ARTICLES

WHATSAPP AS A BATTLEFIELD: ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHY IN EVANGELICAL PRAYER GROUPS

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ABSTRACT
How can anthropological research help to understand the effects of the centrality of the use of digital media in everyday religious life? Distancing myself from apparent and erroneous oppositions between traditional and modern that questions like this often raise, I investigated ways in which the use of smartphones is configured as "battlefields" for praying, preaching, sharing testimonies, establishing intimacy with God and overcoming demons. Considering ethnography in "prayer groups" composed of evangelical women, I reflect in this article on my positionality in fieldwork carried out in co-presence circuits that included churches, homes and two WhatsApp groups led by a Pentecostal Pastors' couple. By exploring the ambivalent meanings in the religious uses of cell phones, I point to intersectional dynamics that make WhatsApp a central religious

device for non-institutionalized pastoral careers and the collective exercise of evangelical faith.

Every day, text and audio messages, emojis, stickers, GIFs, videos and photos sent by those who ask for prayers and aimed at those who need to be reached by the force of divine miracles are shared in the so-called evangelical "prayer groups" on WhatsApp. Following the daily lives of people through an ethnography carried out in two of such groups, both exclusively formed by women, was a way of understanding the importance of sending voice messages and sharing images as technologies for improving religious virtue, as well as seeing changes in prayer rituals and other practices in which those women engage, such as fasting, and testimonies of victories achieved through participating in a routine of evangelical "campaigns".

"Zap"[1] "audio messages", voice messages that were mostly sent during the night, provide new meanings to daily prayers, preachings, and testimonies shared daily in those chat groups. These voice messages thus operate as translators of languages from other media, similar to what radio did with television while keeping up with the domestic rhythm followed by housewives. This relationship between radio and how it was transformed in space and time experiences for the Brazilian working-class women was pointed out by Almeida (2003) in order to understand how media and its mediations were responsible for strengthening the combination between gender and domesticity.

The uses of social media that emerged after the 2000s, such as platforms and mobile applications that encompass the arrival of the so-called web 2.0 (boyd, 2014), have led to historical and contextual transformations of what is considered public and private. With various ways of living and negotiating domesticity, evangelical women are ethically engaging in prayer groups on WhatsApp, stretching established institutional limits and granting spaces for different evangelical ways of belonging. As a "battlefield", an emic term that expresses spiritual struggles between God and the Devil, smartphones are widely present in the way (neo) Pentecostal evangelicals[2] act in the world, through metaphors that present the warlike dynamics of supernatural warfare and its effects on the daily life of these subjects.

1 "Zap" is one of the terms by which the app is popularly known in Brazil.
2 The parentheses refer to the relational way I have used the terms "Pentecostal" and "Neopentecostal" throughout the research, in order to situate the churches I have been to and the religious belonging of my interlocutors. Besides institutional delimitations suggested for understanding these movements and their denominations, this choice is justified by the fact that my own starting point in the research was not the churches, but rather the circulation between projects and missions (Machado, 2013) that were often not institutionalized.

The use of the term "battlefield" as a way of building political action in the world has gained significant relevance in feminist studies, most frequently referring to uses of the body as both an effect and a production informed by gender and other markers in everyday life. In this work, I stress how evangelical women have produced battlefields through other materialities that mediate the interaction with their bodies. Far from being a specific characteristic of the interactions in the observed groups, various works (Fonseca, A.; Dias, 2021) and debates in the public space, mainly during the Brazilian elections, have shown how evangelicals have made expressive use of WhatsApp in Brazil, in communications that happen mainly through the application's feature of grouping contacts.

Considering WhatsApp as a research field has allowed me to identify institutional and partisan politics as one of the realms that constitute the daily life of spiritual warfare in those prayer groups, but not the only one. Combining the dimensions of online and offline co-presence, WhatsApp groups are digital environments that have been producing political disputes that are not limited to voting. Although important analyses have focused on the dissemination of misinformation and fake news in that application, I have indicated ways in which the use of WhatsApp groups by evangelical women for sharing testimonies and making collective preachings and prayers disturb established notions of what a church is, producing new meanings and shapes for what it means to be evangelical today.

Throughout this text, I present reflections on ethical conducts and methodological processes adopted from an ethnography in two WhatsApp groups, in which I participated as a researcher from 2017 to 2022. This work presents a part of my doctoral thesis (Mochel, 2023a), in which the broader goal was to reflect on how WhatsApp has been reconfiguring the political and spiritual daily lives of Pentecostal women, as this media is traversed by race, gender, and erotism. The uses of this application's multiple interfaces and features were analyzed from an investigation that involved attending events for women, called "Tea Parties" and "Conferences" and held in their homes and churches, as well as observing their prayers, testimonies, preachings, and other practices shared in their prayer groups.

