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"If We Can't Live in Peace, Then Let's Die in Peace!"

The Power of Charismatic Leadership and Apocalyptic Rhetoric in Jim Jones

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Abstract

I midten av 1900-tallet i USA var det en oppblomstring av kultbevegelser. En gruppe som senere har blitt omtalt som en kult, er «The Peoples Temple». Gruppen fikk mediedekning da over 900 medlemmer døde etter å ha drukket gift i Jonestown, Guyana, ledet av Jim Jones. Mye forskning har vært rettet mot tragedien i Jonestown og Jones selv, mens denne oppgaven retter søkelyset mot to sentrale aspekter ved hans lederskap: karisma og apokalyptisk tenkning. Ved å anvende ulike teoretiske forståelser av begrepene karisma og apokalyptisk tenkning, søker oppgaven å gi et helhetlig bilde av dem i en vitenskapelig kontekst. For å forstå begrepene i praksis, analyseres de i lys av Jonestown – nærmere bestemt gjennom Jim Jones. Oppgaven undersøker hvordan karisma og apokalyptisk dualisme kommer til uttrykk i Jones' siste tale, som analyseres med bruk av retoriske virkemidler og diskursanalyse for å gi innsikt i hva Jones kommuniserer og hvordan.

For å belyse Jones' karismatiske lederskap og hans bruk av apokalyptisk retorikk, inkluderes også utsagn fra tidligere medlemmer av The Peoples Temple. Det er gjennomført en kvalitativ undersøkelse med semi-strukturerte intervjuer, som ga informantene mulighet til å dele det de ønsket uten å bli avbrutt. Spørsmålene fungerte som en veiledende struktur for å få innblikk i både gruppen og lederen. De tre informantene bidro med verdifull innsikt i Jones, hans karisma og de religiøse aspektene han brakte inn i menigheten. Flere opplyste også om unøyaktigheter ved talen, noe som problematiserte analysen, men samtidig åpnet for en sammenligning mellom materialene.

Analysen viser at Jim Jones fremstod som en karismatisk leder gjennom følelsesladet språk, strategisk tilstedeværelse og et budskap om kollektiv frelse. Han brukte klassiske retoriske virkemidler og posisjonerte seg som beskytter, frelser og martyr. Samtidig formidlet han en apokalyptisk virkelighetsforståelse preget av «oss vs. dem»-retorikk, der døden ble fremstilt som eneste utvei. Funnene i oppgaven kan bidra til videre forskning på forholdet mellom karisma og apokalyptisk tenkning, og hvordan disse fenomenene fungerer sammen i kultbevegelser og lignende kontekster.

Nøkkelord: Jim Jones, The Peoples Temple, karisma, apokalyptisk dualisme, apokalyptisk retorikk, kultbevegelser, Jonestown

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Marthe Elin Axland Grindheim

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1. Introduction

"Lay down your life with dignity. Don´t lay down with tears and agony … there´s nothing to death. It´s like stepping over into another plane" (Jim Jones, 1978, 35:53-36:02). These are the words of Jim Jones, addressing his followers, including children, during the final moments of Jonestown. On November 18, 1978, almost a thousand people died from drinking poison or from brute force. Their deaths were the result of Jim Jones's apocalyptic worldview. The media coverage, including helicopter footage and disturbing imagery from the Jonestown complex in the jungle of Guyana, drew international attention to the tragedy. Why would individuals join a religious movement that ultimately led to a revolutionary suicide, and how was one man able to form a bond strong enough to create this outcome? While numerous perspectives exist on this question and various studies have been conducted, this thesis will specifically examine Jim Jones's charisma and his use of apocalypticism and apocalyptic rhetoric. How did Jones construct his charismatic authority, and how did he use apocalyptic rhetoric to maintain control over his congregation?

The Jonestown tragedy has not been a central object of study in religious studies, as it is often overshadowed by other horrors (Smith, 1982, p. 109). It has, however, at times been discussed particularly in terms of millenarianism, apocalypticism, and authority. This thesis aims to emphasize the importance of studying charisma and apocalyptic rhetoric when utilized by influential figures. History has shown that charisma can be a powerful tool, as seen in the case of Adolf Hitler, who used his rhetorical skills to gain influence and further a destructive agenda. Also, Jim Jones demonstrated how charismatic authority, combined with apocalyptic rhetoric, can shape the beliefs and actions of devoted followers. By presenting himself as a prophetic figure while warning his followers of a nuclear apocalypse, he fostered loyalty and a sense of urgency within the Peoples Temple. His charisma and apocalyptic beliefs, in addition to his followers' loyalty, were somewhat captured in the recorded speech made by Jim Jones on the night of the tragedy. To explore how his charisma and apocalyptic worldview were conveyed and interpreted, this study investigates:

How are Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic beliefs conveyed in his final speech, and how are these aspects interpreted by former members and survivors of the Peoples Temple?

