Brazil's Cosmic War:
Apocalypticism, Cosmology, and Exorcism in the Pentecostal Holy War on Candomblé and Umbanda

By

SARAH NEACE
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Approved:

Flagg Miller, Chair

Allison Coudert

Stephen Selka

Committee in Charge

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to understand the intensifying religious conflict in Brazil in which militant Pentecostals have been waging war on Afro-Brazilian religions, namely Candomblé and Umbanda. I focus on the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD)*, also known as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), the notorious neo-Pentecostal megachurch that has led the charge against Afro-Brazilian religions. Scholars and journalists have pinpointed several key social and economic factors that have spurred and shaped this conflict, such as religious competition, moral disagreement, and racism. I acknowledge the significance of such factors in this violent encounter, but I align with scholars who recognize that cosmology also plays a key role here. Thus, I analyze the religious teachings, beliefs, and rituals that have justified and/or inspired Pentecostal violence against Afro-Brazilian religions. I use three key organizing lines of interrogation. First, what drives many churches and adherents of Brazilian Pentecostalism, especially neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG, to practice spiritual (and physical) warfare? Second, why are the Afro-Brazilian religions, which are relatively small and vulnerable, targeted so heavily? Finally, how and why do Pentecostal worshippers internalize and reproduce the demonizing ideas about Afro-Brazilian religions espoused by religious leadership?

I approach the first question by tracing the UCKG's spiritual warfare ideology and practices to premillennialism. Drawing on church media, especially recorded sermons from the UCKG's streaming service, this dissertation presents an account of the UCKG's eschatology to argue for an apocalypticism that scholars of this church have generally overlooked. Contrary to recent arguments that because the UCKG embraces prosperity theology, it must also have an optimistic–i.e., postmillennial–eschatology, I have found that the church embraces a doomsday premillennialist vision inspired by a literal reading of the book of Revelation. This vision bolsters Christian exceptionalism, ties salvation to spiritual warfare, and encourages militancy against anyone and anything deemed evil by the church, ultimately fostering conflict. To address my second research question, my analysis compares the cosmologies of the Afro-Brazilian religions and Pentecostalism using the lens of divine cure to illuminate the inverted roles

possession and exorcism play for these groups in causing suffering or facilitating divine healing. I argue that cosmological overlap and inversion help explain why Afro-Brazilian religions are seen as a potent spiritual enemy within Pentecostalism's apocalyptic scenario. In the context of an enchanted universe, Pentecostals believe in the spirits and the ritual efficacy of Candomblé and Umbanda, but contend that their spirits and rituals are demonic and bring illness and suffering to the Earth, which can only be cured by Pentecostalism's divine cure of ritual exorcism. Inherent in this cosmological inversion are contrasting semiotic ideologies regarding human, divine, and spirit agency. Lastly, I demonstrate through semiotic analysis how UCKG exorcisms ritualize spiritual warfare against Afro-Brazilian religions. Understanding how exorcisms symbolically immerse participants in a world where Candomblé and Umbanda are "proven" to be evil–and where defeating them is a moral imperative–helps to explain how Pentecostal believers on the ground might become convinced to engage in violence against them.

Finally, this dissertation considers how the Brazilian conflict between Pentecostals and practitioners of Candomblé and Umbanda reflects and illuminates broader regional and global currents, such as militant religious responses to secularism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism; the explosive mix of religion and politics within and beyond secular countries in recent years, fostered by the ability of social media to magnify differences and foment division; and challenges to religious freedom norms and laws posed by proselytizing, universalist religions. The ideologies and tactics of absolutist Brazilian neo-Pentecostals–especially apocalypticism and a heavy reliance on media technologies to not only proselytize but also to disparage purported enemies–echo and shed light upon those of other militant religious groups around the world. Thus, this dissertation's conclusion will consider how my analysis of this conflict offers lessons for understanding similar conflicts globally.

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Though it has been several years since I was able to conduct research in Brazil, I would like to once again thank Thaddeus Blanchette and Ana Paula Silva for their friendship and guidance while I was there. I also appreciate Sonia Correa for her hospitality, and Jandira Queiroz, Marcelo Freixo, Peter Fry, and Robson Cruz for helping me in various ways with my research in Rio de Janeiro. This dissertation was born out of that initial MA research, and I am indebted to those who helped me along the way.

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Contents

Introduction

In March of 2018, a Candomblé temple in Maceió, in northeastern Brazil, was attacked.[1] According to the temple *mãe de santo* or priestess, Nailza Araújo, adherents were bombarded by a "rain of rocks" that fell on the property for several hours straight, forcing children who were out in the yard to seek shelter inside. No one was apprehended for the attack, but a large Pentecostal Christian population lived in the surrounding neighborhood, and based on previous encounters, Araújo said she was certain that Pentecostals threw the rocks from a neighboring yard.[2]

The attack on Araújo's *terreiro* (temple) was not unusual: it had been vandalized several times before.[3] Assaults on Brazil's African-derived religions, which include but are not limited to Candomblé and Umbanda, have been on the rise in recent decades. The situation has escalated in the last few years, with registered instances of religious intolerance throughout Brazil increasing annually since 2018.[4] Evangelicals, especially Pentecostals, are leading the charge. The rapid growth of Pentecostalism–a Protestant movement that emphasizes the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as faith healing and speaking in tongues–has spurred a resurgence of violence against the Afro-Brazilian religions, which were historically persecuted but had achieved relatively equal rights in Brazil's contemporary democratic era. Pentecostals undermine this progress by carrying out attacks from the physical spaces of pulpits and city streets as well as the digital spaces of the web.

The loudest opposition to Afro-Brazilian religions comes from within neo-Pentecostalism, the most recent wave of Pentecostalism (beginning in the 1970s), known for mega-churches, an emphasis on

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[1] "Religiosos De Matriz Africana Relatam Ataques Contra Terreiro Em Maceió," TNH1, March 5th, 2018, www.tnh1.com.br/noticia/nid/religiosos-de-matriz-africana-relatam-ataques-contra-terreiro-em-maceio/.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Chris Dalby, "Brazil's Evangelical Gangs Waging War on Afro-Brazilian Religions," InSight Crime, January 13, 2020, http://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/brazil-evangelical-christian-gangs/.

prosperity theology and exorcism, and the use of mass media. Among the harshest and most influential critics of Candomblé and Umbanda is Brazil's quintessential neo-Pentecostal mega-church, the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (IURD), known in the English-speaking world as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). In Brazil, the UCKG is the church most commonly accused of promoting violence because it frequently exorcises Afro-Brazilian religions' deities from adherents during church services, and it uses wide-reaching media platforms, including evangelical soap operas and best-selling books, to further demonize and persecute Candomblé and Umbanda.

This conflict is the topic of this dissertation. There are numerous elements of Pentecostalism's war on Afro-Brazilian religions that warrant investigation, especially its causes. While these religious groups initially seem quite different, they are remarkably similar in terms of social composition and even ritual practices and other elements of cosmology. I seek to explain why two groups that are so alike have become arch enemies. I use three key organizing lines of interrogation to examine this violent encounter. First, what drives many churches and adherents of Brazilian Pentecostalism, especially neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG, to practice spiritual (and physical) warfare? Second, why are the Afro-Brazilian religions, which are relatively small and vulnerable, targeted so heavily? Finally, how and why do Pentecostal worshippers internalize and reproduce the demonizing ideas about Afro-Brazilian religions espoused by religious leadership? [5] Another way to frame these three questions is: what is it about Pentecostalism that fosters militancy, what is it about Afro-Brazilian religions (real or imagined) that trigger Pentecostals to see them as an enemy, and how do members of the former become convinced to support and even take up violence against the latter?

Scholars and journalists have proposed numerous causes of this conflict, with many pointing to economic or socio-cultural drivers of violence, such as religious competition, divergent moral discourses,

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[5] I am not claiming that all Pentecostal churches or adherents are intolerant. I am discussing an important problem that pertains to a portion of the Pentecostal population, likely a small portion with loud voices.

and race and racism.[6] I will discuss the importance of such explanations for conflict later in this introduction. However, it is my contention that they do not fully explain the fervor with which Pentecostals are waging war on Candomblé and Umbanda. While it is crucial to examine the social and economic causes of religious violence, scholars too often overlook or diminish the importance of religious ideas and beliefs. Pentecostals usually frame their opposition to Afro-Brazilian religions in spiritual terms, accusing them of worshipping demons and practicing evil sorcery. Pastors and bishops pose Candomblé and Umbanda as enemies in a spiritual battle in which the fate of the world is at stake. Relatedly, the UCKG claims that because of satanic influence, the Earth will soon catch fire, and the Battle of Armageddon will follow, in which all demonic forces must and will be defeated.[7] It is critical to take such claims seriously because this kind of apocalyptic belief has immense power to motivate people to carry out astonishing and atrocious deeds. As Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins point out, nearly all the religious cults that have been involved in spectacularly violent episodes have manifested distinctly apocalyptic outlooks.[8] This dissertation is most concerned with such teachings and beliefs, as well as the rituals that similarly inspire conflict and/or elevate it to the level of the sacred. Accordingly, in alignment with a few scholars in my field who attend to the cosmic nature of Pentecostalism's war on the Afro-Brazilian religions,[9] I place eschatology and cosmology at the center of my analysis.

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[6] This dissertation is a continuation and re-formulation of the research I conducted for my MA thesis, where I examined such possible explanations for this conflict. See: Neace, Sarah, *Religious Tension in Brazil: The Rise of Militant Pentecostalism and Implications for Afro-Brazilian Religions*, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2016. Note that the situation is as tense or worse today in 2024 than it was in 2016.

[7] The UCKG makes these claims in countless sermons. I analyze a selection of such sermons in chapter one.

[8] Stephen Hunt, *Christian Millenarianism: From the Early Church to Waco* (Indiana University Press, 2001): 8. Hunt is referencing Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Violence and Exemplary Dualism: Beyond the Extrinsic Model," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no. 3 (September 1, 1995): 10–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559508427305.

[9] Especially Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, for example in: "Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions: Explaining the Attacks on Symbols of the African Religious Heritage in Contemporary Brazil," trans. David Allan Rogers, *Mana* 3, no. SE (2007): 0–0.

This dissertation will present an account of the UCKG's eschatology to argue for an apocalypticism that is almost never recognized in scholarship on this church. The UCKG's spiritual warfare ideology and practices stem directly from a premillennialist eschatology that calls believers to fight evil or risk getting left behind to face hell on Earth when Christ raptures his deserving followers up to heaven. By tying salvation to spiritual warfare against evil and encouraging militancy against anyone and anything deemed evil by the church, this apocalyptic eschatology fosters conflict. Additionally, my analysis will compare the cosmologies of Pentecostalism and the Afro-Brazilian religions to illuminate the inverted roles possession and exorcism play for these groups in causing suffering or facilitating divine healing. I argue that cosmological overlap and inversion help explain why Afro-Brazilian religions are seen as a potent spiritual enemy within Pentecostalism's apocalyptic scenario. In the context of an enchanted universe, Pentecostals believe in the spirits and the ritual efficacy of Candomblé and Umbanda, but contend that their spirits and rituals are demonic and propagate illness and suffering, which can only be cured by Pentecostalism and its ritual exorcism. Underlying this inversion are the groups' contrasting semiotic ideologies about human, divine, and spirit agency. Subsequently, I will demonstrate through semiotic analysis how UCKG exorcism rituals symbolically construct the Afro-Brazilian religions as evil and enact a spiritual battle against them. Understanding how exorcisms ritualize spiritual warfare, symbolically immersing participants in a world where defeating Candomblé and Umbanda is a moral imperative, helps to explain how believers on the ground might become convinced to engage in violence.

Finally, I will address how this Brazilian conflict between Pentecostals and followers of Candomblé and Umbanda reflects and illuminates broader regional and global currents, such as the explosive mix of religion and politics within and beyond secular countries in recent years, fostered by the ability of social media to magnify differences and foment division. The UCKG and other neo-Pentecostal churches have had an enormous impact on Brazilian politics with negative repercussions for non-

Christian minorities like the Afro-Brazilian religions.[10] The religious teachings underlying the UCKG's politics–namely, apocalypticism–are mirrored in numerous cases outside Brazil where the politicization of religion and religionization of politics similarly threaten to undermine tolerance and pluralism, including the QAnon movement in the United States. More broadly, the Brazilian conflict is a case of a global resurgence of religious violence, especially involving new religions. The ideologies and tactics of absolutist Brazilian neo-Pentecostals echo and shed light upon those of other religious militants around the world, and this dissertation's conclusion will consider how my analysis offers lessons for understanding similar conflicts globally.

First, however, this introduction will contextualize the problem at hand and lay out my approach to it. In the sections that follow, I will describe Brazil's changing religious landscape and situate the contemporary intolerance and violence suffered by Afro-Brazilian religions in the history of Catholic and state persecution of these religions. I will then outline the major explanations given by scholars to explain the violence perpetrated by Pentecostals, ending with a discussion on cosmology and the centrality of spiritual warfare within the UCKG. The introduction will wrap-up with a section on the theoretical frameworks and perspectives employed in this dissertation–notably emphasizing the importance of ideas and beliefs for understanding religious violence–before finally providing a chapter outline and a description of my research methods.

Brazil's Changing Religious Landscape

Since the Portuguese colonized Brazil in the sixteenth century, Catholicism has enjoyed cultural, political, and demographic predominance. The 2010 census (the most recent census available with data on

[10] The UCKG and evangelicals more broadly helped elect Brazil's controversial former president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022). Bolsonaro is not often described as sympathetic to the Afro-Brazilian religions, and progressives sometimes blame his conservative populist politics for the latest uptick in violence against Candomblé and Umbanda, which began roughly in 2018, the year Bolsonaro was elected.

religious affiliation) reported that an estimated 123 million Roman Catholics still resided in Brazil, more than any other country in the world.[11] However, the share of Brazil's overall population that identifies as Catholic has been dropping steadily in recent decades, while the percentage of Brazilians belonging to Protestant and especially Pentecostal churches has been rising.[12] Approximately 92% of Brazilians called themselves Catholic in 1970 compared with 65% in 2010. Conversely, Protestantism grew from 5% to about 22% of the population in the same period.[13] Since the 2010 census, the trend has continued. Catholics were estimated to comprise only 51% of the population in 2019, with "Evangelics" estimated at 31%; evangelical Protestants are expected to equal or outnumber Catholics by 2032.[14]

Conversion is the main driver of these shifting demographics: Catholicism is swiftly losing adherents to Pentecostalism and other religions. Some studies find that in addition to still holding the largest Catholic population, Brazil simultaneously houses the largest Pentecostal population in the world.[15] The 2010 census reported 25 million Brazilians belonging to Pentecostal churches, or about 13% of Brazilians (more than half of the share of Protestants at the time). [16] In 2013, the U.S. government

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[11] Pew Research Center, "Brazil's Changing Religious Landscape," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, July 18, 2013, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/07/18/brazils-changing-religious-landscape/.
[12] Ibid. "Protestant" is broadly defined here by the Pew Research Center to include Brazilians who identify with historically mainline and Evangelical Protestant denominations as well as Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Church. It also includes members of independent, neo-Pentecostal churches, such as the UCKG and the God and Love Pentecostal Church, both of which were founded in Brazil. In keeping with categories in the Brazilian census, it does not include Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses.
[13] Ibid. These numbers are approximate and census data is imperfect. Many Brazilians associate with more than one religion, as religious affiliation and participation is more fluid in Brazil than in the United States. Many factors can influence a Brazilian's self-reported religious label. Because of the stigma associated with Afro-Brazilian religions, membership is likely to be underreported. However, the numbers give an approximate view of the wide-scale trend of conversion and Protestant growth.
[14] Statista Research Department, "Evolution of Catholics and Evangelists in Brazil between 1994 and 2032," Statista, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1255688/evolution-of-catholics-and-evangelists-brazil/.
Statista does not define "Evangelics" but likely uses the term as something approximate to Protestants, since the majority of Protestants in Brazil are evangelical and the terms are often used synonymously in the Brazilian context.
[15] Wes Granberg-Michaelson, "Think Christianity Is Dying? No, Christianity Is Shifting Dramatically," *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 20 May 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/20/think-christianity-is-dying-no-christianity-is-shifting-dramatically/?utm_term=.fcbadbffeaeb.
[16] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistica (IGBE), "Sinopse do Censo Demográfico 2010," IBGE, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20220204123120/https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv49230.pdf.

estimated that 60% of Brazilian Protestants identified as Pentecostal.[17] The Afro-Brazilian religions have also experienced growth, albeit in much smaller numbers. In 1970, about 2 million Brazilians belonged to "other religions" (including Spiritism, Candomblé, Umbanda, other Afro-Brazilian religions, and global religions like Buddhism). This number increased to about 6 million (4% of Brazil's population) by 2000 and 10 million (5%) by 2010. Much of this growth was within the "Afro-Brazilian religions" category. The 2010 census listed nearly 3.9 million Spiritists, 407,500 Umbanda adherents, nearly 168,000 Candomblé adherents, 14,000 adherents to "other Afro-Brazilian religions," and 63,000 Brazilians who adhered to Indigenous Traditions.[18] Small but consistently increasing numbers of Brazilians also identified with no religion at all (8%, and likely more since 2010), reflecting a global trend.

There have also been shifts *within* Catholicism, which is witnessing a Charismatic revival. That is, a substantial number of adherents and congregations embrace some Pentecostal beliefs and practices–such as faith healing and a belief in other miracles–and sometimes self-identify as Pentecostal despite church affiliation.[19] In 2010, 34% of the total Brazilian population were considered Charismatics, belonging to either Catholic or mainline (non-evangelical) Protestant churches but holding Pentecostal beliefs and/or identity.[20] Some scholars describe this as the Pentecostalization of Catholicism.[21]

These trends hold true throughout much of the greater Latin American region: Catholicism is said to have lost its monopoly but has also become more dynamic; Pentecostalism is gaining widespread influence; and Brazil's unique blend of African-derived religions has been exported to neighboring countries and are growing.[22]

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[17] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2013," U.S. Department of State, https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2013religiousfreedom/.
[18] IBGE, "Sinopse do Censo Demográfico 2010."
[19] Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary, eds, *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (Rutgers University Press, 2007).
[20] IBGE, "Sinpose do Censo Demográfico 2010."
[21] Steigenga and Cleary, *Conversion of a Continent*.
[22] Ibid.

Pentecostalism and the UCKG

Pentecostalism has been one of the fastest growing religions worldwide in recent decades. With roots in Wesleyan Methodism and the American Holiness movement, it became a distinct movement around the turn of the twentieth century, with historians frequently citing the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles as a pivotal founding moment. In 1970, there were an estimated 58 million adherents around the globe, and over 650 million by 2021.[23] Allan Anderson explains that perhaps the central reason for this expansion is that Pentecostalism is fundamentally an "'ends of the earth,' missionary, polycentric, transnational religion."[24] The evangelical nature of the movement means that it emphasizes believers serving as witnesses for Jesus Christ in in the farthest reaches of the globe. Pentecostalism has achieved the most success in the Global South, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

While Pentecostalism is not an official denomination with a singular doctrine, it is distinguished by a core set of theological features. Chiefly, it emphasizes the experience of the Spirit or Gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as divine healing, *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), baptism in the Holy Spirit (a form of possession), and direct revelations from God. For many churches, exorcism is a key component. A literalist approach to the Bible is also common.[25] Regarding eschatology, i.e., views on the last things or end days, Pentecostal churches tend to embrace premillennialism or related forms of dispensationalism. Briefly, this theology teaches that the End Times are here or approaching and will soon be followed by the hellish period of Tribulation, the Rapture, and the battle of Armageddon, which will usher in the holy

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[23] Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 15–25, https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939320966220.

[24] Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

[25] Although reading the Bible always requires interpretation and in practice, literalists often employ selective readings. I will discuss literalism more in chapter one and this dissertation's conclusion.

era of the millennial kingdom.[26] Premillennialism is usually associated with dualism because, as Susan Harding argues, its logic of history is an unfolding of good and evil, and, I would add, one that is immanent.[27] Scholars have perceived shifts in global and Brazilian Pentecostal eschatology toward a more optimistic vision of the last days, but I offer a partial challenge to this in chapter one.

Because *Pentecostal* and *evangelical* are sometimes used interchangeably in the Latin American context, a clarification of their distinctions is in order. In an oft-cited description of evangelicalism, David Bebbington identifies a quadrilateral of evangelical traits: "conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.'"[28] Within this framework, evangelicalism is not particular to any denomination, but some Protestant branches tend to espouse and practice its tenets more than others, including Pentecostalism. Thus, while most Pentecostals are evangelical, many evangelicals are not Pentecostal. *Evangelical* has a very flexible usage in Latin America, where scholars and the public often refer to members of any Protestant denomination and all Protestants in general as *evangélicos* instead of being more specific. Thus, many of the publications I use reference evangelicals, and whether they aim to describe all Brazilian Protestants or mostly just Pentecostals depends on the context. Of course, some non-Pentecostal evangelicals have disdain for Candomblé and Umbanda, but for the most part I will reference Pentecostalism, the category that most accurately encompasses the individuals and groups waging war on Afro-Brazilian religions.

Neo-Pentecostalism is a subset of broader Pentecostalism. It refers to the "third wave" of the Pentecostal movement, beginning in the 1970s, that produced churches with "a much more centralized

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[26] Susan Harding, "Imagining the Last Days: The Politics of Apocalyptic Language," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (1994): 14-44.
[27] Ibid., 24.
[28] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 3.

organization superficially comparable in its pyramidal structure to that of the Catholic Church."[29] Neo-Pentecostal churches are distinguished by monumental buildings in central locations, an ambition to become prominent social institutions, and the use of business management techniques in church operations.[30] In the Brazilian context, the religion is associated with political influence, charismatic leadership, and an appeal to lower-educated and impoverished populations.[31]

Three core elements of neo-Pentecostalism are important for understanding this conflict. First, it embraces the use of the media for the work of mass proselytism and religious advertising (resulting in the nickname "electronic churches"). The television and radio stations acquired by neo-Pentecostal churches are often used to attack or denounce their proclaimed enemies. Second, neo-Pentecostalism allots a central role to exorcism and to defeating demons and evil. This spiritual battle is often extended to other religions and other social groups deemed demonic. Likely with the UCKG in mind, Vagner Gonçalves da Silva argues that Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism is partly *defined* by "the centrality of the theology of the spiritual battle against other religious denominations, especially the Afro-Brazilian religions and Spiritism."[32] Finally, prosperity theology is central to neo-Pentecostal doctrine.

Prosperity theology, also called the prosperity gospel or "health and wealth" gospel, is a theological movement embraced by various Christian denominations and churches, especially within evangelicalism. Prosperity gospel emphasizes four themes: health, wealth, faith, and victory.[33] It teaches that through faith, spiritual forces can turn the spoken word into reality. Further, faith results in and can

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[29] Patricia Birman and David Lehmann, "Religion and the Media in a Battle for Ideological Hegemony: the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and TV Globo in Brazil," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 18.2, (1999): 2.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Paul Freston,"'Neo-pentecostalism' in Brazil: Problems of Definition and the Struggle for Hegemony," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 44.105 (1999): 145–162. The association with political power has only increased since Freston's article.
[32] Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, "Crossroads: Conflicts between Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil* (Brill, 2017), 490.
[33] Here I barely scratch the surface. For an excellent book on the history of prosperity theology, see: Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

therefore be measured in one's personal wealth and health, "making material reality the measure of the success of immaterial faith."[34] Believers trust that no circumstance can stop them from living victorious lives here on earth. Prosperity theology is a legacy of the nineteenth century New Thought Movement (a mind healing movement that focused on the constructive power of thought), as well as American pragmatism, individualism, and belief in and desire for upward mobility.[35] Essek William Kenyon, an early-twentieth-century Pentecostal faith healer, adapted New Thought to his religion, teaching that spirit-minded Christians could exercise dominion over the physical world through faith-filled words.[36] While Kenyon was a minority in early Pentecostalism, his ideas took root: for decades, prosperity theology has been a primary feature of the Pentecostal movement, as it is for the UCKG.

The *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (IURD), also known as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), is perhaps Brazil's most famous neo-Pentecostal church. Often described as its own denomination, it houses Brazil's third largest Pentecostal congregation with at least two million worshippers (while the church has reported seven to eight million members in Brazil, Stefan van der Hoek estimates its membership at closer to two million).[37] It boasts up to twelve million members worldwide (though exact numbers are uncertain). Bishop Edir Macedo, who founded the church in 1977, remains its charismatic and beloved leader. A polarizing but influential figure in Brazil, Macedo has amassed a media empire and enough of a fortune to earn him a place on Forbes' list of billionaires, owning more than twenty TV stations and seventy radio stations in Brazil alone.[38]

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[34] Bowler, *Blessed*, 7.
[35] Ibid. See also: Allison P. Coudert, "'Toxic Positivity': From New Thought to Donald Trump," in *Religious Dimensions of Conspiracy Theories* (Routledge, 2022). Other contemporary legacies of New Thought include Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* and both New Age and secular techniques for manifestation and affirmation.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Stefan van der Hoek, "Immigrant Pentecostalism in the Emergence of the COVID-19 Crisis: Reactions and Responses from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Berlin," *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 7, no. 2 (November 1, 2023): 533–52, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-022-00141-0.
[38] Rowan M Gerety, "Miracles on Demand," *The Revealer*, The Revealer / NYU, March 22, 2013.

The UCKG is no stranger to controversy in Brazil or abroad. Many describe it as a "cult."[39] It is criticized for applying heavy pressure to tithe (a pitfall of prosperity theology, as I will discuss),[40] and it has been accused of financial crimes in several countries.[41] Sensationalist news articles around the world have made or reported on wild allegations against the UCKG, even including the alleged forced sterilization of some of its pastors in Africa.[42] The church has also been the target of numerous lawsuits in Brazil, including suits brought by Afro-Brazilian religions seeking protection from hate speech. Despite its critics, the UCKG continues to find global success. Describing its growth in 2005, Paul Freston wrote, "It is possible that no Christian denomination founded in the Third World has ever been exported so successfully and rapidly; only 27 years after its establishment in 1977, it has over a thousand churches in some 80 countries around the world, outside its native Brazil."[43] This reach has expanded since 2005.

Scholars often frame the conflict under study as a neo-Pentecostal problem, partly because mega churches like the UCKG tend to go on the offensive more than smaller, historical Pentecostal churches. I, too, regularly reference neo-Pentecostalism. That said, some of the smaller churches have espoused intolerance, many place an emphasis on spiritual warfare, and physical and social media attacks have come from members from a range of Pentecostal churches. Many of the theological elements that I find relevant to this conflict were born out of the historical Pentecostal movement and still feature in smaller

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[39] For example: Madden, "Controversial Church Branded a 'dangerous Cult' Planning on Coming to Belfast," *BelfastTelegraph.Co.Uk*, April 25, 2018, sec. Northern Ireland, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/controversial-church-branded-a-dangerous-cult-planning-on-coming-to-belfast/36844800.html.
[40] For example: Maeve McClenaghan, "'Exposed to Horrendous Things': Young People in UK Speak out against Evangelical Church," The Guardian, accessed January 25, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/29/young-uk-people-speak-out-against-evangelical-church-universal-kingdom-god.
[41] For example: "Angola Impounds Brazilian Churches for Alleged Fraud," Monitor, accessed January 25, 2024, https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/world/angola-impounds-brazilian-churches-for-alleged-fraud-1921742.
[42] Lucky Mzimkhulu, "How The Universal Church (UCKG) Sterilised Its Pastors Not To Ever Have Kids Without Their Knowledge - Shocking Details Emerge," iHarare News, February 22, 2021, https://iharare.com/the-universal-church-sterilised-vasectomy-its-pastors/.
[43] Paul Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: A Brazilian Church Finds Success in Southern Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 33–65, https://doi.org/10.1163/1570066052995816.

churches today. For these reasons, I often refer to Pentecostalism broadly when describing the conflict under study. I must make the caveat, though, that not all Pentecostal churches or worshippers attack or even condemn Afro-Brazilian religions. Furthermore, many Pentecostals disapprove of the UCKG. [44]

A final point of Pentecostal terminology: many Brazilian adherents of Pentecostal churches eschew the label *Pentecostal* in favor of calling themselves *crentes* (believers).[45] Members of the public, especially critics of the UCKG, have grabbed onto the label and use it derisively. Some of the sources cited in this dissertation use the term in a neutral sense.

The Afro-Brazilian Religions

Brazil's African-derived religions, also known as the religions of the African matrix or the Afro-Brazilian "cults," include, most prominently, Candomblé and Umbanda. Various other labels that fall under the category include *Batuque*, *Cantimbo*, *Macumba*, *Quimbanda*, *Tambor de Mina*, and *Xambà*. These describe, roughly, variants of and regionally associated traditions related to Candomblé. There is little centralization or hierarchical structure across Brazil's many Afro-Brazilian religious communities. Instead, individual *terreiros* (temple houses/communities) tailor overlapping traditions from a rich constellation of African- and indigenous- influenced beliefs and practices.[46] Despite their small size, these religions hold an important place in the Brazilian religious market (and the national imaginary) because they welcome clients from the public to consult mediums for services like love magic, vengeance against an enemy, or healing. They also host popular, public celebrations. However, they are not missionary

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[44] As Philip Jenkins is careful to remind us: "From the nature of mass media, we do not hear about the other responsible churches that are not involved in abuse or exploitation, and which work faithfully for their members." Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 82.

[45] Paulo Barrera Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 117–31, https://brill.com/view/title/32952. Rivera finds this to be especially common in the urban periphery/slums, where Pentecostalism is least homogenous.

[46] Steven Engler and Ênio Brito, "Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous-Influenced Religions," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 142–69.

religions and typically require intensive spiritual and ritual training to fully participate. Despite having diverse racial demographics and often retaining historical ties to Christianity, the religions tend to maintain strong connections to African heritage and black and Afro-descendent identities. This is especially true for Candomblé.

Candomblé is a syncretic religion built on oral traditions with roots in the varied Yoruba, Fon, and Banto animist religions that were brought to Brazil by African slaves in the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.[47] The first official Candomblé temples of worship, which were dedicated to Yoruba gods and goddesses, were established in early nineteenth-century Bahia. Originally, slaves incorporated elements of Catholicism into their traditions to feign conversion in front of Portuguese masters, and modern Candomblé rituals maintain many elements of Catholicism. Candomblé has one supreme god, called *Olodumaré* in Yoruba, but it also has several other deities and classes of spirits, most notably the *orixás* (orishas in English), which are ancestral African spirit deities.[48] The orixás have secondary identities as Catholic saints. For many worshippers, the Catholic saint names are superficial, but for others, deities and saints have conceptually merged into singular beings. A chief tenet of Candomblé is that orixás must be respected and appeased through ceremonial spirit possession (called *incorporação*– incorporation) and ritual offerings, sometimes including animal sacrifice.

There is no singular Candomblé, which is instead an umbrella category that provides some sense of shared identity for practitioners as well as a useful construct for academic description. Today, terreiros

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[47] In this section I give a highly generalized description of Candomblé. For more on the rich history of its origins, creation and spread throughout Brazil, as well as modern variants, see: Engler and Brito, "Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous-Influenced Religions"; Vagner Gonçalves da Silva and Fernando Giobellina Brumana, "Candomblé: Religion, World Vision, and Experience," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 170–85; Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, *Candomblé e Umbanda: Caminhos da Devoção Brasileira* (Selo Negro, 2005);.and Nei Lopez. "African Religions in Brazil, Negotiation, and Resistance: A Look from Within," *Journal of Black Studies* 34.6 (2004). Sage Publications, Inc.: 838–60.

[48] While outsiders often refer to Candomblé as polytheistic (including many anthropologists of the past and some still today), many Candomblé practitioners and contemporary anthropologists assert that the religion is monotheistic because its spirit hierarchy is headed by a single, supreme god. Christianity of course has its own history of contesting charges of polytheism, with the Holy Trinity functioning to dispel accusations that Jesus is a second god.

that emphasize traditions from the Yoruba–called *Nago* in Brazil–are sometimes idealized by practitioners and black rights activists, and even privileged by scholars and journalists, for being the "purest" or the most authentic Candomblé. In contrast, houses that emphasize indigenous Brazilian and/or non-Nago African–namely Bantu–traditions, are often set apart by outsiders and take on qualifiers in their names.[49] Similarly, Candomblé enjoys more esteem than Umbanda in many circles for its "purity."

To introduce Umbanda, it is necessary to discuss Spiritism (*Espiritismo*), which was not created in Brazil but has been uniquely molded there. Established in mid-nineteenth century France by Allan Kardec, Spiritism combines a reincarnationist doctrine with Christianity and mediumship. Spiritists emphasize God as supreme and believe that he presides over a material and a spirit world. Spirits can traverse through both worlds as they please and can communicate with humans through mediums. Brazilian Spiritism, also called Kardecism (*Kardecismo*), has distinguished itself as a variant of the global religion by incorporating healing and miracles into its practice, reflecting mixture with Afro-Brazilian traditions.[50] Kardecism is not as "Afro-Brazilian" as Candomblé, though, because its European origins and textual doctrine made it more popular with literate whites upon its introduction to Brazil in the nineteenth century. Today, Spiritism is a broad category, used to refer to both Kardecism–the specific, text-based religion–and a broad set of hybrid popular practices that involve working with spirits to provide services of healing, cursing, and divination, sometimes including Candomblé and Umbanda.[51] Some sources categorize Spiritism as an Afro-Brazilian religion, and Pentecostal critics like the UCKG's Bishop Macedo also often lump it in with Candomblé and Umbanda.

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[49] For example, *Candomblé de Caboclo,* used to describe a style of Candomblé that incorporates indigenous spirits. Engler and Brito, "Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous-Influenced Religions."
[50] Steven Engler and Artur Cesar Isaia, "Kardecism," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 186.
[51] Ibid., 191. Note that the 2010 census did not distinguish between Kardecism and Spiritism, so the nearly four million Brazilians who self-identified as Spiritists may have belonged to various religious communities.

Umbanda, founded in the 1920s, mixes Candomblé and Kardecism with indigenous Brazilian traditions, including the worship of and communication with animal spirits. Umbanda was founded by Spiritists who supposedly sought out Afro-Brazilian rituals in order to add excitement and emotion to their practices, leading them to draw on elements of Candomblé.[52] This is sometimes referred to as the "blackening" of Kardecism.[53] Later, *Caboclos* (indigenous spirits) were incorporated into ceremonies.[54] Thus, Umbanda became a mixture of traditions from Brazil's three principal races/cultures: white/European, black/African, and indigenous. Like Candomblé and Spiritism, Umbanda rituals focus on possession and conversing with the dead. In the 1930s, during times of persecution of what came to be known as "low Spiritism" (any Spiritism that featured African elements), some Umbanda groups de-Africanized their religion to emphasize affiliation with Kardecism.[55] Today, Umbanda communities vary on how much they emphasize the European elements of Spiritism over African traditions and vice versa.

In general, Brazil's African-derived religions minimize or eschew Christian notions of heaven and hell as well as an apocalyptic finale. Most communities believe in a human and a spirit realm, and upon death, humans are either thought to enter the spirit realm, reincarnate to become progressively more evolved, and/or become one with Oludumaré. This is not to say there is never a place for evil: variants of Candomblé, Umbanda, and especially Quimbanda fear and/or revere precarious, morally complex deities/spirits like *Exu*, the divine trickster.[56] Sometimes depicted with a pitchfork, Exu is both a spirit and class of spirits (*exus*) linked with crossroads, cemeteries, and even hell. Some communities expel and deceive him to keep him at bay; some call on him for vengeance against enemies; and some even

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[52] Steven Engler, "Umbanda and Hybridity," *Numen* 56, no. 5 (January 1, 2009): 545–77, https://doi.org/10.1163/002959709X12469430260084.
[53] Ibid., 557.
[54] Unlike *orixá*, *Caboclo* is usually capitalized in the literature on Brazilian religion.
[55] Engler and Isaia, "Kardecism," 195.
[56] For a unique, detailed portrait of Quimbanda and its variants, written by a practitioner, see: Mario Dos Ventos, *Na Gira Do Exu - Invoking the Spirits of Brazilian Quimbanda* (Lulu.com, 2008). Quimbanda is distinguished from Candomblé and Umbanda because of its emphasis on Bantu over Yoruba traditions and especially because it places exus and *pomba-giras* (the female counterpart of exus, often depicted as prostitutes) at the center of its cosmology.

associate him with the Devil, Beelzebub, and/or Lucifer.[57] But most often, Exu is simply thought of as a messenger between humans and the orixás and/or the dead; an intermediary, just one of many deities or spirits that requires offerings from practitioners. Usually capable of both good and evil, he is a figure of duality or balance. Still, he is a–if not *the*–central target of demonization by Christian critics, who paint him as evil and tend to associate him with Afro-Brazilian religions in general.

The traditions that comprise the category of Afro-Brazil religions are enormously diffuse and diverse: it would be impossible to thoroughly describe all the variations in beliefs and practices here. However, Afro-Brazilian religions are imagined by outsiders as more homogenous than they are in reality, especially by demon-fearing evangelicals. Any African-derived religion in Brazil has the potential to be subject to intolerance and/or violence. Thus, this dissertation is concerned with the Afro-Brazilian religions broadly. My sources differ on the labels they use: some refer only to Candomblé or Umbanda when describing attacks on both, and some reference Quimbanda, Macumba, and others.[58] For the sake of generalization, I usually only mention Candomblé and Umbanda by name. I make only a few references to Spiritism because of the category's ambiguities, and because I consider Kardecism somewhat separate from Afro-Brazilian religions. However, Spiritism (in both the broad and narrower sense) is indeed under attack for emphasizing spirit possession, and portions of my analysis will be applicable to describing intolerance against it.

On the Question of Growth

Numerous scholars have asked why Charismatic Catholicism, Pentecostalism, and even Afro-Brazilian religions have all experienced growth in Brazil. A common approach to this question is a

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[57] Eduardo Galeano and Marjorie Melville, "The Devil in the Slums," *CrossCurrents* 21, no. 3 (1971): 257–68.
[58] *Macumba* does not have an English translation but has an association with devil-worship. However, some practitioners of various Afro-Brazilian traditions have embraced the label, and it has also been accepted by some anthropologists as coterminous with or comparable to Candomblé and/or Spiritism.

marketplace approach, as championed by Andrew Chesnut.[59] Chesnut argues that Brazil and much of Latin America had a monopolistic religious market, with the Catholic Church as the lazy monopoly, until the twentieth century.[60] When the market opened up, religions that could offer desirable products and meet consumer demand gained converts, with the three aforementioned groups having the most success. Chesnut explains that these religions offer distinctive products that appeal to Brazilians in different ways (for example, different stances on "black magic" and morality, which I will discuss in chapter two).[61] Despite their differences, though, he asserts that their success is mainly due to offering the same valuable products in the religious marketplace: faith-healing and *pneumacentrism* (a focus on spirit possession).

Chesnut claims there is widespread demand for divine healing and pneumacentrism because Latin America has a "greater incidence of all types of physical, psychological, and spiritual afflictions."[62] Regardless of their approach to conversion, many scholars have agreed that religions that succeed in Latin America do so because they address the difficulties derived from "pathologies of poverty," like poverty-related illnesses.[63] I am hesitant to adopt a description of Latin America as essentially and uniquely plagued with afflictions. However, it is important that these religions are most widely received by Latin America's poor, and this is a global trend for Pentecostalism as well, which has experienced the most growth in regions with poor healthcare and other kinds of infrastructure.[64] Divine healing and pneumacentrism are primary avenues through which each of these religions addresses the pragmatic and

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[59] For example: Andrew Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits: Conversion and the Products of Pneumacentric Religion in Latin America's Free Market of Faith," in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, ed. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (Rutgers University Press, 2007),
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 74.
[63] For example, Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary, "Introduction," in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* (Rutgers University Press, 2007).
[64] For detailed accounts of the centrality of healing in Pentecostalism, see: Candy Gunther Brown, ed., *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

material problems of their devotees, on one hand, and offers direct religious experience and experiential access to the divine, on the other hand.

To narrow in on Pentecostalism, its growth is also credited to the appealing optimism of prosperity theology and the excitement of exorcism (although these are both intimately connected with discourses and practices of divine healing, the topic of chapter two).[65] The religion's success is also partly due, simply, to its evangelical nature. Its enormous emphasis on proselytism and the drive to save souls is part of why it very intentionally–and skillfully–competes in the marketplace. Effective evangelism tactics of Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism include its use of mass media, exciting faith healing events, loud music during church services, and expeditions into *favelas* (slums) to recruit and perform public ceremonies. The UCKG has also adopted the strategy to open churches close to bus terminals in big cities to "lure people on the go."[66] It even stations "consolers" (*consoladores*) in cemeteries to help people grieve the loss of loved ones. It also has a heavy presence in prisons, where about eighty percent of prison ministries are evangelical.[67] This "prison-to church" pipeline has resulted in the proliferation of evangelical drug-traffickers–one of the main groups attacking Candomblé and Umbanda–who have joined or returned to join drug trafficking organizations upon release from prison.

While the question of growth is not a central concern of this dissertation, it is important that some of the aspects of neo-Pentecostalism that are appealing to converts amount to or inspire conflict with other religions (namely, spiritual warfare through exorcism), and that Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions bear substantial similarities, as I will discuss.

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[65] Paul Alexander, *Signs and Wonders*.
[66] Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil," 122.
[67] Robert Muggah, "In Brazil, Religious Gang Leaders Say They're Waging a Holy War," The Conversation, November 2, 2017, http://theconversation.com/in-brazil-religious-gang-leaders-say-theyre-waging-a-holy-war-86097.

The Problem

Persecution: Past and Present

African derived traditions were persecuted for more than four centuries in Brazil before gaining a degree of respect, recognition, and relatively equal rights in the modern era. The history of this persecution cannot be untangled from the history of race relations because historically, oppression of Afro-Brazilian religions was tantamount to racism and the suppression of African culture. This began with the forced conversion of Brazil's earliest African slaves to Catholicism, the official religion of Portugal's Brazilian colony. The persecution of slaves' religions inspired the syncretism found in Candomblé, in which African traditions were masked under Catholic ones to remain undetected.

The Portuguese monarchy abolished the slave trade in 1850, although it was not illegal to own slaves in Brazil until the 1880s. Increasing numbers of Africans and Afro-Brazilians were "freed," but the government did not allocate resources to aid them in assimilating. Many reportedly died outside the properties of their former masters, having found no shelter or opportunity in the cities.[68] From the 1870s onward, the result of the "cautious and unsympathetic liberation" was that uneducated ex-slaves were thrown into competition with immigrant labor flowing into Brazil.[69] When Princess Isabel finally officially abolished slavery in 1888 (the last of the New World territories), abolition was not the culmination of a struggle for liberty but rather "a slow and procedural process" resulting in a sort of "passivity and resignation regarding black disadvantage."[70]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, white Brazilian intellectuals found inspiration in the prejudicial ideas of naturalists like French novelist Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, who wrote A*n*

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[68] Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, "Not Black, Not White: Just the Opposite: Culture, Race and National Identity in Brazil," *Center for Brazilian Studies* (University of Oxford, 2003).
[69] Ibid., 7.
[70] Ibid., 9.

Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races (1853). This book is often considered the first example of scientific racism.[71] De Gobineau condemned biological and cultural mixing, and he convinced many whites of their inherent biological superiority. His influence led Brazilian scientists to subscribe to phrenology, physicians to propose eugenics and condemn inter-racial marriages, and lawyers to call for restrictions on Africans migrating into the country as well as a separate penal code for blacks.[72]

Social and legal racism extended to any religious practices associated with Africa or blackness. Elite, white Kardecisim was often given a pass, while "low spiritism" was not. In the nineteenth century, the government adopted a racist discourse on "hygiene" that painted Candomblé and Umbanda as unhygienic and pollutant, as well as legislation that prohibited the "illicit" practices of medicine, magic, and curing.[73] *Magic* was seen as categorically opposed to *religion*, and African-derived traditions were associated with *feitiçaria* (witchcraft or sorcery). From the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, practitioners of Afro-Brazilian traditions were subject to prosecution by civil authorities and their ritual objects periodically confiscated in police raids. In 1927, a police commission was created in the federal capital of Rio de Janeiro to repress "low spiritism."[74] In 1934, a special police precinct was dedicated to enforcing these repressive measures, and in 1937, within this precinct, a Department of Drugs and Mystifications was created specifically to combat religious practices considered criminal.[75] "Lurid news accounts throughout this period portrayed African-derived religions as depraved and their followers as prone to immoral and criminal acts," Kelly Hayes explains, with outraged readers writing to newspaper editors "demanding that the authorities put an end to the scourge of black sorcery."[76]

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 10.
[73] Kelly E. Hayes, *Holy Harlots: Femininity, Sexuality, and Black Magic in Brazil* (University of California Press, 2011).
[74] Lopez, "African Religions in Brazil."
[75] Ibid.
[76] Hayes, *Holy Harlots*, 14.

In response to these actions, in 1934 and 1937, Afro-Brazilian Congresses were held in Recife and Salvador.[77] Fortunately, the presidential inauguration of the sporadically tolerant Brazilian dictator Getulio Vargas sparked a reduction in the legal persecution of Afro-Brazilian religions in the 1930s. Swayed by the Afro-Brazilian Congresses, Vargas decriminalized African religions with Presidential Decree No. 1202 in 1938.[78] However, he also re-imposed Catholicism as the official religion of Brazil and minority religions continued to experience mixed levels of oppression under his presidency.

The same era witnessed a change in the way that Brazilians conceptualized racial mixture. Lilia Moritz Schwarcz explains, "Only in the 1930s does miscegenation transform itself from being Brazil's supreme disgrace into being its sublime defining characteristic."[79] Famously, Brazilian author Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (*Slave Masters and Slaves*) is frequently cited as a key catalyst for this change. Freyre's notorious book painted an idealized portrait of Brazilian slavery, in which paternalistic masters oversaw faithful slaves. For Freyre, the Portuguese were a tolerant people, and crossbreeding was an acceptable model of civilization. Brazilian history was a history of intercourse of the three seminal cultures that produced a rich, racially harmonious national culture.[80]

This rhetoric worked its way into mainstream culture and politics. Brazilians came to tie national identity to racial mixture, Samba, Capoeira, and other symbols of African heritage and miscegenation. The creation and spread of Umbanda in the 1920s and 30s marked another symbolic mixing of Brazil's three formative cultures. Afro-Brazilian religions were adopted by small but significant groups of whites, and religious demographics became increasingly diverse. Freyre laid the groundwork for what would later come to be known as Brazil's "myth of racial democracy." The myth was cemented in the 1950s when,

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[77] Lopez, "African Religions in Brazil."
[78] Ibid.
[79] Schwarcz, "Not Black, Not White," 12.
[80] Ibid. This discourse was itself racist in that it privileged mixture and brown skin above blackness.

because Brazil had had no open racial conflicts, a couple of UNESCO-sponsored studies rendered Brazil as a racially harmonious model for other societies to follow.[81]

Brazilians began to see racism as a thing of the past, if it had every truly existed at all. Discrimination was thought to be targeted at class rather than race.[82] Racial distinctions seemed to have faded away, replaced by a shared mixed-race identity. But while in the social imaginary race relations had changed drastically from the nineteenth century, inequality and prejudice prevailed on the ground. Schwarcz explains:

> The Brazilian tendency would be to continue to discriminate, despite considering such an attitude outrageous for the sufferer and degrading for the practitioner… It is as if the Brazilians repeated the past in the present, but translated it into the private sphere. The abolition of slavery, with rights under law and the right to work becoming universal, was not to affect the traditional pattern of racial accommodation; on the contrary, it would serve only to camouflage it.[83]

Substantial work has been done on modern race relations in Brazil, and the general position among academics is that the notion of a racial democracy has always been and remains a myth. In 2004, Telles found that despite high rates of racial intermarriage and residential proximity, blacks had not gained full inclusion into Brazilian economic and political life.[84] Afro-Brazilians were (and are) disproportionately poorer than their white counterparts. John Burdick argues, "In Brazil, in general, the lighter one's skin and the straighter one's hair, the higher one's status; the darker one's skin and the more

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[81] While at present many Brazilians still feel that a lack of open conflicts or segregation laws post-abolition means that Brazil has always had less racism than the United States, many alternatively argue that precisely because there were no open racial conflicts, Brazilian society never really dealt with its racism (supposedly in contrast with the U.S.'s Jim Crow era and the subsequent Civil Rights Movement, although any myth that the U.S. has "dealt with" its racism is of course false and is increasingly recognized as such).
[82] Edward Eric Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.
[83] Schwarcz, "Not Black, Not White," 18.
[84] Telles, *Race in Another America*.

tightly curled one's hair, the lower one's status."[85] Despite this everyday reality, Brazilian culture still embraces the sentiment of equality and myth of racial democracy. The mulatto remains a quintessential symbol of national identity, and miscegenation a popular ideology.

