

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE NEWS: MELODRAMA AND FACTUAL RECORD

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ABSTRACT

The controversial establishment of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Portugal was the subject of many news reports during the 1990s, in which accusations of serious crimes — from charlatanism to connections to drug trafficking and child abduction — filled the pages of newspapers (G. M. Dias, 2006; R. A. S. Dias, 2016; Farias, 1999; Farias & Santos, 1999; Júnior, 2013; Machado, 2003). Many of these news reports linked the Church with stereotypes about Brazil and Brazilians and referenced Brazilian soap operas, which were quite popular in the country at the time. To observe whether these characteristics have been maintained over the years, the author analysed reports published by the influential newspapers *Público* and *Expresso* from the early 21st century (2001 and 2002), in 2010 and 2017, respectively. Inspired by critical discourse analysis and framing analysis, and with the theoretical support of the theory of social representations, such analyses allowed the author to conclude that the characteristics identified in the 1990s remained, although the Church's media presence has since reduced. In turn, the reference to soap operas manifests in the fabric of journalistic discourse, with a hybridisation formed between the melodramatic and informational genres.

KEYWORDS

social representations, journalism, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, melodrama, soap operas

A IGREJA UNIVERSAL DO REINO DE DEUS EM NOTÍCIA: MELODRAMA E REGISTO FACTUAL

RESUMO

O polémico estabelecimento da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus em Portugal deu ensejo a uma cobertura jornalística durante a década de 1990, em que acusações de crimes graves — de charlatanismo a ligações com o narcotráfico e o rapto de crianças — preencheram as páginas dos jornais (G. M. Dias, 2006; R. A. S. Dias, 2016; Farias, 1999; Farias & Santos, 1999; Júnior, 2013; Machado, 2003). Também se observou no discurso jornalístico do período a associação da Igreja a estereótipos sobre o Brasil e os brasileiros e a referência às telenovelas brasileiras, então bastante populares no país. Com o objetivo de observar se estas características se mantiveram ao longo dos anos, analisámos peças publicadas pelos jornais de referência *Público* e *Expresso* no início do século XXI (2001 e 2002), em 2010 e em 2017. Inspirada pela análise crítica do discurso e a análise de enquadramentos, e com o suporte teórico da teoria das representações sociais, tal análise permitiu-nos concluir que se mantém as características identificadas nos anos 1990 na cobertura da Igreja, embora a sua presença mediática se tenha atenuado. Por sua vez, a

referência às telenovelas revela-se na tessitura do discurso jornalístico, com uma hibridez entre os géneros melodrama e informativo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

representações sociais, jornalismo, Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, melodrama, telenovelas

1. INTRODUCTION

Founded in Brazil in 1977, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) began its internationalisation in Portugal, establishing its presence in the country 12 years later. That was not smooth and caused some conflicts, which were widely reported by the media. Two facts can be referred to as significant events of the arrival of the Church in the country: the purchase of the Coliseu concert hall in Porto, which caused numerous protests, and the aggressive attack on worshippers who were attending a meeting in a shopping centre in Matosinhos (G. M. Dias, 2006).

The attempt to buy the Coliseu was interpreted as an offence — especially by the population of Porto, due to the history and cultural importance of the building — and generated widespread public demonstrations; the “Matosinhos case”, however, refers to the 10-hour period in which worshippers were surrounded by a crowd shouting insults and trying to physically attack them. Both events, which took place in 1995, had wide repercussions in the media and marked the moment in which news media coverage of UCKG became recurrent. However, references to the Church in newspapers date back to 1991. According to Guilherme Dias (2006), not only were accusations made against its leader, Edir Macedo, and the UCKG scrutinised by the Brazilian justice system, but descriptions of the cult also took a pejorative tone, for example, with the term “bishop” — the term used for the Church’s priests — being written in quotation marks.

Miguel Farias (1999) identifies a piece from *Correio da Manhã* newspaper as the first example of a series of increasingly common news reports about the Church printed in various media sources. Entitled “Seita ‘Suspeita’ Tem Igrejas em Portugal” (A “Suspicious” Sect Has Churches in Portugal), the news report dates from the 16th of June 1991. According to the author, given the lack of studies and research centres in Portugal on new religious movements — a fitting designation for UCKG — in the early 1990s, the press became the main opinion maker about the Church. During this period, reports on the UCKG¹ focused on two main aspects: their extravagant character and the hysteria in its meetings — which included exorcisms and miracles — as well as its income and prosperity, emphasising tithing requirements and the characterisation of its members as people with low literacy.

At this point, it should be explained that UCKG classifies itself as a neo-Pentecostal denomination by emphasising the third entity in the trinity — the Holy Spirit — through

¹ Farias (1999) analysed reports published between 1992 and 1999 by the following newspapers: *Expresso*, *Independente*, *Visão*, *Público*, *Diário de Notícias*, *Jornal de Notícias*, *Correio da Manhã*, *Capital* and *Tal & Qual*.

miraculous manifestations such as “baptism in the spirit”, speaking languages, and physical healing. A focus is also placed on the temporal world, appealing to the worldly needs of worshipers. In this approach, poverty and wealth are the practical opposite of sin and grace, respectively. Although the so-called “theology of prosperity” is not present in the entirety of the neo-Pentecostal movement, its presence in the UCKG is noticeable due to the emphasis placed on a transformation of life not only in terms of body, spirit, and life-style but also consumption patterns (Garrard-Burnett, 2011).

It was also noted that the press began to associate UCKG with Brazilian nationality in this period, as can be observed in the following excerpt written by Diana Andringa for *Público* newspaper on the 5th of August 1995:

watching just one of the UCKG’s usual television broadcasts is sufficient to provide an understanding of how its persuasive power comes, to a large extent, from its harmony with the programmes that form the mainstays of our so-called generalist televisions: the promotion of fear and irrationality, even the skilful maintenance of the Brazilian accent in soap operas... (G. M. Dias, 2006, p. 302)

The mention of the priests’ accents being the same as the characters in Brazilian soap operas implies that their emotions are not grounded in reality, like the fictional characters on television. Igor Machado (2003) mentions another moment when, in the context of the aggression against the UCKG worshippers, a reporter for the *Diário de Notícias* (the 11th of November 1995) says the following: “there is nothing worse (...) than bishop João Luís or José Carlos, speaking in a soap opera accent, giving us media lessons in civics” (p. 213)². Rafael Dias (2016) also indicates the relationship established by the newspapers between the Brazilian accent and that of soap operas and the language of the Church (pronunciation and plots) when citing excerpts such as the following in *Público* on the 27th of August 1995:

the Universal Church speaks the same language as soap operas, and similarities are not only in the accent, which is so familiar to Portuguese ears but also in the many difficult lives, many easy promises of happiness to be fulfilled right at the end of the series. (p. 272)

The author also cites another report printed in *Público* (“Igreja Universal da Rádio de Deus”; Universal Church of the Radio of God, the 24th of August 1995, p. 35), where the Brazilian accent is once again highlighted as a characteristic of the Church: “on the other end of the line, until 2:30 or even 3:00 in the morning, a voice with a Brazilian accent appeals to all who think about abandoning life. The UCKG waits for all the lost sheep” (R. A. S. Dias, 2016, p. 272). Rafael Dias (2016) concludes that associations between the UCKG and something fanciful and unreal had become common in the press during this period.

