congressmen and senators are elected, through political parties that they helped to organize and finance, they do not defend a political agenda based on an individual's autonomy, democracy, or respect for republican values. Usually allied with the big farmer lobby and conservative political forces, they have great difficulty supporting social movements, popular demonstrations, and the right to strike. Notwithstanding a typical Pentecostal moralism, above all in family, sexual, and gender issues, Pentecostal politicians have often been trapped in money and corruption scandals. UCKG Bishop Carlos A. Rodrigues and

Eduardo Cunha, former president of the Congressmen Chamber and AG influential member, are the most known. Nowadays (October 2017), Pentecostal politicians belong to the main core of those political forces that artificially maintain in power—such as the most unpopular and formally accused President Michel Temer. Fortunately, there are also clear signs that Pentecostal bases are moving away towards greater independency, regarding their political representatives. The 2018 general elections will show how consistent that trend can be.

4. Religious Diversity and Pluralism in Brazil—Some Points of Discussion

Bader (2003) and Beckford (2003, 2010), Ammerman (2010), Yang (2010), and Thériault (2010) provided valuable contributions and pointed out necessary distinctions in the debate about religious diversity and pluralism. It seems that Bader and Beckford, as Brazilian religion sociologists (Mariano 1999; Campos 1997; Baptista 2009), did not foresee the possibility that has now been drawn in the Brazilian political horizon with great clarity. It has to do first with the concept of religious diversity, and second with an insufficient analysis of the State's correlation to religious pluralism.

- (A). The situation of religious diversity and the relative tolerance, provided and guaranteed by the secular Brazilian State, now tends to be trampled by the systematic political strategy by Pentecostal agents and institutions. In fact, instead of confronting and eventually opposing the “secular state,” they have been trying, by different paths, to occupy space and institutional apparatuses to favor their political-religious interests. Pentecostals seize the state apparatus through official politics, organizing and financing political parties, campaigning openly for certain candidates, indicating names to State functions, and linking denominations to the program of parties which they control. Bader's proposed model of *Nonconstitutional Pluralism* (NCP) does not consider this possibility of religious institutions functionalizing the formally laic State to corporative interests. This kind of action questions the relationship among religious diversity, pluralism, and democracy in Brazil. The notion of religious diversity implies a positive acceptance of cultural and religious *diversification* in a given moment. But in a context marked by fierce competition, which amounts to personal hatred and revenge among religious agencies and their main leaders, the concept of “religious diversity” seems very static in capturing tensions and conflicts and accounting for the complexity. It acts like an instant, depthless photograph of the momentary religious constellation in a given society. After a short time, the same expression could indicate a very different constellation but reveals nothing about the reasons and direction of the religious change. “Religious diversity” must always be historicized; alone it does not help to grasp the *provisional* character of each religious diversity, nor its *dynamics*, nor the *unevenness* of forces/resources involved, nor the *suffering* it can produce for concrete people. When the State in a given moment adopts and protects the existing religious diversity—looking ahead to favor religious pluralism—it can adopt and protect the religious diversity imposed by the conquerors and victorious. That is especially true concerning the fragile indigeneous religions in Brazil.
- (B). As pointed out, the politics of religious diversity and tolerance provided and fostered by the secular State are not sufficient to prevent situations of active intolerance, religious predation, and religious violence. By religious predation I mean those attitudes planned and carried out by religious agencies for stealing, annexing, and expropriating a religious group of symbolic resources considered strategic. Predation means also attracting, co-opting, or repeatedly bullying other religious adherents in an aggressive, physical, and symbolical, violent, and intolerant way. Victims often report of speeches that humiliate, demonize their religious symbols and beliefs, or incite hatred. In such a context of hostility erupted among religious competitors, which includes aggressive and public practices of predation, intimidation, and revenge against weaker religious contenders, should one not defend the need of state intervention?

The religious ultra-liberalism practiced today in Brazil has created pathetic situations of abuse of religious, media, and economic power by certain churches, especially by neo-Pentecostals.

The ultra-liberal religious market, with total or almost total deregulation favors *de facto* predatory, violent, carious, lobbying, corporatist practices that frequently hurt not only the principles of fair competition—so exalted by hard capitalism—but the human rights of followers of weaker religious communities, or with less economic, political, and media power. Criticism can be made to “religious economy” theories about their basic position regarding the religious diversity. Such theories consider a liberal, non-State-regulated, free religious market as ideal and desirable condition for religious competitors. But they do not seem to consider the violence suffered by the “defeated” religious competitors (not competitive enough?) nor the disruptive social costs it brings with. Violence and suffering can be much more intense and ethically unjustifiable than a necessary State regulative intervention. It can hurt human fundamental rights and turn impossible a real religious pluralism, and therefore democracy.