Within the context, despite their small size, Candomblé and Umbanda remain key symbols of Brazilian culture, identity, and popular religion. Brazilian Catholicism and the government both became increasingly tolerant in the latter half of the twentieth century. By the 1960s, Afro-Brazilian religions enjoyed relatively peaceful co-existence with other religions. The 1988 Brazilian Constitution guarantees religious freedom to all religious groups, and in July of 2015, the Racial Equality Act was signed into law and for the first time explicitly provides for the right to practice religions of African origin.[86] The resurgence of oppression marks a major challenge to this progress especially because, as Robert Muggah argues, the current wave of religious bigotry is more pointed, and more violent, than in the past.[87]

Evangelical and especially Pentecostal attack strategies include demonization from the pulpits; exorcizing beloved African deities from attendees in church services; propaganda onslaughts in the media; and threats, violence, and expulsions by evangelical drug gangs. Silva describes how neo-Pentecostal "armies of Christ" are urged to take to the streets and disrupt Afro-Brazilian rituals or to try to close down terreiros.[88] In a case that made headlines in 2015, two men shouting about the Devil hit an eleven-year-old girl over the head with a rock while she donned white Candomblé robes near a terreiro in Rio de Janeiro.[89] In 2022, during a Candomblé celebration in Vitória da Conquista (Bahia), a man who

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[85] John Burdick, "Why Is the Black Evangelical Movement Growing in Brazil?," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (May 19, 2005): 311–32, https://doi.org/DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X05009028.
[86] This is law # 12.228. Note the safeguarding of Afro-Brazilian religion under an act explicitly concerned with racial equality.
[87] Robert Muggah, "In Brazil, Religious Gang Leaders Say They're Waging a Holy War," The Conversation, November 2, 2017, http://theconversation.com/in-brazil-religious-gang-leaders-say-theyre-waging-a-holy-war-86097.
[88] Silva, "Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions."
[89] Bruce Douglas, "Attack on 11-year-old in Rio Highlights Fears of Rising Religious Intolerance," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, June 19, 2015.

reportedly identified himself as evangelical parked a car with a speaker mounted on it in front of the terreiro and tried to exorcize anyone who entered.[90] None of these are unique occurrences–the breadth and frequency of instances of intolerance is part of what makes this phenomenon so concerning.

According to Brazil's Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights, Afro-Brazilian religions were targeted in roughly half of the 1,506 registered instances of religious intolerance between January of 2016 and June of 2018.[91] This leaves out unreported and unregistered instances, forms of intolerance that are difficult to register or quantify (such as the use of demonizing discourse), and cases where authorities (mis)classified attacks as something other than religious intolerance. The BBC reported that allegations of religious intolerance in Brazil increased 106% from 2021 (in which there were 583 reports) to 2022 (in which there were 1,200, an average of three per day), with a majority of the reports filed by practitioners of Umbanda and Candomblé. The BBC also found that the allegations of religious intolerance on the internet increased over 500% between 2021 and 2022 (from 614 to 3,800).[92]

Moreover, despite official legal protections, religious intolerance sometimes occurs within the walls of institutions, and victims often find they have little to no legal recourse in practice. Candomblé practitioners have reported discrimination in hospitals and their children have reported facing intolerance in schools.[93] Some Candomblé practitioners claim that teachers leave Afro-Brazilian religions out of school curriculum because of their personal views and the preferences of most students' families.[94] In 2023, authorities registered the physical destruction of a terreiro in Salvador da Bahia as "theft and

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[90] André Bernardo, "'Liberdade religiosa ainda não é realidade': os duros relatos de ataques por intolerância no Brasil," BBC News Brasil, January 29, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-64393722.
[91] María Angélica Troncoso, "El Candomblé, La Religión Que 'Resiste' a La Creciente Intolerancia En Brasil," Www.efe.com, 21 May 2019, accessed 30 May 2019. www.efe.com/efe/america/gente/el-candomble-la-religion-que-resiste-a-creciente-intolerancia-en-brasil/20000014-3981455.
[92] For example, Bernardo, "'Liberdade religiosa ainda não é realidade.'"
[93] Ibid.
[94] Eleonora Lundell, "The Pentecostal War Against Afro-Brazilian 'Demons' – Politics, Selfhood and Shared Experience of Spiritual Work in Southeast Brazil[1]," *Revista Del CESLA* 26 (2020): 195–220.

damage to things of artistic, historical and cultural value," rather than religious intolerance, angering the temple community by minimizing its religious status and its recourse under the law.[95]

Fortunately, while conservative evangelicalism has had a large influence on Brazilian politics and institutions, there are numerous government agencies, human rights organizations, and religious activists trying to combat religious intolerance and improve protections for Afro-Brazilian religions. This has resulted in the creation of various hotlines and reporting platforms, state-supported committees to investigate intolerance, and regular rallies and marches held around the country in the name of tolerance. In efforts to call attention to the severity of the violence against Candomblé and Umbanda, some have been describing attacks on them as instances of "religious racism." I have noticed an increase in this kind of label in news reports since I began researching this conflict in 2014. While I attend more to the religion than the racism in "religious racism," I am glad to see a growing recognition of the racial dimension here. I argue that there is much more than racism going on, but it t is important to situate the contemporary persecution of Candomblé and Umbanda in its racist historical context to show how vulnerable these religions were and are. I will return to the racial component of this conflict later in this chapter.

The UCKG Accused

Headlines, publications, and Brazilian social media posts abound that identify the UCKG as a primary attacker. The UCKG and its *crentes* are stigmatized by a large portion of the Brazilian public for its reputation for intolerance. Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners share this sentiment and fight back in courts. The physical attackers of Candomblé and Umbanda temples and practitioners that have been identified belong to various churches, but the UCKG is often blamed for creating the climate that inspires such attacks because of the wide reach of its blatantly intolerant discourse and practices.

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[95] Gabriela Amorim, "Terreiro é novamente invadido e depredado na região metropolitana de Salvador (BA)," Brasil de Fato, February 14, 2014, https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2023/02/14/terreiro-e-novamente-invadido-e-depredado-na-regiao-metropolitana-de-salvador-ba.

For example, Macedo and his church use their media holdings to air religious television programs on popular networks that specifically demonize Afro-Brazilian beliefs and practices.[96] Silva describes how these programs typically work:

> Many of these programs show reconstructions of "real cases" or dramatizations in which symbols and elements from Afro-Brazilian religions are depicted as spiritual means for obtaining malefic results only: the death of enemies, the spread of disease, the separation of couples or love tangles, family disagreements, etc. Such programs also commonly include testimonies of conversion from people claiming to be past frequenters of terreiros, who are interviewed by the pastor and 'confess' the harm they inflicted with the help of Afro-Brazilian entities (referred to as encostos, 'props,' 'supports'). The most heavily exploited testimonies are from those claiming to be former priests of Afro-Brazilian religions, called ex-pais-de-encosto, 'ex-prop-fathers,' who explain in detail how they made despachos [ritual offerings] and the malevolent intentions behind them.[97]

Such testimonials are a recruitment strategy, but they also reflect how the UCKG has adopted cosmological elements of the Afro-Brazilian religious system into its own system only to demonize them.

Relatedly, Bishop Macedo has published books explaining why Afro-Brazilian religions are demonic.[98] Church-sponsored social media posts and newspaper articles make similar claims. UCKG services exorcise African deities from attendees of church services, which is particularly offensive to practitioners of Candomblé and Umbanda because they associate exorcism with horrendous violence. I will analyze the spiritual warfare carried out in exorcisms throughout this dissertation.

Why is the UCKG so concerned with the Afro-Brazilian religions, when they are estimated to represent only 2-3% of Brazil's population? What is it about both groups and their interactions that make this encounter so violent?

Existing Explanations for Conflict

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[96] Silva, "Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions."
[97] Ibid.
[98] See Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: deuses ou demônios* (Unipro, 2019).

Scholars and journalists have suggested a few causes of this conflict, with competition as a primary explanation. Chesnut is a leading voice in this camp. He explains that religions compete for maximum membership in the marketplace, especially evangelical groups seeking to save as many souls–and gain as many resources–as possible.[99] In order to compete, religions must distinguish themselves, especially when they have the same target audiences: in this case, the residents of favelas. While Chesnut recognizes that Afro-Brazilian religions do not proselytize in the same way as evangelicals, he asserts that the prestige and livelihood of the *mães de santo* (priestesses) depend on the number of ritual clients and the amount of their payments or donations for services rendered, implying that they too participate in competition. [100] A market approach helps explain why Pentecostal churches might seek to stamp out any competition posed by Afro-Brazilian religions, especially for leaders like Edir Macedo who stand to profit from a growing membership. However, the UCKG's campaign against Afro-Brazilian religions seems overblown considering their small size and non-missionary nature.

Patricia Birman and David Lehmann similarly recognize the UCKG as engaged in competition, but more for political power and control over the rhetoric and imagery of power as well as the Brazilian popular imaginary.[101] They associate attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions with broader challenges to Brazilian culture, such as critiques of syncretism, clientelism, and Catholic tolerance and acceptance of secularism. They argue that attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions are thus "also an attack on the Catholic Church and the cultural elites who tolerate and even honour them as elements of a national identity, built on a [broadly accepted] positive valuation of syncretism." [102] (This is despite the fact that the UCKG is itself syncretistic, blending itself with the very traditions it condemns.) Birman and Lehmann's claim is supported by rhetorical critiques of Catholicism made by the UCKG (and even an incident where a bishop

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[99] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits."
[100] Ibid., 80. The focus of some Candomblé houses on emphasizing Yoruba/Nago "purity" also points to competition, at least with other houses.
[101] Birman and Lehmann, "Religion and the Media in a Battle for Ideological Hegemony."
[102] Ibid., 156.

"kicked" a saint on national television, the backlash to which made the church retreat).[103] Overall, Birman and Lehmann find this battle to be part of a project, shared with all "fundamentalist" religious movements, "to undermine popular culture and especially popular culture as constructed, again, by the elites."[104] This is an important argument, for the UCKG is undeniably a power-seeking institution claiming to hold a singular vision of truth and seeking cultural reform. A battle for ideological hegemony might help explain why Afro-Brazilian religions, as such important symbols of national identity, are targeted despite their small size. The question becomes, what makes them so offensive to Pentecostalism?

Many scholars recognize that Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions oppose each other morally. Ascribing a bit more agency to religion than typical market approaches, Chesnut considers beliefs, practices, modes of worship, and morality when defining religious "products." He finds that part of the appeal of the product offered by Candomblé and Umbanda is a lack of the standard moral prescriptions from the Christian system. For example, Afro-Brazilian religions make no prohibitions against drug use, prostitution, or homosexuality. Chesnut argues that the "relatively amoral diasporan doctrine provides spiritual assistance and protection for purposes and acts considered morally dubious at best and evil by Christian rivals and prevailing social mores."[105] Further, referring to the fact that Umbanda lets people call on spirits to harm their enemies, Chesnut argues, "Naturally, the great majority of diasporan mediums deny practicing sorcery or 'black magic,' but there is no question that many, if not most, do, since to refuse work with the *Exus* would probably result in a loss of clientele."[106] The use of exus to carry out curses is an undeniable point of Pentecostal contention.

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[103] For a more detailed description of the event, see: Birman and Lehmann, "Religion and the Media in a Battle for Ideological Hegemony." The *"chute do Santo"* ("kick of the Saint") incident demonstrates that Catholicism still enjoys too much power to be victimized by the UCKG's intolerance.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 87.
[106] Ibid., 88.

Despite addressing religious morality and beliefs, however, I still find Chesnut's market approach too focused on the instrumental aspects of religion. His depiction of Umbandan mediums as held at the mercy of clients' demands for "black magic" (rather than being motivated by tradition, spiritual fulfillment, or fear of reprisal from spirits) is an example, one that echoes negative stereotypes. Further, Afro-Brazilian religions are not amoral: they indeed have their own morality systems.[107] That said, there are stark differences between the morality systems of Afro-Brazilian religions and Pentecostalism (and greater Christianity), which partly explains their clash, and Chesnut's description highlights how Afro-Brazilian religions are *imagined* by their critics to consist of black magic and amorality/immorality.

Stephen Selka argues that struggles for moral distinction are meaningful in themselves (rather than viewing moral discourses as expedient competition strategies).[108] Looking at Brazilian evangelicalism and Candomblé, Selka finds that in communities that are relatively homogeneous in terms of social compositions, the two groups' opposing morality discourses play a central role in struggles for moral distinction. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, he describes how evangelicals, specifically Pentecostals, tend to describe Candomblé: as malicious, deceitful, greedy, conniving, and ultimately evil. This allows Pentecostals to frame themselves as the respectable group that liberates its members from malice and evil. In contrast, Candomblecistas describe evangelicals as espousing moral superiority, and as greedy, nosy, intolerant, and disrespectful to Afro-Brazilian culture.[109] Their own moral discourse focuses on balance and harmony, as well as the maintenance of relationships grounded in reciprocal obligations along the lines of spiritual kinship.

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[107] Stephen Selka argues that that Afro-Brazilian religions are described as amoral because they because they do not require members to adhere to a fixed set of ethical precepts, but he rejects the description of amorality with an assertion that they stress a balanced and pragmatic approach to moral questions. See: Stephen Selka, "Morality in the Religious Marketplace: Evangelical Christianity, Candomblé, and the Struggle for Moral Distinction in Brazil," *American Ethnologist 37*, no. 2 (2010): 296.
[108] Selka, "Morality in the Religious Marketplace," 296.
[109] Ibid., 298.

Selka is less concerned with how divergent moral discourses spur conflict than with illustrating how they function as boundary markers and indices of social distinction, as well as how moral discipline is used for self-transformation projects.[110] He positions violence, like attacks on terreiros, as falling at the extreme end of Pentecostal-espoused moral superiority.[111] But in describing moral discourses he points to behaviors and attitudes that justify or potentially incite such extreme acts. For example, he explains, converts to Pentecostalism from Afro-Brazilian religions in particular "invoke discourses of good and evil and righteousness and sin to highlight the disjuncture between their present and past lives."[112] After their conversion, their previous religions become deplorable. These moralizing, dualistic discourses demonize and therefore dehumanize Afro-Brazilian religions, setting the stage for intolerance.

Another explanation for this conflict that merits consideration is that it is driven by racism. Symbols from Umbanda and especially Candomblé have been operationalized by pro-African and black rights activists in the black consciousness movement, who employ these religions to affirm ethnic and racial identity.[113] The racism explanation usually comes from such black movement activists, as well as journalists and Afro-Brazilian religious leaders, more often than academic researchers. Claims of racism are inherently political because Afro-Brazilian religions have had mixed success seeking justice against religious intolerance in Brazilian courts, which may be more likely to prosecute racial discrimination. That said, such claims make race a necessary consideration for this discussion, as does the racist history of the oppression of Candomblé and Umbanda, as well and as recent scholarly framing of the persecution of Candomblé and Umbanda as "religious racism."[114]

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[110] Ibid., 304.
[111] Ibid., 299.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Stephen Selka, "Ethnoreligious Identity Politics in Bahia, Brazil," *Latin American Perspectives* 32, no. 1 (January 2005), https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X04271.
[114] Danielle N. Boaz, *Banning Black Gods: Law and Religions of the African Diaspora* (Penn State Press, 2021).

Race in Brazil is a notoriously fraught subject, and the racial dynamics of the encounter between Pentecostals and Afro-Brazilian religions are highly complex. Analyzing racial demographics provides little if any clarity, as all religions under study are comprised of similar, highly diverse demographics.[115] Burdick found, in 1999, that "Brazilians who identify themselves at the dark end of the color continuum are converting to Pentecostal churches over historical Protestant churches at a rate of about three to one."[116] In 2005, Paul Freston described the UCKG as having a social composition lower even than that of most Pentecostal churches, reflected in lower income and education levels and the "darker average color of members."[117] Videos of attacks on temples often reveal black or brown-faced attackers, especially when portraying evangelical drug traffickers attacking terreiros in their own communities. When I was in Rio de Janeiro researching this conflict, some of the academics I spoke with were hesitant to describe Pentecostal violence as racist because of the vulnerable status of most Brazilian and global Pentecostals due to their own race and/or socioeconomic status. This again reflects how Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions appeal to and compete for adherents from the same populations.

None of this is to say that black and brown people cannot hold racial or colorist prejudices, nor that such prejudices are absent from this conflict. Research has shown that dark-skinned Brazilians sometimes begin to see themselves as whiter and/or are more likely to marry white partners as they receive higher levels of education or achieve higher income.[118] This is called "whitening." I have wondered whether Pentecostalism might have a whitening effect, where members might come to see

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[115] I analyze the 2010 census data in Neace, "Religious Tension in Brazil," finding roughly comparable racial demographics across these religions. Race in the census is self-reported (with the five available categories being color labels). There are several potential issues with how the data is reported and collected, but it is reasonable to say that Brazilians from all major racial/color categories are represented, in large numbers/percentages, in all these religions.

[116] John Burdick, "What Is the Color of the Holy Spirit? Pentecostalism and Black Identity in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 2 (1999): 111.

[117] Paul Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 37.

[118] Luisa Farah Schwartzman, "Does Money Whiten? Intergenerational Changes in Racial Classification in Brazil," *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (December 1, 2007): 940–63, https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200605.

themselves as lighter than Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners with similar skin tones. This could support some kind of racist cognitive dissonance for black Pentecostal attackers. However, in contrast with such speculations, in Burdick's analysis of Brazilian Pentecostalism, he finds that "although evangelical Christianity involves a variety of beliefs that are incompatible with a strong ethnic identity, this religion also includes a range of ideas and practices that nourish rather than corrode black identity."[119]

Burdick's analysis points to how part of what is going on is a struggle over what it means to be black in Brazil. Selka affirms this in his examination of ethnoreligious identity politics in Bahia, Brazil, where he contrasts progressive evangelicals' approach to antiracism with the black consciousness movement's strong self-identification with Afro-Brazilian religious traditions.[120] For progressive evangelicals, blackness is more about ancestry than shared cultural traditions, especially because only a small percentage of African-descended Brazilians actually practice Candomblé. Evangelical conservatives–which make up much of Pentecostalism, including the UCKG–are probably less likely than progressives to be concerned with antiracism, but some Pentecostal churches and adherents have been active in black rights activism. Regardless of politics, many Pentecostals take issue with using Candomblé to affirm black identity. Some of the academics I spoke with in Brazil argued that Pentecostal attackers can and do hold anti-African attitudes without being racist, because "black" and "African" are not co-terminous. Moreover, some Pentecostals embrace African symbols but seek to strip them of African *religion*. Silva explains that while neo-Pentecostal targets have included symbols of African heritage that are traditionally related in some way to Afro-Brazilian religions, such as samba, capoeira, and *acarajé* (a west African shrimp bean dish used in Candomblé offerings), some neo-Pentecostal

[119] Ibid., 109.
[120] Selka, "Ethnoreligious Identity Politics in Bahia, Brazil."

churches have appropriated these symbols and removed their ties to African religion.[121] Hence, some churches offer "Evangelical Capoeira" and "the Lord's *acarajé*."[122]

The UCKG's behaviors outside of Brazil, especially in Africa, offer insights for this conversation. In past news publications, the UCKG has caricaturized indigenous, non-Christian Africans as, basically, jungle-dwelling, drum-beating savages.[123] The church has condemned indigenous religions throughout Africa, associating them with witchcraft. African UCKG pastors have also claimed they are paid less than their Brazilian counterparts. Addressing such claims, however, Paul Freston does not find the UCKG's behaviors in Africa to be overtly racist, but rather, "ethnocentric."[124] The UCKG purports to want to empower black South Africans (arguably using paternalistic rhetoric) by ridding them of witchcraft. Further, its cultural insensitivity is not specific to Africa or predominantly black regions: Freston explains that the UCKG has clashed with host populations just about everywhere, including in white areas of Europe.[125] Relatedly, remarking on its primary support bases around the world, Freston describes the UCKG as an "ethnic" church, one of black immigrants in much of Europe, Hispanics in the US, and Brazilian immigrants in Japan.[126] Returning to Brazil, the UCKG and other churches take issue with mediumistic religion regardless of connections to Africa or blackness, including Kardecism. This altogether mixed portrait is specific to the UCKG and not all of Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism, but it demonstrates the complexities of analyzing race in the conflict under study.

The potential degree of racism and/or ethnocentrism practiced by the UCKG and broader neo-Pentecostalism is outside of the scope of this dissertation. However, I contend that because of the

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[121] Silva, "Conflicts between Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions," 496.
[122] Ibid.
[123] This is an important point of discussion in chapter two of: Neace, "Religious Tension in Brazil."
[124] Paul Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God."
[125] A primary example offered by Freston is a quote from the UCKG's newspaper, *Folha Universal,* which stated, "The Luxemburgers are cold, racist, and very closed." *Folha Universal,* 6/20/99, cited by Freston in "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God," 47.
[126] Ibid., 40.

historical context of race relations in Brazil (and globally), contemporary attacks on African culture and religion cannot be entirely separated from race. As Lundell argues, "The fact that demons in the neo-Pentecostal context are many times identified in the form of Afro-Brazilian entities indicates both societal and spiritual levels of racism and socio-historical discrimination against the Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural legacy."[127] Symbols have power,[128] and attacks on symbols of African heritage and black identity have power. Further, Danielle Boaz finds that attempts to limit the practice of African diaspora religions (in Brazil and elsewhere) have the classic hallmarks of how racial prejudice has permeated legal and justice systems (e.g., over-policing in African diaspora religious communities in the same way that black communities are often over-policed).[129] The *effect* of violence against the African diasporic religions is that largely black and brown communities are targeted, and many Afro-Brazilian adherents perceive themselves to be victims of racism.[130]

Nonetheless, I also contend that racial and ethnic prejudices are not the primary driver of violence here. While substantially more research on the role of race in this conflict is warranted, race is not likely to be identified as a singular explanatory variable. We need to ask, what is it about Afro-Brazilian *religions* that are more threatening to militant Pentecostals than other symbols of African heritage and black identity in Brazil?

Competition, a Pentecostal culture war, and moral disagreement undoubtedly factor into the Pentecostal war on Afro-Brazilian religions, probably to varying degrees for different actors. Race is an important–if opaque–dimension of this violent encounter as well. But it would be a mistake to reduce the conflict to any of these. Instead, examining religious beliefs and practices sheds light on how Afro-

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[127] Lundell, "The Pentecostal War Against Afro-Brazilian 'Demons.'"
[128] Santa Clara University, "The Power of Symbols," Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, accessed May 2, 2024, https://www.scu.edu/ethics-spotlight/the-power-of-symbols/.
[129] Boaz, *Banning Black Gods*.
[130] Admittedly, again, such claims are political, and perception does not equal reality. This bolsters the notion that the racial element of this conflict is immensely complicated.

Brazilian religions are positioned as a demonic Other on a *spiritual* level. Thus, I join a handful of researchers in my field in using cosmology as a primary avenue for exploring this conflict.

While Lundell argues that the holy war promoted by Brazilian neo-Pentecostal churches seems to be "primarily a battle over authority and dominance in the field of Brazilian spiritual economy, that is, one of the biggest fields of consumption in Brazil," she also marvels at how this war shows that "Afro-Brazilian religious *entities* still hold such a powerful position and effective agency touching individual lives and socio-political power-relations" in the broader culture.[131] The Afro-Brazilian religions are *imagined* as powerful because of their cosmological influence on Brazilian culture, and their cosmology, including its popular pantheon, is a key part of what is under attack. Candomblé and Umbanda are condemned not for containing ignorant folklore, but for worshipping spirits Pentecostals believe are real, but evil. Despite the small size of the Afro-Brazilian religions, the UCKG's incorporation of their deities into its eschatology as demons makes the religions a source of great and ever-present danger. This points to cosmological overlap–and inversion.

Relatedly, Silva observes that while Afro-Brazilian religions and neo-Pentecostalism have obvious differences, they share a religious lexicon, grammar, and symbols.[132] He also notes that each are religions of lived experience in the body and argues that combating Afro-Brazilian religions may help Pentecostals attract people loyal to the experience of magic and ecstatic religion, but who come to perceive Christianity as more legitimate.[133] In the end, Silva argues that attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions are less about competition and "are more related to the role that religious trance and magical mediations have come to occupy within the Pentecostal system's own inner workings, in light of its

[131] Lundell, "The Pentecostal War Against Afro-Brazilian 'Demons.'" My italics for emphasis.
[132] Silva, "Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions."
[133] Ibid.

contact with the Afro-Brazilian repertory."[134] Silva's emphasis on cosmological interactions provides a launching point for my discussion on the role of cosmology in this conflict in chapter two.

Cosmic War and Spiritual Warfare

Militant Pentecostals claim that they are engaged in a battle between good and evil. Scholars of global religion have observed religions increasingly turning to old narratives that depict such battles and, accordingly, embracing a martial rhetoric. Mark Juergensmeyer uses the term *cosmic war* to describe militants' "imagined battle between metaphysical forces–good and evil, right and wrong, order and chaos."[135] Juergensmeyer argues that a cosmic war ideology lies behind many cases of religion-related violence in contemporary Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other traditions.[136] From interviews with terrorists across numerous faiths, he finds that the appeal of this ideology is that it provides a coherent worldview (explaining why things are the way they are, identifying who is who); explains why bad things happen; demonizes (and dehumanizes) enemies; justifies violence; empowers participants to take action; provides militant roles; gives transcendent timelines (so religious actors persist in their struggle because a good outcome is destined to come, even if it takes centuries); promises personal redemption and heavenly rewards; and is exciting.[137]

Importantly, Juergensmeyer argues, "Concepts of cosmic war are accompanied by strong claims of moral justification and an enduring absolutism that transforms *worldly struggles into sacred*

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[134] Silva, "Crossroads," 490.
[135] Mark Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.65.
[136] Ibid. Juergensmeyer is careful to point out that cosmic war ideas and associated militancy is not limited to a specific religion or kind of religion. He writes that every religion has images of grand battles, and that groups across numerous traditions have used these images to promote conflict historically and more recently. Note that Candomblé also has images of warfare, with *Ogum* as the orixá of war. When Ogum possesses someone in Candomblé, he is dressed wearing a breastplate and a sword. I have not observed Candomblé practitioners invoking Ogum in their struggle against evangelical hostilities, but that might be an interesting avenue for research.
[137] Ibid.

battles."[138] The authority of religion gives worshippers the "moral standing to employ violence," making religious terrorism and other forms of violence difficult to combat because "its enemies have become satanized: one cannot negotiate with them or easily compromise."[139] His emphasis on the magnification of daily encounters into sacred struggles helps to explain what materialist and social explanations for conflict lack. Whatever the grievances are of religions involved in conflict, the magnification of hostilities into a spiritual battle on the part of one or both parties changes the nature of conflict, making it more intractable.

The UCKG's cosmic war rhetoric is a quintessential feature of its services and media communications. Bishops and pastors call for adherents to fight the "forces of evil."[140] Bishop Macedo posts messages about war and battle on his social media accounts, often accompanied by images of swords and armor, alluding to Christian crusaders.[141] In one blog post, Macedo cited the following verse from Ephesians:

> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.[142]

Macedo's blog post then urges adherents to arm themselves in order to win all battles with the Devil, demonstrating an emphasis on defense.[143]

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[138] Mark Juergensmeyer, "Terror in the Name of God," in *Thinking Globally: A Global Studies Reader* (Univ of California Press, 2013), 298. My italics for emphasis.
[139] Ibid.
[140] I have observed this in countless church services, both in Rio de Janeiro and online.
[141] For example, see Facebook posts for "Bispo Edir Macedo" from 5/20/19 and 5/21/19. Accessed May 29, 2019.
[142] Ephesians 6: 11-13. Cited from Bishop Edir Macedo, "Ouça o que o Espírito diz aos cristãos… Parte 1," *Bispo Edir Macedo*, A Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, May 21, 2019. Accessed May 29, 2019. https://blogs.universal.org/bispomacedo/2019/05/21/ouca-o-que-o-espirito-diz-aos-cristaos-2/?fbclid=IwAR2hg_94YzQ2KYRAnx2aqenDWtV0siTE2jKolv4YFqcOORNMF8eoOdnwtnc
[143] Ibid.

In 2015, in a controversial move that to many suggested an offensive rather than defensive attitude, the UCKG formed a group of altar boys named the "Gladiators of the Altar." The Gladiator boys wore shirts donned with swords and had matching military haircuts, and they marched in unison through large church gatherings while chanting that they were "ready for battle." The Gladiators of the Altar put secularists and Afro-Brazilian religious leaders alike into a frenzy throughout Brazil, with even a judge reportedly describing the group as a "militia."[144] After intensely negative publicity over this, the Universal Church seems to have retired the group–or, at least, they have disappeared from the media.[145]

Like Silva, scholars observing this focus on war and battle within Brazilian Pentecostalism (especially neo-Pentecostalism) deem it *spiritual warfare*. Within Christianity, spiritual warfare is a battle against evil forces carried out in the spiritual realm. In an academic sense, spiritual warfare is an ideology, narrative template, rhetoric, and images and symbols pertaining to war against evil, along with actions directed at carrying out such war. Thus, it also describes violence against purported human enemies. Patricia Birman emphasizes the UCKG's practice of exorcism–which not only carries out war on demons and vague forces of evil but also simultaneously on the spirits of Afro-Brazilian religions–as a central element of its spiritual warfare.[146] Enacting spiritual warfare through exorcism is supposed to liberate UCKG worshippers from evil. For Birman, "the notion of a spiritual battle launched by the IURD makes this war on Devils a form of ensuring future salvation on the cosmic level, establishing a permanent conflict with the malignant forces of evil."[147]

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[144] Pedro Zambarda de Araujo, "Desembargador diz que Igreja Universal criou 'grupo paramilitar,'" Diário do Centro do Mundo, January 24, 2020, https://www.diariodocentrodomundo.com.br/essencial/desembargador-diz-que-igreja-universal-criou-grupo-paramilitar/.
[145] A few years ago, a Google search on the Gladiators of the Altar would yield results from UCKG web and social media pages, but this is no longer the case.
[146] Patricia Birman, "Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religions to Neo-Pentecostalism – Opening New Horizons of the Possible," in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, ed. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 115-132.
[147] Ibid., 122.

In studies on the UCKG around the world, the notion of spiritual warfare arises again and again. Outside of Brazil, the enemies targeted by the church vary according to local context. Competition with Afro-Brazilian religions does not drive the UCKG's dualism and emphasis on war: there is a general model of dualism and spiritual warfare that is adapted to local customs in different regions. The model is best adapted in cultures with enchanted worldviews (including Brazil, as I will discuss in chapter two), where converts can maintain their existing belief in "magic" and spirits, and Pentecostalism can contrast itself with local religions by arguing that it is more effective in solving daily problems.[148] In the Brazilian case, enchantment and the spiritual warfare ideology have fostered the incorporation of numerous elements of the Afro-Brazilian religious cosmology into the Pentecostal cosmology and spiritual warfare schema, resulting in the deities of Candomblé and Umbanda becoming demons.

To understand why militant Pentecostalism attacks Afro-Brazilian religions, I ask why it embraces spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is a powerful proselytism strategy, but it is not just a tactic in a conscious effort to compete. Rather, I find that it is directly born out of Pentecostal theology. A literalist approach to the Bible and a corresponding apocalyptic eschatology are the prime source of the spiritual warfare ideology (as I will argue in chapter one). While it is difficult to pinpoint causality, tracing the roots of spiritual warfare suggests that theology, cosmology, and ideology contribute to the militarization of extremist Pentecostals (rather than cosmic narratives being a post hoc justification for violence). The ideology provides moral justification, especially for the actions of Pentecostal leaders like Bishop Edir Macedo, who might have different motivations from the average Pentecostal worshipper, but cosmic war narratives built around an apocalyptic eschatology can also foster aggression and violence on the ground as worshippers internalize calls to fight powerful spiritual enemies in the name of God.

Frameworks and Perspectives

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[148] Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*. See also: Alexander, *Signs and Wonders*.

On Religion

To be clear, the goal of this dissertation is not to paint religion as essentially and necessarily intolerant or violent. Ideas about the sacred are formed, molded, and interpreted by human beings, who put them to harmful as well as benevolent uses. Like Scott Appleby, I find religion to be "an ambiguous enterprise, containing within itself the authority to kill and to heal, to unleash savagery, or to bless humankind with healing and wholeness."[149] In addition to posing challenges for societies, religion is also used in peacemaking by countless religious actors around the world.

Further, I do not aim to demonize Pentecostalism or even neo-Pentecostalism. Pentecostal groups in Brazil and globally have promoted tolerance and unity on myriad occasions, and even controversial churches like the UCKG do good work for their communities.[150] More simply, the vast majority of the world's Pentecostals remain uninvolved in violent conflict, and it would be inaccurate to imply otherwise. I also acknowledge that many or even most Pentecostals are vulnerable and subject to marginalization in some form due to socioeconomic status and limited access to resources. Powerful leaders like Bishop Macedo, who are arguably the guiltiest when it comes to promoting conflict, may be focused on amassing resources while their followers struggle to make ends meet. However, enough Pentecostals have been swayed by the incendiary messages of leaders like Macedo and gone on the offensive in enough instances and locations to make violence a significant, concerning trend. Elements of their religion facilitate and

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[149] Scott R. Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 29. Other scholars who share this position include Sathianathan Clarke in *Competing Fundamentalisms: Violent Extremism in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017) and various authors in John Witte Jr and M. Christian Green, eds., *Religion and Human Rights: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[150] For example, in a discussion on Pentecostalism's complex relationship with human rights in Brazil, Paul Freston observes that Pentecostalism has made strides in protecting and asserting dignity for lower classes: Paul Freston, "Religious Pluralism, Democracy and Human Rights in Latin America," *In Religion and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (2011): 101-128. The UCKG also has its own NGO and does aid work in many countries.

justify such militance. With my focus being violence, this dissertation will emphasize negative behaviors of absolutist Pentecostals over the positive aspects of the religion.

In a similar vein, I should reiterate that there is substantial heterogeneity among and across the religions under study. Global Pentecostalism is not monolithic, nor is Brazilian Pentecostalism or even neo-Pentecostalism. Paulo Barrera Rivera notes that the number of members of small Pentecostal churches, collectively, is by far higher than of any singular church save Assemblies of God.[151] The Afro-Brazilian religions are particularly diverse, with Candomblé alone housing a vast array of religious expressions. [152] Religious membership and identity is also highly fluid in Brazil. However, while I do not wish to gloss over the nuances of these religions and their members' commitment levels, it is nonetheless necessary to use ideal-typical categories to mark boundaries for the sake of generalization and comparison.

Academic constructs are useful not just for naming and grouping religious communities together, but also for describing their beliefs and practices. Spirit possession, which I refer to frequently throughout this dissertation, is an example of this. The term *possession* is widely rejected by most of the religious practitioners under study, regardless of religious affiliation, due to its negative connotation. They each use different terms to describe what they are doing. But the term is still often used in academia as an analytical device that allows comparison across traditions and cultures, which Bettina Schmidt claims is useful for the functional interpretation of the practice.[153] Schmidt cites an influential definition of spirit possession from Crapanzano:

> "Any altered or unusual state of consciousness and allied behaviour that is indigenously understood in terms of the influence of an alien spirit, demon, or deity. […T]he possessed act as though another personality–a spirit or soul– has entered their body and taken control.

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[151] Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil," 124.
[152] This is thoroughly discussed in: Engler and Brito, "Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous-Influenced Religions."
[153] Bettina Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 431.

> Dramatic changes in their physiognomy, voice, and manner usually occur. Their behaviour often is grotesque and blasphemous" (Crapanzano 2005: 8687).[154]

I conceive of spirit possession in a similar manner to Crapanzano, with the caveat that the degree to which a purportedly possessed person behaves in a "grotesque and blasphemous" manner (from the perspective of their religious community) varies widely. This mostly does not apply to Afro-Brazilian religions' possession rituals, and only applies to Pentecostal possessions when the community understands the spirit to be demonic (this excludes Holy Spirit Baptism).

Chapter two will elaborate thoroughly on how the religious groups under study conceive of possession and what names they use for it. In short, for Pentecostalism, possession is the appropriate label for demonic experience, which is entirely separate from Holy Spirit Baptism. For Candomblé and Umbanda, possession is usually called *incorporação* (incorporation). In Spiritism, practitioners prefer *mediunidade* (mediumship). Relatedly, *exorcism* is a less controversial term but still does not encapsulate all the various ways that Pentecostals talk about "discharging" a spirit from a person's body, and "delivering" them from evil. Still, I use the general constructs of possession and exorcism throughout this dissertation for comparison across traditions.

The Importance of Ideas

Neo-Pentecostalism has been a prominent subject of academic studies on Brazil for some decades. However, academic publications have dealt mainly with sociological issues and less with the theology and doctrinal basis of the movement. Components of Pentecostal theology such as pneumatology and eschatology have not attracted the same attention in studies on neo-Pentecostalism as on classical Pentecostalism. There is a misconception that neo-Pentecostal churches, especially the

[154] Ibid., 432.

UCKG, do not have an elaborate or clearly articulated theological doctrine. This dissertation will clear up the misconception by examining UCKG theology and especially eschatology in detail.

My analysis of teachings and beliefs stems from a primary goal to produce new, productive understanding of the religious worlds of those under study. As Hayes reminds us, citing David Chidester, "One of the responsibilities of the academic study of religion is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange."[155] The endeavor to understand the motivations and justifications for the violence at hand requires making sense of a phenomenon that is easy to reduce, condemn, or cast aside. I adopt Bruce Lincoln's perspective that it is most often complex ideology that empowers people to carry out atrocious deeds, rather than "primitivity" or simplistic thinking.[156] If we can put ourselves in the minds of Brazilian Pentecostals, we can ask and attempt to answer, why did rocks rain down on a Candomblé temple in a largely Pentecostal neighborhood? In what world does it make sense to carry out a war against African-derived religions? I have been influenced by the writings of Bob Orsi and Wendy Doniger to try to enter the minds and worlds of those under study.[157]

Underlying these efforts is my insistence that religious beliefs and ideologies matter for analyzing religious conflict. In his study on religious violence and fundamentalism, Sathianathan Clarke similarly urges scholars of this topic to recognize the importance of religion.[158] While he acknowledges the importance of economic and political grievances as well as social and psychological alienation as factors for fundamentalists' motivations, he argues that cultural, political, economic, and psychological approaches to religious violence are each reductionist in their own ways. In conjunction with these

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[155] Hayes, *Holy Harlots*, 27.
[156] This argument is articulated in multiple chapters in Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology & Practice* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).
[157] For example, see: Wendy Doniger, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (University of Chicago Press, 1995); Robert A. Orsi, "Snakes Alive: Religious Studies between Heaven and Earth," in *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 177–204.
[158] Clarke, *Competing Fundamentalisms*.

approaches, he is concerned with religious motivations and convictions and aims to highlight the "multidimensional role that religion plays to stoke conflict and terrorism."[159] I align with Clarke. To disregard Pentecostal militants' own claims that they are engaging in a cosmic war between good and evil is to under-recognize their agency and overlook the power of their ideology.

Admittedly, ideas about the sacred are not always principal drivers of behavior, even as pertains to religious membership and engagement. Using findings from interviews, Barrerra Rivera argues that there is little "enchanted" reality for Pentecostals in Brazilian slums, where members go in search of mundane benefits (such as healing and social, economic, and other forms of capital).[160] He finds that members' utilitarian perspective leads them to quit without regret when "things get better." This echoes Chesnut's claim that seeking out religious healing is a–if not *the*–primary driver of conversion in Brazil.[161] However, I suspect that the members who quit when things improve are not often the same folks who burn down terreiros. Pentecostal violence against Afro-Brazilian religions is likely carried out, most often, by absolutists, for whom ideology is a powerful driver. And Pentecostalism offers a strong theological and ideological framework for their attacks.

In addition to beliefs and ideologies, religious symbols and rituals have the potential to inspire, justify, shape, and elevate conflict to the level of the sacred. Rituals are important because of the massive degree to which they do symbolic work, including shaping a performing religions' ethical system and ideas about how to treat people in the world.[162] Analyzing exorcisms provides insights into the neo-Pentecostal ethics of spiritual warfare and ideas about how to treat Afro-Brazilian religions. When I analyze rituals, I draw on Richard Parmentier, who theorizes ritual as a highly structured system of social

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[159] Ibid., 26.
[160] Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil."
[161] Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*.
[162] Michael Lambek, *The Ethical Condition: Essays on Action, Person, and Value* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

action–laden with symbolism or semiotic representation–with contextual power.[163] Rituals transform things and people. Chapter three will thoroughly elaborate on Parmentier's approach and the method of semiotic analysis I employ, but in short, it allows for the analysis of signs–i.e., icons, indexes, and symbols that might include things like the words in a sermon, dress, bodily gestures and posture, and voice and tone–that are central to meaning-making and ritual efficacy.

Finally, when comparing religions' ideas about the sacred, specifically about spirits and demons, I also draw on Webb Keane's theoretical framework of semiotic ideology.[164] Semiotic ideology broadly relates to a cultural system of ideas and underlying assumptions about words and things (signs), what functions they serve, and what moral and political consequences they might produce. To elaborate, semiotic ideology "ties general semiotic processes to specific judgments of ethical and political value: to take a sign a certain way is to take seriously the world it presupposes, and often, the life that that world recommends."[165] Of particular relevance to my work is Keane's research on people's semiotic processes involving supernatural beings. Christian and indigenous religious cultures often have divergent semiotic ideologies regarding the possibilities for the range of beings that might exist in the world and/or the moral status of spirits. They also diverge on the concept of agency, reading spirits as signs differently, in the semiotic sense, depending on whether they believe spirits can and should have agency or not. Comparing and contrasting the semiotic ideologies of Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions is useful for understanding how and why beloved deities in Candomblé and Umbanda feature in the neo-Pentecostal system as demons.

The Global

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[163] Richard J. Parmentier, *Signs in Society: Studies in Semiotic Anthropology* (Indiana University Press, 1994).
[164] Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, Vol. 1. (Univ of California Press, 2007).
[165] Webb Keane, "On Semiotic Ideology," *Signs and Society* 6, no. 1 (2018): 64.

I first began research on this conflict from within a Global and International Studies program, and I continue to employ a global perspective in this dissertation. At the broadest level, Brazilian neo-Pentecostal attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions might be considered a case study of the global resurgence of religious violence, adding to a growing list of conflicts that scholars use to refute or reform secularization theory.[166] At an intermediary level, this conflict mirrors the ongoing politicization of religion and religionization of politics in officially secular countries like the United States. It also sheds light on the challenges of new religious movements. More narrowly, this is a case study of Pentecostalism's growth and its clashes with local cultures, especially indigenous religions, around the world. The UCKG has had especially tense encounters with indigenous religions throughout Latin America and Africa. Examining possible explanations for the Brazilian neo-Pentecostal movement and conflict with Afro-Brazilian religions has implications for larger trends, which I will discuss in the conclusion to this dissertation. By using this case as a model for examining similar conflicts globally, this project seeks to contribute to the field of Global Studies in addition to Religious Studies.[167]

On Violence

This dissertation utilizes the notion that violence comes in many forms, especially in this conflict. For example, there is physical violence through assaults on people, but also their temples and liturgical objects; rhetorical violence through demonizing discourse, especially in church publications and media; and symbolic and ritual violence such as that enacted in exorcisms. The latter category might also be deemed spiritual violence, especially from the perspective of Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners, who

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[166] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 4.
[167] My influences from Global Studies include Mark Juergensmeyer and Giles Gunn. For example, Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda* (University of California Press, 2008); Giles Gunn, *Ideas to Die For: The Cosmopolitan Challenge* (Routledge, 2013).

believe that exorcising orixás causes great spiritual harm. Injuries similarly come in a wide array of forms here. The violence is also both interpersonal and institutional.

Crucially, the violence I discuss here is carried out against Afro-Brazilian religions, not by them. Afro-Brazilian religions have responded, for the most part, through legislative and other peaceful efforts, such as holding marches. Despite this, for the sake of brevity, I often frame the violence as "religious conflict." Admittedly, this is potentially misleading. Describing the attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions by evangelical drug traffickers in favelas, Danielle Boaz emphasis that this is not a two-sided struggle: rather, the latter is "unilaterally committing gross violations of the latter's human rights."[168] Boaz critiques the way that researchers have "typically employed the perpetrators' own language and worldview about spiritual 'warfare' or 'conflict' to describe these attacks" because this "downplays the severity of the violence and inaccurately suggests reciprocal aggressions between Afro-Brazilian and Evangelical religious communities."[169] Instead of describing the violence as "warfare," Boaz argues that evangelical assaults on Afro-Brazilian religions are one-sided aggressions that contravene international laws and norms and are better labeled "crimes against humanity."[170]

Boaz makes important points. This is not a two-sided conflict *between* two groups, but rather, an assault *on* one *by* another. However, the ideology of spiritual warfare is a primary focus of my research, and language describing spiritual warfare features prominently in this dissertation. I find this to be a useful term to describe the range of methods and cosmic framework employed by Pentecostal militants. It also fosters recognition that Afro-Brazilian religions are spiritually attacked, which might seem insignificant to secular outsiders but is immensely important to practitioners of Candomblé and Umbanda.

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[168] Danielle N. Boaz, "'Spiritual Warfare' or 'Crimes against Humanity'? Evangelized Drug Traffickers and Violence against Afro-Brazilian Religions in Rio de Janeiro," *Religions* 11, no. 12 (December 2020): 640, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11120640.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

When I describe "spiritual warfare" and especially "conflict," I do not intend to imply that this encounter involves reciprocal aggressions.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter one is dedicated to examining the theological roots of Pentecostalism's spiritual warfare ideology and practices. I analyze UCKG publications and especially recorded sermons to lay out an elaborate description of the UCKG's eschatology, the first account of its kind (to my knowledge). Contrary to recent arguments that because of prosperity theology, neo-Pentecostal eschatology has shifted to a more optimistic vision of the last days, I find that in reality the UCKG adheres to the premillennialist dispensationalism of traditional Pentecostalism. The UCKG combines prosperity, materialism, and this-worldly engagement with the pessimistic belief that the Earth will burn in fire before good forces can prevail and the theological view that true Christians will be raptured at any moment. Ultimately, this chapter argues that core features of Pentecostal theology, namely this apocalyptic eschatology, have inspired its cosmic war ideology and dualism, and therefore lie at the heart of this conflict.

Chapter two compares and contrasts the cosmologies of Pentecostalism and, broadly, the Afro-Brazilian religions, using the lens of divine cure. I examine how possession and exorcism have inverted functions in these religions, bringing about either divine healing or immense suffering depending on the religion. This inversion is potent in the context of cosmological overlaps, such as an enchanted worldview that features a shared pantheon. The relationship of these religions' cosmologies, as well as divergent semiotic ideologies on the moral status of spirits and their agency, helps explain how and why Pentecostals construe Afro-Brazilian religion as existing in the same spiritual or cosmic universe as Christianity, but as a force for evil. The Pentecostal belief in the efficacy of Afro-Brazilian religion makes the latter a prominent target in the former's spiritual warfare schema.

Chapter three employs semiotic analysis of UCKG exorcisms. I lay out my semiotic approach, drawn from Richard Parmentier, before examining how UCKG exorcisms symbolically create the effect

that demons are present, construct pastoral and church authority, and demonize and defeat Afro-Brazilian spirits and religions. I suggest that by immersing adherents in the symbol-laden world of ritual exorcism, the UCKG gives them compelling evidence that spiritual warfare is effective and ethically necessary. This helps explain how Pentecostal members might be convinced to take up the neo-Pentecostal call to battle Afro-Brazilian religions.

