



# **Prophetic Voices in Brazil for a theology of change**



**PROPHETIC  
VOICES  
IN BRAZIL**



# **PROPHETIC VOICES IN BRAZIL**

**for a theology  
of change**

Christian Aid  
Brazil Programme

2019

© Christian Aid, 2019

Christian Aid Brazil Programme

[christianaid.org.uk/brazil](http://christianaid.org.uk/brazil)

[brazil-info@christian-aid.org](mailto:brazil-info@christian-aid.org)



Christian Aid is a member of

**actalliance**

# Contents

- II Introduction
- 18 No wealth is innocent: demands from the  
gospel and social inequality  
*Nancy Cardoso*
- 30 Jesus and the insurgent memory of “people with no face”  
*Fábio Py*

- 42 Alternatives to violence and authoritarianism  
*Felipe dos Anjos*
- 60 For paths of Liberation: theological signalizations  
*Ricardo Gondim*
- 70 Reflections on the Public Sphere and Theology:  
through paths of resistance and liberation  
*Bianca Daébs Seixas Almeida*
- 86 In the Nets of the Amazon: theological reflections  
in complex times  
*Yuri Puello Orozco*
- 98 Building Prophetic Paths in the Struggle for Justice,  
Dignity, and Equality in Brazil Today  
*Ronilso Pacheco*
- 109 Authors







# Introduction

Christian Aid is an international organization that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We are the official international development and cooperation agency of 41 Protestant churches in the United Kingdom and Ireland, supported by individuals, churches, governments and institutions. We are present in Africa, Asia and Latin America, supporting projects based on the needs of communities and not on their religion, creed or nationality.

We are part of a global movement for justice, and on this base, we reiterate our commitment to change, expressed in our Global Strategy for the period 2019-2026, where we affirm that:

We remain convinced that poverty is political. It is not an accident; rather, it is caused by human structures and systems. We understand that to achieve lasting solutions, *poverty, power and people's ability to speak* against and remove injustices must be tackled together.

We are called to challenge the cause of poverty and to transform our world into a place where everyone can experience life in all its fullness<sup>1</sup>.

In Latin America and the Caribbean this call encounters redoubled challenges at a time of severe social tensions and conflicts with complex political, economic, cultural and socio-environmental implications. The region is experiencing a progressive reduction in the exercise of constitutional rights that represented achievements in social, economic and gender justice, as well as civil liberties. Undoubtedly, this situation affects the lives of millions of people who are violently impoverished and excluded, with less rights and without access to justice. In this context our strategic pillars are:

## Poverty

For Christian Aid, poverty is an issue that goes beyond the economy. The poorest and most difficult to reach people are not there by chance. It's a matter of power! Gender, race, ethnicity, social status, disability or age are some factors of inequality and exclusion. This injustice removes dignity, denies

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Aid Global Strategy*, <<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-03/global-strategy-web.pdf>>.

access to their rights, access and control of resources, peace and life in fullness. As a faith-based organization, we are united by the belief that all people have innate worth and dignity, and that poverty is a scandal because it deprives them of that dignity.

## Power

Addressing poverty is not limited to treating symptoms alone, although this is important. Real transformation will only be achieved when the structural and systemic causes of poverty are addressed. For this it is essential to understand the local power dynamics and to influence them through the construction of collective power. Our commitment is that those living in poverty can take control of their lives and be at the forefront of systemic transformations.

## Prophetic Voice

The prophetic voice is a collective action, even when a single person or a single organization states the complaint and demands justice. Prophetic voices are not mere speeches or texts, they must be actions created with communities that articulate three fundamental dynamics: justice, solidarity and faith. In Latin America and the Caribbean there is a rich trajectory of the prophetic voice that denounces what takes away dignity and announces new moments that are already happening in people's daily struggles in contexts of inequality.

## The challenges in Brazil

With 210 million inhabitants, Brazil remains among the most unequal countries in Latin America and the world. The per capita earnings of the richest 10% are 17 times higher than those of 40% of the poorest population.

Since 2014, inequality has grown in the country due to the withdrawal of rights, underfunding of public policies and increasing private control of natural resources, evidencing a structural crisis. During this period, the richest had an increase of 3.3% in accumulated income while the poorest fell by more than 20%, reaching the highest level of inequality ever recorded<sup>2</sup>. In other words, those who had much, came to have more, and those who had little, came to have less.

From the theological point of view, social inequality has always been a question that mobilizes the exercise of faith, the experiences with God and the possible presence of religions in the political scene. In a society so divided and so unequal – where is God? A testimony of faith cannot be indifferent to these questions.

This context of social and economic setbacks is marked by profound changes in the Brazilian religious field, with the consolidation of important confessional displacements within Christianity and the strengthening of discourses and practices that justify and legitimize the hierarchization of society. In these new religious dynamics there seems to be no theological questioning about the indignant poverty of the majorities, the lack of equal access to rights and opportunities.

The structures of exclusion based on class, gender, and race give rise to a prophetic cry that interrupts every claim to legitimize the inequality in God. In this sense we need to answer

<sup>2</sup> Income inequality in Brazil reaches the highest level ever recorded, says FGV/IBRE, 21.05.2019, <<https://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2019/05/21/desigualdade-de-renda-no-brasil-atinge-o-maior-patamar-ja-registrado-diz-fgvibre.ghml>>.

confronting questions and explain motivations and alternatives: why do evil and injustice live among us and make us so unequal?

## Sustaining prophetic voices

The long history of churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs) working in defence of the Common House and the most vulnerable communities in the country lives with this reality. Therefore, to broaden and deepen the role of churches and FBOs for equality and justice in Brazil, Christian Aid, the World Council of Churches, ACT Brazil Ecumenical Forum, the National Council of Christian Churches, the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil and many others are working together.

In 2018, we started the *Water for Life* project, with the objective of expanding our joint action capabilities. In this context we developed capacity building activities for religious leaders, community outreach, communication campaigns and informative texts and video clips as ways to support the prophetic action of faith organizations and national and international networks. This publication was developed within the framework of this project and the collaborations established by it.

The texts that will follow are the result of the seminar *Injustice and Inequalities in Brazil Today: Theological Challenges and Faith*

<sup>3</sup> In the selection we also included the text “Building Prophetic Paths in the Struggle for Justice, Dignity and Equality in Brazil Today” (*Construir Caminhos Proféticos na Luta por Justiça, Dignidade e Igualdade no Brasil Hoje*), by Ronilso Pacheco, which was not presented at the seminar, but dialogues with the debate about the concept of prophetic voice in Brazil today.

*Responses*, held on 5 and 6 September, 2019 in the Holy Trinity Parish (Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil) in São Paulo<sup>3</sup>. Several organizations were with us, such as the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB), Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), Sempreviva Feminist Organization (sof), Christian Council of Churches (Conic), Episcopal Anglican Church

of Brazil (IEAB), Pro-Indigenous Commission of São Paulo (CPI-SP), Gaspar Garcia Human Rights Centre, Koinonia Ecumenical Presence and Service, Open Society Foundations, Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (Repam), and the Frente de Evangélicos pelo Estado de Direito (Evangelicals for the Rule of Law).

The authors are theologians who sign their articles and assume positions that cause us to displace convictions and produce new syntheses. The publication of these texts aims to equip churches and FBOs with new theological tools for collective discussion. We know that there are countless challenges in Brazil today, making it necessary to produce new dialogues and to innovate in theological responses to the issues presented here.

We hope this publication will be a contribution from Christian Aid to the urgent and necessary dialogue between social movements, NGOs and theology, helping to strengthen the voices that prophesy against injustice and inequality.

**Brazil Programme  
Christian Aid.**









# No wealth is innocent:

demands from the  
gospel and social inequality

*Nancy Cardoso*



Social inequality is the clearest evidence that corruption, theft, bribery, exploitation, and crime exist: the world's eight wealthiest men own as much combined wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of the planet<sup>1</sup>.

The organization of social life under the capitalist mode is based on the systemic alienation that estranges workers from the product of their work, estranges communities from their territory that is ripped off of their raw materials, legitimizes the expropriation of wealth, resources, and possibilities by a minority... and no! Nothing about this is natural, normal, or explicable.

No wealth is innocent: all wealth is fed by some. Secret, organized corruption is not a privilege of poor, “underdeveloped” countries. However, if we consider that corruption kills – because it misappropriates hospital, schools, security funds –, the biggest homicide is structured corruption. We must not let the necessary

<sup>1</sup> BBC Brasil, January 16th, 2017, in: <http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-38635398>.

outrage over cases of “cultural” microcorruption make us overlook the big corruption. That one is harder to see. But it’s the one that kills the most people<sup>2</sup>.

While it may be explicable, theologically, it has been easier to explain and ponder about poverty – its causes and challenges and forms of overcoming it – than about wealth. There is always room to understand and tolerate wealth as part of life in society. We even live with the idea that wealth is the outcome of faith. I would like to share – based on the question about inequality – a different view, one that sees wealth as an obstacle to faith, or even wealth as an offense to God.

Globalized capitalism, which operates at unprecedented levels of wealth concentration, advances and deepens its own imperialism through intervention agencies – wars, financialization of the economy, fierce extractivism, biotechnological control, political destabilization in areas of resistance, and massive ideological and media presence.

For contemporary authors, under global capitalism driven by intense competition, periphery countries and economies are involved in ever faster-paced commercial trade, maintenance of profit margins, and political agreements in which they cannot afford to keep competition rules.

Globalitarian capitalism ravages all institutions, breaks all limits, dismisses democracy<sup>3</sup>.

With no organic social consensus, the elites need to take control over the State by promoting “coups and ruptures,” and make sure to remain competitive in the global casino by getting priority access to public re-

<sup>2</sup> GALEANO, Eduardo, in: <http://site.adital.com.br/site/noticia.php?lang=ES&prevlang=PT&prevprevlang=ES&prevprevprevlang=PT&prevprevprevlang=ES&cod=36766>. Our translation.

<sup>3</sup> OLIVEIRA, Francisco. “O avesso do avesso”. In: *Piauí*. Issue 37, 2009, available at: <http://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/o-avesso-do-avesso/>. Our translation.

sources through subsidies, funding schemes, and privileged conditions in bidding processes, that is, corruption is necessary for the elites to secure their power and maintain the forms of subordination. In this sense, inequality as the product of corruption is structural, structured, and protected by the State and its mechanisms of power. In the words of Florestan Fernandes:

This political articulation between the more equals, which is oligarchic-democratic in its essence and applications, immediately and irredeemably takes on the form of a systematic, across-the-board co-optation. Co-optation happens between groups and subgroups, segments and subsegments, between classes and sub-classes, always implicating the same thing: the intrinsic, unavoidable corruption of the power resulting from it<sup>4</sup>.

It is in this scenario of endless intervention and exploitation that we must identify and also recognize the agencies of Christianity as part of the mechanisms fighting for the hegemony of Western capitalism of the Northern Atlantic. Financially globalized capital has no commitment to production processes or national territories. It makes up something immaterial for itself, consolidating the “invisible hand of the market” as a metaphysical truth. This purportedly spiritual capitalism then has to borrow/hijack/rent from Western Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> FERNANDES, Florestan. “A revolução burguesa no Brasil. Ensaio de interpretação sociológica”. 5th edition. São Paulo: Globo, 2006, in: [https://interpretacoedobrasil.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/fernandes\\_a-revoluc3a-7c3a30-burguesa-no-brasil-ed-globo.pdf](https://interpretacoedobrasil.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/fernandes_a-revoluc3a-7c3a30-burguesa-no-brasil-ed-globo.pdf). Our translation.

Capitalism has developed in the West as a parasite of Christianity (one can demonstrate this not only in relation to Calvinism, but to all the other orthodox currents of Christianity) so that, in the last

analysis, the history of Christianity is essentially the history of its parasite, capitalism (...) Christianity, at the time of the Reformation, did not favour the emergence of capitalism, but it rather transformed itself into capitalism<sup>5</sup>.

The parasite “belongs” to its host, but not “organically”: it feeds on the host, but changes it, seizing some of its resources. The parasite does not perform photosynthesis – it needs a living organism to take from it what it needs to live and grow. The picture suggests a historical and dated, yet structural relationship, as the host not only “favours” the growth of the parasite, but adapts to it, losing its own autonomy. This image helps to understand Western Christianity action beyond mechanical relationships and requires an in-depth process of radical criticism, discernment, and engagement of an anti-capitalist, liberating Christian *praxis*.

The objective of neoliberal strategies is not to eliminate poverty – even those negotiated in the name of development. They are satisfied simply by avoiding conflicts, keeping a certain social cohesion, helping the poor to formulate their social demands and keeping them at the necessary levels of reproduction of the processes of production and concentration of wealth. Here is where the Christian religion shows its ability to be a host.

