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**WHY ALL THESE 'NEOS'? WHY NOW?  
THE STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS OF 'NEW AGE  
SPIRITUALITIES' IN THE GLOBAL-MARKET ERA, AS SEEN  
FROM LATIN AMERICA**

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**Abstract:** This article starts with a critique of the current mainstream approaches that share the implicit assumptions of what I call the “secularization paradigm”, showing how and why these approaches are ill-suited to understand the importance and constitution of the Neo-Nebula (New Age, Neopaganism, Neo-Indianism, Neo-Shamanism and related phenomena). The article then sets out to sketch the lineaments of the Nation-State to Global-Market model, highlighting the specific characteristics of religion in both regimes. The article follows with a discussion that shows how the characteristics of Neo-Nebula religiosities can all be related to the social conditions created by the neoliberal and consumerist revolution. The analysis concludes by arguing that Neo-Nebula religion participates in the production of a cosmopolitan self that can navigate the ever-fluxing flows of contemporary global capitalism in more or less or in less than more counter-cultural make-ups for predominantly urban, educated, and middle-class publics, while ‘aggrandizing’ and connecting the Self, nature, and the cosmos. The specific focus of this article is on Latin America, in relation to ‘the West’ and global trends. It also includes notes on the question of the “re-enchantment” or (re)appropriation of archaeological sites by the Neo-Nebula.

**Keywords:** New Age; Neopaganism; Neo-Indianism; Religion; Market Society; Pentecostalism; Cosmopolitanism

## Introduction

The last half century (1970-2020) has seen remarkable religious changes across the globe. One of these has been the emergence of New Age and related spiritualities, such as Neo-Paganism, Neo-Shamanism, and Neo-Indianism (Pike, 2001, 2004; Csordas, 2002; Sutcliffe, 2003; Dawson, 2007; Galinier & Molinié, 2012). The importance of this ‘nebula’ (Champion, 1994) of movements, networks, affinities, beliefs, and practices is difficult to estimate. For researchers close to mainstream sociology and issues such as secularization, it is marginal and therefore negligible (e.g. Casanova, 1994). Some even question its religiosity (e.g. Champion, 1994). For others, the importance of this nebula can hardly be overestimated. A number of authors argue that New Age and related religiosities constitute the implicit majority religion today in many Western countries (Adler, 2006; Salomonsen, 2002; Blain, Ezzzy & Harvey, 2004; Pike, 2004; Magliocco, 2004; Partridge, 2004, 2005; Possamai, 2005; Taylor, 2010; Gauthier, 2012; Fedele, 2013).

In places like Latin America, the emergence of these entangled movements and networks has been part of a profound process of diversification, fragmentation, and reconfiguration of religion for a population that has been considered traditionally and homogeneously Catholic, or at least Christian. While its extent is arguably less pronounced as in “the West”,<sup>2</sup> New Age in Latin America is ‘a very wide cultural phenomenon’ that is ‘plastic’ and in ‘constant transformation’ (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996: 123-124), and therefore uneasy to estimate in what neo-positivists call “real numbers”. In this sense, New Age has deeply penetrated societies and popular culture in Latin America as in the West, morphing and disseminating through media and popular culture, shaping what Guerreiro (2018), studying Brazil, calls a pervasive “ethos”. Because it spills well beyond the strict confines of routinized institutional “religion” by taking on novel forms and contents (Semán & Viotti, 2015), New Age and its correlated “alternative spiritualities” evade attempts to circumscribe it with any precision (cf. Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). Even when they reactivate claims of ‘national essence’ (de la Torre, 2016: 62), as in the Neo-Indigenous movements (Galinier & Molinié, 2012), the nebula composed of these various “spiritualities of the self” (Heelas, 1996) is constitutively transnational and reticular, and

any attempt to isolate Latin American or Western ongoings goes against the grain.

Overall, then, whether in the West or the Americas, the debate opposes those who see New Age as evidence of continued secularization and those who see it as representing one of the major trends within a wider and profound transformation of religion in modernity (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996: 21; Semán & Viotti, 2015). This article argues in favor of the latter proposition, by showing how this “Neo-Nebula” is a hallmark product of our globalizing world and not the marginal product of a transitory phase in modern history. Finding a consensual name for this wide array of phenomena is difficult. While the best appellation probably remains ‘New Age’ in its wider acceptance, I suggest to call it the Neo-Nebula in this article to draw attention to the reticular, non-institutionalized, and loosely organized characteristics of the phenomena under study. The appellation stresses how most if not all of the nebula’s components are “new”: reappropriated, syncretic reconstructions of traditional references (e.g. Neopaganism). The prefix “neo” also draws our attention to the fact that something has changed over the course of the twentieth century as regards religion which affects both its form and content. I recognize that the term Neo-Nebula is an odd one, and would like to find a better one. Yet I am gambling that it spontaneously summons the meanings that I am trying to convey and insist upon.

In essence, I argue that this wide, ever-shifting, and highly diverse phenomenon is the result of a shift from what I call the Nation-State regime of religion to a Global-Market one. This analytical frame is the result of over a decade of work in an attempt to provide an alternative to secularization-embedded approaches and Rational Choice. It starts from the hypothesis that contemporary religion, as other social dimensions, are best understood against the backdrop of the recent—and global—rise to dominance of market economics over all aspects of social life and all societal institutions. This rise of the “Market”, through the combined processes of neoliberal implementation and the massification of consumerism, has profoundly shaken the former embedment of societies worldwide within the framework of the Nation-State (cf. Gauthier, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2021a; Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Gauthier & Martikainen, 2013, 2020; Martikainen & Gauthier, 2013). From

this perspective, the array of “Neo” phenomena, from New Age to Neo-Shamanism, Neo-Paganism, and Neo-Indianism, can be understood as paradigmatic forms of religion in the Global-Market era on a spectrum that includes, at the other end, fundamentalisms and Charismatic religiosities like Pentecostalism (cf. Cornelio, Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2021a, 2021b).

This article therefore starts with a critique of the current mainstream approaches that share the implicit assumptions of what I call the “secularization paradigm”, showing how and why these approaches are ill-suited to understand the importance and constitution of the Neo-Nebula. The article then sets out to sketch the lineaments of the Nation-State to Global-Market model, highlighting the specific characteristics of religion in both regimes. The article follows with a discussion that shows how the characteristics of Neo-Nebula religiosities can all be related to the social conditions created by the neoliberal and consumerist revolution. The analysis concludes by arguing that Neo-Nebula religion participates in the production of a cosmopolitan self that can navigate the ever-fluxing flows of contemporary global capitalism in more or less counter-cultural make-ups for predominantly urban, educated, and middle-class publics, while ‘aggrandizing’ (Dawson, 2011) and connecting the Self, nature, and the cosmos. The specific focus of this article is on Latin America, in relation to “the West” and global trends (cf. Carozzi, 2000; Amaral, 2001).<sup>3</sup> The reason for this, apart from the obvious point that this journal is Latin American, is to stress that the social scientific of religion urgently needs to set aside its strong Western bias, which is grounded in what I call the secularization paradigm, defined and discussed below.

The topic of this article was agreed upon with the editors of this special issue on the ways in which the Neo-Nebula invests archeological sites. It is not directly tied to this issue, though. Rather, it proposes to situate New Age and related “self-spiritualities” within the wider religious landscape and its profound transformations since the 1960s and 70s in the wake of the massification of consumerism and the ensuing neoliberal revolution. While the social scientific study of religion has close to ignored the importance of this rise to dominance of market economics, my claim is that correcting this lack leads to a radical change of perspective by which the Neo-Nebula no longer appears to be marginal within the “religious sphere” or “field” but rather as one of its paradigmatic forms.

