



Violent Conversion

**Brazilian Pentecostalism
and Urban Women
in Mozambique**

LINDA VAN DE KAMP

RELIGION IN TRANSFORMING AFRICA

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Urban Women in Mozambique**

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Introduction

You want to change your Life? You have to be 'Violent'! – Bishop Edir Macedo¹

'We are in war' (*Estamos em guerra*), yells a pastor the first time that I enter a Brazilian Pentecostal church in 2005, in the centre of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. Sounds of distorted guitars, crashing cymbals and crime thriller music play loudly. There are more than a thousand people present, mainly women, and they all start to stamp their feet on the floor crying, 'go away, go away [demon], and never return' (*sai, sai, e volte nunca mais*). Several women fall down on the floor. The pastor says they are possessed by evil spirits and asks everybody to direct their hands towards the women and scream 'burn, burn, burn' (*queima, queima, queima*) to drive the demons away forever.

While Pentecostals generally stress that the world is a place of spiritual warfare between God and Satan, for women frequenting Brazilian Pentecostal churches in Maputo, this spiritual war appears to have become appropriated in particular ways. Women form the majority of the visitors to Brazilian Pentecostal churches in the city (see below). Throughout the 26 months I lived in Maputo, between 2005 and 2011, many women told me that a certain spirit obstructed their intimate relationships, and I noted that Brazilian Pentecostal pastors were exorcising a specific spirit or demon called the 'husband of the night' (*marido da noite*), 'spiritual husband' (*marido espiritual*) or spirit of Pombagira – an Afro-Brazilian spirit that personifies sexual ambiguities. The symptoms that women who are connected to such a spirit experience include having sexual intercourse without the physical presence of anyone, a lack of success in marriage and the sudden disappearance of their partners and/or disputes with them. If they are married, the relationship is tense, the husband is uninterested in his wife but instead 'views her as his sister', or the women do not conceive. In these situations the

¹ *Quer mudar de Vida? Você tem que ser 'Violento!'*, Sermon at the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, 28 June 2014, <http://aescolidamt.blogspot.nl/2014/06/quer-mudar-de-vida-voce-tem-que-ser.html>.

Maputo women frequently turn to Brazilian Pentecostal churches where pastors fervently combat these and other 'evil' spirits.

Pentecostalism is relatively new to Mozambique, where before independence from Portugal in 1975 the religious landscape was largely defined by traditional African religions, Islam, Catholicism, classic Protestantism and African Independent Churches (AICs). In the post-colonial era, however, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are of growing importance,² and according to the last census (INE 2010) now represent 11 per cent of the total population (see below). This rapid growth is embodied in the new churches that come from Brazil and have sprung up in every neighbourhood in Maputo (Cruz e Silva 2003; Freston 2005). They are part of the new global brand of neo-Pentecostal Christianity that thrives in Africa, Latin America and Asia. These churches attract upwardly mobile urban middle-class women for whom Brazilian Pentecostalism, with its fervent connection with the Holy Spirit and its 'Violent Conversion', is fundamental to their lives.

This book demonstrates why and how these women find the combative approach of Brazilian pastors towards 'evil' and Afro-Brazilian spirits, such as Pombagira, appealing. In doing so, it focuses on the interplay between the Afro-Brazilian spiritual war and gender issues in a city that has been experiencing intense socio-cultural, political and economic transformations through Portuguese colonialism (until 1974), during a period of socialism after independence (c. 1974–89), a civil war (c. 1976–92) and the introduction of neo-liberal socio-economic and democratic structures (in the 1990s).

The aims of the present book are twofold. First, it seeks to contribute to discussions relating to the role of Pentecostalism in processes of social transformation. Pentecostalism has mainly been approached as a response to globalisation. Through religious practices, people may give meaning to and be able to deal with the anxieties of neo-liberal capitalism and commoditisation (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Maxwell 1998; Meyer 1998a; Pfeiffer *et al.* 2007; Vásquez 2009). Many scholars also argue that Pentecostalism offers help and security in times of uncertainty and poverty (see Hunt 2002a, 2002b; Meyer 2007: 122; Robbins 2004: 124; van Dijk 2010). Conversion to Pentecostalism can also bring about personal empowerment and socio-economic development (Attanasi and Yong 2012; Berger 2009, 2010; Martin 2002).