The conclusion of this dissertation will re-situate the Pentecostal Holy War on Afro-Brazilian religions in its larger global context and reflect on what lessons this case may offer for understanding similar conflicts globally.

Research Methods

I began this project in 2014 under an MA program in Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I visited Rio de Janeiro during the summer of 2015 to attend church services, meet with academics specializing in Pentecostalism, as speak with NGO workers and Candomblé members concerned with religious violence against the Afro-Brazilian religions. I visited a couple of small, traditional Pentecostal churches, and I attended several UCKG church services at three different locations in Rio de Janeiro as a participant-observer. I also attended a public forum concerned with combating religious intolerance and promoting religious freedom. My resulting MA thesis provided a solid initial overview of this conflict, but left me with numerous remaining questions, so I decided to a pursue a PhD in Religious Studies to dive deeper into the religious beliefs of those under study.

Unfortunately, when I advanced to candidacy in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had just begun. The pandemic foiled my plans to return to Brazil for more research on the ground. However, with the pandemic, church services were increasingly filmed or moved online. The UCKG had also developed its own subscription-based streaming service, Univer Video. Along with the church's YouTube channels and other social media platforms, Univer provided me an excellent opportunity to examine church teachings

in real time from the United States. The plethora of information available online made up for my cancelled travels to Brazil and proved to be immensely fruitful.

All of my primary data is taken from public events, figures, publications, sermons, videos, and social media. This project is highly interdisciplinary and embraces a mixed-methods approach. I use event, discourse, and semiotic analysis as primary methods, though I also draw on past research as a participant observer. I ask open-ended questions and employ mostly qualitative research methods, so this project is more exploratory than explanatory, although I do hypothesize about causes of and especially contributors to conflict.

Chapter One: Apocalypse

In 2017, a telenovela called *Apocalipse* (*Apocalypse*) was launched on a major Brazilian television network. In a trailer advertising the telenovela, a sequence of scenes depicts global apocalyptic catastrophe.[171] A billowy, black demon rides behind two men driving through city streets in a convertible. Refugees in a camp flee their tents during an earthquake. Bodies lie in the wreckage of collapsed buildings. The Eiffel Tower is engulfed in flames. Tsunami waves first overtake city blocks and then vacationers at a resort pool. A firing squad executes a line of men. Song lyrics are pasted on the screen throughout, narrating suffering and darkness. But then cataclysm gives way to salvation. The lyrics emphasize that Jesus will return. Smiling Christians are beamed up to heaven. An elderly man lands among the clouds and is greeted by a brightly illuminated human-shaped figure. The message is clear: the end of the world is here, but true Christians will be saved.

Apocalipse aired on Brazil's second largest television network, RecordTV, from November 2017 to June 2018. While the trailer described above displays random scenes of mass chaos and destruction, the show's plot follows four specific characters living in New York from the 1980s to the present as they witness the fulfillment of biblical prophecies. The series culminates in a righteous battle against one of the four, who turns out to be the Antichrist. Like other telenovelas, the series was prolific: it ran five nights a week for a total of one hundred fifty-five episodes. But while it was packaged as a soap opera and presented to Brazilian masses, RecordTV is not a fully secular network–its owner is the founder of the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), billionaire Bishop Edir Macedo. The trailer described above can be found on official YouTube channel of UCKG leader Renato Cardoso. Clips from the series are available on its streaming service, Univer Video.

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[171] "Futura Escuridão – clipe oficial novela Apocalipse," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPZh3WOOywo.

It is widely acknowledged that the UCKG espouses Manichean dualism and teaches that true Christians are engaged in battle against evil, with declared enemies including Satan and Afro-Brazilian religions. Some observers note that Bishop Macedo, the UCKG's founder, has aligned perceived enemies with the Antichrist. This kind of dualist, martial rhetoric often indicates apocalyptic prophecy belief. Within Pentecostalism, apocalyptic thinking has been intricately tied to the popular theology called dispensationalist premillennialism, which posits that the world will soon witness unprecedented chaos and destruction before Christ returns to save true believers, battle the Antichrist, and reign over a heavenly kingdom on earth for a thousand years. The graphic vision of Earth's destruction and Christians' salvation laid out in the telenovela *Apocalipse* lines up with a premillennialist theology. However, scholarship rarely connects the UCKG with premillennialism.

Little scholarly attention has been dedicated to pinpointing the UCKG's exact eschatology, i.e., its doctrine of last things. Some studies reference premillennialist features of its teachings, but usually incidentally or briefly. Observers note that Scripture plays a relatively minor role in UCKG services, and many perceive the church to be doctrinally vague. Many researchers thus emphasize material and ideological rather than doctrinal contributors to its behaviors. Those that focus on doctrine fixate on prosperity theology, one of the church's most documented teachings. Therefore, when scholars do investigate the UCKG's eschatology, many narrow in on its valorization of wealth to assert that its members are more concerned with building their own kingdom on Earth than immanent catastrophe.[172] A growing body of work thus posits that the UCKG and its members hold an optimistic, postmillennialist vision of the future. Spiritual warfare practices typically do not factor much into such accounts.

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[172] I will analyze several such accounts later in this chapter, but examples include: Luciano de Carvalho Lírio, "Igreja Mercado – Relatório de Observação de Cultos da IURD," *Anais do Congresso Internacional da Faculdades EST* 2, no. 0 (May 1, 2015): 255–70; and Kleber Fernando Rodrigues, "'Vida e vida com abundância' - teologia da prosperidade, sagrado e mercado: um estudo de afinidade eletiva entre a TP, o mercado e a ética de consumo na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus" (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2002).

I challenge the growing argument in the literature that the UCKG has guided Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism through an eschatological transition into postmillennialism. Indeed, the UCKG valorizes wealth, praises success, and models material engagement with this world. But these teachings coexist with apocalypticism. Spiritual warfare practices evoke vivid images of battle and doom, and the graphic end-of-days vision conveyed in *Apocalipse* suggests that the church's eschatology is more theologically coherent–and more premillennialist–than is generally recognized. Additional church media yield clarity: analyzing recorded sermons and video productions, I have found that the UCKG teaches a detailed, apocalyptic, premillennialist vision of the last days built directly on the book of Revelation.

Drawing on the small body of work that recognizes apocalyptic elements of UCKG doctrine, this chapter constructs a thorough account of the UCKG's eschatology. I will begin by defining and characterizing apocalypticism and millennialism, particularly premillennialism. Next is a review of existing scholarship on the church's eschatology. Finally, an analysis of UCKG media, especially recorded sermons, demonstrates that the church teaches an elaborate premillennialist vision. Ultimately, attention to this theology sheds light on the UCKG's conflict with purported enemies like Afro-Brazilian religions. In this case, dispensationalist premillennialism is conducive to spiritual warfare, as the UCKG perceives itself and its enemies as key players in an end-of-days scenario.

Apocalypticism in Context

Apocalypticism generally involves a concern with doomsday prophecies and cosmic cataclysms. Contemporary apocalypticism is grounded in ancient, sacred apocalyptic texts. Though apocalyptic thinking has existed since time immemorial,[173] the Christian book of Revelation–also called the Apocalypse of John–was the first to refer to itself as an apocalypse. The Greek term *apokalypsis* means

[173] For example, Norman Cohn traces it all the way back to the Ancient Near East in *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (Yale University Press, 2001).

"uncovering," or more figuratively, "revelation": the Apocalypse of John was intended to reveal previously hidden realities about the author's circumstances and events to come.[174] The term *apocalypse* has come to be applied to Jewish and Christian works that share features of form and content with the book of Revelation.[175]

According to Martha Himmelfarb, texts in the apocalyptic genre usually present themselves as revelations to a great hero of the past mediated by an angel, often in the form of symbolic visions of history and/or journeys through the heavens.[176] These texts address such topics as the heavenly temple, the divine throne room, astronomical phenomena and other secrets of nature, the Last Judgment and cataclysmic end of the world, and reward and punishment after death.[177] Christopher B. Hays adds that dualism and the idea of a time of testing are important themes.[178] The emphasis on eschatological interests within apocalyptic texts has long inspired in readers belief in end-of-days scenarios.

Paul Boyer asserts that "most Christians throughout history have believed in God's providential oversight of history and in a final eschatological consummation," and that "most still do today."[179] This belief has pervaded American popular thought *en masse*, evidenced by a widespread conviction that the sequence of events that will herald the end of the world are foretold in the Bible. Boyer explains that in the U.S. context, among Protestants, prophecy belief "usually comes embedded within a larger religious matrix that goes by the label 'evangelicalism' or (to use a somewhat more specialized and restrictive

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[174] Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 1.
[175] Including the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Hebrew Bible's book of Daniel, and numerous selections from the New Testament.
[176] Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse.*
[177] Ibid.
[178] Christopher B. Hays, "'Proto-Apocalyptic' Constellations in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," in *Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Currents through History*, ed. Kelly J. Murphy and Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler (Fortress Press, 2016), 37-59.
[179] Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2009), ix.

term) 'fundamentalism.'"[180] He asserts that prophecy belief is a "*religious belief system*, […] a way of ordering experience, and it gives a grand, overarching shape to history, and thus ultimate meaning to the lives of individuals caught up in history's stream."[181] Present events and interactions are deemed cosmically important and interpreted through a biblical framework. For fervent believers, this often inspires a dualistic focus on good and evil and a belief that the righteous will be sorted from the wicked, where the wicked must and will be defeated.

The book of Revelation is arguably the most influential text on apocalyptic thought in contemporary Christianity. It was written around 90 A.D., in a time of Roman persecution. Rome had propagated the cult of emperor worship to support the spread of empire, and to reject this cult, as many Christians did, was an act of treason punishable by death.[182] The work is addressed to the Christians of Asia Minor in that challenging time, revealing to them problems in their own behavior and society at large as well as John's visions of the coming end times. John also provides guidance and hope for salvation. Revelation is long, detailed, obscure, and full of symbolism, so there is no replacement for a proper and thorough reading of the text. What follows, though, is a cursory summary of the book.

In chapters 1-3, John describes the details under which he received his revelation and conveys these details in letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. As a prisoner on the island of Patmos, he received an apocalyptic vision from Jesus, and was instructed to spread Jesus' message to the seven churches and guide and admonish them. In chapter 4, he begins his vision of the future, or rather, "a series of cyclical, partially overlapping, and densely symbolic visions."[183] First, John is shown the heavenly

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[180] Ibid., 3. Boyer does not define either term. I will not discuss fundamentalism in detail until this dissertation's conclusion, but for now it suffices to note that within Christianity, fundamentalism is usually recognized as a subset of or category that overlaps with evangelicalism, defined by its strict focus on biblical literalism as well as conservative values and rigid morals. But whether or not an evangelical takes a literal approach to scripture or identifies as fundamentalist, he will still see the Bible as divinely inspired, including the book of Revelation.
[181] Ibid., x.
[182] Boyer, 36.
[183] Ibid.

throne room. Jesus Christ is represented as a slain lamb who is the only one able to open the scroll with seven seals. John describes the removal of each of the seals, the first four of which summon the infamous four horsemen, commonly thought to represent the Antichrist, War, Famine, and Death.

With the first seal comes the white horseman, who rides out as a conqueror bent on conquest. Second is the red horseman, who has the power to incite violence and is given a sword. Third is a black horseman bearing scales in hand, talking about the exorbitant cost of food. Finally, the fourth horse comes forward, a pale horse carrying the rider Death, followed by Hades. Death and Hades are given authority to kill a quarter of the world's population. Subsequent seals are removed, with the fifth seal revealing the comforting of Christ's martyred followers; the sixth bringing cataclysm, where the sky falls to the earth and people seek safety among rocks and in the mountains; and the seventh bringing a glimmer of hope, where 144,000 loyal followers are marked with seals on their heads and promised eternal blessedness. There is then a half-hour silence in heaven, after which seven angels blow seven trumpets. The seven trumpets bring more judgments that will rain down on the earth.

The judgments, including fire and giant locusts with human faces, kill off mass segments of the population. For example, a third of mankind is slaughtered by a supernatural army of warriors riding horses breathing fire, smoke, and brimstone. Two "witnesses" appear who cause worldwide drought and plagues. A beast arises from a bottomless pit and kills the witnesses who are then resurrected and lifted to heaven. A woman is in labor and a dragon, identified as Satan, is determined to eat her son. The son is born, the woman evades the dragon, and he and his angels are defeated and driven from Heaven to Earth. Two beasts rise from the sea. Given authority from Satan, one rules the world by winning followers and punishing detractors. More plagues ensue. The Whore of Babylon, riding on a beast, drinks the blood of saints and martyrs. Ten kings make war with the Lamb but are crushed. The judgments conclude with the fall of Babylon (often thought to represent Rome, the realm of evil).

The rest of Revelation describes the ultimate struggle between forces of good and evil as well as the struggle's resolution. After the fall of Babylon, there is a final battle between Christ and Antichrist–the Beast. The Antichrist and false prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire and Satan is sealed in a bottomless pit for a thousand years. There is rejoicing in heaven, and Christ's martyrs are resurrected to reign with Him on Earth for a thousand years. Later, after Christ's millennial reign, Satan gathers armies and tries to start up the war again but is defeated by fire from Heaven and cast into the Lake of Fire. All beings who ever lived are resurrected, judged before the white throne, and designated either heavenly bliss or a second death and torment in the Lake of Fire. Chapters 21-22 describe the establishment of the New Heaven and New Earth. The New Earth is a divine kingdom headed by God in a new Jerusalem. There will be no suffering or sin, but only those recorded in the Lamb's book of life can enter.

There are manifold scholarly approaches to the book of Revelation. Boyer explains that many scholars have a "preterist" interpretation of Revelation, believing that "John was commenting on the dark events of his time, alluding in veiled language to the Roman emperors, including the current one, Domitian, and offering hope for the future."[184] Under this interpretation, each character, event, and numerical piece of the narrative represents something from John's and early Christians' reality. For example, the Beast may symbolize both the Roman imperial system and the "evil" Emperor Nero, who–though he had died in 68 A.D.–was predicted to return in the future, seize power, and persecute Christians all over again. In contrast with this historically specific approach to the text, other scholars view Revelation as "part of a vast body of ancient mythic material in which supernatural beings embodying good and evil wage war on a cosmic scale."[185] Boyer takes a middle approach:

> Revelation offers not only a spiritualized version of current future events reworked for literary effect, or a generalized mythic representation of the perennial clash of good and evil, but also a specific message both of warning and of hope to readers whom the author

[184] Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 43.
[185] Ibid., 44.

> knows personally, concluding with an eschatological vision of Christ's imminent return, an end to suffering, and the inauguration of a heavenly kingdom of peace and justice. From this perspective, the work reveals with particular clarity the eschatological expectations that gripped the embattled early church.[186]

Boyer's perspective maintains an emphasis on both mythology and allusion to historical events, but it also suggests that Revelation was intended to depict a literal end-of-times scenario.

Boyer imagines that the Apocalypse of John probably seemed both incredibly demanding and exciting for early Christians in the Roman Empire. Christians undergoing persecution were told that if they could be counted among the righteous, they would be rescued and vindicated. The excitement spurred by Revelation has not waned: for two thousand years, interpreters have viewed it as a call to action and an account of events to come. Due to the imaginative power and poetic richness of sacred apocalyptic texts, Boyer remarks, "It is hardly surprising that they became part of the living fabric of Western culture."[187]

Christian Millennialism

While some Protestants continue to emphasize historical elements of Christian apocalypses, many are more concerned with the prophetic aspects of the texts and their contemporary relevance. Many Christians believe that while John received his revelation and wrote the letter to the seven churches millennia ago, his revelation foretold future events that still have not yet fully come to pass. They then interpret their current circumstances through the lens of Revelation and other apocalyptic texts, looking for signs of the fulfillment of prophecy. There is much focus on the timing and circumstances of Christ's return and the Millennial kingdom. Millennialism, also called millenarianism, is the doctrine concerned with this future, often immanent, millennium.

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[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid., 45.

Millenarian views date back to the first century A.D., when early Christian interpreters used biblical texts like Revelation to predict Jesus' return and the creation of his kingdom on Earth. There was also early opposition: for example, the Gnostics eschewed the idea of a literal, earthly kingdom in favor of spiritual gnosis.[188] Millenarianism seemed to disappear for a few centuries because of political opposition to the belief and the reinterpretation of texts by notable theologians like Augustine.[189] Later, however, a millenarian perspective took a major foothold in medieval Europe. The Crusades were fueled by apocalyptic belief, especially surrounding the figure of the Antichrist, with whom perceived enemies were associated.[190] In the twelfth century a Calabrian monk, Joaquim of Fiore, developed a thorough eschatological doctrine based on the book of Revelation, where he surmised that time on Earth comprises three ages: the Age of Law, presided over by God the Father; the Age of Grace, inaugurated by Jesus' birth; and a future Age of the Spirit, in which, after Antichrist's defeat, righteousness will prevail.[191] Influenced by Fiore, European Christians started predicting the date of the millennial age to be ushered in by Jesus' return. They interpreted wars and politics with a developing millennialist eschatological lens up through at least the seventeenth century. Debates about the millennium were prominent in the Protestant Reformation. Millennialism also provided a spiritual framework for the discovery of the New World, spurring American exceptionalism and influencing American Christianity from its beginning.

Contemporary millennialism can roughly be divided into two camps: *premillennialism* and *postmillennialism*. Under the former, the world will soon fall to ruin, and then Christ will return and win the Battle of Armageddon before ushering in the thousand-year heavenly kingdom. Early and medieval Christians planted the roots for premillennialism, and there have probably always been at least some Christians who believed in Earth's coming destruction prior to the millennium. But in the early United

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[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Norman Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, Revised and expanded edition (Oxford University Press, 1970).
[191] Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 52.

States, premillennialism became a minority view, associated with the Millerites and a few others. An optimistic turn spurred the development of postmillennialism, which asserts that Christ will return *after* the thousand-year kingdom, a millennium of peace built by humans. Early Americans came to believe that Christian influence and social improvement could bring about the divine kingdom on Earth.[192] They thought there was work to be done here and now to transform the world into something heavenly. At the end of the nineteenth century, though, after witnessing the brutality of the Civil War and a depression in the 1890s that preceded great labor unrest, many Christians no longer saw hope of fundamentally reordering and improving the world.[193] They shifted away from postmillennialism and back to the view that Christ's intervention would be needed to create Heaven on Earth.

A key figure in the reemergence and development of premillennialism in the late nineteenth century was John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), a Scottish Protestant preacher. Darby is credited with developing *dispensationalism*, which teaches that mankind's time on Earth can be divided into a series of epochs, or dispensations. Bible prophecy is said to reveal much about the past and future dispensations but is silent on the present Church Age.[194] The Church Age began with Jesus' crucifixion, and is supposed to end with the Rapture, the moment when all true Christian believers will be taken up into heaven to meet Christ. The Rapture marks the transition into the final era and spurs the event sequence that leads up to the millennium. While earlier Americans had already begun developing rapture doctrine and the roots of dispensationalism date back to at least Joachim of Fiore, Darby wove these strands together with the belief in Christ's premillennial return "into a tight and cohesive system that he

[192] Ibid.
[193] Randall J Stevens, "From Abolitionists to Fundamentalists: the Transformation of the Wesleyan Methodists in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries," in *American Nineteenth Century History* 16, no. 2 (2015): 173.
[194] Boyer, 88.

buttressed at every point by copious biblical proof texts."[195] The resulting system is generally called *dispensationalist premillennialism* or *premillennial dispensationalism*.

Inspired by Darby and other influential thinkers, as well as harrowing political and social events, premillennialism quickly emerged as the dominant strand of Christian millennialism at the end of the nineteenth century. Throughout much of the twentieth century, which saw two devastating world wars, a global depression, and the Spanish Flu pandemic, variants of premillennialism could be found on both sides of the Atlantic and in evangelical missionary movements around the globe. Still today, Harding explains that most Bible-believing Protestants in America are premillennialists of one sort or another.[196] Premillennial dispensationalists differ on the number of dispensations that make up human history (ranging from three to eight), but all draw on Darby's teachings and 1 Thessalonians to emphasize the Rapture as the key transitional moment between the current and final dispensation. Under premillennial dispensationalism, the end of the world will soon occur as follows: in the end times or last days, there will be a dark interval of wars, disasters, persecution, and other terrors; Christ will rapture all of the true believers into heaven while those left on earth will suffer the torment of a seven year period of Tribulation, during which a series of judgments wipes out portions of the population; Christ will assemble his army of believers and return to the Earth; the army will meet the Antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon and win; Christ will begin the heavenly Millennial kingdom on Earth; and at the close of the millennial era, there will be a Last Judgment, in which the righteous will be sorted from the wicked, with the wicked cast into the Lake of Fire.[197]

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[195] Ibid., 89.
[196] Susan Harding, "Imagining the Last Days," 15.
[197] Ibid. While the term "dispensationalism" comes from Darby's teaching that time on Earth is divided into a series of epochs, with the current one ending when the Rapture begins, adding "premillennial" to "dispensationalism" often signifies pre-tribulationism, a belief in the Rapture before Tribulation.

Premillennialism can be divided into *historic* and *futurist* strands. In historic premillennial scenarios, we are currently witnessing the end times and Tribulation simultaneously: "the present is the very last moment of human history, of both the Last Days and the Great Tribulation, a highly combustible moment in which all as-yet-unfulfilled Bible prophecies are being fulfilled."[198] Under this thinking, "true" Christians are important actors in the events that bring about the Second Coming and Armageddon. In contrast, futurist premillennialists distinguish the present, or the last days, where prophecies are not yet being fulfilled, from a future period where the prophecies are fulfilled, including Tribulation. Futurist premillennialists tend to mark the Rapture as the transitional event to occur *before* Tribulation. Under either variant, current events are often read as signs of that the end times have arrived or are near. For historic premillennialists, the signs indicate the worst possible state of affairs, and for futurists, the signs may indicate that things are deteriorating and that the Rapture will soon occur.[199] Either way, Harding explains, both types of millennialists *enact* their apocalyptic stories in some way or another, and end-time stories are "'political' in the sense of creating a particular lived reality."[200]

To clarify, reality is often less rigid than these typologies might suggest. Boyer explains that a strict division between premillennialism and postmillennialism can be misleading.[201] The differences between historic and futurist premillennialism can also be obscure. There is not always a clear separation between the last days and the fulfillment of prophecy: many premillennialists believe that "signs" of the end times coincide with prophecies thought to occur prior to the Second Coming or Tribulation. Among dispensationalists there are arguments about the exact timing of the Rapture, with some believers–including most historic premillennialists–taking a mid- or even post-Tribulation view. Despite all these

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[198] Ibid.
[199] For example, at the time of my writing this, many millennialists interpreted the COVID-19 pandemic as a sign of the End Times.
[200] Harding, "Imagining the Last Days," 16.
[201] Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*.

nuances, the impact of millennialism on American and global Christianity, evangelicalism, and especially Pentecostalism cannot be overstated.

Pentecostalism and Premillennialism

Pentecostalism was born out of the premillennialist turn at the end of the nineteenth century.[202] Some argue that Pentecostalism was, at its core, a millenarian belief system focused on the Second Coming.[203] According to Grant Wacker, early Pentecostals embraced the dominant formulation of dispensational premillennialism circulating at the time, but with three key changes.[204] First, Pentecostals claimed that only Holy-Spirit-baptized believers would be taken up in the Rapture–other Christians might escape hell but would not escape the persecutions of the Tribulation Era.[205] Second, while most evangelicals thought that spreading the gospel message was a crucial precondition for Christ's return, Pentecostals were adamant that Christians must preach the *full* gospel to usher in Christ's return. Distinct from the standard message of salvation through repentance, the full gospel emphasized signs and wonders, including healing and baptism, evidenced by speaking in tongues.[206] Finally, Pentecostals carried out a dramatic reconceptualization of the current dispensation's role in history.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century evangelicals had developed an account of the present dispensation, sometimes called the Church Age, thought to fit between the dispensations of Grace (earthly Christ) and Kingdom (Christ's heavenly reign). These evangelicals renamed this age the "Great Parenthesis."[207] They argued that this dispensation was an interruption of the divine plan set for history,

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[202] Pentecostalism is often considered an offshoot of Wesleyan Methodism, which Stephens associates with premillennialism and fundamentalism, at least as it existed at the end of the nineteenth century. See: Stephens, "From Abolitionists to Fundamentalists."
[203] For example, D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (BRILL, 2019).
[204] Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 253.
[205] Ibid. Wacker notes how this was driven by powerful sociological motivations: Pentecostals allotted a special place for themselves, set apart from rivals and critics.
[206] Ibid., 252.
[207] Ibid.

which resulted from the Jews' free–and thus unforeseeable–rejection of Jesus.[208] It was widely held that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, initially bestowed on Christians on the Day of the Pentecost, had ceased at the end of the dispensation of Grace in the early second century. The Great Parenthesis was thought to be characterized by a lack of miracles. And since God himself had abolished the supernatural gifts, any present reappearance of the supernatural was fraudulent if not Satanic.[209]

Pentecostals rejected this theory and replaced it with the latter rain covenant. The absence of miraculous gifts between the second and twentieth centuries did not mean that God had taken them away. Rather, the church's apostasy had made it spiritually unfit to experience miracles.[210] They held that the present age was a fulfillment of God's plan, not an interruption, and that miracles were part of its inception and conclusion. Pentecostals interpreted the early and latter rain or harvest metaphors in Deuteronomy 11:14, Joel 2:23, and James 5:7 to mean that the Lord had promised to manifest his power first in an early or former rain to prepare the soil for planting, then again in a late or latter rain to prepare the crops for harvest.[211] They dubbed the miraculous events that occurred on the Day of Pentecost the "early rain" (marking the beginning of the dispensation) and the ones that took place in their own time the "latter rain." The latter rain had been foreshadowed in the Protestant Reformation while the holiness revivals of the 1890s qualified as "preliminary showers," and the twentieth century movement marked the beginning of the "full deluge."[212]

Despite these three modifications to dispensational premillennialism, Pentecostals preserved most of its core elements, especially the pervasive perception that the Earth was witnessing catastrophic signs

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[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid., 254.
[211] Ibid., 254.
[212] Ibid., 254. This theology is why Pentecostals were often known as "latter rain folk"–and often described themselves as such–up until the mid-twentieth century.

of the end times.[213] Citing the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, World War I, the rise of Bolshevism, and other global events, radical evangelicals saw the world undergoing rampant destruction. They predicted that humans would spur their own annihilation through scientific advancement and misguided politics. They argued that events in the natural world would worsen, mirroring man's self-destruction with ongoing cataclysms. Like other evangelicals, then, Pentecostals experienced a sense of urgency and immanent catastrophe. The world had to be evangelized to initiate Christ's return before events deteriorated further. Like countless Christians before them, Pentecostals adopted martial rhetoric, envisaging themselves as soldiers on the frontlines of battle, tasked with saving souls from evil and ignorance.[214] They were extremely concerned with hell and the torments of hellfire soon to come. They were adamant that non-Christians, and often nonevangelical Protestants, were doomed to damnation.[215]

Yet, despite the Pentecostal rhetoric of doom, there was also a pervasive discourse of hope. Wacker explains that Holy Ghost folk knew that Christ would soon reign, and they would reign with him. They expected to physically be whisked away into heaven anytime. In the meantime, they knew that the Lord had chosen them alone to lead a vast movement of global spiritual conquest.[216] Converts embraced expansionism and exhibited "invincible confidence in their own prospects for religious and perhaps even cultural victory in this present world."[217] They made extensive efforts at reaching the farthest corners of the globe, inspired converts with their sense of being chosen, and taught the socially marginalized to translate worries over immediate misfortune into dreams of long-range fortune.[218] To fulfill their mission, they raised money for travel, advertised in the media, and set up enduring ministries. Pentecostals thus balanced supernatural concerns with pragmatic ones the same way they balanced doom with hope.

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[213] Ibid., 256.
[214] Ibid., 258.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., 262.
[217] Ibid., 252.
[218] Ibid., 265.

Today, Pentecostals are still known to be eschatologically excited Christians.[219] At the end of twentieth century, Huibert Zegwaart observed that while not all Pentecostals were premillennialists, most were.[220] He wrote:

> They sing of their future reign with Christ and about the thrones which they hope to occupy in His millennial kingdom. Furthermore, Pentecostals look forward to the time in which they will be vindicated before the whole world that refused to believe their message, scorned them and at times showed itself quite hostile to them. But more than all that they expect to live forever in the mansions prepared for them in the Heavenly Jerusalem, close to the heart of Him in whom they believe, seeing the face of the Almighty.[221]

Millennialism has remained an important doctrine for Pentecostalism in the twenty-first century, but scholars have increasingly perceived flexibility or hybridity within Pentecostal eschatology. They observe Pentecostal optimism about prospects in this life, here and now, before the Rapture. Contemporary Pentecostals believe they can and should improve this world, not just by saving souls through evangelization, but also by improving adherents' lives. However, their partial successes in this world are seen to ultimately pave the way to a future full salvation that is both material and spiritual. [222] Describing global Pentecostalism, Candy Gunther Brown argues that pre and postmillennial visions of the present and future "often merge into hope both of a progressive transformation of the present world and of a radical rupture between an imperfect earthly order that is passing away and the apocalyptic coming of the perfected kingdom of God."[223]

Wacker observes a similar hope for material improvement in contemporary Pentecostals, but as noted above, he describes early Pentecostals as optimistic too, even if their optimism coexisted with a sense of doom. He argues that American Pentecostalism has only changed superficially over the last

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[219] Huibert Zegwaart, "Apocalyptic Eschatology and Pentecostalism: The Relevance of John's Millennium for Today," *Pneuma* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 3-25.
[220] Zegwaart, "Apocalyptic Eschatology and Pentecostalism."
[221] Ibid., 3.
[222] Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, 375.
[223] Ibid.

century, with global Pentecostalism roughly mirroring American Pentecostalism.[224] On one hand, "biblical inerrancy and wooden literalism hovered as close to the ground at century's end as they did at the beginning."[225] On the other hand, hope is still pervasive as the religion continues growing rapidly and Pentecostals valorize and sometimes gain wealth. And Pentecostalism's dual impulses–spiritual and practical–continue to coexist. Wacker reconciles this as follows:

> In one sense, the world-affirming impulse–the expectation that "something *good* is going to happen to you"–seems to stand in tension with the world-denying impulse. But in another, deeper sense, it clearly does not. The otherworldly legitimates the thisworldly. It says that all things are possible for modern-day saints [Pentecostals], no less than for the New Testament ones. It is hard to imagine a formula better suited for a civilization wracked with timeless spiritual needs, yet rapidly opening to the unprecedented possibilities of tech and information-age prosperity… Pentecostals transcended one of the fundamental problems that had engaged the entire history of Christian thought and pastoral concern–what we might call the "Mary and Martha" problem: how to negotiate spiritual and material well-being at once. Since God's Holy Spirit did everything, Holy Spirit-filled Christians did nothing. But since Holy Spirit-filled Christians did nothing, they were free to do everything. That conviction, as inspiring as it was ironic, gave saints the two greatest goods that mortal existence had to offer: the life beyond in all its fullness, and the life at hand it all its richness. It was heaven below.[226]

Wacker's "heaven below" mirrors Brown's observations about Pentecostal hope for a material, progressive transformation of this world. But this vision was built by early Pentecostals. The early movement embraced hope despite the doom of dispensational premillennialism. Wacker does not dive into contemporary Pentecostal millennialism, but he asserts that the early movement's theology has remained largely unchanged.[227] This implies that premillennialism prevails and that it is–and always has been–compatible with optimism about the state of Pentecostals' lives and their prospects for spreading salvation while they await Christ's return. A question arises, then, has their sense of immanent catastrophe–and doom about the fate of non-Pentecostals through the end times and beyond–remained

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[224] Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 266.
[225] Ibid., 266.
[226] Ibid., 268-9.
[227] Ibid., 266.

alongside their hope to improve converts' lives? For neo-Pentecostal churches like the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, it has indeed.

Millennialism, Neo-Pentecostalism, and the UCKG in Brazil

As in the United States, premillennialism has had an important role in Brazil's religious history, especially within Pentecostalism. Premillennialism was a core feature of the first wave of Pentecostalism, which arose in the early twentieth century and is represented by the Assemblies of God church–still Brazil's largest Pentecostal denomination today.[228] The second wave, which arose in the 1950s and 60s and was characterized by a renewed interest in healing, is also recognized as premillennialist. However, the third wave, neo-Pentecostalism, is described as breaking with the premillennialist tradition. Kleber Fernando Rodrigues argues that one of the most important distinctions between the first and second waves of Pentecostalism, on one hand, and third wave neo-Pentecostalism embodied by the UCKG, on the other, is a rupture in eschatology.[229]

Taylor Boas explains how some scholars have attributed the growing political ambitions of evangelicals throughout Latin America to the growth of neo-Pentecostalism, "whose very different view of the end of the world is more favorable to participation in public life."[230] Latin American evangelicals from the first several decades of the twentieth century, like Brazil's first and second-wave Pentecostals, have been described as premillennialists more concerned with salvation than political participation. In contrast, Boas asserts, "Neo-Pentecostal denominations like Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God revived an older view, postmillennial theology, which held that Christ would return after the

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[228] Gerson Linden, "Eschatological Pneumatology as a Theological Framework for Evaluating the Pneumatology of the International Church of God's Grace in Brazil" (St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Seminary, 2017): 4, https://scholar.csl.edu/phd/52.
[229] Kleber Fernando Rodrigues, "'Vida e vida com abundância' - teologia da prosperidade, sagrado e mercado : um estudo de afinidade eletiva entre a TP, o mercado e a ética de consumo na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus" (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2002): 61.
[230] Taylor C. Boas, "The Electoral Representation of Evangelicals in Latin America," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, February 28, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1748, 8.

thousand-year period of peace and prosperity."[231] The resulting task is to build the millennial kingdom on Earth, requiring active engagement in the world.

Gerson Linden examines this perceived eschatological shift brought on by neo-Pentecostals in his dissertation on a major Brazilian neo-Pentecostal church, the *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* (the International Church of the Grace of God).[232] He reasons that because Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism emphasizes prosperity theology, healing, exorcism, and the promise of a better life in this world, premillennialism is less central in the third wave than in the historical Pentecostal churches.[233] For Linden, these beliefs and practices equate, at least partly, to a postmillennial view that the world can be Christianized and that the Second Coming will occur at the close of the millennial period of righteousness and peace. He acknowledges that Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism may espouse premillennialism in theory, but asserts that in practical terms, its eschatology more closely resembles postmillennialism.

Linden's argument mirrors Brown's view of the hybrid nature of eschatology within contemporary global Pentecostalism.[234] Both writers imply that a focus on this-worldly improvement and well-being contrasts with the traditional pessimism of premillennialism. Extending this reasoning further, one might argue that prosperity theology's optimism precludes an apocalyptic sense of impending doom. In further contrast, premillennialism has been associated with efforts at spiritual salvation while prosperity theology teaches material engagement with the physical world. Why strive for material gain if

[231] Ibid.,
[232] Linden, "Eschatological Pneumatology."
[233] Ibid., 4; 12.
[234] Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*.

one believes he will shortly be raptured up to heaven? This incongruity is why prosperity theology is rarely connected with premillennialism, though the two are far from incompatible, as I will argue.[235]

Several other scholars draw similar conclusions about Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG. Ultimately, premillennialism seems to no longer be perceived as a major feature of Brazilian Protestantism because neo-Pentecostalism's embrace of prosperity theology. In the following section I will document–before challenging–the UCKG's perceived departure from premillennialism.

Toward an Account of The UCKG's Theology

There is not a huge body of work dedicated to the UCKG's theological principles, with much less on its eschatology. A major factor in this lack of investigation is that scholars (and lay critics of the church) observe minimal or surface-level use of the Bible in UCKG services.

When I attended services in Rio de Janeiro, I found that Bible passages were read sparingly, and audience members rarely used a Bible for reference.[236] Pastors delivered sermons intermittently throughout the services, yelling animatedly into a microphone. Loud organ music frequently accompanied the shouting. The sermons focused on a general theme, usually related to everyday struggles and how to overcome them. In between segments of the sermons, there was substantial time dedicated to collective singing and prayer. There was also a large focus on ritual. Communion occurred regularly, and Fridays were the designated deliverance (exorcism) day. At the church I attended most often, faith healing was always the major focus of each service (and for the UCKG, healing and exorcism are one in the same).

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[235] It is important to remember that Wacker describes early premillennialist Pentecostals as balancing dual impulses: spiritualism and practicality/materialism. They had hope for their immediate lives before the impending Rapture. See: Wacker, *Heaven Below*. On a related note, Weber described Dutch Calvinists as looking to prosperity as a sign that they were predestined for salvation. Materialism does not preclude apocalyptic prophecy belief or a concern with spiritual salvation.

[236] During the summer of 2015, I lived in Rio de Janeiro and attended local UCKG services several times a week in the neighborhoods of Copacabana and Botafogo. My experiences generally resemble the observations of other researchers who have visited UCKG churches in Brazil and elsewhere. Services in local communities can be seen as tokens (individual instances) of a general type (blueprint).

The audience members were highly engaged through the service: they shouted, sang loudly, waved their arms, held each other's hands, and prayed. They eagerly awaited their turn to be anointed with holy oil, and they acted refreshed and renewed after drinking blessed water. By the end of each service, several worshippers had begun crying as they knelt on the floor in prayer. It was unclear to me whether attendees spoke in tongues, but they sobbed and mumbled unintelligibly. Overall, I found services to feel highly emotional, sensorial, and improvisational. Scripture seemed to take a backseat to bodily experience.

Because my experience is common, the UCKG is generally not perceived to be literalist, nor to espouse a strict, clearly defined doctrine. There is a tendency to dissociate it from the kinds of Christian churches–especially literalist and/or fundamentalist–that teach clearly articulated theological principles rooted in specific interpretations of biblical passages. Luciano de Carvalho Lírio concedes that UCKG sermons do often begin with a brief biblical passage, usually from the Old Testament, with occasional passages from the New Testament to narrate Jesus' miracles.[237] However, he places sermons under the homiletic category *thematic*, as opposed to *textual* or *expository*. Thematic sermons' structures are not based directly on biblical texts, but on themes chosen from short selections therein. Lírio observes that throughout UCKG sermons, Scripture is often used in fragmented or decontextualized ways, even asserting that passages are forced or manipulated to legitimize the daily theme or lesson.[238]

Despite the way scholars have observed the use of Scripture in services, however, the UCKG does hold official core doctrine at the heart of its theology. For those willing to search through the church's websites, official statements are available to illuminate its doctrine. For example, on the American website for the UCKG is the following list of the church's beliefs:

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[237] Lírio, "Igreja Mercado," 263.
[238] Ibid.

1. We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in their original writings as fully inspired by God and accept them as the supreme and final authority for faith and life.
2. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. **We believe in Jesus Christ**, that was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born by the virgin Mary and is true God and true Man.
4. We believe that God created man in His own image; that man sinned and thereby incurred the penalty of death, physical and spiritual; that all human beings inherit a sinful nature, which causes actual transgression involving personal guilt.
5. **We believe in Lord Jesus Christ**, that died for our sins, a substitutionary sacrifice according to the Scriptures, and that all who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood.
6. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, His ascension into heaven and His present life as our High Priest and Advocate.
7. We believe in the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory.
8. We believe that those who repent of their sins, receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and hold fast to Him are born again by the Holy Spirit and become children of God.
9. We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, empowering believers for service with accompanying supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
10. We believe in the divinely ordained ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.
11. We believe in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, the eternal blessings of the redeemed, and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected salvation.
12. We believe that the one true Church consists of all those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that the local church on earth should take its character from this conception of the spiritual Church and, therefore, new birth and personal confession of the Christ are essential for church membership and **universal community**.
13. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ appointed two ordinances – baptism in water and the Lord's Supper – to be observed as acts of obedience and as a continual witness to the facts of the Christian faith; that baptism is the immersion of the believer in water as a confession of the Lord Jesus in burial and resurrection, and that the Lord's Supper is the partaking of the body and blood of our Savior in remembrance of His sacrifice until He comes.
14. We believe that divine healing seen in the Old and the New Testaments is an integral part of the Gospel.
15. We believe the Bible teaches that without holiness no man can see God.

16. We believe in sanctification as a definite, yet progressive work of grace, commencing at the time of the new birth and continuing until the end of one's life.[239]

The first belief immediately points to the divinity and authority of the Bible. It is not explicit that Scriptures are perceived to be inerrant or require a literal approach, but this is inferable. There are several other lines that hint at literalism, like the third point referencing the Virgin Birth, the fourth that suggests a belief in the doctrine of Original Sin based on Genesis 2, the fifth that ties the crucifixion and Jesus' sacrifice to "Scriptures," and the fourteenth point that locates divine healing within the Bible.

The UCKG's Brazilian website makes related statements of faith (though in a more narrative format), and one point yields clarity regarding the question of literalism.[240] After three paragraphs concerned with the nature and history of the Holy Trinity, a fourth paragraph explains that the Holy Trinity reveals His will through the Bible, "which was written by divinely inspired men, as shown in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for education in righteousness, so that the man of God may be perfect and perfectly fitted for every good work.'"[241] While there may be little reading in daily sermons, the UCKG officially holds Scripture as divinely inspired and likely inerrant since its teachings are said to foster perfection.

Returning to the numbered beliefs from the UCKG's U.S. website, there are clear eschatological ideas that are rooted in biblical apocalyptic texts.[242] The belief in "the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory" equates to the Second Coming. Point thirteen states that the Eucharist is to be carried out in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice "until He comes." The timing of the Second Coming is notably absent, but the event itself is clearly important. The belief in "the resurrection of the just and the unjust,

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[239] "Beliefs of The Universal Church of The Kingdom of God USA," Universal, The Universal Church, web.universal.org/usa/beliefs-of-the-universal-church-of-the-kingdom-of-god-usa/. Bolding preserved from the original. However, the original uses bullet points, which I have replaced with numbers for ease of reference.
[240] Universal, "Em que Cremos," Universal.org - Portal Oficial da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, accessed October 5, 2021, https://www.universal.org/a-universal/home/.
[241] Ibid., my translation from Portuguese.
[242] The Universal Church, "Beliefs of the UCKG USA."

the eternal blessings of the redeemed, and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected salvation" resembles the Last Judgment outlined in Revelation and thought by premillennialists to occur after Christ's millennial reign. This same belief also clearly reflects dualistic thinking. None of this confirms pre or postmillennialism, but it does portray the church's concern with eschatological events.

Finally, on the Brazilian website, there is a section on tithes and offerings. The section begins: "Universal also believes that tithes and offerings are as sacred as the Word of God. Tithes signify faithfulness, and offerings signify the servant's love for his Lord. All who serve God are entitled to an abundant life. This is what the Lord Jesus affirms in the book of John 10:10: '...I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'"[243] Unsurprisingly, prosperity theology–including financial sacrifice but also optimism–is therefore part of official UCKG doctrine. The tithes section concludes with another optimistic verse: "Finally, the belief is that everyone must have a permanent relationship with the Lord Jesus by faith and thus gain eternal life, which He promised to all who persevere until the end. 'To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.' Revelation 3.21."[244] There is no elaboration on who or what shall be conquered, but it is interesting how the doctrine of tithing is connected with faith, conquest, and eternal life.

While the teachings discussed here do not form a comprehensive account, they comprise a strong start in demonstrating that the UCKG holds a relatively clear official doctrine, contrary to the perceptions of many researchers. Admittedly, everyday reality at church–both pastoral messaging and worshippers' interpretations–may stray from this official doctrine or make only vague references to it.[245] And it is difficult to say how frequently members of the UCKG read official doctrinal statements. Hence, the literature on UCKG eschatology tends to focus more on the emotional nature of services and the church's

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[243] Universal, "Em que Cremos."
[244] Ibid.
[245] Again, de Lírio argues in "Igreja Mercado" that Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism teaches premillennialism in theory but has come to embrace postmillennialism in practice.

preoccupation with wealth than official theological statements. However, fortunately, some scholars in recent years have called for increased attention to official doctrine.[246] Taking up this task, I find that the church elaborates on its doctrinal formulations in surprising detail in media productions and even widely attended services. Pastors indeed work to instill correct doctrine, including eschatological concepts like the timing of the Second Coming prior to the millennial kingdom. But before making my case for dispensationalist premillennialism, it is prudent to summarize the literature on UCKG eschatology.

Prosperity, Demons, and Eschatology: Existing Scholarship

As Eric Kramer explains, "To many Brazilians today, the mention of Pentecostalism immediately summons one of two images: money flowing to the altar or demons writhing before the congregation."[247] These associations are born out of interactions with neo-Pentecostal churches, which have come to overshadow smaller, historical Pentecostal churches. Financial sacrifice and exorcism rituals are both central to Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism, especially the UCKG. Researchers have dedicated substantial attention to both images: most scholarship on the UCKG's teachings focus either on its prosperity theology, its spiritual battle against Satan,[248] or both. Again, there is not much attention to the UCKG's eschatology. However, when scholars do attend to the church's vision of the future, they usually draw conclusions based on money at the expense of demons.

Prosperity–and financial sacrifice–is a frequent sermon theme in UCKG services. Bishops use Scriptures to underscore the importance of giving to the church. Collection plates circulate on an ongoing basis, facilitated by *obreiros* ("workers"), church employees clothed in white. As an outsider, even as an anonymous member of an enormous audience, I felt immense pressure to donate. Lírio notes that because

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[246] For example, Samuel Marques Campos in "O Sacrifício Encantado: Percepções, Ritualidades e a Identidade na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus" (Belém, Universidade Federal do Pará, 2018).
[247] Eric W. Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power in Brazilian Neo-Pentecostalism," *Latin American Perspectives* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 100.
[248] Leonardo Vasconcelos de Castro Moreira, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Madrid : A Church without Borders" (Ph.D., University of Warwick, 2019), http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/129918/.

of the emphasis on tithing, critics have accused Bishop Macedo and the UCKG of "defrauding the Old Testament" to support the practice of financial sacrifice.[249] But in exchange for their offerings, prosperity theology teaches that adherents' generosity will return to them tenfold. Sermons valorize material success and services are regularly dedicated to discussing financial literacy and goals. Scholars view this materialist theology as indicative of an earthly and optimistic eschatological vision. Lírio argues, "The eschatological sky is not the focus of the UCKG. The faithful seek, through Prosperity Theology, a paradise established on Earth."[250]

Some researchers have thus come to draw conclusions about the UCKG's eschatology based almost solely on prosperity theology. For example, Rodrigues argues that the capitalist, consumerist ethic of the UCKG, which divinizes the market and encourages worshippers to enjoy consumer products, means the church has abandoned a belief in Christ's impending return.[251] For Rodrigues, the capitalist ethos indicates a fully postmillennial doctrine, distinguishing the UCKG from the premillennialism defended by most Pentecostals.[252] Rodrigues provides examples of the UCKG's teachings that its followers are meant to enjoy blessings in this life, but he does not give direct evidence that they have eschewed a belief in Christ's immanent return. Rather, he deduces this using a Weberian analysis.

In his renowned essay, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," Weber argued that a religion's ethos or ethic can be sorted across two axes: asceticism versus mysticism, and inner-worldly versus other-worldly engagement. The Calvinists Weber analyzed valued hard work, saving money, and refraining from indulgence. He famously labeled the corresponding Protestant Ethic as "inner-worldly asceticism." In contrast, Rodrigues uses Weber to argue that classical Pentecostalism has an outer-worldly

[249] Lírio, "Igreja Mercado," 263.
[250] Ibid., 262.
[251] Rodrigues, "'Vida e vida com abundância,'" 62.
[252] Ibid.

asceticism.[253] This ethos eschews participation in politics in favor of evangelism: the goal is to save as many souls as possible before the destruction of the world and Christ's return. Contrasting with Wacker, perhaps overlooking the worldly engagement of classical Pentecostals, Rodrigues characterizes premillennialism as a concern with the afterlife over the present one.[254] In contrast, Rodrigues argues that the political, social, and economic engagement of the UCKG can best be understood through the lens of inner-worldly consumerism.

