

Profit Prophets and God's money: Of family demons and the blessed life

The anthropology of African Independent (AIC)¹ and Pentecostal churches is essentially an anthropology of community enterprises. With varying levels of success, anthropologists have analysed these Christian movements in terms of the social content and goals of interactions between members of church congregations. As such, they showed that Pentecostal churches provided social, spiritual, economical and symbolic security to people otherwise exploited or threatened by repressive political and extractive economical conditions. Consequently, many theorists tied the upsurge and popularity of successive 'waves' of Pentecostalism to specific periods of increased political, economical and social insecurity (e.g. Comaroff 1985; Devisch 1996; Freston 2001; Meyer 1998).

This was especially true for the latest wave of Pentecostalism. Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs)² originated in the Third World during the late 1970s. They moderated the ascetic moralism of classic Pentecostalism while emphasising the prosperity gospel and a doctrine of spiritual warfare (Freston 2001: 15-20; Robbins 2004: 121-122; cf. Meyer 2004: 453). Many theorists pointed out that PCCs' manifestation and phenomenal growth coincided with a period of great political turmoil and with the introduction of various structural adjustment and trade liberalisation plans in Africa. As such, contemporary social research on PCCs related their enormous popularity to the rise of what the Comaroffs (1999; 2000) referred to as "millennial capitalism", or neoliberalism, the crisis of the postcolonial nation-state, transnational and diasporic culture, and mass mediated popular culture (Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001; Gifford 1994, 1998; Marshall 1998: 278-315; Ter Haar 1994: 221-240).

¹ Sundkler (1948) insisted that these churches were not merely African branches of mission churches but that they were fully independent from mission churches. Despite Apiah-Kubi (1981)'s argument for the term African Indigenous Churches and Anderson (2001)'s use of African Initiated Churches, many authors (e.g. Meyer 2004) follow Sundkler's form.

² There is some disagreement about the tendency to lump churches with widely different structures, doctrines and practices into this single category. However, these churches share enough common features, especially the emphasis on ecstatic experiences, to allow for this (cf. Robbins 2004: 122; Freston 2001: 2).

Anthropologists widely agreed that this new wave of Pentecostalism offered Africans an opportunity to opt into the global economic order from which they had been excluded (Maxwell 1998: 350-373; Maxwell 2005; Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 1999). They paid particular attention to the ways in which these new institutions, through intensive socialisation, created acquisitive, flexible *individuals* better able to cope with neoliberalism's economic and social agenda (Mate 2002: 549; Maxwell 2005). Anthropologists asserted that people who converted to PCCs were uniquely positioned to take advantage of new forms of capitalism by cutting ties with economically burdensome relatives (Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 2001), by creating support networks outside of webs of kinship (Maxwell 2005), by making lucrative global connections (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Engelke 2004) and by being able to manipulate the perceived forces that determined the flow of economic resources (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000). Authors have also shown that PCCs not only allowed a space in which people could talk about the market and their desires for commodities in it, but also framed the economic promises of modernity as promises of the Christian God (Maxwell 1998; Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 1999). They showed how PCCs naturalised and even shaped the desire for luxury commodities in "workshops" devoted to personal grooming, fashion and interior decorating (e.g. Mate 2002: 551-556).

In the process of creating modern individuals, anthropologists agreed that PCCs also generated new communities that countered the neoliberal state's "cultural project" (Buckser & Glazier 2003; Mate 2002; Maxwell 2005; Meyer 1996; Van Dijk 2001: 216-232). Contrary to the state's tendency to treat its citizens as collections of individuals, and to destroy creative or fulfilling social relations, PCCs supposedly created new identities and kinship ties based on membership to the kingdom of God (cf. Dodson 1997:33; Marshall 1993: 224-225; Martin 1990). In this egalitarian and therapeutic community, church members supposedly found hope and security in the wake of neoliberalism's worst excesses (Maxwell 2005: 4-32).

My research on a Durban branch of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), a PCC of Brazilian origin, questioned the institutional determinism of much of the previous work on the topic. As such, the UCKG was a church without a 'community' and one in which each member actively resisted the very intimacies of Christian fellowship. In this paper I will explore this ethnographic anomaly by looking at the impact that neoliberal policies had on social relationships in Durban, at

UCKG members' understandings of what it means to be "blessed" and at wider local ideas about social intimacy and witchcraft. I problematise the links made in the literature on this topic between social intimacy and security and contend that such analyses are economically overdetermined and that they fail to engage with the complex ways in which people are 'modern' and in which they understand Pentecostal Christianity.

The UCKG: A church of strangers

The UCKG opened its first branch in South Africa in 1993, a year before the country's first democratic election, and quickly became the UCKG's most successful region outside of Brazil. By 1997 the UCKG in South Africa collected over \$900 000 per month from a handful of congregations (Freston 2005: 40, 51) and by 2004, the church had more than 230 branches in the country. As an organisation, the UCKG has more than 10 million members in almost 90 countries, showed returns of at least \$1 billion per year in 2001, employed 15 000 pastors and bishops, owned a Brazilian television network, hundreds of radio stations across the world, various newspapers, a construction company, furniture factory, travel agency, a bank and a credit company (Braid 2001; Buckley 2001; Jones 2001; Oro & Semán 2001: 183; Treviño 2001). LM Consultoria, a holding company, administered the church's vast business empire while 18 elected deputies in the Brazilian congress looked after the UCKG's political interests at home (Freston 2001: 15-58; Nascimento 1995; Oro & Semán 2001: 183; Vasagar 2001). During my research in 2004/2005, the church distributed 300 000 free weekly newspapers in South Africa, had an official website, a call centre in Johannesburg, weekly television and radio programmes and daily advertisements on radio and television.

Unlike other local PCCs, the UCKG did not plough any of the vast sums of money they collected³ back into a church 'community' or to outsiders and asserted that charitable work diminished faith in both givers and receivers. The pastors consequently urged their members to refrain from such "good deeds" and to rather sacrifice their money in church so that they could become "blessed". Few people in church openly questioned the wisdom of this advice, or discussed it in social settings, mainly because they came to church alone and rarely knew more than a handful of

³ The church's headquarters in Johannesburg seemed to be the only branch that offered social services.

other church members. Moreover, UCKG members actively guarded against close social relationships in church and often stated that they came to the church precisely because no one there knew them. Members also seldom tried to invite their family or friends to the UCKG. In fact, church members' relationships with their families and lovers were fraught with conflict, often because they attended the UCKG. These family conflicts were especially fierce just before and after the biannual Campaigns of Israel as families fought over the precious resources that strong members sacrificed in these Campaigns. Many members also encountered angry resistance from their families for going to the UCKG because of the church's supposed connotations with occult activities. The UCKG was thus largely filled with single people who were 'strangers' to each other.

Similarly, the pastors and bishops were also 'strangers' to most members due to the UCKG's policy of rotating its clergy on a three- or six-monthly basis (depending on the guidance the national bishop received from the Holy Spirit). At any time there were between six and ten pastors at the Cathedral of Faith in Durban while the unpredictable and high turnover rate of pastors undermined any lasting loyalties or bonds with a congregation (see also Freston 2005: 41). The pastors' anonymity was further strengthened by the minimal contact that the clergy had with the congregation outside the church's six daily services. They didn't make home visits or hold informal social occasions where they could mix with their flock. The clergy lived in apartments at the back of the church and returned to their quarters promptly after the services. Church members could approach the officiating pastor for a short window of ten minutes before and after each service. For more serious problems, they could make an appointment with a pastor through the church secretary. Very few people did.