The religion of capitalism is different for different social classes: for those who take part in the circle dance of consumerism, it is the promise of credit possibilities, full and infinite realization; for those who don't have access to consumption, it is a mechanism that keeps them continuously in debt and delays them access to credit, which always generates more poverty. *Poverty is the necessary condition of capitalist production and accumulation of wealth.* No wealth is innocent, no wealth is good or fair.

<sup>5</sup> BENJAMIN, Walter. “Capitalism as Religion”, in: [http://www.rae.com.pt/Cader-no\\_wb\\_2010/Benjamin%620Capitalism-as-Religion.pdf](http://www.rae.com.pt/Cader-no_wb_2010/Benjamin%620Capitalism-as-Religion.pdf)



Exposing wealth as an obstacle and an offense to faith in Jesus' gospel is necessary here. Telling the truth to the powerful and exposing those who have, systematically and structurally, broken up and continue to break up the collective in the name of personal, classist, and corporate interests. And talking theologically about this is also necessary, because there is a strong tendency for Christian tradition to be used to legitimize inequalities... which reduce Jesus to a life coach! We must bring back the prophecy of what Jesus proposed to radically fight poverty and inequality.

## **We are missing one thing!**

*When the young man heard this statement,  
he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*  
(Matthew 19:22)

*But when he heard this he became quite sad,  
for he was very rich.*  
(Luke 18:23)

*At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad,  
for he had many possessions.*  
(Mark 10:22)

The story of the “rich young man” is a well-known one. A meeting that did not go well. There was a lot of congeniality between Jesus and the young man, the conversation was polite, the topics were deep, and the dialogue is real. The elements of family and community life that Jesus mentioned – “you shall not commit adultery”; “you shall not murder”; “you shall not steal”; “you shall not lie”; “you shall not disappoint anyone”; “you shall

honour your father and mother” – define a life marked by ethics, and the young man will say he will obey all that. “But that is not enough! That is not enough!” Jesus lovingly says. Mark’s gospel reads: “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, ‘You are lacking in one thing.’” The ethics of family and community life is important, but it’s not enough.

When Jesus poses him the challenge of selling everything the young man owns and giving it to the poor as a condition to follow him as a disciple, the issue of ethics expands to the social forms of the organization of social life, especially the forms of accumulation and property. Matthew and Mark wrote how the conversation went wrong, pointing out the basic reason: *for he had many possessions!* Luke would rather write: *because he is very rich.* Jesus will transfer all demands and imperatives from the Gospel to the poor. Much more than good personal relationships, Jesus – lovingly – radicalizes it by pointing out the vital movement toward social reconciliation: to overcome the basic contradiction of society – poverty and inequality –, which is the result of accumulation and concentration. Jesus, with radical love, shows the way: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23).

## Getting Zaccheus down from the tree!

Allan Boesak, from South Africa, wrote a deliciously delicate article: “And Zaccheus remained in the tree: Reconciliation and justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”<sup>6</sup>. He is looking into the post-apartheid process and the contradictions that made it become increasingly disappointing as a work of social reconciliation, especially for black communities. He argues that coming to an agreement

<sup>6</sup> BOESAK, A., “And Zaccheus remained in the tree: Reconciliation and justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, in: <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/40>

or achieving social reconciliation can only be possible if there is justice. So he brings up the story of Zaccheus, from Luke 19:1-10. Zaccheus was an infamous and rich tax collector who earned his wealth by corruptly manipulating the tax system and exploiting people under the Roman Empire rule. The rich had to accept his extortion rules and the poor suffered three times more: paying unfair taxes to the Romans, being exploited by Zaccheus' fees, and in the hands of the rich who kept their earnings by exploiting their work and nature in the occupied Palestine.

It's easy to realize that there was no love in the relationships under that tree: Zaccheus was loathed, as he represented the most apparent face of the system of exploitation and inequality. Tensions were high between the community and this "short in stature" man. Climbing the tree shows some curiosity or demand Zaccheus had. There are many interpretations about this. Apparently, he climbed the tree in the hopes he could see Jesus. Jesus sees Zaccheus and talks to him, against the crowd's will. Jesus loves that man in the tree and wants to talk to him, go to his house, eat with him, share his bread. Meanwhile, the people grumbled: Jesus enters his house and eats with the stealer. Well, love has these things, this movement of opening up opportunities, creating alternatives. We don't know what Jesus and Zaccheus ate or drank, or even what they talked about. We do know the result of that co-existence:

*Half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor.  
And if I have extorted anything from anyone  
I shall repay it four times over!*  
(Luke 19:8)

Jesus' love opened doors for reconciliation and justice as an expression of the compassionate presence of God. Love unites and reconciles, but it needs a concrete mediation of justice as the restoration of community life, of life in the world. Jesus is

radical, immediately connecting Zaccheus' response to salvation: "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

Zaccheus admitted having defrauded, stolen, extorted, and that his wealth was an impediment to his reconciliation with God and the community. The radical consequences of love that brought to true reconciliation are: transformation, restoration, justice. If no concrete action were taken, Zaccheus would have stayed up in that tree.

### **Coming down from the tree: restorative justice**

The political and economic actors cannot flirt with the churches, parasitize churches and the economic movement. Our assignment is to call, in a loving appeal, for conversion and reconciliation, not tolerating palliative or superficial responses. Ethical and formal attitudes and behavioural responses are not enough. Zaccheus must come down from the tree to allow for difficult, loving conversations: to publicly acknowledge his participation in the theft and destruction of the Common Home in order to create answers toward reparation and restitution.

It is only then that salvation will enter the house of the rich, the relationships can be restored, and equality among all will become the imperative of the Gospel. Talking about reconciliation and unity while also keeping Zaccheus in the top of the tree is a historical, theological, and political mistake that will cost us our relevance in future processes in defense of the rights and integrity of the Earth and its beings.





1 It's important to highlight that this essay was written based upon the drafts I wrote while preparing for demonstration-like classes and public religious-ceremony-like protests, started in 2016, with *Coletivo Vandalizando*, in Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro. During the activities organized by the collective *Coletivo Vandalizando*, it was possible to connect ideas and experiences, as far as style and content are concerned. They have now been written for the first time because of Christian Aid's invitation to join this seminar. Therefore, reflecting upon the importance of understanding Jesus' grassroots movement is core to activities fostered by the collective. When members of the collective have gathered in public spaces to reflect upon faith together with passersby in Cinelândia's stairs, Rio de Janeiro's urban geography was the platform upon which one was to reflect on Jesus' movement from the perspective of the work done to the benefit of the Roman world in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.



# Jesus and the insurgent memory of “people with no face”<sup>1</sup>

*Fábio Py*





The Body of Christ was killed and symbolically quartered along the Roman Empire. That has happened for a reason! Jesus was a member of a great movement of rebellious Palestinians against the Empire. Still, the impact of his insurgent memory was so piercing that, two millennia later, it is still used by different governmental forces: from fascist administrations – such as Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Salazar, and, in Jair Messias Bolsonaro’s Brazil; – to more left-wing-like governance – such as Workers’ Party (PT) administrations in Brazil, Kirchner administrations in Argentina – seen as more open to a plurality of faces.

A non-pretentious reading of biblical texts reveals that Christ was not alone in his journey. In fact, he was always surrounded by people, or, as Evangelists would put it, by the “crowd.” It is not that hard to see him as part of a movement made up of different people in Palestinian soil in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. For this reason, I would like to put forward a historical description on Jesus’ followers as a set of faces that could not be seen by the official lenses of the Roman Empire. That population segment, although invisible to Roman power, would later put together a

wide-ranging grassroots movement so broad and diverse that the “punishment” for its leader was death by crucifixion.

Some specialists support the idea of comparing Jesus’ and his followers’ journeys to a grassroots movement. Gerd Theissen highlights that “following Jesus was a social movement for those who fought against Roman occupation in the Fertile Crescent, the movement consisted of bitter lives rebelling against Roman lash”<sup>2</sup>. Another researcher on the New Testament, Richard Horsley, states that Jesus’ movement has some characteristics of “social banditry.” Horsley’s<sup>3</sup> work is key for understanding insurgent characteristics of the Christian movement. To Horsley, Jesus’ followers were outcasts because they supported a broader anti-Roman Empire message, as suggested by the last verses in the Gospel of John: “my peace I give you” (John 14:27). It refers to the idea that followers had a broader political project against the demands of Rome. Roman politics was based upon violence against populations by means of the “Pax Romana.”

## What did Jesus’ followers do for a living?

To construe the process of organizing for Jesus’ movement, it is important to learn about trades some of Jesus’ disciples, who heard Christ “calling,” used to dedicate to. New Testament texts mention those trades. According to biblical excerpts, Joseph, Jesus, and James were “carpenters.” However, considering Palestinian geography in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and even today, trees are awfully rare. The weather in the region is semiarid, which does not allow for trees to grow and thrive, not even medium-sized ones. There were bigger trees only in territories close by, such as Lebanon and its famous “cedar trees.” Bearing that in mind,

<sup>2</sup> THEISSEN, Gerd. *Sociologia do movimento de Jesus*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1983, p.74.

<sup>3</sup> HORSLEY, Richard & HANSON, J. *Bandidos, profetas e messias – movimentos populares no tempo de Jesus*, São Paulo: Paulinas, 1996.

one may wonder: why was Jesus' job translated as "carpenter" in the Bible if he lived in a region where being a carpenter was impossible due to lack of raw materials?

The word "carpenter" will only appear in translated texts around the 17th century<sup>4</sup>. Back then, England's Missionary House had to put together a translation that would work both domestically, in Great Britain, and overseas, in countries where its Imperialism got (or still gets) a foothold. As in England houses are made of wood, Jesus' and his father Joseph's job was translated as "carpentry" in the English version of the Bible. Nevertheless, in Palestine, when Christ was alive, houses used to be made of stones. Hence, having original texts as a source, the best translation to Joseph's and Jesus' job would be "stone breaker." Father and son used to do taskwork supported by Rome to build Roman cities throughout the Empire<sup>5</sup>. In this case, it is important to state that portraying Jesus as a carpenter may conceal his true social stratification. Jesus was no carpenter. He was a bricklayer and belonged to one of the poorest social segments in Roman soil. Considering Jesus as a bricklayer makes him

4 Cf. HILL, Christopher. *A Bíblia inglesa e as revoluções do século XVII*. Lisboa: Presença, 1983, p.78.

5 Cf. HILL, 1983.

6 Cf. HILL, 1983.

7 Cf. MALINA, Bruce J. *O Evangelho Social de Jesus: O reino de Deus em perspectiva mediterrânea*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2004.

8 Cf. STEGEMANN, E; STEGEMANN, W. *História social do proto-cristianismo. Os primórdios no judaísmo e as comunidades de Cristo no Mundo Mediterrâneo*. São Paulo/São Leopoldo: Paulus/Sinodal, 2004.

calling Peter "stone" more logical, as this term was typical vocabulary to 1st century Palestinian "stone breakers"<sup>6</sup>.

Another trade Jesus' followers would perform is "fishermen," represented by Peter and Andrew. Historical records show Rome actively controlled lakes, rivers, and seas<sup>7</sup>. Those areas were the source of the main food product Romans would consume in Palestine: fish. Nonetheless, due to Roman rule, Palestinian fishermen would get the smallest fish to eat (as depicted in the text on Jesus' miracle of bread and fish<sup>8</sup>). In this case, often-

times, Palestinians such as Peter and Andrew would work in the process of making and repairing Roman fishing nets, instead of working as “fishermen” themselves. Fishermen were people Romans trusted. Thus, Palestinians would only be allowed to weave, collect the remainder, and get the smallest fish. That is: New Testament fishermen were net weavers and remainder pickers in Roman beaches<sup>9</sup>.

It is also important to consider the group of women who were close to Jesus. They also must have been disciples, although the New Testament does not portray them this way. Hence, it is crucial taking Mary, Martha, and many other women who walked with Jesus into account. Little is said about their jobs. However, oftentimes, they are labeled as prostitutes<sup>10</sup>. In fact, there is a chance they have resorted to prostitution for a living. But it is also likely they were weavers, such as Doksa, mentioned in Acts of the Apostles. Therefore, as we are dealing with female characters, it is hard to define the term “prostitution”, as it can be used to wrongly label women who had children out of wedlock, such as Mary, mother of Jesus<sup>11</sup>. For this reason, Mary has been theologically introduced from the perspective of a mythology of a miracle, the highly important “virginal conception.” What may be behind these theological constructions are two possibilities: the first one, Mary may have had intercourse with a man other than Joseph. The second one highlights the fact that Roman soldiers would often rape women and men in the regions they ruled. Rape was extremely shameful in the Fertile Crescent patriarchal culture. Therefore, Gospel texts could have been constructed as a theological metaphor to conceal the fact that Mary had sexual intercourse before marriage because she felt like it, or due to Roman rape. According to Torah texts, either option is shameful for Jewish women<sup>12</sup>.