These views, which essentially stress the coping mechanisms of Pentecostalism, are challenged by observations regarding the Brazilian Pentecostal missionary presence in Southern Africa (van Wyk 2014; van de Kamp 2010). I argue that the Mozambican case demonstrates how the emergence of specific religious

² Evangelicals emphasise a personal conversion experience, and Pentecostal Evangelicals stress the importance of the additional reception of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues (Shibley 1998: 77).

movements, such as Brazilian Pentecostalism in Maputo, should not be understood primarily as a reaction to social, political or economic forces and globalisation; instead, religious groups act on and actively shape these and alternative forces. This insight comes from observations of how Brazilian Pentecostal discourses and practices urge converts to fight for a better life by stressing that believers should not wait until 'the global' reaches them but should make and create it themselves by using 'violence': converts need to appropriate the Pentecostal techniques of *breaking* with kin, *confronting* local cultural forms of love and marriage and *destroying* local patterns of exchange. Pentecostal ideologies and practices involve a spiritual war in which Pentecostals are soldiers in the fight between God and the Devil, using *spiritual* forces of praying, fasting and tithing (see below). In this sense, women's conversion to Brazilian Pentecostalism is thus not primarily a response to globalisation but is a force of globalisation in its own right.

Second, this study aims to demonstrate the importance of specific global links of Pentecostalism, most notably the South–South links. Various scholars have written about the apparent 'fit' between Pentecostalism and globalisation and its diverse ways of manifestation (Droogers 2001; Meyer 2010; Robbins 2004). In general, the study of global Pentecostalism has tended to focus on the spread of a modern Pentecostal culture that is predominantly Western (Droogers 2014: 196; Robbins 2004: 118). According to this view, Pentecostalism is a paradigmatic case of a global cultural-religious flow that started in the West and has travelled from country to country introducing a uniform set of practices and ideologies (Poewe 1994). Scholars have argued that Pentecostalism is attractive because it offers access to modern (Western) processes of cultural, economic and democratic globalisation (Berger 2009; Gifford 2004; Martin 2002).

Although this line of research has yielded important and generalised insights, it has tended to neglect transnational ties in global Pentecostalism and their diversity. So far, few studies have considered the increasingly important South–South linkages within the global Pentecostal movement – with the exception of works by Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001) and Freston (2001) (see also Oro *et al.* 2009; Rocha and Vásquez 2013). A good example of South–South transnational Pentecostal connections is the significant presence of Brazilian Pentecostal churches and missionaries in Southern Africa (Freston 2005). Pentecostalism's Southern forms appear to be contributing to and shaping processes of globalisation and modernisation in specific ways (van de Kamp and van Dijk 2010; see also Mafra 2011; Velho 2007). It could be suggested that global Pentecostalism becomes relevant for its followers in terms of the particularities of its transnational connections. The South–South transnational ties of Pentecostalism in Mozambique, including the Afro-Brazilian battle, offer possibilities for upwardly mobile women to transcend what is local, to move away from it and to pioneer new life spaces in order to effect transformations, shape

opportunities and constraints. Brazilian pastors enforce cultural distance from 'Africa' by urging converts to destroy elements of 'African culture'. The powerful atmosphere of conquest that South–South Pentecostalism consequently creates is important in understanding its violent techniques and effects (see further Chapter Two). Given the dominant role of Southern Pentecostalism in global Christianity today (Jenkins 2002), this insight may influence our understanding of the future of religion in the twenty-first century.

Brazilian Pentecostalism in Maputo

From the early 1990s, shortly after the end of a civil war, Christianity began to boom in Mozambique (see e.g. Cruz e Silva 2008; Pfeiffer *et al.* 2007; see also Morier-Genoud 2000). The end of the war also marked the end of a socialist era and the start of the democratisation and liberalisation of the economic and political domains, including a relaxing of regulations concerning religious expression. Since the colonial period, the Roman Catholic Church had been the country's biggest Christian church, followed by various Protestant churches and African Independent Churches (AICs). However, by 2010 in southern Mozambique, including Maputo, this situation had been reversed. The results of the most recent census (INE 2010) show that Catholicism is no longer the most important Christian denomination, but instead it has been overtaken by African Independent Christian movements, such as the Zionist churches (*Igrejas Zione*) (Cavallo 2013; Cruz e Silva 2008; Seibert 2005). Moreover, for the first time, Evangelicals and Pentecostals were counted together as one separate category, showing their growing importance. In the capital Maputo, they comprised 21 per cent of the population (INE 2009a).³