As a consequence, the contributions in this issue should be seen as being of particular importance for the wider social scientific study of religion. In the closing section of this article (entitled CODA), I briefly attend to the issue of archeological sites by showing how their recent investment by Neo-Nebula phenomena has its conditions of possibility in the shift from the Nation-State to the Global-Market regime, as the latter entails a change in the value awarded to premodern and indigenous traditions in broader society.

## **Why secularization fails the Neo-Nebula and why we need an alternative**

In his now classic *Public Religions in the Modern World*, José Casanova (1994) critiqued the limitations of secularization, yet dismissed “New Age” spiritualities’ as having little social and political incidence. Out of the three intertwined propositions making up secularization theories—privatization, religious decline, and the differentiation of social spheres—, Casanova argued that only differentiation holds up to the evidence. He also argued that secularization is more than a set of theories: It forms the very *paradigm* within which modernity has understood religion since the Enlightenment (Casanova, 1994: 17-18; cf. also Tschannen, 1994).

Expanding on this last idea, I suggest that the following assumptions also make up the secularization paradigm: methodological nationalism (the idea that religion is best understood within the limits of national territories), a political and institutional bias (which favors issues such as Church and State relations and institutionalized forms of religion), an accompanying gendered bias (which favors “masculine” and “rational” expressions of religion over “feminine” and “emotional” ones), a focus on belief and exclusive belonging, an understanding of religion in relation to the private/public and religious/secular divides, a quantitative rather than qualitative appreciation of religion (religion can decline or return rather than change), a neglect of cultural aspects, as well as a strong ethnocentric focus (the West as the spearhead of historical change and Post-Reformation Western Christianity as the standard for religion in general) (cf. Gauthier, 2020a, 2020d). In essence, then, secularization-embedded social sciences favor ‘churched’ (Beyer, 2013) forms of religion over any other form, and are founded on the implicit proposition that

this historical construct is somewhat the definitive form—or at least one that continues to form the core of religion today, across the world.

In this sense, the secularization *paradigm* remains by far the dominant framework within which the social scientific study of religion, especially sociology, understands religion—even for authors who have rejected secularization *theories*. Hence the perhaps dominant idea that we are presently in a phase of fragmentation of religion, or in a directionless and formless transition that is stretching itself evermore so out (cf. Beyer, 2012, 2013). Yet such apprehensions, I argue, start from churching religion as their standard, and remain embedded within the assumptions of the secularization paradigm.

This sheds light on the reasons why New Age and related “spiritualities” are marginalized as a theme of study, and why they appear marginal with respect to what is still seen as “real religion”—i.e. churching religion—, even when the latter form is declining and the former is expanding. This also explains why most of the tenors of sociology continue to focus on Western countries and simply ignore places like Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, which are implicitly cast as lagging behind the historical trends of secularization.<sup>4</sup> As a result, research fails to understand religious change in Latin America as happening within the same time-frame as events in the West. This is a major hindrance when it comes to mapping out the Neo-Nebula, as it is constitutively transnational.

Quantitative research is particularly embedded in the secularization paradigm and is therefore made to overlook and misrepresent the Neo Nebula altogether. In such research, Latin America continues to show high numbers of its population identifying with Catholicism, even though the total is decreasing. Overall, the proportion of Latin Americans who identify as Roman Catholics has decreased from 90% in the 1960s to 69% in 2014. Meanwhile, Pentecostalism has risen to roughly 10% of the population, while ‘non-affiliated’ and agnostics have risen from 4% to 8%, with atheism remaining negligible (Pew Research Center, 2014). On the surface, this data seems to support the secularization thesis, with Latin America appearing to be on the same path as the West, although belatedly.<sup>5</sup>

In my view, such an analysis completely misses what is actually going on and which has to do with qualitative variables rather than

quantitative ones. For one, these figures hide a massive shift towards charismatic types of religion that well exceeds Pentecostalism, and even Christianity itself. They also fail to account for the development of the Neo-Nebula and the penetration of New Age ideas, beliefs, and representations (e.g. God as “cosmic energy”, reincarnation, the importance of self-realization) in the mainstream. As reported by Gutiérrez Zúñiga (1996), the participants within the Neo-Nebula, not to mention their sympathizers, identify as either Catholic or non-affiliates in the official data. They therefore evolve under the radar, and it is no surprise that they remain in the margins of the social scientific study of religion at the same time that they are expanding within the mainstream of Latin American societies.

Religion is not declining, whether it is in Latin America or elsewhere: *churched* religion is. Religion, meanwhile, is *changing*, and the Neo-Nebula is a paradigmatic part of this change.<sup>6</sup> A new theoretical frame is needed in order to make sense of these developments.

### **The Nation-State to Global-Market regime thesis**

The best way to propose an alternative to secularization is to identify the implicit assumptions on which it is based and propose new ones. The most significant assumption is social differentiation, according to which every social sphere, including religion, can be analyzed as being autonomous and only having non-constitutive rapports with other spheres. This assumption has been subjected to critique by Linda Woodhead (2012) for Europe, and Birgit Meyer (2010, 2012) has argued that differentiation is simply irrelevant in the case of Africa, an argument that can easily be extended to Latin America. Following the methodology suggested by the Durkheimians and expressed by Marcel Mauss in his programmatic 1927 text *‘Division concrète de la sociologie’* (Mauss, 1969: 42-80; cf. Gauthier & Vandenberghe, 2020), human societies, even modern ones, are integrated wholes. Therefore, the analysis of any one of its ‘dimensions’ can only be complete when ‘reported to the whole’ (Mauss, 1969: 52; my translation). Similarly, Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]) proceeded to show that social spheres are not insulated. They are ‘embedded’ in wider society, however differentiated they appear. My own addition to these premises is the idea that, in complex societies, one social sphere can function as the embedding, founding, integrating,

structuring, and institutionalizing force, and that this function can be devolved to a given societal institution, for instance: The Church, the State, or the Market.

The model I defend considers that modern societies have gone through two different constellations, or regimes, from the late nineteenth century to today: the Nation-State and the Global-Market.<sup>7</sup> Authors as different as Hobsbawm (1992), Anderson (1983), Rosanvallon (1989), and Eiseinstadt (2002) have shown how both the State and the Nation became institutionalized over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as the normal and natural political form of modern societies on the one hand, and its preferred ‘imagined community’ on the other. By using capitals to both State and Nation, I want to insist on how these constructs function as *ideas and ideals* at least as much as they are actual institutions. Or, as Durkheim (1990 [1912]) would have said: ‘moral ideals’. As Mauss (1920) noted, State and Nation function together as a hyphenated entity, the Nation-State, and suppose each other, both in theory and in practice (cf. van der Veer, 2001; Rosanvallon, 1989). While the State became institutionalized over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as the main social and societal regulator, the Nation was constructed as its community of reference.