² It is believed that the author misinterpreted this reference, as, according to Rafael Dias (2016), this excerpt was written by José Leite Pereira, the then director of *Público* in Porto, and features on Page 4 of the edition printed on the 11th of November 1995.

Two social perceptions about Brazil can be observed in this media reference to the Brazilian accent: the first, which was longstanding, relates to the stereotype of trickery and the idea that Brazilian people are con artists. The other was more recent, relating to a feeling of a Brazilian cultural invasion in which soap operas emerged as a paradigmatic example. Thus, Machado (2003) proposes that while the pair sex and trickery represented one of the main ways in which Brazil and Brazilians were perceived in Portugal, the way soap operas were linked to the UCKG led to the idea that the former promoted new ways of dealing with sexuality and the Church as a “trambique” (scam)³.

These current images of Brazil and Brazilians — periodically updated by inserting new elements, such as the Church’s arrival in the country — originate from the Portuguese imperial experience. Beyond the peculiarities of this experience in the Portuguese context, and the specific relationship between Portugal and Brazil during the colonial period, it is possible to understand the perpetuity of these images and their association with the UCKG phenomenon from a decolonial perspective (Quijano, 1992). Understanding coloniality as the persistence of the hegemonic paradigm of modern colonial rationality, where the ways of producing knowledge, the systems of meaning and the like of the colonised peoples “were [remain] enclosed in the category of the ‘exotic’” (Quijano, 1992, p. 13), we identify the presence of such a perspective in the journalistic coverage of the UCKG during the 1990s⁴.

As Farias (1999) indicates, in light of this new phenomenon, the newspaper’s analysis sought to identify “exotic” elements (a term used by the author) in the services, discourse, and actions of the UCKG. The underlying defence of rational values and European cultural heritage can also be observed in articles such as the following, published by *Jornal de Notícias* newspaper on the 30th of May 1999 (“Temas Especiais: Viagem Pelo Reino da Crendice Profunda”; Special Issue: A Journey Through the Realm of Deep Belief):

and when Bishop Marcelo Breyner, referring to the incidents in Matosinhos, says that “that’s good for the world to see what Portugal is like”, we always feel like saying “Amen!”... in fact, it is good that the World can realise that this corner of Europe is not a “banana republic”. (Farias, 1999, para. 55)

Also, from a decolonial/postcolonial perspective, in line with Boaventura Sousa Santos’s (2001) thesis about Portugal historically asserting itself as a coloniser while

³ The image of an exalted sensuality is historically associated with Brazilians (especially Brazilian women). Hence we may wonder how this image clashed with establishing a Brazilian Church in Portugal. In her ethnographic work in the country, Clara Mafra (2002) observed that the stereotypes of masculinity and sensuality were also associated with Brazilian priests — who did not shy away from mentioning sexual themes during meetings, even in a veiled and jocular tone — which curiously served to endorse their competence within Portugal. The author even says that the priests’ style was reminiscent of the “heartthrobs in Brazilian soap operas” (p. 193). However, no work or the analysed pieces mentioned such a connection drawn by the journalistic discourse.

⁴ Paradoxically, an expression of coloniality can be identified in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God’s approach, especially in its fierce criticism of Afro-Brazilian religions. As Mafra (2002) points out, priests in Portugal taught that Brazil was the land of Umbanda and Candomblé, where the devil was incorporated and an object of worship. To convey the message, they described some rites practised in these religions during the rites, emphasising aspects of impurity, danger, and cruelty.

also being somewhat colonised, Farias (1999) interprets this excerpt as evidencing the opposite of what it tries to express: “a certain feeling of inferiority compared to Europe, trying to transfigure itself into a false strength of character” (para. 56).

2. THE “BRAZILIAN INVASION”

The feeling of Brazilian invasion is largely explained by the fact that soap operas introduced in Portugal formed the basis of the main transformations seen in the Portuguese television market. As Catarina Burnay (2005) exemplifies, the broadcasting of *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela* (Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon) in 1977 led to Portuguese people changing their routines and behaviour during the period in which it was broadcast, including the time of sessions held in the National Parliament. The consequence of this intense presence of Brazilian soap operas was the consolidated consumption of Brazilian cultural products they advertised. Books, music, theatre, and cinema were considered “best-sellers” whenever they were related to soap operas (Ferreira, 2014).

Despite its enormous popularity with audiences, the widespread presence of Brazilian soap operas and related cultural products triggered social criticism about the so-called “Brazilian invasion” — mainly by the press. Paulo Gracino Júnior (2013) indicates a piece published in 1981 by *Jornal de Notícias* newspaper that pointed to the “attempt at Brazilian colonisation through soap operas” (p. 196). The preponderance of a double concern can be observed in this criticism by the press: a presumptive popularisation of the “Brazilian” accent, and approval of customs and habits, especially relating to sexuality.

Where the latter is concerned, the social impact of Brazilian soap operas must be understood in the context of over 4 decades of conservative dictatorship (which ended in 1974), which imposed a strong sense of morality regarding sexuality (Pais, 2010). As Isabel Ferin Cunha (2005) notes, Brazilian soap operas were then not perceived as conveying emancipatory models of womanhood but as examples of cultural and sexual transgression.

As an artistic genre, soap opera is ranked below other genres such as theatre, cinema, and literature in the assessment hierarchies created and maintained by the press and their critics. By routinely employing techniques of affective involvement, appealing to everyday life, repeatability, and redundancy, these same characteristics link soap operas to television, which is “seen as a manipulator of consciences; the result of a ‘cultural industry’ that turns everything it touches into a product” (Burnay, 2005, p. 108).