On the surface the UCKG, in common with other new PCCs thus "liberated" the individual from webs of local kinship obligations (cf. Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 2001: 216-232). However, unlike other new PCCs, the UCKG did not foster new relationships among its members based on Christian fellowship or identity. With regard to the former, the church was rather unique, even in Durban's diverse religious scene. It had no Bible reading groups or "cells" as they were locally known, no tearooms, job seekers' centres, clinics, charitable committees or outreach programmes. The Durban UCKG Helpcentre, which at one time provided local newspapers to jobseekers and occasionally fed the homeless, closed down because of the perception that "unbelievers" abused the facilities (Kushoni, 10/08/2004; Thandi,

13/06/2005; Assistant Zethu, 05/07/2005). More cynical observers asserted that the church only opened a HelpCentre for a few months to qualify as a non-profit organisation⁴. On a national scale, the church's television programmes and large public meetings in sport stadiums were organised to introduce more people to the UCKG's unique technology, not to convert them to Christianity or to a fellowship of Christians, a sentiment often repeated by the pastors. Furthermore, only "strong members" openly admitted membership to the church while few people forged an identity based on their membership to the UCKG.

The establishment of the church also seemed to be set outside of the social origins of most other PCCs. In this regard, the UCKG set up commissions to investigate the probabilities of success of new branches abroad⁵, to evaluate the most appropriate local discourses, to study the relevant laws, to devise the legal constitution of the church, the best location for its churches and to carry out the rental or purchasing of buildings (Freston 2001: 199; Freston 2005: 37). Furthermore, the church's history was not inscribed onto the landscape, in authoritative church publications or in the communal recitation of its members (e.g. Maxwell 2005) but found its most comprehensive historians in an antagonistic media.

Even the relationship with God was devoid of the intimacy prescribed in other Pentecostal churches. In the UCKG people were encouraged to literally engage in one-off contracts (covenants) with God through their tithes, offerings and sacrifices to "test him". They were told that the more they invested, the greater the chance they had that this investment would yield spectacular results. These engagements were highly individual acts, required no "work", no Bible study or commitments to a religious community or God that went beyond the prescriptions of the covenant.

I argue that this "individualisation" and almost Weberian rationalisation evident in the church was not a consequence of the transformative abilities of the UCKG. Rather, the UCKG's unique engagement with the unseen and its concomitant empowerment rhetoric allowed individuals to fight the demons which supposedly caused the social and economic insecurities of their neoliberal world. Being a UCKG member and participating in its technologies was thus not a selfish pursuit but one

⁴ However, the UCKG was not registered as a charitable or non-profit organisation or as a church. The organisation only officially registered their name and logo to protect their intellectual property rights to its use.

⁵ In (former) Pastor Justino's autobiography (1995: 100) he described how he made an exploratory visit to South Africa in 1989/1990 while helping to pioneer the UCKG in Portugal (Freston 2005: 37-38).

fundamentally geared towards creating a “blessed life”, which included harmonious family and social relationships. However, the pursuit of a blessed life in the church produced much financial and emotional insecurity, especially when the very families UCKG members tried to bless bewitched, disowned and bitterly fought with them. In the end, the UCKG could promise its members an unencumbered engagement with the unseen forces that shaped their lives precisely because it excluded the messy relationships and responsibilities of a tight-knit church community. In this lay its greatest attraction to those trapped in the brutal existence of a neoliberal world.

PCCs and the (un)making of neoliberal individuals and communities

In the literature, PCCs are often held up as both products and institutional producers of “modernity” while PCC practices are often translated into notions of globalisation and neoliberalism (e.g. Meyer 2004: 454- 465). As producers of neoliberal “modernity”, PCCs are said to rupture ideas about production, exchange and personhood in line with the demands of late capitalism. Thus when anthropologists describe instances where Born-Again Christians tithe, sacrifice, consume commodities and pray for wealth, they often frame these actions in terms of the capitalist market -or its magical incarnations (Comaroffs 2000: 312-316; Hasu 2006: 679-692; Maxwell 1998; Meyer 1995: 236-255; Meyer 1998). For example, Meyer (1995: 236-255) explained Ghanaian Born-Agains’ fascination with the devil, associated with non-Christian gods and Western luxury goods, against a background of difficult socio-economic conditions. She consequently asserted that stories about the devil in church entailed a critique of the capitalist economy and an opportunity to fantasise about things people could not afford but nevertheless desired. Here, the devil is analytically treated as a symbol of something else, capitalism, while the agency that locals ascribed to Satan and his helpers are reduced to mere talk about the mechanisms of a neoliberal economy. This treatment however ignores Ghanaian Pentecostals’ ontological and phenomenological understandings of their world and reduces their conversion to a single dimension, the desire for capitalist success.

Apart from framing PCC practices in terms of the market, anthropologists have also attributed the decisions of individual converts to cut ties with their unconverted families to particularly shrewd financial decision-making (see Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 2001). In this regard, studies of PCCs repeatedly state that becoming “Born Again” transforms the individual, other-orientated African into a ‘modern’

enclosed *individual* better able to maximise his/her profits (Mate 2002: 549; Maxwell 2005; Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 2001). Like-minded, emotionally supportive but financially undemanding church communities then support PCC converts in this transformation. The Weberian echoes in such analyses are almost too obvious to ignore and underscore the “commodity logic” of capitalism. In this regard, Marx 1867 [1990] claimed that in capital systems relationships formerly based on sacred values and personal dependence became purely motivated and impersonally presented as commercial interest. Money, as an impersonal and anonymous means, mediated this process (cf. Barber 1995: 205; Guyer 1995: 5; Miller 1987: 34-49; Miller 1995: 144; Parry & Bloch 1989: 4-6). For the most part, anthropologists have interpreted these changes positively as evidence of African people’s unlimited ability to adapt to new socio-economic and political circumstances.

However, not everyone agreed with this positive interpretation. James (1995: 5) for instance described PCCs as an alarming and predatory force;

While attractively glossed with natural or divine guarantee, they are powerfully fuelled by the resources from the rich countries, bypassing the gatekeepers of national sovereignty and the guardians of community to make their claim on individual persons.

As such, James warned that PCCs contributed to a global upsurge in intolerance and related this to PCCs’ commodification, global communications and the ascent of ideologies unconstrained by the give and take of local relationships (James 1995: 7-9). Other authors looked at the debilitating political impact that PCCs had on their membership (Robbins 2004: 135- 136; see Freston 2001) and noted that it was an inherently conservative movement because it promoted individual as opposed to structural solutions for social problems (Martin 1990: 266; Robbins 2002: 189-206). For the detractors of PCCs, these churches with their global reach, their “predatory” impact on individuals and communities, their emphasis on material accumulation and consumption and their political conservatism represented the epitome of the neoliberal project. Indeed, as Konings (2003) have shown, political and economic liberalisation forms a key condition for PCC’s appearance and for their massive mobilisation of followers.