During the period in which this research was conducted, alternating face-to-face and online moments, I interacted with a network of about 150 women, present in two prayer groups on WhatsApp. Both got the same name: "Virtuous Women"[3]. Through participating for observation in worships and in visits to churches and their homes, I maintained closer relationships

3 All names of people, groups and institutions used here are fictitious.

with a Pastors' couple who managed these and many other groups with the same name, as well as with their "daughters in faith", as they called their most frequent followers, whose number varied following changes that occurred during the period in which the ethnography was conducted.

This couple's followers I have interacted with were aged between 30 and 60 years- old, lived in favelas and suburbs of the Brazilian states of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, and attended services in different Pentecostal churches in their areas. There were also those who were called "strays", a term that identifies someone who stopped attending an evangelical church. Over time, I also got to know Brazilian immigrants in Italy and Spain, places to which Cristiane, a female pastor and the groups' main leadership, had traveled with funding by the groups' members.

I participated with these women in the organization of various events, creation of promotional materials, and social media management activities for the Pastors' couple of the Virtuous Women groups. These were also referred to, in different situations, by terms such as Project and Ministry. In this manner, I have established a relationship in which the challenges of not being an evangelical researcher in this context gave way to a relationship of mutual collaboration, becoming myself another person "working for Jesus", as they constantly pointed out. Navigating entering the fieldwork through negotiations that involved religious belongings, the fact that I was not seen as part of a couple with a man, was significantly younger than most there, and presented myself as a feminist researcher posed challenges that I sought to overcome in the theoretical and methodological reflections of this research.

WHATSAPP AS A RESEARCH FIELD

The analytical choices that I have explored in this work had as a core premise the transformations caused by the portability acquired with cell phones and the mobile technologies they have enabled. Connection functionalities and financial advantages in the consumption of packages favoring communications over social media apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook,[4] offered by several Brazilian mobile companies, indicated developmental elements that form the context in which this research was situated, as an effect of the "use of smartphones [that is] symbiotically associated with the popularization of social networks" (Lins, 2019, p. 58).

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4 For comparative purposes, data released in one of BTG/FSB 2022 election polls (*apud* Ramos et al., 2023) pointed out to Facebook as the main social media source of political information (36%), followed by WhatsApp and Instagram (both with 35%). I'd like to thank the generous contribution by this journal's anonymous reviewers in improving this information, as well as this text as a whole.

In more than a decade since its emergence, WhatsApp has stimulated important reflections as a communicational phenomenon in Brazilian daily life. Its widespread presence is numerically the most extensive in Latin American countries (Latinobarómetro, 2018) when compared to other social media, indicating its ubiquity in different realms of collective life. Managing daily lives with personalized interactions, whose objectives are flexible and follow the space and time available for its users, consolidates new affective dynamics that have sparked intense debates about the effects of platformization and their biases in informational flows.

More centrally, such social debates have been leveraged by reflections on the types and shapes taken by sociabilities promoted in WhatsApp groups. The possibility of operating large groups, recently expanded by the platform through the "Communities" feature[5], allows the creation of environments that diversify the networks of their users, bringing the application closer to the broader sociability characteristics already present in other social media, while also seeking to maintain the intimate attributes of these interactions. The effects of this "hybrid character" of WhatsApp (Cesarino, 2020b) have been understood as responsible for political turns in the Brazilian electoral landscape, constituting discursive patterns that shape the infrastructure of "digital populism" (Cesarino, 2020a).

Far from being exclusive to the electoral landscape, the repercussions of the use of broadcast lists, one-to-one chats or WhatsApp groups in everyday life allowed the creation of arrangements and disputes over understandings of politics that go beyond voting. In this context, such choices share the space with changes in the realms of family relations and conjugality models, at work, and in other sociabilities engaged by zap. Analyzing these different "discursive fields of action" (Alvarez, 2014) that have been consolidated through the technological feature of groups was part of an ethnographic work in which religious dynamics were articulated with gender, sexuality, class, race, and generational markers, shaping up a Brazilian evangelical field that has been transforming and transformed by relationships established through uses of this digital media.

