

PART II

Community, Religious Habitus,
and the Senses

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4. Faith Full: Sensuous Habitus, Everyday Affect, and Divergent Diaspora in the UCKG

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I felt something inside of me telling me to do it. It feels right.

—Author's field notes, anonymous interviewee, March 2014

Q: What do you mean it came from here? [places hand on chest]

A: You know, it's a feeling, like a sensation.

—Author's field notes, interview, April 24, 2014

Collecting empirical data on religious influence is near impossible. However, in 2014 I humbly embarked on this task, initially looking for religious influence by studying religious ideology and texts. I took notes on church sermons. I collected observations on religious identities and ritual practices among Afro-Brazilian Catholics, Neo-Pentecostals, and Candomblé devotees.¹ The information was useful; however, I felt that some core dimension of religious influence and experience was missing. Finally, I began asking adherents directly, through semistructured interviews, what influenced them. I focused on understanding how religious beliefs aid adherents in making important or difficult decisions. I immediately noticed a trend in answers across the religious groups, exemplified by the transcriptions at the start of this chapter.

This chapter is an inquiry into how feelings and sensations guide religious adherents through perilous moral terrain and shape adherents' sense of self. Drawing on data from a 2014 field study examining the diverse religious

experiences of Afro-Brazilians in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, this chapter asks how Neo-Pentecostal “sensational form” and sensuous habitus, or dispositions, impact the individual and collective religious experiences of racialized religious bodies (Klaver and Kamp 2011, 422).² I assert that sensing faith is part of affective racialized experiences, and while scholars of critical affective theories have noted that race and racism are constituted through everyday affect and feeling (Ahmed 2005, 2012; Zembylas 2014), few have considered the affective intersection of religious and racial identity and experience (Crawley 2016). As a result, this chapter attempts to bring critical affect theory into conversation with Black religious studies.

In this chapter I explore how the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG; Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus) sustains a sensuous habitus that supports individualist and neoliberal goals, including preparing adherents to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I highlight the importance of connection and disconnection in Neo-Pentecostal sensuous relationality and then draw parallels between how UCKG sessions feel and how religious identities are crafted, specifically in the case of Afro-Brazilian members of the UCKG and their corresponding discourses and ideologies of race.

Neo-Pentecostalism: Expansions and Contentions

In 1977 a charismatic Brazilian preached his first UCKG sermon out of an old funeral parlor in Rio de Janeiro (Lima 2008). At that point, the UCKG was a new religious institution headed by two local preachers. However, Edir Macedo and his brother-in-law would eventually expand the influence of the UCKG, building more than six thousand temples in every state of Brazil, opening churches in over two hundred countries, and acquiring the second-largest media company in the nation (Gonçalves da Silva 2007; Lima 2008, 13).

The UCKG is part of the third wave of Pentecostal influence in Brazil, also referred to as Neo-Pentecostalism.³ The Neo-Pentecostal wave, which took off in the 1970s, coincided with urbanization trends in Brazil. Neo-Pentecostalism has the fastest rate of growth of any religious movement in Brazil since the spread of Catholicism through colonization (Chestnut 2003). Neo-Pentecostal expansion has largely converted poor and Afro-Brazilian populations. Of the many Neo-Pentecostal churches that have been acquiring converts since the 1970s, the UCKG is the richest and the second largest; it comprises primarily Afro-Brazilian women (Chestnut 2003; Rabelo, Ribeiro Mota, and Roberto Almeida 2009, 5).⁴

Defining aspects of Neo-Pentecostalism include ecstatic religious experiences, belief in receiving the Holy Spirit, medical miracles, baptisms, speaking in tongues, tithing, and prosperity theology.⁵ In particular, Neo-Pentecostalism is differentiated from preceding Pentecostal waves by its moderate asceticism, business rhetoric, use of media, and emphasis on a spiritual war being fought between believers (*crentes*) and the Devil. Traditional Afro-Brazilian religions have become a primary discursive and religious enemy in this spiritual battle (Gonçalves da Silva 2007, 208). Catholicism, still the most popular religion in Brazil, is often regarded by the UCKG with indifference or shame. The UCKG leadership has blamed Catholicism for allowing syncretic traditions to develop in Brazil, which some see as a result of Catholic idolatry or saint worship, overshadowing the supremacy of Jesus Christ (Chestnut 2003; Selka 2007).⁶ The spiritual war between the UCKG and Afro-Brazilian religions has recently intensified, resulting in increased violence against Afro-Brazilian religious devotees and their places of worship (Gonçalves da Silva 2007). Some scholars argue that it is the similarities and not the differences between Neo-Pentecostal rituals and Brazil's preexisting ecstatic traditions that fuel the UCKG's derogatory stance and discourse (Chestnut 2003; Gonçalves da Silva 2007, 208).⁷ Many of the affective aspects of Neo-Pentecostal rituals resemble Afro-Brazilian religions and provide services that Afro-Brazilian religions traditionally offered, such as ritual healings, direct access to spirit, and affective ceremonies (Chestnut 2003; Gonçalves da Silva 2007; Rabelo, Ribeiro Mota, and Roberto Almeida 2009). Violent acts like the looting of Afro-Brazilian religious temples can be read as a physical and symbolic demarcation between practices that could otherwise be seen as similar in function and in target populations (working-class Afro-Brazilian women). Ironically, fervent Neo-Pentecostal opposition to traditional African beliefs and practices like Edir Macedo's first book, *Orixás, caboclos e guias: Deuses ou demônios?* (*Orixás, caboclos, and guides: gods or demons?* [1985]), seem to inadvertently affirm that Afro-Brazilian religions remain powerful and influential in many Brazilians' lives (Comaroff 2012, 50).