In this regard, most scholars writing on PCCs agree that neoliberalism refer to more than just trade and political liberalisation and the withdrawal of the state from areas of social provision and welfare. Authors on both sides of the debate agree that the introduction of neoliberal policies lead to increased social inequalities, soaring

unemployment due to the outsourcing of production to independent, temporary contractors, dispossessions and a drop in living standards (cf. Harvey 2005: 2-4, 152-182). Neoliberalism is thus by definition and by the consequences of its implementation, tied to increased risk and to increased social, political and economical insecurities. For those wary of PCC practices and organisations, PCCs as quintessentially neoliberal organisations make political subjectification an “ethical technique” (Bratich, Packer & McCarthy 2003) or “technique of the self” (Burchell 1996: 19-36; O’Malley 1996: 189-207) which precludes the kind of political changes that liberation theology for instance instigated. This point of view is often supported by opinions about the functions of churches in civil society and is invariably poorly informed by ethnography. Conversely, detailed ethnographies of PCCs often lean towards seeing these churches as institutions that offer their membership socio-economic sanctuary and a privileged insight into the workings of an opaque new system.

I contend that such conceptions of “Born-Agains” in the literature are economically over-determined and that this determinism detracts from the complexity of being “modern” and being a Born-Again Christian. In this regard, I agree with Sahlins (1996)’s argument that anthropology is the bearer of a “bourgeoisified” Judeo-Christian cosmology according to which an original state of chaos gives way to the order of society or the state. As such, Sahlins contended that anthropology’s main concern was to explain how fallen and needy individuals come together in cooperative organization. However, by universalising this problematic as the key to interpreting human societies and social action, anthropology has subverted its attempts at cross-cultural understanding (cf. Scott 2005: 190). In this paper, I aim to contextualise the social lives of the diverse group of people who attended the UCKG and the ways in which such lives precluded the need to be “sociable” in church. Contrary to other authors on PCCs, I will argue that the church did not serve as an institution that transformed its members into hyper-modern individuals but that they were already transformed by the neoliberal conditions in which they were thrust. They were also transformed by almost two centuries of Christianisation in the region, by the rights-based culture of post-liberation South Africa (see Crush 2000: 103-133; Schneider 2002: 145-167), and by the “poisonous” influence that neoliberal policies had on moral values (Ashforth 2005). As such, my analysis starts with the heterogeneous individuals that attended the UCKG, their diverse backgrounds and their (often)

fraught relationships with their families. I intend to show that church members were more complex than the *homo economicus* of anthropological literature and that single solutions such as conversion and individualisation could not alleviate the various ways in which those individuals were assaulted by “modernity”.

Casuli's difficult relations

I was on my way to attend the Friday exorcism service on January 28, 2005 when I walked into Casuli outside the church. We hadn't been in contact for almost a month because she had to return the cellphone she borrowed from her cousin in the face of escalating family feuds in the wake of the latest Campaign of Israel. I was curious to hear if her sacrifice during the Campaign had changed her life as she had hoped. Casuli boasted that her problems had intensified and assured me that this was a sign that the demons knew she was fighting them and that they wanted to dishearten her before she garnered enough power to dispel them from her life.

Casuli launched into her story of hardship, public ridicule and suffering with relish. Things were particularly bad before and after she made her Campaign sacrifice. Her Christmas was rather depressing, with no large cooked meals, no drinks, sweets or family to celebrate with her. She spent the festive season cooped up in her room while her children had to go to their respective fathers because she didn't have food at home. Her aunt didn't want to share her festive meal, knowing that Casuli saved all her money to give to the UCKG. She pointedly told Casuli to “go ask your Brazilians for money”. As Casuli had to give all her money for her sacrifice, including her daughter's child-support grant, her muffin-selling business faced a bleak New Year. She didn't even keep enough money to buy the batter. Casuli's aunt also threatened to start charging her for her lodgings or throw Casuli and her daughter out on the street. I suspected that it was because she knew how much Casuli gave to the UCKG and imagined that some of it could be better spent around the house. Her grandmother sided with her aunt and accused Casuli of bewitching another family member who mysteriously died in a car accident. As if this wasn't enough, Casuli's future mother-in-law also took to calling her *isipoki* (ghost) and taunted her about her continuing poverty and lack of success.

As on previous occasions, Casuli exclaimed that her relatives were not as “clever” as they thought, that she was “fighting them” in church and that she would “show them that the God of the ghosts was alive”. I was rather surprised that God's

lack to deliver the goods and her expected disappointment didn't feature in this discussion. Rather, Casuli swung the conversation around to tell me about the numerous demons infesting her mother-in-law, her aunt and possibly her grandmother. She asserted that Satan shrewdly used them to target her after her participation in the Campaign of Israel. To prove that they were indeed infested, Casuli took pleasure in telling me about her three enemies' immoral actions and witchcraft activities. This became a familiar feature of our discussions in the following months.

Casuli suspected that her boyfriend's mother was bewitching him with a type of '*muthi* (medicine/ witchcraft substances) that made his whole salary disappear from his pocket to reappear in hers. She kept all Job's money and prevented him from paying Casuli maintenance money for his daughter, Buqili. The old woman apparently had an insatiable appetite for new consumer goods and forced Job to buy a weekly list of groceries that included luxury items such as "cheese, polony [a loaf of processed meat], lettuce, rice and Coca-Cola" (Casuli, 01/02/2005). She was so avaricious that whenever Casuli and Buqili went to visit, she would "even hide the bread" so that they had nothing to eat. Once, when Casuli bought polony for Buqili's lunch, Job's mother stole it and ate it all. Her predatory greed stretched beyond her son and granddaughter to her other children; a young '*makoti* (young married woman), a daughter who suffered from epilepsy and a son whose left side was paralysed from a stroke or "something" (a euphemism for witchcraft). The latter two's "unexplained" illnesses guaranteed Casuli's mother-in-law two government disability grants of R740 per month on top of her "large salary" as a cleaner in a government hospital and Job's income of between R500 and R1800 per week as a taxi driver. Apart from this allegedly illicit income, her youngest daughter also helped her with household chores on a daily basis despite being married to a family that lived on the other side of the township. Casuli remarked that this was "strange" because a '*makoti* usually helped her mother-in-law and worked in her husband's house since he paid the '*lobolo* (bridewealth). Casuli thus constantly implied that her future mother-in-law's illicit accumulation was fuelled by greed and accomplished through witchcraft.

That same night, Job's sister had an epileptic fit and passed away (Casuli, 28/01/2005). Casuli later explained her unexpected death by saying that God took her and her government grant because He saw that her mother "loved money too much" (01/02/2005). Over the next few days, Casuli cleaned her "surprised" mother-in-law's

house and helped her prepare for the funeral. For a short while she was happy that their differences seemed settled but soon suspected that her mother-in-law would steal her six-year-old daughter to do the household chores as a slave. Casuli was also highly suspicious when her enemy offered her tea and sandwiches. She “knew” that there was *‘muthi* in the offering and fought the demons by praying very hard just before she ate it. Casuli also washed herself with holy water from Israel that she had received in church that night.

Their temporary truce didn’t hold very long because Casuli renewed her attempts to get Job to pay maintenance money for Buqili. She threatened to take him to court with the help of Mr Singh, a magistrate in church (02/02/2005). Casuli also asked me to type and print letters to Job, purportedly from Buqili’s school and the school’s transport company asking him to pay the fees or face legal action (31/01/2005; 01/02/2005; 03/02/2005). Three weeks later, Casuli abandoned her plans to take Job to court. She told me that she went to speak to one of the pastors and he advised her to rather pay her tithes and make renewed sacrifices so that God would change her mother-in-law’s heart as this was the real source of her troubles (25/02/2005). The pastor’s response was a common one in the UCKG (e.g. Pastor John, 08/03/2005; Thandi, 20/06/2005). In the next few months, Casuli’s renewed commitment to fight the demons in her in-laws didn’t deliver positive results. Job continued to shirk his responsibilities towards his daughter and was often drunk and violent when Casuli went to his house to collect the money while her mother-in-law’s greed didn’t abate (e.g. 25/02/2005).