My main argument places WhatsApp alongside other devices that are key for consolidating a religious daily life beyond churches. Seeking to balance tensions between public and domestic congregational models, prayer groups in WhatsApp elicit reconfigurations that produce other titles, such as Projects and Ministries. This non-institutionalized configuration

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5 WhatsApp Communities allows the creation of groups with up to 2 thousand members and was launched in Brazil following a negotiation in 2022 with the Superior Electoral Court (TSE in the acronym in Portuguese), postponing its release. Raising the maximum number of members in Whatsapp groups, from 256 to 512 participants, was similarly postponed. This increase was rolled out along with the release of Communities, shortly after the presidential elections that took place that year.

gathers evangelical women from different religious denominations, broadening alternative models for women's pastoral careers or expanding performances of religious authority for those who are not in the prestigious spaces formalized by an institutional tie. Along with public events held in churches and other common spaces of sociability in Pentecostal meetings, such as garages, rooftops, and living rooms where the "Virtuous Women's Tea Parties" take place, WhatsApp prayer groups have mobilized new work and income dynamics and formed communities that challenge existing debates about religious presence in digital environments.

Throughout the fieldwork, I followed a group/Project/Ministry[6] that presents the unfolding of these multiple ways of relating, as conformed in the contemporary Pentecostal field. Sharing their leadership, the couple of Black pastors Cristiane and Bruno, both in their 40s, played a key role in introducing me to WhatsApp as what would become the core field of this research. Both did volunteer work as pastors in a large denomination with various branches in Brazil, offering their assistance to pastors deemed "official" in churches located in the Central and North regions of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Without receiving any kind of material compensation for this work, they developed their Project/Ministry alongside it, strengthening relationships with followers who attended this church sporadically.

The idea of creating a "zap group" to meet the request made by women to the female pastor was the couple's first step in exercising what they named as their "calling with women"[7]. In the various "Virtuous Women" prayer groups, there were no men and the male pastor's participation was more reserved. The triad highlighting their qualities as "mothers, wives, and businesswomen" constituted both their daily routines in the prayer groups and in face-to-face events, mostly held in the same church where the Pastors' couple worked as volunteers, a major São Paulo-based Pentecostal denomination with branches in other states. Drawing relationships between these pastors' personal conversion stories, as well as their online and offline circulations, and those of the women who followed them in their groups and events, was fundamental for understanding how the relationships established in a Ministry become new institutionalities through WhatsApp use.

Although its formalized meaning goes from the public management domain to a synonym for church, Ministry is a term that can be defined as something going beyond the congregation as a physical space. In the

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6 Capitalizing the initials in Ministry and Project denotes valuation hierarchies adopted by my interlocutors in relation to other recurring terms, such as "group", "*zap* group", "women's group", "virtuous women's group", among others.

7 Terms and expressions heard during fieldwork will be indicated by quotation marks throughout the text.

Pentecostal evangelical context, Ministry may refer to: the divisions between groups responsible for religious work in the space of the church (women, youth, music, dance, etc.); the relationship between the main church and its branches; or to identify a personal project or mission to which someone is dedicated, usually involving the name of a religious leadership or of their missionary activity (Machado, 2020).

Similarly to what has already occurred in other forms of evangelical missionary groups that explored the disputed uses of new media since the 1960s, being a Ministry goes further than solely being detached from a single church. Such a model can also articulate many of them or survive as a Project without any institutional bond. The circulation of independent missions such as parachurch organizations,[8] for instance, has inspired expansions to various sizes and characters through partnerships with actors and spaces associated with the secular field.

Be it independently or bonded to major denominations, Brazilian models that analyzed characteristics of these Projects have emphasized the importance of musical fronts combined with leadership positions occupied by women. It is, therefore, through the expansion of the gospel music scene and its forms of interdenominational adhesion that the female audience gains exclusive spaces of congregation, consolidating the uses of media and the organization of public events aimed at women as the foundations for the development of a female agenda for (neo)Pentecostal Ministries.

According to Raquel Sant'ana (2017), the combination of media usages and experiences in events has formed contemporary repertoires that are characteristic of an "evangelical imagination" in Brazil that seeks to legitimize itself in order to establish narratives of national cohesion in the public space. After historically being key mediators in family conversion (Birman, 1996), Brazilian evangelical women have led circuits in which articulations between gender, race, class, and generation define possibilities of agency, paradoxes, and limitations. With preachings on themes addressing topics related to the "sentimental life", such as love and marriage, these leaders have been conducting the Brazilian Pentecostalism through transnational contexts of the global South (Van de Kamp, 2012).

Simultaneous to work in large denominations, the emergence of informal leadership careers in Pentecostalism has also conformed other distinct Ministry models. Examples such as that of mendicant preachers, as described by Mariana Côrtes (2017), are characteristic of "bastard positions" performed in the precarities of the religious market of preaching. The growth of

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8 Parachurch projects were organized as a criticism elaborated by the evangelical youth. This proposal served to contest the doctrinal rigidity regarding music and uses of musical instruments in Protestantism. About this, see Cunha (2007).