Contemporary studies of the spread of Pentecostalism have begun highlighting the role of the senses in religious conversions and experiences of faith, especially in the Global South (Brahinsky 2012; Klaver and Kamp 2011; Rabelo, Ribeiro Mota, and Roberto Almeida 2009; Witte 2011). Analyses of how adherents feel sacred and divine presence both in and through their bodies have highlighted issues of subjectivity and relationality in religion and religious persons' experiences (Brahinsky 2012; Klaver and Kamp 2011; Rabelo, Ribeiro Mota, and Roberto Almeida 2009; Witte 2011). Affective aspects of Pentecostal and

Neo-Pentecostal religious rituals have been described as “creat[ing] a space totally filled by divine presence, a wave of power that spreads and leaves not a soul untouched. But this is also a power that multiplies and individualizes itself, making each body a dwelling” (Rabelo, Ribeiro Mota, and Roberto Almeida 2009, 1). The movement of spiritual influence through multiple individual bodies, as Miriam Rabelo, Sueli Ribeiro Mota, and Cláudio Roberto Almeida (2009, 1) point out, is a defining aspect of group religious experience and its corresponding identity politic. The UCKG is a large religious institution (some argue it functions as a business even) whose influence spans from national politics to local community initiatives (Comaroff 2012, 55; Gonçalves da Silva 2007, 215).⁸ As such, UCKG adherents are both the subject and the target of institutional power relations working both on and within the body (Foucault 1977). Studies of embodiment and analyses of sense cultivation continue to bring into focus issues of relationality and the semiotic relationships among people, concepts, and the material and spiritual realms; however, the relationship between race and religion needs to be incorporated into the growing literature on feeling and the senses as well (Beliso-De Jesús 2015; Rabelo, Ribeiro Mota, and Roberto Almeida 2009, 2).

Feeling, the Senses, and the Body

Feeling throughout this chapter refers to physical sensations dependent on the senses that can be experienced on the body (tactile or felt on the skin), as well as sensations felt in the body through the internal organs (e.g., when one’s heart is racing), and the cognitive process of knowing that one has a feeling (Miller-McLemore 2014, 690). The senses, which often inform feelings, consist of seven modes of stimuli perception, six of which are linked to specific body parts: sight (eyes), sound (ear), touch (skin), taste (tongue), smell (nose), and motion and balance (inner ear canal); the seventh is unconscious or subconscious perception or intuition (Drewal 2005, 3). However, the senses and the sensations they produce do more than alert individuals to physical stimuli; they act as tools for perception and comprehension. That is, they help people make sense of their physical, emotional, and spiritual worlds (Beliso-De Jesús 2015; Stoller 1989). Contemporary studies of the senses have convincingly argued that our senses are culturally produced. Analyses of sense perception in the Global South have also highlighted that knowledge production, which relies on the senses, must also be culturally constructed (Beliso-De Jesús 2015; Drewal 2005; Geurts 2002; Miller-McLemore 2014; Stoller 1989). The study of non-Western communities and their cultures of perception highlights alternative

modes of knowledge and discernment, also known as “indigenous hermeneutics” (Adebanwi et al. 2014, 461).⁹ While seeing and hearing may be the basis of Western scientific observation and knowledge production (“see what I mean”), the tactile, olfactory, and gustatory senses can be preferred modes of perception, producing culturally specific forms of knowing in which it would perhaps make more sense to discern comprehension by asking, “You smell me?” In religious research, feeling represents a form of knowing and perception that can be difficult to describe yet particularly salient for discerning esoteric and unknowable matters—matters that require faith or blind conviction (Miller-McLemore 2014, 698).

In this chapter I attempt to portray how UCKG adherents’ bodies are disciplined, felt, and observed relationally through the senses. I ground this exploration of the senses in anthropological studies of religious embodiment linking culture to the body, the senses, and consciousness.

Each culture imbues the body with numerous meanings, which serve as both maps and repertoires for individual experience and expression. This meaning, however, is not merely a cognitive or symbolic overlay. Rather, comparable to how the music of an etude becomes part of the “ways of the hand” (Sudnow 1978) through ritual practice, social meanings become physically embodied. If we accept Bourdieu’s thesis about embodiment and social practices, then we can understand how senses—not only moral senses but also religious senses—can be acquired and embedded in our bodily experience. (McGuire 2016, 155)

Not only are the senses at the center of comprehending bodily experience, but the senses can also alter bodily awareness. Studying the Egyptian Islamic Revival, anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2001, 213–214) goes so far as to argue that embodied dispositions, or *habitus*, are capable of reorganizing and re-normalizing consciousness, the will, and desires. Mahmood likens *habitus* to the Arabic word for religious habit making, or *malaka*, and cites Egyptian Muslim women who teach themselves to become modest and to desire modesty through the consistent practice of veiling as an example. According to Mahmood (2001, 216), religious practices are not solely enacted through the body; they re-form the body by targeting adherents’ desires. Religion therefore targets the body, the mind, and the senses. Integrating psychology with anthropology to comprehend religious influence, Steven Parish’s (1994) examination of the stimulation of moral consciousness through Hindu prayer demonstrates that religious practices can be generated through conscious exercises that can (attempt to) change an adherent’s consciousness from the inside out. Religious rituals can

no longer be described as merely embodied repetitive practices meant to express particular religious symbols or ideals; religious rituals are also capable of reconstituting the interior self through body discipline and sensuous habitus (Mahmood 2001; Parish 1994).