The most prominent neo-Pentecostal churches in Maputo have come from Brazil (Cruz e Silva 2003; Freston 2005). Since Pentecostal churches do not keep records of members and some people frequent the churches temporarily, it is difficult to say exactly how many people attend Brazilian Pentecostal churches, but the number is substantial. The most significant Brazilian Pentecostal church, the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, known as Universal Church) has at least one church building in every neighbourhood, mostly at strategic locations such as a central market or on a main road. Huge cathedrals (*catedrais*) have also been built. The new main cathedral of the Universal Church, the Cenáculo da Fé (Cenacle of Faith), at the

³ According to the census, Catholicism represented 28 per cent of the total population, Islam 18 per cent, Zionism 16 per cent and those without religion 18.5 per cent. It should be noted here that the classifications used in the census are debatable (Morier-Génoud 2014; see also Cruz e Silva 2008: 168–72).

Avenida 24 de Julho in the centre of the city, which was inaugurated in March 2011, is the largest modern church building in Mozambique. It contains a main auditorium with several thousand seats, a few smaller auditoriums, offices, a bookshop and a cash machine. All the Brazilian Pentecostal churches organise three to six services every day in each of their buildings and all the churches are packed with both temporary and permanent visitors, especially at the early morning and evening services just before and after work hours. The different churches in Maputo attract between 100 and 2,000 people, depending on their size. They often organise chains of services and prayers, a chain being a commitment to come to a church service on the same day every week, often for at least seven successive weeks, and to donate money at the end of that period.⁴ If participants break the chain, they have to start all over again for the chain to be effective. The churches also regularly organise mass rallies in public spaces, such as the Universal Church's *Dia da Decisão* (Decision Day), in September 2011, in the newly inaugurated Estado Nacional de Zimpeto, on the outskirts of Maputo. This stadium was built for the 2011 African Games with a donation from the Chinese government (Gerety 2013). All the Pentecostal churches use (radio) air time and (try to) feature on television, and the big churches, such as the Universal Church, own their own radio and TV stations. This visible and public presence of the churches is an important element in their strategy.

Like the new neo-Pentecostal churches elsewhere in the Global South those in Mozambique stress the importance of a direct personal experience with God through the embodiment of the Holy Spirit by followers of Jesus Christ (Anderson 2013; Asamoah-Gyaduh 2013; Mariano 1999).⁵ Despite encompassing a broad spectrum of Pentecostal worshippers, neo-Pentecostalism can be identified by the following features (Anderson 2004: 144–65). First, the neo-Pentecostal view of the world is one of a spiritual battlefield between demonic and heavenly forces (Hackett 2003). Against this backdrop, neo-Pentecostals in Africa are concerned with the influence of ancestral spirits, which

⁴ This is modelled on the Catholic *novena* (Freston 2005: 43).

⁵ Wagner (1988) described three historical periods of activity of the Holy Spirit in the twentieth century. The first wave refers to the birth of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century, such as in Los Angeles (Azusa Street) in 1906, which has come to be considered the birthplace of the Pentecostal church (for a discussion, see e.g. Stewart 2014). The second wave was the spread of the Charismatic movement throughout some Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s. The third wave started in the late 1970s and was also called neo-Pentecostalism or Pentecostal–Charismatic Christianity. See Freston (1995) on Brazilian Pentecostalism. But these classifications are increasingly being debated because of the historical and theological differences within Pentecostalism, and the overlap between the various waves (Anderson 2013).