Thus, the establishment of the UCKG in Portugal, as the dentist controversy in the mid-1990s and that of sex workers in the early 21st century⁵, had a notable influence on updating Brazil and Brazilians’ image in the country. In these two cases, the stereotypes of trickery and extreme sexuality were associated, respectively, with Brazilian dentists and

⁵ In 1991, the Portuguese Professional Association of Dentists began to denounce Brazilian dentists acting illegally in the country since, as the official body responsible for regulating the profession, it was deemed the only body capable of granting the equivalence of diplomas that allowed Brazilian dentists to practise their profession (Machado, 2003). Regarding the issue of Brazilian sex workers, this was marked by the eruption of the highly mediatised case “Mothers of Bragança” in 2003, concerning the petition established by women from the Northern Portuguese city to expel Brazilian women for, supposedly, seducing their husbands (Pais, 2010).

Brazilian prostitutes; the UCKG identified as something “new” from Brazil was seen from an interpretative viewpoint interrelating images of trickery, corruption, and easy profit (Machado, 2003).

Thus, the establishment of the UCKG was experienced both as a threat to the catholic pillars of Portuguese society and as a surge in irrationalism. It opposed the current process of modernisation that began with Portugal’s accession to the European Economic Community in 1986. In this context, the media played a leading role in combining the aspirations of various segments of society with the conflicts in which the UCKG was involved (Júnior, 2013).

A few years after its arrival in the country, the UCKG was already registering frequent appearances in newspapers with a particular type of coverage, being characterised less as a religious institution and more as a criminal association (Farias, 1999). As Guilherme Dias (2006) notes, the name of the Church was linked to crimes numerous times — the accusations ranged from charlatanism to links to Colombian drug trafficking and child abduction, though these were rarely confirmed.

Although the events of 1995 boosted this recurrent news coverage of the UCKG, its media presence diminished from 1999 onwards. One hypothesis to explain this reduction was the replacement of Bishop João Luís, who was then responsible for the Church in the country, with one of Portuguese origin. Thus, “calm came from the diacritical signs of ‘Brazilianness’ no longer being so strongly present in the figure of the new bishop” (Dias, 2006, p. 313).

3. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

Some news reports published by *Público* and *Expresso* newspapers were then analysed to discuss the journalistic coverage of the UCKG over the years following this initial turbulent period. The first two reports date from 2001 and 2002, corresponding to the period in which the Church media presence would have been reduced. The other four news items refer to two situations that occurred in 2010 and 2017 concerning the inauguration of the first UCKG cathedrals in Portugal, and the denunciation of an illegal adoption scheme by the Church, respectively.

To verify whether the characteristics observed in the media coverage of the Church in the 1990s were maintained in the following years, all editions published by *Público* and *Expresso* were assessed between 2000 and 2005 and from 2010 to 2015. The reason for selecting these two periods is that while the first interval concerns the period in which the Church’s presence in the newspapers would have declined, it also coincides with the second wave of Brazilian immigration to Portugal. As Jorge Malheiros (2007) indicated, the Brazilian community had constantly increased since the 1980s. However, it experienced a vertiginous growth from 1999 onwards, with a notably younger stream of arrivals, more women with lower levels of education. That contrasted with the first wave, composed mostly of skilled workers. The selection of the second period of analysis corresponds to an interest in verifying the presence of the UCKG in the newspapers at

a time during which the foreign community as a whole decreased in Portugal due to the economic crisis⁶.

Considering that throughout the 1990s, and especially after the events of 1995, news reports about the Church were largely guided by social perceptions about Brazil and Brazilians, an investigation of journalistic coverage is justified not only during a less turbulent period for the UCKG but also for a period that was decisive for the migratory flow between Portugal and Brazil. It is worth highlighting that the second wave of Brazilian immigration was more closely linked with discrimination and xenophobia due to the immigrant's characteristics (Malheiros, 2007).

When hard copy editions of the newspapers printed between 2000 and 2005 were analysed, only two news reports about the Church, one from *Expresso* and the other from *Público*, were identified. Regarding the two news items from 2010, both refer to the same fact: the inauguration of the first UCKG cathedrals in Portugal. The two 2017 news reports refer to an alleged illegal adoption scheme first broadcast by TV channel TVI. The significant repercussions of this case determined its integration into this analysis. News reports were selected from the newspapers' websites by searching for the keywords "IURD" (UCKG) and "adoção" (adoption).

An analysis of the texts allows for the assessment of the relationships between the Church and Brazilian soap operas. They transcended mere references to prototypical signs of Brazilianness and the connotative sense of generating deceitful emotions spreading in journalistic discourse. This is noticeable through observation of the topics selected and highlighted in each news item (for example, when they are positioned in more prominent places on the page or repeated throughout the text) and how they are associated with cultural symbols familiar to a Portuguese audience. As Robert Entman (1993) points out, the sociocultural dimension is inseparable from the action of framing because a certain way of perceiving and understanding reality always relies on common sense and the perception of a given society for background. So, "culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping" (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Therefore, the hybridisation of one type of discourse can be identified — one that has a more factual and analytical profile typical of journalism, with another of a fictitious character, closer to what would be defined as popular literature. Thus, the understanding presented by Anatol Rosenfeld (2005) can be employed in which fictional characters are not the only or even the most relevant distinctive feature of literature, with aesthetic evaluation criteria bearing a particularly significant weight for this determination⁷. Therefore, the verification of the fictional character of a text is independent of such value criteria, referring instead to ontological, logical, and epistemological problems.

⁶ As can be verified in the annual statistical reports produced by the Portuguese Immigration and Border Service (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras, n.d.).

⁷ It should be emphasised that this kind of fictional contamination in the coverage of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God is not like so-called "literary journalism". Without disregarding the ethical issues intrinsic to journalistic activity, literary journalism affirms itself as imbued with a moral purpose. Thus, it appeals to the importance of journalists' interpretations and the use of literary techniques responsible for revealing deep truths about human behaviour to readers and giving meaning to "real stories" (Pauly, 2014).

Considering the continuation of characteristics identified in the 1990s in the news reports analysed, such as linking the UCKG to serious accusations and the rhetorical, stylistic, and syntactic aspects of the discourse, it is understood that coverage of the Church in *Público* and *Expresso* is similar to the macro genre of melodrama, in which the patterns of fairy tales are sometimes applied to situations that correspond to the reality of daily life. This can be affirmed because “the same patterns that work very well in the demoniac-magical world of the fairy tale turn out to be false and caricatured when applied to the representation of the profane universe of our current society” (Rosenfeld, 2005, p. 19).