For Rodrigues, UCKG members are more like Weber's Calvinists than classical Pentecostals in that they maintain a this-worldly ethos, but they differ from both regarding asceticism. Contrasting with the austerity of Weber's Calvinists, UCKG members are taught to pursue material blessings in this life. Rodrigues notes that first and second-wave Pentecostals have held a common phrase corresponding with the Second Coming: "Jesus saves, and he will return." In contrast, Edir Macedo teaches that "Jesus saves, and he liberates."[255] For Rodrigues, this liberation paradigm replaces the classical belief in Christ's impending return: Christians can be free of misery and destruction, and instead pursue prosperity and peace on Earth. In a postmillennial vision, they are free to build heaven here and now. As I will demonstrate, this account misses the UCKG's concerns with immanent eschatological events.

While studies of the UCKG's eschatology seem to always emphasize its pursuit of material blessings, some are more nuanced than others. As part of recent increased attention to the UCKG's doctrine and theology, Campos captures more details of the UCKG's eschatological vision using doctrinal statements.[256] He begins by thoroughly outlining premillennialism and its role in classical Pentecostalism, recognizing the importance of this history for Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism, before pointing out a key departure: "If Pentecostal eschatology highlights the imminent return of Jesus and the rapture of the

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[253] Ibid.
[254] Wacker, *Heaven Below*.
[255] Ibid., 64.
[256] Campos, "O Sacrifício Encantado."

Church from this world of suffering and sin, Neopentecostalism emphasizes an eschatology that favors the faithful in this world."[257] Whereas Pentecostalism has a "future, transcendent eschatology," (which, to me, conflicts with the notion of Jesus' immanent return) he argues that "the model of messianism-millenarianism expressed in neo-Pentecostal movements is immanent and present."[258] Campos uses statements from the UCKG's Brazilian website–like the reference to an abundant life from John 10:10 and Jesus' promise of eternal life from Revelation 3:21–to elaborate. He shows that the UCKG teaches that all Christians have the right to a life of abundance and that they should hope for Christ's immediate return, which will make the abundant life eternal.[259] Essentially, believers can partly experience the kingdom now, with Jesus to return for the full inauguration.

This is essentially a more detailed, UCKG-specific version of Brown's argument about the hybridity of global Pentecostal eschatology.[260] Like Brown and others, Campos finds the optimism of prosperity theology to mark an important change from premillennialism. However, he recognizes the historical context of premillennialism for neo-Pentecostal eschatology correctly notes that the UCKG still emphasizes the impending Second Coming to mark an epochal transition. But Campos is silent on the UCKG's teachings on the end times, the Rapture, Tribulation, and the Antichrist. Without addressing these, his account implies that the abundant life is seen as something continuous; uninterrupted. He does not address demons or spiritual war, or the fact that the UCKG only directs optimism at true believers.

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[257] Ibid., 87. My translation. Italics preserved from the original.
[258] Ibid. Drawing on Campos' work, Soulo Baptista Cerqueira also finds the UCKG to have an "immanent and present" eschatology, although his reasoning is based on the UCKG's NGO work in the countryside of Brazil's arid northeast, where it has coordinated the planting of farms in the style of Israeli Kibutzes. For Cerqueira, this is evidence that the UCKG seeks to build a millennial kingdom here and now. Saulo Baptista Cerqueira, "Conteúdos Messiânicos-Milenaristas Nos Movimentos Pentecostais e Neopentecostais," *Revista Observatório Da Religião* 1, no. 1 (2014): 199–217.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*.

His dissertation focuses on the divine cure, the health portion of the Health and Wealth Gospel, so this is likely beyond the scope of his work. Still, we are left with gaps.

With scholars characterizing the church as optimistic, what do we make of its extreme concern with evil forces? The UCKG's dualism is apparent in many elements of its teachings, including in images of battle and demons invoked in services. The sermons I heard were heavily concerned with an ongoing spiritual war between the forces of good and evil. Pastors often spoke of *guerra*, *batalha*, and *luta* (war, battle, and fight), explaining that Pentecostal worshippers need to fight outside forces–those opposed to Pentecostalism, and evil in general. One pastor warned that Satan was going to visit each of the adherents in the body of someone trying to question their faith, and it was their duty to remain faithful. On a few occasions, adherents were likened to *soldados* (soldiers), fighting for the greater good in the face of evil. Famously, services frequently feature exorcism, a form of spiritual warfare. Campos' account of earthly optimism is incomplete without reconciling it with the militant dualism that underlies this warfare.

In an article called "Demons and Money," Stephen Selka helps with this reconciliation.[261] He examines how the UCKG's notions of prosperity, framed as "possession of," are interrelated with deliverance from demons, framed as "possession by":

> At first glance the relationship between these two kinds of possession might seem spurious, but they are closely connected… Liberation from spiritual possession opens the way for the accumulation of material possession. That is, demonic control (possession by) impedes our realization of the prosperity (possession of) that God desires for human beings.[262]

Demons are perceived to be the root cause of all illnesses in life, including poverty. War with demons comprises the pursuit of health and prosperity. Importantly, with faith, demons can be defeated. Selka is concerned with possession and not eschatology here, but his account illustrates how battle with demons

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[261] Stephen Selka, "Demons and Money: Possessions in Brazilian Pentecostalism," in *Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions*, by Paul Christopher Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 155-176.
[262] Ibid., 157.

and the pursuit of prosperity reinforce one another. His argument could be extended for scholars like Lírio to argue that UCKG's dualist, spiritual war is aimed at creating a heavenly, prosperous kingdom on Earth.[263]

Arguably, though, the UCKG's spiritual warfare reflects an inherent cynicism. And of course, it promotes fear. Pentecostals' successes require continual battle against myriad evil spirits. A person might be able open the door to material success through exorcism, but they are never free from the threat of new possession and illness. As Rivera argues, "It can be said that the Pentecostal subject, unlike the Protestant subject, oscillates between purity and impurity."[264] Evil forces are relentless; everyone is vulnerable.

Moreover, spiritual warfare promotes intolerance and violence. Demons double as spirits celebrated in other religions. In Brazil, exorcisms target the beloved deities of Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners, but in other countries, the UCKG adopts and demonizes elements of other religions. It also aligns perceived *human* enemies with the forces of evil. Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners are denounced as witches and facilitators of demonic possession. Other targets include Muslims, Hare Krishnas, Jews, homosexuals, Catholics, and even non-Pentecostal Protestants. The UCKG battles these "enemies" not only in church but in thorough, demonizing media campaigns. If the UCKG is working to transform the world into a prosperous heavenly kingdom, this transformation requires constant battle.

Admittedly, not all perceived enemies require annihilation: those who can be converted can be saved. The UCKG loves to "save" ex-practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions, especially *pais* and *mães de santo* (Candomblé priests and priestesses) through exorcism and conversion. These cases are celebrated as proof of the church's strength. But those who do not convert are condemned. If there is a

[263] Lírio, "Igreja Mercado."
[264] Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil," 119.

vision of salvation, it is not universal but precarious and exclusionary. This clashes with the vision of postmillennialism, an optimistic portrait of a transformational, global Christian kingdom.

Undoubtedly, spiritual war and earthly prosperity are connected, as Selka shows. The UCKG's ongoing spiritual battle serves to further its this-worldly aims: it bolsters its perceived spiritual strength and thus material growth by allowing it to perpetually defeat demons, heal its members, and recruit new ones by demonizing competing religions. The fear instilled by the church makes its services more appealing, lending credence to its calls for increased attendance and financial offerings. For the faithful, there is optimism: the UCKG poses itself as more powerful than demons and the religions it associates with them. I contend, though, that the perpetual nature of this spiritual war also undermines the UCKG's power–the work is never finished. Regardless, the UCKG does not teach that it will defeat all demons, successfully Christianize the world, and usher in a kingdom on Earth prior to Christ's return. It does not even teach that after being exorcised, believers must simply accumulate and enjoy riches and blessings while they await Jesus to make the abundant life eternal. Fear and militancy may facilitate wealth, but they are not framed as temporary hurdles in creating a human-made heavenly kingdom.

On the contrary, the UCKG's rhetoric about its purported enemies reflects premillennialist themes. Ilana Van Wyk documents this in an article on the UCKG's anti-ecumenicalism in South Africa.[265] She observes that as part of the UCKG's spiritual warfare, it denounces other religions and teaches a politics of suspicion, all bolstered by frequent references to demons and Satan. Van Wyk is not focused on eschatology, but she details an important event for our purposes: Bishop Macedo's reference to the Antichrist to denounce Christian unity across denominational lines. In a tirade against ecumenism delivered in a blog post on the South African UCKG's website, Bishop Macedo states: "'In the name of peace and love the work of ecumenism runs parallel to religiosity, targeting a future of only one

[265] Ilana van Wyk, "Fragile Wars: Anti-Ecumenism in a South African Church," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 2 (2018): 269–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2018.1415069.

government led by the antichrist and assisted by his beast (the false prophet).'"[266] Macedo's concern with these apocalyptic figures clearly draws on Revelation.

Van Wyk points to premillennialism only incidentally (she never applies the term), but some scholars reference premillennialism more directly. In her insightful work on the incorporation of Judaism within Brazilian evangelicalism, Marta Francisca Topel connects the "Judaization" of Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism to dispensationalism.[267] She begins with a history of dispensationalism (coterminous with dispensationalist premillennialism, developed at the end of the nineteenth century) and its Jewish elements. Dispensationalism has always drawn heavily on the Hebrew Bible, allocating epochs to its most prominent figures (e.g. ages of Adam and Moses). Further connections include the following: early dispensationalists believed that Jesus' Second Coming will save the Jewish people in the same way that his first arrival did; both the Jewish people and the Christian church are said to be the people of God; and in the Second Coming, Jesus will initiate the millennial kingdom in Jerusalem.[268] Topel argues that the Jewish elements emphasized in Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism stem from dispensationalism.

The influence of Judaism on the UCKG is illustrated most famously by its construction of its famous *Templo do Solomão*, or Temple of Solomon, in São Paulo. This temple was reportedly built with stones brought from Jerusalem. According to Topel, it is intended to serve as a sign of the impending Second Coming.[269] The temple also represents a belief in the salvation and importance of the Jewish people (despite its location in Brazil and not Jerusalem, an interesting departure). Additionally, the UCKG and other neo-Pentecostal churches are said to incorporate Jewish rites into their liturgy. Topel

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[266] Ibid., 275.
[267] Marta Francisca Topel, "A INUSITADA INCORPORAÇÃO DO JUDAÍSMO EM VERTENTES CRISTÃS BRASILEIRAS: ALGUMAS REFLEXÕES," *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões* 4, no. 10 (May 2011): 35–50, https://doi.org/10.4025/rbhranpuh.v4i10.30382.
[268] Ibid., 40.
[269] Ibid., 48. Note how this is an enactment of prophecy: according to Topel the Temple is a "sign," but was intentionally constructed by the church to be read as such.

concludes that these are not innocent choices: behind these actions hides the popular Christian millennialist belief that there is no salvation outside of Jesus, and that at some historical moment near the end days, the Jews will massively convert to Christianity.[270]

Thanks to Topel, we finally have an investigation of UCKG's eschatology beyond money and optimism. She recognizes that prosperity and a belief in the Apocalypse are compatible. However, her perspective seems to be relatively unique, and her focus on Jewish elements as markers of dispensationalism is narrow. Her article thus makes an excellent launching point for further investigation into the UCKG's eschatology.

In taking up this investigation, I have found that UCKG followers are regularly exposed to church media where elaborate eschatological views are communicated and likely internalized. And a foray into such media immediately reveals the UCKG's deep interest in premillennialist visions of the Apocalypse, built directly on verses from the book of Revelation and other Scriptures.

Apocalypticism in UCKG Media

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Brazilian neo-Pentecostals embraced the televangelist model of North American "electronic" evangelical churches. Citing an interview from an Umbanda leader from her fieldwork on the conflict between Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions, Lundell describes her interviewee's perception that "Pentecostal dominance in its contemporary context only became possible because of its presence on and ownership of the media channels. Indeed, television has a large, if not the most, significant role as a source of information for the vast majority of the Brazilian

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[270] Ibid., 48. This is a widespread belief in Christianity dating back to its early days, based on Paul's prophecy of the ultimate redemption of "all Israel" in Romans 11. Analyzing the history of Christian interpretations of Romans 11, Jeremy Cohen details how medieval Christianity constructed the "eschatological Jew": the Jew of the end time, "when upheaval, cataclysm, and salvation will bring the tumultuous course of terrestrial history to harmonious resolution and perfection. Jeremy Cohen, "The Mystery of Israel's Salvation: Romans 11:25-26 in Patristic and Medieval Exegesis," *The Harvard Theological Review* 98, no. 3 (2005): 251.

population."[271] Pentecostal–especially neo-Pentecostal–churches gain converts using media, which earns them political votes, which in turn aids them in gaining more influence, power, and presence in the media.

The UCKG has been particularly thorough in its utilization of media space.[272] In addition to owning numerous radio and television stations in Brazil and other countries, the UCKG takes massive advantage of the internet for proselytism and programming. The church and its bishops maintain several Youtube channels featuring recorded services and other content. It also has more specialized media outlets for believers willing to pay for content: since 2016, the UCKG has offered its own streaming platform, Univer Video. By downloading the Univer app and paying just seventeen Brazilian *reais* per month (currently less than four dollars), subscribers can stream live and recorded church services as well as Christian films and television, anywhere, anytime.

It is difficult to find neutral statistics on the consumer usage of Univer Video, but in a 2018 article from the UCKG's website, it claimed that shortly after Univer's launch in 2016, the app reached one million "hits" (*accessos*) per month.[273] It also boasted more than three thousand hours of Christian content at the time, including animation, television, film, programs for children and families, and live services. The content has broad appeal: the home page advertises self-help, advice for love and better living, meditations, Bible-based documentaries, pastors' discussions of current events, American evangelical movies, and numerous series dedicated to Bible verses and themes. Univer has been adapted for smartphones, tablets, and LG and Samsung Smart TVs. It can be accessed globally, and in addition to Portuguese-language content, there are six other language options including abundant productions in

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[271] Lundell, "The Pentecostal War Against Afro-Brazilian 'Demons,'" 204.
[272] Nadia Garcia Basso, "Simulacro no Reino de Deus: o uso da mídia televisiva no espaço religioso da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus como reflexo da condição pós-moderna," April 29, 2011, http://tede2.pucsp.br/tede/handle/handle/1804.
[273] "Univer Vídeo: Veja o Que Há De Novo Na Maior Plataforma De Conteúdo Cristão Do Mundo." *Igreja Universal Do Reino De Deus*, Universal, 9 Aug. 2018, www.igrejauniversal.pt/univer-video-veja-o-que-ha-de-novo-na-maior-plataforma-de-conteudo-cristao-do-mundo/.

English. The official Facebook page for Univer Video currently has more than 400,000 followers, where subscribers discuss their excitement for new episodes of their favorite biblical dramas to be released.[274] The UCKG seems to have tapped into a significant market, broadening its media reach and appeal.

Univer is a thus a goldmine for investigating how the UCKG's theological vision is conveyed to and consumed by many of its followers. Most useful for my purposes, the platform offers a large collection of sermons delivered by Bishop Macedo from the church's flagship location, O Templo do Solomão, in São Paulo. Bishop Renato Cardoso–Macedo's son-in-law and the current leader of the UCKG–is among several others who deliver sermons from the Temple of Solomon. As the UCKG's headquarters, the temple functions as a pilgrimage site and has the capacity to seat thousands. The recordings show that each bishop's services are heavily attended. While famous for their exorcisms, mass healings, and emotional sermons (resembling the services at smaller, local churches throughout Brazil), here Macedo and the other bishops also deliver sober, lecture-style sermons. In abundant recordings, they verbalize specific theological positions paired with directed reading and analysis of the Bible.

Importantly, the Apocalypse is a major theme in Temple of Solomon services and on Univer broadly. Many of these sermons and other content are organized into entire series dedicated to the study of Revelation. From such content, a detailed premillennialist eschatological vision emerges.

The Earth Will Catch Fire, and Jesus Will Return!

The content displayed on Univer demonstrates apocalyptic thinking straightaway. On the English-language homepage, an episode of the series "Meditation of the Word," is advertised with the heading, "It will be 'too late' for many people." In an advertisement for a "documentary" about the end of the world, the screen reads, "THE BEGINNING OF THE END: IF ONLY HALF OF THESE SIGNS ARE

[274] As of May 1, 2024. See: https://www.facebook.com/univervideo

TAKING PLACE, WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME LEFT." A pastors' discussion of current events (in 2020) covers doomsday fears that everyone will be microchipped by 2030. Another video is titled "The Reality of Hell." The homepage also advertises a series called "A Warning of Salvation," in which the series' narrator warns that viewers must embrace salvation (through faith and conversion) before time runs out. In episode one, the narrator says that the old phrase "It's never too late" was coined by the Devil, and those who have heeded this phrase are now in hell.[275]

Not surprisingly, in 2020, these warnings often pointed to COVID-19 as a sign of the end times. Episode five of "A Warning of Salvation" is dedicated to COVID-19. The narrator warns:

> Although this generation is the best informed… they cannot see God's blatant warnings about the end of time. They notice many things, but do not notice the biblical prophecies being fulfilled… perhaps this pandemic is not the end yet, but what is happening in it has all the fingerprints of the preparation for the emergence of the Antichrist.[276]

The narrator goes on to explain which events indicate apocalyptic things to come: the closing of churches as non-essential businesses, the condemnation of churches, and the health and safety measures imposed on society as precautions against COVID-19, like masks, distancing, quarantine, and testing. The narrator expresses that because people have acclimated to these measures and events, when the Antichrist arrives, they will be complacent and receptive to his deception. He concludes: "Every day means we have one day less… the time for salvation is running out."[277]

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[275] *A Warning for Your Salvation,* episode 1, "It's too late," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=181383.
[276] *A Warning for Your Salvation*, episode 5, "Rehearsal for the end," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=185329,: 00:58-1:50.
[277] Ibid., 4:45-4:50. Since I conducted the research for this chapter, several studies have been done on the UCKG's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, finding that it initially claimed the pandemic was a conspiracy, and later shifted to blaming the virus on demons. Van der Hoek, "Immigrant Pentecostalism in the Emergence of the COVID-19 Crisis"; Erik Fernando Miletta Martins, "A incorporação da pandemia na retórica da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus," *Calidoscópio* 19, no. 1 (July 23, 2021): 32–46, https://doi.org/10.4013/cld.2021.191.03.

On the Portuguese language portion of Univer, a multitude of additional apocalyptic content is accessible. Much of this is collected within series like *O Estudo do Apocalipse*, which translates to both "the study of the Apocalypse" and "the study of Revelation."[278] This series includes one-off sermons and thematic, multi-episode seasons. Each season corresponds with a weekly sermon/lecture series given by Macedo or Cardoso at the Temple of Solomon, each series with a specific apocalyptic theme. Seven of the seasons have the following titles, which refer to Revelation: "Signs of the End Times," "The Beginning of the End," "The Seven Signs of the Second Coming," "Letters to the Seven churches," "Seven Trumpets," "The Opening of the Seals," and "The Vision of the Throne of God." There are other series dedicated to the Apocalypse as well, like *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo (The Earth Will Catch Fire*) in which each season covers a different chapter of Revelation. These series and other videos show Macedo, Cardoso, and other bishops guiding thousands of audience members through in-depth readings and interpretations of apocalyptic Bible texts.

In episode one of "Signs of the End Times," Macedo makes two key eschatological claims.[279] First, we are witnessing the end times, with signs all around us. Second, these signs began in 1948: the creation of the state of Israel marked the first sign of the immanent return of Jesus.[280] The first example given to indicate the end times is the toxic global food supply. Macedo argues that GMOs are an unnatural transformation of our food corresponding with poisonous agro-toxins.[281] The meat we consume is also filled with toxic hormones. Further, the Bible says there will be famines and storms, and ten percent of people today are hungry: "This is a sign."[282] Here and in other sermons, Macedo's concern

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[278] In Portuguese, the book of Revelation is called *Apocalipse*. Martins finds that
From here forward, most of the video and series titles I reference are in Portuguese. I leave the citations in Portuguese but translate to English in the prose of body paragraphs. Quotes from these videos are also my translations from Portuguese.
[279] *Estudo do Apocalipse*, season 1 "Sinais do Fim dos Tempos," episode 1, "O primeiro sinal da vinda de Jesus," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=47516.
[280] Ibid., 18:10-35; 36:15.
[281] Ibid., 02:10-07:00.
[282] Ibid., 21:50.

with the food supply implicitly connects with the black rider of famine from Revelation. Macedo is also concerned with violence, which evokes the image of the red rider of war. He argues that the world is much more violent today than when he was a child, describing his perception that the news frequently features parents killing children, husbands killing wives, and vice versa, exemplified by mass shootings in the U.S.[283] This is all evidence that we live in a perverse, corrupt society; the Devil is contaminating our food supply; and we have arrived at the end times. But again, we also have signs of Christ's immanent return because of the "return" of the children of Israel to the state of Israel in 1948, which Macedo explains is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, foretold in the fig parable in Matthew 24:32.[284]

In episode two, Bishop Renato Cardoso elaborates on the world's present doom and the manner of its destruction.[285] Chiefly, he reminds us, the world is said to end in fire.[286] He begins with news reports and the fact that astronomers, biologists, nuclear physicists, etc. offer a variety of scenarios in which life on Earth will end. Cardoso says, "If there is anything that the scientific community agrees on it's this: the planet has an expiration date."[287] Life-ending scenarios include nuclear war, which he warns is a major threat from unstable states like Iran and North Korea; illnesses and famine; water shortages; and environmental disasters, especially solar flares.[288] He claims that world governments spend billions investigating the possibility of life on other planets because our planet will become uninhabitable at any moment. Ultimately, Cardoso asserts, this is foretold in the Bible. He then takes the audience through 2 Peter, chapter 3, beginning with verse 3.[289] Focusing on the role of the historical "scoffers" in denying the end times and the return of Jesus (2 Peter 3:3-6), Cardoso says that anyone today who denies the end

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[283] Ibid., 22:35-26:45.
[284] Ibid., 9:40-18:10.
[285] *Estudo do Apocalipse*, season 1 "Sinais do Fim dos Tempos," episode 2, "Como o mundo irá acabar?" Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=47607.
[286] Ibid., 05:25.
[287] Ibid., 05:50-06:00.
[288] Ibid., 6:00-12:10.
[289] Ibid., approx. 18:30-33:00.

times are the same as the biblical scoffers. He moves carefully through a literal account of the historical creation and first destruction of the Earth through water, and its coming destruction through fire (2 Peter 3:5-7). The sermon ends with the reminder that although disbelievers will satirize the Christian faith and belief in the end times, it is imperative that the audience guard their faith against disbelievers, open their eyes, and learn to read the signs.[290]

In a standalone sermon video called "A Revelation from Lord Jesus for You!", Macedo maintains a focus on the dismal nature of present events but also restates hope for Jesus' return. The sermon is built around Revelation 1:1-3, which describes how John's revelation was a vision–i.e., a gift–from Jesus. Macedo treats John's vision as a historical event. He repeats and expounds on verse 1 for forty-five minutes before concluding with a close examination of verses 2 and 3, which emphasize the prophetic nature of the revelation. He explains that we are awaiting the explosion of the Earth in fire; that the Bible speaks of the Earth on fire; that we have heard that polar ice caps are melting due to global warming; that we have been told that food/plants do not contain as many vitamins and nutrients as they did in decades past; that there will be food shortages as we reach 8 billion people; and that food is full of chemicals, "things that aren't good for us."[291] He describes further calamity resulting from COVID-19, specifically the separation of families because of the virus.[292] Macedo argues, all of these circumstances are inside Revelation. Finally, he says, "I hope Jesus returns now, right now" and "I am awaiting my lord."[293] Ending on a positive note, Macedo finds the pandemic, poverty, and other pandemonium in life to be small problems in the face of Jesus' return.[294]

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[290] Ibid., 33:00-36:36.
[291] "Estudo do apocalipse com Bispo Macedo – 17/10/20 – Uma Revelação do Senhor Jesus para você!" Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=182640, 37:35 – 38:50.
[292] Ibid., 39:00-41:00.
[293] Ibid., 50:15-50:49.
[294] Ibid., 51:00-51:11.

In another recent sermon delivered to a crowded Temple of Solomon, Bishop Julio begins with more concerns about the COVID pandemic before turning abruptly to the topic of sexual deviance. He warns that soon people without vaccine passports will not be able to travel freely.[295] In the future, he says, everyone's payment and passport info will be stored in a single chip that will be used to control them. Bishop Julio shifts to describing the increased aggression of humanity.[296] Apparently, over the past ten years, sexual, mental, and physical abuses have increased drastically. A primary site for exercising aggression is inside the home, and the Bishop reminds us, "One of the prophecies of the last times is that people will become perverse."[297] He then shows a documentary-style video that displays clips of battered women and children crying as well as disturbing news coverage of abuse cases in Brazil, like the rape of a four-month-old and a mother who prostituted her eight- and thirteen-year-old children. The narrator laments that society sexualizes children and then moves to footage of a man picking up a little boy and girl with a lustful expression, explaining that the man is openly attracted to them.[298] Other signs of the end times include rampant prostitution and pornography.

The concern with the end times, including violence, suffering, perversion, and oppression goes on. Measured by time and frequency of discussion, the end times are likely the most central eschatological concern in the apocalypse-related content. Observers are taught to look for signs of catastrophe and evil, to fear and mistrust the government and non-believers, and expect the Earth to be destroyed. As far as I have observed, they are not given prescriptions for how to make things better or told they can prevent the destruction. The most important means of survival is, simply, faith.

The First Seal, the Rapture, and Tribulation

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[295] *Estudo do Livro: A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, episode 30, "O arrebatamento," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=206439.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid., 0:30-1:10.
[298] Ibid., 02:30-04:45.

There is more to this eschatology than signs of the end times, though. The UCKG gives a detailed account of the impending transition from the last days into the next epoch, when Christ will return. As in most dispensationalist frameworks, the Rapture is a key transitional event here. In the UCKG's schema, the Rapture is sparked by the opening of the first seal, as described in Revelation 6. The first seal releases the white horseman–the Antichrist. Bishop Julio teaches that growing religious confusion and the weakening of the true Church indicate that the arrival of the white horseman, "the spirit of deceit," is immanent.[299] Because of the horse's white coloring, people will mistake this horseman for Jesus, despite his true identity. [300] Cardoso explains that with this first horseman's arrival a new epoch will begin, bringing illnesses and suffering never seen before.[301] This marks the beginning of Tribulation, or as Cardoso sometimes calls it, Affliction. But crucially, this also spurs the immediate return of Jesus to rapture the true Church into heaven.[302]

First, when the white horseman comes and Christ descends, all people throughout the history of time who have died in Christ will be resurrected. Abruptly afterward, the true Church–to include some adults and all children–will be raptured into the clouds and united with Jesus, thereafter forever with the Lord. [303] This marks the marriage of the Lord with his bride, the true Church. When raptured, Christians will instantaneously disappear from the Earth. Those left behind will be immensely confused. Those who remain on earth during Tribulation will try to come up with explanations for the disappearances of so many people.[304] One explanation will be alien abduction. Curiously, Bishop Julio discusses how films about aliens have set a precedent for this explanation by describing aliens as interested in intervening in

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[299] *Estudo do Livro: A Terra vai pegar fogo*, episode 29, "A abertura do primeiro selo." Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=206219.
[300] Ibid., 12:29.
[301] *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo,* Apocalipse 6, episode 2, "O arrebatamento," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=149726, 1:10-1:22.
[302] Universal, *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, "O arrebatamento," 7:17.
[303] Ibid., 7:20-7:35. Bishop Julio explains the Rapture in the same way by reading directly from 1 Thessalonians in: Universal, *Estudo do Livro: A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, "O arrebatamento."
[304] Universal, *Estudo do Livro: A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, "O arrebatamento."

human affairs. He says, "It is not difficult to see the hand of evil in this as a form of preparing an alternative explanation for the Rapture."[305] To the despair of those left behind, the Holy Spirit will be raptured up along with the Church, unavailable to help those pitiful below. Life will be unprecedentedly dreadful for those who remain. They will seek death and not find it–they will even attempt to die and fail.[306] They can still be saved if they manage sincere conversion even without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but they will pay for their delay through persecution, torture, and death.[307]

Even though true Christians will be raptured before the worst events occur, Bishop Julio is careful to reiterate that evil forces are presently working in the world.[308] He recognizes that because the first seal is not yet broken and because Tribulation will begin *after* the Rapture, some people may think they can relax and wait to be whisked up into heaven. However, he warns the audience against this thinking. He reminds viewers that we are experiencing war daily, especially war against oppression. Posing a question about what causes these wars, he answers, "malignant spirits" who, as Jesus tells us, aim to "rob, destroy, and kill mankind."[309] It is crucial to remember that in the Brazilian context, these "malignant spirits" are thought to be the very same as the spirits celebrated by Afro-Brazilian religions. So rather than encourage audience members to solve climate change or reduce the spread of COVID-19, or even simply to pursue wealth and prosperity while awaiting the Rapture, they are urged to fight against demons and oppression, which may be interpreted as fighting against the religions–and their practitioners–supposedly responsible for invoking demons.

In addition to presenting dual themes of salvation and terror, the Rapture sermons lay out a specific vision of dispensationalism. Cardoso asserts that human time is comprised of four epochs.[310] The

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[305] Ibid., 18:00-20:29.
[306] Universal, *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, "O arrebatamento," 4:40-5:05.
[307] Ibid., 16:00-16:35.
[308] Universal, "A abertura do primeiro selo."
[309] Ibid., 11:10-11:22.
[310] *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, "O arrebatamento."

first was the epoch before law. The second, marked by Moses, was the epoch of law. The third, the age of Grace, began with the first coming of Jesus. Interestingly, Cardoso asserts, this is still where we are today.[311] Here the UCKG differs from other dispensationalists and historical Pentecostals in that it teaches only four dispensations and does not separate out the present age (called the Church age by other dispensationalists) from the age of Grace. The fourth and final epoch, Cardoso explains, is the one that begins with the first seal. The breaking of the seal, the arrival of the Antichrist, the Second Coming, and the Rapture collectively and almost simultaneously mark the shift from this age to the next. This schema shows a rather coherent, detailed premillennialist eschatology.

The Final Epoch

The season "The Beginning of the End" from *O Estudo do Apocalipse* describes the final epoch in the dispensationalist framework. The sermons here describe the events in the order they are presented in Revelation from Rev. 19 on. The final epoch begins with Tribulation and an ongoing battle between good and evil, which quickly reaches a climax. During this future period, the Antichrist reigns, and Babylon grows ever hedonistic and evil. The bishops describe how Babylon is defeated and how Christ descends with his army to fight the Battle of Armageddon. Bishop Julio shifts to future tense, explaining that during Armageddon, millions of humans will go to Israel to try and destroy it, but they shall fail.[312] The Beast (Antichrist) and his armies will be defeated,[313] then Satan will be defeated and imprisoned by an angel and cast into a pit, and the Beast and the False Prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire.[314] Satan will remain imprisoned for Christ's reign of a thousand years. At the end of that reign, there will be

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[311] Ibid., 6:05-6:30.
[312] *Estudo do Apocalipse,* season 7, "O início do fim," episode 5, "Satanás é solto e finalmente derrotado," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=57820.
[313] *Estudo do Apocalipse, s*eason 7, "O início do fim," episode 3, "A besta e seus exércitos são derrotados," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=57461.
[314] *Estudo do Apocalipse,* season 7, "O início do fim," episode 4, "Satanás é aprisionado por mil anos," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=57647.

another attempted rebellion by Satan and his followers: he will gather new armies from among those who have been blessed to live in Christ's millennial kingdom. They will try to dethrone Christ but will be destroyed by God before Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire once and for all.[315] There will be a final judgment before Christ's white throne, where all those who have ever lived will be resurrected and evaluated. Those who are undeserving of salvation will be cast into the Lake of Fire. There will a be New Heaven and New Earth, a New Jerusalem, and a new Garden of Eden overseen by God and inhabited by the righteous. This narrative very clearly a highly literal interpretation of the book of Revelation.

More Lessons from Revelation

Christian morality and dualism are obvious themes throughout the apocalyptic content, as they are in apocalyptic texts. In one sermon, the bishop discusses who will be condemned to the Lake of Fire on judgment day.[316] He reads from Revelation 21:8, which states, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." The bishop defines and describes these categories of sin. When he gets to fornication, he specifically condemns premarital sex in addition to adultery. The rest of the sermon emphasizes spiritual strength and integrity. For example, regarding the sin of cowardice, which he says is the worst, he asserts that "timidity in faith is an offense to God."[317] Sorcerers are those who practice *feitiçaria*, sorcery and/or witchcraft, as well as "the superstitious; those that make decisions according to diviners; the prognosticators; and the practicers of occultism; also including in this group those who rebel against spiritual authorities… Rebellion is considered as serious as the sin of *feitiçaria*."[318] Idolators are those who place anyone or anything ahead of God. Finally, the

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[315] *Estudo do Apocalipse,* season 7, "O início do fim," episode 6, "O julgamento final diante do Trono Branco," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=57928.
[316] *Estudo do Apocalipse,* season 7, "O início do fim," episode 11, "Os que serão condenados," Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=58399.
[317] Ibid., 3:00-3:50.
[318] Ibid., 18:47-20:00.

Bishop clarifies that this list is incomplete, and that religious hypocrites and others will also be condemned to the Lake of Fire too.

I will discuss the history of the term *feitiçaria* in chapter two, but it suffices to say for now that Afro-Brazilian religions fall under this category from the perspective of Pentecostalism. The sermon discussed previously is therefore fairly explicit that practitioners of Candomblé and Umbanda will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Though, admittedly, the vast majority of the rest of the population will be damned, too, under the UCKG's teachings, including many Christians.

Fear is obviously a major theme, as is the pressure to behave properly to achieve salvation. In his Rapture sermon, Cardoso asks the audience to imagine that the Rapture has occurred, evidenced by the instant disappearance of millions of people around the world, and they find themselves left behind on Earth.[319] How many listeners must panic at this thought? Cardoso then explains that he has no doubt he will be raptured. He assures the audience that God does not want them to have to worry about being left behind and has given them his Word to save them, advising them to practice the Word to guarantee themselves the Rapture.[320] They are told to resist the flesh, vices, carnal desires, drinking, cigars, sex, and drugs. Cardoso clarifies that God does want them to have sex and to be extremely satisfied sexually, but only inside the home in an appropriate marriage relationship.[321] Note how these statements, combined with other concerns about prostitution and perversion, show that the UCKG is concerned about people having the right kind of sex. Overall, there is a persistent message of warning and condemnation of sin, an emphasis on traditional morality and the importance of church membership, but also the assurance that the Lord has given believers' the tools to control be happy and control their own futures.

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[319] *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*, "O arrebatamento," 18:00-20:00. This musing is a popular one in premillennialism, evidenced by the Tim LaHaye's famous *Left Behind* serious.
[320] Ibid., 21:30-21:50.
[321] Ibid., 23:00-25:00.

Lastly, disbelief and persecution are also clear concerns. In episode two of "Signs of the End Times," Cardoso laments that despite all of the signs, 99.9% of Christians are too occupied with daily struggles to notice the end times.[322] In episode four, which focuses on the persecution of the Apostle John in Revelation, Cardoso warns against disbelief and urges followers to heed Jesus' message.[323] He guides the audience through the first chapter of Revelation, pausing to explain the symbolism in each verse and its relevance for the modern world. The first few verses yield the following commentary: the early Church was persecuted under Roman rule because the idea of Jesus was threatening; the Apocalypse of John was written to companions in affliction in a time of persecution; the Christian life is not a "sea of roses"–Jesus promises interior peace, but outside the Christian lives a war and is often persecuted for this faith; and many Christians become chameleons and try to blend in, but this is wrong: "you have to be true."[324]

Cardoso continues in this vein with a close reading and interpretation of subsequent verses. For example, the seven lampstands in Rev. 1:12 are the seven churches to which John is writing his letter; Jesus appears in the middle of the seven lampstands (churches) to demonstrate the importance of strength in community; the seven stars in Jesus' right hand are angels of the church, and believers must be like the stars in Jesus' hand; happiness is not in music, dancing, or clothing, but rather in having the spirit of Jesus inside oneself.[325] In the conclusion to episode four, Cardoso compares our last days with the time of Noah's Ark, when Noah spent one hundred years building the ark in the desert. Everyone thought he was crazy; no one understood the message. Today is similar: the world is "dancing and partying," but

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[322] *Estudo do Apocalipse*, season 1, "Sinais do Fim dos Tempos," episode 2, "Como o mundo irá acabar?" Univer Video, https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=47607. 1:20-3:10.
[323] *Estudo do Apocalipse*, season 1, "Sinais do Fim dos Tempos," episode 4, "A perseguição do apóstolo João" https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=49493.
[324] Ibid., 00:01-04:34; 06:20-07:10; 08:00-10:00.
[325] Ibid., 14:00-28:30. Between this section and the next, Cardoso moves to an analysis of John's collapse in Revelation 1:17, which states, "When I saw him [Jesus], I fell at his feet as though dead." Cardoso uses this verse to condemn the popular doctrine of "falling," whereby Pentecostals and others believe that the power of the Holy Spirit makes people fall prostrate or writhe on the ground. For Cardoso, this interpretation and behavior is an unfortunate mix of doctrine with carnality, which is fascinating considering the common association of Pentecostalism and especially neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG with bodily experience and ecstatic movement. 29:00-33:20.

believers must keep remembering Jesus' message and maintain a state of deserving salvation because they can die, or Jesus can return, at any time.[326] Ultimately, Cardoso asserts that it is crucial to not be among majority of Christians in the world who are not heeding the message (and who will not be raptured).

Broader Consumption

Univer is only the most recent noteworthy development in the UCKG's decades-long history of media proselytism. Beyond the subscription-based audience reached by Univer, the church reaches Brazillians *en masse* through television broadcasting. Most notable is RecordTV, one of the largest commercial television stations in Brazil (it has wavered between second and third largest). Originally called TV Record, the station was founded in the 1950s. Edir Macedo purchased it in the 90s and renamed it to Rede Record, and then rebranded it as RecordTV in 2016. In 1999, Birman and Lehman described TV Record's dual religious and secular agenda:

> [TV Record] is evidently aiming to be a commercially viable, professional TV station, attracting a nation-wide audience and carrying advertising and mainstream non-religious programmes, broadcasting preaching and the testimony of converts during off-peak hours and all through the night… the company has proved able to attract top-ranking newscasters and presenters. In the long run, the church is said to envisage creating a cable station for its religious broadcasting, keeping its terrestrial facility for commercial transmission. For the time being however, the TV network is presumably being sustained by the contributions of the Universal Church's followers.[327]

RecordTV has sustained its dual agenda in recent daces. It continues to broadcast both mainstream and religious programs, for example *Top Chef* and Renato and Cristiane Cardoso's Christian advice program, *The Love School*. Programs like the network's four biblical telenovelas sit somewhere in the middle, offering fictional drama through the cinematic realization of biblical stories. They deliver exciting plotlines while teaching Pentecostal morality, ideology, and theology. Essentially, the network embraces

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[326] Ibid., 35:45-38:30.
[327] Birman and Lehmann, "Religion and the Media in a Battle for Ideological Hegemony."

the mixture of the sacred with the profane–an excellent proselytism and marketing strategy. Indeed, many *crentes* claim to have found the church through its religious programming on Rede Record/TV Record.[328]

Apocalipse, the telenovela, demonstrates how the UCKG conveys apocalyptic messaging to a broad audience. The series follows four characters over two decades as they experience the events described in the book of Revelation. They witness catastrophic end times events in New York (e.g. 9/11), Rome, Jerusalem, and Rio de Janeiro. A main character, Ricardo, becomes the Antichrist and fights to dominate the world. He is empowered by the scientific discoveries of another character, Benjamin. Ultimately, good Christians, including main characters, must fight evil. In the end, some Christians "fall" and come to worship the Devil, while criminals and faithless people repent, find faith, and are "saved." The medium of telenovela makes the show feel like any other TV drama, as the characters also experience romance and relationship drama, have children, and suffer daily hurdles.[329] However, *Apocalipse* delivers a surprisingly elaborate eschatological vision of the Earth's coming destruction and cosmic battle.

Univer proudly advertises *Apocalipse* with scenes from the series and interviews with the cast.[330] A collection called "Scenes from the novela Apocalipse" offers fifty-six clips of the show, each several minutes long, organized chronologically and by theme. The themes are "Signs of the end," "The seven seals in Revelation," "The Rapture," "The Great Tribulation," "Antichrist," and "Final judgment." The clips are then titled based on plot event–see the table below for a full list. Read from beginning to end, the list of *Apocalipse* categories and clip titles simultaneously describes a large portion of the show's plot and the premillennialist eschatology enacted within.

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[328] Nadia Garcia Basso, "Simulacro no Reino de Deus: o uso da mídia televisiva no espaço religioso da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus como reflexo da condição pós-moderna," April 29, 2011, http://tede2.pucsp.br/tede/handle/handle/1804.

[329] For example, between lessons about being a good Christian, parts of this feel like the American television series, *Supernatural*.

[330] As noted in the introduction to this chapter, trailers for the show can be found on church-sponsored YouTube channels too. In the trailer on Bishop Cardoso's Youtube channel, one viewer's comment reads: "Watching today 3/23/20, coronavirus causing deaths and mixing up all systems, Jesus is returning, praying to the Lord."

Figure 1: Title Selections from the Telenovela Apocalipse

Clip Category	Clip Titles		
Signs of the end	"Tsunami" "Mystery and revelation" "Breaking of familiar ties" "Destroyed family" "Betrayals" "The false prophet" "Drugs" "Terrorism"	"Rebellion" "Prisons, violence, and hate" "Church, entertainment, and warm gospel" "News" "Absent parents and rebellious children"	"Familial conflicts" "Signs in the sky" "Suicide attempts" "The four horsemen of the Apocalypse" "Deceit and sin" "Book of Revelation" "Revelations"
The Seven Seals in Revelation	"The white horse" "The seventh seal" "It might be the end…"	"The power of the brand" "Where are we going to stop?"	"Losing the war" "The war is going to begin"
The Rapture	"Surveillance" "Mysterious disappearance"	"The future that awaits everyone" "The sacred duty"	"Is it his fault?" "One truth: two testimonies"
The Great Tribulation	"What will come?" "To those who were left behind" "Children of the dawn"	"God blesses the word" "Victory of the world government"	"Who do you think he is?" "Live or die" "Misery"
Antichrist	"Welcome to the prince" "Spirit of the victim" "I am the king!"	"City of the future" "Difficult times" "Dawn of peace?"	"Strategy of evil" "Rest in peace" "Mark of the beast"

	"The predestined" "Broken world"	"Construction and destruction"	"Rain party" "The traitor"
Final Judgment	"The final battle"	"And you?"	

The telenovela would make for interesting deeper analysis, but in short, *Apocalipse* gives an exciting, dramatized portrayal of premillennialist dispensationalism. This is religious programming conveying apocalyptic prophecy belief with broad, secular appeal.

Additional examples abound in which the UCKG imparts apocalypticism through wide-reaching media channels. One example is Renato Cardoso's recently published book called *The Earth Will Catch Fire: Will you be here for the Apocalypse?* which offers a verse-by-verse examination of Revelation. [331] The cover image shows balls of fire falling from the sky and skyscrapers ablaze, and the cover boasts that the book contains scenes from the telenovela *Apocalipse* from Record TV. Brazilians who watch *Apocalipse* for entertainment but not religious reasons might be inclined to pick up Cardoso's book due to its connection to the telenovela. The readership should not be overstated–I have not been able to find statistics on copies sold–but considering that Edir Macedo is a best-selling author and the church's media are extremely far-reaching, it is significant that the present leader, Cardoso, continues using UCKG platforms to promote dualistic and apocalyptic prophecy belief. Further, Cardoso's work shows in detail how the church's apocalypticism derives from Scripture and theology.

Final Analysis

Through an assortment of media examples, I have demonstrated that the UCKG embraces premillennialism. There are important trends in how it constructs this apocalyptic vision. Regarding

[331] Cardoso, *A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo*. My translation of the title and content.

current events, it takes a global view of signs of the end times. Israel plays an important role in prophecy fulfillment; COVID-19 features prominently as another indicator of prophecies; events in the United States are important markers of the end times, such as 9/11, and U.S. government reports are authoritative in demonstrating doom; and Iran and North Korea are said to pose major threats and might prove to be key players in Earth's coming destruction by fire. The bishops do not seem to weigh in on the cause of climate change (that I have found), but they do lend credence to the concept of climate change by citing scientists' and governments' reports as proof of the Earth's accelerating destruction. This all demonstrates that while the UCKG tailors its message to Brazil in some small ways, most of its concerns are common in broader western evangelical dispensationalism.

Pastors sometimes simplify or misuse current event reports. In a case of blatant misuse, the UCKG cited a satirical news article as factual evidence of signs of the end times. The mishap occurs in a segment of a UCKG-produced documentary played in a sermon about the first seal from Revelation.[332] In the jarring segment, the narrator describes the tragic problem of organ harvesting in China, Egypt, India, and Iran. The video displays a screenshot of a news article about how Chinese authorities seized over 7,200 human penises on a cargo ship from Nigeria. This is a clear show of shocking evil and perversion in the world. However, according to Reuters Fact Check, the article is a satirical piece from the World Daily News Report.[333] Combined with a mistrust for science shown in *Apocalipse* as well as conspiratorial thinking about COVID-19 in numerous sermons, this example demonstrates how scientific and other facts are often subordinate to or only serve to bolster narratives, beliefs, and prophesy.

Regarding homiletics, diverging from common descriptions of UCKG services, the Temple of Solomon sermons are delivered as lectures; feel rehearsed and planned; and do not involve music,

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[332] Universal, *Estudo do Livro: A Terra Vai Pegar Fogo,* "A abertura do Primeiro Selo."
[333] Reuters Fact Check, "Fact Check-Story about Organs Found on a Cargo Ship Was Intended as Satire | Reuters," Reuters, April 15, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-satire-organs-idUSL1N2M821Y.

singing, healing, communion, or exorcism. They feel like a charismatic reinterpretation of "fire and brimstone." While Lírio describes UCKG sermons as thematic, the sermons I have analyzed here are often textual, expository, or a mixture.[334] There is also surprising use of the Bible. Audience members are even told to bring their Bibles every week and read along, and sometimes to read at home.[335] The UCKG provides monthly Bible reading guides on its Facebook pages too, where followers are encouraged to read a new selection of Scripture every single day. In the sermons and online, the texts are approached as fact and analyzed minutely and literally. There is of course interpretation involved, as is necessary when analyzing Scripture.[336] Interpretations can be selective.[337] However, there is no doubt for these orators that the texts are historically accurate and prophetic. Finally, bishops use these texts to instill correct doctrine in followers.

There is another key distinction between smaller local services and the apocalyptic sermons I have analyzed: the latter are not concerned with prosperity. Despite the widespread recognition of UCKG's prosperity theology and its regular services and media content related to financial success, these videos are silent about whether Christians should strive to build mansions while they await the eschatological future. There is not a clear message that members can live in financial bliss while COVID-19 pandemic measures destroy society and spur the arrival of the Antichrist, let alone the idea that people

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[334] Lírio, "Igreja Mercado – Relatório de Observação de Cultos da IURD." Textual sermons analyze small sections of text minutely, elaborating on exact meaning. Expository sermons take larger sections of scripture to convey the bigger picture.

[335] For example, in Universal, "Signs of the End Times," episode 2, "Como o mundo irá acabar?" Cardoso tells everyone to bring their Bibles each week during the course of the Apocalypse lecture series and instructs them to finish reading 2 Peter at home.

[336] In a slide from a sermon on the first seal, Bishop Julio states: "The symbols, characters, actions, and places in Revelation are clues for your interpretation and understanding. And it is from here, the opening of the seals, that they become most important, for they point to future events." Universal, "A abertura do primeiro selo," 08:05, my translation.