they consider to be satanic spirits that need to be combated by the Holy Spirit (Meyer 1998a; van Dijk 1998). Secondly, neo-Pentecostalism concentrates on the so-called Prosperity Theology or Health and Wealth Gospel, underlining how a combative faith brings happiness, health and prosperity in all aspects of life (Coleman 2000; Gifford 2004; Martin 2002). This includes the financial practice of 'sowing and reaping': the more money one offers, the more money one may expect to earn. Thirdly, neo-Pentecostal churches are characterised by an entrepreneurial style of operation, including their own institutional organisation, style of intervening in the media and politics, and the use of modern marketing strategies (Freston 2001; Pype 2012; Ukah 2008). This corresponds with a fourth characteristic of the neo-Pentecostal movement, which is its international orientation (Anderson 2004; Coleman 2000; Meyer 2010). Most neo-Pentecostal churches operate in global networks of exchange where the public media as well as the circulation of charismatic leaders, ideas, books and other materials are crucial in targeting localities around the world as part of the mission to transform nations, communities and people's personal lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As part of the growing power of Southern Christianity (Freston 2001; Jenkins 2002; Sanneh and Carpenter 2005), Brazilian Pentecostals have established new transnational Christian connections in Africa. Until the early 2000s, most of the Brazilian evangelical missionaries in Africa went to Mozambique (Freston 2005: 55) and today Brazilian churches are integrated and prominent in the country's (peri-)urban landscape. Non-Brazilian transnational Pentecostal churches in Mozambique mostly originate from South Africa or Zimbabwe, sometimes also from Malawi or Tanzania (see e.g. van Koevering 1992; Maxwell 2006). Other churches come from outside the Southern African region, such as the neo-Pentecostal Redeemed Christian Church of God, which has its roots in Nigeria, and the Ghanaian Lighthouse Chapel.⁶ These non-Brazilian neo-Pentecostal churches attract expats but few Mozambicans since English is the prevailing language used.⁷ More importantly, these churches lack the cultural imagery that has developed in the transnational setting of the Brazilian churches. As a result, the transnational neo-Pentecostal churches in Mozambique remain predominantly

⁶ A few neo-Pentecostal leaders from Asia and the Middle East regularly came to Mozambique, such as Pastor Dilkumar from one of the largest Evangelical church in the Middle East, the King's Revival International Church in Dubai, who held mega services of miracles. As my interlocutors from time to time switched churches and I followed them, I also visited new, non-Pentecostal transnational churches like the Brazilian-Japanese Igreja Messiânica Mundial (the Messianic World Church/Johrei Centre) with its Buddhist influences, which rapidly became very popular.

⁷ The expats I met in these churches were Nigerians, Zimbabweans and South Africans who were living in Maputo.

of Brazilian origin⁸ and even where they did not originate in Brazil, they often have close ties with it. The prominent neo-Pentecostal Igreja Evangélica Cristã Maná (Christian Evangelical Church Maná), for example, originated in Portugal but was often considered Brazilian as it is also active there. The same applies to transnational churches set up by Mozambicans; for example, the fast-growing neo-Pentecostal Evangelho em Acção (Gospel in Action) also maintains close ties with Brazil.

During the periods of my research in Mozambique, between 2005 and 2011, the transnational neo-Pentecostal churches in Mozambique were almost all run by foreign pastors who are predominantly from Brazil, and to a lesser extent from Angola, and in the case of Maná from Portugal too. The Portuguese language and the countries' shared history as a result of colonialism have facilitated the connection between Brazilians, Angolans, Mozambicans and to a lesser extent Portuguese. Consequently, the international network these churches in Mozambique enjoy is primarily Lusophone,⁹ with a key role being played by Brazil. Moreover, the Brazilian pastors perform a specific Pentecostal style, which Mozambican converts characterise as a passion exposed in gestures such as embracing and in a form of openness that they found contrasting with the generally more reserved bodily movements of Mozambicans. The 'therapy of love' is an example of this particular Pentecostal style (see Chapter Five).¹⁰

The African descent of many Brazilian Pentecostal pastors and their knowledge of Afro-Brazilian religions also play an important role. Many converts expressed how, in contrast to European missionaries, 'the Brazilians understand these things of *magia negra* (black magic)' (see further Chapter Two). According to Anderson (2004: 69–70), the fact that Brazil has one of the highest numbers of Pentecostals must be seen in the light of the significance of Afro-Brazilian religious movements like Umbanda and Candomblé, because Pentecostals accept the reality of the spirit world but exorcise the 'demons' of Umbanda and other movements.

The most prominent Brazilian neo-Pentecostal churches¹¹ in Maputo are the Universal Church, the Igreja Pentecostal Deus é Amor (the Pentecostal Church God is Love, known as God is Love) and the Igreja Mundial do Poder de Deus (the World Church of the Power of God, known as the World Church) (see below for details). Some women have been frequenting a church for as long as fifteen years, while others frequently changed churches. Some Pentecostal

⁸ An exception is the fast-growing neo-Pentecostal movement that will not feature in this study, Iris Ministries (Brown 2011; Poloma 2003: 215–35).