Given the impossibility of including all the media coverage on UCKG, it was decided to limit this study to the newspapers mentioned due to their influential nature in Portugal. This type of newspaper is commonly cited by other media and has wider access to prominent sources, thus influencing not only the field of media but also public opinion on various topics (Noelle-Neumann, 1991). It should be recalled that during the 1990s, the media were the main opinion-makers about new religious movements, including UCKG (Farias, 1999). Therefore, the interest in verifying this coverage later in newspapers as closely related to the establishment of public opinion is reasonable. It was also noted that the dramatic matrix of journalism is more present in the popular press than the rational-illuminist matrix, both in terms of newsworthiness criteria and in the structure of the news. Although any newspaper is the univocal expression of a unique matrix (Amaral, 2007), an interest arose in comprehending whether the dramatic matrix remained in the coverage of the UCKG in influential newspapers.

A hypothesis that the Church’s presence in other types and formats of media also presents a discourse in which the fictional and the informative genres overlap is presented here. As observed by Carla Baptista (2018), the title of the television news series *O Segredo dos Deuses* (The Secret of the Gods) — about the alleged illegal adoption scheme — evokes ideas of soap operas and police operations. However, the fact that a long, 10-episode series was created, which was far from justified in the complexity of the facts and the necessity of adding relevant details, resulted in scenes considered to be remarkable being shown time and again, which added emphasis but not information.

One interesting point is that the news television coverage of the case “Mães de Bragança” (Mothers of Bragança) was also influenced by melodrama. As Ferin Cunha (2005) points out, “in the images of prostitution, the object of desire [was] presented in a veiled way, through technical and scenic resources that hid the characters and displayed the most desired parts of the body” (p. 550). This form of exposition suggested the influence of soap operas on the Portuguese perception of Brazilian immigrant women and, in addition, the perception of the phenomenon of UCKG.

Such coverage opposes the Church’s public strategy, seeking to accentuate polarisation and explore the exotic and the spectacular. In contrast, the journalistic discourse works with the social imagination about the Brazilian invasion and current stereotypes about Brazil and Brazilians. So, considering the journalistic discourse linked the UCKG to prototypical signs of Brazilianness, a theory of social representations has been employed as a theoretical basis throughout the article.

4. SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

First developed by Serge Moscovici (1988), the theory of social representations proposes to explain how and why thoughts and feelings are generally disseminated among many people or most individuals in a society. The concept of social representations is established as “thoughts in motion”, in which they circulate through media communications and dialogic communications between groups and people to understand how these thoughts and feelings converge and allow the individual to become social. Social representations play a fundamental role in familiarising us with the unknown (a new fact or phenomenon) according to the categories of our culture.

According to Moscovici (1988), a theory is expressed simultaneously as a way of observing social phenomena and a system that describes and explains them. Thus, the author argues that a diversity of methodological approaches must be developed within the scope of the theory of social representations proposed herein to analyse journalistic content⁸. Birgitta Hoijer (2011) also advocates using social representation theory in the design of media research, identifying it as a suitable theoretical basis for studying how the media and individuals represent social and political issues in society.

Social representations shape our relationship with society and, as a result, become a component of social organisation. Social reality is dependent on social representations in the sense that various representations of a phenomenon engender different understandings of it (and thus change social reality). Moscovici (1988) cites the distinct views on motivations for drug use — genetic impairment, family disruption, and cultural tradition, among others — to exemplify this process, which can also be understood in terms of attitudes to the UCKG in Portugal. As Farias (1999) comprehends it, journalistic discourse about the Church in the 1990s came very close to the images shared by an anti-sect ideology, while researchers such as him and Virginia Garrad-Burnett (2011) sought to understand this new phenomenon of religiosity from a more neutral, scientific perspective.

In establishing a social representation, two socio-cognitive mechanisms are identified: *anchoring* and *objectification*. The former concerns the process of associating a new and unknown phenomenon with older but similar social representations, and the latter relates to the action of turning this unknown into something concrete — usually an image. Once established, social representations acquire an inherent character, although individuals retain the ability to rework their cognitions. This means that social representations are not always logical and coherent despite their correspondence with widespread patterns of thought. Instead, they denote the complex, heterogeneous character of social thought.

With the controversial arrival of the UCKG in Portugal, it is believed that an anchoring process was at work when hegemonic social representations about Brazil and Brazilians were mobilised to give meaning to an unknown phenomenon. As exemplified in the journalistic coverage of the period, in which references were made to Brazilian soap operas

⁸ While the communication devices proposed by the theory of social representations are difficult to use directly as conceptual tools for empirical analysis, the same does not apply to the theoretical-methodological approaches of framing analysis and critical discourse analysis. However, combining these with the theory of social representations would help overcome what is identified as one of its greatest shortcomings: the absence of a more in-depth discussion about the ideological aspects and power relations that surround social representations (Hoijer, 2011).

and their emotions, providing plentiful images of corruption and easy profit, this anchoring process was fed by the immense flow of images that continued to reaffirm the representation of a wild, exotic country — one propagated since colonial times (Bosco, 2017).

The anchoring process takes place through various communication mechanisms, such as naming, in which a new phenomenon is associated with an older social representation through the act of naming, inserting it in a common frame of reference. An example is when the UCKG is called a sect, as referenced in the first news report published in Portugal (“Seita ‘Suspeita’ Tem Igrejas em Portugal”). As we know, the term “sect” has strong negative connotations and is generally associated with the image of segregated religious groups with unusual and extreme customs and beliefs. Thus, this anchorage by naming can be understood as closely related to stereotyping processes, as described by Walter Lippmann (1922/1998).

Also relevant is anchoring through metaphors, as identified in the context of the aggression against the worshippers, when the UCKG emerged from Fernando Marques’ commentary in *Público*, on the 11th of November 1995, as being dangerous to Portuguese society:

the UCKG does not pay much heed to the way in which it spreads its message or benefits from the weaknesses of those who adhere to its promises of divine healing. So, it is natural that it generates antibodies within a mostly catholic population. (G. M. Dias, 2006, p. 307)

According to Guilherme Dias (2006), the news reports that covered the UCKG settling in Portugal generally sought to represent the Church as a virus infiltrating Portuguese culture and the Lusophone space. Júnior (2013) also observes that reports about the Church published between 1995 and 1996 almost always featured beside reports about the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. Whether a coincidence or not, some of these pieces associated the advance of AIDS in Portugal with a higher rate of migration⁹.