Finally, the last trade Christ disci-

<sup>9</sup> Cf. MALINA, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> OTERMANN, Monika. *Jesus e as Mães de Israel. Ou: como Maria de Nazaré chegou a ser mãe em Israel*. Estudos Bíblicos, v. 99, 2008, p. 98-107.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. OTERMANN, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. OTERMANN, 2008.

ples performed was “tax collector,” Matthew’s job. In the Jewish world, it meant betrayal to one’s roots. Tax collectors were treated that way because they used to charge Jerusalem Temple’s fees and tariffs. They were cursed for working as collection agents who knew how to speak Hebrew and Aramaic, and directly served the Empire<sup>13</sup>. They would collect fees and tariffs at the Temple. For this reason, Sadducees and the highest levels of Pharisees hated them. Other social-political groups would respond differently to tax collectors. They were, therefore, people who struggled to be accepted in Jewish elites. Thus, tax collectors dully turned into Jesus’ followers due to a set of biases they faced<sup>14</sup>.

## The non-place of Jesus’ followers

Considering the trades Jesus’ followers used to engage in before the “calling,” it is easy to understand why they accepted living an almost nomadic life in Jesus’ ministry. Yes, living from one house to another, from one village to another, from one tribe to another and relying on donations for survival<sup>15</sup>. Those were the possibilities for a living to people who embraced the ethical commitment to fighting against the Empire. Basically, the reason why is that having no house, no fixed dwelling, made it harder for the Empire to capture them. For this reason, in a shrewd way, Gerd Theissen, in his important essay *The Sociology of Jesus’ movement* (*A sociologia do movimento de Jesus* (1983)) sets forth that Jesus and his disciples had no “living place” in the Empire because they had a nomadic life under Roman siege. Theissen supports that Jesus and his disciples built/started a great social movement against the Empire by

defending the “Kingdom of God” (*basileia ton theos*), in complete opposition to the “Kingdom of Rome” (*basileia ton roma*) defended by Rome in the cities exploited/ruled by Romans.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. MALINA, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. MALINA, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. THEISSEN, 1983.

As aforementioned, Jesus' social movement organization was autonomous and managed to attract followers who used to engage in different forms of underemployment in Roman territory. They would get food and drink donations in every tribe, every backcountry, every city "living out of faith" (Luke 6,2). It is interesting that for having had no dwelling nor property of free land, some Ancient history researchers state that Jesus may not have existed. Such evidence is supported by historians such as Crossan (1994), Theissen, and Mertz (2004), who state that Jesus' name is mentioned in no ancient agreement, text, or document before the 3rd century. In fact, this information shocks Christian doctrines; however there is a very straightforward historical explanation for it: Jesus' followers were the ones who had no home/house; thus, they were invisible to Roman treaties, agreements, and documents<sup>16</sup>. There is also further important information: in all likelihood, Jesus was illiterate. Hence, it would have been almost impossible for him to have done any piece of writing. Maybe, for this reason, the theory based on Ancient history (official) information, which supports that Jesus never existed, makes sense<sup>17</sup>. Yes, because a broad grassroots social movement of the wretched would never have been recorded in Roman high-level documents.

## What can Jesus as a "person with no face" teach us?

The information that Jesus may not have existed to kings and aristocrats of his day is key and should be further analyzed. It shows the need, as set forth by Liberation Theology, to establish a commitment to the plight of the poor<sup>18</sup>, to "people with no face" because the example of the one who resurrected from the dead,

<sup>16</sup> Cf. THEISSEN, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> CROSSAN, John D. *Jesus: uma biografia revolucionária*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. BOFF, Leonardo. *Jesus Cristo libertador*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1973; Lowy, Michael. *A guerra dos deuses*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2000; MESTERS, Carlos. *Flor sem defesa*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1984.

lived a nomadic life with no home, no family, and no property highlights the need for such commitment, which is clear when one reads the Gospels attentively. Such realization is construed in some Gospel excerpts, such as Matthew 17,24-27, when a Roman soldier is bound to collect taxes and Jesus tells Peter to go to the riverbank and get the money from the mouth of a fish<sup>19</sup>. This brief narrative reinforces the understanding that Jesus' movement was so marginalized, so outcast-like that his crowd carried no trace of money whatsoever. His grassroots movement consisted of stone breakers, women, net weavers, and tax collectors. It was a movement for the ones who lacked beauty, lacked assets, and it could result in a plethora of elements. For instance, water, which quenches people's thirst and is used in natural cycles, must be disputed against the projects of powerful people. Such dispute is part of the Kingdom of God. It shows the art of the poor people's God walking on Earth. A dangerous project, against the Roman project, which resorted to force and weapons to impose itself on behalf of its elites.

Hence, the insurgent character of Jesus' social movement<sup>20</sup> was so dangerous that the leader was killed the most brutal way possible. He suffered an undeniably political death by crucifixion. A highly symbolic death too, as the Empire strategically set the place of crucifixion at the highest area of the city to show what would happen to insurgent people. The event was so great and unexpected that Slavoj Žižek and Boris Gunjević state that Jesus' historic image is that of a "social monster," that is, in their description, "Christ's monstrosity in Ancient history"<sup>21</sup>. Such a great movement that the Empire failed to suppress. A movement against authoritarianism, the elites, clericalism, different expressions of racism, Empires, and agricultural estate.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. MESTERS, Carlos. *Flor sem defesa*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1984.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. THEISSEN, 1983.

<sup>21</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj; GUNJEVIĆ, Boris. *O sofrimento de Deus. Inversões do Apocalipse*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2015, p. 193.

Bearing that in mind, Jesus' social movement defended that water, as well as land, must belong to all. The land should not be fenced, and people should be granted the right to have access to it. As regards to water, it should not be kept in dams as it is done nowadays. Water has its natural flows and should not be used to the benefit of few people who have access to privileged geography. Christ was a monster-like social bandit in Ancient times because he questioned Imperial institutions and voiced grievances of those who had no living place. Nowadays, his example makes us ethically question the fact that rivers have been transformed into goods, water has been transformed into a private good for consumption in bottles, which do not quench one's thirst. Similarly, rivers themselves have been turned into waterways.

Therefore, reflecting upon the Christian project on the Kingdom of God means questioning the fact that natural resources have been turned into consumer goods. The Christology of that social monster for "the ones who had no living place" leads us to question the whole construction of capital for the Western urban man and focus, today, on social organizations for those who have too little, people with no face. Accordingly, an updated Christology takes into account this place of meaning on the history of the defeated, of the people who fought for land and water, who belonged to the crowds of people with no face, who struggle daily to survive the steamroller approach of capitalist modernity.









# Alternatives to violence and authoritarianism

*Fellipe dos Anjos*



As has long been the case, the contemporary world is deeply shaped by the *ancestral forms of cultural, legal and political life* built around fences, enclosures, walls, camps, circles, and, above all, borders. Procedures of differentiation, classification, and hierarchization aimed at exclusion, expulsion, and even eradication have been reinvigorated everywhere. (...) New voices have emerged proclaiming, on the one hand, that there is no such thing as a universal human being or, on the other, that the universal is common to some human beings but not to all. Others emphasize the necessity for all to guarantee the safety of their own lives and homes by devoting themselves – and their ancestors and their memories, in one way or another – to the divine, a process that only subtracts them from historical interrogation and secures them completely and permanently within the walls of theology.

(Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*)

There are two erroneous assumptions about the *present time*. The first is the modern idea/ideology that religion is something archaic, the creation of primitive human thought or savage irrationality to be overcome by reason. The second, which is linked to the first, is to believe that this is why, especially in view of the scandalous presence of religion in contemporary politics, we are living in the past, experiencing social decline or veering toward primitive irrationality. These superficial interpretations of the current moment generate at least two intellectual and political problems: *a.* they dismiss the epistemological potential of theology/religion and *b.* they invalidate analyses of the present time in history.

When we observe contemporary forms of authoritarianism, proto-fascism and institutional violence, we can see that we are not dealing with setbacks/social decline or a catastrophic return to supposed pre-modern/pre-enlightenment dark ages in which some primitive, underdeveloped, savage or disorderly religious obscurantism has the capacity to mobilize the main forces capable of managing relations and conflicts. No, we are not talking about setbacks or some scandalously outdated exception. We need to expose the latency, survival, duration and repetition of mythical-theological models that are intrinsic to these social structures and that modern rationality insists on calling objective, rational, developed and civilizing. From a more sociological point of view, liberal and neoliberal democracies are not (and were not) more scientific, objective or more rationally evolved in relation to political references to religion. The failure to comprehend the survival of this temporality and these mythical-theological policies at the core of the infamous rule of law – the sacerdotal structure of capitalism as a religion – is precisely what prevents us from developing a better understanding of the political conflicts in the world today.

These so-called “ancestral forms of cultural life”<sup>1</sup> are still active and

1 Cf. MBEMBE, Achille.  
*Crítica da razão negra*. Lisboa:  
Antígona, 2014.  
Our translation.

productive and are what ensures the efficient biopolitical management of ways of life and relations within social life. Religion is the one that consecrates the production of the divisions in reality: the processes of “differentiation, classification, and hierarchization aimed at exclusion, expulsion, and even eradication”, the sacrificial organization par excellence. Religion is a mythical-transcendental force and cultural structure capable of governing relations and subjectivities through images, languages and the production of afflictions and affections. Therefore, it is important to know how to interpret the persistence of this “very present past”.

## **We are at war**

Make no mistake. There is nothing abnormal, excessive, regressive or extraordinary about the current context of violence we are experiencing. It is part of neoliberal democracies’ normal, everyday way of functioning: to govern, they use war, strategically targeted sovereign violence of the state or sacrificial violence that is generated when the law is applied selectively to economically marginalized populations living in precarious conditions. Exception and sovereign violence are paradigms of governance or the fulfilment of what Walter Benjamin had already foreseen: the exception has become the rule for all parties on the path to the consolidation and radicalization of capitalism as the only real religion. All theologically sustained and mythically purified. It is in the interfaces between the biopolitical logics of war and religion that we must build a theological critique of contemporary forms of totalitarianism and authoritarianism. We must bring wars and gods from the same epistemological place together to extract some inconvenient criticisms of the processes we are currently witnessing that are segregating and threatening life.

And again, what we are dealing with is not war in the sense of a return to an archaic, primitive, savage and undemocratic order, but rather the biopolitics of war. The latter is used as a method of governance, since the management and mythical structure of war lies at the heart of the neoliberal model of democracy. What we have is, in fact, a *war between ways of life*. In the words of Peter Pál Pelbart,

we are at war. War against the poor, against blacks, against women, against indigenous people, against transsexuals, against crack addicts, against the left, against culture, against information, against Brazil. The war is economic, political, legal, military and via the media. There is open warfare, even though it is denied; there is an all-out war, but it is camouflaged; it is a relentless, unlimited war without rules, even though they want us to believe that everything is under the strictest, most peaceful institutional, social, legal and economic control. In other words, alongside the generalized escalation of the all-out war, there is a move to stifle it at the national level. This supposed normalization underway, negation or pacification through violence – this is the way that the new schizophrenic regime apparently wants to impose its logic according to which war and peace have become synonymous, just like exception and normality, coup and governability, neoliberalism and civil war are<sup>2</sup>.

We are no longer dealing with wars between nation states over supposedly vacant land, natural resources or markets, as we did centuries ago. Instead, we are witnessing a war *against the population itself*; a war of classes, races, sexes and subjectivities. This war seeks to maintain and deepen the gaps in our

<sup>2</sup> PELBART, Peter Pál. “Da guerra civil”. In: *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psicologia*, Rio de Janeiro, 70: 190-198. p. 190. Our translation.



societies, but now at the planetary level. According to Alliez and Lazzarato, authors of *Wars and Capital*<sup>3</sup> launched in 2016, “we are living in the time of the subjectivation of civil wars”, as “capitalism and neoliberalism carry wars within them like clouds carry storms”. Thus, to “stoke the flames of its predatory economic policies”, neoliberalism promotes “authoritarian and policed post-democracy”.