[337] However, I contend that fundamentalist/absolutist churches and those who teach literalism more generally typically use Scripture selectively–this is almost a natural feature of the literal interpretation of what are highly symbolic, ancient texts, because they do not map perfectly on to contemporary realities and contain conflicting ideas within themselves.

should pursue wealth because they will get to keep it, uninterrupted, through Christ's return. It is inferable that *everything* will be destroyed, including fancy cars and homes–which has me wondering, what would Bishop Macedo predict for the grand Temple of Solomon? Moreover, also absent is a message that believers can build heaven on Earth. Instead, the general idea is that the world is going to burn, that true Christians will be raptured before the worst of it occurs, but that they must actively maintain faith and fight oppression and demons while they wait. These calls to fight malignant spirits are mirrored in general everyday services, but the silence here on health and wealth is a stark contrast.

Perhaps these sermons and services are directed at different things. Lecture-style sermons available on Univer seem aimed at teaching doctrine and reinforcing fear and loyalty. Likely most observers who access the apocalypse sermons are already committed to the church. While new members probably stumble upon services at the Temple of Solomon, the temple's role as headquarters and pilgrimage destination might suggest a high level of commitment for many attendees. The sermons are otherwise found on a subscription-based app, again indicating commitment. High-level knowledge is imparted. Attendees do not have to be literate to understand the sermons since the bishops explain verses in heavy detail, but familiarity with the Bible undoubtedly helps. Each sermon deals with specific pieces of the eschatological chronology and the bishops do not tend to place the events on a timeline in relation to one another, so the audience must attend all sermons in a series or have substantial knowledge of the eschatology to understand the sequence of events. That said, for new visitors and for those increasing their commitment and exposure to the church through a Univer subscription, for example, standalone sermons still depict clear dualistic, apocalyptic messages even if some of the detail might be lost.

In contrast, while services at smaller UCKG churches attract long-term members, they are also heavily focused on new recruitment. These services are fun. The emotion, improvisation, and promises of health and wealth energize followers and boost their enthusiasm for all the church has to offer. Pastors do not remind attendees that any mansions they secure now are going to burn to the ground, along with most

people they know, soon. I admit, too, doctrinal vagueness is often a reality. Almost anyone can follow along. Rituals and community are emphasized over theology and texts. However, doctrinal vagueness does not preclude the production of specific narratives and vivid images, and church leaders teach people to see and fight demons and look for persecution and oppression. Doom and hope are intermingled.

Three final points can be reiterated. First, the UCKG uses both the carrot and the stick, i.e., optimism and doom. These are pervasive throughout all sermon and service styles as well as media forms, and they serve to reinforce one another. Second, the UCKG's teachings vary substantially regarding the degree to which they display doctrinal vagueness or specificity depending on the location and activity. These first two traits make the UCKG skilled at recruitment and proselytism, as well as indoctrination. Finally, its doctrine on dualism and militancy is both vague and extremely extensive, making it applicable to anyone deemed evil by the church and its believers. I will discuss this third point in the section below.

The UCKG's Eschatology and Spiritual Warfare

The improvisational, emotional, and thematic nature of many UCKG services does not mean that the UCKG does not hold clear and elaborate theological stances. And numerous services break from the improvisational pattern, as I have discussed. The UCKG has a more coherent theology and doctrine than is often recognized by researchers, especially where eschatology is concerned.

There is a trend in the scholarship to lump prosperity, materialism, and this-worldly engagement with postmillennialism. However, Wacker's description of early Pentecostals shows that optimism and materialist inclinations coexisted with the doom of premillennialism, so it is not useful or accurate to define premillennialism as strictly pessimistic and spiritualist or outer-worldly, leaving postmillennialism as the only option for optimism and materialism. The UCKG's valorization of wealth and demands for financial sacrifice does not equate to a postmillennial eschatological vision. Despite the hope that accompanies a mission to save souls and improve life for its members, the church also teaches that the world is witnessing a war of good and evil, and that the Earth will burn in fire before good forces can

prevail. Thus, we need to account for the dual nature of neo-Pentecostalism's prosperity theology and materialist impulses, on one hand, and apocalyptic doom on the other.

I began the research for this chapter by asking, where do the UCKG's dualism and spiritual warfare ideology come from? I have found that they are not just a competition strategy and a means of furthering this-worldly aims. Rather, the UCKG's spiritual warfare is situated in and stems directly from its eschatology. Using church recordings focused on apocalyptic themes, I have constructed an account of the church's eschatology, challenging notions that the UCKG's doctrine is consistently vague as well as claims that its eschatology can be inferred simply by noting its prosperity theology. The resulting account is a UCKG-specific version of dispensationalist premillennialism, which emphasizes the following themes: Pentecostal agency but also relentless evil to be fought; the persecution and suffering of (true) Christians; a need to battle disbelief and stand one's ground in the face of ignorance; the return of the Jews to Israel as part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy; a general pessimism about the state of the world; the impending destruction of the world through fire; the impending rise of the Antichrist, the Second Coming, and the Rapture, all to be inaugurated by the opening of the first seal; the subsequent unprecedented horrors of Tribulation; major successes of evil forces prior to defeat by Christ and his army; and an optimism about the futures of believers who embody Christ's spiritual message and feel the glow of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. These themes are built into a four-part dispensationalist framework that resembles the premillennialism of classical Pentecostalism much more than is generally recognized.

Regarding historic versus futurist premillennialism, the UCKG sees biblical prophecies beginning to unfold now, but most prophesied events have not yet occurred. Most dispensational premillennialists, including Pentecostals, are futurists. They read current events as signs of evil in the world, but the ultimate punishments carried out by God during Tribulation have not yet occurred. The UCKG does not seem to assert that judgments are happening here and now–rather, it claims that the unbelievers *will* be punished. Again, this is all mixed with the hopeful teaching that adherents can improve their lives, take

agency over their futures, and prosper. But premillennialism has always featured hope about salvation and excitement over Christ's coming return. The UCKG has an apocalyptic, dualist, futurist, dispensational premillennialist eschatology that *also* teaches that true Christians are favored in this life.

It is important that this eschatology and broader spiritual warfare ideology are thorough in their promotion of fear and vague, general, and highly inclusive when it comes to identifying enemies. Whether connected directly to Revelation or part of more general discourse about demons, calls to fight are not usually accompanied with instructions for who, what, when, or how to defend against or attack. Bishops do not profess to know who the Antichrist will be–the enemy is vague. However, the enemy is also everywhere. The UCKG teaches that the good forces are shrinking in size. Most people will suffer for their sins, and nearly as many will die (perhaps even multiple times if we consider resurrection); most people will be influenced by demons if they have not been already; and many people, even Christians, are prophesied to join Satan's ranks. Ultimately, most people cannot be saved: only very few names are in Christ's Book of Life. This extreme pessimism about the fate of non-believers and fear about how prolific the enemy's forces are might facilitate a lack of empathy for outsiders, especially those Pentecostals deem witches, sorcerers, and sexual deviants. To clarify, daily reality often does not reflect religious ideals, and countless Pentecostals happily coexist with practitioners of Candomblé, Umbanda, and especially Catholicism, whether in their friend or family group, often in the same household. But for those most fervent, who take doctrine most seriously, apocalypticism may encourage them to cast aside those deemed Other. This helps to explain why some or perhaps many believers do not value the dignity, rights, and lives of people who, according to Pentecostal teachings, are associated with evil.

Thus, the UCKG's apocalyptic thinking is conducive to conflict. This is a challenge of apocalypticism generally: all the major, spectacularly violent episodes carried out by religious militants in

recent decades were supported or even inspired by distinctly apocalyptic outlooks.[338] In this dissertation's conclusion, I will reflect on apocalypticism in more depth, drawing comparison between the UCKG and other militant groups, including new religious movements popularly known as "cults," as well as the far religious right in the United States, such as the New Apostolic Reformation. These other apocalyptic groups demonstrate that the UCKG's attitudes and beliefs are not unique.

[338] Stephen Hunt, *Christian Millenarianism*; Anthony and Robbins, "Religious Totalism, Violence and Exemplary Dualism."

Chapter Two: Divine Cure

As endless sermonizing about the immanent Apocalypse demonstrates, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is hyper-focused on an ongoing battle between good and evil. I contend that animosity towards Afro-Brazilian religions is not the source of the UCKG's spiritual warfare ideology: theology is. However, in Brazil, they have become an integral component of the UCKG's dualist framework. How and why are Candomblé and Umbanda construed as evil in the apocalyptic schema? The UCKG displays hostility for several reasons. I have discussed material and social explanations for conflict in the introduction to this dissertation, including religious competition and moral disagreement. The premillennialist eschatology laid out in chapter one helps explain how economic and social grievances might be given cosmic importance. However, despite their small size and the minor competition they pose, the Afro-Brazilian religions are disproportionately treated as potent demonic enemies. Analyzing their cosmologies helps explain why. This chapter compares Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religious cosmologies to illuminate how and why Candomblé and Umbanda have become a prominent spiritual target in the UCKG's apocalyptic cosmic war schema.

The UCKG claims that neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions are diametrically opposed, but they actually have much in common. This extends beyond the demographic similarities between the adherents of each group (as discussed in this dissertation's introduction) to the realm of religious cosmology, ritual, symbol, and lexicon. The UCKG has adopted the spirit pantheon of Candomblé and Umbanda.[339] Each of these religious groups operates in the same general spiritual universe in which innumerable–but also specific, namable–supernatural beings constantly intervene in human affairs. In addition to generally sharing a pantheon, these religions identify supernatural beings as

[339] This is not to say that they share a uniform, singular spirit pantheon, but rather, that there are enough commonalities across Brazil's many Afro-Brazilian religious communities to extrapolate a generalized pantheon of orixás and other kinds of spirits. Regardless, all the various deities and spirits recognized by Afro-Brazilian religions are considered metaphysical realities by the UCKG.

ultimate sources of pain and suffering and offer supernatural solutions for healing. Thus, they have a similar appeal: they each promise to ease the pain and suffering of adherents through *a cura divina* (divine cure). Divine healing is believed to occur through conversion, proper rituals, and improved relationships with the divine. Collectively, these similarities foster the religions' opposition. This is not just because similarity inspires competition and a struggle for distinction. Rather, in the context of cosmological overlap, key differences convince Pentecostal believers that the religions are fundamentally at odds on a cosmic level.[340]

In neo-Pentecostalism, cosmological elements of Afro-Brazilian religions are inverted. The deities and spirit guides celebrated by Candomblé and Umbanda appear in the UCKG's rituals as demons. Spirits are key to healing for Candomblé and Umbanda but cause immense pain and suffering for Pentecostals. Exorcism is intolerable for Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners and restorative for Pentecostals. An examination of these groups' beliefs, discourses, and practices surrounding pain, suffering, and healing illuminates insurmountable differences that are potent precisely in the context of their remarkable similarities.[341] Applying Webb Keane's theoretical framework of semiotic ideology further illustrates this opposition. [342] While Pentecostals and Afro-Brazilian religions have similar semiotic ideologies regarding the range of beings that animate the world, they diverge starkly regarding the moral value of spirits and non-human agency, causing them to semiotically "read" spirits–and their

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[340] Silva argues along these lines in "Neo-pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions." Selka also emphasizes cosmological overlap in "Demons and Money." I will return to these works later in this chapter.
[341] Scholars have applied the metaphor of sibling rivalry to conflicts between competing religions that are similar to one another. For example, see: Corinne G. Dempsey, "Rivalry, reliance, and resemblance: Siblings as metaphor for Hindu-Christian relations in Kerala State," Asian folklore studies (1998): 51-70. Most commonly, the metaphor is used to describe religious violence between the Abrahamic religions, which share a genetic line. For example, see: Paul F. Knitter, "Islam and Christianity sibling rivalries and sibling possibilities," *CrossCurrents* 59, no. 4 (2009): 554-570, and Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's name: Confronting religious violence*, Schocken, 2017. The metaphor is imperfect when applied to this conflict because Afro-Brazilian religions are less competitive than proselytizing religions, do not have supercessionist goals, and do not seem to be trying to gain divine favor. However, this conflict does bear several important characteristics of sibling rivalry, especially considering the groups' demographic and cosmological similarities, their struggle for distinction from one another, and the Pentecostal inversion of Afro-Brazilian religions' symbols and spirits.
[342] See: Keane, *Christian Moderns*.

effects on people's lives–with nearly opposite interpretations. Hence, spirit possession has opposite functions for the two groups, with negative consequences for Candomblé and Umbanda.

In the following section, I will characterize the Brazilian religious background, focusing on enchantment and sorcery, and I will introduce semiotic ideology. Then, I will use the lens of illness and cure to compare Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religious cosmologies. Next, utilizing existing scholarly arguments, I will make a case for the importance of cosmological overlap in this conflict before examining how inverted methods for divine healing–i.e., exorcism and possession–form an interrelated ritual system that fuels the neo-Pentecostal spiritual war against Candomblé and Umbanda. In the context of an apocalyptic worldview, Pentecostalism's inversion of Afro-Brazilian religions' cosmologies (which is inspired by a rigid semiotic ideology that recognizes the metaphysical reality of spirits but asserts that only humans and God can properly have agency) makes these religions an evil enemy in a cosmic war.

Brazilian Enchantment

There are common threads of popular religiosity woven through the Brazilian religious landscape. Several widely shared cosmological elements and a common popular religious discourse permeate the religious field. Steven Engler and Bettina Schmidt describe this as a "general background religiosity, a 'Brazilian religious matrix'" that "emerged from the contingent encounters between Indigenous, Iberian Catholic, and West and Central African cultures."[343] This "matrix" has played a central role in Brazil's social and cultural development.[344]

The key common denominator of Brazilian religiosity is belief in shared spirits, such as *orixás* (African deities), *caboclos* (indigenous spirit guides), and *exus* (trickster spirits). Such deities and spirits have come to permeate the Brazilian popular imaginary by way of Indigenous and African diasporic

[343] Steven Engler and Bettina Schmidt, eds., *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil* (Brill, 2016): 6, https://brill.com/view/title/32952.
[344] Ibid.

influence. These spirits are thought to frequently interact with humans and significantly impact their lives. Most Brazilians also believe in magic and the efficacy of Candomblé and Umbanda rituals (whether celebrated or feared). Brazilian religiosity places an emphasis on ecstatic experiences; this-worldly benefits of rituals; the healing powers of certain peoples, often women; the power of magic to harm; and the efficacy of rituals and spiritually-charged material objects to ward off evil forces.[345] Simply put, Brazil is highly enchanted in a Weberian sense.

Brazilians also tend to have relatively fluid religious identities and behaviors. Conversion, dual memberships, passages between religious identities,[346] hybridization, and syncretism abound, as well as a related capacity to accommodate a variety of potentially conflicting beliefs. The religious marketplace is complex and dynamic: "clients" seek services beyond the bounds of their own religion. Many Catholic and Protestant Brazilians consult with Afro-Brazilian religions' mediums for help with everyday problems, and Christian symbols and figures still feature in many Candomblé and Umbanda temples. Engler and Schmidt explain that for many Brazilians who subscribe to some form of Christianity, Brazil's other traditions are seen as rooted in or otherwise resonant with Christianity, which accentuates their appeal as providers of religious services.[347]

It is imperative to recognize that the Pentecostalism battle against Afro-Brazilian religions occurs in this enchanted arena. Like many of Brazil's churches, the UCKG teaches that "the world of spirits exists."[348] The UCKG recognizes Afro-Brazilian religious rituals as efficacious. However, it balks at the idea that Candomblé and Umbanda are rooted in or compatible with Christianity and condemns any

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[345] Ibid.
[346] The concept of passages is developed by Patricia Birman to describe what she considers a uniquely Brazilian process of passing between religious identities without converting in committed and clear-cut ways. See: Patricia Birman, "Conversion from Afro-Brazilian Religions to Neo-Pentecostalism – Opening New Horizons of the Possible," in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, ed. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 115–32.
[347] Engler and Schmidt, *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*.
[348] https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=68310

practice of their rituals. This is largely due to the nature of Pentecostal theology, for example its premillennial, apocalyptic outlook, which teaches Christian exceptionalism and calls believers to seek out demons, enemies, and evil. The dualist, absolutist nature of such a theology helps explain why enchantment looks so different for neo-Pentecostalism than for Candomblé and Umbanda.

However, despite rejecting the flexibility that pervades the Brazilian religious sphere, the UCKG has adopted several elements of Afro-Brazilian religions into its own system, blending with the very traditions it condemns. It is likely that some instances of this are strategic, but it is also likely a natural product of belief and cosmology. This chapter will demonstrate that neo-Pentecostal theology, cosmology, and ideology facilitate syncretic blending. Regardless, the UCKG's power and popularity are partly attributed to its syncretism. Selka explains that its global success is partly due to its uncanny ability to engage local forms of religiosity, as it has been most successful where anxiety about demons and witchcraft already exists.[349] The UCKG bolsters such anxieties and then poses itself as the solution by offering the cure. I will broaden my analysis to the realm of the global in the conclusion of this dissertation, but first, this chapter examines specific areas of incorporation and interaction between Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism and the Afro-Brazilian religions.

Semiotic Ideology

Webb Keane offers a useful method for comparing religions and their ideas about the supernatural, including spirits and demons, in his semiotic approach. Keane emphasizes that people's self-understandings are inseparable from historical specificity and the semiotic forms (e.g., words and sounds, replicable shapes of money, habits of physical gestures, etc.) in which their self-understanding is embedded.[350] His focus is semiotic ideology, which broadly relates to a cultural system of ideas and

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[349] Selka, "Demons and Money," 159.
[350] Webb Keane, "Religious Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (1997): 66, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.47.

underlying assumptions about words, sounds, images, etc., how they are "read" or interpreted, what functions they serve, and what moral and political consequences they might produce. Of particular relevance here is Keane's argument that "semiotic ideology links the ways people make sense of their experiences to their fundamental presuppositions about what kinds of beings animate the world."[351] Analyzing religious cultures' semiotic ideologies–for example, their assumptions about spirits, demons, and human and divine agency–helps explain how Pentecostals "read" spirits like those celebrated in Candomblé and Umbanda with vastly different political and moral consequences.

Notably, across the Brazilian religious landscape, people have very similar notions about what kinds of beings animate the world: innumerable spirits are believed to have the power to possess people, act on behalf of people, and enact their own agency. In perceiving spirits as real, most Brazilians take seriously a world in which unseen supernatural forces direct daily life. This is of course true for Afro-Brazilian religions and Pentecostalism, in which the existence of spirits is an empirical fact. However, these religions assign value to–or assess the moral quality of–spirts as signs very differently. They diverge ideologically about the nature of good, evil, and what kinds of beings *should* animate the world, i.e., what kinds of beings are part of a moral, benevolent order, and what kinds of beings must be defeated. Therefore, they make highly contrasting ethical judgments about spirits, leading to key distinctions in spirits' roles in propagating illness and healing. These differences partly stem from conflicting conceptions of human and supernatural agency, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Feitiçaria

Christianity has a long tradition of disagreeing with the world's indigenous religions about what kinds of beings and material things have or should be granted agency (despite two millennia of the absorption and Christianization of indigenous ideas, spirits, and gods). These clashes are reflected in the

[351] Ibid., 66.

history of the discourse on fetishism. As Roger Sansi-Roca explains, the English *fetish* originated from the Portuguese *feitiçaria*, meaning sorcery or witchcraft, and *feitiço*, meaning magic charm.[352] Today, *feitiçaria* is a derogatory label hurled at Candomblé and Umbanda by critics, especially within neo-Pentecostal discourse. The UCKG's Bishop Macedo warns that the "*feitiçaria, bruxaria, e magia*" (sorcery, witchcraft, and magic) of the Afro-Brazilian religions poses a serious threat to Brazil and the world. [353] He also calls for people to destroy the "fetishist" objects and images of Candomblé temples.[354] A rich history underlies the modern usage of *feitiçaria*, revealing interesting connections between the semiotic ideologies of medieval Iberian Catholics, neo-Pentecostalism, and Brazilians more broadly.

Sansi-Roca traces the discourse of feitiçaria over the last several centuries across the Atlantic from Portugal and Africa to Brazil. He explains that when Portuguese travelers first used the term to describe ritual practices they encountered along trade routes in Africa (from about 1500), it was because they recognized these practices as sorcery, having their own sorcery at home.[355] In Iberia, diverse magical practices and objects (e.g., herbs and amulets) were used to ward off evil spirits, protect the body, and bring good fortune. Sorcery was practical, flexible, and widespread–a universal phenomenon not seen to involve religious worship.[356] Inquisitioners, too, believed feitiços and feitiçaria to have efficacy, and they persecuted feitiçaria not as heresy but as a personal contract with the Devil.[357] Catholicism of course had its own magic, e.g., holy oil blessings, praying to saints for miracles, and transubstantiation, though Catholic authorities generally denied these were magical. Some feitiçaria practices blended personal sorcery with religious magic, such as using amulets containing consecrated altar stones that indexed the

[352] Roger Sansi-Roca, "The Fetish in the Lusophone Atlantic," in *Cultures of the Lusophone Black Atlantic*, ed. N. Naro, R. Sansi-Roca, and D. Treece, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 19.
[353] Edir Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias: deuses ou demônios* (Unipro, 2019).
[354] Ibid. Such calls, of course, amount to blatant religious intolerance and the promotion of violence.
[355] Sansi Roca, "The Fetish in the Lusophone Atlantic," 19.
[356] Ibid., 22.
[357] Ibid., 21.

power of Christ.[358] Within the Iberian Catholic semiotic ideology then, spirits and sorcerers had agency and objects had power: feitiçaria was part of an enchanted world.

The Portuguese discourse on feitiçaria spread throughout West Africa and beyond with creolization, and new syncretic practices developed. For example, through Portuguese cultural and colonial exchanges along the African coast, along with the intermingling of the Portuguese and African slaves in Brazil, the practice of wearing *Mandinga* pouches began and proliferated around the Lusophone Atlantic. Used to ward off evil spirits, the Mandinga pouches were individualized and could be made from various objects, like paper from the Bible, sticks, and altar stones. Worn by all classes and colors of people, the pouches "blended European, African, and maybe even indigenous practices… Feitiçaria was a part of everyone's everyday life."[359]

The discourse on feitiçaria shifted to a concern with fetishism as the Danish, French, and especially Dutch and English overtook Portuguese predominance on the West African coast during the seventeenth century. As Sansi-Roca explains, these Protestant travelers were bothered by the creolization they encountered, and they saw Catholicism as too like African religion. When the travelers picked up the term *fetisso*, they overlooked its Portuguese origin and reinterpreted the Afro-Portuguese discourse on sorcery as the African religion of the fetish, denying the possibility of a space that was both European and

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[358] Ibid., 2

[359] Ibid., 25. The pouches were used in all Portuguese colonies and in Iberia. They were often made and sold by slaves, but blacks, mulattos, and whites all purchased Mandinga bags and were all accused of feitiçaria by authorities. Sansi-Roca describes them as influenced by Catholicism perhaps more than African religion. Interestingly, the pouches were often perceived as coming from somewhere else in the Atlantic: "The paradox of sorcery seems to be that the apparently powerless foreigner, the outsider, the unknown, is the most powerful sorcerer" (Ibid., 26). Sansi-Roca states this before describing an Angolan soldier's take on the Mandinga's potentially diverse origins across the Atlantic, but this quote resonates with contemporary religious conflict in Brazil. Afro-Brazilian religions' adherents are vulnerable: they have always been marginalized, they are subject to colorism and anti-African prejudices, and these traditions have traditionally found shelter in favelas. However, Pentecostals credit them with influencing Brazilian society in countless negative ways. They are treated simultaneously as weak and powerful. The main difference is that they are not unknown, but highly recognizable. This resembles "Othering," as (re-)coined by Gyatri Spivak and elaborated by others. For a good summary on theoretical approaches to Othering, see: Oscar Thomas-Olalde and Astride Velho, "Othering and its effects–Exploring the concept," *Writing postcolonial histories of intercultural education* 2 (2011): 27-51.

African.[360] The fetisso came to include not only magic charms but also the gods of the Africans, and *fetisseros* were their priests.[361] Drawing on travel accounts, Sansi-Roca finds that the travelers refused to recognize the agency of the Devil or the spirits of the dead in the objects and animals that were magical to Africans. Instead of being demonic, fetishes were idolatrous, "artifices made by humans in their stupidity and greed, God being a remote creator in a disenchanted world."[362] The legacy of such accounts was that eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophers came to describe African religion as deviant for being based on self-interest, chance, and the worship of material things. From this perspective, fetishists were unable to distinguish subjects from objects or good from evil.[363] Hence, fetishism became ossified as the religion of African stupidity and primitivity in Enlightenment discourse.[364]

Protestantism is certainly not monolithic and has never been thoroughly disenchanted. The Devil was very much a preoccupation of many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestants.[365] But Sansi-Roca convincingly shows that for a specific but impactful group of people in a specific time and place–seventeenth-century northern European Protestant travelers in Lusophone West Africa and some eighteenth-century European Enlightenment philosophers–intellectual discourse stripped the enchantment out of sorcery and painted African religion as ignorant and ineffective.

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[360] The Protestant travelers' behaviors described in this section also constitute Othering in that the dominant/superior Protestant subject defined itself in relation to the subordinate African through subjugating discursive processes.
[361] Sansi Roca, "The Fetish in the Lusophone Atlantic," 27.
[362] Ibid., 27. These Protestant travelers would have had a different semiotic ideology from the Catholic Iberians regarding agency, which relates to their divergent views on agency and sorcery in African religions.
[363] Ibid., 19.
[364] For example, Charles de Brosses pinpointed fetishism as the origin of all religion, a first primitive step toward developing more enlightened religious forms. European philosophers saw Africans as stuck outside of time and progress, with Hegel finding them outside of history altogether. Ibid., 19. This echoes Keane's findings in his ethnographic study in *Christian Moderns.* In Protestant discourse from both Keane's and Sansi-Roca's studies, modern humans have evolved to eschew the worship of material things and various gods to develop proper conceptions of human subjects.
[365] Allison P. Coudert, "Melancholy, Madness, and Demonic Possession in the Early Modern West," in *Melancholy, Madness, and Demonic Possession in the Early Modern West* (De Gruyter, 2014), 647–89, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110361643.647.

Sansi-Roca's account moves to Brazil, where the Iberian feitiço and feitiçaria were in use from the arrival of the Portuguese. Including but extending beyond descriptions of the Mandinga bags, charges of feitiçaria were made in cases where authorities persecuted practices of magic and spiritism broadly. This occurred with Candomblé: the Inquisition's visitation documents recorded trails of "countless" Afro-Brazilian religious devotees persecuted for meddling in witchcraft.[366] However, not all Candomblé practices were persecuted. Sansi-Roca describes how Brazilian society held a common belief that spirits existed and had agency, and some of them could produce evil charms, but not all spirits were believed to have evil effects.[367] Authorities persecuted magical practices they deemed evil or fraudulent, but they ignored those they deemed inane.[368] Candomblé was one of multiple forms of sorcery that operated in the same public sphere as European religion. The similarities between Brazilian enchantment and sorcery on the one hand, and Sansi-Roca's description of Iberian feitiçaria on the other, suggest that the former do not only derive from lasting African diasporic influence, but also colonial Portuguese Catholicism.

Newer, Enlightenment notions of fetishism were appropriated for a time in the late nineteenth century. Some social thinkers proposed to redefine practices of feitiçaria as fetishism, or *fetichismo*, attempting to adapt Western Enlightenment philosophies to their own reality. Likely influenced by social Darwinism, these Brazilian intellectuals saw Brazil as a mixture of inferior civilizations–i.e., African cultures–with a second-rate colonial power, Portugal, whose Catholic religion was responsible for the backwardness of Brazil.[369] But for these intellectuals, Africanness was the primary problem. Brazilian social scientists, like Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, wanted to live in a modern and European Brazil and attempted to divide their society into its European and African components to achieve this. "Replacing the *feitiço*, the Creole, miscegenated discourse on sorcery, with the scientific discourse on fetishism was

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[366] Silva and Brumana, "Candomblé: Religion, World Vision, and Experience," 170.
[367] Sansi Roca, "The Fetish in the Lusophone Atlantic," 30.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.

central to this endeavor."[370] Some Brazilian newspapers came to use the term *fetichismo* because of this thinking. During this same period, Candomblé devotees were often arrested for offering false medical cures (*curandeirismo*) and charlatanism, implying that their practices were considered fraudulent more than evil.[371] However, the discourse on fetichismo seems to have never become widespread.

Despite nineteenth century intellectuals' attempts to strip the efficacy from sorcery, the disenchanted notion of fetishism seems to have minimally impacted the Brazilian popular imaginary or general semiotic ideology regarding supernatural forces. Using Sansi-Roca to trace the history of the discourse on fetishism reveals a clear line connecting contemporary Brazilian notions of sorcery/witchcraft with sixteenth-century Portuguese feitiçaria, and with Afro-Portuguese hybridized sorcery practices. Candomblé and Umbanda practices tend to be widespread, practical, and relatively universal. They have long been embraced, ignored, feared, and condemned in ways that mirror the treatment of feitiçaria in medieval Portugal. Some degree of intolerance against sorcery–and against Candomblé and Umbanda–has always existed in Brazil, but this history is inconsistent. Brazil has witnessed periods and regimes that displayed tolerance, culminating in official equal rights for Afro-Brazilian religions today. Catholicism has mixed persecution with co-existence, even arriving at relative acceptance in modern times. Still, the spirits and rituals of Candomblé and Umbanda are woven into the fabric of reality of many Brazilians, including Catholics.

The demonization of Afro-Brazilian religions by neo-Pentecostals mirrors Iberian inquisitioners' charges against contracts with the Devil: there is a belief in the metaphysical reality and power of feitiçaria. That neo-Pentecostalism has taken up the charge against feitiçaria with such vigor marks a

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[370] Ibid., 21.
[371] Silva and Brumana, "Candomblé: Religion, World Vision, and Experience," 170. Despite deeming Afro-Brazilian religions evil, though, the UCKG also accuses them of charlatanism. Interestingly, the UCKG (and prosperity theology churches in general) is often criticized by detractors for duping and defrauding its adherents.

(re)turn to quite rigid conceptions of human and supernatural agency, in which "magic" must come from the Devil. Relevant to this discussion is the fact that Brazilian evangelicals, including Pentecostals, frequently chase the Devil out of Candomblé terreiros by cleansing them with oil, destroying statues and other religious materials, and forcing practitioners to destroy their own objects. Semiotic ideology is useful for analyzing this violent response to material objects (debates about iconoclasm, after all, come down to different semiotic processes regarding the interpretation of religious objects). Sansi explains that whether these objects are thought to be only false projections or are actually inhabited by the Devil is unclear, but, "if we look closely at the ritual practices of the IURD, it seems that they attach great importance to the actual material destruction of objects and images, and it is difficult to understand the violence of their actions only as a symbol of rejection. The violent 'cleanings' of the terreiros are not public acts to be shown on television, but ritually effective operations that are believed to actually exorcise the evil spirits that inhabit that place."[372] The holy war on Candomblé and Umbanda reflects a neo-Pentecostal semiotic ideology and cosmology in which sorcery, sorcerers, and objects have power, and spirits are real and capable of exerting agency, but are unequivocally evil, morally requiring defeat.

Illness and Cure

The centrality of sorcery and spirits within not only Afro-Brazilian religions but also neo-Pentecostalism is nowhere more evident than in their discourses and practices surrounding illness and divine cure, the latter being frequently cited as key to the religions' growth in Latin America. In his work on the success of Pentecostalism, Candomblé, and Charismatic Catholicism throughout the region, Chesnut states, "Given the greater incidence of all types of physical, psychological, and spiritual afflictions among the Latin American popular classes, the mass appeal of the standard product of *cura*

[372] Roger Sansi, "Objects and Images in Brazilian Religions," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 526.

divina should surprise few."[373] Many scholars have agreed that religions that succeed in Latin America do so because they address widespread difficulties derived from "pathologies of poverty," like poverty-related illnesses.[374]

As expressed in this dissertation's introduction, I caution against Chesnut's depiction of Latin America as essentially and uniquely afflicted**.** However, Pentecostalism and African diasporic religions are most widely received by Latin America's rural and especially urban poor (this is also generally true for Pentecostalism globally, especially in the Global South[375]). In Brazil, Umbanda and especially Candomblé have famously found safety in favelas for centuries, and today favela-dwellers are the likeliest Brazilians to eschew Catholicism in favor of conversion to Pentecostalism or Candomblé/Umbanda. For both Afro-Brazilian religions and Pentecostalism, the most typical adherent lives among Brazil's poor, marginalized, vulnerable lower classes, and is black or brown. For Brazilians of such low socioeconomic status, financial and social limitations provide barriers to accessing quality healthcare, education, and opportunity. Indeed, Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners and Pentecostals alike, on average, are no strangers to suffering.

A common feature of religion, these faiths provide explanations for the existence of such pain and suffering, as well as solutions for healing. They take human problems that might ordinarily be medicalized, at least in the West (e.g., physical, psychological, and drug-related illness), and spiritualize them. Healing too is spiritualized. Relatedly, in addition to faith healing, Chesnut cites pneumacentrism as a key common denominator that drives these religions' success in Latin America.[376] While pneumatics is the branch of Christian theology concerned with matters of the Holy Spirit, he expands this term to

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[373] Andrew Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits," 74.
[374] Steigenga and Cleary, "Introduction," in *Conversion of a Continent*.
[375] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011).
[376] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits."

refer to any faith-based organization that emphasizes direct communication with the spirit or spirits at the center of its belief system.[377] Spirits are essential to each of these religion's discourses and practices surrounding pain, suffering, and healing, as will be elaborated below.

Within the Afro-Brazilian Religious World

Under an Afro-Brazilian religious worldview, pain and suffering are usually related to the supernatural or have spiritual causes. Illness is often believed to be a result of a ritual or curse, usually involving harm from a spirit. Or it might be ascribed to a depletion of life force. Otherwise, illness may arise because obligations to spirits or deities have not been met. Relatedly, in Candomblé, harm might come from an improper or unrecognized relationship with one's personal orixá(s) that causes so much imbalance as to create sickness. To invoke healing, these supernatural issues must be resolved.

The orixá spirit pantheon celebrated in Candomblé and Umbanda is largely viewed as benevolent, but orixás can be capricious and need appeasing. The lower classes of spirits are also morally complex and/or ambiguous. While many of the lower spirits are helpful, including *guias* (guides) and *eguns* (spirits of the dead; wise old ancestors), others are more neutral, and some can behave malevolently. Neglected or dishonored spirits are thought to cause harm to the community. Practitioners can even cause harm to other humans using some spirits, like *Exu*, a West African trickster spirit. As a religious "product" offered to its "customers," Umbanda lets a medium call upon an exu on behalf of a client to harm an enemy.[378]

For Chesnut, the dispatching of exus is so essential to Afro-Brazilian religions that it distinguishes them from competing religions in the marketplace. He elaborates:

> It is the existence of the Exus in diasporan religions that allows for amoral practices and sorcery. As liminal trickster spirits, Exus are not seen as intrinsically evil but as un-evolved spiritual beings willing to work with clients for the right price. They serve as amoral

[377] Ibid., 74.
[378] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits.".

> spiritual mercenaries ignorant of absolute standards of good and evil and ready to work for the highest bidder. If they have become associated with the Christian Devil and his minions in popular culture, it is because the Catholic and Protestant churches alike have no room for amoral figures and have demonized the Eshus.[379]

Chesnut's description highlights the pervasive perception within and beyond Umbanda that exus are a source of pain and suffering. Afro-Brazilian religious adherents attribute their problems to black magic and amoral spirits, often believed to be sent by enemies. And as Chesnut points out, a shared belief in the efficacy of black magic and spirits makes exus a central point of conflict with Christianity, especially for neo-Pentecostalism.[380] Within the semiotic ideology of most Afro-Brazilian religions as well as Pentecostalism, exus direct unseen forces and wield great abilities; for the former group, exus having agency is a fact of life, but for the latter group, this is immensely evil.

In addition to direct harm caused by tricksters and other spirits, a depletion or imbalance of *axé*– the invisible spiritual force responsible for all life–is another major source of pain and suffering within Candomblé and Umbanda. Under the Afro-Brazilian religious worldview, all beings have axé. When people undergo spiritual crises, their axé becomes depleted. This is believed to cause suffering in all areas of life, including bodily well-being.[381] Thus, the depletion of axé is a spiritual malady that manifests in social and emotional suffering, which tends to ultimately culminate in bodily suffering. Rebecca Seligman asserts that in the context of these beliefs, the body can be read as an index of spiritual well-being.[382] Physical ailments are spiritualized and therefore amenable to spiritual rather than physical healing.

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[379] Ibid.
[380] For Chesnut, exus are part of a morality clash. Crucially, Pentecostals not only condemn Afro-Brazilian religious practices, including the dispatching of exus, for having immoral intentions but also for having negative *effects*. This is key to the conflict, as I discuss throughout this dissertation.
[381] Rebecca Seligman, "The Unmaking and Making of Self: Embodied Suffering and Mind–Body Healing in Brazilian Candomblé," *Ethos* 38, no. 3 (2010): 305.
[382] Ibid., 305.

Lastly, and perhaps most seriously, illness can derive from a person's improper relationship with a deity or deities, particularly one's personal orixá(s).[383] Candomblé practitioners believe that every human being has his or her own personal orixás, and that one specifically "owns the head" of that person.[384] "Failure to acknowledge one's Orixás is understood to lead to disturbances in life, trouble with interpersonal relationships or jobs, and even health problems. In other words, it can lead to various forms of 'suffering.'"[385] A person's primary orixá is a core part of who she is, and without recognition of and a relationship with the orixá, she is incomplete and out of balance. Worse, she is subject to unwanted and painful bouts of possession at inconvenient times by the orixá and other spirits. Possession, too, can be a cause of suffering.

If under Candomblé and Umbanda, pain and suffering can have a variety of spiritual causes, the corresponding remedy is spiritual too. The discourse of divine healing permeates these religions, which pose themselves as an essential form of cure whereby conversion and initiation commence a healing process. They provide targeted and ongoing remedies for both adepts and clients, most of which are aimed at improving relationships with spirits. Robert Voeks puts it simply: "The focus of Candomblé worship is the maintenance of a harmonious relationship between religious followers and the [orixás]."[386]

To appease irritable spirits, practitioners and clients make ritual offerings. Humans and spirits are believed to have obligations to one another that must be maintained, and offerings are a primary vehicle for humans to fulfill their obligations. Offerings range from animal sacrifice to an orixá (typically the

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[383] The notion that improper relationships with gods or spirits leads to suffering is prevalent among the world's shamanistic religions, as are several other elements of the Afro-Brazilian religions' discourses and practices surrounding illness and cure. For a general description of shamanism demonstrating such similarities, see Michael Harner and Sandra Harner, "Core Practices in the Shamanic Treatment of Illness," *Shamanism* 13, no. 1-2 (2000): 19–30. The belief that improper relationships with the divine leads to suffering is also central in Abrahamic religions, especially within branches of Christianity that embrace prosperity theology, like neo-Pentecostalism, as I will discuss in the following section.
[384] Seligman, "The Unmake and making of Self," 303.
[385] Ibid., 303.
[386] Robert Voeks, "Sacred Leaves of Brazilian Candomble," Geographical Review 80, no. 2 (1990): 118, https://doi.org/10.2307/215476.

slaughtering of a chicken and the spreading of its blood and entrails upon an altar) to leaving alcohol and cigarettes when calling on *Pomba Gira* (a feisty harlot/prostitute spirit, the female counterpart to Exu). To combat the damage caused by an enemy using a trickster spirit, a practitioner or a client can pay a priest or priestess for help with counter-magic. Most if not all elements of religious ritual are directed at the replenishment of axé: "physical acts of devotion (e.g., prostration), intense dancing, and trance and possession, during which the body is given over completely to spiritual powers, all serve to bolster axé."[387] Divination offers additional solutions. By reading cowries, Candomblé adepts help followers and clients determine their life path (*odu*), consult orixás, and find answers to problems, all of which facilitate healing in some form.[388] Finally, in Candomblé, sacred medicinal plants are administered by priests and priestesses, who act as shamans, in nearly every ritual.[389] These ritual practices all constitute *cura divina*. However, spirit possession–when developed as a skill and practiced–is the ultimate cure.

Candomblé and Umbanda conceptualize possession differently from Christianity and a bit differently from one another. Neither group embraces the term spirit possession, which has a Christian history and a derogatory connotation. Umbandanistas and many Candomblecistas instead opt for *incorporacão* (incorporation). In Umbanda, *guias* are the possessing entity in incorporation rituals; a medium would "explode" if possessed by an orixá.[390] Guias are not perceived to be omnipotent. Rather, the aim is to consult them for guidance. Guias speak through mediums and offer advice, make requests, and answer participants' questions. Incorporation thus allows the human and spirit worlds not only to communicate, but to fulfill obligations to each other. Umbandan mediums describe themselves as helpless when spirits take control of them, but after the initial shock, they usually submit freely to spirits'

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[387] Ibid., 305.
[388] Silva and Brumana, "Candomblé: Religion, World Vision, and Experience," 182.
[389] For in-depth studies on the medicinal plants used in Candomblé, see Voeks, "Sacred Leaves of Brazilian Candomblé," and Robert A. Voeks, *Sacred Leaves of Candomblé: African Magic, Medicine, and Religion in Brazil* (University of Texas Press, 2010).
[390] Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," 439.

demands.[391] This cannot be forced, but is typically embraced as a gift. Mediums usually describe themselves as semi-conscious during the ritual. Some communities put great emphasis on education and training of mediums to hone their abilities to remain fully conscious, but there is always a firm distinction between medium and spirit in the moment of possession: the message and the responsibility are attributed to spirit, not medium.[392]

In Candomblé, practitioners reject the framework of spirit possession because of the ontology of the orixás. On the one hand they are perceived as entities with elaborate personalities and even physical traits; on the other, they are also described as forces of nature that transcend simple human understanding and are impossible to incorporate, just as it is impossible to embody thunder or lightning.[393] Sometimes orixás are described as personifications of axé. Still, while they are not bounded entities, incorporation of orixás is achievable and vital: it transforms humans into new beings who embody the divine.[394] The illnesses caused by the absence or denial of one's personal orixás is therefore cured through the ultimate, most transformative healing process in Candomblé: the initiation ritual called *fazer o santo*, or "making the saint," in which a practitioner becomes a medium. It takes several years before an initiate is ready for the lengthy initiation process. The process includes extended periods of seclusion at the temple, where the initiate carries out ascetic behavior and learns proper ritual and other practices from adepts.[395] The initiate experiences instances of dissociation from self as various spirits possess her body. At first, the experience is shocking, as neither the body nor the orixás are used to one another, and they both need training.[396]

To be clear, this training period is typically unpleasant. Miriam Rabelo provides first-hand accounts in which Candomblé practitioners describe first-time possession as painful, even comparable to

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[391] Ibid., 440.
[392] Ibid., 440.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid.
[395] Seligman, "The Unmaking and Making of Self,"305.
[396] Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," 440.

a heart attack.[397] Many describe the pull of an orixá as a force that comes from below, makes their legs shake, throws their balance off, and alters their "relationship with place" by making them "lose the floor."[398] The experience is one of rhythm: the body swings from side to side before the orixá takes full possession of it. Many practitioners halt the possession because they feel entangled in a state of suffering, which is compounded by the rhythm. These sensations are considered a call from the orixá asking to be "made." But they also signal interference of other distinct entities at the same time, as it is said the orixá does not come alone: it might arrive with eguns and exus.[399] Mães de santo and pais de santo (adepts) work to individualize the different entities and give offerings to minimize their interference, and they help the initiate open and sensitize the body to the orixá through cleaning, bathing, and resting.

Eventually, there is a final ritual in which the primary orixá firmly enters the body of the new initiate and takes its proper place "on her head." This allows the initiate to overcome the painful experiences of possession. Schmidt describes this experience as transformation of a human body through the encounter with the divine.[400] The person becomes a medium, newly healed and spiritually whole. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork, Seligman finds that the primary reason that mediums reported becoming initiated was to overcome somatic suffering, and they also reported that the initiation process succeeded in healing their suffering.[401]

After the initiation ritual, something of the orixá is thought to always remain in the body of the newly initiated. When orixás later take control of the body, they rise from the torso to the head.[402] The relations between practitioner and orixá become more personal and routine. New mediums do not usually

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[397] Miriam Rabelo, "Rodando Com o Santo e Queimando No Espírito: Possessão e a Dinâmica Do Lugar No Candomblé e Pentecostalismo.," *Ciências Sociales y Religión* 7, no. 7 (2005): 16.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid.
[400] Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," 440.
[401] Seligman, "The Making and Unmaking of Self," 305.
[402] Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," 440.

speak during incorporation, but experienced mediums can master speech after several years, and they slowly gain more control of their bodies with practice. From the start, orixás can always express emotions, like satisfaction and dissatisfaction, pleasure, and anger, through gestures and dance.[403] The human body is a vehicle for communication with the deities, and during encounters the human part of the consciousness is taken over by divine part. Unlike in Umbanda, it is impossible to distinguish clearly between body and mind or soul: they are each comprised of both humanity and divinity. Possessed entity and possessing entity become inseparably merged and create a unique, individual, unified entity.[404]

In addition to the long, incremental, and even painful healing process Candomblé initiates undergo as they become mediums, regular and one-off incorporation events also feature divine healing in both Candomblé and Umbanda. Terreiros throw parties in honor of the orixás to observe a range of holidays, and they hold ceremonies for more local reasons, like the goal to heal a medium. Candomblé and Umbanda mediums undergo healing anytime they practice possession. Their ritual also allows the group to ask possessing entities for advice or make deals regarding healing for themselves or others. That spirit possession is the primary practice of divine healing–especially in Candomblé–is a leading source of hostility from Pentecostals.

Pentecostalism

Like Afro-Brazilian religions, Pentecostalism is thorough in identifying causes of pain and suffering, and they are generally supernatural/spiritual. In the Apocalypse-focused sermons from chapter one of this dissertation, Bishop Macedo teaches that COVID-19 and measures taken to prevent its spread are signs of the end times. Further, he describes how Satan and his minions are wreaking havoc on earth, for example by poisoning the food supply. These are clear examples where supernatural sources are said

[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid., 441.

to underlie misery and illness. As a reminder, though, UCKG services range in terms of the degree to which clear doctrine is laid out. Most of the time, in smaller daily services where theology is not as thoroughly elaborated, the discourse on pain and suffering is a bit more practical and a tad less cosmic. The Antichrist and the end of the world by fire might be less of a focus than people's daily struggles. Regardless, however, the UCKG consistently emphasizes demonic sources of suffering.

From a Pentecostal perspective, illness comes in many forms: physical, emotional, mental, financial, and spiritual. Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism emphasizes poverty and its associated complications as a major form of suffering, resonating with the woes of impoverished Brazilians. But poverty and other problems are ultimately seen to come from "letting in the Devil."[405] According to the Pentecostal worldview, sinful human behaviors undoubtedly cause pain and suffering, but such behaviors are influenced by demonic forces. Highlighting a combination of Pentecostalism's moral conservatism and demonization of secular spaces, Chesnut explains that "the street is the Devil's playground with its crime, prostitution, gambling, and substance abuse."[406] All of these are of course associated with suffering. Relatedly, Pentecostals believe that malicious spirits, i.e., demons, both entice people into wicked behavior and also cause direct harm by interfering in humans' lives through possession, leading to cancer and other illnesses. People who lack faith are more susceptible to demonic influence as well as illness.

The focus on the Devil and demons is attractive because it suggests that if a person strays from the "right" path, he or she was likely enticed by Satan or one of his minions. That said, humans are not free of blame for falling subject to this influence or for having such a lack of faith as to be vulnerable to possession. However, Pentecostalism does provide converts direction for getting their lives back on track. Furthermore, this view that malevolent spirits are the cause of the world's troubles ignores or masks the

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[405] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits," 84.
[406] Ibid.

role of politics and social and economic factors in societal and individual problems. Politics are difficult to change (although the UCKG focuses its efforts there, too); demons can be vanquished.