1.1. Relevance and Contribution to the Field

My thesis is important in the field of religious studies as it contributes to a broader understanding of how charisma and apocalyptic beliefs emerge in religious leaders. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, various theorists have explored apocalypticism and charisma separately. In addition, many books and articles have been written about Jonestown, most of which revolve around the tragic events and Jim Jones as a leader. While the sources used in this thesis provide valuable insights regarding Jim Jones and Jonestown, they do not specifically analyze the effects of charisma and apocalypticism as this study aims to do.

The book *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple and Jonestown* by David Chidester analyzes the tragic events at Jonestown from a religious studies perspective. Chidester explores how the Peoples Temple and Jim Jones' ideology were part of a broader religious context, rather than just a deviation or a cult. He argues that Jonestown should be understood as a religious movement on its own theological and eschatological dimensions. Chidester provides valuable background on Jim Jones and the tragic events at Jonestown.

The book *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan* by John R. Hall, Philip D. Schuyler, and Sylvaine Trinh, focuses on the social and structural processes within the Jonestown tragedy. They emphasize the apocalyptic dualism in a broader tradition, where the world is evil and destructive, while they are saviors. Hall et al. bring insights into the apocalyptic aspects of the Peoples Temple, and how Jones' apocalyptic beliefs increasingly became more isolated and real for him.

Jonathan Z. Smith also offers insight into Jim Jones and Jonestown in his book *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Smith offers an interpretation of Jonestown within religious studies. His essay does not give a final solution, rather, he urges scholars to continue the task with Jonestown. Smith critically examines how the label "religion" is applied to such tragedies. For Smith, Jonestown is not simply an unusual cult but reflects distorted versions of familiar American ideals, such as utopianism. His critique serves as a methodological warning: how we define and study religion deeply shapes what we understand about events like Jonestown. "Smith shows that religion must be construed as conventional, anthropological, historical, and as an exercise of imagination".

Although these books include valuable insights into the tragedy of Jonestown, in addition to various analyses on Jim Jones's leadership, my thesis connects the concepts of charisma and

apocalypticism in the context of Jim Jones, as he is a prominent example of the potential consequences when utilizing both aspects. As many religious leaders are described as charismatic, it is important to understand how it works and how it is used for both positive and negative purposes. The thesis not only contributes to a greater understanding of the interplay between charisma and apocalypticism, but it also includes individuals who experienced the interplay first-hand. As this approach contributes to an insightful understanding of the Peoples Temple, it also offers a framework for analyzing other religious movements, both old and new, where charismatic authority and apocalyptic anticipations play a central role.

1.2. Disposition

To examine these presented questions, the thesis consists of five main chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion.

Chapter 2 provides the essential historical context necessary for understanding the Peoples Temple. It examines the religious and political movements that influenced Jones and the Temple, such as Pentecostalism, the Peace Mission Movement led by Father Divine, the Black Panther Party, and the wider American New Age movement. The chapter also provides an overview of the development of the Peoples Temple from its origins in Indiana to its final settlement in Guyana, offering insights into the group's dynamics, practices, and vision prior to the events of 1978.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical concepts that provide the basis for the thesis. Key terms such as 'cult', 'charisma', and 'apocalypticism' are explored, along with subcategories including 'eschatological and soteriological dualism', 'millenarianism', and 'charismatic leadership'. Using theorists such as Max Weber, Catherine Wessinger, and Stuart A. Wright as a basis, the chapter builds a conceptual framework for the analysis that follows. It also offers critical reflections on the usefulness and limitations of the concept of charisma concerning destructive religious leadership.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach of the thesis. It explains the use of rhetorical and discourse analysis to examine Jim Jones' final speech, alongside qualitative, semi-structured interviews with three former members of the Peoples Temple. The chapter also discusses the strengths and limitations of these methods, including the challenges of

working with material relating to emotional experiences. It also presents the ethical considerations and selection criteria for the interviews.

Chapter 5 offers a rhetorical analysis of Jim Jones' final speech on 18 November 1978. It focuses on how Jones used charismatic authority and apocalyptic rhetoric to frame collective suicide as an act of resistance and salvation. It highlights his use of emotionally charged language, repetitive appeals, dualistic worldviews and his strategic positioning as both protector and martyr. It also examines how members reacted during the speech, shedding light on how authority was enacted and reinforced in real time.

Chapter 6 analyzes the perspectives of three former members of the Peoples Temple through qualitative interviews. It explores their reflections on Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic worldview, their experiences of life within the Temple, and their current interpretation of the final speech. The chapter identifies some moments of agreement and disagreement between the survivors' experiences and theoretical interpretations.

This structure allows the thesis to explore how charismatic leadership and apocalyptic beliefs contributed to the tragedy at Jonestown.

2. Background

This chapter explores the socio-cultural background of 1970s America to understand why the Peoples Temple attracted a diverse membership, including many Black Americans, which is further discussed in Section 2.3. The chapter is organized into four subchapters: A Growing Spirituality in American Society, Church Traditions in 1970s America, Black Americans in the 1970s, and the Background of Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple. Each section examines the cultural and religious developments of the time, exploring how they influenced the rise of the Peoples Temple. Understanding the nature of Jim Jones's authority requires consideration of the societal factors that enabled the emergence of charismatic and apocalyptic movements. The focus is therefore on the religious and spiritual movements that influenced the establishment of the Peoples Temple.