Ministries inspired by megaprojects has been diversifying their fronts and mobilizing aspiring Pentecostal pastors who can both lead institutionalized fronts and find their way in these autonomous projects. The agents in this field, in turn, perform functions often considered secondary, as the effects of authority are performed by scriptures, regulations, and bureaucracies that materialize the conjunction with the State (Das; Poole, 2004).

By creating Ministries, a polysemic category that expresses the ambivalent character of these institutionalities, the evangelical dynamics in WhatsApp, guided by intersectional articulations, refine possibilities driven by the ways in which different Protestantisms have established their own relations with the divine. According to Mafra (2013), interpretations of the Bible without physical intermediaries, proliferation of dynamics of segmentarity and decentralized institutional configurations have consolidated different congregational models that have transformed even more with the rise of Pentecostal movements in Brazil. Their affinities with media channels such as television and radio have helped formulating explanations about the evangelical growth in the country, whose arguments addressed the centrality of relations with the media in establishing ruptures with the Catholic national identity (Sanchis, 1994).

The different usages of the term Ministry in the Pentecostal evangelical context have allowed us to explore ways in which this category has been affecting these ruptures and establishing continuities with missionary actions resulting from the encounter with social media. The negotiated agencies that evangelical women carry out in their ordinary lives, in this sense, transform their smartphones into "battlefields" to repel demons and approach God in spiritual wars, which are experienced from their "praying rooms" and "praying corners", while in public transportation, in the bathroom at work, and in so many other spaces, as allowed by these mobile devices.

On the other hand, the uses of WhatsApp and their viability to collectively build Ministries have not only modified ways of exercising Pentecostal faith, but also redefined exercises of religious authority. As previously argued, looser, more unstable evangelical institutional bonds are negotiated in the intimacies of smartphone use, relying on sporadic fundings granted by graces reached in the groups by the means of spiritual intercessions carried out by the Pastors' couple. Through their non-institutionalized trajectories in Pentecostalism, Bruno and Cristiane carried out negotiations that would not be allowed to pastors with formal bonds to a church, managing the risks of running an interdenominational Project/Ministry on WhatsApp.

POSITIONALITY AND NAVIGATING PRESENCE IN ZAP GROUPS

One of the main ethical issues highlighted by different researchers in the field of Internet studies has been the attention to different experiences regarding concepts such as privacy and consent (boyd; Crawford, 2011). More than following or proposing universal guidelines, additional care about the ethical issues posed by data and the meanings associated with such concepts, as observed in this work, relate to what Markham and Baym (2009, p. xviii) described as an inductive ethical treatment,[9] simultaneously sensitive to context and based on the specificity that each project can present as a more general contribution to online research. The reflections posed by an ethnography in WhatsApp groups invariably pointed out to questions that mutually cover these aspects: if, on the one hand, there is an ethical care in the research, on the other, there must also be constant reinventions in the methodological efforts adopted with the interlocutors.

In the course of this ethnography, I understood that one of the most used ways of interacting in this context, the exchange of voice messages through WhatsApp, could be proven a useful tool not only for establishing rapport in participant observation, but also for conducting interviews. "Sending audios", as they preferred to name this practice, was "a condition of sociality" (Miller, 2021, p. 4) which I learned to aggregate as a part of other methods I had already been using. So, I conducted many interviews in which a list of questions was previously sent, so they could answer me using this feature. That has proved more effective than scheduled interviews through voice or video calls – widely used in the strictest periods of the social isolation caused by the new coronavirus pandemic.

The freedom to choose times when they were more comfortable to record the messages, for instance, was productive among those who expressed shame or fear of talking about issues such as sexuality, violence, and family conflicts. On the other hand, being online with them in the groups implied the adoption of other engagements. In attention to the codes they shared in the interactions in prayer groups, I sought to distance my participation in these spaces from the image of someone who "only observes".

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9 For more context: the "ethical treatment of human subjects is inductive and context-sensitive".

I navigated through my online presence in dialogue with continuities previously established in the dynamics in which I was already involved outside the WhatsApp groups. If initially they were related to organizing events, such as distributing available spots in vans and car rides, and aiding in decisions over food, decorative items, and gifts, over time I was able to adapt these immersions to the ways of interacting that were collectively shared in the application. As WhatsApp groups constituted an important way of spreading an intense media production related to worships, my online activity covered mostly audiovisual records that I made of these moments, as well as sharing digital flyers and editing videos. In the latter, I used to address the history of the Ministry and disseminate the pastors' preachings published in other applications, such as YouTube and TikTok. My participation also included occasional online interactions, such as congratulations on commemorative dates, sharing employment opportunities, and other situations involving donations in climate disasters or responding to violence between those women and their families.