Affect, Race, and Religious Identities

Scholars studying identity have noted that religious affiliations are an important part of social identity making that intertwines with other identity influencers like nationality, gender, race, and ethnic background (Goffman, Branaman, and Lemert 1997; Misra 2011). Researchers have also suggested that the relationship between Neo-Pentecostalism and race is shaped by Neo-Pentecostal discourse and ideology centered on individualist and universalist interests. These interests, they argue, often undermine the formation of ethnic group identity (Burdick 1999; Selka 2005). Quantitative studies have shown that Neo-Pentecostal religious affiliations most often correspond with Christian expressions of identity, while race is seen as a less immanent form of self-identification (Driskell, Embry, and Lyon 2008).

In Brazil race-based political and social consciousness have been closely tied to the development of Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions that symbolize, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, the rejection of slavery, Christianity, heteronormativity, patriarchy, Eurocentricism, middle-class values, and corresponding sensibilities (Bastide and Sebba 2007; de Santana Pinho 2010; Landes 1947). Throughout the twentieth century, Black political organizations advanced the notion of Afro-Brazilians as Black (*negra*), as opposed to brown (*parda*) or mixed (*mulata*), emphasizing a “common oppressor over the last three hundred years in Africa and the Americas, and Africa as a place of common origin” (Selka 2007, 30). The establishment of Afro-Brazilian political and cultural groups in Salvador da Bahia overlapped with the beginnings of Afro-Brazilian cultural commoditization, creating a stronger symbolic connection between Candomblé and Salvador as sites of “authentic” Black Afro-Brazilian identity (Collins 2011; de Santana Pinho 2010; Selka 2005, 2007; Williamson 2012). Despite these forceful connections between Candomblé and Black religious identities, recent ethnographies of religion in Salvador have shown that some self-described Afro-Brazilian evangelicals are pushing for stronger connections between Black and Neo-Pentecostal identities (Burdick 1999; Selka 2007).

Nevertheless, in an era of Neo-Pentecostal expansion, institutions such as the UCKG and their continuous condemnation of traditional African faiths and

cultures seem to make it difficult to reconcile Afro-Brazilian racial identity with Neo-Pentecostal ideology. Through an affective lens, however, racial categories can be reexamined according to the “relational construction of identities, in the forces created between people rather than in fixed social categories” (Tolia-Kelly and Crang 2010, 2309; see also Zembylas 2014). In other words, Afro-Brazilian or Black identities in Brazil may be forged through feelings and everyday sensuous experiences that hinge on relational differentiation between faithful/faith-filled bodies (Ahmed 2005; Zembylas 2014). Rethinking race as a technology of affect is a useful method for deconstructing Black ethnic subjectivities (de Santana Pinho 2010), especially in a society where fluid color identification is often preferred and encouraged over a fixed racial binary between Black and White.

Because religion is a consciously crafted site of sensuous experience, Afro-Brazilian Neo-Pentecostals may arguably feel differently about their racial identity in relation to Afro-Brazilians of other faiths. Approaching race as neither biologically nor ideologically constructed but as an affective technology allows space for considering how differentiation is felt and performed among Afro-Brazilian devotees of different faiths, resulting in what I later describe as a divergent diaspora. However, before remarking on the relationship between the UCKG sensuous habitus and Black racial identity, we must consider how ideology informs religious affect and the religious environment.

Neoliberalism, Individualist Discourses, and Drug Narratives

Much of the scholarship on Neo-Pentecostalism has highlighted that populations throughout Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, in particular, are drawn to the movement’s individualist ideology and its media-savvy brand of neoliberal ethics (Chestnut 2003; Comaroff 2012). By *neoliberal ethics*, I mean “a philosophy in which . . . the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs.”¹⁰ Neoliberalism encourages market privatization, which emphasizes individualist ideology and entrepreneurial autonomy. Individualist ideology has been described as a social and political idea promoting self-reliance and self-motivation. According to sociologists of religion Marylee Taylor and Stephen Merino (2011, 75), those prone to individualist arguments stress individual responsibility and are less likely to support social policies aimed at bolstering equality.

In interviews, I found individualist rhetoric to be prevalent, especially in narratives concerning why people had converted to the UCKG. Twenty-one out

of thirty UCKG men referenced having once been users or sellers of drugs before converting to the UCKG. The frequency of ex-drug narratives suggests that drug rehabilitation is not just a crucial part of UCKG members' social initiatives and religious experience but also an essential part of how the UCKG acquires members. The following are typical conversion narratives shared with me at the UCKG:

When I arrived, I was a drug addict, I couldn't find contentment in my personal life with anyone, and no one believed in me. For a lot of people, I was a lost case. When I arrived at the UCKG, I met someone who helped me a lot. He was a pastor of the, of the church, and was like a father to me. And *I began to fight*, I dedicated myself to the church. . . . I was able to *free myself* of the vices from the life I lived on the wrong side. The majority of, of the guys that I hung out with in that life, the wrong life, when I was [*pause*] in the criminal world, a lot of them aren't around anymore. They're dead. And I believe that I too, if I hadn't come to the church, would also be dead. (Pastor Paulo, 2013; author's emphasis)