2.1. A Growing Spirituality in American Society

Throughout the twentieth century, American religious practices shifted, particularly through the emergence of new spiritual movements. These included the New Age movement, which drew on earlier traditions such as Theosophy and New Thought. These movements helped create space for women as religious leaders in spiritual communities, as discussed by Wessinger et al. (2006, 753-768) in the *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*. By examining the development of these movements, this section clarifies how they contributed to the cultural settings that allowed groups like the Peoples Temple to emerge and attract followers. While there is no direct evidence that Jim Jones was ideologically influenced by New Age thinkers, the broader spiritual environment that they helped to create arguably made his leadership style more culturally relevant. Understanding this broader religious background is crucial, as it helped create the spiritual environment in which charismatic and apocalyptic leaders such as Jim Jones could gain legitimacy.

Theosophy is one of the earlier movements and, as articulated by Helena P. Blavatsky, is a synthesis of Eastern and Western religious traditions with a strong emphasis on mysticism. (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 754). The Theosophical Society played a crucial role in introducing and popularizing Hindu and Buddhist concepts in the West, such as reincarnation. Jim Jones claimed to be the reincarnation of Vladimir Lenin, a belief noted both by scholars and his son, Stephan Jones (Chidester, 1988, p. 62; Jones, 2019). Over time, multiple organizations have emerged within the broader Theosophical movement, continuing the legacy of the

Theosophical Society (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 754). One of these movements is the New Thought movement. The New Thought movement is a distinctly American religious movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century, primarily establishing itself in developing urban centers of the mid- and far western United States (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 757). This movement is rooted in popular religious idealism and affirms that reality is essentially mental and that one's mental state determines material conditions (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 757). The Peace Mission Movement, led by Father Divine, drew on principles of New Thought, which later inspired Jim Jones.

The New Age movement, New Thought, and Theosophy are all part of a broader stream of religious thought that historian J. Stillson Judah has termed the "metaphysical movement" (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 753). The three movements all emerged from a reaction against scientific materialism, asserting the existence of unseen spiritual dimensions that influence human well-being. They especially emphasize the power of thought, consciousness, and spirit to change matter (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 753). The New Age movement became particularly noticeable in the 1960s and grew increasingly prominent throughout the late twentieth century. Its various groups are centered in North America and Western Europe but are influential throughout the world. The New Age movement readily incorporates various beliefs from different religious traditions. It represents a merging of two types of spirituality: basic religion – emphasizing spiritual forces and being affecting material existence, and millennialism – the belief in an impending transition to a collective redemption (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 761). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, where the term millennial is presented, millennial groups anticipate a radical transformation of humanity that will eliminate suffering. Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple have become an example of a millennial group.

The New Age movement borrows elements of basic religion from various traditions. It embraces belief in impersonal forces and personal spirits and gods, the practice of magic, and uses sacred objects such as crystals and stones which are believed to possess special powers (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 761). Within the New Age movement, it was believed that crystals held power and that charisma could stem from a spiritual source of authority (Wessinger et al., 2006, p. 767). In the various pages written by Wessinger, multiple women are described as charismatic leaders, which is a common description of Jim Jones during his time as the founder of the Peoples Temple. This "possession" could be a reason for a person's ability to appeal to their people. Healing practices and the focus on spiritual aspects emerged during the

uprising of the New Age movement, which was adopted by Jim Jones, who regularly focused on healing (Chidester, 1988, p. 3). The development of the New Age may have paved the way for some of Jim Jones' leadership aspects, which incorporated healing and psychic powers (Chidester, 1988, p. 3).

2.2. Church Traditions in 1970s America

Jim Jones took inspiration from various religious traditions, including the Peace Mission Movement led by Father Divine and the Pentecostal movement (Chidester, 1988, p. 4). Understanding these influences is crucial for exploring the development of the Peoples Temple. Jones's mission of racial equality and cultural integration derives from his commitment to social justice, which was shaped early in his life. In 1970s America, there was a growing interest in diverse religious movements, such as Hare Krishna and the Black Panther Party. The Peoples Temple flourished during this time, attracting followers due to its inclusive, multigenerational approach, which appealed to a wide range of individuals seeking community and justice. Due to Jim Jones' commitment to racial integration, the church was particularly appealing to Black Americans. He prioritized his Black members, not only by advocating for racially integrated churches but also by ensuring that Black members were positioned at the front during services. Jones frequently stated that the healing performances in his ministry were a means to integrate and politicize his congregations, reinforcing his commitment to racial equality (Chidester, 1988, p. 3). The following sections provide a closer look at the two movements that most strongly shaped Jones's religious ideology: the Pentecostal movement and the Peace Mission Movement.