Latin America was a pioneer in this process, as independences occurred as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, leading to the construction of modern nation-states (Hobsbawm, 1987, 1992; Anderson, 2016 [1983]). The State (note when I am using capitals and when I am not) inherited the theological foundations of the feudal order and was sacralized and invested with soteriological functions. Through the extension of its administration, the state formatted society and social life according to its own logic (Rosanvallon, 1989). In other words, and contrary to the idea according to which social differentiation gave birth to autonomous social spheres, the State shaped all social spheres—the whole of society—according to its own mode of governmentality: vertical, compartmentalized, hierarchical, and rational (Foucault, 2004; Portier, 2008; Rosanvallon, 1989; Scott, 2020). While nineteenth century liberal political economy (i.e. economic theory) claimed the autonomy of economics, industrial economies in the real world emerged within *national* territories, and were dependent on conditions created by the states (Hobsbawm, 1992; Polanyi, 2001). Communications, whether

roads, rail, telegraph, the telephone, radio, and later on television, were largely developed through the impetus of the rising bureaucratic state, and were readily nationalized, or at least highly regulated (Hobsbawm, 1987, 1992; Gauthier, 2020a). Led by hygienist principles, the state “secularized” health services, education, and reached down to virtually every citizen through the postal service, tax collection, and census.<sup>8</sup>

As Peter van der Veer (2001) has shown in the case of India and Britain, this process profoundly affected religion, which was created as a category in the process while its complex and multifarious social realities were remodeled as a consequence. For van der Veer, the rise to dominance of the Nation-State resulted in a change in ‘social location’ of religion, which was traditionally diffused into a myriad of practices, doctrines, and symbolic systems. Through its formation within the Nation-State model, religion was therefore differentiated, institutionalized, rationalized, privatized, scripturalized, its rituals sobered, its mystical and popular elements rubbed off or repressed. Belonging was made to be exclusive. In a word, religion was ‘churched’. Categories like “superstition” were mobilized all over the world to repress non-conformity to the Post-Reformation Western Christian, monotheistic model. This was of course more than true as concerns indigenous and African religions and traditions in Latin America. Religion thus formatted was submitted to the regulation of the State and made to serve Nation-building processes. In a nutshell, religion in the Nation-State regime, as most other dimensions of the social, were statized and nationalized.

According to this perspective, a strong distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘the secular’ (everything else) is *a possibility among others* amidst this set of statization and nationalization processes, and not a *sine qua non* condition or effect. Similarly, ‘secularism’ as an ideology (Casanova, 2011) was very differently understood, championed, confronted, and institutionalized depending on where in the world one focuses on. In most Latin American countries, with perhaps the exception of Uruguay and Cuba, Nation-State formation did not mean a strong focus on the secular/religious distinction. There is little doubt from this perspective that Latin America went through the same historical processes as in the West over the same period. It cannot be assumed to be “lagging behind” in any reasonable sense.

The Nation-State regime's apex occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War, whether in the form of the Welfare, Communist/Socialist, or post-Independence/Postcolonial state. The stability of this regime began to be tested throughout the 1970s, while the 80s promoted the shift to neoliberal ideologies and policies such as deregulation, export-led market integration, privatization, the roll-back of Welfare and social services, and financialization as the vectors for accelerated economic globalization and integration. These processes accomplished the deconstruction of the state and the disenchantment of its supportive ideals, such as social and scientific progress. The State was dismantled, leaving a diminished administrative edifice in its wake, stripped of much of its 'charisma' (König, 2005). The result of the neoliberal revolution, which became hegemonic and globalized with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, has been the 'marketization' (Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013a; Moberg & Martikainen, 2018; Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020; Gauthier, 2018, 2020a) of every aspect of social life and a transfer of regulatory powers from the State to the Market.

The social and cultural conditions for this shift were prepared some time before though. They started in the 1960s with the emergence of a counterculture in the West, with ripples and echoes across the world and especially in the Americas. This shift ushered in a culture of consumption which is commonly referred to as 'consumerism', that is a culture within which expressive individualism becomes dominant. This is not to say that the 1960s counterculture weren't critical of capitalism. Rather, as Boltanski and Chiappelo (1999) have shown, its expressive thrust catalyzed a shift from the mass, undifferentiated, and class-stratified consumption of Fordist-Taylorist capitalism to a more personal and niche brand of consumption aligned with Romantic values (Campbell, 1987) and fitted to answer the social need for authenticity (cf. Lee, 1993) in the new globalizing 'society of identities' (Beauchemin, 2004). With consumerism, consumption becomes more than a type of activity; it is a veritable *ethos*, a new way of life that has diffracted class identities into a myriad of lifestyles. Consumerism is a culture in which values are shaped, and community and identity are produced, by and through consumption (Slater, 1997; Sassatelli, 2007; Lury, 2011; Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013b; Gauthier, 2015, 2020a,

2021a). Consumerism has reshaped how people relate to themselves, others, and the world.

Consumerization and neoliberalization are related and complementary processes that have disseminated across the world, given impulse by supranational institutions like the IMF and the WTO, as well as by the deregulation of media channels and the rise of Internet and social media, transforming societies and instituting marketization as a structuring force (Moberg & Martikainen, 2018; Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020; Gauthier, 2018, 2020a, 2021a; Chaudhury & Belk 2020). Through these processes, the Market—the idea, ideal, and actual institution—replaced the State as the preferred actor for social and societal regulation. Similarly, the Nation as the most important container for identities has been eroded while the Global has emerged as the backdrop for complex identity reconfigurations, whether in the form of lifestyles or reactionary and conservative reaffirmations of nationalism.

As with neoliberalism, the penetration of consumerism and its actual effects have been variegated, heterogeneous, discontinuous, hesitant or forceful, and so on, yet global societies have been transformed significantly in the process and almost all of their dimensions with them (Brenner et al., 2010; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). As Shmuel Eisenstadt (2002) insisted when talking about 'multiple modernities', variegations occur within a given spectrum of possibilities, and they are therefore best understood as variations on a same theme. One significant change has affected governmentality—the modality of the exercise of power—, which has shifted from a government-type—that is a vertical, bureaucratic, and hierarchical one—to a horizontal, networked, partnership-based governance-type in state, para-state, and non-state organizations alike (Duchastel, 2004; Portier, 2008). This shift has been accompanied by the critique of modern and Nation-State-born institutions of all types, whether in the field of politics, health, education, media, science, or religion. Furthermore, while the State needs to differentiate, institutionalize, compartmentalize, and rationalize in order to effectively regulate (Scott, 2020), the Market strives on fluxes and niches (Foucault, 2004). Marketization therefore disaggregates the boundaries and categories inherited from the Nation-State era and proceeds to actually de-differentiate social spheres and blur their

boundaries. This process is encapsulated by Zygmunt Bauman's idea of a 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2012 [1999]).

The tipping point between the Nation-State and Global-Market regimes varies according to the regions and countries. This does not mean that the state is no longer an important actor, or that the nation dissolves. Only, the state no longer ambitions to cater to individuals from 'cradle to grave' (Woodhead, 2012) and is no longer the privileged lever by which to reform society. As the many waves of privatization and state administration reforms clearly show, it is the Market which now provides the *grammar* for state legitimization. Similarly, and as Hobsbawm (1992) already noted, the idea of the nation and its correlated form of nationalism today tend to recede into conservative and reactionary forms which aim reaffirm a form of solidity and permanence in the midst of global fluxes. The authoritarian and populist agendas of Latin American leaders like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil thrive on the nostalgia of a once-powerful state and an exclusive, even racist brand of nationalism.

The shift to the Global-Market regime has been accompanied everywhere by the emergence and growth of entrepreneurial, reticular, and voluntary forms of religion, of which Pentecostalism and the Neo-Nebula are paradigmatic as much as they are opposed. As I will argue below, both also cater to different, class-based experiences of globalization and cosmopolitanism. The religious institutions of the church type, meanwhile, are handicapped in a marketized environment because of their constitution. They therefore tend to decline as well as operate important changes in order to adapt (Schlammelcher, 2013; Pettersson, 2013; Moberg, 2017; Gauthier, 2020a).