I was eleven years old when I left home. I used drugs because my family fought a lot. I was also very rebellious and anxious [*nervosa*]. At fourteen years of age, I came into the UCKG, and a pastor there told me, "There's a solution for everything." I began to see that the life of drugs and crime wasn't worth it. I became calmer. (Pastor Gabriel, 2014)

Look at the work that is done in this church. The UCKG is—outside of Brazil and here in Brazil—important. Why? It's a resuscitation of our youth. They are looking—they come here thinking that they will find support, and, honestly, they find love and daily comfort here. And they find a peace that they don't find outside because many of them are troubled. Força Jovem has a beautiful work doing what? Rescuing Christian youth who are addicted to drugs, who don't have any hope or perspective on life. (Débora, 2014)

Drug rehabilitation services are an integral part of UCKG community work and serve as a visible reminder that the UCKG offers support to community members (like free drug rehabilitation programs) that the Brazilian state has not or cannot manage through social services. A noted feature of neoliberalism in societies is the powerful discourse that moving away from state-run facilities toward private-sector maintenance of public services and contracts will better serve the public. Examples include the privatization of public schools (for example, charter schools) and formerly government-run utility compa-

nies, as well as, in this case, support for nonpublic medical services, such as local drug rehabilitation centers. The UCKG is therefore encouraging a neoliberal ethic by urging its adherents, both discursively and through its community presence, to stop relying on local government for support with local and (inter)personal issues; instead, one should manage one's problems alone with support from the church. Interviews showed that many adherents internalized these neoliberal inflected, individualist ideals, restating them in their personal conversion narratives. Furthermore, I found that individualist discourse privileging individual autonomy was often layered with another neoliberal ideal: that people, like markets, should be self-regulating and competitive in order to win. My informants described the benefits of converting to the UCKG accordingly:

Look, financially, because we teach people in the church [*pause*] *how to win financially and not to depend on anyone*. This is the vision that we here pass on to others—to them. That they can, they can, yes, be the head [in charge]. They can be in charge of their own business, *not depending on others*, and that is the vision that we pass on here. That they have potential because there are many people who arrived here at the bottom, people who think that there is no way to overcome their problems. *People who are unemployed, people who are underdeveloped*, people thinking about taking their own life because they think that it's the only solution. It's here that we show them that *they are capable*. That *they can win* and that they *need not depend on anyone to win*. It depends on them alone, in their faith. So you see it's—so many people arrive here homeless, today they are good people, people that are *respected in society, have a good quality of life*. So this is what is taught to people. (Pastor Paulo, 2013; author's emphasis)

Q: Do you think that the state and community do not offer help but that the church offers this kind of help for people? Help like with work?

A: Look, there are people [*pause*] who work in the church. There are people who work in the church. But it's the kind of thing where a person arrives here suffering, and *we teach them to win. Win both here and outside*, in the world. Do you understand? Because the Universal Church is the kind of thing, we tell people that misery is [*whispered tone*] a thing of the devil. It's because the Bible says that God came to bring life and life with changes, and that is what we believe in the Universal Church. (Pastor Bruno, 2014; author's emphasis)

Discourses that individuals must self-discipline, win, and self-manage were reiterated among the UCKG, its authorities (pastors), and its adherents; in turn, these individualist and neoliberal values shaped ideas of how to be virtuous, how to speak virtuously, and, returning to the topic of this chapter, how to feel virtuous. As one pastor told me, “It depends on them alone” to gain “respect” and a “good quality of life,” which, according to the core tenets of the UCKG, can be attained only through baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Feeling Inside and Outside the UCKG

The UCKG church I reference throughout this chapter opened its doors approximately twenty years ago directly across from a prominent Candomblé *terreiro* (a Candomblé temple or house of worship) in a working-class neighborhood of Salvador. The historic neighborhood had been a *quilombo*, a maroon community for formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilians. Owing to its prominent role in slave resistance movements, several Candomblé terreiros were established within the neighborhood; over the years, Catholic and other Christian churches began to populate the area as well. The opening of a UCKG there was controversial yet unsurprising. The UCKG had long been engaged in a public campaign to shame Afro-Brazilian religions, and one of its well-known strategies included opening churches across from terreiros in an effort to out Candomblé supporters and devotees who frequented terreiros anonymously (Gonçalves da Silva 2007, 214–215).

The Candomblé *terreiro*, the UCKG, a Catholic church, a Baptist church, another Pentecostal church, a supermarket, a beauty-supply shop, and a luncheonette lined the commercial street. Cars and buses passed in front of the churches throughout the day; some cars parked haphazardly on the sidewalk, forcing pedestrians to walk in the street while looking over their shoulders for oncoming traffic.