An important consequence of this way of thinking is that under Pentecostalism, suffering can be eliminated in this world, here and now. As prior discussion on eschatology has shown, "continued earthly suffering with a glorious reward in heaven is not a major trope in Pentecostal discourse."[407] Diverging from several Protestant branches' teachings, the religion does not tell adherents to suffer quietly, live piously and ascetically, and await eternal salvation. Suffering is only valued as a past state, and it can–and should–be overcome. Indeed, "Stop Suffering" is the UCKG's slogan. Neo-Pentecostal tools for overcoming suffering include conversion, faith and prayer, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the grace of God, and the right kind of living.[408] All of this clearly demonstrates prosperity theology, which is a legacy of the nineteenth century New Thought movement and early twentieth century ideas surrounding the power of positive thinking.[409] The UCKG's various modes of divine healing are classic elements of this Health and Wealth Gospel.

The global popularity of Pentecostalism is frequently attributed to its promises of healing, which are legitimized by adherents' divine cure success stories.[410] Chesnut asserts that in Latin America, divine healing induces "consumers" to join Pentecostalism more than any other "product" offered by the religion.[411] Describing findings from ethnographic work in Bolivia, Wightman finds that "discourses of healing are prevalent in nearly all aspects of Pentecostal practice, including sermons, testimonios, and

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[407] Jill Wightman, "Healing the Nation – Pentecostal Identity and Social Change in Bolivia" in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, ed. Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 243. Wightman's findings about Bolivian Pentecostalism seem to hold true for Pentecostalism in general and resonate with arguments made by other scholars, like Chesnut, about Brazil.
[408] Ibid.
[409] Kate Bowler, *Blessed*; Allison P. Coudert, "'Toxic Positivity.'"
[410] For example, see Brown, G*lobal Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*.
[411] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits." However, some studies have found that leaving crime is a more popular reason for joining a Pentecostal church than having a health problem. Still, Pentecostals conceptualize this as healing a person's life and soul, if not their body. Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil," 124.

prayer meetings."[412] Indeed, UCKG television programs on RecordTV and other channels constantly feature healing testimonials. Clergy and adherents alike apply the language of healing not only to physical and other ailments that are often otherwise medicalized, like addiction and mental problems: ailments that can be healed through Pentecostalism range from financial situations, homelessness, and unemployment to marital difficulties and other familial discord.[413] Individuals seek healing for family and friends in addition to themselves, no malady is off limits, and believers love to talk about how it works.

Wightman finds divine healing to be the central theme of most conversion narratives: healing is an "integral part of forming a new Pentecostal identity."[414] When her interviewees spoke of healing, the discourse was often something like "Jesus healed my life."[415] The healing that comes with conversion is inextricably connected with faith and living "right." Chesnut reports that converts list repudiation of vice as a key change–or the most important change–in life since conversion.[416] For example, when drug dealers or prostitutes convert to Pentecostalism, they (theoretically) make a break with their past lives and embark on a holier path, initiating an experience of healing. This kind of narrative is ubiquitous in UCKG television programming. Chesnut suggests that the concept of living "right" gives the individual sufferer a mode of action for overcoming personal grief and affliction.[417] Further describing the appeal of pairing conversion with healing, he writes:

> The doctrine of conversion in which joining a Pentecostal church is conceptualized as part of a process of spiritual rebirth allows the believer to be born again into a healthy new environment where the demons of poverty can be neutralized. Conceived of as a 'positive transformation of the nature and value of a person,' religious conversion appeals to those people and groups who have been stigmatized or negatively evaluated by society.[418]

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[412] Wightman, "Healing the Nation," 244.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Ibid.
[416] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits," 84.
[417]Wightman, "Healing the Nation," 243.
[418] Chesnut, "Specialized Spirits," 84.

While Afro-Brazilian religions similarly view conversion as a healing process and even a process of rebirth, they do not emphasize such a moral transformation. The concept of breaking with past "sin" to embrace a holier path is foreign to Afro-Brazilian religions because their morality systems are not dualistic; they do not demonize but rather accept behaviors and qualities like prostitution or homosexuality. Converts are not required to break with their former lives in the same way. As discussed in this dissertation's introduction, such moral differences are one contributor to conflict. The UCKG condemns what it perceives to be immoral behaviors in Candomblé and Umbanda, and it loves to share the testimonials of former practitioners who denounce their former lives as sinful.

Unsurprisingly, my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro completely supports the notion that healing is a quintessential feature of UCKG discourse and practice. Sermons regularly centered around the theme of healing, with various healing practices carried out at every service I attended. At the large, centrally located churches I visited, pastors orchestrated divine healing on an efficient, mass scale. For example, every attendee had the insider knowledge that they should bring water bottles to every service for healing rituals (during initial visits, I seemed to be the only person without one). The pastors would bless everyone's water collectively from the pulpit. When attendees drank from their water bottles in unison, they were deemed healed of all ailments. It was evident from gestures and other emotional displays that the worshippers were delighted about this ritual and believed in its efficacy.

In addition to healing rituals during daily services, the UCKG also holds enormous faith healing events in stadiums around the world. From Brazil and Mozambique to New Zealand, people seeking divine cure can join massive revival meetings attended by thousands of people at a time. During these events, a lucky few are invited onto the field or stage for everyone to witness their spectacular healing, and attendees give testimonies about past or present miracles. The audience is always collectively healed as well. These services function as promotional recruitment events and are advertised extensively.

In New Zealand, at one such event in 2017 called "You Will Be Lifted," the UCKG offered free vials of holy oil to all in attendance for the purposes of healing.[419] Showing the diverse array of maladies that can be targeted for healing, the advertisement pamphlet enumerates the following as motivations for people to come and receive the holy oil: "Poor Health, Bad Dreams, Can't Sleep, Feeling Depressed, Suicidal thoughts, Nervousness, Drinking & Family Problems, Debts & Spiritual Problems, Relationship Problems, Constant Failures, Victim of Curses, Tension & Anxiety, Tired of Life, All you do going wrong, Or any other problem."[420] The mention of curses demonstrates the UCKG's enchanted semiotic ideology, and the collective list reflects the church's logic that suffering comes in a multitude of forms and is widespread and universal. There is no clear distinction between spiritual and medical causes or experiences of suffering. Furthermore, no problem is too small or too mundane–or conversely, too severe–for divine healing, which can be as dramatic as a sporting event or as personal as using a UCKG-supplied stash of holy oil at home.

The use of holy oil for healing derives from the Bible, as the pamphlet referenced above explains:

> Mainly, the Holy Oil was chosen by God as an instrument of faith as He healed the sick and as a point of contact to overcome darkness with all its evil forces. Notably, the Lord Jesus Himself instructed his disciples to anoint people with Oil and miracles followed. "*And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." Mark 6:13.* [421]

This passage associates oil with miracles (and crucially, it unites exorcism with healing). Interestingly, however, in an advertisement for holy oil on the UCKG's British website, there is a disclaimer that states, "Please note that the oil itself has no magical properties, but it can be used to awaken your faith and give you the willpower to overcome your battles. Our spiritual advice should be seen as a Compliment to any

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[419] The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, *You Will Be Lifted! Event*, Auckland, New Zealand, 2017. Image of pamphlet taken from: Tess Nichol, "Church's Oil Claimed to Help Heal," NZ Herald, NZ Herald, 25 Aug. 2017, www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11873021.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid. Italics in the original.

scientific or medical treatment you may be receiving."[422] In denying magic, this disclaimer undermines promises of miracles, a transparent effort at legal self-protection. It also acknowledges that adherents may be using modern medicine in their search for healing, as many Pentecostals do. Still, it pinpoints the true heart of the Health and Wealth doctrine: faith.

Under Pentecostalism, the outcome of divine healing is directly connected to faith. Pentecostals are told to believe *before* praying for healing: they should expect to be okay despite whatever evidence there is to the contrary.[423] In the services I attended in Rio, it was always emphasized that faith was key to the efficacy of the water bottle healing ritual. Prosperity theology is foundational to Pentecostal efforts at healing *any* kind of suffering, including poverty: with enough faith, anything is possible, and with a ten-dollar donation to the church, a hundred or a thousand shall return to the donor's pockets. Prosperity theology gives Pentecostals agency and control over their own problems, as well as a direct line to God to request help.

This also provides a justification for the failure of healing rituals: if it does not work, the person asking does not have enough faith. Adherents waiting for a miracle are also told to trust in God's timing. Furthermore, while some people may claim to experience healing instantaneously (as the UCKG frequently advertises), healing is often conceived of as an incremental process. Adherents are encouraged to keep attending, routinely apply oil, etc., and be patient. They are told to work up their faith like they are building muscles. Paul Alexander describes this as appealing because it helps Pentecostals make sense of the world.[424] But it also places blame on sick people.[425] Anecdotes abound of people leaving neo-Pentecostal churches because they blame people for "lacking enough faith" to be cured of severe illnesses

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[422] "The Great Distribution of the Blessed Oil," UCKG HelpCentre, Jan 24 2022, https://www.uckg.org/the-great-distribution-of-the-blessed-oil/.
[423] Paul Alexander, *Signs and Wonders*.
[424] Ibid., 12.
[425] This type of thinking is rampant in Prosperity Theology. Coudert discusses this as one of several downsides of New Thought thinking in "'Toxic Positivity.'"

like multiple sclerosis or cancer. However, Alexander asserts that *most* Pentecostals trust God and find fault in their own prayers or the lives of people who are not healed, figuring that if God chooses not to heal them then they have not asked properly.[426]

Beyond prayer and water bottle blessings, perhaps the most powerful form of healing is through possession by the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism, especially neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG, is highly pneumacentric. The Holy Spirit is a cornerstone of the religion, arguably emphasized more than Christ or God, contrasting with many other trinitarian branches of Christianity. Pentecostals vehemently reject the term "possession," however. Since within a Pentecostal semiotic ideology, there can be no divinity apart from God (i.e., the Holy Trinity), they use the framework of spirit possession only in relation to an inferior spirit. Conversely, Baptism with the Holy Spirit, called *inspirição* (inspiration) and *visão divina* (divine vision) in Brazil, gives experiential access to the truly divine.[427] Told that with enough faith, focus, cleanliness, purity, and prayer, the Holy Spirit will enter their bodies and transform them, Pentecostals aspire to achieve this baptism from the time they first join the church.[428]

Describing this ritual in Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism, Rabelo finds that the sensations associated with Holy Spirit Baptism contrast with Candomblé's discourse about incorporation. [429] Here, the experience is typically marked by a feeling of lightness, a sense of being lifted off the floor or floating, and especially by a hot burning sensation as the fire of the Holy Spirit burns at their core.[430] This experience is signaled by the common Pentecostal phrase "baptism by fire." Many people speak in tongues or dance around to signal the presence of the Holy Spirit. People report experiencing immense happiness, carnal and erotic pleasure, brotherly love, filial devotion, and peace.[431] Despite different

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[426] Ibid.
[427] Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," 441.
[428] Rabelo, "Rodando Com o Santo e Queimando No Espírito."
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid., 27.

sensations indicating possession, baptism by fire is like incorporation in that "to be inhabited by the Holy Spirit is to become a vessel of the divine."[432]

Interestingly, elements of Candomblé and Umbanda have made their way into Holy Spirit baptism. Describing neo-Pentecostals experiencing inspirição, Rabelo observes, "In movements and howls, some resemble *filhos de santo* [Candomblé members], possessed by caboclos [indigenous spirits], which seems to suggest the incorporation of elements from this religious universe in the Pentecostal framework."[433] The UCKG would undoubtedly reject this comparison. Adherents insist they do not lose control or consciousness. They are taught that Jesus wants them to perceive the marvels and a loss of control marks demonic interference and threatens the respectability of the church. Correspondingly, contorting hands and writhing on the floor is read as a sign of malevolent spirit possession. In an Apocalypse sermon discussed in chapter one, Bishop Cardoso even denounces the popular Pentecostal "doctrine of falling," which encourages a form of prostration in which an individual falls to the floor while experiencing Holy Spirit baptism. He critiques the doctrine for its "carnality" and proclaims, "When you fall on the floor it's because a demon is manifesting… When you receive the holy spirit, you don't fall on the floor… you rise up."[434] For the UCKG, not only do Candomblé and Umbanda get possession wrong, but so do other Pentecostals! Such debates reflect anxieties about distinguishing self from other when the rituals of each group bear remarkable similarities.[435]

While spirit possession, i.e., demonic experience, is taught to be the ultimate source of pain and suffering by Pentecostalism, it can be reversed with the help of the Holy Spirit. As such, all the various kinds of healing discussed above double as exorcism–or rather, *descarrego* (deliverance) and *libertação*

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[432] Ibid., 29.
[433] Ibid., 25.
[434] Universal, *Estudo do Apocalipse*, season 1, "Sinais do Fim dos Tempos," episode 4, "A perseguição do apóstolo João" https://www.univervideo.com/History/Play?m=49493, 32:15-33:00.
[435] Again, this resembles sibling rivalry.

(liberation)–especially within neo-Pentecostalism. Anointment with holy oil was a frequent method of exorcism and healing in the Rio churches I attended. Attendees would form two quick-moving lines to be anointed by the pastor or a church worker at the front. It was promised that this would cast out demons. Similarly, the UCKG teaches that Baptism in the Holy Spirit expels demons, as does healing through prayer and drinking blessed water.

The most spectacular form of deliverance, however, is the recognizable, dramatic ritual in which a bishop or pastor interrogates and then defeats and expels a demon from a possessed person. During these liberation ceremonies, demonic possession must be initiated prior to exorcism: demons must be forced to manifest before they can be expelled for good. Schmidt finds that in such ceremonies, the body language of the possessed resembles mediums in Umbanda incorporations, but the possessing spirits, as we would expect, become reinterpreted as demons.[436] Deities and spirits from the Afro-Brazilian religions regularly make their way into neo-Pentecostal exorcisms only to be defeated. This brings us back to cosmological overlap between neo-Pentecostalism, Candomblé, and Umbanda.

Cosmological Overlap and Inversion

As has been shown, Pentecostals do not believe that Afro-Brazilian religions are false or powerless. In popular Brazilian fashion–and in popular global Pentecostal fashion–Brazil's Pentecostals believe in a highly enchanted world where the spirits of Candomblé and Umbanda truly exist and their rituals really "work." But they are seen as evil and destructive. To combat Afro-Brazilian religions' "feitiçaria," the UCKG adopts but demonizes elements of these religions, incorporating them into its own system. There is, therefore, substantial cosmological overlap, appropriation, and inversion. In the context of a shared, enchanted view of the universe, contrasting semiotic ideologies regarding agency (which play

[436] Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," 443.

out in overlapping but inverted discourses and practices surrounding illness and cure) drive Pentecostal demonization.

Existing Accounts

While many approach the neo-Pentecostal conflict with Afro-Brazilian religions by focusing on social and especially economic factors, scholars have recognized that cosmological similarities intensify hostilities. Silva summarizes early scholarship on Brazilian Pentecostal relations with Candomblé and Umbanda, which argued for the groups having different cosmologies, before taking his own stance emphasizing cosmological overlap.[437] Silva outlines Fry and Howe's argument that Umbanda and Pentecostalism were profoundly different in terms of organization and cosmology.[438] Asking how they could be popular among the same sociological profile (workers and urban immigrants), they concluded that the two religions represented a distinct, opposed way of dealing with the same afflictions in Brazilian society. Pentecostalism emphasized a world of order, strict morality, and asceticism, and Umbanda emphasized mediations and magic to manipulate the mundane world and navigate through its disorder.[439] Silva argues that since Fry and Howe argued this in the seventies, the rise of neo-Pentecostalism has transformed the scene by shifting closer to Afro-Brazilian religions, "albeit only to negate them."[440] Chiefly, neo-Pentecostalism has "translated the ethos of magical and personal manipulation to its own system, but now *under new management*."[441]

For Silva, then, if classical Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions have two distinct responses to affliction, neo-Pentecostalism has a third, middle response that "softened" the asceticism and the stereotype of the "believer" of historical Protestantism and came to valorize earthly pleasures and

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[437] Silva, "Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions."
[438] Silva cites Peter Fry and Gary Nigel Howe, "Duas Respostas à Aflição: Umbanda e Pentecostalismo," *Debate e Crítica 6* (1975: 75-94).
[439] Ibid.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Ibid., emphasis in the original.

encourage consumption as signs of salvation.[442] This change involved the cosmology of neo-Pentecostalism overlapping itself with that of Afro-Brazilian religions. Silva describes the overlap:

> This shift towards Afro-Brazilian religious cosmologies elected the figure of Exu (or of the 'spirits of the darkness'), originally invoked in the Umbanda sessions and now in the neo-Pentecostal sessions of exorcism… as its key element of mediation and inversion. [Exu's] function now is to manifest in order to be expelled in the name of the healing and salvation of the possessed individual. No longer the dwelling-place of the malignant, the released person 'expels the favour' (which in the Umbanda system always left him at the mercy of dispatch rituals) and imposes his 'right' to divine grace, speaking directly with his or her celestial master par excellence. The neo-Pentecostal literature is filled with book titles alluding to the follower's need to assume the role of someone who 'demands his rights,' who 'takes possession of the blessing.' Hence, while they fight 'witchcraft,' these churches do not discard the magic implicit in their liturgies and their use of lexical and symbolic elements from the Afro-Brazilian religions.[443]

In addition to demonstrating the inversion of Exu, Silva's passage illustrates three key points. First, it depicts neo-Pentecostalism's human-empowered view of agency, shown in urging adherents to "impose" and "demand" rights. While Silva draws a parallel between these actions and the "magical and personal manipulations" of Afro-Brazilian religions, they derive from prosperity theology (tracing back to New Thought and even to Enlightenment-era Protestants' emphasis on individual salvation). Because prosperity theology already promotes an ethos of magical and personal manipulation, the UCKG is primed to appropriate relevant elements of the Afro-Brazilian religions. In doing so, it emphasizes the primacy of the individual in ways that Candomblé and Umbanda do not.

Notwithstanding differing degrees of individualism, though, as Silva suggests, under *each* religious worldview, humans have power to call on the divine (either by request or demand) and expect a response. This might involve calling on God for healing and prosperity, an orixá for help and cure, or an exu to carry out a favor. Under the neo-Pentecostal cosmology and semiotic ideology, these are inherently

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[442] Ibid.
[443] Ibid.

different because God is supreme and actually helps, while the spirits of Umbanda are ineffective and harmful to human agency. For example, exus keep Umbandanistas bound to spirit obligations and rituals and orixás require submission and offerings. From an outside perspective, though, these exchanges with the divine are relatively similar. Are human beings truly allotted full agency and empowered to exert it in Pentecostal world? Surely the Christian God also expects submission and dictates believers' behaviors, e.g., by requiring prayer, lifestyle behaviors, and donations. This said, the religions conceive of and talk about agency differently, and they teach that their ritual practices empower and inhibit humans and spirits quite differently.

The second points illustrated in Silva's passage is that exorcizing African spirits empowers neo-Pentecostals. Umbandan elements are not just embraced by but are even essential to the neo-Pentecostal system: while they are said to harm humanity, their existence sets the stage for healing and liberation. The UCKG relies on the "feitiçaria" of Afro-Brazilian religions to demonstrate its own strength and miraculous power.[444] The third point from Silva is related: ironically, neo-Pentecostalism employs its own magic to counter that of Candomblé and Umbanda.

Similarly observing that the spirits from which one is delivered in the UCKG are the very ones that are venerated in Candomblé, Selka takes a stronger stance on cosmological overlap, arguing that the two religions share a cosmological vision and ritual logic.[445] In his discussion about how the UCKG excels in places where anxieties about sorcery already exist, he explains, "The IURD engages local practices in a way that sets up a complementary opposition similar to that between sorcerer and healer in African diaspora religions, thereby absorbing and reflecting that which it opposes along the way."[446] This suggests that, similar to the way Pentecostalism and other Christian branches rely on the devil to display

[444] Here is perhaps the ultimate example of Othering described in this chapter.
[445] Selka, "Demons and Money," 159.
[446] Ibid.

the power of God, the UCKG defines itself within a binary framework, requiring a demonic sorcerer to set itself up as healer. Importantly, Selka finds that this absorptive or reflective tendency involves more than appropriation of selected elements, arguing instead that in Brazil, neo-Pentecostal churches like the UCKG and the Afro-Brazilian religions form "complementary aspects of a single ritual network."[447]

I align with Selka here: Afro-Brazilian religion and Pentecostalism, especially neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG, have intertwined cosmologies containing interrelated rituals. This is most evident in the rituals of possession and exorcism. In Brazil, the UCKG relies on Umbanda and Candomblé, at least in part, for its existence. It frames evil around other supposed enemies in contexts outside Brazil, but the point is that it defines itself in relation to other–purportedly evil–groups, and its rituals perform violence against such groups to demonstrate its own power. I will discuss how this ritualized, symbolic violence might contribute to physical and other kinds of attacks in chapter three. In the remainder of this chapter, though, I reflect on how semiotic ideology provides a new angle for thinking about the cosmological relationship described by Silva and Selka, mainly by focusing on agency.

Agency, Possession, Exorcism, and Conflict

Aspects of the African diasporic religions, including their pantheon(s), are problematic for Christianity in general. The history of the discourse on feitiçaria illustrates this well, as does the figure of the exu. Using a spirit for harm is condemned by Christianity, which has a long history of promoting belief in the efficacy of black magic, the Devil, and spirits. Exus are not only popular targets of Pentecostalism, but also Catholicism. However, while most Brazilians condemn or fear some spirits and rituals from Candomblé and Umbanda, even Catholics tolerate or even embrace other elements of the Afro-Brazilian religions. The connection between orixás and Catholic saints probably helps, as Catholics are no stranger to celebrating beings that seem to fall somewhere between humans and God on the

[447] Ibid.

divinity scale. In Pentecostalism, though, the unique moral qualities and deeds of individual spirits or classes of spirits are essentially irrelevant. While the Devil and demons have agency in the Pentecostal universe (and arguably a *lot* of it, considering believers' fixation on them), the Christian God is the only supernatural being that *should* have agency; he is the only one believed to empower rather than hinder humans. All spirits apart from the Holy Spirit are perceived as hindering human subjecthood.

To put this another way, Pentecostals and Afro-Brazilian religions have largely similar semiotic ideologies, with some key differences. The differences–e.g., disagreeing on the moral value and effects of spirits as signs–are more powerful because of the similarities: agreeing on the range of beings that animate the world; reading spirits as an empirical reality. While the two groups have similar notions about the *ability* of spirits to enact agency, they diverge strictly regarding the *morality* of spirit agency, and of humans granting and recognizing spirits' agency. Pentecostals labeling Afro-Brazilian religious practices as feitiçaria–which is viewed as morally incompatible with Christianity, but not metaphysically so–reflects this.

Possession–as a concept, discourse, and ritual practice–is thus central in the conflict between neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions. As a key component of these religions' interrelated ritual system, it operates in remarkably similar ways for each group (possession is a sacred ritual through which practitioners seek divine healing through experiential access to the divine; unwanted possessions are dangerous and adherents must put in substantial work to achieve good, healing possession experiences). However, the semiotic ideologies and discourses surrounding possession and the supernatural beings involved differ markedly for each group.

In Candomblé and Umbanda, possession is often cited as initially painful, difficult or impossible to control, unpredictable, and a nuisance or even something to be feared. Anecdotes abound where adherents experience problems with spirits interrupting their lives during daily activities. A total loss of control is considered undesirable because a total suppression of human agency is too. However,

possession is believed to be an inevitable, necessary fact of life. Through practice, initiates become skilled mediums. Umbandan mediums can exert some agency, and they always remain separate entities from the guias that possess them. In Candomblé, mediums retain a bit of agency while recognizing and respecting the agency of the orixás, but the human cannot be separated from the divine. Neither has full control, and neither is suppressed. It seems that across the Afro-Brazilian religions, possession is valued when it balances the agency of humans with the divine to the benefit of both.

In Pentecostalism, believers embodying the Holy Spirit claim to experience pleasure, and to remain fully conscious and to fully maintain and exert their own agency. Another key difference is that God is not said to demand or request possession to benefit himself or make an exchange; if anyone is demanding it, it is the human subject. However, it seems unavoidable that the Holy Spirit exercises agency during possession, considering neo-Pentecostalism's God is omnipotent, that he chooses whether to appear in Holy Spirit baptism as a blessing and a gift, and that he requires certain kinds of behavior as pre-requisites for possession. Rabelo finds that neo-Pentecostal adherents report a feeling of dominion over the head and mouth, demonstrating at least some suppression of human agency.[448] And again, she finds that in practice, those possessed by the Holy Spirit sometimes contort like Umbandan mediums.[449] However, Pentecostal descriptions of Holy Spirit baptism are of course decidedly different from those of spirit possession, which I will discuss this in detail in chapter three.[450] In sum, spirit possession is painful, illness-inducing, and involves a complete loss of human control and agency. Because the Pentecostal semiotic ideology only values human and divine agency, Pentecostals read indicators of spirit possession (like erratic behavior, changes in physical posture and voice quality, etc.) as stemming from demonic

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[448] Rabelo, "Rodando Com o Santo e Queimando No Espírito: Possessão e a Dinâmica Do Lugar No Candomblé e Pentecostalismo."
[449] Ibid.
[450] Testimonials about having suffered demonic possession are rampant in church services, which can be viewed on UCKG TV programming, YouTube, and the Univer Video streaming service. I will cite several of these in chapter three.

influence, while Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners typically have a much more positive reading of the same indicators.

Conflict is born out of the Pentecostal perspective that Afro-Brazilian religions and their practitioners constantly seek out demonic influence via possession. Consequently, the UCKG attributes the proliferation of demons and therefore pain and suffering directly to Candomblé and Umbanda. Nevertheless, "evil" spirit possession has an essential role in neo-Pentecostalism as exorcism, which features in essentially every church service. Silva pinpoints the figure of Exu as the quintessential example of this role: "The figure of Exu is an element of mediation and inversion for neo-Pentecostalism. He isn't called to act as a messenger or garnerer of favor, but his function is to be expelled in the name of the cure and of salvation from possession."[451] Selka observes the function of exorcism as restoring agency to humans: "Pentecostalism liberates its adherents from evil forces that limit their ability to make their own rational and ethical choices."[452] However, under Candomblé and Umbanda, because disconnection from one's orixás is the worst cause of pain and suffering, exorcism is revolting. It constitutes a violent violation of self and community, hindering both spirit and human agency. The UCKG makes a special effort to "save" former adherents of Candomblé by exorcizing orixás and other spirits from them, not only bolstering faith commitments of Pentecostals but dealing great harm to Afro-Brazilian religious communities. Pentecostalism's divine cure constitutes violence against the African-derived religions.

I have already stated that Afro-Brazilian religions enhance Pentecostalism's power and appeal: Afro-Brazilian religion is an essential provider of the pain and suffering for which Pentecostalism is the cure. I would add, though, that by believing in, obsessing over, and appropriating elements of Afro-Brazilian religions, Pentecostals affirm the power of their spirits as well as the efficacy of their rituals. Candomblé and Umbanda are not just competitors in a religious marketplace, but also formidable spiritual

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[451] Silva, "Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions," 226.
[452] Selka, "Demons and Money," 300.

enemies with immense capacity for destruction. Of course, as Selka reminds us, Pentecostalism claims that it is more powerful.[453] If the implication of battling Afro-Brazilian religions is that they are strong, Pentecostalism poses itself as stronger. This means that Afro-Brazilian religions can be defeated, and crucially, that their practitioners can be rescued from demonic influence (if they are willing to convert – until they do, they are associated with evil). Still, in demonizing these religions, Pentecostalism affirms their ontological power.

In final analysis, investigating these religions' discourses and practices surrounding pain, suffering, and healing–as well as their semiotic ideologies regarding human, non-human, and divine agency–provides a way to understand their overall cosmologies, and how the rituals they have devised to ensure the health and welfare of their adherents contribute to their conflict. At a surface level, the two religious groups bear striking similarities in their conceptions of illness and cure. However, the Devil is in the details. In light of a shared but inverted cosmology, the reversal of Candomblé's and Umbanda's divine cure (possession) by Pentecostalism's divine cure (exorcism) constitutes violence. The same beings and rituals either cause pain or healing, depending on who you ask, and this makes all the difference.

[453] Ibid.

Chapter Three: Exorcism

Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism is defined, in part, by its penchant for spiritual warfare. Within the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, virtually every service features spiritual warfare in practice. Exorcism, "the sequence of actions that dramatize the manifestation, interrogation, and expulsion of demons in the possessed," is the most prominent example of this.[454] Importantly, the spirits, beliefs, and cultures of Afro-Brazilian religions are central targets of UCKG exorcisms. While neo-Pentecostalism in general is well-known for its opposition to Candomblé and Umbanda, the UCKG is unique in the degree to which it incorporates elements of these religions into its exorcisms to demonize and defeat them. Exorcism rituals are thus a–if not *the*–primary site where UCKG attendees are presented with convincing evidence of the spiritual "evils" of Afro-Brazilian religions and the church's power to vanquish them.

Exorcism is a highly visible, ritualized form of spiritual warfare. Ritual is important for several reasons. I draw on Richard Parmentier to theorize ritual as a highly structured system of social action–laden with symbolism or semiotic representation–with contextual power.[455] I supplement Parmentier's theory of ritual with the work of Joel Robbins, who argues that rituals both present people with and allow them to perform transcendent versions of values.[456] Relatedly, Webb Keane finds that rituals semiotically construct and reflect ethical worlds.[457] Analyzing a religion's rituals thus provides insight into its social structure as well as its ethical values–including ideas about how to treat other people and beings in the world. And because successful rituals are perceived to have efficacy, i.e., to really "work," analyzing a religion's rituals sheds light on how it fosters conversion and appeals to and affects participants.

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[454] Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power," 108.
[455] Parmentier, *Signs in Society*.
[456] Joel Robbins, "What is the matter with transcendence? On the place of religion in the new anthropology of ethics," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, no. 4 (2016): 767–808.
[457] Webb Keane, *Ethical Life: Its Natural and Social Histories* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

In this chapter I use semiotic approach to analyze recorded UCKG exorcisms.[458] Through semiotic representation–e.g., through icons, indexes, and symbols–exorcisms convey, reflect, and enact ideas about how to treat Afro-Brazilian deities and religions. Religious language, participant tone and gesture, and other ritual elements collectively produce the effect that demons are present; enact an apocalyptic battle against them; reenergize and transform participants; reinforce authority; and overall demonize and semiotically defeat Afro-Brazilian religions. Ultimately, these elements work together to semiotically produce and legitimize the ethics of spiritual warfare, which calls worshippers to vanquish evil, especially in the form of Candomblé and Umbanda. Embracing Michael Lambek's conclusion that ritual actions have moral consequences,[459] I argue that Pentecostal witnesses of UCKG exorcisms likely internalize an ethics in which war on Afro-Brazilian religions is imperative, helping to explain how believers on the ground come to take up violence.

Semiotic Analysis

On Ritual

Exorcisms are more than direct physical attacks on evil spirits: myriad layers of symbolism comprise these highly structured rituals. While all human communication and action are inherently symbolic, ritual is particularly so. That is, rituals are packed with semiotic representations and involve a wide variety of representational modes. The physical objects, words, gestures, and other signs in rituals stand for or point to things in complex ways.[460] For example, images or statues can serve as models of the divine (*icons*), indicate physical divine presence (*indexes*), or both (*indexical icons*). Sermons and prayers

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[458] Again, I draw my approach from Parmentier. I have watched, transcribed, and analyzed dozens of recorded exorcisms (in part or in whole), most found on official UCKG YouTube channels. I cite a handful of these throughout this chapter, but collectively, all of the videos I have watched (as well as the services I attended in Rio de Janeiro in 2015) inform my descriptions of the typical UCKG exorcism.
[459] Lambek, *Ordinary Ethics*.
[460] I refer to "signs" in a Peircean sense, as does Parmentier in *Signs in Society*. Note that much of modern semiotics is indebted to Peircean semiotics, developed by Charles Pierce in the nineteenth century, in which signs are classified as icons, indexes, or symbols.

might assign participant roles to invisible entities, recontextualize historical events, construct pastoral authority, and/or reproduce divine speech. Within an exorcism, the tone of a subject's voice and the posture of her body might signal demon possession. Rituals are interpreted differently according to observers' beliefs and ideologies about the world and the cosmos (e.g., semiotic ideologies), but shared rituals generally inspire shared semiotic meaning. This includes a shared perception of efficacy: ritual has not only symbolic richness, but also symbolic *power*, i.e., the ability to affect the world in real time. Exorcism remains a prominent feature of Pentecostal and other churches because they facilitate participants' direct experiences of the supernatural as well as personal transformation.

Parmentier explains that rituals have the power to change social relationships, convey divine powers, cure diseases, or coerce natural forces.[461] Pentecostal exorcisms frequently achieve each of these and more. Where does this efficacy come from? Parmentier argues that a ritual's contextual power is derived from the high degree of presupposed textuality of its ritual forms.[462] Simply put, a specific instance of a ritual is powerful because it derives from a culturally recognized template. Thus, ritual speech and action often seem highly structured, as though they follow a script. However, the efficacy of ritual also depends on socially anchored variable features and is narrowly channeled or situationally patterned.[463] Parmentier finds a paradox here. Rituals are excessively formal and conventional, and yet context-specific and powerful-in-context. He resolves this paradox with the semiotic perspective that sees ritual as the contextual anchoring of hyper-conventional forms.

Regarding context, rituals are always situated in their communities. They occur at calendrical intervals, in designated places (usually sacred ritual spaces), and they involve defined social roles as well as the prior conditioning of participants.[464] For example, Friday is the designated day of deliverance for

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[461] Parmentier, *Signs in Society*, 128.
[462] Ibid.
[463] Ibid., 129.
[464] Ibid., 130.

the UCKG. Exorcisms typically occur at church, although they are not limited to this space. Sports stadiums are a popular UCKG venue for faith-healing gatherings involving exorcisms, and now the church offers deliverance via phone call! In a mass stadium, exorcism is a highly efficient, anonymous, mass-produced healing ritual, whereas smaller services foster more individual attention and personal display. UCKG members are pre-conditioned to expect a male bishop or pastor to perform the ritual, for him to be aided by female *obreiras* (workers), and for demons to possess women's bodies more often than men's (I will return to these gender dynamics later in this chapter). Basically, specific people, places, and customs play key roles in the production of specific rituals, a limited range of contextual factors leads to some variation, and participants' expectations are conditioned by experiences in the community. Finally, specific people are changed by rituals in specific ways. Typically, only participants and observers are affected: those not in attendance are not exorcized. Rituals modify things in context.

On the other hand, rituals are decontextualized, which produces and reinforces their conventionality. Parmentier describes four modes of decontextualization.[465] First, rituals are "distantiated" from the intentions of participants. The efficacy of a ritual is independent or recoverable across the variability of specific contextual enactments. Second, they are decentered, or freed from limitation of contextual specification and reference. Rituals reference universal truths, and they are often still believed to "work" even if time and place must change. Third, rituals encourage a phenomenological bracketing of the surrounding social world by creating a coherent world within the ritual sphere. In this world, mundane concerns are suppressed, and symbolic assertions are made that do not hold up in a mundane world. Fourth, ritual is self-referential. Its hyper-structured components form a network of "mutual implication and internal metareference."[466] Essentially, rules for ritual action are on display as part of the structure of the ritual. Exorcisms are decontextualized in each of these ways.

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[465] Ibid., 131-132.
[466] Ibid.

The fourth component of decontextualization is crucial: the "hyper-structured," conventional, rule-governed character of ritual action helps account for the effective power of ritual performances. Rituals are not just conventional, they are so conventionalized that they highlight their own rules, pattern, model, or semiotic type.[467] In signaling not just cultural conventions but conventionality itself, ritual performances call attention to cultural templates or predictive blueprints. This is why a prescribed series of actions in ritual is understood as a *type* rather than a *token*, i.e., a system of general conventional regularities rather than a singular event or sequence of concrete, realized instances. Parmentier summarizes the token/type dichotomy as "pinpoint[ing] how a specific ritual enactment (token) points back to an original template that is understood to undergird its efficacy (type)."[468]

Chiefly, ritual blueprints are believed to derive from supernatural sources (at least for religious rituals–the focus here).[469] As Parmentier explains, this cosmological or transcendent grounding of cultural prototypes is the ultimate source of the power of ritual to "offer a glimpse of a higher order of things."[470] In other words, in calling attention to their own rules and patterns, which are believed to have divine origins, rituals display legitimacy and gain transcendence. As a manifestation of the general pattern, each individual instance of a ritual serves as a "replica that brings into context the legitimized authority, divine precedent, or mythological charter behind ritual action."[471]

The Structure of UCKG Exorcisms

While the UCKG uses various and frequent methods to liberate its members from evil spirits, it also dedicates entire services specifically to the theme and practice of exorcism. Namely, Friday services are known as *sessões de descarrego*, meaning "discharge" or "unloading" sessions. Importantly,

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[467] Ibid., 133.
[468] Naomi Janowitz, "Inventing the Scapegoat: Theories of Sacrifice and Ritual," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 25, no. 1 (2011): 16.
[469] Parmentier, 133.
[470] Ibid., 133.
[471] Ibid., 133.

descarrego signals the spirit-filled world of Afro-Brazilian religions, in which spirits are thought to physically ride around on the backs of people. The act of descarrego, then, is aimed at unloading such spirits from attendees. The day of the week for descarrego is not arbitrarily chosen: it corresponds with a primary day for the services of Afro-Brazilian religions, serving as a "spiritual counterprogram."[472]

The UCKG frames these services primarily as healing sessions, but it also commonly associates them with *libertação*, meaning both liberation and deliverance. Advertisements and agendas for Friday services displayed on the church's websites and in pamphlets use images of hand-cuffed fists breaking chains apart.[473] The promise is that through prayer and ritual exorcism, Friday services liberate attendees from the burdens and illnesses–spiritual, financial, physical, etc.–caused by possession, and they leave healed. Within this framing, healing and liberation are bound with exorcism and spiritual warfare.

Kramer describes the typical Friday service as a spectacular spiritual drama that unfolds in three acts.[474] First there is an opening, then an extended battle, and finally a climax with a resolution where evil is defeated and the power of good–and the church–is on full display. In a sense, these Friday sessions are comprised of rituals within rituals. The more obvious ritual, and my primary focus, is the dramatic sequence in which an evil spirit is targeted and physically expelled from a person's body. But Kramer's template reflects how the overall Friday service is a ritual as well. Each Friday deliverance service and each individual exorcism within it are thus tokens (specific instances) of a type (general blueprint).

The first act of Kramer's "spiritual drama" is the opening to the overall service, which establishes the emotional tone. During Kramer's fieldwork, and during my own in Rio de Janeiro, Friday services began with a hymn before the pastor delivered a sermon inspired by a few short Bible verses. In recorded

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[472] Martijn Oosterbaan, *Transmitting the Spirit: Religious Conversion, Media, and Urban Violence in Brazil* (Penn State Press, 2017).
[473] For example, see the weekly agenda on the Brazilian IURD website: https://www.universal.org/agenda/post/sessao-do-descarrego/.
[474] Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power," 101. Kramer's article is from 2005, but little has changed since then: my observations about UCKG exorcisms are consistent with his descriptions.

sessions from the Templo do Solomão, the bishops usually skip the hymn and begin immediately with a passage or prayer and a sermon, often about the dangers of evil, the weaknesses of false gods, and the power of God.[475] Evil spirits are not yet physically observable. Instead, the bishop or pastor focuses on the invisible dangers of possession, like poverty and illness. After lamenting the ills of evil forces, the pastor uses prayer to liberate the audience from demonic influence. The prayer is a plea to God for group exorcism.

Next comes the more recognizable ritual within the larger service, an extended performance focused on exposing and directly addressing evil spirits. Demons physically manifest in attendees' bodies–usually after the pastor demands that they reveal themselves–and are targeted for expulsion. The pastor and obreiras might pull a couple or even several possessed people up to the front at once, but the ritual focuses on one spirit/victim pair at a time. The pastor interrogates the possessing demon, forcing it to reveal its identity and intentions in a highly dialogic interaction. The demon answers questions directly; it names itself; it denounces God and the church while also describing them as powerful or even merciful; it describes its own malice, and how it came to invade the victim's life. Intermittently, the pastor addresses the audience to emphasize something said by the demon, usually regarding the grace of God, the danger of straying from the church, and/or the evils of Afro-Brazilian religious work.

This dialogic performance culminates in a climactic sequence of expulsion by the pastor and the collective group. The pastor aggressively places his hands on the subject's head and repeatedly commands the demon to leave, and the audience wills the expulsion as well. Indeed, audience engagement is a crucial component of the ritual. They tend to clench their hands, stomp their feet, and/or shout. The demon is expelled and flees, and the audience rejoices. The pastor concludes the battle by

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[475] For an example of one of numerous recorded exorcism that displays the structure described here, see: Igreja Universal, "Sessão Do Descarrego - 20h - 24/07/2020," *YouTube*, July 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fl-9P6OG0PI, accessed March 3, 2022.

interviewing the liberated person. She–while both men and women are exorcised, women are more common subjects of this ritual–conveys relief and expresses gratitude. She might reflect on the darkness she endured leading up to and during the possession and discuss how she now feels healed, sometimes declaring that she is miraculously cured of severe illness. In the last act of Kramer's spiritual drama, the pastor reflects on the triumph of God and the church. But often, the service does not end there. The pastor might turn to a second or third victim of possession and complete, again, an individual exorcism ritual. Eventually, however, the session is wrapped up with more sermonizing and prayer for liberation and healing. The overall service has been a mass exorcism, and the audience is meant to leave freed and revitalized, with faith renewed.[476]

The layering of ritual within ritual, combined with the event template outlined by Kramer, points to *hyper-structure*. Fridays are always for descarrego, and regardless of location or pastor, the sessions consistently conform to the same narrative sequence and moral schema outlined above. Through cyclical repetition (multiple exorcisms might occur within a single service; the overall service also functions as a greater mass exorcism; the pattern is repeated every week), exorcisms call attention to their own structure. This structure derives from a standard Christian biblical narrative in which evil forces gain headway or are exposed; the forces of good and evil battle; and ultimately good prevails, defeats evil, and liberates the faithful. The book of Revelation is a perfect example, and interestingly, its narrative has a cyclical structure as well. This biblical precedence imbues exorcisms with divine legitimacy, where they might be read as replicas of divine events, like mini apocalyptic battles. This makes them effective, i.e., efficacious. Because of Pentecostal theology, like the premillennialism discussed in chapter one, audience members have been pre-conditioned to anticipate supernatural battles where good inevitably triumphs over evil. The UCKG symbolically reminds them that liberation is the inexorable outcome of such battles (for

[476] If they do not feel that way, they have been taught that they did not pray hard enough or believe faithfully enough.

example, with the images of fisted hands breaking free of chains). The exorcism conforms to and reinforces the blueprint and attendees' expectations, and they perceive it to be real.

The Christian narrative structure and unwavering dualist moral schema are among numerous elements that comprise the UCKG's exorcism type. The blueprint also prescribes parameters for physical gestures and posture; the tone and voice of the pastor and the demon; various uses of language including naming, labeling, and pragmatic speech acts such as commands; the participant roles of pastor, demon, possessed, audience, and often even an outside sorceress; and consistent themes presented through predictable messaging, especially surrounding the malevolence of Afro-Brazilian religions. Each of these semiotically contributes to the efficacy of exorcisms.

The Production of Evil

The semiotic representation and production of supernatural forces is one of the most important elements of exorcisms. Various modes of representation signal the presence of demonic entities for participants and observers. Icons and indexes are both important here. *Indexical icons*–signs that both formally represent things and also index, i.e., point to things–are especially significant. Because of their dual function, indexical icons have a high degree of symbolic power to produce and affirm supernatural effects. In exorcisms, they are particularly effective in representing evil (along with forces of good, which I will discuss later in this chapter). Additionally, naming, labeling, and other forms of reference affirm the presence of evil entities and associate such entities with Afro-Brazilian religions.

In virtually any UCKG exorcism, the subject of the ritual produces sounds and gestures that both formally represent a demon and index the presence of one. Demons (from within the bodies of human subjects) always speak in a remarkably low voice; they laugh hoarsely and manically; they use an angry, wicked-sounding tone; they writhe, sway, and contort their hands and fingers. The speaker's voice is iconic in that it models what many people imagine demons sound like, and it is indexical in that it marks the physical presence of the demon. The voice is both *like* a demon's, and (for Pentecostals) it *is* a

demon's. Similarly, the contorted body and gnarled hands of the human subject formally represent the demon by mimicking a cultural conception of demons' physicality, while they also signal the presence of a demon by demonstrating its effect on the body of the possessed. These indexical icons are particularly powerful when a woman is being exorcised, which is most often the case. As an outside observer I have been shocked by the guttural shrieks and cackles that emerge from women's bodies in exorcisms. [477] It is not difficult to understand how these sounds are read by believers as unnatural and therefore supernatural. For Pentecostals, demonic voices are proof of demons' presence.

Further evidence comes from demons' self-identification: it is common for demons to name themselves. Like the narrative sequence of the ritual, naming in exorcisms draws on a long history of cultural-religious narratives to produce and affirm the presence of supernatural evil. In one exorcism, the demon (from within a woman's body) calls himself Beelzebub, popularly known as "the Prince of Demons."[478] In another, the demon self-identifies as *O Enganador*–"The Deceiver"–a name associated with the Christian Devil.[479] In many instances, possessing entities use the name Lucifer or various other pseudonyms for the Devil. Naming is quite complex semiotically, but suffice it to say that naming has an indexical function here. When a supposedly possessed woman claims an infamous name that is obviously not her given name, nor a pseudonym that Pentecostals believe anyone in their right mind would use, this indexes the presence and agency of the demon.

Labeling is similarly important, and it ties the evil spirits in UCKG exorcisms not only to a Christian cultural history, but also to a specifically Brazilian one. As discussed in chapter two, Brazilian Pentecostals adopt the popular spirits of Brazil but always as evil entities. As such, descarrego sessions

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[477] Countless exorcisms display these features, but for an example, see: Bispo Edir Macedo, "Entrevista Com Encosto No Brás," YouTube, September 16, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyGBiFcKth0, accessed June 17, 2022.
[478] Macedo, "Entrevista Com Encosto."
[479] Igreja Universal, "A Profetisa De Macapá," YouTube, November 19, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0WoVsqynb0, accessed March, 20 2022.

often replace or combine Christian labels for evil spirits with popular labels from Afro-Brazilian religions. As evidence of a shared Brazilian religious lexicon, the UCKG most frequently refers to possessing entities as *encostos*. Brazilians generally understand an encosto to be a spirit, perhaps that of a deceased relative, that interferes with the life of the person whom it haunts.[480]

Kramer considers *encosto* to be a general category shared by Brazilians *en masse*, and he claims that the UCKG uses it in response to the 1989 federal law that prohibits religious discrimination.[481] But he implies that the UCKG chose the term as an effort to get away with discrimination, implicitly acknowledging that the term is associated with Afro-Brazilian religions. Birman sees the reference as more direct. For Birman, UCKG discourse is distinct from evangelical speech in general because of its overt attacks on Afro-Brazilian religious symbols, and encosto is an example of this. She views demonization as a conversion strategy: the UCKG adopts but modifies the discursive and symbolic features of other religious discourses as means of establishing meaningful forms of "passage" between them and Pentecostalism. This allows converts to hold on to assign new meaning to their old beliefs and cosmologies. In short, as I have discussed in previous chapters, the UCKG appropriates and negates recognizable symbols from other religious groups–especially Afro-Brazilian religions–as a means of fostering conversion and participation in the church. "In this new voicing, the sense of encosto changes as its field of reference is extended to include all manner of spirits from Afro-Brazilian religions" (rather than just the spirits of Brazilians' dead relatives).

More specific labels are abundant. UCKG exorcisms frequently target *Exu* and *exus*. The female counterpart of Exu, *Pombagira*, also makes regular appearances. Pombagira is a celebrated but temperamental prostitute spirit–with *pomba giras* comprising a class of a corresponding figures with

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[480] Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power," 111 (referencing Maggie, 2001,: 143). Note the use of "encosto" in the video title of the recorded exorcism: Macedo, "Entrevista Com Encosto."
[481] Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power," 118, footnote 6; Bettina Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*.

various names and local expressions–that neo-Pentecostals love to hate. Kramer describes a descarrego session in which the bishop summons various encostos by name, saying,"'That's right, come out… the spirit of darkness, whose name is Pombagira, with the name of Maria Padilha'" before declaring to the audience that Pombagira is possessing and harming the female subject of the ritual because the woman's husband's lover summoned her via sorcery involving the husband's underwear.[482] The mention of Pombagira semiotically conveys that the mistress is an Umbanda practitioner. This dialogue shows how naming paints the spirits of Candomblé and Umbanda as demons that cause illness and need to be exorcized, and it implicitly associates their practitioners with illicit sexuality and malicious sorcery.