⁹ Lusophone refers to linkages with Portuguese culture and language.

¹⁰ The therapy is a public meeting that resembles a church service but is dedicated to the subjects of marriage, love and sexuality.

¹¹ I use the shorthand terms Pentecostalism and Pentecostal churches for neo-Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostal churches.

women I met moved to churches other than the three principal ones during my period of study; these included the Brazilian Igreja Baptista Renovada (Renewed Baptist Church)¹² and the prominent neo-Pentecostal Church Maná.¹³ Brazilian missionaries also work in the classic Pentecostal Assembly of God Church, the Igreja Evangélica Assembleia de Deus (Evangelical Church Assembly of God, known as Assembly of God). Generally acknowledged to be the biggest Pentecostal – and maybe even Protestant and Evangelical – church in Mozambique, this Church was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century (Garrard in Burgess and van der Maas 2002: 180). While it has lost many members to the Brazilian neo-Pentecostal churches some have returned and some neo-Pentecostal elements have been incorporated into the Assemblies, such as the focus on tithes and the exorcism of demons during church services.¹⁴

¹² This Church has its roots in the classical Baptist Church of Brazil and was set up in Mozambique by a female Brazilian pastor (for a history of Baptist churches in Mozambique, see Thompson 1989). It demonstrates aspects of the Prosperity Gospel and maintains relations with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Churches. In addition to its weekly Sunday services, there are prayers on Tuesday evenings, Bible study on Wednesday evenings, prayers and fasting on Friday mornings and a service on Friday evenings. On Saturdays there is a programme for the youth. I attended a meeting for women on the National Day of Mozambican Women when the topic was women's value and potential. Several meetings were organised for the youth to discuss subjects such as dating, love and sexuality. There is also a specific ministry for deaf persons. Maputo's main Christian bookshop used to be found on the Church premises, selling literature from Brazil.

¹³ Maná was founded in Lisbon in 1984 by the engineer Jorge Tadeu, who was born in Mozambique and converted to Pentecostalism while living in South Africa. It was officially registered in Mozambique in 1997. Based on interviews and the webpage of the Church, I estimate that today Maná has about 70 places of worship across Mozambique. Television and radio play a central role in Church life. The Maná Satellite television channel (ManáSat) is transmitted from Lisbon to Mozambique, and members reported how a service from Lisbon used to be broadcast in its entirety during a service in Mozambique (see also Smit 2012: 248). Developments in the Church in other parts of the world, such as Brazil, can be followed on ManáSat. In 2006, a local television channel opened. Maná church has become particularly prominent due to its radio broadcasts and its radio station Viva (Lively or Hurray!) is the preferred channel in many *chapas* (public transport, minibuses) as it features popular (secular) songs and offers listeners the chance to send messages to friends. As well as services on Sundays and Friday nights, Maná organises courses during the week for new converts, prayer meetings and house groups. There was a regular *cruzada de milagres* (crusade of miracles) on Saturdays, and next to the main church building near the Estrela Vermelha Market (which is known for to sell stolen goods), a small shop sells books written by Jorge Tadeu. In contrast to the Brazilian Pentecostal churches, Maná has female pastors.

¹⁴ There are several types of Assemblies of God Churches in Mozambique (see e.g. Maxwell 2006: 69, 99, 101; Premadharwa 2015). The Assembly of God in Maputo has always had close links with the Assemblies of God in South Africa where missionaries from the

In the past few years, and since periods of fieldwork, other well-known Brazilian Pentecostal churches have been established, such as the Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus (International Church of God's Grace), and Brazilian missionaries have been arriving and creating their own independent churches.