On the other hand, I chose not to participate in the daily routines of religious prayers, fasting, and testimony, that prompted a greater engagement in the group. In the religious campaigns and prayer requests, for example, I limited myself to brief reactions that included repeating emojis like the heart, two hands together (🙏) and hands up (🙌). In addition to these interactions, I avoided sharing content that my interlocutors classified as "talking about politics", although outside the groups these were the subject of conversations between me and those to whom I was closer. As I was able to build relationships interpreted by many of them as similar to those of people who "work for Jesus", as previously mentioned, both my engagement through media production

and my choices for not participating in praying and sharing testimonies on prayer campaigns have marked a positionality that has sometimes incurred on limitations, sometimes in proximity. Such tensions, however, are not exclusive to online research, but instead are common to the ethnographic coexistence itself, more generally.

In another plan of the ethical and methodological negotiations, I sought to understand what meanings were attributed in those WhatsApp groups to the ideas of consent, as well as to how my interlocutors approached or distanced themselves from what they considered public or private. Unlike the more private uses of social media, in which one person talks directly to another, the groups feature was interpreted by them in a similar way to the uses they made of other media such as Facebook, often indicating that there were two ways to be a part of the "virtuous women's group", beyond the events: on face (Facebook) and on zap.

In one of his analysis of Facebook uses, Daniel Miller (2012) referred to the platform's "wall", a space where publications called "posts" are made by users, as a "semi-public" space. For this author, since this is a content that does not require direct interaction, "posting" on the wall does not impose the same type of demand reserved for private interactions, such as when we send a direct message to someone or make a phone call. Mechanisms developed for group communication, such as e-mails, specialized forums, chat rooms, among others, were later described by Miller et al. (2016) as responsible for modifying the polarization between public and private in online spaces.

In dialogue with this author's interpretations, I understand the prayer groups that I have accessed in WhatsApp as semi-public spaces. Sharing a message or image in these groups inhabits the order of diffuse expectations, in that this communicational act may be directed to someone in particular who has been indirectly cited, as well as foresee generalized reactions from other participants. At the same time, this semi-public nature refers to the very ways of accessing the group, which were not limited to previously known women who had been added to the group by the pastor at the request of members. There were also contacts from the pastor's own network, in addition to public links shared on different social networks by the couple of religious leaders.

Instead of simply considering the semi-public nature of prayer groups as a free arena to collect data without conducting individual and collective negotiations, I considered other specificities in these reconfigurations of the public/private borders as they happened on WhatsApp. Since sharing content in evangelical groups (almost) exclusively constituted by women

builds trust relationships mediated by values related to imaginaries of gender, race, and class, these reconfigurations may also imply, as research works exploring gender and sexuality markers in digital contexts have shown (Pelúcio, 2015; Lins, 2019), different degrees of intimacy and consent that are linked to the trust relationships built with the leaders, with the group, and with the researcher.

Therefore, since I have not established contact with all the participants of these WhatsApp groups, in this research I only use images and voice messages shared by those with whom I could make agreements in this regard. As I have argued, our contact was extended, since the beginning, to conducting interviews and/or being together during fieldwork. I also used to take advantage of many occasions when I interacted in the groups to indicate to their members that I was a researcher, seeking to elaborate ways of providing this information in a non-mechanical, non-protocolary way.

While analyzing its contents, I was mindful of not taking screenshots that could incur any identification of the participants. Regarding text messages, such care turned to not transcribing literally contents that relied on hashtags,[10] which generate indexable links. These strategies sought to avoid the possibility of tracking publications using built-in search engines that are present in different digital platforms.[11]

Over the years, the frequency in which I followed the groups' contents changed, with structured data collection efforts being more concentrated in the first two years of the research. In this period, which I classify as an initial exploratory phase, I sought ways to systematize the contents using a built-in feature of the application, "staring a message" as favorite, to save on my cell phone those that most caught my attention. Structuring weekly tables helped me understand recurring information through records that I considered priority: Who are the conversation starters? What were the most shared contents? What were the explicit and implicit rules? Which differences could be noted when comparing the interactions between members and those they established with the religious leaders who managed the group? What types of conflicts were most frequent?