The street saw consistent pedestrian traffic: a mix of residents, churchgoers, *povos-de-santo*, and shoppers.¹¹ The only quiet moments in the neighborhood seemed to be early Sunday mornings right before Mass and other religious services began. Most afternoons the sounds of car engines and the smell of exhaust gave the neighborhood a distinctly urban feel. The smell of fried foods hung in the air. There seemed to be a steady stream of chatter between neighbors and shopkeepers throughout the day. There was even a community soundtrack consisting of music from the storefronts, music from people’s homes, and loud bursts of sound from a passing car or motorcycle. There was also an almost-imperceptible murmur coming from small rectangular speakers tied to the community’s lampposts. The music was mostly up-tempo and popular, except

for Sunday mornings, when it switched to love ballads. The competing sounds seemed to permeate both public and private spaces, entering homes and returning to the street; the sounds blended together until they reached the tinted glass doors of the UCKG. The doors, often closed but never locked, had the unique ability to let the sounds of Christian ballads seep out into the street while blocking community sounds from coming in. When I reached the UCKG around midday, I would catch a reflection of the terreiro across the street in the glass doors as I pushed them open.

The UCKG doors acted as both a physical and a sensual barrier blocking out the profane sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of the street. From inside, dramatic religious ballads provided a new soundtrack, resounding off the white walls and down each neat row of white plastic chairs. The holy music, as well as the speakers it came from, hung heavy from the high ceilings. The white, pristine appearance was a sharp visual contrast to the chaos, color, and concrete of the neighborhood outside. In fact, the UCKG's sensuous habitus could be described as deliberately crafted in contrast to the literal and figurative outside world.

During my first participant-observation sessions at the UCKG, I felt a stark difference in the sensuous environment and culture between the UCKG and other public, private, and even Catholic and Candomblé spaces I had frequented in Brazil. The difference was not overtly symbolic, iconographic, or architectural (in the way that Catholic crosses and Candomblé altars tended to draw contrast and characterize a space) but more tonal and sensuous. Many religious spaces stimulate symbolic awareness of the sacred through shared and individual sensuous experience, be it through music, decoration, architecture, scents, proprioception, or ritual movements, including dancing, kneeling, and praying.¹² Shared affective experience reinforces an embodied religious culture, which contributes to notions of religious commonality, community, and a corresponding identity. In the UCKG, however, intentional sensuous disconnections and reconnections between profane, sacred, worldly, and ethereal relations reinforced traits of Neo-Pentecostal ideology and, most strikingly, informed adherent bodies to hold a particular sense of self along with corresponding perceptions of the world.

The first disconnection—what I had instantly felt in the UCKG but could not at first pinpoint—was the removal of children from sessions. Families with small children were greeted at the door by women known as *obreiras* (trained volunteers or workers), who then escorted the children to a back room while the rest of the family found seats in the main hall. I asked an *obreira* why children were removed from the main hall during sessions, and she replied,

“It allows the parents to pray without interruption and connect with the Holy Spirit.” The absence of children affected the sensuous culture in a number of ways. First, the visual presence of children and the vulnerability that children and infants exude in their need for adult support were absent from the space, which visually reinforced the importance of individual autonomy. In addition, the sounds of an otherwise family-centric community were silenced as well; babies crying, children giggling, adults hushing their children, and toddlers’ footsteps were removed and replaced with only the sacred sounds of adults preaching, praying, and singing.

The removal of children from sessions was the first of a series of sensuous disconnections meant to prepare adherents to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Another immediate sensuous disconnection came from body discipline and tacit emphases on avoiding tactility. While public displays of affection were often enacted in public spaces and in both Catholic churches and Candomblé terreiros, holding hands, hugging, or kissing between family members, couples, or friends was avoided in the UCKG. Tactile disconnections reinforced feelings of independence and isolation. Devotees sat in individual white chairs rather than sharing a pew. Some devotees held a Bible in idle hands, but touch was rarely felt or seen in the sessions, including acts as familiar as a mother-child embrace.

There was a gendered logic to this aversion to touch that reinforced the morally conservative aspects of UCKG ideology as well. Even young married couples would stand side by side throughout a session without holding hands or touching one another. On occasion, a pastor would initiate a special prayer for couples, telling them to hold hands and put their free hand up to God in prayer. These exceptional prayers allowed couples to reestablish their tactile connection momentarily, under the tutelage of a pastor, in order to ask God for protection from jealousy and sin.

Disconnections from children and touch in the earlier parts of UCKG sessions reinforced an introspective awareness of discipline and independence through the body. The body and its capacity for sensuous distractions were moderated by tactile disconnections meant to prepare the body for a greater purpose than mundane physical and sensuous associations; it marked the beginning of reforming adherent bodies to become sacred vessels for the Holy Spirit.

The UCKG’s sensuous habitus, its connections and disconnections, was also experienced audibly. Sessions always began with a pastor leading the church in song over a microphone. Some days, an instrumental CD would accompany the singing; other days, devotees would sing a cappella. Although UCKG members sang the same lyrics and melody in unison, a mode of encouraging collective identity through shared sensuous effervescence, UCKG members also sang as if

alone, in their own rhythm and key. That is, there was little effort to maintain a unified or melodious quality to UCKG prayers and songs. Singing in the UCKG felt like a simultaneously individualized and shared sensuous experience.

The sonorous quality of UCKG sessions could be described as a patterned chaos of song, prayer, and preaching expressed through a slowly mounting crescendo. The audible peak consisted of a mix of song and prayer being shouted, cried, whispered, and wailed over other shouting, crying, whispering, and wailing voices. The mix of voices would often become so loud and intense that I could barely hear the pastor's cries over the microphone. The pastors' prayers were accompanied by a staccato refrain of "Amen" and "Yes!" or "No!" The previously disciplined bodies of the adherents were reinvigorated and seemed to react sociably to the sounds and their vibrations. Hands would sometimes accompany prayers and refrains, some gliding slowly from side to side, others frantically waving over a neighbor's head. Some devotees would fall on their knees and begin to weep. Most kept their heads pointed upward and their eyes shut, denying any urge (if it existed) to look around.