## Coloniality and sacrificial racism

If the biopolitics of war is the predominant model of social management in neoliberalism, when discussing the case of Brazil, we must link this criticism of the state and the full-scale war to its colonial, pro-slavery and racist origins. To speak of war as a policy in Brazil, and violence as order, is to speak of the structural and subjective continuation of coloniality and slavery. And if the Brazilian model is based on colonization, the sacrificial structure and the latent, veiled and unresolved genocide of slavery, we must question the role that racism plays in structuring the composition of these types of killing (necropolitics) that are continually reproduced in the depths of Brazilian social dynamics.

One clear observation that researchers working on violence in Brazil repeatedly highlight: the scapegoat, the body that can be sacrificed or the preferred enemy of state violence is the black body of poor youth living in the favelas. The black, young and poor body is what is killed and what dies the most in contemporary Brazil. Neoliberal governmentality and the militarization of daily life are sentencing poor and black bodies to sacrificial death at the hands of both the police and drug traffickers.

Therefore, we must think of and create ways to intervene theologically and politically in the problems generated by structural racism in Brazil.

3 ALLIEZ, Éric; LAZZARATO, Maurizio. *Guerres et capital*. Paris: Editora Amsterdam, 2016. Our translation.

In *Critique of Black Reason* (2014), his densest and most important work, black philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe explores the idea of race as a Eurocentric/modern representation of the Black Man as a pre-human figure who is incapable of evolving beyond a supposed primitive, animal stage. Thus, the discourse on race is not analysed outside its connections with modernity and the vast management, and even theological, mechanisms that it uses to fabricate subordinate and sacrificial images, languages, rationales and structures. Race is a way of designating non-European humanities – one that, as Mbembe strongly emphasizes, is violent and treats these humanities as subordinate and inferior. Recognized and named according to Eurocentric logics of race, these humanities are always portrayed in a relation of humiliation, exploitation and death with the white, Christian, European superego. According to Mbembe’s conception, in the discourse on race, the Black Man either represents an ontological absence, a “non-being”, a degradation of human beings or, on a secondary level, an objectified and, more precisely, monstrous presence. Mbembe states that the *monster* is a narrative or a caricature that represents the “genesis of differences”<sup>4</sup>.

Once invented by modernity, race was turned into a biopolitical structure – which is repeatedly reinvented and reproduced – to control and exploit the black body. Colonial enterprises based on primitive capitalism spread the “black structure of the world” around the globe and reached the United States. Now, with the changes in neoliberal capitalism’s modes of production, it tends to spread to all the peripheries and undesirable populations of the world. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Darwinian and post-Darwinian theory led to a decisive biologization of race<sup>5</sup>. The fabrication of racial issues has begun again. For Mbembe, these new patterns of racism are caus-

4 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 40.

5 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 44.

ing mutations in the structures of hate and reconstructing the figure of the intimate enemy<sup>6</sup>. In sum,

Black reason consists of a collection of voices, pronouncements, discourses, forms of knowledge, commentary, and nonsense, whose object is things or people “of African origin”. It is affirmed as their name and their truth [...] From the beginning, its primary activity was fantasizing. It consisted essentially in gathering real or attributed traits, weaving them into histories and creating images. [...] In this context, “Black reason” names not only a collection of discourses but also practices – the daily work that consisted in investing, telling, repeating, and creating variations on the formulas, texts, and rituals whose goal was to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and site of salvage exteriority, who was therefore set up for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization<sup>7</sup>.

These discourses are part of concrete systems of violence and exploitation of the bodies targeted by this performativity of the discourse on race. The idea of a universal history of reason, and the series of policies that it gave rise to, was created based on this “Western consciousness of blackness”<sup>8</sup> – that is, this constellation of narratives that are constantly being adapted and updated – to form a writing of history from the viewpoint of Western modernity, which is supposedly universal, true and absolute. For Mbembe, this writing of history based on the fantasy of the Black man as an inferior, exploitable non-human being and the consequent creation of institutions and economic-political systems derived from this

6 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 45.

7 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 57-58.

8 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 58.

arrogant imaginary view of the world depends on a performative dimension. And “the structure of the performance

was in many ways theological”<sup>9</sup>, as beneath these Eurocentric colonial practices and narratives lie Christian rationales.

Based on these premises, Mbembe defines race and racism by their connections to the simulacrum of a face and the production of stereotypes. It is surprising just how close his definitions are to the ones proposed by René Girard in relation to the scapegoat mechanism. René Girard’s sacrifice and scapegoat mechanism are brought to the present, as they are highlighted by Mbembe’s work on the structure of racism and vice-versa. The performativity of the discourse on race and racism converts the Black Man into an *image* (*speculum*). The persecutory stereotypes of sacrifice turn the Black man into a scapegoat. The fictional enemy, scapegoat and the Black man are linked to death by a sacrificial theology-politics of the image. Stereotypes, stigmas and racisms turn bodies into annihilable images, simulacra of faces. These images appear in advance before the real face of the sacrificial victims do; they pass before our religious eyes even before we see the victims’ faces as they truly are. This is because race is a place of reality and of truth – “the truth of appearances”<sup>10</sup> – and “the racial theatre is a space of systematic stigmatization”<sup>11</sup>.

The sacrificial operation generates a monstrous double: an enemy that substitutes me in the act of violence and an enemy that also substitutes the body that is the target of the sacrificial violence, since what I see is an enemy or scapegoat, and not a real subject. The enemy and the scapegoat are masks that the sacrificial community oblige the other to use. Monster masks. The substitute victim sacrificed by racism is, during the act, a simulacrum of a face or the object of various persecutory stereotypes. All of these mythical-religious formulations are between the victims and sacrificial communities, or between a violent, but religious self, and a monstrous other who is sacred because he or she is killable. This is the only way one can kill the other in peace, in the name

9 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 60.

10 Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 66.

11. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 67.

of God or for the sake of peace-making. Racism, like sacrifice, makes us look at a given face and imagine it or transform it into an enemy/killable image. Racism and sacrifice, as psychic phenomena, make us hide the other's face, cover it with a veil of sacrificial justifications, a veil of persecutory stereotypes, which will purify our violence in the future or will not make us see the violence we commit against the other as something abominable. This is a fundamentally mythical-religious process.

Thus, based on the reflections we have shared thus far, we propose that the persecutory stereotypes and the simulacra of a face associated to structural racism produce the *biopolitics of sacrifice* in the context of neoliberalism. In most modern cases, the “sacrificial labour of race” must be understood as part of a broader connection between capitalism, sovereign violence and Eurocentric discourse on humans and race. This connection is sacrificial because it leads to the use of the state's right to kill against black lives, which are deprived of humanity by the Eurocentric discourse on humans in the name of the transcendence of capitalism as the religion of modernity.

The concrete/materialist situation of the sacrificial efficiency of the European discourse on race, the context in which modern necropolitics operates, the political space for executing the sovereign right to kill, is what Mbembe refers to as the “vertiginous assemblage” between: a) human trafficking (from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century) – when men and women from Africa were turned into human-objects, human-commodities, and human-money; b) Black people's struggle for survival in the context of the colonial experience; and c) the globalization of markets or the privatization of the world under the aegis of neoliberalism and the increasing imbrication of the financial economy, the post-imperial military complex and electronic and digital technologies that are reconfiguring the social organization of labour<sup>12</sup>. In other words, for Mbembe, the discursive economy

<sup>12</sup> Cf. MBEMBE, 2014, p. 12  
c 13.

of race, which we can call the sacrificial economy of the image/Black man, is inherently linked to an economy imposed by the colonization of the world by contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, one can summarize the approach to necropolitics as follows: there is an economy of the image, race and hostilities attached to the sacrificial economies of neoliberalism. And to supplement this material chain, a mythical-theological economy is produced or triggered as a way of justifying and purifying neoliberalism's economies of violence and death: racist, exclusive, militarized and sacrificial. For Mbembe, the modern delirium of race – or the becoming black of the world, which produces and requires the use of sacrificial state violence – responds to the demands for colonization, extractivism, conquests, assassinations and sacrifices of capitalism – the European-white-Christian-superego's daily religion.

When redesigning the world of social relations based on these fantasies on race/racism and while encouraging humanities and populations to understand each other as competition based on the logic of the friend-foe dichotomy, neoliberal governmentality will demand that a strong apparatus of violence be put into place to control its internal conflicts. In other words, in its exploitation of the security and police state, it will demand that the sovereign authority use sacrificial violence against marginalized populations in the periphery. The militarization of daily life in the slums and peripheries of the world is therefore a response to neoliberalism's demand to manage the state of exception and reorganize the world based on an economic rationale which, in turn, relies on the fantasies of race and the enemy to keep its apparatus of sacrificial violence active. As we can see,

wars of occupation and counterinsurgency aim not only to track and eliminate the enemy, but also to create a partition in time and an atomization of space. *In the future, part of the empire's task will consist in transforming*

*the real into fiction, and fiction into the real.* The mobilization of airpower and the destruction of infrastructure, the strikes and wounds caused by military action are combined with the mobilization of the masses through images. They are part of the devices of a violence that seeks purity<sup>13</sup>.

The efficient construction of the monstrosity of the other guarantees the consequent purification of the violent and sacrificial modes used to eliminate it. Tracing a nexus between the production of otherness, the structural racism of capitalism and the militarization of life – based on the concept of the biopolitics of sacrifice or, like Mbembe, the notion of necropolitics – is a fundamental theoretical move for understanding the mythical-religious activities of neoliberal governmentality. The biopolitics of sacrifice exposes, among other things, the incapacity of the order of contemporary biopolitics to deal with any notion of the other. In addition to triggering the construction of a series of persecutory stigma, it invariably puts the other in the line of fire of one mechanism of death: sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a kind of political ontology that deals, in practice and in terms of the impacts of the political language of religion on daily life, with how the conflicts and wars between humanities and populations depend on monstrous constructions of otherness. The policies of death derive from the policies of otherness. The enemy can only be annihilated in real life if he or she has already been killed in the mythical-theological field of alterity. In other words, the modification of the political structures of death, or the appearance of criteria and assumptions that regulate the dynamics of life and death, requires changes to the political structures used to construct otherness and to the ways of recognizing and affirming the possibilities experienced by the other, regardless of who this other is and how he appears. Whether someone

<sup>13</sup> MBEMBE, 2014, p. 16.

is killable or not is linked to the production of otherness and the political criteria used to recognize differences. Commenting on the experience of colonial violence carried out by the necropolitics of modern capitalism, along the same lines of what we are investigating based on Mbembe's reflections, Frederic Jameson suggests that:

One of the fundamental determinants of the modern experience (of capitalism) may be found in the way imperialism masks and hides the nature of its system (...) the imperial powers of the oldest system do not care about their colonies or the violence and exploitation that is the basis of their own prosperity, nor do they want to be forced to recognize the crowd of "others" hidden by the language, the stereotypes and the sub-human categories of colonial racism<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> JAMESON, in: GRAHAM, Stephen. *Cidades Sitiadas: o novo urbanismo militar*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016. p. 92. Our translation.

## Strategies and alternatives

Considering the historical and structural dilemmas presented above and their implications, which are deeply rooted in our subjectivities and social subconscious, and also taking into account the extensive network and mobilizing potential of religious communities and organizations in Brazil, I propose the following initiatives:

1. *Build*, in ecumenical partnership with the different religious traditions present in Brazil, a collection of critical theological analyses of the violence of the state based on the religious references of each tradition;



2. *Conduct* a comprehensive campaign to confront the structural racism that defines the political and social culture of Brazil;
3. *Organize* a campaign for the decriminalization of drugs;
4. *Raise* popular awareness on the social benefits of the demilitarization of the police;
5. *Create*, in partnership with local churches in militarized territories, spaces to receive victims of state violence.

### QUILOMBOLAS\*:

racism, violence and resistance against mining companies in Oriximiná.

The connections between violence and inequalities became clear in the experiences of quilombola communities in the municipality of Oriximiná (Pará), when confronting the interests of mining companies. The economic, social and power inequalities that mark the lives of *quilombola* populations reduce their power to influence issues that directly affect them, such as decisions about mining activities in the region. Of the 14 *quilombola* territories in Oriximiná and neighbouring Óbidos, only 5 are titled and regularized, and the lack of formal access to land adds to the vulnerability scenario that these communities live in relation to the large extractive economic interests.

Located on the banks of the Trombetas River, the *quilombola* territories are the main obstacle for companies to expand bauxite exploration. Currently, the region provides the largest bauxite production in the country, and the third largest in the world. In the process of the expansion of the exploration which began in the region in 1979, the conflict of interest between the communities and the mining company has required constant negotiation. A study on this process of negotiation of the mining company with the communities showed the violence suffered by the latter. Coercion, threats, physical and moral embarrassment, material and financial damage are some recurring tools used to suppress the rights of communities over their territory.