These questions guided the second phase of the research on WhatsApp groups, in which I analyzed the collected data. The recurrences verified

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10 Characterized by the hash symbol (#), hashtags aggregate audiences on social networks around topics formed by one or more words. Such topics can gain "viral" effects, a term that refers to subjects that reach great repercussion, engagement, and visibility on social networks.
11 These and other measures regarding traceability and safety in storing fieldwork material were shared in an online mini-course taught by Carolina Parreiras and Barbara Castro (2020) at State University of Campinas (Unicamp).

weekly helped build tables based on the dynamics of the groups themselves, which I divided between fixed tables and thematic tables. While the fixed tables helped recognize which dynamics repeated most frequently on situations led by the couple of pastors or introduced by the groups' members, with the thematic tables I sought to describe other usual activities that showed greater oscillations in the sharing of routines in the group. In the latter, I added content related to institutional politics, conspiracy content, job vacancies announcements, motivational messages, good morning/afternoon/evening greetings, among others.

I filled in both tables with descriptions of participating observations in different spaces, attaching videos, photos, emojis, stickers and excerpts of messages shared in the same period or in other occasions. With different orders of engagement by my interlocutors, choosing content for these tables followed criteria based on my observation of what stood out for an analysis across WhatsApp, whose flows were built between online and offline practices, in addition to my presence in the fieldwork.

With a framing that goes beyond tracking changes made by the groups' members over time or concerns about the linearity of the periods covered, I recorded daily habits of sharing images and recording voice messages during prayers. In addition, the pastor couple repeated the practice of performing preachings by voice messages and the participants' answers with prayers have allowed me to reflect on sensory experiences involved in listening to audio messages on WhatsApp.[12]

12 For a more in-depth analysis of the negotiations carried out through voice messages, see Mochel (2023b).

Date or period	Activity
June 14-21, 2017	**"Three Elements" campaign**

The campaign is launched at 00:30 with a voice message by pastor Cristiane, in which the duration is of three and a half minutes, explaining how to carry out the campaign daily in the next seven days. The name of "a troubled someone" must be written in a piece of paper, then put inside a small bottle with the three elements – water, olive oil, and grape juice, with the grape juice "representing the blood of the lamb" –, so that the "Lord visits this person" and can undo the "sorcery that was thrown against them". Throughout the campaign, this piece of paper should dissolve in the bottle, "along with the problems", while the bottle's swinging would come to "shake the person's structure" and thus "open their ears" to the voice of God.

During the campaign, the pastor shares prayers with her husband, pastor Bruno. Both share videos in which they walk holding a bottle with the "three elements" through a deserted street in their neighborhood, at different times of the night. Some of these daily videos, named as "Walk of Faith", show pastor Bruno alone; in others he is accompanied by Cristiane. Both alternate these calls to prayers with text messages, always during the night.

The answers arrive instantly, in text and voice messages with prayers. One of them sings a Gospel song. There are also many emojis showing hands together in prayer and flames of fire, text messages with cries of "glory to God," "hallelujah," the latter often typed repeatedly by a participant. Records of synchronous campaign activities in pictures share the space with the faces of family members for whom the participants ask for prayers. Some prayers arrive only at daytime, in the morning and in the afternoon. Other people say: "I prayed, but I did not share"; "I have already prayed, but I will not share it".

Source: Author's elaboration, 2017.

Date or period	Activity
April 30, 2018	**"Jehovah-jireh" campaign**

At the launch of another campaign, the preparation is once again narrated by the pastor in a voice message. Every night of the next fifteen days, a glass of water, clothes, documents, and a piece of bread must be "presented to the Lord". Clothes can be given to those in prisons or hospitals, while the bread must be eaten with water after prayer, so those who pray can "open their eyes", "have strategy", "see Jesus". During the campaign, these elements must also be shared with relatives needing prayers. The anointed water can be added to cooking meals, along with pieces of bread "crushed into crumbs" to be offered to "the son who is addicted", "the husband whose head is with his mistress". Using faith to provoke miracles "is madness". "We must be mad!", says the pastor. This interjection is a reminder that this would be a "prophetic act", a term repeated in different moments of her voice message, stressing the word "act". "A prophetic act is for those who believe. If you do not believe, then you will just join us in prayer". Many pictures arrive with records of the campaign in the following days. Throughout the day, selfies of family members arise, showing them in moments of leisure, in their homes, in parties. Those are prayer requests that are readily met by a few women, no more than three, who answer throughout the day.

Source: Author's elaboration, 2018.

Elaborating these tables allowed me to qualitatively address the challenges related to dealing with a space of intense data traffic. Although the validity of quantitative criteria and software uses is legitimate for many research works conducted on WhatsApp more recently,[13] the adoption of a handmade, qualitative research permeated by constant negotiations with the interlocutors allowed me to explore other aspects of the ethical and methodological debate on digital research. Reflecting on uses, features, and relational agreements across WhatsApp also pointed out to "the possibility of many experiments and contextual redefinitions of ethnography" (Parreiras, 2015, p. 71), bringing tension to its relations with anthropological theory.