In telling me about her second enemy, Casuli focused on her aunt’s avarice, immorality and witchcraft. She told me how her aunt had a relationship with a married man. The poor man did everything her aunt wanted and behaved “strangely” by not leaving her even though she refused to cook for him and made him wash her underwear. To Casuli, her aunt’s brazen behaviour and her ability “to force” her lover clearly indicated that she had used *‘muthi* to bewitch him. Although this particular type of *‘muthi* was irresistible and very strong, people in the townships believed that it inevitably caused the death of its victim. In February 2005, Casuli ominously announced that the lover started to show signs of TB (tuberculosis). In March 2005, he left Casuli’s aunt and went back to his wife. The aunt was heartbroken but kept on steaming her body with *‘muthi* and *-phalaza*’ed (vomit after taking an emetic) to

“force him” to come back. Casuli suspected that the man’s wife had somehow managed to break her aunt’s spell with even stronger *‘muthi*.

Another indication that her aunt was irredeemably immoral was that she illegally “ate” the money her deceased husband left his children. According to Casuli, it was an enormous sum of money and allowed the aunt to be idle instead of looking for a job. She predicted that her nieces would not see a cent of the money and that there would soon not be enough to even pay their school fees. Like her mother-in-law, Casuli’s aunt had an insatiable appetite for expensive bathroom sets (a bath, toilet and washbasin with pedestal) and groceries. She also, through her example and explicit teaching, corrupted her teenage daughter with thoughts of men and vulgar language (01/02/2005).

Casuli was a bit more ambivalent about her grandmother. On the one hand, she was convinced that her aunt had turned her grandmother against her and portrayed her grandmother as a victim of a particularly devious and evil woman’s machinations. She said that her aunt was “spoon-feeding [her grandmother] with bad words” (03/05/2005). On the other hand, Casuli’s grandmother’s children were prone to more than their fair share of bad luck. None of them were employed and those that were, like Casuli’s mother, died in mysterious circumstances. Furthermore, Casuli also implied that it was highly unusual that her grandmother was named in her mother’s will and that she “ate the money” that was supposed to go to Casuli’s brother. In this context, her grandmother was suspected of lineage sorcery and was perhaps even the root cause of her aunt’s evil⁶.

During the course of my research and my friendship with Casuli, the feud with her aunt escalated beyond repair. In March 2005, the aunt threw Casuli’s belongings out on the street twice and locked her out of the house on numerous occasions. She blamed Casuli for the break-up of her relationship with the married man and accused her of telling the man’s wife that she was using *‘muthi*. The aunt’s teenage daughter and two cousins who were staying in the house also publicly hurled insults at Casuli, only cooked for themselves and bullied Buqili whenever Casuli went to church. On each occasion, Casuli was highly upset but determined to fight “these demons” in church. She couldn’t afford to move out of the house and was already trying to put

⁶ Lineage sorcery was considered a very dangerous form of witchcraft in which a sorcerer used his or her position as head of a family to ‘close’ the *amadlosi* to other family members (cf. Ngubane 1977: 30-46).

some money away for the next Campaign, in which she wanted to sacrifice for a good job so that she could buy a house of her own.

It was a cold winter's day in April 2005 when Casuli phoned me with the news that her aunt had finally kicked her out of the house. She was crying uncontrollably, bemoaning her "luck" and the fact that she was rendered homeless. Two of her friends offered her a bed for the night but she guessed that she wouldn't be welcome to stay with them for long because they were also unemployed and would probably expect some form of rent. During the time she lived with them, she didn't pay anything and constantly complained that they ate her food. Casuli managed to stay with her friends for three weeks before they too kicked her out. She was finally forced to rent a shared room at R75 per month from an old man a few houses down the street. He didn't like children, especially Buqili, fitted locks to the taps and locked the toilet at night so that no one would disturb him. He also threatened to evict them when Casuli didn't pay the rent on time.

Out of desperation, Casuli concocted a "foolproof" plan to ensure that her grandmother would evict her aunt and give the family's house in Umlazi to her. She planned to tell her grandmother about her aunt's immoral sexual relationship, knowing that it enraged the *amadlosi* (ancestors) and potentially "closed them" to the whole family. She borrowed some money for the taxi to the small rural town where her grandmother lived and on the chosen day anointed her body with the UCKG's holy oil. However, when she arrived at her grandmother's house, her aunt was already there and had "poisoned" her grandmother against her. Seeing her aunt, Casuli quickly left. A few days later, she received a letter in the post from her grandmother. In it, her grandmother accused Casuli of witchcraft, warned her not to go near the house in Umlazi, cursed her in the most vulgar language and promised never to speak to her again. Casuli was convinced that her "rude" niece had written the letter and that she added more than her illiterate grandmother dictated. She was nevertheless devastated about the letter and gloomily remarked that her aunt's presence at her grandmother's house was not a coincidence. This, and her grandmother's inexplicable behaviour, was definite signs that Satan was working against her. Casuli vowed to intensify her fight against him and consequently made a "chain of prayer" in the family services on Thursdays. She also confessed that she was very scared that something might happen to her aunt because if it did, she would surely be named as the responsible *umthakathi* (witch) (see also Miss Mfubi, 01/07/2005).

A few days later, Casuli decided to threaten her grandmother with legal action over her mother's estate and the R2 500 her *gogo* (grandmother) "ate" from it. She hoped that the threat of such drastic action would force a truce. Since she couldn't go near her grandmother's house after the letter, she decided to approach three old women who had some influence on her grandmother. Casuli hoped that they would tell her grandmother that it was shameful to be taken to court by your grandchildren and that they would facilitate a reconciliation. According to Casuli, the old women were scandalised by her aunt's manipulation and promised to talk to her *gogo* (03/05/2005). Casuli felt vindicated and eagerly awaited the reunion. It never came.

Fighting kin

Casuli's woes were by no means unique. The majority of my interviewees and friends at the UCKG had highly volatile relationships with their families. These relationships were characterised by mutual witchcraft accusations and conflicts over money, especially before and after the Campaigns of Israel. Very often, the money that strong members sacrificed was earmarked for other purposes such as paying school fees, transport costs, rent, mortgages and groceries. Sacrificing such money in church often led to heated family quarrels. Depending on a family's circumstances and dynamics, these quarrels remained at a low level of intensity for months after the Campaign or would escalate beyond repair, as was the case with Casuli.