The Pro-Indigenous Commission of São Paulo (*Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo*, CPI) has been operating in the region since the 1980s, supporting *quilombola* and *ribeirinho*\*\* communities to guarantee their territorial, cultural and political rights, seeking to contribute to the strengthening of democracy and the recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities. With support from Christian Aid, CPI has already been side by side with *quilombola* communities in important achievements such as the titling of over 400 000 hectares of land. Their assistance also aims to ensure that the company's dialogue with the *quilombolas* respects constitutional and internationally guaranteed rights regarding free, prior and informed consultation.

\*Translator's note: Quilombolas are descendants from Black enslaved people who, in colonial times, fled from slavery seeking shelter in isolated regions and remained there even after abolition, maintaining their own identity and culture.

\*\*Translator's note: Ribeirinhos are a traditional population who lives near rivers (rios, ribeiros).







# For paths of Liberation:

theological signalizations

*Ricardo Gondim*



A few days before September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro went to the Temple of Solomon. Edir Macedo made him kneel down at the altar to receive a blessing and the laying on of the hands. This scene drew a lot of attention. Newspaper, television and Internet commentators highlighted several details: for one, Macedo was standing facing the public, while the president was on his knees with his back to the people. In his prayer, Macedo affirmed that a president prior to Jair was not successful during the term in office because he or she refused to kneel, but that with this gesture of submission, the current present would be successful. However, what is even more noteworthy is the size of the auditorium. Even though the Temple of Solomon is now more a tourist attraction than a place of pilgrimage, the number of people present was impressive. A genuine multitude of people watched the head of a secular state bow before the bishop of the richest neo-Pentecostal church in Brazil. There were nearly ten thousand people there. And all of them watched, in amazement, one of the most important moments of the country's religious history. This is not to men-

tion the fact that the event was transmitted by various radio and television stations, owned by the bishop, and thus seen by millions of others.

Neo-Pentecostalism has advanced at an astonishing speed. Its message moves the masses. Its promises go from resolving economic problems and prosperity to curing illnesses and spiritual deliverance. In a country with serious, century-old difficulties in offering the poorest classes possibilities of upward mobility, the chance to squeeze one's way up the ladder through a supernatural intervention is very appealing. And this gives neo-Pentecostal churches the capacity to not only raise, but also mobilize, millions. Their magical promises of immediate benefits charm people, literally.

Alongside the growth of neo-Pentecostalism, progressive Christian groups' numbers remain low and they have limited representativity and mobilizing capacity. While their conferences and seminars on progressive issues bring together 20-30 people, neo-Pentecostals and, more recently, charismatic Catholics draw hordes of people to their temples and stadiums.

It would appear, then, that the aspirations of progressive segments – both Catholic and Protestant ones – were crushed by fundamentalists with a political bias towards the extreme right.

When the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil (CNBB, for its acronym in Portuguese) was held on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the secretary general was Dom Hélder Câmara. Back then, there were no charismatic Catholics with the power to impose a reactionary agenda, nor singing priests, and no one imagined that parishes would be emptied by the calls of groups with extreme right-wing, moralist agendas. From July 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 1962, mainline Protestants met in Recife for a conference entitled "Christ and the Brazilian Revolutionary Processes". Organized by the Evangelical Confederation of Brazil, representatives of 14 denominations dreamed of a more just nation. Pastors proposed reforms to the social, political and religious structure to ensure



that the future development of the country would be just. Two days before the coup d'état that condemned the country to 21 years of dictatorship, the Pentecostals were not yet famous for their wealth, they did not imagine that one day they would occupy one of the palaces in Brasília, nor were they harboring desires to appoint a minister to the Federal Supreme Court.

Between the early 1960s and 2019, Catholics and Protestants witnessed the undeniable rise of fundamentalists, literalists, moralists and reactionaries. There is no point in trying to pretend nothing is happening without any self-criticism. Even if small progressive groups resist, liberation theologians insist that they are still important in the peripheries and progressive Protestant agencies continue to hold symposiums, congresses and debates, the crushing majority of Evangelicals, Catholics and Protestants are influenced by tele-Evangelicals and priests that have little affinity with issues of socioenvironmental conservation, the fight against racism, denouncements of misogyny or the inclusion of LGBT people and the recognition of their dignity.

The growth of fundamentalism can certainly be explained by its proximity to economic neoliberalism or perhaps the emphasis on spiritual meritocracy or the poorly disguised use of excessively pragmatic theology by these sectors of the clergy. Some appear to unscrupulously use popular superstitions and magic (I use the term here in its sociological sense) as a way to alter social realities. There are members of the clergy who grow and gain political power and wealth without any qualms about oppressing the poor even more. They offer false hope. They create expectations that will never be met. Cunningly, they add to the cruelty that the people oppressed by system already suffer by making them believe that if they do not prosper, it is their own fault because “without faith, it is impossible to please God”. However, there appears to be something more than mere perversity in the actions of these priests and ministers: theology. With the strengthening of the extreme right since the campaign

and election of Jair Bolsonaro, it became clear that: mainline Protestants, neo-Pentecostals and conservative sectors of the Catholic Church went from merely influencing political processes to be the ones who lead them. This is not merely a pragmatic move. When the Evangelical coalition dictates openly moralist agendas and charismatic Catholics intimidate politicians on abortion, the legalization of drugs and gender issues, it is not simply a question of opportunism. There are definitely certain convictions beneath this apparent craving for wealth and power.

I list below the four main assumptions that serve as the basis for the most conservative discourses of Christian groups in Brazil.

- I. *Anthropological pessimism.* Even if different groups do not explicitly mention Augustinian theology on the fall, original sin or the failure of Adam and Eve, it is clearly present in the mindset of the most popular preachers. It is believed that there is an intrinsic tortuosity in people and, as it is responsible for deviant behavior and promiscuity, it must be redeemed. If people are corrupted at birth, the priority of the church's work must always be to fix these deviations. Forget structural injustices and social sins. The logic of personal redemption leads one to believe that by saving people, society will automatically be saved. The doctrine of original sin remains concealed in moralism that ends up imposing itself as public policy. It is relatively common to hear sermons in which pastors repeat the idea that all human beings since Adam "are born under the wrath of God". By extension, people believe that they are responsible for the fact that the entire country is also "under the wrath of God". The way to reverse this curse is by converting "promiscuous homosexuals", "drunks" and "feminists". One can understand, then, how groups who stray from the norm could be blamed for the country's economic backwardness, urban violence and

the lack of future prospects. And the easiest way to protect the nation from the wrath of God is by converting or eliminating sinners.

2. *Sacrificial theology.* Faced with the perversion of human beings, fruit of inherited and thus inherent sin, people cannot “save themselves”. As salvation is attributed to the merits of the other (in this case, Jesus), the perception of the cross as an inspiration for processes of salvation is a substitute. This sacrificial and substitutive concept creates passiveness. People expect salvation to come from outside. All one has to do is “accept” the merits of the sacrifice of the Messiah. Again, one can understand why believers from different churches are vulnerable to accepting the idea of a political “Messiah” making the effort to revolutionize history for them. If it is true for individual salvation, then it is also true for national salvation.
3. *Theology.* The idea of a sovereign God is kept intact in the minds of the majority of believers, Protestants, Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Catholics thanks to phrases such as “God is in control”. With this belief, history is advancing on the right track. Everything happens according to the absolute will of God: “if it happened, it is because this is the way He wants it”. This theology serves to justify, when convenient, the insanity of the most bizarre politicians. Though exaggerated by neo-Calvinists, the idea that history advances inevitably towards a glorious end is perhaps one of the most solid stones upon which current religious conservatism rests. There is clearly an option of interpreting biblical texts, especially on God, based on Greek philosophy and not Semitic theopoetry. As long as the systematization of the “omni” traits (omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent) is given more importance than the subtleness and delicacy of mythic perceptions, the

theism of an almighty monarch will be stronger than an all-affectionate lover.

4. *Eschatology*. It is believed that Christ will, in fact, gloriously return at any moment now. In his second coming, he will redeem nature, history and the entire universe. In some circles, people believe that his return will happen in two stages: in the first, he will save believers from the great tribulation and in the second, he will rule with an iron fist. When one criticizes the lack of believers' involvement in the preservation of the planet, one must remember that many believe that there is no need to make an effort to save the forests, rivers and animals: "Christ will soon return and all will be saved".

I believe that as long as we do not perceive these assumptions underlying the various discourses, there is no point in denouncing the expansionary efforts of these conservative groups as demagogic, opportunist or promiscuous. They truly believe that people are lost and condemned to hell. They believe this so strongly that they are willing to preach the gospel in trains, at hospital doors and in prisons. They vote for populist candidates because they are certain that a moral reform will save the country. And in the name of a blessing for the country – "blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" – they are willing to make concessions on issues that they believe are less critical, such as culture and international dialogue. If the churches continue to debate whether their priority should be evangelization or social action, it is because they tacitly accept the idea that sinners are in danger of burning in a metaphysical hell forever. Now, if the eternal fate of human beings is at risk, then taking care of a temporary and ephemeral life here will be less important than guaranteeing their celestial fate. If they are certain that God has everything under control, there will never be a real need to create social movements to denounce and resist. And

with the guarantee that Jesus will return at any given moment, even if some Christian sectors show interest in and care for the environment, there is no urgency to engage in real activism to defend the planet we live in.

As long as these assumptions remain untouched, the perspectives are not good. Progressive Christian movements will continue to talk about hope and propose resistance, but they will watch, dumbfoundedly, as obscurantist, medieval Catholicism grows stronger and mainline Protestants and neo-Pentecostals will no longer be ashamed of being called neofascists.





# Reflections on the Public Sphere and Theology:

through paths of  
resistance and liberation

*Bianca Daébs Seixas Almeida*





The purpose of this article is to reflect on who are the subjects of overcoming the processes of injustice today. In this sense, we propose looking at the political situation that silences and marginalizes these subjects through the dialogue with the theoretical references of political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who points to the crumbling of the public sphere as one of the ways for the emergence of authoritarian systems. And, finally, reflect on how Liberation Theology contributed to the insertion of these subjects in the public sphere of Brazil by giving them a voice and a turn.

To begin this reflection, it is worth recalling the image that circulated the social networks and television on September 1, 2019, in which Edir Macedo, religious leader of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and owner of Rede Record tv, anoints with oil the head of the current President of the Republic of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro and, in an epic scene, full of sound and visual effects, utters the following words: "This time, God chose Bolsonaro to lead 210 million Brazilians" and then "I use of all the authority given to me by God to bless this man, to give him wisdom, so that this country may be transformed, to make a new Brazil".

The scenes were worthy of an absolutist state, a time of strong alliances between clergy and nobility, a political moment when the king was the law, and the Church, the venerable feudal lady, her guarantor. To the people, bread and circus, as Nicolau Machiavelli noted in writing *The Prince*. The time when the people were subjects and there was no idea of citizenship inspired by the democratic experience of Athens, whose political principles underlie the contractual relations that gave rise to the Modern State.

In this poorly Republican climate, dissonant voices are increasingly muted to make way for a single, true and morally sacred speech. The practices of violence that affect all, but most strikingly and immediately, people in situations of social vulnerability in our country are growing.

As we watch epic scenes sealing the political conspiracy with a part of the church, Brazil records the number of 12,3 million unemployed people and an increasing number of people in informality, with no record, hence no basic labor rights. In addition, the number of homeless people is growing in every state, crossing the fine line between poverty and misery.

Hate speeches and religious intolerance multiply, especially against Afro-Amerindian religions. People burning and stoning terraces, demonizing their fellow men, making “little guns” with their hands in great gospel marches. In a clear apology for physical violence, they tip over the black, poor and peripheral bodies whose lives are but statistical data on the violence of the country that kills more young people than countries at war, according to data provided by the *Atlas of Violence*<sup>1</sup>.

Environmental crimes and attacks on indigenous peoples, practiced in Brazil since the colonization processes, are no longer fought and prevented from being encouraged and legitimized by the public power. The fires denounced

<sup>1</sup> IPEA, *Atlas da Violência* 2018. Available at: [http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=33410&Itemid=432](http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33410&Itemid=432)

by INPE – National Institute for Space Research are ignored while community leaders of indigenous and traditional peoples are persecuted and murdered. Thus, the quest for profit has left behind a huge trail of blood, mud, ashes and a mass of bodies from the forest to the savanna.

Public policies in the area of gender are being scarce, and in their place are growing chauvinist, classist, racist and sexist attitudes that contribute to the increase of femicide and violence against women, especially black, poor and peripheral women.

The LGBTQI+ population is disrespected and the violence against them results in a significant number of homicides whose cases are terminated even before the police investigation phase, showing how prejudiced the Brazilian state is.