The ethnographic specificities of my presence in the group generated unforeseen returns, resulting from an ethnographic project that was critical to some conceptions about the dangerous nature of conviviality with "those deemed inappropriately religious" (Harding, 1991, p. 376). As argued so far, my positionality in online and offline interactions has not turned this into an ethnography with "the repugnant other", to use another term by Susan Harding (1991). In addition to "working for Jesus", gender, race, and regional background markers that we shared also made us closer and suspended, at least momentarily, the fact that we did not share an evangelical religious belonging.

Drawing attention to the relations enabled by positionality in the research brings complexity to places produced by "persuasive fictions" (Strathern, 2014) frequently adopted in social analyses on evangelical groups. In this regard, Simon Coleman (2018) proposes an important self-objectification exercise in order to build a way out that relies on different ethical positions that, instead of being opposed, are mutually productive:

I am asking for a little more irony over our own positioning. As anthropologists, we should not let the earnestness and seriousness of our ethical stances cause us to fail to acknowledge the particular qualities of irony and play in practices of Prosperity. Borderlands can be confusing, if productive, places in which to dwell, and in which to make ourselves (Coleman, 2015, p. 307).

SMARTPHONES AND THEIR MORAL PANICS

Multi-sited research (Marcus, 1998) in prayer groups allowed me to explore other ways of getting to know my interlocutors and strengthening bonds with those with whom I already maintained relationships in other spaces.

13 I refer here to investigations monitoring political content in WhatsApp groups and, more recently, also in Telegram, as carried out by academics and research institutes that predominantly adopt the "lurker" approach, as defined by Ferguson (2017).

Even though many of those in the groups did not show up in the events, their presence in the groups was important for my understanding of WhatsApp as a space that generates modes of participation that are different from face-to-face interaction. There were no monolithic opinions among the groups' members, and exchanging points of view elicited controversies that did not appear in other contexts of our daily routines.

Reflecting on cell phone uses as a fundamental technology for increasing connections with God has shed a light on many of its ambivalences as an instrument of evangelization by these evangelical women. While they serve as a support for carrying out devotional practices in which people pray together and seek blessings to become closer to God, smartphones were also often portrayed as curses in the women's groups I participated in. Their materiality was pointed out as part of a broader set of "worldly" technologies and things that lead to degradation, following a common path in Protestant evangelism that is constituted of disputes between modernity and tradition, guiding classifications that are historically attributed to the problem of fetishes in Christianism[14].

In different texts and memes shared[15] in these WhatsApp groups, references to media were personified in moral panics, displaying demonic beings that destroy the family. Usually metamorphosed in feminine bodies, televisions, mobile phones, and tablets were described as "charming" and associated with sexual promiscuity, along with other worldly behaviors and vices. Here I highlight two of several examples shared in the groups in this regard.

In the first, a text attributed to an "unknown author" and titled "The Mistress" describes the transformation of a television into the figure of a woman who does not get old and seduces a "family man". This man, in turn, distances himself from his wife and children, forming a new family whose children are computers, tablets, and cell phones. In the second example, shared later, an illustration shows two sequences of comics. In one side, collective children's play contrasts with children playing individually on the cell phones; in the other, a family gathered around a dining table replaces this same family group on the sofa, with each member individually handling their phones, not interacting with each other.

14 See Latour (2002).
15 Memes are visual digital pieces associated with a large amount of web shares. Their multiplication through various social media channels gains shared meanings known by the term "viralization". The connection with viral replication indicates their online popularization. Stating that something or someone "turned into a meme" implies considering the massive level of reach of these contents.

The seduction attributed to a femininity metamorphosed into technological beings and evoking threats to the family associates notions of gender and sexuality with models of conduct portrayed as reprehensible in popularly known stories about new technologies and their dangers to humanity The ways in which evangelical women experience possibilities of practicing their faith in these spaces are in constant dispute with moralities that not only degrade these technologies' status, but also demonize them. While the use of cell phone becomes inescapable, the moralities around this materiality may present as conflicting in this context, also being affected by generation markers that act as important elements of the spiritual battle fought against media technologies in order to protect the family.

Simultaneously to sharing these contents, my interlocutors held constant negotiations with what could be (or become) demonic. In Sandra Rubia da Silva's research (2015) on cell phone uses among evangelical groups, the materiality of smartphones also appears as a target for disciplining practices, aiming at enabling ways of using them that are more compatible with these people's principles. As the author points out, in these groups, permissions stated that only hymns and gospel music should be used as ringtones. Similarly, Juliano Spyer (2018) commented that his evangelical interlocutors in a research in the Brazilian state of Bahia use social media for disciplining the family and ascending at work, indicating ways in which these technologies can often be used to protect themselves from threats posed by "modernizing forces" and reinforcing conservatisms.