Thami for instance explained that sacrificing her family's groceries money for the month would not make them "starve" and that they still had tea and bread at home. In her all-female household she explained her sacrifice in terms of a "small inconvenience" and hoped that their suffering would soon lead to better lives for them all (20/06/2005). Although her sisters and daughters grumbled over the money "thrown away", Thami was the only full-time breadwinner in the family. She had kicked her "useless" husband out after he was laid off three years ago and couldn't find another job. Her sisters and eldest daughter occasionally found cleaning and babysitting jobs but couldn't afford to live alone. By necessity, they thus had to suffer with her. Thami's household exemplified the effects that the government's neoliberal GEAR policy had on the feminisation of labour in South Africa. In this regard, several authors noted that due to neoliberal policies, large numbers of men were made redundant on South African mines and in factories around Durban. The secure, unionised jobs in manufacturing and production increasingly made way for jobs in the

service industry. This industry offered low-income, part-time and transient employment to (mainly) women (Cabezas, Reese & Waller 2006; Casale & Posel 2002: 156–184; Van Der Westhuizen, Goga & Oosthuizen 2007). As such, Thami's complaints about her useless husband and her female dependents' meagre, sporadic wages were common in the UCKG (Assistant Dingi, 19/05/2005; Fikile, 07/10/2004).

Khathazi on the other hand was unemployed and largely dependent on her husband's small income as a soldier. Like so many other unemployed mothers in the UCKG, she sacrificed her children's school fees without telling her husband. Khathazi lived in perpetual fear that he would find out before their blessings started to flow and monitored all incoming mail closely. However, it all came to a head when her children didn't get their report cards in July and her husband went to speak to the headmistress. Khathazi received a thorough beating when he came home. They couldn't afford a divorce while the potential child maintenance fees would've bankrupted him. Their relationship became fraught with considerable conflict (Khathazi, 08/10/2004). Thandi's father didn't even wait for his wife to come home but stormed into the church, dragged her out before she made her sacrifice and gave her two black eyes for "stealing" their mortgage payments for the church. Apparently, he had lost his high-powered job a few months before the incident while she kept the family afloat with her job at a department store. The family consequently had to make considerable cuts in their monthly expenses and quality of life. Thandi's father couldn't spend his money on "fast women" anymore and was extremely resentful of his wife's new "authority". He also accused Thandi's mother of having affairs with the Brazilian pastors (Thandi, 13/06/2005; 20/06/2005).

Stories like these were abundant in the UCKG. Given the large sums of money that strong members sacrificed, the economic pressures that most families faced and the fact that people joined and attended the UCKG singly, the temptation to ascribe such conflict (like other authors) to economics alone is great. This is doubly so in the context of the post-apartheid feminisation of labour and of social benefits in South Africa. In the latter regard, the government's child- and social support grants were predominantly paid out to women, giving them privileged access to what often amounted to the largest source of income for a family⁷. However, an economic analysis ignored several of the "non-economic" reasons why UCKG members'

⁷ The government's child support grants of R190 (£13.32) per month were woefully inadequate to fulfil even the most basic needs of the children it targeted (IRIN 2007).

families hated the church or why they accused UCKG members of witchcraft, for instance why Casuli was called a “ghost” and why her aunt kicked her out. An economic analysis also assumes that when people like Casuli, Tami, Khathazi and Thandi’s mother sacrificed money, they did so out of selfish and anti-social reasons. Their ability to ignore the claims of their wider families supposedly transformed them into hyper-modern, self-contained individuals who dealt with the risks of a neoliberal era by cutting social ties. This was not the case. These women were already transformed by the changing labour market, by the government’s inability to provide adequate social and health care, by the conflicts that a wide disparity in incomes engendered and by the closures and exclusions of this new economy (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001). The UCKG members were not sacrificing to *become* hyper-modern individuals but *because* they and their families were already transformed by the worst excesses of neoliberalism. Like Casuli, they were fighting those demons in church.

Blessed Families of God

In the UCKG many congregants made promissory notes during the Campaigns of Israel specifically for their “family” and “sentimental” lives. They often tithed and offered thousands of Rands to achieve a happy family life and for the attendant financial responsibilities of having such a family. Indeed, being single or alone was considered unnatural and against God’s plans for man (Pastor Pauline, 21/08/2004; Pastor Siphon, 19/08/2004; Persi, 23/08/2004). There was “something wrong with you” if you didn’t desire a married and fertile life with your partner (Assistant Fikile, 22/06/2005; Pastor Pauline, 21/08/2004). Furthermore, all discord in a family was attributed to Satan’s work. It was a good Christian’s responsibility to fight Satan and his demons in order to restore God’s intentions on earth (Pastor Siphon, 19/08/2004).

Despite Casuli’s fights with her aunt, her legal threats to her grandmother and her speculations about her future mother-in-law, she ardently desired harmonious family relationships. To this end, she fought those demons in church by sacrificing during the Campaigns and by making chains of prayer. Indeed, to have a “blessed family of God” was concomitant to *being blessed*, a condition that embodied the six-fold blessing that the Holy Spirit supposedly worked through the ministry of the church. The church defined these blessings as financial “prosperity, health, family, love, God’s Spirit” and freedom from the work of demons or “salvation” (UCKG 2003: na). Accordingly, the church’s daily services were radically orientated towards

accessing these blessings through tithing, offerings, exorcisms, sacrifice and “strong prayer” while little attention was paid to life after death, Heaven, the end of time or the Second Coming. For the most part, the UCKG’s seven daily services focussed on increasing the health and wealth of their congregants immediately. Therefore Monday services revolved around securing financial prosperity, Tuesdays were devoted to healing, Wednesdays to seeking the Holy Spirit’s power, Thursdays to resolving family problems, Fridays to exorcising demons, Saturdays to securing a marriage partner and solving relationship issues and Sundays to tithing.

At the heart of the UCKG congregants’ struggle was an emphasis on the transformative abilities of the power of the Holy Spirit. It was said that by harnessing this power, you could transform your life from one of a “miserable Christian” to the life of a “blessed man or woman of God”. The hallmark of a blessed Christian then was driving a new Mercedes Benz or BMW, wearing Armani and other designer suits, living in a double storey house in Umhlanga Ridge (an upmarket area in Durban) and eating the best food that money could buy. Blessed Christians also had sizeable sums of money in the bank and were employed as directors of large companies. And, above all, they also had blessed families in which women were fertile, men were the “head” and had money to support their dependents and where children were respectful and obedient (Mvungi, 15/01/2005). Marriages, like those of “white people” also lasted until old age. As Pastor Bheki proclaimed, “This is what God wants to prepare for you. Not for the things of two weeks, not for the things of one month, for the rest of your life!” (11/06/2005).

In this conception of being blessed, money and large families were not opposed. Instead, they were intricately linked to each other and to other conditions of a blessed Christian’s life. The link between money and harmonious social relationships were expressed in countless services in the UCKG. For instance, on the 26th of May 2005, Pastor Vladimir explained it as follows; “Sometimes you wonder why your neighbour does not like you. Your neighbours when they see you, [they just wave at you] because they cannot stop to talk. [It is] because he sees that you have nothing...You are going to knock on his door to ...ask for money. Then they run away from you. That is why he hates you”. He continued, “while you are miserable [and] are facing so many financial difficulties, no one wants to be close to you my friend...No one wants to come visit you”. On the other hand, if you were rich, “your house is always full...Everybody comes to your house, even your friends, your

relatives from rural areas there far, far in the farm. They remember you and they say we come at lunchtime to eat” (26/05/2005). Thus a blessed family came with wealth and success but seldom before it. For this reason, most of my interviewees agreed that one could only take a mountain or a jug for your family once your “blessings started to flow”.