Formal education is no longer a priority and is becoming the privilege of those who can afford it, a move that goes against what Anízio Teixeira had planned by writing *Education Is Not Privilege*, in 1957, defending the democratization of public, free and quality education. Higher Education has been scrapped along with Public Universities which has become one of the main targets of the current government. In the meantime, as part of the current government crumbles with speeches that the land is flat and global warming is the invention of scientists, thousands of research are being discontinued and others simply will not exist, widening Brazil's educational deficit by many decades.

Higher Education has been scrapped along with Public Universities which has become one of the main targets of the current government. And they also serve to censor exhibitions of works of art and to instill a climate of distrust and fear for any action that deviates from the unblemished morality of the “good men”.

In addition to all these measures that move the Brazilian people away from the “public thing”, we can also observe a clear inversion of values guiding the discourses and actions of a significant part of Brazilian society. An example of this behavior is how naturally people listened to the open praise by the Bol-

sonaro's clan of the torturer Ustra, who took great pleasure in abusing, raping, and torturing women by putting rats into their vaginas and then with the refinements of cruelties, when already disfigured, naked and dirty, he also was delighted to take their young children to see their mothers deprived of their humanity and thus complete the cycle of torture by deeply affecting the body, soul and mind of his victims. It is appalling to realize that neither the hate speech nor the torturers' actions embarrass these religious leaders, who freely announce the election of Bolsonaro as president of Brazil as a divine choice.

### **The end of the Church's prophetic gift and the trivialization of evil**

Certainly, there are different categories of Christian people. There are those who disagree with Mr. Edir Macedo's speech and understand that the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro as President of Brazil was not a divine choice, but a consequence of social, political and economic factors that found in him a channel for the materialization of this crude, harmful and numbing policy. Thus, among many factors that have brought us, as a society, to this moment, and that contributed to the consolidation of the current political profile, I would like to point out the crumbling of the Public Sphere, and for that I propose to rescue some concepts presented by Hannah Arendt.

At the end of World War II, political philosopher Hannah Arendt, a German Jewish woman who had taken refuge in the United States of America, wanted to understand why Europe, and in particular a literate and educated Germany, collapsed and fell silent in the face of the atrocities of a man like Adolf Hitler and saw the totalitarian systems born in his gut. She knew that Hitler and Nazism was not the cause, but both a consequence of a world in deep despair. In pursuit of this understanding,

Arendt wrote two books: *Origin of Totalitarianism* and *Human Condition*.

To speak of the human condition, Arendt begins her argument by explaining that, with the expression *activa vita* she intends to designate three fundamental human activities: work, labor and action, in which each activity corresponds to one of the conditions of existence of the human being<sup>2</sup>. According to Arendt, work is the activity that corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism and resulting decline are linked to the vital needs that can be met by work activity. That is, the human condition of life and its needs require the work activity, in order to survive.

Whereas labor she defines as the activity corresponding to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not embedded in the ever-recurring life cycle of the species and whose mortality is not compensated by the latter. According to her, “labor provides an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from any natural environment. Within its boundaries every individual life is sheltered, though this world is meant to survive and transcend them all”<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the human condition of labor is worldliness.

And lastly, Arendt analyzes the activity of action by making it clear that this is the only activity that occurs directly among human beings without the mediation of things or matter. She explains that the human condition of plurality corresponds to action, “[...] the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world [...]”<sup>4</sup>.

Arendt points out that while all aspects of the human condition have something to do with politics, plurality is specifically the condition, not just the condition without which, but by which all political life exists. Arendt argues that the public sphere is undoubtedly the place of plurality, the place of necessary conflict, ideological clashes and

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ARENDT, Hannah. *Human Condition*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> ARENDT, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> ARENDT, 2010, p. 9.

nonconformity. That is why courage is a necessary condition for the exercise of citizenship, because, by exposing and defending his ideas, the human being reveals himself, naked before the other. For this reason, the public domain does not allow the homogenization of the people who congregate in it, their identities are revealed to the world distinguishing them from the others without implying a hierarchy.

Philosophy understands that when things can be seen by many people in a variety of ways, the reality of the world can appear more real and reliable. For her, the ordinary world ends when it is viewed only in one respect and only allowed to present itself in a single perspective<sup>5</sup>. Thus she points to the importance of plurality for the exercise of citizenship in the context of the Greek *polis* where everything should be decided by words and persuasion.

To be political, to live in a *polis*, means that everything was decided by words and persuasion, not by force and violence. For the Greeks, forcing people by violence, ordering rather than persuading, were pre-political methods of dealing with people, typical of a life outside the *polis*, characteristic of the home and family life in which the head of household reigned with unchallenged and despotic powers, or life in the barbarian empires of Asia, whose despotism was often compared to domestic organization<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, we can say that the great contribution of the Arendtian concept of the public sphere lies in the idea of politics which she treats as a detached category of economic and social logic and, therefore, opposes the liberal idea of thinking of this sphere as a place for individuals interested in experiencing a radical form of private existence. For Arendt, politics is a

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ARENDT, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> ARENDT, 2010, p. 64.

dimension of human life that happens when people are able to find a unit of reference in the diversity of plural life. She explains, however, that gradually the boundary between the public and the private spheres became very blurred, and from this blurred boundary between them came what she called the “social sphere”.

### The social sphere and the age of the individual consumer

Arendt explains that the social sphere is an advent of the modern era, the result of the transposition of private logic into the public world. Arendt understood that needs needed to be solved before politics, that no one can think, discuss, and analyze about the ways of the *polis* while hungry or in some other state of basic need. And that is why she places the activity of work as the first of human conditions, with the exception that meeting the basic needs of the human being is necessary to keep him alive but not active.

One of the main problems in the social sphere, according to Arendt, is the ability to replace action with behavior. Step by step, the human being substitutes conflict for comfort, the pursuit of the common good for social ascension, until his desire to be replaced almost completely by the desire to have, to possess, to consume everything and himself returning to his state of *animal laborans* totally displaced from his human capacity to act. *Instead of action, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior*, by imposing numerous and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or extraordinary feat<sup>7</sup>.

This gradual substitution of action for behavior gave rise to what the author called a “mass society,” meaning that the various social groups were absorbed into a single society, such as family units

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ARENDT, 2010, p. 49.

before them. For the author, the clearest indication that society constituted the collective organization of the vital process lies in the fact that, in a relatively short time, the new social domain has transformed all modern communities into societies of workers and employees. In other words, these communities immediately focused on the only activity needed to sustain life. She explains that, in order to have a workers' society, it is not necessary that each of its members truly be a worker or a laborer, it is enough that all its members consider everything that they do primarily as a way of sustaining their own lives and that of their families, that is, as a way of meeting their needs.

Society is the way in which the fact of mutual dependence for life, and nothing else, takes on public importance, and in which activities related to mere survival are allowed to appear in public<sup>8</sup>.

In this new configuration, in which work prevails over other activities in the social sphere, objects of use are now treated as if they were consumer goods, in a manner that

a chair or table is then consumed as quickly as a dress, and a dress wears out almost as quickly as food. This form of relationship with the things of the world, moreover, is perfectly suited to the way they are produced. The industrial revolution replaced all handicrafts with work, and the result was that things in the modern world became products of work, whose natural destiny is to be consumed, rather than products of the work, which are intended to be used<sup>9</sup>.

In this way, the author explains that the interminability of the work process is guaranteed by the ever-re-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. ARENDT, 2010, p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> ARENDT, 2010, p. 154.



curing needs of consumption and, consequently, the interminability of production can only be guaranteed if its products lose their character as objects of use and become more and more objects of consumption. Which ultimately turns the citizen into a mere consumer.

We must emphasize that, strictly speaking, every individual needs to consume in order to live, that is the purpose of the work activity and, therefore, it is part of the active life. The author's criticism is that the consumer does not consume to live, he lives to consume. Thus, she says:

In our need to replace worldly things around us more and more quickly, we can no longer afford to use them, respect and preserve their inherent durability; we have to consume, devour, as it were, our homes, our furniture, our cars, as if these were the "good things" of nature that would deteriorate unused if they were not quickly dragged into the endless cycle of man's metabolism with nature. It is as if we have forcibly broken the distinctive boundaries that protected the world, the human artifice, of nature, both the biological process that proceeds within it, and the cyclical natural processes that surround it, surrendering to them and abandoning their ever-threatened stability of a human world<sup>10</sup>.

As we look at the modern world and, as Arendt did, note the installation of mass society that has transformed the individual into a mere consumer (*animal laborans*) by depriving him of his capacity for action, we may suspect a certain almost hopeless historical fatalism.

However, Arendt, more concerned with denouncing the historical and social processes that removed the individual from the public domain than giving ready-made recipes for a political doing or

<sup>10</sup> ARENDT, 2010, p. 155-156.

remaking, breaks the logic of fatalism by inserting in her discourse the element of birth as a condition for the possibility of the restart. According to the author:

the new always happens in opposition to the overwhelming possibility of statistical laws and their probability that, for all practical and everyday purposes, amounts to certainty; thus, the new always appears in the form of a miracle. The fact that man is able to act means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is capable of accomplishing the infinitely unlikely. And this, once again, it is possible only because each man is unique, so that with every birth comes into the world something uniquely new. From this one who is unique one can truly say that before him there was no one<sup>11</sup>.

Arendt will further argue that this mere consumer, *animal laborans*, is completely removed from the public sphere, he has immense difficulties in consciously interfering with the decision-making sphere of power because all his time is spent to ensure his own survival and survival of his family. But what is the purpose of this existence? What causes are we fighting for? What gives meaning to this existence? Being active means understanding that beyond basic needs there is a common world to share. Action must be taken to ensure plurality of ideas, respect for differences, to value the legacy of tradition and at the same time to be open enough to welcome the new. It is by creating space for political exercise that dialogue takes over, not force as a mediating element of discussions and decisions, that we will concretely transform the destiny of the state and its citizens.

11 ARENDT, 2010, p. 222-223.

## Liberation Theology and Access to the Public Sphere

In this way we can understand that the political moment that we are going through with so many elements similar to those that gave rise to totalitarian systems is largely a consequence of the alienation of people from the public sphere. However, we note that when Arendt wrote her texts, she looked at the Athenians' experience in ancient Greece and then found that, first, they had to overcome basic needs and then enter the space of the public sphere. The question that worries us is: How can we bring the silenced and marginalized voices closer to the public sphere in Brazil when issues related to basic needs such as health, food, education and housing are still major problems to be overcome by a significant portion of the population?

To this question there must be many answers, but Liberation Theology dared to build a path by making a preferential option for the poor and oppressed as it sought to insert them into the political ambience through their struggles for land, bread and peace.

According to Boff, in his text on 40 years of liberation theology,

liberation Theology did not fall from heaven nor was it invented by some inspired theologian. But it emerged from the bunt of this major worldwide and Latin-American movement, on one hand political and on the other ecclesial. She set out to think of ongoing ecclesial and political practices in the light of the Word of Revelation. It appeared as a second word, critical and ruled, referring to the first word which is the actual practice with and with the oppressed<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> BOFF, Leonardo. "Forty Years of Liberation Theology" Available at: <https://leonardoboff.wordpress.com/2011/08/09/quarenta-anos-da-teologia-da-libertacao/>

Leonardo Boff further explains that Liberation Theology came directly from the materially poor, the

oppressed classes, despised peoples such as indigenous people, marginalized blacks, women subject to chauvinism, defamed religions, and other bearers of social stigma. But he soon realized that “poor and oppressed” have many faces and their oppressions are increasingly specific. One cannot speak of oppression-liberation in a general manner. It is important to qualify each group and to take seriously the kind of oppression suffered and its corresponding yearning for release.

From this perspective, Liberation Theology opens the way for the insertion of new subjects and new theologies that seek to amplify marginalized voices. They used, as one of their tools, the interconnection processes in which faith communities, social movements and academia dialogue, exchange experiences, strengthen themselves and thus socially and politically resist the systems of oppression that materialize in body and soul of the most vulnerable people.

Although the processes of economic stability experienced in Brazil since the 1990s, in addition to other political and ecclesiastical actions, have contributed to the cooling of liberation theologies, we understand that liberation paths can continue to emerge from the potentiation of formative processes in the spaces of faith as long as we make the prophetic commitment to live an incarnate faith, committed to a kingdom of justice and grace. Politicizing people out of faith means making a prophetic commitment to building a common place where people can live with dignity and be respected in their uniqueness amidst the diverse expressions of their ways of being and existing in this world.