Despite this common association of the UCKG with negative stereotypes about Brazil and Brazilians, its installation in Portugal was quite successful (Mafra, 2002), which also explains the media attention focused on it. This success intensified the feeling of a “Brazilian invasion”, voiced mainly by the press. The transnational flow in which the Church was included when it arrived in Portugal can also be noted, the transposition of an institutional novelty coming from the “periphery” and invading the “centre”, thus reversing the trend of the traffic of know-how in the globalised economy. Combined with this inversion was also the presence of agents who were not well qualified in terms of “erudite culture”, who arrived in the country with the mission of re-educating — albeit in strictly religious terms — a society with higher educational standards.

It should be recalled that Europe ensured that its regime of representation prevailed over its colonised subjects, positioning them as the “other” of the dominant discourse

⁹ As the author (Júnior, 2013) also recalls, during the controversy surrounding Brazilian dentists in the 1990s, the statements made by members of the Professional Association of Dentists of Portugal about how Brazilian dentists could transmit acquired immunodeficiency syndrome to patients.

(Hall, 1990). Though this regime has been constantly updated, it remains potent to this day, making it easy to comprehend the negative impact of the successful installation of the UCKG in Portugal, not only on its intellectual elite but also on the section of the population closest to catholic tradition. Because “when it comes to the implantation of these religious movements on European soil, what was once ‘good news’, a breath of modernity for Latin hearts, becomes something threatening, capable of corrupting the solid pillars of European modernity” (Junior, 2013, p. 188).

5. THE POSITIONING STRATEGY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Mafra (2002) points out the union established between the Church and the mass media when UCKG arrived in Portugal, as this had been in preparation in Brazil during the 1970s. Therefore, its implantation in Portugal was linked with the emergence of not only physical churches but also radios.

Beyond the promotion of radio programs and the acquisition of radio stations, the UCKG established a heterodox but quite successful relationship with the media, positioning itself as follows: it composed messages in line with the logic of polarised opinions, took advantage of the exotic and the spectacular, and it always looked for opportunities to recreate them. An example of this strategy is the 1995 case known as “Chute na Santa” (literally, “Kick the Saint”), in which a priest kicked an image of Nossa Senhora da Aparecida, patron saint of Brazil, whose national holiday was celebrated on that day, during a TV programme, criticising what the Church sees as a false symbol of Catholicism.

Interestingly, this strategy of highlighting contrasting and contentious opinions was established somehow by accident. According to the myth of origin, the union between the Church and the mass media took place in the year of its foundation, when a worshipper who was healed funded a short programme on a radio station in São Paulo. This programme, coincidentally, came after another one presented by a *mãe-de-santo*¹⁰, which allowed Edir Macedo to contrast the religious responses of the two cults and create a style that was well-received by the audience. Whether it developed by accident or not, the fact is that UCKG has a particularly aggressive approach towards other religions and cults, especially Umbanda and Candomblé — which are considered diabolical or satanic — as well as the Catholic Church (Farias, 1999).

This positioning on the public scene generated two situations: the wide propagation of the Church’s opinions and the tendency to form dichotomous poles about itself, with the public divided between passionate opponents and tenacious sympathisers. The former is explained by the violent nature of the positions taken by the UCKG, of strong opposition to certain social consensuses, which allows them to express themselves intensely; and the latter is because this form of communication gave rise to the establishment of controversial social representations, which emerged from the intense antagonism towards certain societal segments. As Moscovici (1988) explains, this type

¹⁰ The name used to refer to the priestesses of the following Brazilian religions of African origin: Candomblé, Umbanda, or Quimbanda.

of representation is often expressed in terms of a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor, something noticeable in the position of the UCKG that, despite addressing specific interlocutors, in general terms, asserts itself in opposition to — and with a mission to rescue — a society degenerated by diabolic forces disguised as a false Christianity. As Edir Macedo stated in an interview with Brazilian magazine *Veja* on the 6th of December 1995: “the problem is the Catholic Church. They’re responsible for all the misery and disgrace of Brazil and the rest of the world. (...) Everything it teaches is against the people” (Farias, 1999, para. 8).

Therefore, “given that the Church ends up opposing publicly established institutions, those ‘non-conformists’ with the *status quo* tend towards a more sympathetic position” (Mafrá, 2002, p. 111). Thus, events such as the attempt to buy the Coliseu, which was seen as a critical moment, are part of the planned set of actions on the public scene. They are constructed as dense dramas employed to mobilise public opinion, and the positioning of the Church always encompasses an explanation with persecutory content¹¹.

6. ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS

The journalistic discourse emerges from a socio-cognitive process, which takes place within a shared culture and is based on established social roles. When framed in a certain way, a news piece delimits the cognitive parameters through which it will be read. However, this interpretation always corresponds to an autonomous action by audience members.

In the texts analysed, it was observed that the framing device used most often was the rhetorical structure of the discourse, considering that metaphors, catchphrases, and visual representations were used recurrently. This can be observed in “Crime na Igreja” (Crime in the Church; *A Revista do Expresso*, the 6th of January 2001, pp. 40–53), concerning a long interview with a former Portuguese priest who made serious accusations about the Church, revealing what would be its criminal ramifications.

With a front-page headline in the edition of the newspaper printed that day and the reference to the interview filling the front page of *A Revista do Expresso*, one can conclude the importance placed on the accusation by *Expresso*. In the interview, João Coelho made accusations involving the Church with prostitution, drugs, arms trafficking and the like. In addition to highlighting it on the front page of its magazine — displaying a drawing of a wall with the symbol and name of the Church and some bricks fallen on the ground — *Expresso* also mentioned the interview on the front page of the newspaper with the headline “Armas e Droga na IURD” (Guns and Drugs in the UCKG), printed just below the title in the privileged upper central position of the page.

The image employed on the magazine’s first page allows the association between this and what different authors previously identified in reports about the UCKG in the

¹¹As Farias (1999) points out, even before the Coliseu controversy, journalists were attacked in April 1995 by members of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God while reporting in Vila Nova de Famalicão. In July of the same year, in Póvoa do Varzim, members of the Church also disturbed the catholic feast of Our Lady of Bethlehem by stepping on some typical decorative flower carpets (although it is worth emphasising that the author does not indicate the source of these statements).

1990s: its portrayal as an institution whose actions sought to keep it in obscurity, but which the accusation of a former priest brought into the light, thus knocking down the bricks that made up its fortress, as proposed in the metaphor contained within the image. In contrast, the headline on the front page of the newspaper highlights some sentences about the former priest in bold and displays a drawing in which two men remove tranches of money from a safe.