In this regard, the pastors often warned the congregation not to “vaccinate” (Pastor Edson, 26/05/2005) their families against the UCKG by asking them for money (see also Pastor Joao, 09/06/2005) or forcing them to come to church (Pastor Vladimir, 02/12/2004) or telling them that they were infested with demons (Pastor Siphon, 19/08/2004; Pastor Vladimir, 11/11/2004). Although everyone in church knew that “when you see other people doing wrong things, it is because of the evil spirits and the demons” (Pastor Vladimir, 11/11/2004), the pastors preached caution in publicly denouncing people for having demons. Instead of trying “to clean a fish with your bare hands” and “only get[ting] a few scales off”, Pastor Pauline said that “Prayer, [sacrifice] and fasting is like a knife” and that it “cleans [the fish] totally” (05/08/2004). He and his fellow pastors persistently urged the congregation to fight their family demons in church by using their “knives”. According to the pastors, you had to “overcome” (the demons) and become blessed because “[i]f you are being defeated, your family will not come to this church. They will say I do not want to talk to somebody who is defeated... They need to see results in your life” (Pastor Edson, 26/05/2005).

Church members like Casuli found reassurance in this and ascribed their families’ taunts about their lack of success, their “God of ghosts” and their “Brazilians” to their own failures to be blessed. They referred to the conflicts that erupted in their families after their Campaign sacrifices in the broader idiom of Satan working in their lives and vowed to “overcome” these demons. In this fight they seldom acknowledged their families’ claims to the financial resources they devoted to the church as legitimate. Women like Khathazi knew that their sacrifices had dangerous consequences but risked the violence to re-establish now fractured and brutal family lives. This was a lonely fight and one in which the individual often fought against demons, stealing, scheming family members, witches and witch familiars sent to distract them from attaining their blessings and those of their families.

The fight against family demons

In almost every service before the Campaigns of Israel and on tithing Sundays the pastors warned the congregation to hide their tithing envelopes or promissory containers in places where their families would not find it. One of the Brazilian pastors for instance warned the congregation not to tell their families how much they planned to sacrifice because their families were not of “the same vision, the same faith”. He commanded the congregation to safeguard “God’s money” against those who just wanted to buy cigarettes and *utshwala* (beer) with it (09/06/2005).

This was not a scare mongering tactic but one that spoke of the many disappointed UCKG members who lost opportunities to access their blessings through their sacrifices and tithes due to thieving demon-possessed family members. For example, one old woman complained to me that she could not participate in the January 2005 Campaign of Israel because her unemployed son stole her sacrifice from under her pillow while she was sleeping. For the June Campaign she slipped the money into her underwear before she went to bed and gleefully told me about his nightly frustrations. To *Gogo Thembu*, this was a sign that she was overcoming the demons and that her sacrifice would yield the desired results, among them to bless her son with a good job (*Gogo Thembu*, 06/06/2005; 13/06/2005). In other households women were often threatened with violence while all my interviewees complained about the watchful gazes, the distrust and the tension in their families in the weeks before the Campaigns or tithing Sundays.

The family conflicts over financial resources offered, sacrificed and tithed in the UCKG stretched beyond widespread quarrels, thefts and domestic violence. Many members were also plagued by witchcraft that stemmed from their close kin (e.g. *Thandi*, 13/06/2005). In church the pastors often warned people that their relatives could bewitch them and send demons because they were jealous and didn’t want them to succeed. In this regard, Geschiere (1997: 11, 69-96) noted that witchcraft in Africa arose from the intimacy of the family and the home and that it presented the “dark side of kinship”. As UCKG members strove for more intimacy in their families and as they identified the start of the flow of their blessings, the dangers of family witchcraft increased. Like *Casuli*, UCKG members came to church to fight such witchcraft and used the holy oil, water, sand, salt and paper given out in the church to strengthen their bodies and neutralise the ‘*muthi*’ they suspected their families of using.

Despite these precautions, many UCKG members were ‘infected’ by family demons. In these cases, it was generally assumed that the infected individual had either not fought hard enough or had knowingly come into contact with the sources of demon-possession. Visiting *izangoma* (diviners/ healers), attending family ceremonies that honoured the *amadlosi* or where food was set apart or sacrificed for them was considered extremely dangerous activities. A person could also simply be infected by wearing the bracelets given out at *amadlosi* ceremonies or touching anything that came into contact with those that “worked” with the *amadlosi*.

Most people in the UCKG came to the church alone and were apprehensive about telling their families that they were members because of the negative rumours about the church. They were consequently often faced with difficult demands from their families to attend ceremonies for the *amadlosi* (Bridgette & Thandi, 28/07/2005). New UCKG members also had great difficulties extricating themselves from the intricate webs of ceremonial obligations that accompanied *amadlosi* ceremonies. Mrs Masinga was one of these people. As a post-menopausal woman and the oldest surviving member of her generation in her father’s lineage, she played a central role in the ceremonies held for the *amadlosi*. She burned the *imphephu* (a fragrant herb burned when communicating with the ancestors) and “called out” to the *amadlosi* when the men slaughtered the animals. Mrs Masinga explained that the *amadlosi* would not listen to their family unless all the ritual taboos and prescriptions, which she learnt from her father, were upheld. During our interview, Mrs Masinga spoke about the enormous resistance she expected from her family should she refuse to fulfil her traditional role in future. Her family would accuse her of “closing the *amadlosi*” (lineage sorcery) to them and might even suspect her of other “witchcrafts”. She didn’t think that her *amadlosi* would mind as much as her living family members and said that she would just burn some *imphephu* and tell the *amadlosi* about her intentions. She didn’t know what to do with her kin. Mrs Masinga hoped to do this soon because she wanted to become an assistant in the church (Mrs Masinga, 03/03/2005).

People in the UCKG who occupied less senior positions in their families were equally ambiguous about their relatives and their obligations to the *amadlosi*. Due to immense pressure, they often attended family ceremonies and found it hard to refuse the slaughtered meat, the specially brewed beer and the ‘*mbuzi*’ bracelets that their families offered them. Pastor Vladimir described this dilemma in one service thus;

Arriving there on the farms ...they mix with...the relatives, with the family. And the relatives they say you should sacrifice to *amadlosi*... [They say that] you cannot forget your ancestors. You should think of ... that '*sangoma* who take care of you since you were young. [They say that]...you cannot succeed because that '*sangoma* needs to prepare you this drink. And you have to drink it up. So the person fears more the mother than...God! If yousay no to [your] grandmother, to [your] mother, she is going to be cross [with you]. She is going to say that [you are] no longer part of the family (30/01/2005).

Pastor Vladimir experienced the same pressures from his own family. His seven brothers refused to come to his wedding because he did not buy beer for the celebrations. He urged the congregation to "fear God" in such situations more than their families and to persevere in their fight against the demons (Pastor Vladimir, 30/01/2005).

Like Casuli, many UCKG members found it hard to heed the pastor's calls not only because of the breach in social etiquette and the emotional strain that this implied but also because of the loss of future security. Many UCKG members were acutely aware that they could be reduced to the state of a "miserable Christian" within the blink of an eye and that the church didn't offer any social, emotional or financial support for those who had fallen on hard times (Thandi, 13/06/2005). Instead, the UCKG urged them to "fight their demons". This was of little comfort to those possessed by demons. For instance, when Casuli first moved in with her aunt, she had "many demons" and was unemployed, homeless and in dire financial straits. Although they fought from the start, Casuli's grandmother, her '*malome* (mother's brother) and various other members of the family always intervened to keep the peace. In the end, Casuli stayed with her aunt, rent-free, for four years. Her friends were less patient and asked her to leave after only one month. She had fewer claims on their hospitality. UCKG members generally tried to keep up cordial relationships with their families in case of such contingencies and rather opted for preventative measures when they attended family ceremonies or shared meals with people who communicated with the *amadlosi*. In these social situations, they anointed their bodies with the church's holy water, salt and oil and augmented its protection with silent prayers.