As the sessions neared the receiving of the Holy Spirit, the prayers reached an earsplitting volume. At sessions with more than fifteen attendees, the voices yelling over one another made it difficult to focus on any one person; some members' voices seemed to deliberately compete with the intensity of the pastor's prayer and his rhythmic punctuating statements like "Oh Lord!" The intensity of prayer and song would eventually taper off as the pastor transitioned to a quiet sob over the microphone, revealing that a piano instrumental had been playing over the speakers all along. Even with the glass doors closed, passersby on the street could hear the rise and fall of UCKG songs and prayers.

Connections to the Holy Spirit

According to the "What We Believe" section of the UCKG website:

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.

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.

Every prayer, action, and feeling in each session and its corresponding disciplinary, individualist underpinning eventually led to the climactic moments

when adherents would receive the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹³ In the presence of the Holy Spirit, previously gendered tactile barriers were obscured as pastors (only men) touched the heads of both women and men to facilitate connections between devotees and the Holy Spirit. Often a pastor would walk up and down the aisle, shouting fervent prayers and holding one hand high to God, as if absorbing power, while the other hand gripped a microphone. As prayers became increasingly urgent, the pastor would eventually stop walking, look into someone's eyes, and place his palm on their forehead; almost instantaneously, the devotee would shake or pass out, a sign they had received the Holy Spirit. Obreiras also broke gendered tactile boundaries to catch and stabilize adherents on the brink of losing bodily control after receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

While tactile experiences among UCKG members had previously been carefully mitigated and disciplined, in the presence of the Holy Spirit touch became a crucial part of each adherent's connection to spirit, be it through the pastor's hand or through the occasional touching of a red mantle.¹⁴ The sudden shift in the UCKG's attitude toward tactility and touch, and the significance of members' previously idle hands, draws attention to the tenuous relationship between the sacred and the profane (Durkheim 1996). Touch, which previously signified the profane and potentially sinful trappings of the body (gluttony, sex, lack of hygiene, vulgarity, all distractions from the sacred), later became the catalyst for spiritual and embodied renewal. The sensuous disconnections from mundane modes of tactility, heightened by prayerful individualization early on in the sessions, later enabled the body to emerge sanctified and host the power of the Holy Spirit (for more on Pentecostal haptics, see Reinhardt 2014).

The centrality of touch to receiving the Holy Spirit is supported theologically as well. When Paul teaches the disciples about the Holy Spirit, he must touch them to make them receptive to the Holy Spirit:

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hear-

ing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19:1–4, New International Version)

The significance of the tactile sense in highlighting the connections among the body (touching the mantle with your hand), mind (recognizing that touch), and spirit (leading to an altered state of consciousness) is further exemplified in how adherents described connecting with the Holy Spirit. According to a UCKG elder, “[You] sacrifice your body; you cry, you laugh, you pass out. You don’t feel anything.” By heightening sensations in and on the body, adherents access the Holy Spirit and through this sacred connection transcend sensuous and bodily awareness and constraint. Receiving the Holy Spirit is also described as a rebirth or freedom. As one adherent described it, “You wake up a new person.” Personhood (i.e., the body, mind, spirit, and consciousness) is transformed by the Holy Spirit. To understand this process better, rather than explain it in his own words, a pastor referred me to Acts 2:1 of the Bible. The passage reads, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:1, New International Version).

In this passage feeling again arises as a central part of experiencing the Holy Spirit. Moreover, descriptions of the Spirit are sensuous and obscure normative interpretations of the relationship between the body and its corresponding senses. The Holy Spirit is described as appearing to the men as fiery tongues, an organ traditionally linked to the gustatory and not the visual sense. The fiery tongues then rest on the men, triggering a vulgar conflation of tactile with gustatory functions. Thereafter, the men become “filled” with the Holy Spirit. Upon being filled by the Spirit, the men begin speaking other languages or “tongues,” signifying that the Spirit can also penetrate new domains of consciousness.

Not only does the Holy Spirit reorganize the body and its previous modes of sensuous experience (seeing, hearing, feeling, knowing), but once the body has accepted the Holy Spirit, it becomes a vessel for spiritual fulfillment and renewal “enabled” by the Holy Spirit to do things that previously could not be done.

Disconnections and Divergent Diasporas

In this chapter I have attempted to describe how a sensuous habitus acts as a link between ideological and embodied religious experience, shaping modes of perception that both inform and reform the body. My findings suggest that feelings of disconnection experienced during UCKG sessions reaffirm individual autonomy and self-discipline within and between adherents, while feelings of reconnection, enabled by receiving the Holy Spirit, signified the potential for new sanctified relationships within and between adherents.