2.2.1. *Pentecostal Movement*

Pentecostal movements emerged in the United States during the twentieth century, giving rise to many denominations. A fundamental belief shared across all branches of Pentecostalism is the baptism of the Spirit, which occurs after conversion. Spirit baptism, which is not the same as water baptism, is considered a secondary experience, most manifested through ecstatic practice of speaking in tongues (Stein, 2002, p. 206). Pentecostals believe in miracles, where the signs are quite extraordinary, and they cherish the divine healing of the body as it is vital to the blessings available in Christ (Macchia, 2009, p. 286). Pentecostals interpret the biblical texts as a narrative that directly involves them through the work of the Holy Spirit. Each text serves as a direct outlet to the God of the kingdom, who is

the ruler of all history and is felt in the here and now. From a Pentecostal hermeneutical perspective, any attempt to confine the biblical text within distinct historical periods undermines its immediacy and ongoing relevance (Macchia, 2009, p. 285). There are two prominent figures in the early development of this movement, namely Charles Fox Parham, who led a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, and William J. Seymour, the son of former slaves, who was influenced by Parham's teachings (Stein, 2002, p. 206). Seymour later introduced these teachings in Los Angeles, where he led the Pentecostal revival known as the Azusa Street Revival. Pentecostals believed they were living in the final days, and therefore, the movement was permeated with eschatological beliefs, particularly of a premillennial nature. Pentecostals used the term "Latter Rain", which reflected their conviction that the outpouring of God's Spirit, accompanied by miraculous signs, signaled the imminent end of the age. Early Pentecostals combined an intense apocalyptic expectation with a strong critique of various aspects of American society. Over time, however, this critical stance diminished, particularly among Pentecostals who experienced upward social mobility (Stein, 2002, p. 206).

Macchia (2009, p. 289) refers to how contemporary Pentecostals, especially among the scholars of the movement, do not interpret history exclusively through a narrow charismatic interest. The earlier perspective underscores the immense value Pentecostals have placed on charismatic spirituality. This spirituality represents a form of spiritual freedom to search for insights of the new creation in the here and now, and to encourage hope in a way that transcends what is viewed as reasonable or possible in scientific or rational understandings of human experience. The desire for a more diverse and extraordinary charismatic life within the church has often encouraged a vision of the church as fundamentally charismatic, interactive, and open to surprises rather than juridical, hierarchical, or predictive. At its core, Pentecostal eschatology embodies an adventurous engagement with the Spirit, where divine possibilities remain limitless, contributing to its enduring appeal (Macchia, 2009, p. 289). Jim Jones was inspired by the Pentecostal church, which will be further discussed under subchapter 2.4. Jones was also inspired by Father Divine's Peace Mission movement.

2.2.2. *Peace Mission Movement*

The Peace Mission Movement, led by Father Divine, was among the most controversial sectarian communities holding alternative apocalyptic views. Father Divine, born George Baker, was an African American preacher who declared himself the fulfillment of the Book of

Revelation's prophecies, in which God comes to earth to transform it (Stein, 2002, p. 206). Drawing from New Thought, a modern religious movement rooted in the belief that mental states shape material conditions, the Peace Mission gained popularity in a rapidly changing urban North marked by industrial growth, displacement, and social polarization (Lindsey, 2014, p. 352). Earlier scholarship often portrayed the Peace Mission as an aberrational cult appealing mainly to poor Black urban populations by offering free meals and emotional sermons (Watts, 1991, p. 476). However, Father Divine's theology emphasized the embodiment of divine spirit within each person and the attainment of immortality, health, and prosperity through spiritual practice (Watts, 1991, p. 478). The Peace Mission encouraged economic self-determination, urging followers to pool resources to establish cooperative businesses. Father Divine's theology linked salvation with prosperity, legitimizing wealth as part of a divine mission and offering hope to the poor. This message of empowerment extended beyond material success to include a broader vision of racial equality and civil rights. While rarely speaking directly about race, he taught that God was Black, a belief that inspired pride among African Americans and reinforced the movement's anti-racist stance (Watts, 1991, pp. 481, 496).

Jim Jones explicitly modeled aspects of the Peoples Temple on Father Divine's movement. The two groups shared similar racial demographics in leadership and membership, communal living practices, and a focus on overcoming racial inequality (Moore, 2006, p. 58). Members called Jones "Father," resonating with Divine's title. Women made up the majority in both groups, ranging from three-fourths to nine-tenths in the Peace Mission and approximately two-thirds in Jonestown, many of them poor Black women, often widowed or divorced (Moore, 2006, pp. 73-74). This reflects a common trend in New Religious Movements, where women, especially from marginalized communities, were often overrepresented. Both movements had a patriarchal structure, with the leader surrounded by a staff of mostly white women (Hall et al., 2000, p. 20). Communal economic models were central in both cases, with pooled resources supporting the collective. One notable difference lies in their approach to racial integration: Father Divine promoted celibacy, while Jim Jones encouraged interracial relationships and biracial children. Despite differing methods, both movements shared commitments to racial equality, economic justice, and social transformation (Moore, 2006, pp. 73-74). Although Jones was influenced by Father Divine, his earliest inspirations stemmed from the Pentecostal movement, which shaped his worldview from a young age. Still, the two

men's shared emphasis on racial justice was likely reinforced by the rise of Black Power and broader cultural shifts in the mid-twentieth century.