## ECUMENICAL CAPACITY BUILDING FOR POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Christian Aid and its partners dedicate to building faith leaders' capacities to act against injustices and inequalities in Brazil. From the interfaith articulation at the 2018 World Alternative Water Forum, faith-based organizations have committed to working for fair access to Brazil's natural resources. The letter of commitment establishes actions of spiritual and theological formation, political advocacy and communication as the axes of work of the ecumenical movement.

The "Waters for Life" course offers training for clerical and lay audiences from different churches. A partnership between Christian Aid, the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (Conselho Nacional de Igrejas Cristãs do Brasil, CONIC), the Regional Ecumenical Advisory and Service Centre (Centro Regional Ecumênico de Assessoria e Serviço, CREAS) and the Faculdade Unida College of Vitória made it possible to hold the first edition of the online course, attended by 94 people from 16 Brazilian states and 31 religious denominations. Participants were able to access content on theological foundations for the issues of defence of water, inequalities and natural resources, and guidelines for the elaboration of an incidence plan.

In addition to empowering leaders to work in their territories, the course strengthens the ecumenical network. Different faith-based organizations, social movements, and church networks participated in the elaboration of the course contents and dissemination of the course. Along with this publication, the elaborated materials provide supporting texts for discussions in grassroots groups and churches about caring for Creation and social justice.





# **In the Nets of the Amazon:**

**theological reflections  
in complex times**

***Yuri Puello Orozco***





No, I don't believe in a God who demands human sacrifice. I don't believe in a God who lays waste a woman's life to save a man's soul.  
(Jostein Gaarder, *Vita Brevis*)

The Seminar “Injustiças e Desigualdades no Brasil Hoje: desafios teológicos e respostas de fé” [Injustices and Inequalities in Brazil Today: Theological Challenges and Responses of Faith] promoted a debate between social movements and people engaged in theology in order to start a conversation on the experiences of conflicts, contradictions, and struggles found across Brazil today. Two main questions were made at the seminar: how to understand the current Brazilian context and what are the bridges and proposals that Theology could help build to promote solutions to these challenges. I will point out here some of the important reflections that emerged from these debates.

Firstly, what is this reality that demands, today, that we seek dialogue as a bet, that we seek to build “ways out”? As a starting point, it should be said that we live in a neoliberal economic-po-

litical-religious context articulated with conservative agendas that break with the desire for dialogue and agenda with the progressive popular sectors of civil society. There is a deterioration, destruction, dispossession that is caused by the interests of capital, especially agribusiness, mining and the financial sectors. The implementation of the neoliberal project in Latin American countries is marked by the so-called “Washington Consensus”<sup>1</sup>. This consensus proposes “a set of neoliberal reforms that, despite differing practices in different countries, are doctrinally focused on deregulating markets, opening up trade and finance and reducing the size of the state’s role”<sup>2</sup>.

The new reconfiguration of the political and economic field, at world and national level, is totally at odds with any project that prioritizes social policies or practices aimed at reducing inequalities. The rise of the right in the world has its impacts also in Brazil. We are challenged to seek explanations as to why anti-democratic right-wing forces become viable here.

In this context, a huge presence of the religious sphere gains strength in the public space. It is a fundamentalist expression of Christianity allied to a conservative political bias that takes as its banner the defense of a moral agenda, intolerant of other religious expressions, contrary to everything that has to do with claiming and gaining rights. They are positions contrary to the evangelical values themselves. These religious forces are strategically articulating themselves in international fora such as the OAS or the UN to influence policies or recommendations from these venues. Here in Brazil, for example, we see the articulation of conservative evangelical and Catholic representations trying to gain space to hinder other proposals and impose theirs.

<sup>1</sup> This consensus is the result of a meeting in Washington in 1989 convened by the Institute for International Economic, which was attended by private entities, Latin American economists with a liberal profile, International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the US government. Their conclusions are summarized in ten points.

<sup>2</sup> NEGRÃO, 1998, p. 41-43.

They mobilize in national bodies that define laws or policies related to sexuality, gender, family, human rights, environmental issues, education, etc. They are Catholic and Evangelical parliamentary groups that abandon differences and articulate to try to contain the advancement of agendas favorable to the sexual and reproductive rights, gender, LGBTQI+ and other that they consider a threat to the family model they defend.

With respect to social movements that seek to overcome injustices, the channels of dialogue with governmental bodies are weakened and the agenda of rights threatened or with numerous attempts to annul. However, we recognize the history of resistance and commitment of the population in defense of rights. Resistance permeated with hope, utopia and struggle make a constant presence in this context.

### **Theology at an unexpected time. Desert, empty, where are we going?**

Reality in its multiple dimensions becomes the starting point for theological reflection and a possible contribution to dialogue. However, if the social reality is intricate, diverse, porous and multi-dimensional, how can one reflect theologically? It becomes complex because the theological doing cannot be isolated from the context; on the contrary, theological reflections are impregnated with social processes, loaded with dynamics, interests, power relations, social actors and horizons of transformation. And it is in everyday life that this complex reality is expressed, materialized and established. Daily life built by people belonging to various cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, sexual, political and generational expressions. They are the people, mediated by their contexts, inserted in the complexity of existence, with their questions, their reflections, their stories, that provoke theological reflections. Thus, it is imperative to know, to listen, to reflect before saying what we should do.

Still, how do we situate ourselves in this world, with our rationality, with our theoretical frameworks, with our threatened bodies? A world of insecurity when today, precisely if we are women, we need security for our bodies. A world of uncertainty when today we need some certainty for tomorrow's job, for health, for education, for the party. These uncertainties, this unbalancing, life-complicating shifting land are the great challenges: among powers, sovereign capital, sovereign gods are massacred, murdered, unjust historical projects, gender ideologies, family, gay healing, carnival, parties in the community, transgression, revolt.

The symbolic power that the Amazon offers inspires us to reflect on inequalities and injustices in Brazil today. The forest that gives life but can also take it away. At the same time, it attracts, seduces, welcomes, amazes, intimidates and shelters. Experienced in us, it invites us to marvel, to transcend in its intrinsic world of fascination and amazement. This whole that the Amazon is, which makes us experience contradictory feelings, only does not become violence if it is experienced as an encounter, in a symbiotic relationship of all beings that live there or visit it: relationships of respect, wisdom, knowledge, as a gift of flora, fauna and their original populations.

Can the Amazon be imagined as a source to sustain unfair and unequal relationships? Or, on the contrary, should we rescue and know its dynamics of life and the alternatives it offers to all the beings that are there? What theological reflection inspires us in this dynamic of the Amazon? The contribution of a theological reflection to the much-desired dialogue would be like fresh water drawn from the rivers of the Amazon that resist death by contamination. It would be a rehearsal of the paths drawn by the forest, the fauna and the feet of human beings who inhabit it to discover the intuitions, the horizons, the cares and the benefits that led them to delineate them. It would be to discover that the effects of a threatened, plundered, battered Amazon

have also produced community and resistance. It would be an invitation to know these ways that allow us to experience the transcendence, coming from the human reality, the cosmos and the relationships that the Amazon offers us, as well as to find signs of the divine in the historical struggles of all people who are committed to preserving and defending this piece of world.

When we think about the reality of social inequality and injustices that produce poverty, some questions arise: How to overcome this reality? Who are its promoters? What do we have to talk about? On what grounds? With whom do we sit to talk, opponents or allies? Is the maximum moment of dialogue-denunciation? From the dynamics of the Amazon, with all its protagonists, we can seek inspiration for these questions. Has the Amazon rainforest adapted to new plantations in its territory? How does it behave in the face of the violence exerted by the owners of loggers and miners in its body? How does it respond to its deforestation? Has it adapted passively? What resistance has it offered?

Without entering into the scientific knowledge of the dynamics of forests and faunas, we clearly perceive the negative impacts that these hierarchical man-nature anthropocentric domain relations have left. The expression “nature is speaking” tacitly denotes a critique of the irresponsible way in which this relationship has been given, which leaves its legacy in depleting the soil, losing biodiversity and worsening global warming. What reading do we make of the fires? Revelation! The Amazon is speaking. Revolution, fury is the expression that something must change.

However, arson reveals the outside hands killing healthy life-giving dynamics. They are theological structures with their abstract, perfect, white, masculine, powerful, uncompromising gods that demand sacrifice and are invoked to legitimize all these historical projects that produce injustice and inequality. Theologically, we must seek a critical place from where we can radically denounce these death-producing projects and relationships. Because poverty is not only an expression of low income,

but is understood as deprivation of basic capacities, deprivation of opportunities to develop the potentialities, abilities or freedom of all beings. And this is unworthiness, it is injustice, which must be denounced. We cannot find divine relations in mechanisms that produce poverty and inequality. We cannot accept an idolatrous God who needs death in order to survive. Theological sources must be sought without the key of the efficiency of historical projects, without the face of a victorious, sacrificial God.

## Theological Reflections from the Amazon

Reflecting theologically from an unwanted and unexpected place leads us to think that, in this non-place, in this agonizing condition, we must give rise to the beacons and build another place of encounter, of hope, of land flowing with milk, honey and wine: The Amazon. It is from this unexpected place that theological reflections on their diversity should promote and strengthen prophetic voices that shake the foundations of projects producing unwanted places. Prophetic voices denouncing the inequalities of class, gender, race, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, social injustice.

In this sense, in a context of social inequality caused by unjust relations, theological reflections must take as source human practices of liberation, because it is these practices that will build this other place, sustaining, encouraging and refreshing this walk, not the other way around. Theological reflections that have as their starting point the affirmation of life projects, the radicality of the denunciation, inspired by the practices of organizations fighting for rights and the practices of people who, because of their commitment to liberation, were murdered.

Theological reflections that rescue the voices of resistance, prophecy and hope-giving that are within the communities, that encourage and depart from the radicalism and the questions.

Theological reflections promoting culture encounters in the complexity of their expressions to produce life, a rescue of this community and resistance-promoting Amazon.

Theological reflections that again contain, from other sources, the Amazon, in an account that denounces the patriarchal, racist, sexist, classist relations, that leaves aside the centrality of a male order that kills, justified by a superior male being that must be obeyed.

Theological reflections that assume the plural voices, which surpass Christian exclusivism and embrace the multiplicity and diversity of spiritualities.

Theological reflections that promote listening, denunciation and announcement.

Theological reflections denouncing private property and wealth as idolatrous, contributing to retaking and rethinking ethical practices in an unwanted place context.

Theological reflections inspired by liberation practices, which assume a world view that has the human being as a collective subject, in interrelationship with other forms of life, knowledge and wisdom, which take as a source the complexity of life with all their ambiguities, that walks, jumps, penetrates the field of relations, the territories, the territorialities that we are and in which we are.

Theological reflections that, inspired by the logic of the Amazon, promote the interrelationship between all beings, not the domain and control, promote practices of collective path construction, dialogues in controversial territories, from bare feet, free smiles, from the jolly screams of children.

Feminist, black, trans, queer, theological reflections, “liberator of God and of themselves, without the great monuments ... that saves bodies from traditional salvation”<sup>3</sup>, who learns from processes, is provisional, arises from

3 SOUZA, Daniel. *A revolta da ineficiência. Os acontecimentos de junho de 2013 no Brasil e suas destituições político-teológicas*. Doctorate thesis. 2019.

uncertainty, and have as its horizon the free walk, to be questioned by the novelty, by the plural voices.

Theological reflections that are like the nets of the Amazon: a place of rest and sustenance, a place to be born and die, a place that welcomes. Nets that rock our dreams, our stories, the net that helps us rearrange for our sustainability.



## PROPHETIC VOICES FOR THE AMAZON

“God speaks to us of all creation. Heaven and Earth proclaim the presence of the love of God that gives us life in the forest, in the waters, in the atmosphere, in the miracle of seeds and in the diversity of all that exists. Every being who breathes participates in this love. Every being who breathes also knows that this lovemade world, is threatened and exploited by an economic model that transforms everything into merchandise, which does not accept limits for its expansion and accumulation of wealth. We, churches, ecumenical councils, and faith-based organizations are aware of these painful, imminent and worsening threats:

- Learn to listen to the cry of the forest and all its beings and cultures: often we were callous and deaf to this cry that is born in the heart of the Amazon;
- Learn to abandon our preconceived ideas about the region: often we do not listen to the beings and cultures that make the Amazon beat;
- Learn to interpret the deterioration of economic, cultural, religious and political models of intensive and predatory extractives: often we do not raise our prophetic voice in the defence of peoples, species and territories against megaprojects in the region, financed with local and global capital, promoters of the climate crisis;
- Let us learn to embody our faith in life and in Amazonian cultures: we often tolerate supremacists and destructive missionary proposals, destroyers of the diverse presence of God in the Amazon.