Contents stored on the cell phone were also involved in other forms of control in Josiah Taru's research (2019) on mobile app uses among members of a Ministry in Zimbabwe, when he analyzed such disciplining practices in the speech of a young interlocutor who indicated that he would not "mix", on his smartphone, the applications used for prayers with videos and pornographic images sent through other groups. These modes of control, according to the author, create forms of governmentality (Foucault, 2010) enhanced by the vigilant pastoral gaze. In the narratives of these religious followers, their practices are guarded by both God and their leaders, who would spiritually capture deviations with the "anointment" transmitted through applications.

Therefore, there was a need to leave WhatsApp groups in which nude pictures and other pornographic contents were exchanged, since they could appear to pastors in prophetic dreams denouncing sins committed by their followers, creating "subtle disciplining regimes" (Taru, 2019, p. 165), which constantly reminds young members of the omnipresence of their leadership. Similar sensations have also been described regarding extra-marital affairs that could be discovered in the same way.

In an approach that is different from the discourses about the dangers that media could bring to the family, I also observed similarities with disciplinary regulations in practices of good coexistence within women's prayer groups. Throughout our online coexistence, I did not notice any behavior being punished with public alerts[16] or leading to evictions of group members, but interdictions related to sharing pornography and other contents appeared in a text on good practices shared by pastor Cristiane, titled "Group Rules", at the end of 2020. In this text, fully written in upper case, the religious leader combined different emojis in red that indicated that, in addition to forbidding "posting videos of violence and pornography", it was not allowed to "speak ill of any church and pastor".

The statement, received by the participants with "hallelujah", "amen", "yes ma'am, my pastor" and emojis expressing agreement, also set rules for good coexistence in the group. Among them, the pastor requested that those women participated in campaigns and responses to members' requests for prayers, assisted in running tea parties and conferences organized in the groups, and also asked them to avoid interrupting her or diverting the subject at times when the focus should be on prayer campaigns and important communications shared by her and her husband in the group.

If the aspect of ubiquity in omnipresence reinforces surveillances, this research's interlocutors also indicated the enhancement of religious life in the direction of what they consider to be more "real" in their relationship with God. According to how two of them described their choices to be part of this Ministry, the uses of cell phones and social networks distinguished "private"17 interactions with Cristiane as more "real" than those with other religious leaders, especially those established with pastors who do not practice what they preach in their churches. Their interpretations of reality, such as frankness and authenticity, key characteristics to religious authority in Pentecostalism, point to the ethnographic complexities of interactions between evangelicals and different digital media, in a way that cannot be reduced to the appropriations of doctrines, and that have, in turn, been redefining religious practices.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS
Throughout this work, I indicated ethical and methodological paths taken in an ethnography performed in prayer groups exclusively integrated by

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16 There was an exception related to sharing content about politics. After the attacks on the Brazilian government headquarters on January 8, 2023 in Brasilia, pastor Cristiane sent a voice message prohibiting sharing "political opinions".
17 Term by which message exchanges made directly between two people in message applications are usually called.

evangelical women on WhatsApp. I showed ways in which the polysemy around the way names such as Ministry, Project, and group present this digital media as a current possibility to experience new institutionalities for pastoral careers and evangelical affiliations.

The centrality of WhatsApp uses in contemporary evangelical reconfigurations has been explored in three sections of this text. In the first, I pointed out to WhatsApp as a religious device for exercising evangelical authority in non-institutionalized Ministries, engaging interdenominational negotiated agencies and expanding informal religious markets. In the second, WhatsApp is configured as an ethnographic research field, enabling analyses of non-verbal communication elements and sensory resources that expand methodological projects on and for digital investigations, as well as bringing reflections on consent, positionality, and how to navigate presence in online research.

In the last section, finally, I highlighted the ambivalent place of smartphones in the evangelical daily life of spiritual battle. By performing moral panics present in these contexts, cell phones and other technologies are transmuted into dangerous characters, which must be contained and permeated by rules that constitute WhatsApp groups as an institutionality for the multiple digitally mediated evangelical belongings. Therefore, exploring "prayer groups" integrated by evangelical women led to the unforeseen paths of an ethnography on religious daily lives formed by online and offline flows. Through them, I stressed the importance of discussing WhatsApp as it is used by evangelical women in their daily lives, seeking to contribute with necessary nuances to both ethical and methodological debates, as well as to macropolitical discussions about conservatisms in Brazil.

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