2.3. Black Power in the 1970s

Rather than tracing the entire historical development of Black American oppression, this section focuses on the social and political landscape of the 1970s that shaped the Black membership in the Peoples Temple. In this context, I use the term Black Americans to refer to individuals identified by their skin color and racialized experiences, rather than strictly genealogical or cultural definitions of "African American." Given the diversity of the Peoples Temple's membership, "Black Americans" is used throughout this thesis to encompass individuals from varied racialized experiences. Jim Jones established the Peoples Temple during a time when Black Power and alternative spiritualities were rising, which became important elements of his church. To understand why the Peoples Temple was embraced by many, it is essential to consider the rise of Black Power movements and how the societal changes created space for the Peoples Temple. It is especially important to focus on this group within the Peoples Temple, and therefore their place in society, as a majority of the members were Black Americans. This subchapter will focus on the Black Power movement and movements such as the Black Panther Party. Additionally, it will explore why Black Americans would be attracted to the Peoples Temple, which was viewed as a white movement (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 120), despite its significant black membership, due to its leadership under Jim Jones, a white male. This illustrates how Jim Jones's charisma enabled him to mobilize people whose lived experiences differed radically from his own.

During the processes and political institutions of the 1960s and 1970s, people of color were provided with new opportunities to participate in a "global civil society". The Black Panther Party has some credit as one of the most significant institutional forerunners to the development of such a society (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 107). The Black Panther Party was founded by Huey P. Newton, whose image, as portrayed and provided by the party, was intimately immersed in the organization's practical political activity, in addition to its focus on black self-determination and his experiences being a part of the black lumpen of Oakland. Such factors, in addition to his visual presence and public persona, with some extent of charismatic power, became the key to his success within politics and within the party itself, which led to a broad cross-section of black communities in America (Harris & Waterman,

2004, p. 108). Newton shared the common experience of police brutality and incarceration with his people, which further bound him to his members as well as them to him. Alongside the common experiences, Newton was an educated and articulate man about the difficulties his communities and companions faced, but was also able to outline concrete strategies he believed would bring on revolutionary social change and black self-determination (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 108). He worked as a savior figure, someone a person of color could identify with during their confusion of position in the emergent post-war, postcolonial, post-Jim Crow order. He effectively became an image of different types that emerged together, which produced a strong set of loyalties to individuals and ideological doctrines (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 110).

The Peoples Temple had similarities to the Black Panther Party. Jim Jones' ministry in the mid-1950s was a response to the persistent economic and racial inequality, despite the post-war prosperity of the First World. His work paralleled that of the Black Panther Party, Black intellectuals of the early 1970s, and numerous ministers, both black and white, who were engaged in social activism across the United States during the 1950s. From the beginning, his perspectives were shaped by the necessity of viewing personal and communal commitments within the broader framework of movement-building. His activism against racism in Indianapolis drew him into circles of activists in both the secular and the religious worlds, drawing in parishioners who were equally committed to racial justice(Harris & Waterman, 2004, pp. 104-105). Both white and black congregants were drawn to his vision of integrating Sunday morning church services, historically the most segregated time of the week, while also using the church as a platform for broader political engagement beyond racial integration (Harris & Waterman, 2004, pp. 104-105). Jim Jones included some of the same sources of political and cultural identity that Huey Newton did, such as historical references to slavery as well as the more contemporary days of Jim Crow. This made it easier to draw in more politically active segments in the Bay Area, where the population consisted of both white people and people of color.

To attract Black Americans to the Peoples Temple, Jones adopted the language and rhythms typical of Black preachers, performed faith healings, and provided health and social services for California's urban poor. His typical sermons seamlessly blended religious and political messages, incorporating announcements of free medical care alongside dramatic demonstrations of his supposed healing powers. Jones borrowed heavily from Black Panther

rhetoric, where he would paint the American society as irredeemably racist, capitalist, and corrupt, insinuating that only a socialist revolution would cleanse it (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 110). Despite similar rhetoric, Jones and Newton had a more fundamental difference. Newton resisted the creation and upholding of a cult-of-personality status, whereas Jones actively cultivated and embraced it. He openly acknowledged his central role in the movement but insisted that modeling his leadership was the only way to guide his followers to socialism. His efforts to maintain and reinforce his authority not only unified his followers but also contributed to the strict structure that would later define the movement's path (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 112). Although these movements attract a variety of people, they also become a topic in various media outlets, which later became one of the reasons for the Peoples Temple's exodus to Guyana.

2.4. Background of Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple

2.4.1. *Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple*

Jones's apocalyptic worldview played a central role in his leadership and the community's sense of purpose. According to Chidester (1988, p. 2), Jim Jones started preaching from a young age, where he would set up a makeshift church for the animals and neighbor children whom he would preach to. He was exposed to religion throughout his childhood, which took the form of enthusiastic, dynamic services of various Pentecostal churches that he attended. The affection for the emotional flavor of Pentecostal Christianity he got from these churches persisted throughout his life. These churches provided him warmth and acceptance (Chidester, 1988, p. 2). He saw the potential in this and thus wanted to take it further into his church. "By 1953, Jones began to recognize the potential in Pentecostal-style, evangelical faith healing for attracting crowds, raising money, and serving as a pretext for integrating churches." (Chidester, 1988, p. 3). He founded the Peoples Temple in the 1950s, and it increasingly attracted more people. As a religious and political project, Peoples Temple was able to give meaning to a world that was quickly emerging, as well as to position collective agency as a lever for progressive change (Harris & Waterman, 2004, p. 104). Jim Jones' church consisted of people from different cultures and generations, as he was against racial segregation and believed that every person was created equal, a revolutionary belief in an American society filled with racism and segregation.