In the interview, Coelho's image is not shown, despite his name and surname being exposed. The only photos that illustrate it correspond to the image of the former priest's back, contemplating what appears to be a photo of a cult, and another photo of his baptism, exposed on the last page and occupying the part of the wall drawing where the bricks are fallen. The rest of the text is composed of illustrations corresponding to the narrated facts, such as baptism scenes, grooming of worshipers, theft of a safe, or driving illegal goods... All very graphically, the mockery and irony of the characters are certainly not lost, almost as if readers were reading a comic book in which these are the villains.

Before starting the interview, the text narrated what Coelho claimed was a recent attempt by the Church to murder him. Corresponding to the tone revealed by the illustrations, the report takes on a melodramatic style in excerpts such as the following:

at first, the boy's face seems to frame the boxer's expression in mid-fight. The hard gaze is fixed on the interlocutor; it is permanently on guard. (...) He still has a swollen face, and the scars around his eyes accentuate his coldness. (A *Revista do Expresso*, the 6th of January 2001, p. 40)

Considering that this style is identified in the illustrations and content of the interview, it is important to discuss what defines fiction. In the structure of any text, whether fictional or not, the only layer with ontic autonomy is that composed of typographic signs printed on paper or digitised on a screen, with others — formed by clauses and significant units of various degrees — are already considered unreal because they must be materialised by the appropriate appreciator. After all, these significant units can project certain “objectual contexts” by attributing relationships between objects and their qualities — for example, “the rose is red” — only through certain logical operations undertaken by the reader. “Thanks to the objectual contexts, an intermediate layer of certain ‘schematic aspects’ is constituted. When they are specially prepared, the schematic aspects determine specific realisations by the reader” (Rosenfeld, 2005, p. 13).

Such schematised aspects must be specially crafted in fictional works because it is through them that the reader's imagination is able to concretise ideas. In the excerpt highlighted above, it can be observed that the characterisation of the ex-priest goes beyond what would be readily presented to an external observer, thus spelling out what could have been cast as mere inferences. Examples include mention of coldness in his eyes, which are permanently watchful. As such schematised aspects are presented to the reader in this excerpt, without demanding elaborate realisations on their part, it can be concluded that the reader is induced to develop a broader realisation of what can be described as the UCKG's universe.

After a brief account of the attempted murder, the text briefly presents what will be detailed in the interview: the early rise of the young man in the Church hierarchy and his consequent involvement in shady deals. What captures the most attention in this passage is the way the text seeks to justify the entry of, then a teenager, into the UCKG: “but, as he was a skilled kid, at the age of 14 he was already wondering why a man would work himself to the bone to get ahead in life”. And how it ironically classifies the crimes with which the Church was involved: “auspicious” (*A Revista do Expresso*, the 6th of January 2001, pp. 40–53).

The structure of fictional sentences does not differ much from that of other texts, as they all seem to correspond to judgments. What differentiates a fictional text from a journalistic text is its intention because while the former stops at purely intentional, objectual contexts without seeking to veer towards any autonomous objects, the latter seeks exactly that. Even when the fictitious character of a text is not clearly revealed, it is evidenced by the effort made to particularise objectual contexts via the preparation of schematised aspects and the profusion of circumstantial details. Where the excerpts of the interview are concerned, this effort is observed in highlighting insignificant information, such as the coldness felt in the boy’s eyes and the causality of events, evident in the justification presented for his admission to the UCKG. Though such a strategy presents itself as aesthetically poor, as characters and situations are introduced almost without nuances — the unscrupulous Church that does everything it can to get money or the ambitious young man who became vigilant after suffering physical attacks, among others.

As Márcia Amaral (2007) explains, melodrama is revealed in journalistic discourse when it restricts itself to presenting the singularity of facts to the greatest extent possible. From the point of view of an influential press, in which *Expresso* is included, the publication of accusations such as that issued by the ex-priest is comprehensible, as it involved a relevant institution in Portugal and had the potential to generate developments within the scope of a criminal investigation¹². Nevertheless, by sentimentalising the narrated facts — through the description of Coelho’s face and by explaining in the caption that he was “sorry” — and not providing any context about the neo-Pentecostal profile of the Church, the interview ends up being another reductionist mechanism used to particularise the phenomenon of the UCKG.

While the association between the UCKG and Brazilian identity was not evident in this text, the same cannot be said for the report “Fé e Dinheiro na ‘Ilha de Deus’” (Faith and Money on “God’s Island”; *Público*, the 12th of August 2002, pp. 2–3), which describes two mega-meetings put on by the Church in Lisbon and Porto in celebration of its 25th anniversary. Given a suggestive title, the sensationalist character of the meetings is described in the article — “there are no constraints, people shout, applaud, sing, faint, cry” — and it also highlights the words spoken by the Brazilian priests: “right, amen, it’s over, that’s it!!!”, “can ya believe that?”, “the suffering’s over; that’s why you feel relieved. See, guys?”.

¹² Coelho’s account is not counterposed to any position of members of Universal Church of the Kingdom of God or statements from the police, although it is stated that the case was already under investigation. As we could not find any further references to this case, we think the denunciation has been shelved.

It is worth noting that Portuguese newspapers would often adapt quotations by Brazilian speakers to European Portuguese. However, this report maintained direct quotes, using the words enunciated by the priests in a noticeable colloquial style in which grammatical rules were not always observed. Such an occurrence is common in everyday life and does not necessarily indicate a lack of knowledge of the correct use of the Portuguese language by the speaker. However, the intention implicit in exposing the priests' words without adapting them can be assumed to have been to suggest a low level of education.

It was also observed that the characteristics identified in the 1990s were maintained. In addition to the considerable space given to the report — its headline, “faith and money mania over 25 years of the UCKG” and accompanying photo occupy almost a third of the first page — the three images used to illustrate it are composed of: a worshiper in a trance with his hand on his chest and a person holding his head; what appears to be a priest wearing a tie, with both hands pressed over a woman's head; and a hand in the air, holding a wallet and a cheque. Such photographs emerge from the report as an objectification of the phenomenon that is the UCKG. They enhance the cult image commonly associated with the Church (along with all the negative connotations of the term) by employing images that would represent the supposed character of hysteria present in its cults and the financial exploitation of worshippers.

Also, in the “questions and answers” section about the Church (a section of the report), it is highlighted that the Church “is the largest Brazilian multinational corporation”. A notable fact is that the answers to questions such as “what are the most important rituals in the UCKG's meetings?” and “is the tithe the Church's only source of income?” are not assigned to specialists, raising doubts about the origin of the information provided.