For Brazilian members of the UCKG, a dispatched spirit does not need to be named to be associated with Exu or Pombagira. When a demon is said to have been sent by a woman to harm a victim, the message is that Afro-Brazilian religion is involved whether the spirit is explicitly tied to Candomblé or Umbanda or not. The exorcism of O Enganador provides an example. Below is an excerpt of the dialogue between pastor and demon:

> Pastor (asking about the possessed woman): "What are you doing with her? How is her life?"
> Demon: "Destroyed"
> Pastor: "Her health? Her marriage?
> Demon: "Everything, her children… her husband has a lover.. and she has a cancer and is damned even while she speaks of curing."
> P: "She has cancer?"
> D: "She does."
> P: "Where?"
> D: "It's a tumor. She learned of it after she arrived here."
> P: "And it was you that put it there?"
> D: "It was."
> P: "Do you want to kill her with this cancer?"
> D: "Her husband's lover said, "Go there, kill her, because I want her husband" and I entered and I am here."
> P: "His lover sent you here?"

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[482] Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power," 113. Maria Padilha is both the name of a popular Spanish historical figure and the crossroads goddess, a type of pomba gira, named after her.

D: “The lover of her husband, yes.”[483]

There is a lot to unpack even in such a short excerpt, but focusing on reference is illuminating. First, the pronouns are important in attributing participant roles. The demon uses first person pronouns for itself and third person pronouns to refer to the possessed woman, and the pastor mirrors this with second person for the demon and third person for the possessed woman. These simple acts of reference distance the demon from the woman and grant it agency over her body: it is understood by adherents to be the author of her words. And second, references to the victim’s husband’s lover assigns another crucial participant role, this time to someone not present. Like the mistress who dispatched Pombagira in the previous example, the mistress here is a source of evil and the cause of the possession. This reminds observers that it is very often other humans–practicing other religions–who invoke demonic interference in their lives. And this signals Afro-Brazilian religion.

While it is not made explicit, the dialogue above affords the interpretation that the mistress is an Umbanda practitioner who has dispatched an exu for the purpose of murder. Further, the name “The Deceiver” signals that the exu is a manifestation of the devil. This dialogue semiotically merges cancer-causing devils with exus and/or encostos, links them to witchcraft and thus Umbanda practitioners, and ultimately teaches that Afro-Brazilian religions not only to partake in evil practices but that they are *effective* in harming people, hence the need for UCKG healing through exorcism. This message is not surprising: the UCKG vilifies Afro-Brazilian religions frequently and noisily. What is important is how through semiotic representation, the ritual provides convincing supernatural evidence of the UCKG’s claims. This exorcism is not just a reflection and declaration of the UCKG’s prejudices, but for believers it is also empirical proof of the evil the church warns against. When the pastor later succeeds in

[483] Igreja Universal, “A Profetisa De Macapá,” 3:08-4:05. My translation.

exorcising the demon and healing the woman, the ritual also enacts the church's promises of salvation and triumph and validates its claims of superiority over other religions.

Overall, Kramer finds that in UCKG exorcisms, "the names, the posture, and the clawlike hands of the possessing spirits clearly identify them with Afro-Brazilian religions, Umbanda in particular."[484] The semiotic construction of Afro-Brazilian deities as demonic entities is a powerful display. It conveys to Pentecostals the reality, efficacy, and evils of the spirits from the Brazilian popular imaginary, and maligns the associated religions and practitioners as well. By naming and classifying the spiritual entities, the UCKG faces them head on: it does not avoid or cower from them. Acts of reference aid the UCKG in symbolically constructing these beings as something familiar and powerful before defeating them, demonstrating its own superior power.

Authority, Power, and Gender

Semiotic representation is key not only to representing and producing the spectacularly evil in ritual exorcism, but also to constructing the authority and power of the pastor and the church as evil's opposite. During the average UCKG exorcism, the pastor stands tall and looms large; uses a deep, bellowing, and recognizably masculine voice; displays a confrontational stance by facing his body directly toward the demon or the audience; gestures aggressively; makes commands; and shows physical dominance over the demon by controlling the human host's neck to keep her body in a submissive position. This power and authority are clearly bound up with masculinity and aggression.

Kramer describes how the UCKG models and celebrates masculinity by favoring especially masculine pastors, within and beyond ritual performances:

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[484] Kramer, "Spectacle and the Staging of Power," 114. Note that here we have indexical icons again; the postures and clawlike hands both formally represent elements of Umbanda and its spirits, especially regarding the appearance of mediums under spirit possession, while also signaling their presence.

> The controlled display of masculine qualities (macho swagger) and a pietistic emotional sensibility are important characteristics of leadership, especially among those who rise in the institutional hierarchy. The physicality of the body and tonality of voice are significant aspects of pastors' stage presence… In my observation the titular or consecrated pastors had deeper voices and heavier, more muscular bodies than either their auxiliary counterparts or their workers, who were often scrawny. In effect, the bodily presentation of the pastor becomes a form for the modeling of highly desired social values that his discourse in turn aims to inculcate.[485]

A semiotic approach might suggest that pastors' masculine bodily presentation is *iconic*: it visibly models desirable social values associated with masculinity, such as strength. And while official doctrine denounces the worship of any human, it is possible that some participants might read this bodily presentation as also iconic of godliness, where men of God might be imagined to share physical traits with, say, Christ. Within exorcisms, pastors' performance of masculinity also points to or *indexes* a supernatural force: the power to control and expel evil spirits. This power might indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit and be read as flowing through pastors like a current, or instead it might be perceived as a more permanent trait/ability the pastor has acquired. Either way, it comes from God by way of faith, holy (masculine) behaviors, and a relationship to the church. Regardless, pastors' sounds, words, and gestures collectively represent the idea that power, authority, and strength are masculine; that masculinity evinces strength, power, and authority; and that the church and its pastors embody each of these.

Additionally, the UCKG regularly uses medical symbolism to construct authority. This is undoubtedly a result of the church's promises surrounding faith healing, which is presented as a viable or even superior alternative to modern medicine. Medical symbolism lends such promises credibility. Chesnut suggests that in UCKG services (which nearly always emphasize the theme and practice of

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[485] Ibid., 105. Kramer continues: "The spectacular body of the pastor is a microcosm of the body politic of the church. The pastor's forceful presence represents the values of power, individual autonomy, wealth, and health. Humor and good oratory skills are also features that make particularly pastors stand out" (105).

healing, as I have discussed) the church resembles a hospital.[486] He likens the pastor to a medic, healing at the front. *Obreiras* (workers, often women) wear uniforms resembling nurses' uniforms and "perform triage on the patients in the pews."[487] Descarrego, the ultimate healing service, exemplifies this. Pastors, including Bishop Macedo, often wear white lab coats over their clothes.[488] This is of course iconic of doctors' garb. When the pastors eventually lay their hands on afflicted audience members and liberate them from demons, their white coats mark them as spiritual physicians. Such medical imagery, especially in exorcisms, is a visual reminder that possession and illness go together. It also reinforces the dualism at the core of the UCKG's teachings. For example, the dichotomy of healing/illness is analogous to each of the following: exorcism/possession; Holy Spirit/demon (also the Devil, exu, encosto, etc.); UCKG/Afro-Brazilian religion; pastor/priestess; and of course, good/evil.

Church authority is also constructed by characteristics of the possessed. As a major conversion strategy, the church's favorite subjects to exorcise are new converts from Afro-Brazilian religions.[489] In particular, each former *pai de santo* and especially *mãe de santo* (saint father and saint mother) exorcised is a feather in the UCKG's proverbial cap. By ridding ex-practitioners of orixás and encostos, and by healing them of the damages caused by such spirits, the UCKG symbolically communicates that the spirits are harmful and that these religions are ineffective in helping those who seek solutions from them. The presence of former priestesses especially endorses this message. In turn, the UCKG, its pastors, and the Holy Spirit are demonstrated to be superior. Exorcisms are perceived by Candomblé and Umbanda to

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[486] R. Andrew Chesnut, "Exorcising the Demons of Deprivation: Divine Healing and Conversion in Brazilian Pentecostalism," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford University Press, 2011), 177.
[487] Ibid.
[488] For example, see: Bispo Edir Macedo, "Sessão do Descarrego - Bispo Macedo - 20/04/2018," *YouTube*, April 20, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnjFRkxAI4o. Accessed Nov. 15 2021; Igreja Universal, "Sessão Do Descarrego - 20h - 24/07/2020," *YouTube*, 24 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fl-9P6OG0PI. Accessed Mar. 3 2022.
[489] Roger Sansi, "Objects and Images in Brazilian Religions," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 515–34, https://brill.com/view/title/32952.

be immensely violent and degrading, emphasizing the function this ritual has as a spiritual warfare practice against not just spirits but Afro-Brazilian religions directly.

Contrasting with the pastor's authority, the demon's power is always held in check. This is visibly evident by its cowering, kneeling, or hunching over. Generally, the bodily gestures of the possessed subject indicate that the demon tries to resist the pastor's domination, but it always ultimately submits and is defeated. The submission is a physical, iconic representation of the power dynamics between pastor and demon, and it also indexes an ongoing larger spiritual battle in which the forces of good are more potent than the forces of evil. Again, because the representation of these evil forces often involves reference to Afro-Brazilian spirits, the ritual communicates to audience members that such spirits and associated religions are submissive and weaker than the church, the pastor, and God.

We must not forget what this all means for the human host, for it is her body that is dominated and submits. Hence, submissiveness also takes on a gendered quality. As a reminder, while men are sometimes exorcised during UCKG services, women are much more frequent targets of descarrego, and thus aggression. One reason for this is that the UCKG is particularly heavily frequented by female adherents (even compared to the already high rates of feminization in Brazilian Pentecostalism).[490] However, beyond statistical representation, women are central in exorcisms for theological reasons (as I will discuss below). Regardless, the *effect* of women's participation in exorcism is, at least partly, that they are dominated by men. In 2011, an elderly woman who was allegedly thrown to the ground by an aggressive pastor during an exorcism asserted that the pastor underestimated her frailty.[491] In 2017 courts ruled in her favor against the church, ordering it to pay her 8,000 *reais*, although the church denied responsibility. The denial itself is interesting: the self-righteous refusal to admit wrong-doing or apologize

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[490] Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*.
[491] Extra, "Stj Mantém Condenação Da Igreja Universal Por Lesão a Fiel Durante Sessão De Descarrego," *Extra Online*, Globo, 4 May 2017, https://extra.globo.com/noticias/brasil/stj-mantem-condenacao-da-igreja-universal-por-lesao-fiel-durante-sessao-de-descarrego-21294259.html.

reflects qualities often associated with machismo. While this incident probably falls along the outer limits of the norm, it illuminates a very real gendered power hierarchy within the UCKG, where masculine aggression can be juxtaposed with female submission.

Pimentel claims that the role of women in the UCKG bears plenty of nuance and particularity, but ultimately, she finds that the church places little value on women outside of their responsibility for their family's well-being and a duty to be obedient to their husbands.[492] It is interesting then how important their role is in exorcisms. Pimentel argues that women's centrality is for theological rather than social reasons.[493] She explains that while both men and women are considered responsible for liberating the world from evil spirits and the misery they cause, it is women's duty as mothers and housewives to keep evil away from the family. In this light, undergoing exorcism is an act of caretaking, almost in a domestic sense. On the other hand, Pimentel argues that being the instrument of demonic possession and exorcism gives women "new significance." She adds, "The demon takes from the devotees the blame for their actions but not the responsibility… to confront and liberate," finding that this key responsibility is placed on the shoulders of women.[494]

Pimentel's claim about the erasure of blame reflects an argument in the literature that possession provides women opportunities for expression in religious communities that have marginalized them.[495]

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[492] Fernanda da Silva Pimentel, "Psiquê nos Domínios do Demônio – um olhar sobre a relação entre exorcismo e cura em um grupo de mulheres fiéis da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus," *Revista de Estudos da Religião* 2 (2005): 22–34.
[493] Fernanda da Silva Pimentel, "Quando Psiquê se liberta de Demônio – um estudo sobre a relação entre exorcismo e cura psíquica em mulheres na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus" (São Paulo, Brasil, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2005).
[494] Ibid., 123.
[495] Hayes makes this argument about Candomblé and Umbanda (although she finds it is greater Brazilian society and its machismo that marginalizes women rather than Afro-Brazilian religious communities). Kelly E. Hayes, *Holy Harlots*. For more on attributing agency (and thus credit/blame) to non-human sources, see the section on speaker intentionality in Keane's review of the semiotics of religious language: Webb Keane, "Religious Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (1997): 47–71, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.47. See also: I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203241080.

Because the spirit is the presumed author of the words spoken during possession, it provides a scapegoat for the possessed woman's behavior prior to and during possession/exorcism rituals. It also gives her a platform and a mouthpiece from which to air grievances. For example, possessed women often verbally attack (male) pastors during descarrego sessions, which would be entirely inexcusable except for the purported presence of a demon. The ability to discuss things like husbands' mistresses, difficult children, poor health, and financial woes might relieve a need to complain or vent. Exposing husbands' poor behavior might subject them to public accountability and slightly reduce their power. Regardless of such new opportunities for expression, women might simply be said to hold power as a result of their religious importance in exorcisms: they are, after all, the focal point of the UCKG's quintessential healing ritual.

However, women function mainly as a vehicle for evil to be battled and illness cured. Pimentel sums it up this way: women are the "'port of entry' for Evil."[496] Church rhetoric describes them as more susceptible than men to demonic influence and especially witchcraft and sorcery. Quoted by Pimentel, Edir Macedo teaches that "Women who experience their sexuality fully and let their sensuality show through their actions or posture 'do this because they have a demonic spirit, called pomba-gira.'"[497] And while taking the blame for women's behaviors might make Pombagira helpful, she also symbolically aids the church in the regimentation of misogynistic gender norms by serving as a symbol of bad female sexuality.[498] Further, she does not excuse women from being susceptible to possession in the first place. Exorcism gives women a prime role in liberation, but only from an evil whose presence is fostered–and often invoked–by their very gender.

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[496] Pimentel, "Psiquê nos Domínios do Demônio," 23.
[497] Ibid., 25. Silva Pimentel references Edir Macedo, *O Perfil da Mulher de Deus*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Gráfica Universal, 2002: 28.
[498] I use the term regimentation from Parmentier, *Signs and Society*. See chapter 6 for his discussion on ideological and institutional regimentation, which is, briefly, when signs have the function of organizing and categorizing things and people, as well as establishing criteria for what is considered proper behavior.

In the end, Pimentel finds that despite being the instrument of liberation and consequently healing, women within the UCKG do not receive a permanently elevated social position within the church. While the manifestation of the demon in the body of a woman enables the identification and consequently the liberation of the possessed person, the success is firmly linked to God's word and–consequently–to the power of the (male) pastor.[499] Possession does provide opportunities for expression, but ultimately, authority and power within the UCKG are masculine, and femininity is linked with submission, susceptibility, sorcery, and even evil.

Finally, the link between women and possession in the UCKG makes for an important juxtaposition with Afro-Brazilian religions, where the esteemed role of medium is also most often filled by women. Both religions largely attribute the invocation of spirits to priestesses/sorceresses, and both associate femininity with mediumship and possession, but they clearly assign different moral values to these associations. It is crucial that the UCKG favors former Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners for exorcisms, with the ideal subject being ex-priestesses. This is one of many ways in which the UCKG adopts and affirms the reality of Afro-Brazilians religious elements to subvert them. Pombagira serves as another example. Though morally complicated in Umbanda, she is also beloved–especially by women and gay men–for allowing practitioners to celebrate feminine and queer sexual expression in a heterosexual macho culture. The UCKG's maintenance of the link between what it deems illicit female sexuality and pomba giras is an attack on gender norms in Afro-Brazilian religions.

Pragmatic Language and Efficacy

In addition to various uses of language discussed above, *pragmatic speech* is another key mode of semiotic representation that makes exorcisms effective. Pragmatic speech is speech that *does* something:

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[499] Bettina Schmidt, "Spirit Possession," in *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, ed. Bettina Schmidt and Steven Engler (Brill, 2016), 436.

it is simultaneously speech and action, or action undertaken through speech. Austin famously described such speech as "performative."[500] Austinian performatives include promises, apologies, and especially ritually effective statements like the common officiant declaration, "I now pronounce you man and wife." Semioticians have come to eschew the notion of performativity in favor of pragmatics and its sub-category *metapragmatics*, which is when speech reflexively refers to the very actions it is undertaking.[501] The sub-category allows for a distinction between "I now pronounce you husband and wife," and "You are now husband and wife": both are pragmatic in the right context, but only the former refers to its own action. Silverstein describes performative/pragmatic speech acts as "indexical sign-tokens" that are "*creative* or *entailing*."[502] Creative indexicals point to a context "that may become an intersubjective reality–and thus subject to further or other indexical presupposition–precisely as a causal consequence of the occurrence of that particular sign."[503] In short, pragmatic speech utterances index a reality that may be created in real time as a result of being pointed to. Such speech is common and especially powerful in ritual, where it plays an active role in the transformation of subjects, whether a bride and groom in a wedding ceremony or a possessed person during an exorcism.

Prayer is full of pragmatic speech, and descarrego sessions are full of prayer. In one service, Bishop Macedo's opening prayer calls for illnesses to be cured: "*Seja os doenças eliminadas!*"[504] The sentiment is roughly, "May illnesses be eliminated," but *seja,* the subjunctive for "be," also functions as a command, as in: "Be eliminated, illnesses!" Similarly, Macedo shouts, "*Seja livre! Seja livre do lixo… seja livre agora*!" which means, "Be free! Be free of trash… be free now!"[505] These utterances are not just expressions of hope for healing: they also constitute the act of healing–i.e., curing–itself. Macedo

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[500] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Clarendon Press, 1975).
[501] Keane, "Religious Language," 50.
[502] Michael Silverstein, "The Improvisational Performance of Culture in Realtime Discursive Practice," *Creativity in Performance*, 1998, 271. Emphasis in the original.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Bispo Edir Macedo, "Sessão do Descarrego - Bispo Macedo - 20/04/2018."
[505] Ibid., 4:50.

continues the prayer with a call for evil to manifest in audience members in order to be defeated: "All witchcraft, all sorcery, all magic, all evil… manifest now the spirits, the anxieties, the encostos… manifest all of it now for the final time in the life of this creature… to never again occur, because when these people leave tonight they will never carry around this encosto, this trash, again!"[506] This is a plea but also an order, a summons that causes demons to appear (via semiotic representation). In response, some people scream demonically and contort their bodies. Obreiras escort a few to the front of the room, where they kneel and writhe on the floor. The stage is set for hands-on exorcism, the next act of the ritual drama. From just an opening prayer, pragmatic speech already points to and creates a reality in which some people are healed, and others are primed for healing through the manifestation of demons.

Such pragmatic speech acts index and produce resulting states because they simultaneously prescribe and comprise ritual action. Paired with corresponding gestures, Macedo's commands enact key steps in the series of actions required by the exorcism ritual event template, and they also trigger audience participation by serving as implicit cues for participants to act a certain way, i.e., by regimenting their behavior (a common feature of religious ritual). In acting out and pointing to the narrative structure of exorcism, pragmatic speech is thus another indicator of hyper-structure. One final example is illustrative. Perhaps the most indexically creative pragmatic speech act of an exorcism marks the climax of the narrative, when the bishop or pastor expels the demon by yelling something like "*Sai diabo!*" ("Leave, devil!"). This is not just a command but an effective act of removal. The demon is not understood or represented as having enough strength to resist. Expulsion is consistently and often quickly achieved by the speech act; when signaled by such an utterance, possession victims basically always behave as though liberated. In the stage of the ritual that follows, the subjects tell stories of rapid and spectacular healing

[506] 4:50-5:10.

caused by the exorcism carried out in that simple command. The pastor's words are witnessed to have immense transformative power, reflecting and reinforcing his and the church's authority.

Within the neo-Pentecostal system, pastors' speech–which often doubles as divine speech, where the Holy Spirit is presumed to be a participant in the service/ritual–is effective.[507] With corresponding gestures, their words summon and expel demons–often the spirits of Candomblé and Umbanda, carry out spiritual warfare, and bring transformative healing to subjects. Words in exorcism rituals shape and change reality. As is common for rituals, pragmatic speech is thus an essential part of how exorcisms work, i.e., part of their ritual efficacy.

The Ethics of Exorcism and Spiritual Warfare

Like other research in this dissertation, my semiotic analysis of exorcisms is part of an endeavor to understand how some Pentecostal leaders and worshippers come to condone intolerance and even violence, and why Afro-Brazilian religions are targeted so heavily. I maintain, like Lambek, that most of the time, most people act "ethically" or with ethical criteria in mind.[508] There are of course innumerable exceptions. Tempted by self-interest, which frequently clashes with the interests of others, people sometimes consciously act against their own values, morals, and/or ethics. Pentecostal leaders might find they benefit directly from straying from such principles as "love thy neighbor" to attack competing religions, gain new converts, and amass financial and other forms of capital (again, Edir Macedo is a billionaire). But on average, most people try to do what they think is right or good, or want to think their actions are right.[509] Likely more often, more people want to think their actions are at least justified. So

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[507] For a discussion on the varied speaker/participant roles and multiple embeddings that occur in ritual speech, when "discourse attributable to one actor is layered into the speech produced by another," see: William F. Hanks, "Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles," in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, ed. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 160–202.
[508] Lambek, *The Ethical Condition*, xvii. To be clear, the ethical criteria individuals use to judge whether an action is right or wrong vary widely from person to person, especially across different communities.
[509] Ibid.

how do the UCKG's followers become convinced to support intolerance? How does violence come to make sense for believers on the ground ? What light can exorcism shed upon this?

To begin to answer these questions, it is important to look beneath the surface at what the community's ethical system *is*. This includes its ideas about what constitutes "good" behavior and how to treat people in the world. Christianity and even Pentecostalism come in many shapes and sizes, so the specifics of neo-Pentecostalism and the UCKG are pertinent. I examine specific examples of neo-Pentecostal ethics throughout the dissertation and in this chapter, including below. I find the following two basic conclusions about ethics to lie at the core of this conflict: the neo-Pentecostal ethical system dictates that it is imperative to not only resist but also battle evil forces, and under the ethical system Afro-Brazilian religions constitute evil.

The task of mapping a community's ethics benefits from analyzing the explicit teachings of its leaders who set ethical standards; this has been a major project in this dissertation, and the two conclusions above can be deduced from such analysis. For example, Macedo's books provide a wealth of information on his values and the corresponding ethical code he aims to inculcate in his followers, including his views that Afro-Brazilian religions' deities are actually demons.[510] Sermons about the immanent end of the world (like those referenced in chapter one) convey an insistence that evil forces are pervasive, especially in those who would entice believers from the church, and must be fought at all costs. Sermons also explicitly condemn behaviors that are associated with, embraced by, or tolerated under Candomblé and Umbanda (e.g., prostitution, drug use, and homosexuality). Such teachings already illustrate how intolerance and violence against these other religions might be deemed justifiable or even ethical. Official, explicit ethical statements from UCKG leadership provide endless data from which a top-down depiction of its dualistic ethical system can be assembled.

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[510] Macedo, *Orixás, Caboclos e Guias*.

Rituals shed further light on religious ethics that can move us beyond a top-down view. Robbins argues that rituals allow practitioners to perform transcendent versions of values, which he defines as "representations of the good or what people take to be desirable."[511] It follows that at minimum, as performances of religious values–and I would add, ethics–rituals reflect such values and ethics and can thus be analyzed to map them out. Descarrego sessions reflect the UCKG's ethical stances in many ways, some obvious and some subtler. For example, the centrality of women in exorcisms can be viewed as a transcendent version–i.e., an extension–of church family values, in which women have a key role in protecting their families from evil. At the same time, their role as vessels for evil to manifest reflects a negative valuation of women, contrasted by the masculinity of the pastors who model goodness. The adoption of Pombagira as a demonic entity reflects the UCKG's teachings about female sexuality, and the involvement of mistresses who dispatch spirits reflects prescriptions regarding proper sexual relationships and marital fidelity. At the heart of the ritual is again the dualist ethics that calls for war against evil; exorcisms reflect the value that it is good or even imperative to battle evil spirits. The presence of symbols from Afro-Brazilian religions reflect an extreme negative valuation of them as evil and inferior. In short, exorcisms serve as a microcosm of the church's ethical system (and also its semiotic ideology, discussed in chapter two).

Crucially, participants like possessed women and audience members play a crucial role in the performance of these ethical values, demonstrating some level of buy-in and perpetuation of the system. Kramer finds that adherents' will to fight the cosmic war and the "revolt" of each person against the Devil find expression during services and especially exorcism rituals "in collective gestures such as clenched fists and the stamping of feet. The idea of warfare condenses an institutional ethos and a psychological

[511] Robbins, "What is the matter with transcendence?" 775.

disposition or bodily habitus."[512] This kind of behavior, which is generally below the level of consciousness, suggests indoctrination.

So how does the UCKG's ethical code come to be adopted by adherents as a guide for conduct? And how do its prescriptions become further embraced as values–as ideals to strive for? Ritual is even more illuminating here. To reiterate Robbins' point, ritual allows for values to be extended and performed as something transcendent. In other words, ritual brings ethical teachings into the realm of the sacred, imbuing them with divine significance. Exorcisms, then, are not simply *reflections* of ethics but *live enactments*. They serve as a domain in which adherents experience the validity of the UCKG's claims and the goodness of its values in real time. Robbins argues that rituals might even "create" values, or at least lend the desirable quality that makes values more than inert ideals. He summarizes, "Ritual is a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable."[513] Further, ritual "presents participants with clearly articulated representations of transcendental ideas of great importance… and renders them desirable in ways that turn them into values."[514] So through the semiotic linking of extramarital affairs with cancer, prescriptions about proper sexual behavior transcend the obligatory and become desirable. By semiotically demonstrating that the battle against evil spirits, often dispatched by Umbandan sorceresses, brings healing and goodness to the prior-possessed, exorcisms ostensibly prove spiritual warfare to be ethically good. Similarly, the role of converts from Afro-Brazilian religions shows the audience that the denunciation of these religions is more than just prejudice: it is valid, and good. In short, through ritual exorcism, the church's teachings about good and evil as well as its ethical codes of conduct have the potential to become not just rules and regulations but shared values and firmly held beliefs.

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[512] Kramer, *Spectacle and the Staging of Power*, 106.
[513] Robbins, "What is the Matter with Transcendence?" 776.
[514] Ibid.

Lambek provides another perspective that demonstrates the usefulness of ritual for examining ethics.[515] He is centrally concerned with how actions construct the parameters for ethical judgements and behaviors. He considers how performative actions create criteria by which to determine whether an act is good or bad, right or wrong, etc. and finds that "a source of criteria lies in the act of speaking itself and especially in the utterances found in ritual."[516] Citing standard Austinian examples of performative speech, e.g. in marriage rituals, he argues that ritual changes the criteria that apply to its subjects, changing their behavior and the behavior of others towards them. For example, when a couple is married, new judgements about how they should behave might include expectations for sexual behavior, cohabitation, procreation, financial and domestic interactions, etc. Following arguments developed by Rappaport, Lambek sees ritual, which elaborates and magnifies pragmatic properties of speech, as consequential for ethical relations and indeed necessary in establishing both the distinctions or criteria for ethical life and the commitment of persons to specific relationships, roles, identities, projects, etc.[517] Part of the power of ritual is that it establishes social contract and certainty by offering public enactments of commitment to particular statements and courses of action.[518]

In this vein, exorcisms establish ethical criteria for how to behave and how to treat people and other beings in the world. The pragmatic speech act at the climax of exorcisms–"*Sai, diabo!*"–changes the criteria (or at minimum reinstates old criteria) that people apply to the human subject and that she applies to herself for judging her behavior. Once exorcised, she is expected to be healed and to behave as a proper woman of God. She most likely feels an increased demand to pray earnestly and attend services more frequently, perhaps even to donate more money to the church. She should also eschew lewd behavior, be obedient to her husband, and take care of her children. She is undoubtedly expected to denounce

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[515] Michael Lambek, *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action* (Fordham Univ Press, 2010).
[516] Ibid., 21.
[517] Ibid., 22.
[518] Ibid.

behaviors, ritual practices, and spirits, associated with Afro-Brazilian religions. And she may even be expected, or expect herself, to denounce practitioners of Candomblé and Umbanda. Exorcisms might be read as establishing ethical criteria for how to judge the actions of people more generally, beyond individual possession victims. For example, exorcisms that attribute possession to an outside sorceress/mistress might establish and reinforce criteria for how to treat the mediums of Candomblé and Umbanda. More broadly, I assert that these rituals establish criteria for how to treat Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners. At minimum, this might be tolerating intolerance against them. Worse, for some, it might be taken as a call to commit intolerance or even violence.

In sum, through exorcisms, bishops and pastors construct rhetorical proof of the occult forces that threaten members, as well as the power of faith to overcome them. By linking the demons in exorcisms to Afro-Brazil religions, the UCKG promotes war against them. For some, perhaps the most fervent, violence becomes acceptable, even imperative. This is an ethical world in which violence makes sense.

Conclusion: Global Context and Implications

This dissertation has asked why Brazilian Pentecostal militants, especially the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, have waged war on Candomblé and Umbanda. I have argued that if we can put ourselves in the minds of Brazilian Pentecostals, we might come to understand the scenario in which a Candomblé terreiro was attacked with rocks in a largely Pentecostal neighborhood. Crucially, developing an understanding of the UCKG's and Pentecostalism's violence in Brazil help us to better understand the potential for violence inherent in militant Pentecostalism–and absolutist religion–more generally.

The causes of the Pentecostal war on Afro-Brazilian religions are numerous and complex, and motivations–whether conscious or subconscious–undoubtedly vary for different militants. Scholars have identified several economic and social elements at work. These include competition over adherents, wealth, and territory (mostly on the part of Pentecostalism, which has encroached into spaces traditionally welcoming to Candomblé and Umbanda); neo-Pentecostalism's search for ideological hegemony and an attack on mainstream culture, including the role of Afro-Brazilian religious symbols in Brazilian national identity; and clashing moralities and a Pentecostal attack on sin. These religions are also very similar in terms of social composition and use competing moral discourses to emphasize social distinction, loosely suggesting a sibling rivalry.[519] Additionally, attacks on Candomblé and Umbanda reflect anti-African prejudices, and some Afro-Brazilian religious leaders and black rights activists also point to racism. The role of race in this scenario is complex and difficult to pinpoint, and while I have suggested that we cannot boil this conflict down to race, racial undertones should not be dismissed. However, though I recognize the relevance of the social and economic factors listed here, I have emphasized what I consider

[519] Their geographic and cosmological overlap also point to sibling rivalry, although again, sibling rivalry is not a perfect metaphor because this is such a one-sided conflict. That said, criticisms run in both directions. For example, see: Selka, "Morality in the Religious Marketplace."

key factors inspiring Pentecostalism's attack on Afro-Brazilian religions that warrant additional scholarly attention: cosmology and eschatology.

Pentecostal militancy is saturated with language and symbols pertaining to good and evil. Asking why the UCKG frames its conflict with the Afro-Brazilian religions in cosmic terms–i.e., as a spiritual battle for salvation from demonic forces–I have shown that its spiritual warfare ideology is not just a competition strategy or justification for violence, nor was it created in response to Candomblé and Umbanda. Rather, I have traced the ideology directly to an apocalyptic, premillennialist eschatology. Like classical Pentecostal churches, the UCKG teaches that the Earth's destruction by fire is immanent; only true Christians can escape this horror and be raptured up to heaven; and Satan's forces, while innumerable and formidable, must and will be defeated by Christ and his army before the millennial kingdom can be inaugurated. By teaching that most people on Earth are going to burn in hell, this dualistic eschatology promotes fear and Christian exceptionalism. It also encourages militancy as believers are called to seek out and confront evil forces, even (or perhaps especially) in human form. Several scholars have overlooked this premillennialist eschatology in their focus on how the UCKG and broader contemporary Pentecostalism emphasize prosperity theology. However, more nuanced attention to theology and doctrine reveals that apocalyptic doom and fear coexist with the UCKG's optimism about health and wealth (as was the case for historical Pentecostalism). Further, because premillennialism is at the root of the UCKG's spiritual warfare, I contend, it is also at the root of its holy war on Candomblé and Umbanda.

Asking why the Afro-Brazilian religions, despite their small size, are such a prominent target of the UCKG and Pentecostal militants, I have argued that Candomblé and Umbanda are well-suited to fill the role of a demonic enemy in a dualistic, apocalyptic war scenario because of the nature of their cosmologies. The Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religious cosmologies overlap substantially, including belief in an enchanted world animated by spirits and a focus on possession and divine healing. In the context of this overlap, crucial differences–such as contrasting semiotic ideologies regarding human and

divine agency, the moral status of spirits, and whether possession or exorcism constitutes divine healing or creates the world's pain and suffering–are of major importance. Cosmological overlap and difference have led to neo-Pentecostalism's inversion of the Afro-Brazilian religious cosmology, producing an interrelated ritual system in which possession by orixás, encostos, and other spirits from Candomblé and Umbanda leads to confrontation with these spirits through the exorcism of possessed attendees (and sometimes unwitting Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners) in neo-Pentecostal ceremonies. Using the lens of divine healing, I have argued that the conflict is inextricable from the religions' cosmological relationship, in which one group's divine cure is another's source of illness and vice versa.

Finally, I have used semiotic analysis of UCKG exorcisms to demonstrate how they ritually enact apocalyptic spiritual warfare in real time. These exorcisms symbolically immerse participants in a world in which Afro-Brazilian spirits–and the *feitiçaria* of Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners–are metaphysically real, evil, and powerful, but also weaker than the UCKG and destined to be defeated. Typically, exorcisms are "successful," i.e., church members perceive them to be efficacious. As such, they are interpreted by participants not as symbolic but as physical evidence of the threats posed by Afro-Brazilian spirits, the infinite illnesses they bring, and the wickedness of Candomblé and Umbanda. Exorcisms also provide "proof" of the holiness of the UCKG and its spiritual warfare. This is a compelling demonstration of the church's ethics. With rituals having the power to instill participants with a religion's ethical principles, UCKG exorcisms teach believers that it is moral and even necessary to fight evil, Afro-Brazilian spirits, and, I argue, Afro-Brazilian religions. Because exorcisms are one of the most significant modes of members' engagement with the church (due to sheer frequency of deliverance services and the observable fervor with which audiences participate), they help explain how zealous practitioners might be convinced to practice intolerance, or even support or take up violence.

Collectively, an account of the UCKG's apocalyptic eschatology, a comparison of the neo-Pentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religious cosmologies using the lens of divine cure, and semiotic analysis

of UCKG exorcisms go a long way in demonstrating the importance of religious ideas for understanding the conflict under study. Of course, religious ideas do not exist in a void. Theology originates–and continues to inspire new generations of believers–not independent of, but in connection with social interactions and material concerns. However, in the case of the conflict under study, worldly struggles are interpreted as sacred battles in part because Pentecostal cosmology and theology bifurcate the world into good and evil and encourage militancy as a general disposition. Premillennialism establishes cosmic war as the status quo. Neo-Pentecostalism in particular defines itself as good in relation to evil, relying on a demonized enemy for its power and appeal, and due to their cosmologies, Candomblé and Umbanda aptly fit the bill.

Why do this conflict and my findings matter? What is at stake in Brazil and beyond, apart from the obvious issue of harm to the Afro-Brazilian religious community, and broader Brazilian society? Brazilian Pentecostalism's war on Candomblé and Umbanda is a case study of broader global currents, such as the politicization of religion and a resurgence of religious conflict. At the narrowest level, the UCKG's actions in Brazil are but one example of its antagonisms around the globe: as a transnational enterprise, it competes with and demonizes indigenous religions, condemns sexual minorities, and is generally accused of extremism in dozens of countries. As one of the fastest growing religions–if not *the* fastest–of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, segments of the wider Pentecostal movement have been involved in some form of conflict just about everywhere the religion has gained a foothold. The Brazilian case sheds light on such clashes, as well as some of the challenges posed by strands of broader evangelicalism, various new religious movements, and fundamentalist and/or absolutist interpretations of world religions.

In this conclusion I will situate the Brazilian conflict in its global context and briefly examine the ways in which the Brazilian case–and the beliefs and ideologies that I have argued are central to it–

reflects and illuminates other instances of religious absolutism and violence globally, with an emphasis on the United States for comparison.

Secularization Theory and The Global Resurgence of Religious Violence

Juergensmeyer and numerous others have argued that religious militancy is on the rise globally.[520] Over the last several decades, the persistence of religious fervor and an uptick in religious violence throughout the world has shocked secularization theorists, who predicted the decline of religion in modernity.[521] Formulated by the founding "fathers" of sociology and anthropology (Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim; E.B. Tylor, James Frazer, Augustus Comte), secularization theory is rooted in Enlightenment thinking, in which reason, rationality, and science were considered the ultimate embodiments of progress. The nineteenth century theorists predicted that as industrialization accelerated, rationality and science would overtake religion, which Marx called "the opiate of the masses." Weber dubbed this the disenchantment of the world. Twentieth century western scholars adopted this line of thinking in response to the social tumult of the 1960s in the U.S., the proliferation of individualized forms of spirituality throughout the West, and the general decline of mainline religions.[522]

The rise of Pentecostalism is among countless religious phenomena that have fascinated scholars because they have defied secular notions of modernity. As Rivera puts it, it is "hard to find academic studies or newspaper articles on [Pentecostalism] that do not resort to expressions such as 'Pentecostal spree,' 'the revenge of God,' 'undeniable rejection of secularization,' 'exponential growth,' or 'evangelical turn round,' among other phrases."[523] Rivera problematizes these expressions by explaining

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[520] For example, Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*.
[521] Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World* (Penn State Press, 1994).
[522] Ibid.
[523] Rivera, "Pentecostalism in Brazil," 117.

that the rate of Pentecostal growth in Brazil has slowed in recent years. The UCKG's member base even seems to be declining.[524] However, Pentecostalism's voices–especially the UCKG's–are louder than ever in Brazilian media and politics. And comprising an estimated eighty to ninety percent of Protestant growth in the Global South, Pentecostalism continues to change the face of Christianity and alter religious landscapes around the world.[525] Across the globe, from the Americas to Africa to East Asia, Pentecostals have demonstrated that fervent faith and conservative theology are not disappearing anytime soon.[526]

Jose Casanova explains that there are three prongs to modern secularization theory: differentiation (increased religious pluralism and reduced homogeneity), decline in belief (increasing numbers of non-religious or atheistic people), and privatization (religion operates in homes and religious institutions, not in the media or the government).[527] Differentiation and decline in belief are occurring throughout most of the world, including in Brazil and especially in the West: this demonstrates that parts of secularization theory are indeed still valid.[528] However, Casanova's central thesis is that we are witnessing the "deprivatization" of religion in the modern world, meaning that there is a resurgence of religion in the public sphere:

> Religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them. Social movements have appeared which either are religious in nature or are challenging in the name of religion the legitimacy and autonomy of the primary secular spheres, the state and the market economy. Similarly, religious institutions and organizations refuse to restrict themselves to the pastoral care of individual souls and continue to raise questions about the interconnections of private and public morality…. One of the results of this ongoing contestation is a dual, interrelated process of repoliticization of the private

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[524] Van der Hoek, "Immigrant Pentecostalism in the Emergence of the COVID-19 Crisis."
[525] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.
[526] A small example is illustrative of Pentecostalism's impact in Africa: Philip Jenkins explains that in Ethiopia, the word for Protestant is simply *Pentay*, or Pentecostal, remarking, "How could there be any other kind?" Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 83.
[527] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).
[528] To illustrate this, in 2004, J. Gordon Melton described the U.S. as having "emerged as the most religiously pluralistic society that has ever existed." J. Gordon Melton, "The Fate of NRMs and Their Detractors in Twenty-First Century America," in *New Religious Movements in the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2004).

> religious and moral spheres and renormativization of the public economic and political spheres. This is what I call, for lack of a better term, the "deprivatization" of religion.[529]

Many scholars have pointed to the discontents of secularism, modernity, and globalization to explain the deprivatization of religion. Echoing Casanova, Juergensmeyer finds that religious activists have challenged the idea that "secular society and the modern nation-state are able to provide the moral fiber that unites national communities."[530] Specializing in religious violence–with subjects including various Islamist groups, extremist Sikhs in India, Hindu Nationalists, radical Buddhists, right-wing American Christians, and Zionist Jews–Juergensmeyer argues that in addition to refusing to observe the boundaries that secular society has set around religion, militant religious movements worldwide have two things in common: they reject the compromises with liberal values and secular institutions that most mainstream religions have made; and they reject what they regard as "weak modern substitutes for the more vibrant and demanding forms of religion that they imagine to be essential to their religion's origins."[531] In a similar vein, Lundell explains that the global spread of "fundamentalist movements, especially Islam and Pentecostal movements," is seen as an indicator of "a need for belonging in the fragmented, individualist realities of contemporary societies."[532] Often, these kinds of movements embrace apocalyptic thinking. Jenkins argues that for many contemporary Christians, especially in the Global South, "the book of Revelation looks like true prophecy on an epic scale."[533] To a Christian living in a Third World dictatorship, or fleeing a war zone as a refugee, the image of the government as Antichrist is not a bizarre religious fantasy but a convincing piece of political analysis.[534]

In a more practical sense, "religious resurgence" is stimulated by religions' promise to address the material needs of ailing adherents let down by secular governments and societies. Describing the

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[529] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 5-6.
[530] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 70.
[531] Mark Juergensmeyer, "Religion in the New Global War," *Diakses* 3, no. 20 (2012), 8.
[532] Lundell, "The Pentecostal War Against Afro-Brazilian 'Demons.'"
[533] Jenkins, *The New Christendom*, 275.
[534] Ibid., 275.

growing appeal of faith healing for Brazilians, Chesnut argues, "For the *desenganados* (those with incurable conditions), battered wives, and alcoholics, the failure of secular or worldly solutions leaves the supernatural as the only remaining source of health. Only a miracle of the gods can save the afflicted."[535] Jenkins makes a similar observation in his study on the global growth of contemporary Christianity, where he observes that the most successful new denominations–mostly Pentecostal or charismatic–"target their message very directly at the have-nots, or rather, the have-nothings."[536]

Contemporary Pentecostalism tends to be deprivatized religion *par excellence*. It infuses religion into all aspects of daily life, offers spiritual and material solutions to problems posed or unsolved by the modern secular world, and is often adept at using public platforms to advertise, compete, and affect political change. Unfortunately, as the Brazilian case has shown, intolerance and violence can accompany deprivatized religions' battle against secular, global, and other modern aspects of society, such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Importantly, militants do not usually engage in battle to move society back to some pre-modern era: rather, they adopt modern methods and tools to make modernity more in line with their religious values. Electronic churches like the UCKG exemplify this.

Politicized Religion and Religionized Politics

Juergensmeyer argues that politics have become religionized: "Worldly struggles have been lifted into the high proscenium of sacred battle."[537] Casanova adds that religion has become "repoliticized."[538] Both are true, in varying degrees according to context. Of course, religion and politics have never really been separate, as neither is a neatly bounded, distinct sphere of human life. However, aided by social media and driven by a desire to remake society in the image of the divine–or even to bring about divine

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[535] Chesnut, "Exorcising the Demons of Deprivation," 170.
[536] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 116.
[537] Juergensmeyer, "Religion in the New Global War," 3.
[538] Casanova, *Public Religions*.

prophecy–religions have directly participated in public morality debates, culture wars, and politics in new ways. And in purportedly secular societies, politicians continue to draw on–or increasingly draw on–religion to appeal to voters. This mix of religion, politics, and social media can be explosive.

The UCKG has become a major participant in local and national politics in Brazil (and beyond). Alana Sá Leitão explains, "Understanding the world as a battle between good and evil, and institutional politics and the national Congress as spaces dominated by evil, the only way to change this, according to [the UCKG's] logic, would be bring 'men of God' into politics." [539] In 2005, Ari Oro cited Brazilian elections to illustrate the growth of a UCKG-led "evangelical block" in congress.[540] He found that the UCKG promoted high evangelical participation rates in elections, putting voting and politics into its religious logic, and that this had produced a mimetic effect on other evangelical churches, which tended to imitate its way of doing politics.

In the early 2000s, Brazilian Protestants formed their own caucus, the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, whose goal is to ensure that public policy falls "'in line with God's purposes, and according to his word.'"[541] In 2017, evangelical lawmakers held 85 of 513 seats–nearly seventeen percent–in Brazil's lower house of Congress.[542] They made up twenty percent of the lower house in 2023.[543] Moreover, because the number of evangelical voters increases as Brazilians convert, politicians, regardless of religious affiliation, pander to evangelicals for support. Importantly, Brazilian evangelicals come in all varieties and are not associated with any one political party. The category *evangélico* encompasses all

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[539] Alana Sá Leitão, "Democracy through the Spirit: The Universal Church and Its Interconnections with Brazilian Democracy," *Horizontes Antropológicos*, no. 65 (April 14, 2023), https://journals.openedition.org/horizontes/7180.
[540] Ari Pedro Oro. "The Politics of the Universal Church and its Consequences on Religion and Politics in Brazil." *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 1, no. SE (2005).
[541] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 180.
[542] Robert Muggah, "In Brazil, Religious Gang Leaders Say They're Waging a Holy War," The Conversation, November 2, 2017, http://theconversation.com/in-brazil-religious-gang-leaders-say-theyre-waging-a-holy-war-86097.
[543] Eduardo Campos Lima, "Christians Represented Significant Faction of Capital Rioters in Brazil," *Religion News Service* (blog), January 17, 2023, https://religionnews.com/2023/01/17/christians-represented-significant-faction-of-capital-rioters-in-brazil/.

Brazilian Protestants, who display more theological and political diversity than North America's evangelicals. Jenkins finds that Brazil has a strong evangelical left.[544] However, on average, Brazil's evangelicals exhibit high levels of biblical literalism and lean to the right politically because of strong, conservative stances on issues of sex and gender.[545] Pentecostalism, which makes up the largest share of evangelicals, is usually (though not always) morally conservative and not socially progressive. Most of the UCKG's political participation has been through the Liberal Party, the center-right to far-right party of Jair Bolsonaro.[546]

There is much at stake in this political participation. For example, one of the six categories used by Silva to sort evangelical attacks on Afro-Brazilian religions is "attacks arising from alliances between Evangelical churches and politicians."[547] Evangelicals have led proposals in multiple Brazilian states to ban any religious practices or ceremonies resulting in the death of animals, despite–or rather, because of–the fact that many Afro-Brazilian religious communities practice ritual animal sacrifice. And in addition to issues of religious tolerance, evangelicals are shaping the national debate on social issues such as gay rights, racial equality, women's reproductive health, and education.