For decades, the dominant characteristics of religion have been stabilizing, deepening, spreading, and radicalizing, yet social scientists continue to diagnose transience and fragmentation. This contradiction stems from the fact that they view contemporary religion through the lenses of the secularization paradigm, which has essentialized and naturalized Nation-State regime-type religion ('churched' religion) and overlooks the neoliberal and consumer revolutions and the important shift that has occurred within modern societies and religion as a consequence. While many sub-disciplines within social sciences have acknowledged the massive changes brought on by neoliberalism and consumerism, the social scientific study of religion, and sociology in

particular, has failed to pull in step (Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).<sup>9</sup>

The overall and transversal characteristics of religion in the Global-Market regime depart in significant ways from the model of churchd religion. This is not surprising. As religion changed 'location' (van der Veer, 2001: 8) in the Nation-State regime, it has changed again under Global-Market conditions. Casanova (1994) and others have already established that religion became re-publicized as of the 1980s, yet without offering an explanation for this reversal of destinies, and without linking this to the neoliberal revolution that was underway at the same time. In addition to de-privatization or re-publicization, the immanentization of salvation towards inner-worldly themes such as health, wealth, successful relations, happiness, and well-being is also significant. All of this is undergirded by the telos of self-realization, which is itself the consequence of the massification of expressive individualism and the culture of authenticity that is intrinsic to consumerism. Expressive individualism, that is 'the understanding of life' according to which 'each of us has his or her own way of realizing one's own humanity and that it is important to find and live out one's own' (Taylor, 2002: 83), has penetrated deep into most social strata. I argue that this has to be connected to the fact that conceptions of the divine have shifted away from vertical, other-worldly forms of transcendence towards immanent-transcendent forms like the belief in divine intervention in everyday life, the Holy Spirit, or the divine as cosmic energy and a general interconnectedness.

In the Global-Market regime, belief and scripturalism cede to experience. Formerly dismissed and delegitimized forms of religion such as mystical, popular, and emotional ones are given space to make a comeback in new forms and to formidable extents, including in the business world. Exclusive, territorialized, and life-long forms of belonging cede to voluntary forms of 'communitization' (Gauthier, 2014). Hierarchical, church-type institutions cede to more horizontal and reticular forms of organization on the NGO mold. In tune with the dynamics of consumerism, religion becomes *lifestyled*, catering to everyday and pragmatic ethical questions (i.e. "how to live") as well as to identity and belonging issues (Gauthier, 2012, 2021b). As the container function of the nation becomes eroded, the "global" tends to become the backdrop

for religious imaginaries and communities. This can lead to global forms of community, such as the Global Muslim Umma and the Global Catholic community, or it can lead to transnational subcultural identities and networks in the likes of the Pentecostal and New Age movements. Finally, it can produce conservative, nostalgic, and reactionary reinvestments of the nation (e.g. Gauthier, 2021b). On the organizational level, governmentality shifts from vertical government to networked, horizontal governance. As the state rolls back social provisions in the fields of education, healthcare, integration, and diversity management, religious organizations and movements are given opportunities to step in. Similarly, religious organizations are increasingly submitted to the imperative of developing branding and communication strategies, and to understand their own activities as service-provision with growth objectives (e.g. Einstein, 2008; Pettersson, 2013; Moberg, 2017). At the same time, charismatic authorities thrive while rational-legal modes of authority are eroded as all institutions—politics, media, scientific, medical, religious—are contested, delegitimated, and in crisis (Gauthier, 2020c).

Perhaps the most significant of these changes is the *blurring of boundaries between social spheres*. This affects all social spheres, and not only religion. Yet it is arguably religion for which the consequences are the most dramatic, as de-differentiation undermines any attempt at clearly delimiting the religion/secular divide, disrupting the Nation-State formatting of religion at its core. Instead, new religious forms are emerging in the former divisions between “religion” and “secular” spheres like tourism, education, health, consumption, arts, entertainment, pop culture, and so on (de la Torre & Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 2005). Rather than remaining compartmentalized in a well-differentiated social location and well-appointed times and places, religion comes out of its box. It becomes enmeshed with other social dimensions and, for individuals, all dimensions of life. Religion is no longer driven to be a private matter, to be expressed in certain times and places. Pentecostalism and Megachurches have understood this, as they provide holistic concepts that include easy access, parking, daycare, social services, self-help, entertainment, effervescent community, individual affirmation etc. as part of their offers (cf. Ellingson, 2013; Cornelio & Medina, 2021). In other words: personalization and an encompassing, meaningful, and up-

to-date lifestyle. In many ways, the Neo-Nebula also invests in holistic lifestyles and the possibilities opened up by the blurring of boundaries and de-differentiation.

Yet, even though Pentecostalism and New Age constitute some of the fastest growing and globalizing religious trends in the world today, they are pushed to the margins of the discipline and its analyses. I argue that this is because the assumptions of the secularization paradigm remain the foundations of the discipline, and that this is why it has missed out on the massive changes brought on by the neoliberal and consumerist revolutions.

The reader will, I hope, understand how much this socio-anthropological approach differs from neo-classical economics-grounded Rational Choice theory. The latter is arguably of little use for understanding religion, today as ever. In my view, its rise in academia is a *symptom* of the neoliberal revolution and the penetration of market ideologies in our societies, which allows us to conceive of every non-economic phenomenon, and even religion, in market terms. Rather, it is important to stress how the very idea of the self-regulating “Market” emerged within the Enlightenment as an answer to the question of an optimal mechanism for social order (Polanyi, 2001; Rosanvallon, 1979; Foucault, 2004; Gauthier, 2020a), and that it is how this idea has penetrated our societies and its institutions in recent decades that is determinant for religion, not the application of some dodgy assumptions about the supposedly “natural” laws of offer and demand or the heuristics of a model in which individuals are cast as undetermined and maximizing *homo economicus*.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Neo-Nebula from the Global-Market Framework**

Theories are lenses to see through, connect otherwise isolated facts, and provide fresh, original, and comprehensive understandings. Up to now, New Age and the related phenomena and movements I assemble here under the appellation Neo-Nebula have not been integrated into the folds of a general analytic of contemporary forms of religion otherwise than being relegated to the status of a dysfunctional, ersatz, diluted, fragmented, fuzzy, and not-really-religious type of religion (e.g. Champion, 1994; Stolz et al., 2016). On the contrary, I argue that the Neo-Nebula is central to global religious trends today. Scholars have argued that we

should be aware of the ways in which New Age tropes are contributing to the reconfigurations within Islam, for instance (cf. Howell, 2005, 2007; Gauthier, 2020a: 233-253). New Age, in other words, is a powerful force in the Global-Market formatting of religion. It is not the proof of religion's dilution, secularization, and fragmentation in the face of modernizing forces.

In the West, New Age grew out of the 1960s counterculture and started to penetrate the mainstream in the early 1980s (Heelas, 1996; Pike, 2004). In Latin America, it grew in discrete esoteric circles without as much of a countercultural edge, yet it also expanded rapidly in the 1980s through the impulsion of figures like José Argüelles and the writings of Paulo Coelho (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996; de la Torre & Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 2016: 75-76; Semán & Viotti 2015: 91-92; de la Torre, 2019). The fact that this occurred at the same time as the encroachment of consumerism and the neoliberal revolution is not coincidental, as this is when the Global-Market regime of religion tipped over the Nation-State one. The Neo-Nebula is both a product and an actor of this mutation.