A particular feature of the Pentecostal spiritual war in Mozambique is its Afro-Brazilian connection. The Afro-Brazilian spirits that Brazilian pastors refer to, such as the spirit of Pombagira that personifies sexual ambiguities, play an important role in how Mozambican Pentecostal women view their connections with spirits, and also in their relationships with their partners and kin. Brazilian Pentecostal pastors in Brazil (Birman 2006: 65) and in Southern Africa (Freston 2005: 46–7) consider the heart of all evil to lie in Africa. They explain that since the transatlantic slave trade transported many African slaves to Brazil, evil spirits from Africa, in their view, also crossed the Atlantic and came to figure in Afro-Brazilian possession cults in Brazil, such as Candomblé and Umbanda.¹⁵ The Brazilian Pentecostal missionaries stress that they are now re-crossing the Atlantic to combat the roots of this 'evil'.¹⁶ Thus on the basis of historical cultural proximity in South–South or Brazilian–African exchanges, the pastors at the Brazilian Pentecostal churches in Maputo create a cultural distance from 'Africa' and aim to destroy elements of 'African culture' (van de Kamp 2013a).

The other important element of Brazilian Pentecostalism in Mozambique is the way in which it has wrought significant changes in gender and social relations, shaping the women's lives, and allowing them to fulfil different roles that include taking up a more central position in urban society than would previously have been unimaginable. In this book, I examine this interaction between the Afro-Brazilian connection of Pentecostalism, the spiritual war and gendered social changes in Maputo.

Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), Switzerland, Norway, the UK and the US worked (interview with Reinhard H. Mattheis, 21 May 2007). In 1938, official affiliation came with the Assemblies in Portugal, which brought the Mozambican Assemblies into contact with Brazilians (Upton 1980: 102). In addition to the more classic Pentecostal features of the Assembly of God, it incorporates more aspects of local culture than the neo-Pentecostal churches, and critical views on traditional customs are articulated in a less confrontational manner. The Assembly of God has a theological seminary in Maputo, the Escola Bíblica da Igreja Evangélica Assembleia de Deus de Moçambique, with several other branches around the country too.

¹⁵ The leader of the Universal Church explains this view in his book *Orixás, Caboclos & Guias: Deuses ou Demônios?* (Macedo 2000).

¹⁶ This view was regularly expressed during church services of the God is Love church in Maputo. A Mozambican pastor at the Universal Church explained that there are many more demons in Brazil than in Mozambique, 'but they came to Brazil because of the slaves, thus their origin is in Africa' (conversation, 12 March 2007).



1 Universal Church at the start of the highway from Maputo to the north of the country. Photo: Rufus de Vries

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God

Of the three main Brazilian Pentecostal churches in Maputo, the earliest established was the Universal Church. It opened its doors in the city in 1992, shortly after the signing of the peace treaty that marked the end of the civil war in Mozambique. The Universal Church was founded in 1977 in Rio de Janeiro by Edir Macedo, a white lower-middle class former state-lottery employee. The Church grew rapidly, and by 2000 was Brazil's third largest Evangelical church with about two million followers (Corten *et al.* 2003: 33). Macedo was raised a Catholic and in his youth participated in Afro-Brazilian cults. He became Pentecostal when he was an adolescent. Chesnut (1997: 45) considers this Church to be post-modern because 'the hegemonic beliefs and practices of classic and modern Pentecostalism are syncretised with elements of [the Afro-Brazilian cult] *umbanda* and reinterpreted through the lens of television culture.'

Bishop Edir Macedo and the Universal Church own an enormous international business empire that includes, among others, one of Brazil's largest media conglomerates – Rede Record – with global connections, publishing houses, a private aeroplane, travel agencies, a bank and construction companies (see e.g. Freston 2001: 15–58; Oro and Semán 2001). However, the largest source

of income comes from church donations. The *New York Times* reported that Macedo's wealth is estimated at close to a billion dollars (Romero 2014). In 2014, the Church opened its new 10,000-seat temple in Rio de Janeiro, a replica of the former Jewish temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which cost about US\$300 million (*ibid.*).

This Church has gained the attention of scholars because it is by far the largest neo-Pentecostal movement in Brazil, with an impressive presence worldwide (Freston 2001; Corten *et al.* 2003).¹⁷ By 2015, the Church said to be operating in eighty-one countries, with over a thousand congregations in Southern Africa,¹⁸ of which about 250 are in Mozambique. I estimate that about 100 of these branches are in the capital Maputo.¹⁹ It is the largest neo-Pentecostal church in Mozambique, and the most aggressive in terms of recruiting strategies as well as in its critiques of the local culture. For this reason, this Church features in this study as the most prominent case of Brazilian Pentecostal presence in urban Mozambique.