Admittedly, according to Sá Leitão, the UCKG has allotted funding to some progressive causes, like campaigns against domestic violence. In past decades, it also supported the left-leaning Worker's Party on a few occasions.[548] Edir Macedo had positive relations with Lula da Silva during his first presidency, and Dilma Rousseff invited him to her inauguration ceremony.[549] But this may be because Macedo tends to bet on the winning horse and seeks connections with those already in office. Regardless,

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[544] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 194.
[545] Lima, "Christians Represented Significant Faction of Capital Rioters in Brazil."
[546] Ibid.
[547] Vagner Gonçalves da Silva, "Neopentecostalismo e religiões afro-brasileiras: Significados do ataque aos símbolos da herança religiosa africana no Brasil contemporâneo," *Mana* 13, no. 1 (April 2007): 207–36.
[548] Sá Leitão, "Democracy through the Spirit."
[549] Ibid.

the UCKG has reportedly walked back its women's rights campaigns,[550] and Macedo has been consistent regarding conservative stances on sexual morality and family values. He was a key figure in the crucial evangelical support base for Jair Bolsonaro–dubbed the "Trump of the tropics" by the media–in his 2018 election. He continued to publicly align with Bolsonaro in opposition to homosexuality, "gender ideology," and sex education up through the 2022 election (which Bolsonaro lost). Importantly, Bolsonaro accepted and returned Macedo's favor in unprecedented ways, even visiting the Temple of Solomon after his inauguration and allowing Macedo to consecrate him.[551]

There are interesting parallels between evangelical politics in Brazil and the United States. Describing the emergence of extreme forms of evangelical Christianity in the public sphere in the U.S., Giles Gunn asserts that the realms of the public and the popular have been asked "not only to work for religion but to do much of the work of religion."[552] He describes how evangelicalism has encouraged Americans to take refuge in the "politics of sin," offering believers an opportunity to use their faith to change the public realm into something more congenial with their beliefs and morals.[553] One consequence of this politics is the frequent drawing of boundaries between "us" and "them," with perceived threats (like immigrants, women, slaves, and LGBTQ persons) being positioned as other. Gunn explains, "The upright and the reprobate, the saved and the fallen… have been 'rewritten as the boundaries between good and evil.'"[554]

Since Gunn wrote *Ideas to Die For* over a decade ago, evangelical Christianity has increasingly become involved in partisan politics in the U.S. And while no religion maps perfectly onto a political party, David Campbell explains that regardless of demographic realities, Americans *perceive*

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[550] Ibid.
[551] Ibid., par. 61.
[552] Giles Gunn, *Ideas to Die For: The Cosmopolitan Challenge* (Routledge, 2013), 78.
[553] Ibid., 81.
[554] Ibid., 82.

evangelicals–especially white evangelicals–to support right-wing politics and vice versa.[555] I have discussed how deprivatized religion is partly a response to secularism, but Campbell argues that partisan religion has also had a secular backlash, where increasing shares of Americans have left religion (i.e., Christianity) because they see it as the extension of politics with which they disagree. This suggests a feedback loop in which secularists try to remove religion from the public sphere, religion becomes increasingly politicized in response, people with more moderate or liberal politics leave religion, and increasing shares of Americans who remain (or become) religious are absolutist and partisan. While I do not wish to overstate the size of such a loop (or equate "religion" with evangelicalism), even in small percentages such demographic shifts help explain the growing tensions in the U.S.'s political landscape.

Campbell states that given the deep-seated nature of a religious or secular worldview, such a cleavage has the potential to be especially dangerous: "History shows that religious conflict–including, and especially the disagreement between the religious and the secular–can bring societies to a boiling point, even more so when those religious secular divisions reinforce a political cleavage."[556] Further, he argues, the political fracture along religious-secular lines is a threat to religious tolerance because of the secular backlash to religious politics. The U.S. and Brazilian contexts are not identical: in Brazil, conservative evangelicalism has had less of a secular backlash because Brazilians are much less likely to reduce "religion" to evangelicalism–Catholicism is still the majority, after all. They are therefore less likely to associate conservative politics with "religion" than with Pentecostal or Charismatic religion. But evangelicalism is abhorred by many on Brazil's left, who equate it with neo-Pentecostalism and associate it with intolerance and extremism. In both countries' cases, evangelical populism–inspired by biblical

[555] David E. Campbell, "The Perils of Politicized Religion," *Daedalus* 149, no. 3 (July 1, 2020): 87–104, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01805.
[556] Ibid.

literalism, moral conservatism, and a distaste for godlessness and globalism–has contributed to bipartisan cleavages and demonstrates the challenges of politicized religion and religionized politics.

Underlying evangelical politics in both the U.S. and Brazil is Christian dualism and the related ideologies of apocalypticism, prophecy belief, and cosmic war, all of which are conducive to conspiratorial thinking. Amand Garry et al (summarizing Frennet & Joost) explain that when conspiracy-thinking and violent extremist ideologies intersect, the intersection can pose a threat to society if the conspiracy asserts that "'(1) one group is superior to another, (2) one group is under attack by another group, or (3) the threat is apocalyptic (existential threat) in nature.'"[557] The politics of the UCKG and the Religious Right in both Brazil and the U.S. reflect such thinking. And in both countries, politicians tap into conspiratorial impulses.

In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro's administration relied heavily on conspiracy-thinking in attempts to mobilize and unite its voter base, one of many ways in which Bolsonaro and Donald Trump are similar.[558] Members of his cabinet preached a version of the anti-globalist, anti-communist "One World Order" conspiracy popular in far-right circles in the U.S., which allowed Bolsonaro to draw on the beliefs of conservative Catholics and especially conservative evangelicals. When Bolsonaro lost to Lula in 2022, many of his supporters believed the election fraudulent and his loss a conspiracy, and on January 8th, 2023, some of those supporters marched on the National Congress in a violent riot, much like January 6th in the U.S. Out of the approximately 1,800 people detained, at least four of them were evangelical pastors, and "hundreds of Christian organizations–neo-Pentecostal churches especially, but also Catholic groups–

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[557] Amanda Garry et al., "QAnon Conspiracy Theory: Examining Its Evolution and Mechanisms of Radicalization," *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 26 (2021): 3.
[558] Felipe Pereira Loureiro, "Conspiracy Theory and the Foreign Policy of the Far Right: The Case of Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil (2019-2021)," *Contexto Internacional* 45 (July 21, 2023): e20220034, https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-8529.20234502e20220034.

were involved with or had members take part in the attempted coup."[559] A national survey conducted on January 8th and 9th of 2023 reportedly showed that 64% of evangelicals supported a military coup in Brazil, and 31% supported the capital invasion (compared with 18% of Brazilians overall).[560]

In the U.S., right-wing conspiracies are often stirred by the leaders of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), a growing far-right, charismatic movement that believes God chose Trump to become president.[561] Intimately intertwined with Pentecostalism (John Weaver describes it as a product of Third Wave Pentecostalism), the NAR is dedicated to the restoration of the five-fold gospel of Ephesians, in which the role of apostles and especially prophets are restored to the modern evangelical church.[562] Damon Berry argues that Trump's support among NAR "*prophecy voters*" resulted from obedience to their apostles, who claimed that it was prophesied that Trump was chosen by God. The apostles mandated that believers combat alleged demonic conspiracies aligned against President Trump that seek to prevent the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth.[563] In Berry's 2020 article, which was published prior to the presidential election that year, he astutely predicted: "Conspiratorial and millennialist narratives propagated by those associated with the New Apostolic Reformation will continue to hold influence among the Christian Right in the [U.S.] through the 2020 presidential election. This is, in part, because their dualistic and conspiratorial vision of politics is not confined to the margins of charismatic Christianity, but is common among Trump's most vocal Christian supporters."[564] Berry argues that beyond supporting Trump out of nostalgia for an American past, or for moral or social

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[559] Lima, "Christians Represented Significant Faction of Capital Rioters in Brazil." Lima also reports that numerous videos on social media showed rioters praying and singing gospel hymns as they stormed the capital. There are even reports of rioters speaking in tongues in some of the videos.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Damon Berry, "Voting in the Kingdom: Prophecy Voters, the New Apostolic Reformation, and Christian Support for Trump," *Nova Religio* 23, no. 4 (April 15, 2020): 69–93, https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2020.23.4.69.
[562] John Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation: History of a Modern Charismatic Movement* (McFarland, 2016).
[563] Berry, "Voting in the Kingdom."
[564] Ibid., 72.

reasons, these voters are "*prophecy voters* looking forward to the creation of the Kingdom of God on Earth."[565]

The NAR leads us to another interesting parallel to Brazil in the U.S.: QAnon. The QAnon conspiracy movement has become deeply intertwined with conservative evangelicalism, including the NAR. In the case of the NAR, QAnon, and Bolsonaro's evangelicals, supported or even spurred by conservative political leaders, Satan-fearing conservatives have used social media to spread disinformation, demonize purported enemies, and undermine secularity and tolerance. Miroslav Vrzal explains that QAnon is a variation of satanic conspiracy theory based on "Christian dualism and demonology regarding the idea of the need to fight subversive groups (devilworshipers, witches, and secret organizations) who have formed a pact with Satan and intend to harm the society." [566] Vrzal finds the belief in the need to fight Satan's evil forces to be deeply ingrained in both American conspiratorial thinking and a large part of the American society influenced by Christian fundamentalism, making this belief likely to emerge in other variations similar to QAnon.[567] It is interesting that segments of Brazilian society have similarly been swayed by satanic conspiracy theories, considering Brazil's different religious history from the U.S. However, the devil and dualism have been in Brazil since colonial Catholics arrived; contemporary Christian conservatives just fear and politicize him with renewed vigor.

Moreover, right-wing religious conspiracism in the U.S. and Brazil is part of a global current: even Europe is exhibiting a small but significant wave of conservative Christianity despite usually being

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[565] Ibid. This millennialist vision of the NAR differs from the premillennialism of classical Pentecostalism and other conservative evangelicals in that it asserts that an apocalyptic doomsday scenario can be avoided if people help fulfill positive prophecies, like getting Trump in office. Drawing on a body of work on millennialism, Berry calls this *avertive millennialism* (as opposed to the *catastrophic millennialism* of premillennialists). Berry also argues, "One could say that in the conspiratorial millennialist discourse of the [NAR], the Kingdom of God is believably possible precisely because the evil that opposes it seems to undeniably real" (75). Presumably this evil is the discontents of the secular, global world.

[566] Miroslav Vrzal, "QAnon as a Variation of a Satanic Conspiracy Theory: An Overview," *Theory and Practice in English Studies* 9, no. 1–2 (2020): 45.

[567] Ibid.

thought of as a secular region. In Gionathan Lo Mascolo's edited volume, various authors describe how, inspired by the U.S. Christian Right, ultraconservative European Christians have joined forces to push anti-gender and anti-Muslim narratives, which is influencing the political landscape throughout Europe.[568] The ultraconservatives come from a range of denominations, including Catholicism and Pentecostalism. They espouse a variety of interrelated apocalyptic conspiracies, including variations on the Great Reset and New World Order / One World Order, QAnon, COVID-19, and the Great Replacement. There are also nationalist, Islamophobic, antisemitic, Christian Zionist, and anti-gender conspiracies. While local history and culture have shaped each country's religious and political landscapes, it is fascinating to note the commonalities in each context. In Brazil, the U.S. Europe, and beyond, right-wing evangelical conspiracism is inspired by Christian dualism, apocalyptic prophecy belief, and opposition to secularism and multiculturalism.

New Religions, Fundamentalism, and the Apocalypse

I have been discussing some complicated, concerning trends within contemporary religion: politicized, absolutist, dualistic, and/or militant religion; people who embrace conspiracism and apocalypticism; and religious violence. I would argue that any religion is capable of inspiring these traits, that all of the world's major religions have, and that no religion is entirely prone to them. However, many of the religions that display these traits today are new religions. That is, they have emerged in the last century or two and challenged the orthodoxies of the world's mainstream, established, hegemonic religions, including Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. They have new means of communicating their beliefs, and are often adept at using media technologies. There are two categories of new religions that are relevant here: *new religious movements* (NRMs) and *fundamentalism*. Pentecostalism and other forms of evangelicalism are sometimes housed under one or

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[568] Gionathan Lo Mascolo, ed., *The Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks, and Denominations* (transcript Verlag, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839460382.

both categories,[569] and sometimes intentionally left out (partly because as academic constructs, these categories' definitions are contested). Regardless, they have substantial overlap with both categories.

For many scholars, *new religious movements* are "fringe," "marginal," or "alternative" religious sects or churches that have challenged, reinterpreted, or fused together elements of mainstream religions. As a label, *NRM* is designed to replace *cult*. Thus, it is an attempt to describe religions deemed dangerous by societies' dominant religious and/or secular culture. John Saliba lists the traits that commonly factor into definitions of NRMs: they are said to discourage rational thought; employ deceptive recruitment techniques; manipulate members through guilt; isolate them from the outside world; grant complete power to a charismatic leader; require all energy and finances to be dedicated to the cult or leader; force members to work without adequate pay; teach that the end or the world is near; encourage attitudes that are anti-woman, anti-child, or even anti-family; adopt the principle that the end justifies the means; and have an aura of secrecy and mystery, and frequently, of violence or potential violence.[570] Scholars like Saliba have challenged this negative perception of new, unorthodox religions, because these traits describe only a minority of the religions that were formed in the last couple of centuries.[571] Most new religions offer benefits to followers, are many are peaceful or keep to themselves. Equally importantly, all religions were new at one time, and the world's mainstream religions have all arguably displayed the traits listed above at some point. So, scholars are working to capture what is unique about new religions without over-generalizing or using normative (usually Christian-influenced) definitions.

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[569] For example, Sussan Namini and Sebastian Murken describe Pentecostal churches as NRMs in "Self-Chosen Involvement in New Religious Movements (NRMs): Well-Being and Mental Health from a Longitudinal Perspective," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12, no. 6 (September 1, 2009): 561–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670902897618, while Lundell associates Pentecostalism with fundamentalism in "The Pentecostal War Against Afro-Brazilian 'Demons," and Jenkins finds Pentecostalism to be both fundamentalist and having much in common with NRMS in Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.
[570] John A. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements* (Rowman Altamira, 2003).
[571] Ibid.

Arguing that most definitions of NRMs are fraught with issues, J. Gordon Melton proposes his own working definition:

> Groups of religious bodies/movements which, though they do not share any particular set of attributes, have been assigned to the fringe by, first, the more established and dominant voices in the religious culture, and second, various voices within the secular culture (government officials, watchdog groups, the media, etc.) and thus are basically to be seen as a set of religious groups/movements existing in relatively contested spaces within society as a whole.[572]

Additionally, he explains, what is considered a cult or NRM varies in different societies. For example, Christian groups that are relatively mainstream in the U.S. might be deemed dangerous cults in India.

Melton's definition is useful for highlighting how the religious establishment dictates what constitutes "good" or orthodox religion, and what is "fringe" or "radical." This is best demonstrated by his proposal to replace cults with NRMs in the church-sect-cult typology adapted by some western sociologists and theologians from Max Weber's church/sect dichotomy.[573] In this typology, Christian denominations that form the religious establishment of several western countries make up the dominant category *church* (though Melton proposes expanding this to include "established religious bodies" so as to include religious groups in non-Western countries that dominate the landscape in those countries). *Sects* are seen to resemble the dominant religions and are accepted or tolerated, but are less established and organized, and are perceived as stricter and more fervent in worship. They exist along a spectrum of movement toward becoming churches. *Cults*–now NRMs–are seen as different and extreme, and their status is under constant scrutiny and negotiation. This puts them continually on the defensive regarding

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[572] J. Gordon Melton, "Perspective: Toward a Definition of 'New Religion,'" Nova Religio 8, no. 1 (July 1, 2004): 75, https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2004.8.1.73.

[573] Ibid., 79. For a summary of the origins of the church/sect dichotomy in Weber's writings and the development of the typology by later scholars, see: Jenkins, *The New Christendom*, 168-169.

the authenticity of their spiritual practices.[574] Importantly, many new religious movements eventually make their way to sect or even church status as they integrate with or become more accepted by the dominant culture. We might say this has partially occurred with Pentecostalism.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Pentecostals were often pejoratively referred to as "holy rollers" for their loud, participatory style of worship and their constant attention to the gifts of the Spirit, especially speaking in tongues.[575] Holiness leaders labeled the Baptism in the Holy Spirit "heresy and fanaticism."[576] Baptists and Methodists had several objections, including an overfamiliarity with God assumed in praying for healing; the loud demanding style of evangelists; and emotional, crowd-psychology-oriented healing services that seem to manipulate those in attendance.[577] The snake-handling variants of Pentecostalism were (and are) particularly large targets of scrutiny and criticism.

Today, Pentecostal churches are still denounced by other Christian denominations–and parts of secular society–for these same reasons. Prosperity theology in general draws ire from outsiders. However, Pentecostalism has left the "fringes" of society, at least to some degree, in numerous countries. Jenkins argues that the Pentecostal and independent churches sweeping the Global South by storm are classic sects in terms of leadership (more charismatic, less trained and educated than church leaders), worship style (more fervent, fundamentalist, ecstatic, and supernatural-focused; less rigid), and degree of commitment (higher degree of commitment, tighter-knit communities).[578] Pentecostalism might even be sliding toward the church end of the spectrum: it participates in ecumenicalism, holds global and regional

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[574] Ibid., 81. In addition to church-sect-NRM, Melton includes a category for *ethnic religions*, which fall outside the typology. They are usually treated as churches in their own right despite their differences from the religious establishment because they are specific to ethnic communities and more or less keep to themselves. Afro-Brazilian Religions might be housed under this category.
[575] J. Gordon Melton, ed., "Pentecostal Family," in *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 7th ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003), 83, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3402400021/GVRL?u=ucdavis&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=6928045e.
[576] Ibid., 84.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 167.

conferences, and is generally taken seriously as its own denomination (or rather, a set of denominations and congregations). And with the Charismatic Revival bringing Pentecostal beliefs and practices to more mainstream churches, Pentecostalism's influence on larger society marks a departure from the days of being marginal.

However, within the broad movement, there are strands of Pentecostalism that still seem to fall towards the NRM-cult end of the spectrum. Neo-Pentecostalism is frequently criticized for commoditizing religion and manipulating its members for financial gain. Its focus on exorcism has also awoken old controversies. More controversial than most, the UCKG is frequently ridiculed by Brazilians and has been branded a cult by detractors around the world, including a few European and African governments. It is generally much less accepted than more historical denominations like the Assemblies of God. It also challenges orthodoxies in new ways. The great *chute* ("kick") incident–in which the head of the UCKG in Sao Paulo was seen on television kicking an image of *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, Brazil's patron saint–is illustrative. After the "desecration" of the saint, there were attacks on UCKG church buildings and bomb threats.[579] The UCKG therefore demonstrates how some new religions challenge dominant religious culture and clash with secular society. And while not all new religions have embraced absolutism and a strident oppositional stance–perhaps only a minority do, as Saliba and Melton suggest–there is a subset of new religions that have undeniably done so, including the UCKG.

With its measurable influence on Brazilian society through the media and politics, though, the UCKG poses interesting questions for the church-sect-NRM typology. How do we account for new religions that are controversial, fervent, and deemed radical or "cult" by some traditional religious and secular authorities, but also large, influential, and highly engaged with mainstream culture? We might ask this same question about the New Apostolic Reformation discussed previously. These might be seen as

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[579] Ibid., 196.

moving from NRM toward sect or church because of their power and influence, but they are not becoming less fervent–or less polarizing. The global popularity of these religions–along with the proliferation of NRMs, deprivatized religion, and militancy around the world–demonstrate that there is clearly an appetite for more fervent forms of worship. Mainstream religions have weakened, but also changed in response (e.g., Brazilian Catholicism has become more charismatic). Jenkins' research suggests that if demographic trends continue, highly fervent, supernatural-oriented, "fundamentalist" forms of Christianity will become the new Christianity.[580] These changes to the status quo may require us to reconsider what constitutes "mainstream."

Jenkins predicts that as Southern churches grow and mature, they will lose something of their sectarian character, though over the course of generations. But he also notes that as sects drift away from their origins, they in turn spawn a new generation of enthusiasts who seek to recapture the charisma and spiritual power they believe to be integral to religious experience: "Churches beget sects, which in turn become churches, until they in turn beget new and still fierier sects. The cycle has recured many times and will continue ad infinitum."[581] It will be interesting to see whether and how this cycle plays out.

Relevant to this discussion of new religions is *fundamentalism*. The term originated from a very specific movement within American Christianity in the late part of the nineteenth century as a response to theological liberalism, modernism, and biblical criticism. The early fundamentalists–mainly Baptists and Methodists–sought to focus on the fundamentals of the Bible, emphasizing biblical literalism first and foremost. A central tenet of belief was premillennialist dispensationalism, a hyper-literalist interpretation of the book of Revelation and other chapters in the Bible. Fundamentalism began to have a negative connotation after the Scopes trial, and today it is commonly used as a stereotype to denounce any religious group or practice deemed too strict, irrational, anti-intellectual, or even violent. In a sense

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[580] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.
[581] Ibid., 169.

fundamentalism is an accusation similar to *cult*, except that it is applied most often to offshoots of mainstream religions (*sects*), rather than religions people perceive as being totally new. Because of the negative stereotypes, although many churches continue to embrace the ideals set forth by the original fundamentalists, not all of their adherents self-identify as fundamentalists.

Despite this history, *fundamentalism* has been expanded by some scholars to be a useful construct for describing a fervent, absolutist type of contemporary religion. It is often used to denote literalism, apocalypticism and other forms of prophecy belief, a strident oppositional stance, and/or moral conservativism. For Sathianathan Clarke, fundamentalism is a uniquely contemporary phenomenon, fostered by globalization, with local expressions within various religious traditions.[582] He argues that contemporary religious violence is linked to fundamentalism, which favors unwavering confidence in and complete submission to the "Word-vision" (e.g., biblical literalism) as well as fixed, mandatory "world-ways" that call for an imposition of a specific religion's way of life. In his case studies, he argues, fundamentalism grew out of a political or cultural crisis, often involving a rejection of secularism. He aligns much of contemporary Christianity in the U.S. with fundamentalism, arguing that it deeply influences our political system.

Even though Pentecostalism was born out of the nineteenth century Christian fundamentalist movement, Christians who call themselves fundamentalists (in the narrow, historical sense of the term) usually argue that Pentecostalism is not fundamentalist because it is not literal enough in its approach to scripture, because it supplements or supercedes Scriptures with direct spiritual revelations, and for the others reasons that Pentecostals were called "holy rollers" a century ago. Broader evangelicalism is usually considered a separate category from fundamentalism, partly because evangelicals are not always literalists. However, while Pentecostalism has doctrinal differences from historical fundamentalism,

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[582] Clarke, *Competing Fundamentalisms.*

Pentecostal churches usually do teach biblical literalism and inerrancy, and seek to return to what they perceive to be the fundamentals of the faith.[583] Many of them also teach premillennial dispensationalism or related eschatological visions. Regardless of historical, theological definitions, much of Pentecostalism resembles fundamentalism in the contemporary, scholarly sense. Jenkins considers Pentecostalism fundamentalist without defining it, but seems to mean something like literalist and fervent.[584]

As academic constructs, *fundamentalism* and *NRM* are in the eye of the beholder, but I think they can be useful for categorizing and comparing certain kinds of contemporary religion. And while I agree that it is crucial not to overgeneralize or demonize new or unorthodox movements and forms of worship, we need to be able to continue having conversations about the subset of new religions–to include reinterpretations of old religions–that have an inclination toward absolutism. The Brazilian case reflects something important about how new religions are responding to the modern world and shaping the politics of the societies in which they live, and how sometimes, this has extremely negative implications and repercussions in terms of fomenting social and political conflict.

At the heart of the challenges posed by some new religions is literalism and apocalypticism, which reflect and inspire rigidity, self-righteousness, dualism, and often, fear. To clarify, apocalypticism has always been a feature of Christianity, Islam, and even Judaism, and it often does not lead to violence. In the mid nineteenth century U.S., when William Miller's prophesied apocalypse did not occur as predicted in 1844, his group disbanded in what was known as the Great Disappointment. However, apocalypticism has a great propensity to inspire extremism, and violence, and it seems to have a hold over many new religions and fundamentalists the world over. This is evident in religious antagonisms and violent episodes throughout the world, such as those carried out by: Shoko Ashahara and Aum Shinrikyo;

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[583] See my discussion in chapter one and Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2009).
[584] Jenkins, *The Next Christendom.*

Al Qaeda, ISIS, Soldiers of Heaven, and other Islamic groups in the Middle East; radical Sikhs in India; Kach and other Zionist groups in Israel; Jim Jones and the People's Temple; the Branch Davidians at Waco; Heaven's Gate; the order of the Solar Temple; and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments in Uganda. Each of these groups has acted out an apocalyptic vision with disastrous consequences for its members and/or outsiders. The UCKG has not carried out such extreme violence as mass suicide or murder, but it nonetheless demonstrates many of the negative effects of apocalyptic prophesy belief.

Religious Freedom & Human Rights

The conflict between Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions is fraught with questions about and struggles over human rights and religious freedom. Afro-Brazilian religious leaders often frame attacks on their communities as religious intolerance and persecution, emphasizing the role of hate speech and hate crimes against them. For example, after Nailza Araújo's terreiro was attacked, she lamented her perception that such attacks have "stopped being defined as a hate crime that injures human dignity and freedom," despite her observation that "freedom of expression of [Afro-Brazilian religion] is safeguarded by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by the Federal Constitution."[585]

he Brazilian government officially considers attacks on Candomblé and Umbanda human rights violations. The Ministry of Women, Citizens, and Human Rights and other local and federal government agencies track "instances of religious intolerance," and seek resolutions to the problem. Religious groups band together with government officials in rallies and marches calling for religious tolerance. Notably, there are many evangelicals–including Pentecostals–who participate in these efforts. Additionally, the Brazilian government also formally recognizes the association of Afro-Brazilian religion with African

[585] My translation, from: "Casa De Religião De Matriz Africana é Atacada Em Maceió," *TribunaHoje*, 6 Mar. 2018. Accessed 25 May 2019. https://tribunahoje.com/noticias/cidades/2018/03/06/casa-de-religiao-de-matriz-africana-e-atacada-em-maceio/

heritage and racial identity, providing protections for African-derived religions under Brazil's Racial Equality Act. This is partly why I have argued that while race is not the cause of the conflict, regardless of the intentions and potential prejudices held by militants, attacks on Afro-Brazilian religion undermine racial equality–Umbanda and especially Candomblé have had enormous importance for black people's unity and resistance against subjugation, making attacks on them *feel* like racism.

Despite official safeguards for Afro-Brazilian religions, however, Candomblé and Umbanda have struggled at times to be full recognized as religions in Brazilian courts. In 2014, Rio prosecutors launched a civil action to require Google to remove videos attacking Afro-Brazilian religions from YouTube, and a judge ruled against them, reportedly writing that Afro-Brazilian religions could not be considered true religions because they lack a written text, a hierarchical structure and a god.[586] Fortunately, the ruling was reversed in the appeal, but the fact that ruling happened at all is lamentable, reflecting an enormous bias held by a Brazilian legal official.

Addressing scenarios just like this one, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan argues that a challenge of religious freedom is that courts need a way of deciding what counts as religion if they are to enforce religious freedom laws, asking, "Is it possible to do this without setting up a legal hierarchy of religious orthodoxy? And who is legally and constitutionally qualified to make such judgments?"[587] Sullivan claims that justly enforcing laws granting persons rights that are defined with respect to their religious beliefs or practices is actually impossible, and argues:

> Forsaking religious freedom as a legally enforced right might enable greater equality among persons and greater clarity and self-determination for religious individuals and communities. Such a change would end discrimination against those who do not self-identify as religious or whose religion is disfavored. It might also force religious groups to fend for themselves

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[586] Elina I. Hartikainen, "Adjudicating Religious Intolerance: Afro-Brazilian Religions, Public Space, and the National Collective in Twenty-First-Century Brazil.," *Religion and Society* 10 (January 1, 2019): 92–111.
[587] Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom: New Edition* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 3.

> politically, economically, and philosophically in a new world of radical normative pluralism.[588]

While I do not presume to know whether forsaking religious freedom as a concept and legal doctrine would greatly improve things, it is certainly true that it has substantial shortcomings. Interestingly, in response to being labeled as intolerant and hateful, the UCKG and other Pentecostal churches have claimed that their own religious freedom and freedom of speech are under attack.[589] They assert that their expression–essentially their intolerance–must be tolerated, utilizing human rights discourse for their own benefit. This demonstrates how complex religious freedom and freedom of expression rights can be. On one hand, evangelicals have the right to proselytize, exercise free speech, and practice their religion openly, including condemnation of what they deem immoral. On the other hand, the free exercise of evangelical Christianity and especially intolerant practices like the demonizing discourses of the UCKG impinge upon the rights of Afro-Brazilian religions. And often, it seems like the rights of Pentecostals to free expression supersedes the rights of Candomblé and Umbanda.

Under the umbrellas of freedom of religion and freedom of expression is an issue fraught with challenges: the right to proselytize. Asking what motivates the UCKG's chosen countries in which to establish a presence, namely referring to its efforts in Africa, Paul Freston rejects the notion that the pursuit of financial success is the singular motivating factor. Why? He explains that while "it is reasonable to suppose that monetary calculations are always present, they rarely operate alone, and could scarcely be the deciding factor in the case of many African countries" because there are indications that the UCKG runs at a deficit in most of the continent (at least it did in 2005, when Freston published his article).[590] Instead, Freston suggests that numerical success is an important driver, as it is for evangelical

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[588] Ibid, 8.
[589] Leiliane Lopes, "A Igreja Universal é Vítima De Preconceito, Escreve Bispo," *Gospel Prime RSS*, Gospel Prime, 27 May 2013. Accessed 28 Feb 2018. https://www.gospelprime.com.br/igreja-universal-preconceito-bispo/
[590] Paul Freston, "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: A Brazilian Church Finds Success in Southern Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 38, https://doi.org/10.1163/1570066052995816.

faiths in general. Relatedly, he argues, "In the case of a highly proselytistic church, its global expansion must have some connection with the romance of fulfilling the classic Christian missionary mandate."

Throughout history, the "missionary mandate" has resulted in horrendous destruction of indigenous religions around the world, especially in Africa. Because of this, Makau Mutua problematizes the western notion of religious freedom and the associated right to proselytize in the marketplace of religions.[591] For Mutua, universalizing religions that seek to remake other traditions, in this case Islam and missionary Christianity, have brought torment to Africa. He examines the ways in which, for centuries, they competed over souls and "sought to eradicate, with the help of the state, all other forms of religious expression and belief and close off any avenues through which other competing faiths could be introduced or sustained."[592] Ultimately, he finds that the meeting between messianic faiths and indigenous African cultures resulted in a phenomenon akin to cultural genocide.[593]

Mutua argues that at the heart of the crisis is the belief by some spiritual traditions in their own superiority and their view of the "other" as inferior. Islam and Christianity both justified their expansion through a belief in the racial superiority of the proselytizers. Arab Muslims saw and continue to see blacks as inferior, but see conversion to Islam as a step towards overcoming their inferiority. Christians espoused white paternalism, in which they sought to "take up the white man's burden" and "free" the African from his barbaric, pre-literate, superstitious, state by converting him to their superior culture and religion. In the process of reeducation missionaries ended up deeming African ceremonies and spirit worship as satanic. African dances, marriage ceremonies, female circumcision, and polygamy were deemed pagan or heathen practices incompatible with Christianity.[594]

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[591] Makau Mutua, "Human Rights, Religion, and Proselytism," in *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 94–125.
[592] Ibid., 96.
[593] Ibid.
[594] Ibid., 101.

Mutua also details how the major bodies of Christian and Islamic jurisprudence assert the inferiority of and disrespect for nonbelievers. For example, Shari'a contradicts basic human rights standards by discriminating against non-Muslims, who are not regarded as fully human and could legally be enslaved.[595] Similarly, bigoted Christians from Africa to the U.S. have continuously mined scriptures for references to the subhumanity of Africans and other non-whites to justify apartheid, slavery, and discrimination based on race and color.[596] Many settled on the story of the curse of Noah's son, Ham, in Genesis 9 as a divine curse on all people of African descent. The deliberate destruction of African values was further epitomized by the introduction of a "white" God and Jesus Christ and a "black" devil or Satan.[597]

In addition to the obvious issue of racial subjugation, Mutua argues that the western colonial assault on Africa was particularly damaging because religion was an integral part of being African, and in societies where religion is woven into virtually every aspect of life, its delegitimization can eventually lead to the collapse of social norms and cultural identities: "Imperial religions have necessarily violated the individual conscience and the communal expressions of Africans and their communities by subverting African religions."[598] Further, this subversion dehumanized Africans and created a self-hatred that persists throughout the continent today.[599] Ruling African elites have continued to demonize and shame indigenous religions, and good culture in Africa is still defined by its proximity to western values. African states continue to carry out "modernization campaigns" against "backward peoples" like the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania, African customary laws are overridden by colonial laws in most legal systems, and

[595] Ibid., 97.
[596] Ibid., 99.
[597] Ibid., 101.
[598] Ibid., 94.
[599] Ibid., 102.

many traditional practices (polygamy, healing, worship) are actively prohibited by African governments.[600]

Part of the problem is that proselytism is in tension with the right to be left alone, to choose what to believe. Mutua finds contradictions in human rights laws and norms because of this tension. By protecting proselytism, he argues, the human rights regime has imposed on African religions an obligation to compete in the marketplace of ideas, a task for which as nonproselytizing, noncompetitive creeds they are not historically fashioned. The human rights regime has "incorrectly assumed a level playing field" and "protected evangelizing religions in their march toward universalization."[601] Mutua finds some protections for indigenous religions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, though they do not mention indigenous religions directly. These documents prohibit the use of coercion to "impair" the freedom of others to have or to adopt a religion or a belief of their choice; prohibit the use of force to make converts, and state that "individual rights depend in turn on the ability of the minority group to maintain its culture, language, or religion. Positive measures by states may also be necessary to protect the identification of a minority and the rights of its members to enjoy and develop their culture and language and to practice their religion, in community with other members of the group" (Article 27 of the ICCPR).[602] He also finds the human rights corpus to promote diversity.[603]

Mutua recognizes that perhaps nothing can be done today to reverse the negative effects of forced or coerced religious proselytization, but change is needed moving forward. He calls for the human rights regime to outlaw the forms of proselytization used in Africa and provide for the protection and mechanisms of redress for forms of proselytization that seek to unfairly assimilate or impose dominant

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[600] Ibid., 105
[601] Ibid., 95.
[602] Ibid., 104. Article 27 of the ICCPR.
[603] Ibid., 96.

cultures on indigenous religions.[604] The corpus' emphasis on the importance of creating and maintaining a diverse society is helpful for proposing change because they might be read as possibility excluding certain modes of evangelization: "Proselytization through force, coercion, or in the context of colonization would appear to be excluded."[605] Mutua argues that the best path forward is through asserting rights to self-determination, which he claims is the most fundamental of all human rights because without it, no other human right could be secured; any right which directly conflicts with this right ought to be void to the extent of that conflict. He asserts that self-determination could be expanded to disallow cultural and religious imperialism especially where the intent of the invading religion is to destroy its indigenous counterparts and seal off the entry or growth of other traditions.[606]

The parallels between colonial Christianity in Africa and aggressive, competitive neo-Pentecostal proselytism in Brazil is obvious. Like Mutua, I am concerned by "those dimensions of messianic religions that claim a right not merely to persuade individuals or groups of peoples of the 'truth' as they see it but rather actively demonize, systematically discredit, and forcibly destroy and eventually replace nonuniversality, noncompetitive indigenous religions."[607] While it may seem to many that forcible destruction and conversion of indigenous religions is mostly over, the Brazilian case demonstrates that proselytism still has a very dark side. And with Jenkins asserting that Africa will be the spiritual center of Christianity within a few decades,[608] I cannot help but wonder what will happen to the remaining indigenous religions, which are already being labeled as witchcraft by Pentecostals and other Christians. He also warns that Christianity may find itself increasingly embroiled in conflict with Islam, and even Hinduism and Buddhism. Interestingly, in addition to deprivatized Christianity, the type of Islam that is gaining traction tends to be public-facing, fervent, and "fundamentalist" (as Jenkins says), while

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[604] Ibid., 111.
[605] Ibid., 108.
[606] Ibid., 108.
[607] Ibid., 110.
[608] Jenkins, *The New Christendom*.

contemporary Hinduism and Buddhism both have their share of partisanship and absolutism. As proselytizing religions like Christianity and Islam fulfill their missionary mandates, governments around the world and the human rights regime are going to find upholding religious freedom increasingly fraught with challenges.

Toward a Model for Conflict

In Brazil, we can study how global trends like the deprivatization of religion, the religionization of politics, and apocalypticism play out on the ground. The Brazilian case is also illuminating for examining broader regional and global trends and makes for an interesting comparison to the U.S., Europe, and Africa. Elements of the Brazilian Pentecostal holy war on Candomblé and Umbanda that are useful for reflecting on religious violence and conflict broadly include: literalism, absolutism, and fundamentalism; conspiracism and apocalypticism; an enchanted cosmology and concerns with demons and witchcraft; and challenges to secularism, modernity, and globalism. We might also add that the use of modern technology, especially social media, not only advertise but also demonize enemies and foment division is a crucial feature of religious militancy in the contemporary global era. Admittedly, many of these traits are often used to describe new religious movements. While it would certainly be unfair to associate all of these traits with new religions in general, it is worth continuing to analyze and theorize about the subset or religions that do display these traits, and under what contexts.

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Appendix A: The Efficacy of Cura Divina

The promise of a framework for understanding and overcoming suffering is a main appeal of both Pentecostalism and the Afro-Brazilian religions. A fascinating but immensely complicated question that chapter two dances around is: how does the divine cure work? How does faith healing work in general, and in each of these specific contexts? Millions of people around the world are convinced that their faith and the healing practices of their religion have healed them. Pentecostal growth is partly due to countless testimonies of the efficacy of divine healing by the grace of God. Success stories include miraculous recovery from life-threatening illnesses. Afro-Brazilian mediums cite initiation rites and possession rituals as causing healing and immense transformation. Of course, for many, life conditions and physical ailments never improve, but faith in the healing practices remain for many. This essay is an exercise considers, briefly, how divine healing works, using a survey of existing scholarly approaches.

Fields that have attempted to examine questions surrounding faith healing efficacy include psychology, anthropology, medicine, medical anthropology, theology, neurobiology, and others. While a comprehensive explanation is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is worth briefly laying some influential arguments from anthropology that have had an impact on religious studies and are fruitful for my work. Two important positions arise in anthropological literature on the body. The first position observes that signs and representations are important for efficacy: the various semiotic elements at play in religious rituals like faith healing help determine whether or not the ritual is "read" by participants as efficacious, emphasizing the impact of social and mental representations on bodily experience. The second position is less concerned with semiotics and more concerned directly with bodily experience, but it maintains that bodily movements and experiences are culturally elaborated. Under this position, belief in faith healing seems to be driven by bodily experience, rather than the other way around.

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss takes the first approach, arguing for the importance of symbols and mental representations. In an oft-cited article, "The Sorcerer and his Magic,"[609] Lévi-Strauss develops a theory for the efficacy of religious healing. He outlines four cases of shamanic or magic healing to show that there are three components of belief involved in healing: the sorcerer believing in his power, the patient's belief in the sorcerer's power, and the belief of the social group in which the sorcerer and patient reside. In the example of Quesalid's transformation into a Shaman, Quesalid comes to understand the importance of symbols for healing. He spits out a worm that represents the illness of the patient, rather than having any literal essence of the illness. As a symbol, the worm is necessary to convince the patient of the efficacy of the healing.

Lévi-Strauss starts us off with the insight that symbols and belief (pertaining both to individuals and the communities that shape them) matter for religious healing, emphasizing the connection between the social, the mind, and the body. I am highly concerned with the power of ideas and beliefs and agree that, to simplify Lévi-Strauss's ideas, healing works at least partly because the participants believe it works, and because their semiotic ideologies (a la Webb Keane) place divine healing in the realm of everyday possibility.[610] But his work does not attend to the embodied experiences in healing, which I think are key for putting and maintaining healing in the realm of possibility. The physical sensations that people experience during healing ritual are partly why they believe, if belief might create the sensations.

Thomas J. Csordas seeks to complement "anthropology of the body" literature with an approach concerned with the phenomenology of bodily experience.[611] For Csordas, anthropology of the body, which includes the ideas of foundational theorists like Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, reads the body as text

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[609] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and his Magic," *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology*, (1963): 129-137.
[610] There are numerous others who expand on the role of symbols and collective representations in ritual efficacy, including Webb Keane in *Christian Moderns*.
[611] Thomas J. Csordas, "Somatic Modes of Attention," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (1993): 135–56.

and thus tends to see the body as an object of study. Contrastingly, the phenomenological or embodiment approach takes the "lived body" or the body as "being-in-the-world" as the methodological starting point. Csordas develops the concept of "somatic modes of attention" to tie bodily perception to collective practice. Somatic modes of attention are "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others."[612] Basically, bodily sensations have cultural meanings, and individuals unconsciously (and perhaps consciously) attend to sensations imbued with cultural significance. Class and other types of habitus shape somatic modes of attention.

Csordas examines Catholic healing rituals like anointment with a focus on the somatic experience of the healer. For example, the healer might feel lightness or heaviness, tingling, heat, trembling or vibration, all of which are indicators that the healing will work. It is important for the supplicants and especially for the healers that the healing feel authentic, and Csordas describes Catholic healers as making this determination based on bodily experience. The healer may feel the appropriate sensations when approaching some patients and not others, and they interpret this as divine will that some will be healed that day and others will not.

Earlier work from Csordas in medical anthropology complements his embodiment approach discussed above. [613] Looking at Catholic Pentecostals again but focusing on spiritual/behavioral healing instead of physical healing, he examines healing as a discourse. This discourse is both religious and psychiatric and is shaped by culture. The discourse performs three essential persuasive tasks resulting in the patient's perception that he is healed, which are as follows: "to create a *predisposition* to be healed, to create the experience of spiritual *empowerment*, and to create the concrete perception of personal *transformation*." [614] Csordas finds that this threefold process activates and controls healing processes

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[612] Ibid., 138.
[613] Thomas J. Csordas, "The Rhetoric of Transformation in Ritual Healing," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 7, no. 4 (1983): 333-375.
[614] Ibid., 333.

endogenous–internal–to the supplicant, and either redirects the supplicant's attention toward new aspects of his actions and experiences, or alters the manner in which he attends to accustomed aspects of those actions and experiences.[615] The result is the creation of both a new phenomenological world, and new self-meaning for the supplicant as a whole and holy person.

In the first (but later) piece by Csordas, the physical sensations experienced in Catholic healing rituals are the starting point for analysis. The bodily experiences are attended to as a basis for determining whether healing is authentic. Basically, meaning is made of sensorial experiences that are imbued with cultural importance. Csordas does not address where the sensorial experiences come from in the first place, but his quick reference to habitus is a good start. In the second (earlier) piece, healing is a discourse that essentially primes the supplicant to cultivate inner processes that lead him to perceive, through sensorial experiences, that he has been healed. Both works build on but surpass Lévi-Strauss by focusing on phenomenological experiences *in addition to* cultural representations and belief. Csordas sheds light on how experiences matter for participants' perception of the efficacy of healing and vice versa.

With respect to the specific religious groups under study, Seligman's scholarship on the notion of healing as a transformation of self is illuminating. [616] Drawing on the work of Csordas discussed above, Seligman argues that Umbanda's medium initiation ritual "works" by deconstructing, transforming, and reconstructing the self, turning attention away from old suffering and towards new elements of experience. Then, in a fascinating chapter that looks at the psychophysiological elements involved in possession/healing, Seligman brings in physiology and human biology.[617] She finds that not only do Candomblé mediums attend to culturally-meaningful sensations like heaviness at the onset of trance, but

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[615] Ibid.
[616] Seligman, "The Unmaking and Making of Self."
[617] Rebecca Seligman, "'Bio-Looping' and the Psychophysiological in Religious Belief and Practice: Mechanisms of Embodiment in Candomblé Trance and Possession," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Biology and Society*, ed. Maurizio Meloni et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), 417–39.

they also share a distinctive pattern of autonomic nervous system activity associated with their ritual performance. And compared to non-medium initiates (practitioners lower in the religious hierarchy), they show a distinct pattern of heart rate regulation. This suggests a link between the bodily transformations associated with and learned through mediumship and the psychophysiological function of mediums. Her conclusion is that there is a "bio-looping effect": biology is implicated in processes of embodiment because "cultural and social meanings and practices shape bodily states and the qualities of individual bodies, which in turn shape processes of cultural and social learning and uptake."[618]

Seligman's research richly demonstrates that ritual efficacy is not just produced in believers' minds or even in their attention to bodily sensations. For Candomblé mediums, possession is something learned. Bodies change. Cultural scripts help mediums attend to but also cultivate certain somatic experiences, and then the somatic experiences help bring about and shape the possession ritual. More possession rituals help cultivate the experiences, and so on. What remains to be explained is how mind and body connect. If healing works through a placebo effect, how does the mind cause observable biological changes to the body?

Numerous scholars in medicine and psychiatry have taken up this question, but Sidney Greenfield examines this question regarding Brazilian religion specifically, using a cultural biology approach. [619] Greenfield begins by addressing religious conversion, taking a market approach similar to Chesnut's. He reviews beliefs and practices pertaining to healing across Brazil's popular religions and concludes, "Competitors interrelate with each other as competitors for the same pool of potential worshippers. It is within this marketplace, characterized by reciprocity, that religious groups offer the help of their supernatural(s) in exchange for affiliation and devotion from those who shop for assistance."[620] I still take

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[618] Ibid.
[619] Sidney M. Greenfield, *Spirits with Scalpels: The Cultural Biology of Religious Healing in Brazil* (Left Coast Press, 2008).
[620] Ibid., 18.

issue with this kind of approach because I think it glosses over cultural, familial, and other reasons for conversion and it also paints Brazil as uniquely plagued by illness. That said, a market approach captures the competitive nature of religions and the instrumental reasons for conversion for many Brazilians.

But the most interesting part of Greenfield's work comes in his explanation of how/why healing actually works for many people. Drawing on work in psychology and biology, Greenfield proposes the following explanation:

> Aspects of culture, such as the belief in what may cause and cure human suffering, viewed as information, may enter, as do suggestions made to an individual by a therapist, and flow, moving through the psyche to other bodily systems to the level of the molecules and cells. Beliefs about what spirits and other forms of the supernatural can accomplish may then turn on a specific category of genes to make amino acids that activate the endorphins, the body's own painkillers, or the immune system, contributing to the improvement of the patient and leading to recovery. [Further], what anthropologists report as trance is comparable to hypnosis and […] when a person is in such a state that the information content of suggestions – psychological or cultural – is most effectively transduced to turn on genes, molecules, cells, and bodily systems that aid in healing… The healing rituals of diverse groups include a preliminary phase during which those who recover may enter an altered state of consciousness (ASC), during which the belief in spirits or other supernatural(s) stimulates bodily reactions leading to the cures reported. These are the people who convert. Those who do not enter an ASC and are not cured culturalbiologically are those who continue their quest in the religious marketplace."[621]

Greenfield gives a lot of non-specific, fairly non-scientific description here ("suggestions flow through the psyche through molecules."). However, his theory is not all that different from recent theorizing about epigenetics. Geneticists are increasingly finding that environment, experience, emotion, and even belief act on genes, activating or suppressing gene expressions. In fact, the placebo effect might be an epigenetic phenomenon.

The paradox of faith healing is that one must believe for it to work, and it has to work to really believe–at least that is how it seems to an outsider like me. But Pentecostals witness miracles every day,

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[621] Ibid., 18.

and they hear countless testimonies. So do Candomblé and Umbanda practitioners. Evaluating the way that Pentecostals and Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners are primed to be predisposed to healing and undergo personal transformation, shifting attention to new aspects of experience and away from previous suffering, might be fruitful. Evaluating the role of symbols (in a Levi-Strauss fashion) in creating predispositions to be healed serves as one possible avenue for analysis. Specifically, the symbols of demons as causes for injuries and evil resonate with Brazilian Pentecostals because Brazilian society is highly enchanted. All Brazilian Pentecostals are familiar with Candomblé and Umbanda, and the figures of orixás and exus are highly salient: their role as symbols of evil to be exorcised seems to be particularly important in exorcism's function as healing–in the Brazilian context. The spirits labeled as demons and exorcised by Pentecostals in different geographic regions are adopted from different local religious neighbors. This points to the importance of the symbols used in exorcism/healing.

This is a very preliminary, surface-level, but also thought-provoking overview. It is worth considering how, in the groups that I study, the healers and the patients believe in the healing power of the rituals, and how the social group reinforces this belief (pointing to the role of groupthink and the communal construction and reinforcement of semiotic ideology). Further, it might be fruitful to examine how the healers manipulate symbols to convince the patients of the healing. These considerations mark a point of departure for future research.