(C). As exposed above, better than religious diversity, differentiation can be a useful sociological tool to lay open Pentecostalism historical development and its prominent role in the growing religious diversification in Brazil. However, the concept is not unproblematic. The differentiation dynamics in partial systems, the meaningful specialization, and the autonomization of social subsystems comprise the core of Niklas Luhmann’s (Luhmann 1984) functional differentiation theory. Autonomization (*Verselbständigung*) appears to be the key criterion of functional differentiation. However, if each subsystem operates almost blind within its own logic, differentiation could thus be seen as an automatism that explains itself. To understand why the whole system does not fall apart, one must actually define questions of integration and coordination (Degele 1999). This could be a significant limitation of Luhmannian functional differentiation theories when applied to explain Brazilian Pentecostalism. In his view, privatized decision-making in matters of religion correlates with a decline of public influence of religious leaders. However, in the Brazilian case, we observe the privatization of religious choices combining the witch growing importance of religion in the public sphere. Further limitations of Luhmannian’s systemic model applied to this concrete case would be Luhmann’s depreciation of an individual’s initiative (which is the case of active young Pentecostal leaders) and Luhmann’s restrictions on the possibilities of conscientious and responsible moral action, understood only as *Autopoiesis*. In his rich comments on systemic religion and globalization, Peter Beyer (Beyer 1994) stresses that “public influence for religion will be found in the direction of religious performance,” which seems not to be completely the case here. Then Neo-Pentecostals owe their success and power not only to religious performance or to individual-fitted religious offers but to a great extent to their competence in dealing with media, formal politics, and social complexity-reducing therapies. Therefore, Beyer’s only two options, the liberal and the conservative, for tackling the influence problem of religion in contemporary societies (Beyer 1994, p. 86) appear to be narrow under such circumstances.

5. Conclusions

The dynamics of adapting, laying roots in Brazilian traditional culture and ethos, as well as its permeability to globalization and its ability to respond to individual privatized immediate needs, helped Pentecostalism to reshape itself and to conquer an important role in the public sphere. Pentecostalism offers today a wide range of styles, theologies, liturgies, and products, fitting the most diverse socio-economic, cultural, gender-oriented, and ethnic groups in society. But functional differentiation theories, from which the differentiation concept stems, help little toward thinking further about how to integrate religious violence and suffering caused by Pentecostal expansion into sociological thinking. In the same context, religious economy-oriented theories show theoretical and political limitations when regulating religious policies across social subsystems, which should be tackled by the state or by the civil society.

Religious pluralism, as defined by Beckford (2010), could remain as a desirable ethical and political horizon for an institutionally supported and socially accepted respectful coexistence of different religions within a society. It remains a necessary condition to be achieved in the future.

It is coherent with democratic qualities for the coexistence in open societies. But left alone, the concept suggests that the religious communities should produce this pluralism by themselves . . . by ordinary interaction or by savage competition? Maybe in societies where religion does not play a strong role on the public sphere, one should expect a “civilized” interplay. But in societies where religions are powerful, where the State tolerates religious intolerance and eventually conflicts among religious groups, religious pluralism is a notion proper for misunderstandings. A related critical point remains the use of neoliberal economic theories to tackle questions on religious diversity and pluralism, and they then assume neoliberal totally deregulated religious markets as granted or a desirable ground condition.

In Brazil, in fact, we have been coping with a kind of free-wrestling among neo-Pentecostal religious agencies that use all types of maneuvers and low blows, including their influence in the state apparatus and their strong presence in the media and in “professional” social networks, to attack, weaken, disfigure, and if possible destroy their religious opponents or even critical journalists.⁶ Just like in one Ultimate Fighting Championship, such aggressive and predatory practices of neo-Pentecostal churches have become a part of everyday life and have resulted in a “naturalized” cultural taste. In addition to the outrage of different sectors in society, members of whom shortly turn to the next scandal, and the lack of interest of few police authorities to unveil what happened, corruption-accused State officials are not interested in punishing religious crimes. The last PT (labor party) government created forums of interreligious dialogue in many Brazilian cities, with representatives of religious communities, State officials, and civil society. The purpose was precisely to try to prevent and contain attacks and conflicts among factions or aggressive religious groups. Such initiatives have been dismantled by the present government.

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⁶ E.g., the ongoing attacks between UCKG’ grounder Edir Macedo and his ex-bishop, grounder of UCPG Valdemiro Santiago; or the campaign from this latter against the deceased journalist Marcelo Rezende.

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