As many scholars have remarked, the Neo-Nebula is a product of private entrepreneurs who are marketing their services and offers on a largely unregulated market, on the Internet, and through social media (e.g. Heelas, 1996). The fact that a significant portion of these actors tend to be critical of consumerism, the market, neoliberal policies, materialism, and capitalism at large shows how marketization as I understand it is not about content or substance but *structure* and *form*. In practically all aspects, the Neo-Nebula moves away from the characteristics of church religion. It shuns institutionalization, centralization, hierarchies, and verticality as a mode of organization and circulation of information and power, in favor of horizontal and polycentric networks in which certain actors, authorities, facilitators, and organizers, as well as certain places and events (for instance archeological sites), act as nodes (de la Torre, 2018). Yet as we have seen, these characteristics are perfectly in tune with the wider social trends that have been unraveling in Latin America and elsewhere in the wake of the neoliberal and consumer revolutions. This comes to light when cast against 'the whole' of society (Mauss, cf. supra), yet it remains hidden from view when taken in from a differentiation-based perspective.

The Neo-Nebula has grown and developed under the radar of governments and religious authorities; its organizations, when they exist, often do not even seek to be recognized as religious. They prefer in many cases to be labelled “civil society associations” and “non-profit organizations” (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996: 105). In many Western countries, it is private insurance firms and the demands of citizens, in a bottom-up process, that have awakened states to their existence and convinced some of them to recognize certain healing and self-help practices and techniques as “alternative” medicine in order to have parts of their costs covered (cf. Gauthier & Martikainen, 2013; Martikainen & Gauthier, 2013). This is a significant move away from the former regime when it was the State that was the initiator and regulator of religion.

Most of the actors in this nebula claim the term “spirituality” and are extremely critical of what they call “religion”—that is: church religion. This should not lead us into discussions as to whether this “emic” use of the terms spirituality and religion should translate into “etic” or conceptual discussions on the existence of such a thing as “spirituality”, or whether the latter is “religious” or not. These are sterile avenues. With its implicit distinction between mind and body and its valuation of the former over the latter, the concept of “spirituality” is too profoundly rooted in Christian practice and theology to be of any use. What in the world can such a thing as “secular spiritualities” refer to, especially when overriding marketization and expressive individualism dissolve the very consistency of the religion/secular and public/private divides? Rather, we should notice how church religion itself is changing away from Nation-State characteristics and in the direction of the Neo-Nebula, well beyond the confines of those who engage actively in its networks (Semán & Viotti, 2015; Guerreiro, 2018). New Age and related “spiritualities” are best understood as spearheads in the constitution of a new religious field in which feebly or non-instituted, personalized, and experience rather than dogma-based religiosities are emerging as the new normal and dominant type of religion.

Françoise Champion (1994) has championed the idea that the Neo-Nebula is a sign of the ‘decomposition of religion’ between humanism, psychology, and medicine. This analysis only makes sense when starting from the assumptions of the secularization paradigm and when one disconnects the West from the rest of the world. When looking into

the transnational networks of the Neo-Nebula from Latin America, it is more credible to argue that these are signs of religious *re-composition* that intermesh with indigenous and other neo-shamanistic revivalisms that can hardly be deemed non-religious. Champion's diagnosis rests on wishful thinking and normative concerns (that religion *must* disappear and fragment in modern secular societies) rather than a strong commitment to either empirical evidence or analytical heuristics (cf. Champion, Nizard & Zawadski, 2007; Gauthier, 2008).

A wider perspective shows us how the most thriving religious phenomena of the last decades have emerged precisely out of the blurred boundaries between social spheres, like tourism and pilgrimage for instance (cf. Reader, 2014). Religion in the Global-Market era is no longer contained within a differentiated social sphere in the same way that politics, media, the arts, entertainment, consumption, branding, leisure, tourism, and many other social dimensions have become blurred and remixed into new striking phenomena that challenge prior clear-cut categorizations. The Neo-Nebula is the product of the erosion of these many boundaries, not only the ones between church and "the secular". It has emerged as the belief in Progress, Science, and the State eroded, creating crises affecting institutions in the field of healthcare ("modern" and allopathic *vs* alternative and holistic medicine) for instance. It has also emerged from the penetration, dissemination, and naturalization within our cultures of some of the main tropes and representations of psychoanalysis and psychology, as well as management and marketing (Illouz, 2007, 2008; Einstein, 2008).

A corollary of the widespread erosion of faith in social institutions has been the rise of charismatic types of authority and the decline of what Weber (1995 [1921]: 289-301) called the rational-legal type, which derives from the respect for the rational and hierarchical institutions of modernity. Charismatic authorities are on the rise across global societies, from politics to media and business, and of course religion. This shift, once again, has accompanied the neoliberal and consumer revolutions. As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere (Gauthier, 2021b), the rise in charismatic forms of authority can be understood as a structural characteristic of global capitalism and consumer cultures. It is no coincidence, then, if religious authority in the Neo-Nebula—and Pentecostalism—is almost purely of the charismatic type, from the local

yoga teacher to the global guru. Authority no longer comes from long-winded training in traditional schools or from an institutional position: it derives from experience and the special and unique gifts Weber called charisma. In the Neo-Nebula as elsewhere, media exposure goes farther in consolidating authority than years spent learning theological intricacies.

It is not surprising that the Neo-Nebula has been carried by a strong contingency of women, and that it has breached towards indigenous people—precisely those actors who were marginalized in the Nation-State era. While Nation-State religion was compartmentalized and “male”, the rise of the Neo-Nebula is “female” in a double sense. It is not only carried by a significant portion of women, it also vehicles a feminized interpretation (e.g. Mother Earth) of the divine and a celebration of woman-ness and the essential “Woman”. While women were kept in the margins of church religion, they have been empowered in determining roles in whole sections of the Neo-Nebula (McGuire, 2008). Pentecostalism, meanwhile, remains heavily male-driven and patriarchal. Taken together, they sketch a spectrum of conservative and progressive possibilities that also traverses other domains, in particular politics.

Indigenous people were similarly marginalized when not simply repressed in the Nation-State era. Indigenous traditions, and their religious aspects in particular, were dismissed and delegitimized as superstitious and backwards, and indigenous populations were heavily evangelized as part of their assimilation and confinement into formal or informal reservations. The events of the last decades are remarkable in this sense and show a spectacular turnaround, as indigenous traditions and identities have become fashionable for urban mestizos and religious seekers. Starting with the fascination caused by authors like Castaneda, pre-colonial South American indigenous cultures have been integrated alongside Orientalist beliefs and practices into the formidable melting-pot of spiritual resources that can be brandished as “authentic” against modern Western-led disenchantment.

It is interesting that scholars have been arguing as to whether Neo-Shamanic uses of ayahuasca, for example, are sham or authentic (compare Baud & Ghasarian, 2010 and Amselle 2018; cf. Gauthier, 2010). These debates are largely beside the point, as it is increasingly

obvious that any sharp distinction between authentic and pristine indigenous traditions and inauthentic Western-influenced bricolage is a fantasy with little reality to back it. Again, reality is blurred rather than clear-cut. In the Amazon as in Siberia and the Borneo jungle, indigenous and non-indigenous practices are blended, blurred, interwoven, and interdependent. Authenticity is where people make, see, and believe it. It is the product of ritual efficacy more than the unadulterated reproduction of a past that doesn't exist and which was also constructed as the result of various influences (Chau, 2006; Gauthier, 2012, 2020a; Farahmand, 2021). As Renée de la Torre and Cristina Gutiérrez Zúñiga (2016, 2017, 2018) have shown with the case of the *temazcal* (a Lakota, Mayan, and Central Mexican sweat lodge ritual), New Age has become indigenized as much as indigenous traditions have been 'new-ageized'. This process has effects on both sides which render trials in "cultural appropriation" (which rests on the idea of essentialized and compartmentalized categories) difficult to judge, perhaps even irrelevant. While New Agers and seekers learn what they see as authentic practices and techniques, which were suppressed and sometimes almost entirely forgotten and no longer practiced, they become newly legitimated and can participate in renewed and affirmative indigenous identities. This has important political, social, cultural, and of course religious consequences that cannot be dismissed as entirely negative. At the same time, indigenous identities are opened up, incorporated into new claims of "national essence" (in Mexico, Brazil, and elsewhere) (Gutiérrez Zúñiga & de la Torre, 2016: 62), but also transported onto a transnational plane. Through the New Age appropriation and consumption of their techniques and heritage, therefore, indigenous communities are integrated into national and transnational networks. As Gutiérrez Zúñiga and de la Torre (2017: 331) argue, New Agers don't just appropriate: They pollinate and create new hybridizations. The phenomenon is therefore complex, paradoxical, filled with tensions and contradictions, and difficult to evaluate from a normative stance.