In defence of the great Amazon, its people and all its created beings. In defence of our common home. In defence of every being that breathes. We want the Amazon alive, sovereign and protected. We commit ourselves to the dialogues of faith and to maintain our presence in the region taking as a priority all the beings and cultures of the Amazon”.

Ecumenical declaration “We are the Amazon”, signed by Christian Aid, National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC), Ecumenical Forum ACT Brazil (FEACT), Theological Andean Institute (ISEAT), Comisión Justicia y Paz, and endorsed by 130 churches and FBOs around the world.





# **Building Prophetic Paths in the Struggle for Justice, Dignity and Equality in Brazil Today**

*Ronilso Pacheco*



Latin America in general, and Brazil in particular, have been witnessing the rise not only of economic inequality, but also of more conservative and reactionary forces. The continent is known to have experienced, in the second half of the 1990s and in the first decade of the 2000s, a convergence of progressive governments with strong support from the people. Those administrations allowed and opened the way for some advancement in social policies and greater political participation for the poor and social minorities. However, in South America between 2010 and 2019, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay have seen setbacks in these experiences of reducing extreme poverty and advancing policies that communicated with indigenous, black, and LGBTQI+ people, as well as other groups who have been historically overlooked. That is not different in Brazil. A fierce battle to keep social rights that have been achieved (and which took decades to accomplish) is still being fought, concurrently with an even greater battle to push for more rights. Like in many parts of Latin America, the struggle is not only against increasing inequality rates, but against the endanger-

ment of democracy itself. The struggle is also against public security policies that are becoming more and more lethal to communities, the violation of indigenous peoples' territories, the complete takeover of land exclusively by agribusinesses, the intimidation and censorship at levels similar to what happened in times of military dictatorship, the trivialization of violence against women and LGBTQI+ people, the Brazilian government's complete disregard for deforestation and extractivist activities in the Amazon, the dismantling of committees as an instrument of people's participation in the forging of public policies. Many are the fronts of struggle.

As we face all that, we may wonder: how can we update the prophecy and prophetic voices? It is necessary to recognize, strengthen, and mingle with prophetic voices in Brazil, creating one powerful voice against the violence that takes many forms. And it is clear that it is not simply about the ultimate, extreme violence, but also those cases that intrinsically come with power, government, and decision-making structures that are beyond the reach of common citizens.

Violence and violation also arise from human systems and power structures, and this is why the ways to make them back away or actually stop them should, very likely, also come through the actions of those same human power structures. We cannot go through all violations or all expressions of prophetic voices here, but we can go over some of them to think about the actions that they may inspire.

The verse below, from Psalms, helps us think about how, amid battles and struggles we have to face today, we can glance at and recognize prophetic voices, joining them to strengthen and invigorate ourselves in times of hopelessness.

*Even so we have seen no signs for us, there is no prophet  
any more, no one among us who knows for how long.  
(Psalms 74:9)*

This verse makes us think about acknowledging these voices based on two demands: where they are and how to join them.

## Where are the prophetic voices

This is a question to tackle the first part of our verse: “We have seen no signs for us.” Being able to identify where the prophetic voices are is necessary so that they are not silenced, so that they do not succumb or get lost in the wind of everyday struggles that routinely oppress us and make us feel like victory and hope are impossible. We are surrounded by examples and experiences that, every moment, tell us that the voices are out there, clamoring, crying, inciting, and calling. So, yes, there are signs! We can’t go over many experiences here, but we can mention some in which we can see efforts to mobilize, build, and take action on the horizon.

### *Experience nº 1:*

#### *voices in the Complexo do Alemão slums, in Rio de Janeiro*

In Rio de Janeiro’s Complexo do Alemão slums, there are two media experiences that really translate the prophetic voice spirit. One is the Papo Reto Collective. The collective was created in 2014 and is made up of young people who are committed to reporting the news about their community. Over time, it gradually became the most important channel for the community to mobilize, make demands, and stay informed. The collective made a choice to bring out their own version of the things that happen in the community, which are often superficially depicted or misrepresented in the mainstream media. Its activities became an important tool in many cases that needed counter-evidence to prove that authorities were committing abuses and violations

during police operations. That became very helpful to the citizens who live in Complexo do Alemão. Moreover, the collective also instructed the community, for example, on how to use their phones to record police operations and on legislation regarding image rights, police stop-and-frisk operations, and the limits of warrants and searches.

Another experience comes from *Voz das Comunidades*, a community paper that was also established by a young man, Renê Silva. The project was born in 2005 and was originally distributed to a limited area inside Complexo do Alemão, called Morro do Adeus. In 2010, it became a key tool for the local community to present a “counter-narrative” about the occupation of the Complexo territory by Rio de Janeiro State security forces, in what became the most emblematic episode of the government’s experience creating Pacifying Police Units (the so-called UPPs). It presented a counter-narrative because it was the only media outlet – and reporting from the community – to address the violations and the residents’ losses, while the mainstream media felt a collective euphoria over what it reported as nothing but “the end of the drug trade domination.” But the local outlet asked, “what about respecting residents? What about offering services to promote decent life?” This way, from a local paper that originally focused on topics from leisure activities to events and local services, *Voz das Comunidades* went on to become a major source of information for local residents, with information about safety and operations that affected hospital and school office hours, things that impacted the entire neighborhood’s routine. The paper became so big that it was able to establish a huge work team that now covers stories from all over Complexo do Alemão, and is now a point of reference even for the mainstream media when it comes to talking about the community while listening to the community.

The topics that these prophetic voices of Papo Reto and *Voz das Comunidades* exposed include: collective warrants that were used by State agents to break into any resident’s home at any



time of the day or night, and several residents at once; crime scenes that were often tampered with by law enforcement agents, which ended up turning victims into alleged criminals; brutal and unlawful strip searches, including of women and children; hospitals, health clinics, and schools that had to close, treatments that were discontinued, classes that were suspended, lives put at risk due to police operations during school hours, and school hour changes; stories and articles that were often derogatory to the communities, reinforcing stigmas and generalizations and downplaying the power and diversity of those places, reducing them to nothing but violent territories.

This way, the experiences of Papo Reto and *Voz das Comunidades* show that speaking about “prophetic voice” means not only exposing and reporting the issues, but also echoing the voices that do. Community media is a tool with great potential to strengthen experiences of mobilization and action. Not only that, but they also provide access to different views and perspectives from within local communities, bring up actions for discussion, and offer different references from which to look at contexts that are usually seen and reflected upon from the outside, from big media outlets.

## How can we join prophetic voices

If the current scenario of struggle makes us say, “no one among us who knows for how long,” finding and joining the prophets can point out the paths and fill us with hope. As Jurema Werneck, the director of Amnesty International, finely put it, “the miracle is the struggle.” And the struggle can be seen as a miracle because there are situations and contexts that can make us want to give up the fight. We keep wondering whether it is worth carrying on, and pushing, even though we know not many options are left.

A significant part of the Brazilian people lives in deep poverty. And that means more than simply the lack of resources. Poverty also means being devoid of dignity, of the access to rights, of food, quality housing, health care, education; it means having your own safety and security permanently at risk. Those who are able to find the strength to fight amid all that are performing a miracle. The miracle is the struggle.

*Experience n° 2:*

*mothers of victims of violent crime – memory and affection*

The mothers of victims of violent crime in the state of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are extremely important prophets for us today. They not only expose and report violent deaths or enforced disappearances, as well as the disregard of those who were supposed to care for everyone's life in society, but they also show the way toward a different system of justice, investigation, and liability. They created an important network in which affection is a very powerful element. Many of them did not come from a background of political activism and engagement, but they took the struggle upon them after a blow to the most important thing in their lives: their motherhood. Losing a child in different violent situations in which the State is directly or indirectly involved has motivated many of them to seek justice. Their debate approaches are far from the language of security or violence experts. They bring affection to the struggle. And with it, they also bring an element of memory.

Memory is important, because part of the struggle we are carrying out today is due to the fact that memory has always been disregarded in Brazil's historical processes. There are no relevant policies to promote the memory of the history of the African people in Brazil – which means that the legacy of centuries of slavery and the influence of the colonial enslavement system is perpetuated in Brazil's organization of power and institutions.

Similarly, there are no policies to appropriately promote the memory of indigenous people – which means that there are no policies regarding land, territory, and preservation and use of natural resources that take into consideration the four centuries of exploitation of the country's indigenous peoples.

So, as the mothers of victims restore memory and bring it to the forefront in their prophetic voice, they call people to join the fight, to not let their voices die or be silenced, while violence is burying memories every day. And they do that by exposing: the criminalization of poverty and impoverished territories; the lack of support (from the State and extractivist companies), which leads to neglect; having the victims denied their own memory as a way to erase their lives, their struggle for survival, their search for what can make life truly human and decent.

### **Prophetism and faith guided by justice and dignity**

The experiences above teach us that we do not need to describe the horizon in detail, and that prophecy is not about guessing the future or knowing “when” things will change. It is about guiding the actions that are taken today, in the present time, to allow justice to be demanded now, so that dignity can be achieved now, so that freedom can be respected now. However, none of that is accomplished without fighting for them, and we must find the prophetic voices that inspire us.

Also, the prophecy must be perpetually vigilant and critical, even about itself. Justice and equality are parameters that are always on the horizon, to be ever aware against any possibility of becoming the occupant of the position of domination, exploitation, and control, which could lead to the risk of repeating the same old practices. Prophetism is about the faith that is guided by justice and dignity, and the reasons that make prophetic voices clamour must never be forgotten.

Bringing memory and affection together as agglutinating forces of struggle can be an interesting way to integrate the pursue of justice in Brazil. Strengthening community and collective media channels that can forge counter-narratives and echo other actions can help to multiply prophetic voices. Similarly, there is way to make memory a tool to raise awareness about the struggle. To make sure we never forget. Turning into memory the past and everyday violations and the setbacks hovering around the few victories for those who had their rights acknowledged and their dignity respected. This is the faith in the God of life, of struggle, and of equality and diversity.

# Authors

## Nancy Cardoso

Christian Aid Global Theology Adviser.

## Fábio Py

Advisor to the Rio de Janeiro Chapter of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT-RJ), and professor at the Graduation Program on Social Policies (PPGP) at the State University of Northern Rio de Janeiro (UENF).

## **Fellipe dos Anjos**

Pastor at the Agua Branca Baptist Church (IBAB). He holds Bachelor of Theology degree (2011), Master of Sciences of Religion degree (2019) and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Sciences of Religion at the Methodist University of São Paulo (UMESP).

## **Ricardo Gondim**

Pastor of the Betesda Church in São Paulo and president of the denomination's national conference. He holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree and a Bachelor of Theology degree at Genesis Training Center, in Santa Rosa, California. He holds a Master of Sciences of Religion degree from the Methodist University of São Paulo (UMESP).

## **Bianca Daebis Seixas Almeida**

Reverend of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil serving in the Parish of the Bom Pastor in the City of Salvador, Bahia, Anglican Diocese of Recife. She holds a master's degree in social history and a doctoral degree in Education.

## **Yuri Puello Orozco**

Consultant in project "Migrants and refugees: challenges of the Common Home" from Ecumenical Forum ACT Brazil – FEACT and National Council of Christian Churches. She holds Bachelor of Philosophy and Theology degrees and Master of Sciences of Religion degree.

## **Ronilso Pacheco**

Coadjutor pastor of the Baptist Communion in São Gonçalo, in Rio de Janeiro. He holds a Bachelor of Theology degree from Pontif-

ical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) and is currently pursuing a Master of Theology degree at Union Theological Seminary, in New York.





*Title*      Prophetic voices in Brazil:  
for a theology of change

*Project and design*      Alessandra S. O. de Proença

*Collaborators and checkers*      Sheila Tanaka  
Raquel Catalani


*Translation*      Aline Scatola  
Karen Lang  
Monika Ottermann

*Photos:*

<i>cover</i>	Natalia Blanco
<i>chapter 1</i>	Paulino Menezes/Christian Aid
<i>chapter 2</i>	Natalia Blanco
<i>chapter 3</i>	Rodrigo Zaim/Christian Aid
<i>chapter 4</i>	Rosana Miranda/Christian Aid
<i>chapter 5</i>	wDA/Presbyterian Church in Ireland
<i>chapter 6</i>	Tabitha Ross/Christian Aid
<i>chapter 7</i>	Rodrigo Zaim/Christian Aid



actalliance



Christian Aid is an international organization that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

We are the official international development and cooperation agency of 41 Protestant churches in the United Kingdom and Ireland, supported by individuals, churches, governments and institutions. We are present in Africa, Asia and Latin America, supporting projects based on the needs of communities and not on their religion, creed or nationality.

christian  
**aid**

**act**alliance