An opening is, however, provided in the journalistic discourse to give a voice to the Church's worshipers in the form of published quotes. It can be observed that, in exposing them, the journalist seeks to uncover the possible factors behind the success of a neo-Pentecostal Church in Portugal:

the Catholic priests are not missed; “they don't push the congregation like we do here. In the Catholic religion, faith is not stirred, and dead faith is of no use”. (...) In his opinion, the Catholic Church announces something that does not exist. “It's hypocritical in its actions. There's no Saint Mary in the Bible, and Fátima was never mentioned in the Bible”, he said before Edir Macedo arrived. “I'm here looking for miracles that only God knows how to perform”, he assured. (*Público*, the 12th of August 2002, p. 3)

On the 6th of March 2010, *Expresso* published the report “Chegou o Tempo das Catedrais” (The Age of Cathedrals Has Come; p. 28), the caption of which informs that in the year of the UCKG's 20th anniversary in Portugal¹³, its first cathedral would be inaugurated in Porto and a second in Lisbon. As the text tries to emphasise at various points,

¹³ Although the first Universal Church of the Kingdom of God temple was inaugurated in Lisbon in 1989, the Church was only officially founded in the following year.

cathedrals refer to the first UCKG temples that would be built from scratch in Portugal. The term also employed by Church leaders, the use of the term “cathedral”, refers to the capacity of this type of building to accommodate many people, as explained in the text.

This relationship is also indirectly established because not only were the dimensions of the new cathedral in Porto described in the second paragraph, but the caption of the photo used to illustrate the report also stated that “nowadays, the Church amasses 60,000 worshipers”. A box with the title “Dimensão” (Size) presents the following information: in 2010, the UCKG had 5,000 temples around the world and 15,000,000 worshippers and was present in 177 countries. It can be concluded that the featuring of this kind of information, combined with the description of the first cathedral, serves to endorse the idea that the inauguration of cathedrals corresponds to the pinnacle of what is presented as a successful trajectory. This observation is reinforced in the following answer given by the priest interviewed: “we have been checking some places out, but it will be in a central location and of a size greater than or equal to that North’. Built from scratch. ‘The São Jorge Cinema? No! It’s too small, that would mean backtracking. Now we are building cathedrals’”.

Expresso also made a subtle reference to the classic book *The Age of the Cathedrals* in the title. In this work, Georges Duby (1976/1993) dedicates his explanation to the forms of art — monasteries, cathedrals, and palaces — created during the middle ages in close proximity to the power and universe of high culture. Therefore, the mimesis identified in the title was employed as more of an ironic artifice since, considering the UCKG’s profile, it is clear that its cathedrals do not resemble the narrow universe of high culture in which gothic cathedrals were constructed in the least. The use of this rhetorical device seeks to emphasise the aesthetic and intellectual aridity of the Church, contrasting with its economic strength and “mass of worshippers”.

The tone of moral condemnation implicit in the description of the Church’s activities was maintained when describing the profile of Bishop Fernandes, for example. The report says he resembled a businessman because he wore a full suit and tie, concluding “one can say he ‘deals’ in faith and miracles”. Following van Dijk’s (2002) perspective, we analyse the semantic dimension of the passage in terms of its local coherence, noting that the relationship established between the two propositions is of a consequential nature, in the sense that wearing a suit and tie emerges as a consequence of the priest’s position in dealing with faith and miracles. This observation leads to another of the semantic notions described by the author: “implication”; because a consequential relationship being established by the text seeks to lead readers to the idea that UCKG operates from a commercial perspective.

Associations between the Church and Brazilian nationality are reduced here, punctuated only once when it is stated that the priest’s Brazilian accent is deceptive, as a Portuguese man who acquired a Brazilian accent after 3 years spent evangelising in Curitiba. Notwithstanding, it can be considered that this relationship is surreptitiously established through the stereotype of trickery commonly associated with Brazilians when the discourse connects the religious realm — “faith” and “miracles” — to the commercial

realm with the use of the verb “to negotiate” (Portuguese, “negociar”). As has been ascertained, the establishment of such a relationship has negative connotations, it being present in the bible in the passage about the cleansing of the temple (*Almeida Revista e Corrigida*, 2009, João, 2:13–16).

This moderate tone does, however, end up being put aside at the end of the report. Under the title “Fé Puxada a Água Luso” (Faith Brought About by Luso Water), a criticism of the UCKG’s performance emerges more explicitly in a text that explains that sacred water was distributed during religious meetings, though the word “Luso” (the name of a brand of commercialised water) is presented in brackets. As the text states, both water (Luso) and consecrated roses (from Morocco) were used as “lighters of faith”.

In the article “IURD Entrou na Era das Catedrais” (“The UCKG Now in the Age of Cathedrals”, the 8th of August 2010, pp. 7–9), it can be noted that *Público* also references Duby’s (1976/1993) work in the title, although this report is broader, both in terms of length and in the number of sources consulted. Under the umbrella of “religion”, the report exposes the new projects run by the UCKG in Portugal through quotations from two sources introduced as experts on the Church: Brazilians Claudia Swatowski and Clara Mafra. These researchers emerge as specialists in the phenomenon of the Church, in the use of their titles and academic affiliation.

Such quotes contrast with statements made by Bishop Fernandes, in which he justifies the new cathedrals as follows: “we serve a God who is great, and we do not accept anything small”. It can be observed that quotations are often used to legitimise journalistic discourse. However, this dependence on legitimate sources results in the exposition of a worldview of the establishment (Teo, 2000), as common people, as a general rule, can only voice their experiences, not their opinions.

Although the two women are painted as legitimate sources of information on the UCKG, their claims cannot be said to correspond to an established view of the UCKG in Portugal. In fact, much of what they say contradicts views already entrenched in Portugal about the Church. For example, Mafra answers as follows the question, “can we say that UCKG is also a business phenomenon?”:

in order to assert itself as a benevolent Church, donating goods to collective organisations, the UCKG must have its own capital. Without financial autonomy, the Church would not be able to break through the ceiling of established elites, such as those in Brazil, which are mostly Catholic. In Portugal, the elites also have long secularising and catholic traditions. (*Público*, the 8th of August 2010, p. 8)

7. THE COMEBACK TO THE PUBLIC SCENE

In late 2017, TVI began broadcasting the report *O Segredo dos Deuses*, detailing the illegal adoption of children by the highest echelons of the UCKG. In 10 episodes, the report was broadcast after *Jornal das 8* (8 O’Clock News). The report — which contained

serious accusations and concerned one of the most controversial institutions in Portugal — being broadcast in prime time over several consecutive days produced huge public repercussions.