The removal of children and other tactile distractions, the independent quality of group prayer, and the strategic use of touch to initiate sacred connections to the Holy Spirit constitute an important part of the sensuous habitus that distinguishes UCKG religious meetings from those of other religious communities. Constant reiteration of a sensuous habitus reinforces shared experiences and binds religious adherents in order to fortify group identity politics. Devotees “are made to feel coherently collective” through the time and space they spend in church (Freeman 2010, 8). Maintaining religious identities requires consistent embodying of a particular habitus, of which feeling is an integral part; adherents have to “learn to make the appropriate bodily gestures and facial expressions during religious ceremonies [and] acquire the proper . . . quality of voice for speaking and singing in church or *terreiro*” (Selka 2007, 125), and these embodied and sensuous dispositions are scrutinized openly and implicitly by religious leaders, church members, adherents’ own consciences, and, of course, the divine gaze. The UCKG’s sensuous habitus serves as an interior and exterior signifier of the UCKG’s religious identity, much like the individualist and neoliberal rhetoric of the UCKG’s converts.

While UCKG adherents recognize touch as a catalyst to being filled with the Holy Spirit, avoiding tactile intimacy beforehand reinforces each adherent’s personal and individualized path to the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, in the UCKG, the loud, dissonant sounds of prayers and songs build a collective emotional and sensuous charge that prepares everyone for the ecstatic ritual of receiving the Holy Spirit. Group identity is informed and affirmed through shared sensuous awareness and a culture of senses produced and reiterated by embodied and ritual practices. Thus, returning to the question of how UCKG devotees assert both a Black and Neo-Pentecostal identity, I argue that these conflicting ideologies are reconciled through the sensuous habitus and affective ideology. For instance, an obreira who proudly self-identifies as *negra* explained her identity to me as follows: “I am Black, but I am baptized in the Holy Spirit and a daughter of God.” The *but* in this statement suggests that she is aware that there is a

symbolic disconnect between Black identities and Christian identities and that Blackness perhaps does not naturally align with Neo-Pentecostal ideals, but she also asserts that Neo-Pentecostalism is (1) a choice that Blacks can make that (2) is primarily affirmed through baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

The tensions between race and religious identities and the element of choice that the obreira's "but" highlights were also reinforced discursively through church sermons. For example, a UCKG pastor once remarked during a sermon, "God is negotiating with the devil for our souls. You know the bishop [Edir Macedo] recently went to Angola, to one of the slave ports—you know, where the slaves left from before they came to know Brazil—and he prayed there. He prayed against all the afflictions [*maldições*] that they brought to Brazil." These racial discourses point to an emergent and divergent African diaspora hinging on a temporal shift in racial discourse and politics; the Neo-Pentecostal divergent African diaspora acknowledges its past, in particular, enslavement and the "afflictions" of enslaved ancestors ("I'm Black"); however, it emphatically pronounces its divergence ("but!") by foregrounding one's choice to be baptized and experience a burgeoning future of receiving the Holy Spirit.

The importance of Afro-Brazilians' choice to be Black but children of God is reverberating throughout the public spheres of Brazil as well. In 2012 thirteen evangelical high school students refused to do a school assignment entitled "The Preservation of Ethno-Cultural Brazilian Identity," stating that Afro-Brazilian history promotes sympathy toward "satanism" and "homosexuality." Instead, they submitted a project on contemporary Christian missions in Africa.¹⁵

Patricia de Santana Pinho's (2010) study of African diasporic identity making in Bahia encourages scholars to take note of the distinct and contextualized "trajectories traced since slave times to this day" (97). To avoid essentializing Black ethnic identities, studies of Blackness should capture and reflect the "location, space, and time they inhabit" (de Santana Pinho 2010, 97). Within the UCKG, I found that there is space to affirm a Black Neo-Pentecostal identity; however, it is not through the privileged contemporary sociopolitical modes such as condemnation of anti-African sentiment or antiracist activism. Instead, what I refer to as the divergent diaspora reframes Africa and its diaspora according to a globalized affective movement looking to proselytize and sanctify Black bodies through the Holy Spirit. I refer to this Black subjectivity as "divergent" in order to emphasize the relationship between choice, affect, and Neo-Pentecostal identity making which is described by the anthropologist Jean Comaroff as ontologically divergent from modern Western notions of self:

A host of born-again believers across the world choose to suspend “free” choice and when convicted by divine authority, manifesting a form of self-hood somewhat different from the deliberate Kantian subject that many see as basic to modern rationalism . . . [I]t may be argued that these idealized selves have had only uneven purchase beyond the West. . . . [T]he born again faiths that flourish across the non-European world at present resonate with local ontologies and senses of being, orientations that defy the dualistic categories of liberal modern orthodoxy. (Comaroff 2012, 44)

Choice is, however, only the first step toward remaking oneself as Black but a child of God. To complete the process, one must be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. For instance, the same obreira who described herself as “negra but” also remarked, “We [obreiras] received the Holy Spirit, that is, the true spirit of God, to strengthen us and to pass these changes [*mudanças*] on to others.” The “changes” that obreiras pass on are, therefore, bound to the ability to receive the Holy Spirit independently. Receiving the Holy Spirit is a carefully crafted sensuous and transformative experience, as previously described, and it, according to this young woman, allows obreiras to transform others both spiritually and racially. Black racial identities are thus felt, formed, and passed on through relational connections to obreiras and the greater spiritual community, reaching full realization through baptism in the Holy Spirit. What emerges from this analysis of the divergent diaspora is an affective, relational assemblage of Black bodies disconnecting from their African past and afflicted bodily entrapments to be filled with the Holy Spirit and remade in mind, body, spirit, and (racial) consciousness.

Conclusions: Connections and Disconnections

Q: How does it feel when you receive the Holy Spirit?