Thandi invited me along to one of these family ceremonies, held to thank the *amadlosi* for giving her cousin a good job. On the day before we went, she warned me not to eat the slaughtered meat because the family "prayed over it" and it would make me very ill (01/07/2005). On our arrival, Thandi's mother's sisters, her '*malome* and her grandmothers were very happy to see her and her two sisters and made a great fuss about them. They had not seen each other since the untimely death of Thandi's

mother a year before. Thandi then ushered us into the front room of her aunt's house where a young girl soon served us with cold drinks and some snacks. Thandi explained that her aunt "respected" the fact that they were in the UCKG and that she wouldn't serve us with the traditional beer, slaughtered goat or alcohol she gave to the other guests. As the day progressed, more people arrived and the house and yard soon filled up. However, the front room and the three sisters remained an impenetrable separateness and only a few people joined us once the festivities were in full swing. At about 2:30 pm, Thandi's aunt sent the young girl to serve us with some chicken, which they didn't "pray over". Ten minutes later, amidst loud cheers and ululation, the aunt brought a steaming platter of goats' meat and *ujeqe* (a type of steamed bread) for the circle of older women who sat in the room adjoining ours. Using their hands, the women ate the food with smacks of appreciation. They soon called for beer and stamped their feet impatiently as Thandi's aunt rushed to get some cold quarts of beer.

At this point, Thandi's sister, an assistant in church, remarked to me that the beer and goats' meat was the source of all the problems plaguing the women sitting in the circle. Chief among these problems was the fact that none of them were married despite their advanced years. Dingi said that even if you didn't believe in the *amadlosi*, the goat's meat would make you "sick" because it contained demons and that the demons "didn't care whether you believed in them or not", they still ruined your life. She also advised me not to take one of the '*mbuzi* bracelets that her family gave to those who attended the ceremony as this would definitely contain many strong demons. Dingi then remarked that her mother's family was under a curse because they slaughtered to the *amadlosi*. This was evident because her grandmother, aunt, cousin and her aunt's husband were all addicted to alcohol (02/07/2005).

In the church, the fight against family demons reached frantic intensity when members "manifested" such demons. On the 12th of October 2004, I attended a healing service led by Pastor Cyprian in which a new member manifested her dead grandfather's spirit. The demon claimed that the woman was a member of the UCKG and that he had been trying to kill her. Pastor Cyprian asked one of the assistants if he had ever seen the woman. When he denied knowing her, the pastor pointed at her '*mbuzi* bracelet to underscore the lie. The congregation immediately "burned" the demon by shouting invectives at it and raised their hand palms towards the woman. The pastor then asked the demon how many people he had killed in her family and what else he was doing in her life. Pastor Cyprian screamed, "What about money?"

Huh? Are you making her to suffer?” The demon denied everything else, upon which the pastor taunted it, “What kind of grandfather is this? Where is he? ...Who wants a grandfather like this? Huh? Nobody loves you ... They are laughing at you ... You are soft!” At this point, the woman manifested another demon, one that forced her to go to the *isangoma* in the first place and then forced the *isangoma* to “prophesize” that she should kill a goat for her *amadlosi*. It was at this ceremony that her grandfather’s spirit infected her. Pastor Cyprian remarked that the demons wanted people to spend a lot of money on goats so that they would not be able to afford to come to church or to participate in the Campaigns. The demon confirmed this. “Do you hear that, *Basilwane*? That is why you have to be strong. They are liars!” (Pastor Cyprian, 12/10/2004).

The episode of the new member manifesting demons was not unique. Pastors often drew the congregation’s attention to the fact that the manifestees were new in the UCKG or ‘unknown’. They drew attention to the “fact” that even people who were ignorant of the church’s practices and theology manifested demons of whose presence they were previously unaware. This supposedly attested to the church’s unbiased and universal power. It also underscored the church’s conviction that the *amadlosi* were in fact demons and that the *izangoma* were in league with the devil. The *izangoma*’s attempts to get people to sacrifice goats and cattle to appease their ancestors had a more sinister intention. In the war against God, such ceremonies served as a fertile breeding ground for demons to infest people while the high costs of these ceremonies prevented people from attending church, fulfilling their vows and getting blessed.

A lonely fight

In fighting family demons and those demons that caused people to remain unmarried, the pastors emphasised that church members should rely solely on God and not on other people or on the church (Pastor Bheki, 08/06/2005; Pastor Cyprian, 01/09/2004; Pastor Pauline, 05/08/2005; Pastor Vander, 05/08/2004; Pastor Vladimir, 02/12/2004). To this end, the UCKG in Durban didn’t offer its members any support services. Thembi, an assistant in church, claimed that other churches such as the Durban Christian Centre with their feeding, literacy and employment schemes as well as their AIDS clinics “spoil the people...If the centres [were] not there they [would] learn to pray and suffer so at the end they will be independent and they will cope on

their own and they will learn that all good things come to those that have a connection with God". By not offering these services to its members, the UCKG wanted to teach people "to depend on God and not on earthly things" (Assistant Thembi, 17/06/2005).

More specifically, the church wanted to teach people to depend on themselves (Pastor Bheki, 08/06/2005) when they made their "faith material" through their sacrifices (Pastor Pauline, 05/08/2004; Pastor Vander, 05/08/2004). Like Noah and Abraham in the Old Testament, they were encouraged to show their trust in God through their (monetary) offerings and not to listen to the emotional pleas of their loved ones (Pastor Pauline, 05/08/2004; Pastor Vander, 05/08/2004). This was because God was "the only one who can help" with the "suffering in their home", the "separation, addiction, drugs, alcohol [and] poverty" (Pastor Edson, 26/05/2005). In sacrificing, church members were warned to expect "persecution" and "oppression" from their families and friends (Pastor Vladimir, 23/03/2005).

From a cynical institutional and functional perspective the UCKG's reluctance to establish clinics, literacy and job training programmes, as well as homeless schemes in Durban saved them a lot of money while the lack of "cell" and Bible study groups in the church prevented the kind of schisms that plagued other PCCs. Harder to explain was the UCKG members' reluctance to socialise with other members in church. Unlike other local churches, UCKG members didn't congregate for festivals or funerals, nor were weddings or baptisms celebrated as community affairs. For the most part, weddings and funerals were not even announced in church. My friends told me of weddings but never mentioned any funerals. I (along with a few of my interviewees) was convinced that the church didn't hold funerals until Thandi told me that Bishop Bira led the funeral service for her mother, an assistant, in the Alice Street branch⁸ (Thandi, 20/06/2005). During my fieldwork, another assistant died unexpectedly in a car accident but neither her death nor her funeral was announced in church. An assistant told me about her death a week later during our interview. Baptisms were equally the affair of those individuals directly involved (08/08/2004). Of the two mass baptisms I attended, both occurred after the main service with only a handful of witnesses. The architecture of the church in Smith Street precluded public participation or observation while the pastors didn't invite anyone to stay on. The baptismal pool lay behind a shoulder-high wall on the stage. Sitting in the church

⁸ A store-front church in Durban. The family was told that the Smith Street church's stairs were too narrow for a coffin. The main entrance to this church building was at least 5 metres wide.

facing the stage one could not see anything of the baptisms while the baptised left the stage through a back door to change into dry clothing in the bathrooms. The church didn't have a choir, a tearoom where people could socialise after the services or a women's group. No community affairs apart from reminders of tithing Sundays, the Bishop's visit and the various campaigns were ever announced from the pulpit. Most people attended the church alone and left soon after the services.