Jones' two concerns, socialism and racial integration, which followed Jones throughout his life, were developed after he and his wife, Marceline Baldwin, moved to Indianapolis, where the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan was located (Chidester, 1988, p. 3). Jones's concerns regarding racial integration caused considerable controversy within the racially divided churches in Indianapolis. However, his efforts to promote interracial harmony were recognized, which placed Jim Jones on the honor roll of the Indianapolis Recorder, a weekly Black newspaper. Furthermore, in 1961, he was appointed director of the Indianapolis Human Rights Commission, where he worked to integrate institutions such as the police department, hospitals, banks, and lending agencies (Chidester, 1988, pp. 3-4). Although Jim Jones received remarkable recognition within American society, his animosity towards America slowly increased. Throughout Jones' life, the fear of nuclear destruction seemed to be preoccupying, and because of the conviction that the world was on the edge of a thermonuclear war due to American economic and political interests, his animosity intensified further. Therefore, a prominent theme in his subsequent sermons was how to avoid the devastation of an imminent nuclear war. These sermons also consisted of many references to Guyana as the "Promised Land" where preparations of so-called *blessed places* were made for the Peoples Temple's exodus from America (Chidester, 1988, pp. 5-9).

Within the church, Jones wanted to recruit followers who were highly committed individuals and insisted that they would pursue the cause of the Peoples Temple selflessly, tirelessly, and without compromise. This reflects what Max Weber called an "ethic of ultimate ends", referring to individuals acting in a faithful, rather than rational, manner (Hall et al., 2000, p. 28). To ensure total commitment, Jones invoked a doctrine originally developed by Huey Newton, where the slow suicide of life in the ghetto ought to be displaced by "revolutionary suicide". The result of the commitment would consist of victory against economic, social, and racial injustice, or in death. Essentially, the Temple wanted the members to give up their previous lives and be born again to a collective struggle that had no limits. This radical ethos both deepened the gap between the Peoples Temple and the wider society and served as the ideological foundation for the group's increasingly uncompromising stance. As the Temple found itself locked in a prolonged struggle with organized apostates and their allies, both sides became equally resolute in their respective causes, one in defense of the Temple's vision, the other in determined opposition to it (Hall et al., 2000, p. 28). To attract new members, Jones was able to competently combine apocalyptic imagery, which resonated with people familiar with religious rhetoric, with the political discourse of class and race, intensifying the existing

frustrations of those who were intrigued by his message (Hall et al., 2000, p. 17). This dual approach enabled him to forge a form of religious radicalism that attracted devoted followers to a movement defined by its fierce opposition to American capitalist society. Given Jones's strong rejection of the dominant ideology, that very ideology inevitably fosters a misunderstanding of both his movement and its ultimate demise (Hall et al., 2000, p. 17).

2.4.2. *A Change in the Peoples Temple*

Tensions within the Peoples Temple arose when media coverage increased. The option of exodus to Guyana, therefore, became increasingly attractive in 1977 when two journalists, Marshall Kilduff and Phil Tracy, prepared to publish an exposé on the movement in New West magazine. Following allegations from former members, including Grace Stoen, who defected in July 1976, and others who defected in 1973, an article was finally published in the August 1, 1977, issue of New West (Kilduff & Tracy, 1977). The article suggested that the Peoples Temple should be investigated for potential financial misconduct, coercive practices, alleged physical abuse of members, and questionable involvement in local San Francisco politics. (Chidester, 1988, pp. 9-10).

Members of the Peoples Temple gradually began the exodus to Guyana, and eventually over 1000 members were living at what was called "Jonestown". The emigration of the group to Guyana to create a hate-free society indicates the depth of the group's desire for justice (Moore, 2006, p. 58). The idea of Jonestown was sold and envisioned as a utopian heaven, a socialist paradise in the jungle, allowing those who had faced deprivation, discrimination, and persecution in America to live in peace and freedom. A place where racism, sexism, ageism, and classism would be nonexistent (Chidester, 1988, p. 10). However, this did not reflect the actual experiences of the members. Methods of controlling members increased, and it operated in ways often found in militant political movements and clandestine warring sects (Hall et.al., 2000, p. 24). Jones gained authority by carefully legitimating his proclaimed charismatic mission as a socialist prophet. In practical terms, Jones was able to strengthen his authority by staging displays of paranormal powers and cultivating a network of personal relationships, which at times involved sexual dominance over both women and men. As Jones was bisexual, he used sex as a form of currency 'for the cause,' providing some with intimacy while using it to control or humiliate others (Hall et.al., 2000, p. 24).