### **Transience as a stable characteristic of lifestyled religion**

The discussion in the preceding section shows how the characteristics of the Neo-Nebula are perfectly in tune with the wider social transformations and the dominant trends that have profoundly

reshaped Western and Latin American societies alike over the last four decades or more. Yet the nebula's fluid nature, which contrasts so radically with church religion's solidity and easily recognizable characteristics, has made it difficult for scholars to identify its structures and show how all of this holds together. Fluid belonging, non-exclusive identification, transience, mobility, and continuous change, however, are well-known characteristics of today's neoliberalism-shaped world. These are also neoliberal *values*, as are empowerment, personal responsibility, autonomy, self-realization, health, wealth, and success (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999), which the Neo-Nebula often turns against raw materialism.

Scholars have been misled by this constitutive transience and the wild array of summoned references. Yet this is only the surface. Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2001) has argued that behind the bewildering heterogeneity of symbols, beliefs, and practices making up religion today (even beyond the Neo-Nebula), there is remarkable homogeneity. For large parts of religion today, it is indeed *self-realization* that constitutes the core soteriology and general aim. This is certainly the case for the Neo-Nebula. The telos of happiness, health, wealth, and material or relational success are constitutive of this encompassing goal of self-realization. Yet unlike otherworldly salvation, self-realization is, by definition, never achieved (although this is never put forward explicitly). Self-realization is a *path* and 'paradise lies within' (Semán & Viotti, 2015). Happiness is a dynamic state; hence the emergence of a *seeker* culture (Roof, 1993, 1999; Ménard, 1999; Lemieux, 2002).

The modern myth of Progress was collective, and the social utopias that mobilized social bodies to such an incredible extent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have diffused and defused into a personalized version of progress. Wider social progress is now widely believed to emanate from progress on the individual level rather than collective mobilization. Therefore, *change* is both the condition and the proof of an authentic and effective process of self-realization. Change means moving forward (Lemieux, 2002). It is a dominant value in and of itself. Hence the repeated and insistent calls for 'life change' (Lofton, 2011) that ring well beyond the Neo-Nebula and perhaps constitute the mechanism behind the rise of born-again types of religion and the popularity of rebirthing rituals.

Another structural value is *choice*. Indeed, it seems that religion has no worth today if it is not chosen. Being able to exercise personal choice and making sure that everyone “feels ok” with their participation in a ritual, a workshop, or an exercise is a common characteristic within the Neo-Nebula. Because choice in the here-and-now is valued over choice-hindering long-term commitments, the Neo-Nebula eludes concepts of the likes of ‘New Religious Movements’, which hinge on notions of exclusive belonging and formal adhesion (Heelas, 1996: 9). Yet it is easy to see how choice is a consumerist value, if not *the* most important and determining value of a consumer culture. As studies on consumerism have shown, the exercise of choice is that by which the subject affirms his own existence. Choice, in other words, is the very means of subjectification in a consumer culture. Choice is also the most precious of neoliberal values, since the consumer provides the model for the neoliberal subject and citizen (cf. Saad-Filho & Johnson, 2005; Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013a). As Chicago neoliberal economist Milton Friedman (1980) argued, ‘freedom to choose’ is the alpha and omega of all freedoms, including political freedom.

As a New Age healer explained to me, ‘experience is the measure of truth’, and truth is what feels authentic. The quest for *authenticity* is a cornerstone of the Neo-Nebula, yet it is also a defining characteristic of consumerism (Arvidsson, 2006; Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013b; Gauthier, 2020a, 2020c). It is at the heart of expressive individualism and what Charles Taylor (1991, 2002) calls the ‘ethics of authenticity’. Authenticity is at the heart of the cultural politics of consumerism (Featherstone, 1991) and its dominant form of identity: the *lifestyle* (Lury, 2011; Heilbrunn, 2015). Scholars have noted how New Age and related phenomena are organized into holistic lifestyles (de la Torre, 2016), yet this concept has rarely been taken seriously. For consumer culture specialist Celia Lury (2011: 53), lifestyle ‘refers to the ways in which people seek to display their individuality and their sense of style through the choice of a particular range of goods [and symbols] and their subsequent customizing or personalizing of these goods’ and symbols. All over the world, finding, modeling, and expressing a lifestyle has become ‘a central life project for individuals today’ (Lury, 2011: 53), including in places like the Middle East (Bayat & Herrera, 2010) and Southeast Asia (Fischer, 2009), with important consequences for religion.

Lifestyles are means of expressing both individuality and belonging, and combine aesthetic, political, and religious symbols and dimensions into affirmations in the private and public realms (Gauthier, 2021a).

Heelas first labeled New Age as 'Self-Spiritualities' (1996) before revising himself and preferring the appellation 'Spiritualities of Life' (2008). Yet one expression need not exclude the other, and I would argue that one could also talk about "Nature", "Cosmic", "Tribal", or "Primal Spiritualities". All of these appellations are perhaps best understood as complementary dimensions within an encompassing set of holistic lifestyles. The Neo-Nebula is therefore a matrix of lifestyles that express and aim at interdependence on three axes: vertical, longitudinal, and horizontal (cf. Gauthier, 2016; Tarot, 2000). On the vertical axis, connecting Mind, Body, and Spirit mirrors and accompanies the connection of the Self with Nature and the Cosmos (Pike, 2004; de la Torre & Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 2018). On the longitudinal or temporal axis, reconnection with nature is often mediated by the reconnection with reconstructed ancestral practices, symbols, or spirits from authentic cultures (Hervieu-Léger's (1993) 'chain of memory'). On the horizontal axis, that of community, the connection can extend from a group, a niche identity or a subculture to the whole of humanity, and even to all living and non-living beings. From one group to another, and even from one person to another, the emphasis on either of these axes and the ways the latter are bound together within a system can change, and representations, practices, references, symbols, and claims can be wildly heterogeneous. Yet it is possible to see how the overall structure is standardized, stable, and coherent.

Various scholars have suggested understanding the Neo-Nebula on a spectrum. For Heelas (1996: 32), New Age extends from capitalism-friendly forms of coaching and empowerment techniques to purist and ascetic involvements in spiritual exercises, with the varieties of quests for harmonious self-transformation and modified states of consciousness sitting somewhere in the middle. In their research on the sweat lodge rituals of *temazcal*, de la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga (2018) similarly distinguish between its use and meanings in the Neo-Indigenous circles of the Red Path, those in the Neo-Shamanic and psychotherapeutic circles, those in Women's spiritual circles, and finally their inclusion as part of New Age-infused spa packages. We notice in both typologies

how they comprise a pole of neoliberal and consumer-friendly forms. These are not, as Carrette and King (2005) would have it, the sign of a ‘corporate takeover’ of religion, but rather one that marketization and consumerism are perhaps best seen as the conditions of possibility of Neo-Nebula religiosities.