A: [*exasperated sigh*] You’ll know it when you feel it.

Author’s field notes, interview, May 2014

Blackness and the African diaspora are often defined by politics of heritage and shared struggles stemming from colonialism and enslavement (Burdick 1999; de Santana Pinho 2010; Selka 2007). Afro-Brazilian UCKG members, however, are forcefully disassociating from these popular discourses of Blackness and Black identity. From the UCKG perspective, Africa’s past is demonic, sick, and most certainly not Christian. Instead, self-identified Black UCKG adherents advance a divergent Black subjectivity, one that shares a present and future in

their collective decision to be proselytized through baptism and the Holy Spirit, or filled by faith. The explosive growth of evangelical Christianity, including the UCKG on the African continent, highlights the globalized appeal of a “media-savvy, emotionally hyped, frankly materialistic brand of faith” and the corresponding “force of divine destiny in human affairs” (Comaroff 2012, 42–45). Using an affective lens, it is clear that a divergent diaspora emerges through the strong desire of Black religious devotees around the world (many of whom are converts) to break from fixed notions of a shared African past and redefine Blackness according to modern, universal, and consumerist sensibilities.

As this volume on religious embodiment makes clear, Black religious bodies continue to be the sites through which racial boundaries and their symbolic meanings are negotiated. Receptive bodies’ sensuous disconnections from familial and profane bonds (in this case, representative of a shared African past) allow for a direct and redemptive connection to the Holy Spirit; Black bodies surrender to the Holy Spirit and have a renewed perception of and connection to the world through a decidedly individualist and neoliberal religious experience and racial identity. Deep feelings of peace, renewal, and satisfaction following the receiving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are as far-reaching as the diaspora; feelings stay with adherents long after they leave the church and the scrutiny of their religious community and its leaders. Sensuous dispositions and technologies of affect permeate private and public domains, ending up back in the street with devotees as they walk home and being transported through migration. While feeling alone may not create ideology, religious ideology and experience are certainly colored by feeling.

Feeling and the senses are important to the study of religious embodiment in that they shed light on the aspects of religious habitus that transform racial ideologies and transcend spatial and temporal barriers. According to what they told me, UCKG adherents felt faithful, not just during church sessions, but also at home reading their Bible, in moments of strife, even while riding the public bus. Theorizing from the sensuous aspects of religious experience allows scholars to examine religion as an intuitive, affective, subjective, and interpretive experience. In the words of a UCKG faithful, “You’ll know it when you feel it.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the editors of this volume for their supportive and productive engagement with this chapter. I also thank the readers who provided feedback on this chapter’s many stages and drafts, including Edeline Cantave, Riddhi Bhandari, Bethany Peak, James Padilioni, and Stephen Selka.

NOTES

1. Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion that centers on Orixá veneration.
2. This chapter is a result of dissertation fieldwork and analysis (Cantave 2017) comparing civic actions and beliefs concerning community among Afro-Brazilian Catholics, Neo-Pentecostals, and Candomblé practitioners in a working-class, multifaith community of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.
3. The first wave commenced in 1910 when Protestant missionaries of North American and European descent began their first evangelization attempts in Brazil. The second wave occurred in the 1950s around São Paulo and placed greater emphasis on healing. Some historians attribute low proselytization in these first two waves to the Catholic restoration of the 1930s, in which the Catholic Church was able to expand its membership and reassert its political influence by promoting militant lay figures and supporting the authoritarian political regime of Getúlio Vargas (Premack 2011). Catholic militancy during this period also animated violence against minority religious groups, including both Pentecostals and Candomblé devotees.
4. The largest Pentecostal church in Brazil is the Assemblies of God (Assembleias de Deus).
5. Prosperity theology is the belief that financial success is a blessing from God and that, with faith, piety, and devotion, God may bless adherents with material wealth.
6. *Syncretism* refers to two or more religious belief systems being combined to form a new religious system (Droge 2001). Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda are considered syncretic religions owing to their incorporation of Orixá worship, Indigenous spiritual beliefs, and Catholicism.
7. The preexisting ecstatic traditions are Candomblé, Umbanda, and Kardecian Spiritism.
8. The current mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Marcelo Crivella, and some members of the Brazilian Congress (some of whom form a congressional group referred to as the “Bible Block”) are members of the UCKG.
9. I refer to the West as a hegemonic political and epistemic category.
10. Paul Treanor, “Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition,” Paul Treanor’s archive, December 2, 2005, <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html>.
11. *Povos-de-santo* is a colloquial phrase that translates as “people of the saint.” It is used to refer to the devotees of Afro-Brazilian religions.
12. Proprioception is the perception of multiple bodies united in movement.
13. The epigraph is from Universal Church USA, “What We Believe,” n.d., accessed January 17, 2016, <http://web.universal.org/usa/about-us/what-we-believe-2/>.
14. The red mantle is also known as the “Mantle of Miracles” in the UCKG. It is a red cloth kept on the altar and is used for healing rituals and strengthening of prayers by connecting adherents to the Holy Spirit.
15. Maria Derzi, “Alunos evangélicos se recusam a fazer trabalho sobre a cultura afro-brasileira,” *A Crítica*, November 11, 2012, <http://www.acritica.com/channels/cotidiano/news/alunos-evangelicos-se-recusam-a-fazer-trabalho-sobre-a-cultura-afro-brasileira>.

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