Beyond these forms of social control, based on personal relationships and charismatic projection, the Temple introduced various practices from wider cultural sources. In the book *Apocalypse Observed,* four practices are mentioned. The first one being the practices of "discernment" adopted from the pseudo-Pentecostalists. Jones transformed these "discernments" into a vehicle of intelligence gathering, which was used by the Temple staff to monitor members. A second practice was a military-drill security unit, while the third consisted of social work and counselling psychology techniques from 1970s Californian culture. The fourth, and last practice implemented, was a fundamentalist Christian ethic of punishments for wrongdoing (Hall et.al., 2000, p. 25). By implementing these practices, Jones was able to sustain legitimate collective authority fundamentally by widespread distribution of relatively equal benefits of group life. A shared interest in social control flourished when they were given a personal stake in the organization by the participants. Thus, a comprehensive monitoring system was established by the leadership where members would report both their own and others' issues, sexual behavior, social relationships, as well as their commitment to the Temple, and any deviant or criminal actions. This system could make it difficult for members to leave the group, which contradicts the vision of Jonestown as a place of peace and freedom. The gathered information was used for collective interventions in members' lives and relationships. They would conduct both individual and group sessions, as well as public 'catharsis' meetings, where Jones would sometimes humiliate backsliders and invite the assembly to decide on punishments. Examples of punishments could be paddling or boxing matches for offenders. The collective itself played an active role in the practices that reinforced organizational authority (Hall et.al., 2000, p. 25). As mentioned, many of these techniques were borrowed from the wider society, however, there was a critical difference: while social control in society is extensive, it is not centralized within a single apparatus. In contrast, Peoples Temple consolidated control within the hierarchy of a total institution that enveloped members in a unified system of surveillance, even though many participated freely in school and work outside the Temple. As in any social system, the less committed members would feel the weight of this oversight more heavily in comparison to loyal adherents who adhered to the rules. Internally, monitoring, cathartic sessions, and physical punishment were seen as necessary to uphold standards of acceptable behavior and prevent dissent. From an external perspective, however, these practices were and are viewed as deceiving, physical abuse, and persuasion (Hall et.al., 2000, p. 25).

Considering the implementation of the practices mentioned above, it is understandable that some decided to leave. Some members did remove themselves from the Peoples Temple, and after increasingly more control was imposed upon the members, an organization called "Concerned Relatives" was developed. The Concerned Relatives made a highly visible campaign against the Peoples Temple by contacting members of Congress, meeting with State Department officials, and organizing human rights demonstrations. They generally wanted to seek help from the government regarding the Temple members' exodus to Guyana. After a while, they were able to convince Congressman Leo Ryan to visit Jonestown in 1978. It consisted of former members and relatives of the members within the Peoples Temple (Hall et al., 2000, p. 33). After defection, Jones often responded with intense animosity toward former members. One notable example is Deborah Layton Blakey, who defected as she was afraid of a looming mass suicide (Blakey, 1978). She was a trusted member of the Temple's inner leadership circle; however, after she defected, she, like others, was viewed as a dangerous traitor, class enemy, and conspirator working with the media and government to destroy Jonestown (Chidester, 1988, p. 10).

During her time in Jonestown, she witnessed what Jim Jones called a white night. Before the tragedy in 1978, Jim Jones had a regular ritual of crisis called a white night, which took place as often as every two weeks. Siege and self-defense, catharsis and community mobilization were methods used during the white nights, hoping to prepare the members to resist harassment, incursions, and invasions by their enemies to the death (Chidester, 1988, p. 143). Deborah Layton Blakey mentions these white nights in the affidavit to the US government (Blakey, 1978). She explains how Jones would declare a white night at least once a week, where the entire population would be awakened by blaring sirens. Designated individuals would be armed with rifles and would move from cabin to cabin to ensure the members were responding. Jones would frequently tell his members that the jungle was swarming with mercenaries and that death was expected (Blakey, 1978). Further on, she writes about Jones mentioning a mass suicide for the glory of socialism. He told his members they had to drink the poison, and they would die within 45 minutes. The poison was, however, not real. It was his way of performing a loyalty test on his members (Blakey, 1978). However, Blakey is not the first ex-member to mention this specific white night. In the documentary series *Cult massacre: One day in Jonestown* (season 1, episode 2), some survivors recalled this night in a similar way to Blakey. It is said that they would be called into the pavilion and tested to see if they were committed to Jim Jones and his teachings. One method used by Jones was to tell his

members to drink poison. They were told after drinking their portion that it was not poisoned, and those who refused to drink would be punished (National Geographic, 2024, 31:30-33:00). While earlier tests did not include the poison, the events on 18 November 1978 tragically ended in actual mass poisoning, where their drink was poisoned after the visit from Congressman Leo Ryan.