In his article on the manifestation of the Universal Church in Southern Africa (Angola, South Africa and Mozambique), Freston (2005: 1) claims that this Church is an important player in the growth and spread of Third World evangelism as it is the 'first major example in the region of a new phenomenon: a successful church which is neither of First World nor African origin'. Although the number of churches worldwide seems impressive, the Universal Church has experienced considerable difficulties in many countries and has not always been successful in establishing new branches (e.g. Oro 2004). Mozambique is one of its success stories. The Church is very much present here, and its numerical growth and impact on public awareness have been significant. Mozambican sociologist Carlos Serra wrote (2003: 45) that the Church has been able to gather a big following in just a few years, which no other church has been able to do in Mozambique. The Church has buildings at strategic locations in all the major cities, including Maputo, Beira, Nampula and Chimoió.²⁰

As with everything in the Universal Church, its transnational expansion to Mozambique was centrally planned (Freston 2005).²¹ Its strategy for expan-

¹⁷ The latest census in Brazil, however, shows a decline in adherents of the Universal Church in favour of the World Church of the Power of God and the Assemblies of God churches (IBGE 2012: 143–57; Andrade 2012).

¹⁸ http://www.uckg.org/?page_id=1973, accessed 28 September 2015.

¹⁹ The number of churches in Maputo city is based on personal observation and interviews with church leaders in the period 2005–8, and was updated in 2011.

²⁰ In the more Muslim north, such as Nampula, the Church encounters more difficulties in establishing congregations and is less visible than in southern and central provinces (see also Premawardhana 2015).

²¹ However, a report by Gerety (2013) suggests that it was the initiative of José Guerra, a Mozambican professor of engineering and the Church's president, to bring the Universal

sion and conversion relies heavily, as in other countries, on an extensive use of mass media, a strategic location plan that includes renting cinemas or other public buildings, and its services with their regular daily themes. Brazilian pastors started to hold church services in empty cinemas in Maputo at the end of 1992, and the performances rapidly gained popularity. My interlocutors told me how they initially attended services just out of curiosity, having heard that the Brazilians were entertaining, exorcised spirits, cured diseases, presented solutions for problems and could make one rich. Services used to be a good option for an evening out as no films were screened at cinemas in the early 1990s.²² Others, however, accused the Church of being a sect and a money machine, and of preventing films from being shown in the cinemas. Some people wrote letters to the national newspapers in which they complained that the Church and its Brazilian pastors were taking over all the important buildings in Maputo.²³ It was also accused of drawing believers away from the other churches.²⁴ The Catholic Church in particular experienced a serious loss of members, Catholics and Pentecostals told me (see also Freston 2005: 57). During my fieldwork, the Universal Church appeared in the media again following a conflict with the municipal council in an elite neighbourhood (Polana) where the Church wanted to build its main cathedral, the Cenacle of Faith, which finally has been raised at the Avenue 24th of July in the centre of the city. However, since the Church has been constructing its own buildings, is seen to be investing in Mozambique, is educating Mozambican pastors and has a programme of social work (ABC:

Church to Mozambique, with the help of a Portuguese minister, Ennio Correia, after the Church had been prohibited from entering the country in 1989.

²² After a gradual decline, the national cinema collapsed in the early 1990s after the liberalisation of the media and the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (Power 2004). In other African countries and elsewhere, Pentecostal churches have taken over cinemas too, making their engagement with the public sphere very visible (de Witte 2008a; Meyer 2002; Pype 2012).

²³ Some of the critique was also related to suspicions that the Universal Church would have made a deal with the Frelimo government before the first multi-party elections, which allowed the Church to set up its radio and TV stations and to rent a part of the Frelimo Central Committee building in Maputo (see also Freston 2005: 56, 57).

²⁴ Critical articles about the Universal Church appeared in journals in the 1990s. The former director of the government's Department of Religious Affairs, the late Mr Chabal, informed me that he had to intervene in discussions on television and radio about whether the Church should be ordered to leave the country. He had to explain that Mozambique is a secular state and defended freedom of religion (interview, 18 February 2005). A former secretary of the Council of Christian Churches in Mozambique (CCM), Dinis Matsolo, also told me that the CCM supported the presence of the Universal Church in the country, as freedom of religion had to be maintained (interview, 17 February 2005).