The accusation that children were “stolen” by members of the UCKG and taken out of the country resonated with fears similar to those raised during the Coliseu controversy when the Church was seen as an outside threat that sought to destroy the catholic foundations of Portuguese society. Such fears were rekindled as the alleged illegal adoption of children in the absence of their biological parents constituted a notorious example of an attack against the social representation of Western Christian morality: the family. The result was a group of “mothers”, as they were called by Lusa piece reproduced by *Público* on the 19th of December of the same year (“Mães Manifestam-se em Seis Cidades Contra Adopções na IURD” (Mothers Demonstrate in Six Cities Against UCKG Adoptions), mobilised to “demand answers” from the institutions of power.

Two reports printed in different newspapers were analysed, which contained the same information: an investigation of the denunciation by the Portuguese Public Prosecutor’s Office. Both were published on the 11th of December 2017, before the first episode was broadcast, but the case was already generating repercussions as the report had been presented to the press by the channel’s journalism department. In “Ministério Público Investiga Rede de Adoção Ilegal de Crianças Montada Pela IURD” (Prosecutor’s Office Investigates Illegal Child Adoption Network Run by the UCKG; *Expresso*), it should be noted that the title presents the accusation as a fact. The position taken is continued in the subtitle: “TVI report reveals that at least a dozen Portuguese children were illegally taken from their parents and taken out of the country by Universal Church of the Kingdom of God priests”.

As observed in the previous news reports, this one also reproduces information that seems unlikely. For example, when explaining the origins of the international illegal adoption network, it says that in the 1990s, Edir Macedo “forced the Church’s bishops and priests to undergo vasectomies to prevent them from having biological children, later ordering them to adopt children”. It also mentions a newborn taken from its mother while still in the maternity ward and that three children of one woman, wrongly labelled as a drug addict and HIV positive, were adopted by the daughter of the leader of the UCKG. In fact, the illegitimacy of the ties between the Church leader and his grandchildren are implicitly underlined in the title of a news report by Lusa, also printed by *Expresso* on the same day: “Investigação da TVI Diz que ‘Netos’ de Líder da IURD Foram Roubados em Portugal” (TVI Investigation Says that the UCKG’s Leader’s ‘Grandchildren’ Were Stolen From Portugal).

The *Público* news report, “MP [Ministério Público] Investiga Rede de Adoção Ilegal de Crianças” (Prosecutor’s Office Investigates Illegal Child Adoption Network; the 11th of December 2010) takes a less vehement tone of condemnation by employing a future-tense verb in the subtitle: “TVI report reveals that Edir Macedo, leader of the UCKG, will have been involved in an international illegal child adoption network”. The newspaper did not, however, shy away from sharing the exhortation of Sérgio Figueiredo — then director of information for TVI — at the end of the presentation of the report to the press: “the State was not entirely blameless here, but it is never too late to restore the truth”.

It should be noted that a little over 1 year after the series was broadcast, the Prosecutor's Office filed the denunciation because the investigation conducted denied the claims of the biological parents, among other factors. In early 2020, a deliberation issued by the Regulatory Media Entity forced TVI to display the UCKG's "right of reply" for 9 days.

8. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The establishment of the genre of melodrama is closely related to the developments of the French revolution, the terrible scenes that stimulated the imagination of the popular masses, who began to allow themselves to act out their emotions. By asserting itself as representing the morality of the revolution, melodrama is characterised by the narratives of conspiracies and justice, the innocent victims of which triumph while the villains are duly punished for their betrayals in the end. As Jesús Martín-Barbero (1997) points out, this emotional intensity definitely fits the genre of melodrama by placing it alongside the popular, in a period when bourgeois education began to veer in the opposite direction, by valuing the control of feelings and restricting these to the "private scene".

Over the centuries, in its path from *feuilleton* to TV soap operas, melodrama has adapted to correspond to distinct audience profiles. In Latin America, it established itself as an eminently audio-visual genre, while in Brazil, its most popular format — soap opera — also began to cover more realistic themes, thus approaching daily life in the country (Silva, 2013).

As has been discussed, soap operas were extraordinarily well-received by Portuguese audiences. These products were added to pre-existing Portuguese perceptions of Brazil and Brazilians, established during centuries of contact between both countries. As Júnior (2013) notes when citing an opinion poll published by *Diário de Lisboa* newspaper in 1990, entitled: "Os Portugueses Confundem Telenovela com a Realidade" (Portuguese People Confuse Soap Operas with Reality), soap operas became the faithful image of Brazil and Brazilians in the Portuguese imagination.

When a Church that acts differently from its counterparts arrives in a country, bringing with it rationale and rites that emphasise the exotic and spectacular, a subtle anchoring process takes place in which the actions of the UCKG are linked to common plots across soap operas. This is identified in journalistic discourse in which the alleged criminal actions of the Church are framed under a melodramatic bias. Nevertheless, it is recalled that the melodramatic matrix can also be detected in newsworthiness criteria (Amaral, 2007). As such, in the publication of an interview such as "Crime na Igreja", or in the coverage and repercussions surrounding the accusations of illegal adoption in 2017, criteria can be noted that are less guided by the robust nature of accusations and more by their ability to rouse strong feelings.

Nevertheless, this approach is not always identified. Occasionally, an effort to print a more analytical profile of the UCKG can be observed. As Guilherme Dias (2006) notes, the complexity of the presence of the UCKG in Portugal cannot be reduced to its unique association with current images of Brazil and Brazilians. Nevertheless, as was observed

in the analysis conducted of news reports, newspapers generally relied on these social representations for their stories, especially in connection with the imagination instigated by soap operas, to frame the phenomenon of the UCKG.

Farias (1999) mentions “theological misinterpretations” in journalistic coverage of the UCKG in the 1990s and then defends that academia employed this determination to provide a more balanced understanding of the Church. Nevertheless, as the author argues in another context (Farias & Santos, 1999), a clearly negative image of the Church was crystallised in Portuguese public opinion, which already seemed irrefutable. The analysis of *Público* and *Expresso* news pieces also follows this line of understanding, despite the exceptions mentioned above. Although the current presence of the Church in the media is less pronounced, cases such as the 2017 (*O Segredo dos Deuses*) suggest that this emphasis on melodrama in coverage of the Church remains and may come, once again, to be associated with contexts of xenophobia and religious intolerance.

Translation: Stativa – Text Works

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