### **Conclusion: Lifestyling cosmopolitanism**

Since the turn of the 1980s, scholars have been hinting at some sort of massive change in the pathways of modernization. Labelled alternatively postmodernity, late modernity, liquid modernity, post-industrial society, post-secularity, and post-Westphalian, the diagnosis that something important has happened and that our societies have changed courses has been widespread. Yet this accumulation of ‘posts’ also shows that we seem to know where we no longer are (where we *were*), but not exactly where we actually *are*. This is particularly true in the social scientific study of religion. Yet the historical coincidence with the neoliberal revolution and the last wave of economic globalization provides some significant evidence as to the nature of the new structural dynamics that have become institutionalized since the turn of the 1980s. There is little doubt that the Nation-State as I have defined it was the main social regulator and charismatic locus of societies throughout most of the twentieth century, and there is much evidence to support the idea that the Market and the Global now play a similar and fundamental role in shaping world societies (Gauthier, 2020a, 2021a; Cornelio, Gauthier, Martikainen & Woodhead, 2021a, 2021b).

The Nation-State to Global-Market model provides a heuristic alternative to the secularization paradigm for analyzing the matrix making up the Neo-Nebula. Marginal and a symptom of disaggregation from the latter perspective, the alternative defended here shows on the contrary how the Neo-Nebula espouses the characteristics that have been reshaping *all* social spheres over the last decades. Secularization paradigm-embedded approaches look at religion in general and the Neo-Nebula in particular through lenses that are arguably those of the past. Starting from a differentiation of social spheres approach that isolates religion, social sciences have been mostly blind to the formidable revolution brought on by the rise to dominance of market economics and its effects on social ethos and cultural ideologies alike. From the

perspective defended here, New Age and the Neo-Nebula represent a paradigmatic form of religion in the Global-Market era: personalized, experiential, made up of networks of horizontal organizations rather than hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions of the church type, lacking in formal and rational theologies, adaptable to local contexts and practices while integrating in a particular vision of the global, blending the scientific and para-scientific, thriving in the blurred boundaries between religion and “secular”, aiming social and environmental change through individual transformation and self-realization, emerging from bottom-up entrepreneurialism, producing lived utopias for the here-and-now, catering to immanent concerns of health, wealth, and life balance, aiming to reconnect individuals with themselves as well as with nature and the cosmos, and reenchanted what it perceives as a disenchanted and materialist world (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996: 123).

It has been widely reported that the Neo-Nebula is composed of a vast majority of urban, educated, middle-class social actors (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996; Pike, 2004; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Heelas, 2008; Dawson, 2007; Altglas, 2014; de la Torre & Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 2017). This contrasts with the socio-demographics of Pentecostalism, which recruits massively within the lower, working classes in Latin America as everywhere else apart from Africa (Martin, 2002; Köehrsen, 2018). I suggest we see both of them as polar opposites and paradigmatic forms of religion in the Global-Market regime. They both emphasize experience, healing, born-again identities, voluntary adherence to feebly institutionalized organizations that are networked and *transnational*, charismatic forms of authority, and of course personal choice. They both flourish by catering to holistic lifestyles that transcend social differentiation and provide empowerment techniques for dealing with the fluidity of life in the Global-Market age, emphasizing how it is possible to influence fate, negotiate change, and master uncertainty. They also both relate to transcendent-immanent figures of the divine, whether the Holy Spirit or cosmic energies. In sum: They diverge in content and substance rather than form and structure. While the Neo-Nebula values individuality, liberty, and seeking the divine within the frame of a generalized interconnectedness, Pentecostalism places more worth on group belonging, commitment, and tuning in with a transcendent deity which manifests itself in daily life and worship. While Pentecostalism

maintains the idea of an inalienable and exclusive Truth of which it the sole beholder, the Neo-Nebula embraces Perennialism, i.e. the idea that all religions are particularistic expressions of an encompassing and eternal truth, and an ‘implicit brand of polytheism’ (Semán & Viotti 2015). While the former reinstates clear boundaries between Good and Evil, right and wrong, Men and Women, and espouses Manicheism, the latter promotes an ideal of acceptance of the here-and-now that shies away from rigid and polarized forms of morality.

Grounded in different socio-demographics and thereby different experiences of globalization and of the shift from the certainties of the Nation-State era to the uncertainties of the Global-Market one, I argue that both the Neo-Nebula and Pentecostalism propose appropriate versions of cosmopolitanism, and therefore two different class-bound pathways of integration within global flows. Pentecostalism offers more reassurance, stability, and firm guardrails for populations that have not been the winners of globalization. With the rise and evolution of the health and wealth gospel (Cornelio & Medina, 2021) in its ranks, it promotes empowering tools to achieve success and the promises of materialism that have otherwise eluded them. The middle-classes involved in the Neo-Nebula, on the other hand, have had a more favorable fate, and their claims of re-enchantment contain an element of critique of materialism, even when its practices and techniques have been marketized and consumerized. As Gutiérrez Zúñiga (1996: 70) argues, the popular image of the universe as an interconnected system of energies is a fitting metaphor for globalization. Incidentally, the Neo-Nebula promotes techniques to deal with, domesticate, and ride incessant change and uncertainties, turning challenges and hardship into opportunities to grow, heal, learn, and progress. As middle-class agents, the New Agers and affiliates have more resources, material and non-material, to draw from to affront, manage, and “surf” the never-ending waves of market-fueled globalization.

This sheds light on some of the social conditions of the Neo-Nebula and its particular brand of cosmopolitanism (Gutiérrez Zúñiga, 1996: 85). The Neo-Nebula cherishes diversity, and revels in characteristics that start with the prefixes “pluri” and “multi” as it does in uses of terms starting with “neo”. It is paradigmatically ‘ecumenical, pluri-national, pluri-religious, multi-circuited, and multi-cultural’ (de la Torre, 2019:

16), while offering a dizzying array of 'rituals, celebrations, council meetings, marches, fairs, workshops, conferences [...], gatherings' (de la Torre, 2018: 29), healing circles, pilgrimages, tours, therapeutics, and other practices and experiences. In this sense, the Neo-Nebula thrives on *indetermination*: that of the meaning of its symbols and practices as well as that of its own meaning and identity as an open-ended movement in which one can come and go and move transversally with little if any barriers and demands for long-standing commitment (other than realizing the Self and connecting with nature and the cosmos). It is founded on a service and "pick and choose" orientation in which actors circulate, yet this picking and choosing is far from being undetermined: it is linked to particular socio-demographics and is contained by the exigencies of a holistic lifestyle, the path towards self-realization, and a specific form of transnational and open cosmopolitan citizenship.

### **CODA: The Meaning of Archeological Sites**

So much for a general appreciation of the importance of New Age and related phenomena beyond the framework of the secularization paradigm. Now, what about the theme of this special issue? The Nation-State to Global-Market model also has the potential to shed light on the evolving meanings of archeological sites, and how they are riddled with tensions and competing claims. What we now call "archeological sites" were instituted as such in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries during the construction of Latin American nation-states and as a significant part of their nation-building process. These sites were categorized, cordoned off, separated from "profane" space, and invested with meanings that had to do with the official history of the modern nation. They stood ambiguous, as both the remnants of past grandeur and backwardness. Sites were cut off from the living uses and memories of the indigenous populations that had created or inherited them, and were renovated, reconstructed, and preserved in the name of modern science and national heritage. They served a certain Europeanized version of the body politic and were at the center of national narratives. Their religiosity was transferred from their traditional and pre-Columbian moorings to that of the "secular" modern Nation-State. It was a truly political religiosity, whose authenticity derived from being framed as an oeuvre-d'art in a museum: fixed, suspended in time, the remnants of a distant past that

*had* to remain that way: Distant and bygone. The only ritual use these sites admitted in the Nation-State era was strolling within well-cordoned off pathways and meanings.