It was thus not a surprise that regular UCKG-interviewees often only knew one or two other members in the church. Despite my short membership, I frequently introduced people who had been members for years. Casuli and Thandi for instance didn't know each other even though their membership overlapped by more than six years. At first, I assumed that it was because of the diverse social and economical backgrounds of the members but soon realised that their isolation was cultivated and carefully guarded (Zethu, 05/07/2005). As such, the UCKG offered a space in which individuals could stand apart from their problems and engage directly with the unseen powers that supposedly caused the dysfunctional social, spiritual and economical situation in which they (and their families) were caught. These engagements were highly individual acts and worked precisely because it excluded the small Bible-study and community institutions of other churches. Quite a number of my interviewees claimed that they came to the UCKG because in this church they didn't have to deal with the gossip, dressing competitions and politicking common in other churches (e.g. Makhosi, 11/04/2005; Persi, 23/08/2004). They were also not plagued by the witchcraft sent by fellow jealous church members. They were thus free to "fight the demons" as Casuli so often reminded me.

In the church services the pastors repeatedly commanded the congregation to engage directly with God in 'private talk' sessions. These sessions followed "strong prayers" during which the pastor led the congregation in an increasingly frenzied prayer during which they had to repeat phrases after him. With each phrase, their voices would raise in urgency, volume and tone. Once they reached fever-pitch, the pastor would command the congregation to demand their blessings from God, to talk to God and to ask God for his Power. Each individual would then shout at the top of their lungs, reminding God of his promises and demanding their blessings. They were emboldened by the contracts or "covenants" with God that they entered and sealed through their sacrifices and tithes. It was during these sessions that people "manifested" demons.

Fantastical and outrageous brushes with power

Many “unbelievers” came to see the incredible and outrageous things they heard going on in the church, especially on Tuesdays for the *Isiwasho* service and on Fridays for the exorcisms (e.g. Miss Mfubi, 01/07/2005). For people in Durban, the occult was not just about terror but provided a thrilling brush with excitement and illicit powers (cf. Geschiere 1997). These “unbelievers” would at first listen incredulously, shake their heads and tut at some of the pastors’ comments about the *amadlosi* or their need to sacrifice large sums of money to God. However, as they sat through the service, their attitudes gradually changed from distant scepticism to fascination. Although the pastors’ performances were very theatrical, it was inevitably the manifestations, testimonies and exorcisms that made the biggest impression. Most newcomers were stunned, scared and compelled by the things that the demons divulged and the members testified about. They often retold the more salacious stories in social settings outside the church. In the townships I was frequently entertained with stories about “my” strange church. The change in the “unbelievers” attitudes was most obvious at the moment when the pastor called for the unavoidable offerings. The majority of newcomers stood up and gave something. In all the time that I attended the UCKG, only one “unbeliever” left the service halfway through. The “unbelievers” that I talked to all confessed that they gave money, not because they were compelled or forced to but because they were convinced that the pastors commanded some power. They were afraid that the pastors’ familiars would “get” them if they didn’t offer money (e.g. Mzo, 15/03/2005).

Many of my interviewees recounted how the UCKG services at first amazed and captivated them. Several of them came to the UCKG to investigate the rumours, some with cameras. They recounted their impression that the church had obvious “power” and that they returned to see what would happen next. Most members I spoke to only gradually realised that the church could teach them to “overcome”. During their first couple of visits the church’s perceived power was created by the convergence of large numbers of people and fantastic things. As people visited the church alone, this power and the things that happened in the church were not dissected, appropriated and individualised in a group context. As I’ve illustrated in this paper, UCKG members didn’t socialise or share their lives with each other. It was only when people testified about their blessings that others learnt anything intimate

about their lives. Since people didn't know one another, they couldn't scrutinise the witnesses' testimonies or compare the relative changes that the UCKG's technology produced. As Thandi once remarked, "it is like those BioSlim ads with the before- and after- pictures, sometimes the pictures on the left don't even look like the same person" (20/06/2005). In the UCKG the before- and after- pictures were encapsulated in a single testimony and powerfully echoed with the convincing powers of slimming tablets, pyramid schemes and the Lottery. The rumours about the church accordingly resonated with stories of "fast money", illicit greed and fantastical riches that also circulated about people who used *'muthi* to win the Lottery.

In a fundamental sense, the UCKG members' faith in the technologies of the church and in their command of God's power was dependent on their engagement with spectacle. The UCKG provided this in a series of exorcisms, testimonies, tithes, sacrifices, private talks, strong prayers and covenants with God (like the ones made in the Campaigns). Each one of these acts allowed the individual to engage directly with the unseen and to manipulate (or "fight") those powers that blocked their blessings from God. This engagement was only possible because the individual was unencumbered by the close social ties that characterised other churches and consequently by the attendant dangers of social intimacy. In the relative social isolation of the UCKG, Casuli could thus "fight" the demons that undermined her efforts to reconcile with her aunt, her grandmother and her mother-in-law. She could also "fight" the infectious witchcraft that they practiced or sent on her way. By shying away from close personal relationships in the UCKG, Casuli and other members thus tried to create a space in which they could harness the church's powers to change their personal lives without being infected by the witchcraft of new "kin". Ironically, by prescribing the manner in which people had to engage with the unseen and in redefining individual powers, the UCKG not only fed upon but also exacerbated family conflicts over money, power and changing gender roles.

Conclusion

In this paper, I investigated the UCKG members' apparently asocial and selfish participation in the church. I showed that, contrary to the literature on other PCCs, this participation, which often cut deep into the webs of family obligations, did not transform individuals into hyper-modern subjectivities. Rather, UCKG members were already transformed by the changes in the South African labour market, gender

relationships and the exclusions of the new economy that the post-apartheid government's neoliberal policies produced. They utilised the church's technologies, secure in the knowledge that the UCKG had unique access to the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome the chronic unemployment of their men, the low-income and part-time employment of their women, the violent gender relationships, the fractured family lives, the meagre social grants and the loss of security they so acutely felt. In this regard, perceptions of the UCKG's powerful technologies were strengthened by the lack of socialisation in the church. As such, the church's theatrical testimonies and exorcisms were not dissected in a group context and consequently forced the individual to focus on snapshot presentations of power.

Since the UCKG's technology was fundamentally premised on the sacrifice of large amounts of (scarce) money, its use by hopeful members paradoxically (for the members at least) often caused greater rifts within families. For those thus "orphaned", the UCKG did not provide alternative families or tight-knit social groups that could lend financial and emotional support. Instead, UCKG members were urged to "trust God", or more accurately themselves, and to fight the demons that blocked their blessings. This was by necessity a lonely fight and one that required as few "uncontrollable" new social relations as possible. It was also a fight that brought into high relief the importance of family relations and often motivated UCKG members to attend family gatherings and ceremonies where they were in danger of being infected by more demons. The relationship between sociality and security in the UCKG was thus much more complex than the anthropological literature on PCCs suggested.

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