The practices we see today and which form the focus of the following contributions show a very different rapport to archaeological sites, one that is in many ways a contestation of this prior, Nation-State meaning. They have become important elements within new nativistic narratives and appropriations that create their own idea of Tradition, identity, and the nation. What is truly new here is the way these sites are extracted from their museum form and transformed into living theaters and symbolic actors for religious reconstructions, bricolage, and reappropriations. In this light, New Age and Neopagan investments actually serve the Neo-Indian agenda, and perhaps also that of the Indigenous communities themselves—at least in part. In this sense, the shift from the Nation-State era to that of the Global-Market involves opportunities for new claims of authenticity that thwart accusations of “cultural appropriation” or “commodified alienation”.

We can better appreciate why the Neo-Nebula has invested archaeological sites, especially those that are remnants of non- or pre-Christian societies like those of Meso-America. These are extraordinary opportunities to tap into their reserve of authenticity, which is a condition of their ritual efficacy and at the heart of their lifestyle. We also understand why these investments of archaeological sites take forms that combine tourism, pilgrimage, and consumerism. In the de-differentiated world of religion in the Global-Market era, the boundaries between “the secular” and religion have dissolved, and the latter tends to be marketized in ways that does not erode the authenticity of the experience, on the contrary: It constitutes its very structure and condition of possibility. Hence the Neo-Nebula appears as what I and many other believe it is in fact: A paradigmatic form of religion, non-instituted, fluid, and woven into popular and self-help culture as well as with management (Bell & Taylor, 2003), in a world that is no longer the one in which the Nation-State was the container for religion and in which church religion was the standard.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I warmly thank Cristina Gutiérrez Zúñiga and Renée de la Torre Castellanos for having reached out to me for a contribution in this issue. I have been a follower and distant admirer of both, and am thrilled at the opportunity for exchange. They have agreed for a more theoretical article over an ethnographic one on the Burning Man festival, and I hope they won't be disappointed. I thank them also for sending me a generous pile of theirs and other relevant texts to diversify my sources, and I will refer to these as much as I can. I thank also the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and recommendations.

<sup>2</sup> I am using “the West” and “Western” as convenient labels to designate West-European and North American (“white”) cultural geographies. The following should reassure readers who fear any essentialization or neo-colonialism.

<sup>3</sup> I have only been able to include a portion of the available and pertinent references on New Age and related phenomena in Latin America. For a review of literature on the topic in English, see D'Andrea (2018).

<sup>4</sup> A quick look at the contents of the two major US journals in the sociology of religion, *Sociology of Religion* and *Journal for the Sociological Study of Religion* will suffice to support my argument.

<sup>5</sup> Voas (2008) has made this argument about Greece: that its ‘secular transition’ just started, while it did in the 1920s in most other Western countries. For my critique, and a debate, see Gauthier (2020b), Stolz (2020).

<sup>6</sup> I don't have the space to develop on a theory of religion here, but I think we

obviously need a broader rather than limited one in a case like this. For my discussion of a three-level definition of religion as a tri-axial symbolic system of the gift that is particularly relevant here as in many other contexts, see Gauthier (2016; cf. also Tarot 2000).

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that much of what is presented here can seem affirmed rather than demonstrated. A proper argument with references can be found in Gauthier (2020a).

<sup>8</sup> The only good use of the concept of secularization is a strict one, referring to institutional dynamics by which religious institutions give up more or less forcibly the responsibility of certain provisions or property to the state or the public.

<sup>9</sup> A notable exception is de la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga (2005). Most authors who have used concepts linked to marketization (e.g. Berger, 1980 [1967]; Luckmann, 1967; Stolz, 2008; Roof, 1999; Einstein, 2008) outside of a strictly Rational Choice framework fail to define them and end up outsourcing the analysis to market economics. For an analysis and critique, see Taira (2008), Moberg and Martikainen (2018) and Gauthier (2020a, 2021a).

<sup>10</sup> For a radical critique, see namely Gauthier (2020a).

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*¿Por qué todos estos “neos”? ¿Por qué ahora?  
las condiciones estructurales de las “espiritualidades Nueva Era” en la  
era del mercado global, visto desde Latinoamérica*

**Resumen:** Este artículo comienza con una crítica de los actuales enfoques dominantes que comparten los supuestos implícitos de lo que yo llamo el “paradigma de la secularización”, mostrando cómo y por qué estos enfoques son inadecuados para entender la importancia y la constitución de la neo-nebulosa (Nueva Era, neopaganismo, neo-indigenismo, neo-chamanismo y fenómenos relacionados). A continuación, el artículo se propone esbozar los lineamientos del modelo Estado-Nación-Mercado Global, destacando las características específicas de la religión en ambos regímenes. El artículo sigue con una discusión que muestra cómo las características de las religiosidades neo-nebulosas pueden relacionarse con las condiciones sociales creadas por la revolución neoliberal y consumista. El análisis concluye argumentando que la religión neo-nebulosa participa en la producción de un yo cosmopolita que puede navegar por los flujos siempre fluyentes del capitalismo global contemporáneo en mayor o menor medida para los públicos predominantemente urbanos, educados y de clase media, al tiempo que “engrandece” y conecta el yo, la naturaleza y el cosmos. Este artículo se centra específicamente en América Latina, en relación con “Occidente” y las tendencias globales. También incluye notas sobre la cuestión del “reencantamiento” o (re)apropiación de los sitios arqueológicos por parte de la neo-nebulosa.

**Palabras clave:** Nueva era; Neo-paganismo; Neo-indianismo; Religión; Sociedad de mercado; Pentecostalismo; Cosmopolitanismo

*Por que todos esses “neos”? Por que agora?  
as condições estruturais das “espiritualidades Nova Era” na era do  
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**Resumo:** Este artigo começa com uma crítica às atuais abordagens dominantes que compartilham os pressupostos implícitos do que chamo de “paradigma da secularização”, mostrando como e por que essas abordagens são inadequadas para compreender a importância e constituição da Neo-Nebulosa (Nova Era, Neopaganismo, Neoindianismo, Neoxamanismo e fenômenos relacionados). O artigo então se propõe a esboçar os contornos dos modelos do Estado-nação e do Mercado-global, destacando as características específicas da religião em ambos os regimes. Em seguida, é realizada uma discussão que mostra como as características das religiosidades Neo-Nebulosas podem ser relacionadas às condições sociais criadas pela revolução neoliberal e consumista. A análise conclui argumentando que a religião Neo-Nebulosa atua na produção de um self cosmopolita que pode navegar nos fluxos em constante movimento

do capitalismo global contemporâneo - em composições mais ou menos contraculturais, para um público predominantemente urbano, educado e de classe média -, enquanto “engrandece” e conecta o Self, a natureza e o cosmos. O foco específico do artigo é a América Latina, em sua relação ao “Ocidente” e às tendências globais. Também são incluídas algumas notas sobre a questão do “reencantamento” ou (re)apropriação de sítios arqueológicos pela Neo-Nebulosa.

**Palavras-chave:** Nova Era; Neopaganismo; Neoindianismo; Religião; Sociedade de mercado; Pentecostalismo; Cosmopolitanismo