2.5. Summary

This chapter has provided insight into the cultural and religious conditions of 1970s America at the time when the Peoples Temple emerged. The discussion of the New Age movement has illustrated how religious practice and spirituality shifted in American society during this period. There was more focus on the spiritual than the religious traditions we were used to, which introduced new ways of experiencing religion and faith for many. Drawing from traditions such as Theosophy and New Thought, the New Age movement helped shape a new outlook on spirituality. While Jim Jones was not directly influenced by the New Age movement, the clearer spiritual atmosphere it created enabled the Peoples Temple to attract followers. His approach, inspired by Father Divine's, emphasized racial integration and healing, which resonated strongly with Black Americans. His emphasis on racial integration and spiritual healing, combined with inspiration from Father Divine and the Pentecostal movement, allowed the Peoples Temple to resonate with both politically and religiously motivated followers. At a time when Black Power movements were gaining momentum and traditional religious expressions were being questioned, the Peoples Temple emerged as a convincing alternative for many seeking justice, belonging, and spiritual renewal. However, as Jones's control over the group grew, which added tension, more members began leaving the church. Despite its initial success in fostering a sense of community, spiritual purpose, and a vision of racial justice, the increasingly authoritarian leadership prompted many members to leave.

3. Theoretical aspects

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for analyzing Jim Jones's charismatic leadership and apocalyptic worldview. It is divided into two main parts: apocalypticism and charisma. Each section includes various definitions by different scholars. The goal is to provide conceptual resources that will guide the analysis in the following chapters. This chapter presents the theoretical framework only, while Chapter 4 discusses the methodology used to analyze both the final speech and the interview data. "We didn't commit suicide, we committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world" (Jones, 1978, 42:27-42:37). These were the words of Jim Jones on the final day in Jonestown. To understand what led to this event, it is essential to consider the religious context of the Peoples Temple and the theoretical concepts of apocalypticism and charisma. Throughout American history, many smaller religious movements have emerged that are often labeled as 'cults' by outsiders (Kulik, 2024). These groups are typically led by a central figure who effectively uses charisma to attract and recruit members. However, charisma alone is not always sufficient to maintain loyalty and commitment. In such cases, leaders may employ additional strategies, such as strict social control, socio-political conflict, or apocalyptic rhetoric, to reinforce their authority and keep members engaged. This chapter aims to explore the interplay between two such factors: apocalypticism and charisma. It begins with a discussion of apocalypticism and its related concepts. The chapter then turns to Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority, along with key scholarly critiques and developments of his framework.

3.1. Cult

The term 'cult' is problematic in the study of religion, as it is often associated with negative connotations. According to Kulik (2024), the term 'cult' is defined as "usually a small group devoted to a person, idea, or philosophy". In recent years, the term has been employed as a pejorative identifier for religious groups that are regarded as deviating from the mainstream and engaging in controversial practices (Kulik, 2024). Newer religions have frequently been labelled as cults. However, it should be noted that the term 'cult' did not originally carry a negative connotation. In the ancient Mediterranean world, a wide variety of mystery cults existed, in which exclusively elite members were initiated into these secret rituals, often for a particular deity (Kulik, 2024). Preaching about being special and elite is also common in the final speech, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Therefore, the

word's meaning could be interpreted differently by various people. In consideration of the fact that Kulik's definition could also be regarded as a definition of religion, it is essential to comprehend the complexity of the term. A 'cult', as I use the term, is a smaller religious group that is somewhat secluded from the outside world. The employment of this term is because, according to the provided definition, the Peoples Temple could be regarded as a cult, as the group became secluded when relocating to Guyana. Furthermore, the group engaged in controversial activities during its visit to the US, as reported by newspapers. Throughout the paper, however, the term will be used in the first sense, thus avoiding any negative connotations.

3.2. Apocalypticism

Defining the term apocalypticism has proven challenging for scholars, as it overlaps with several related concepts. Nevertheless, apocalypticism refers to a distinct set of beliefs concerning the end of time. It is typically characterized by three main elements: historical determinism (the belief that events are preordained), the perception of an impending crisis, and the expectation of a final judgment, where evil is defeated and good ultimately triumphs (Svenungsson, 2022). Apocalyptic beliefs and movements are found across many religious traditions, particularly within the Abrahamic religions (Svenungsson, 2022). According to Stein (2002, p. 376), “Apocalypticism, derived from a verb meaning ‘to disclose’ or ‘uncover,’ refers broadly to prophetic disclosure or revelation.” In this context, the Book of Revelation depicts a golden millennial age that can only arise after a violent and transformative cataclysm. This apocalyptic event brings about the destruction of evil and leads to the establishment of a renewed, morally upright world (Hall et al., 2000, p. 3). While the term revelation historically referred to divine disclosure, it has come to be closely associated with “end-time beliefs” in modern apocalyptic discourse.

In the study of new religious movements, apocalypticism is often linked to catastrophism, referring to scenarios in which a divine, supernatural, or non-human force intervenes dramatically in human history, not to reform the world gradually, but to destroy and remake it entirely (Partridge, 2009). Although the Book of Revelation is traditionally read as a description of the final days, the Greek term *apokalyptein* also conveys a broader meaning: it implies a divine unveiling of hidden truths and cosmic forces that shape the world. A clear understanding of apocalypticism is essential for interpreting the belief system of the Peoples

Temple. The term *apocalyptic rhetoric* will be used throughout the thesis to refer to discourse that draws on the apocalyptic concepts and frameworks outlined in this chapter. While several terms could describe the belief systems in question, apocalypticism is the most encompassing (Stein, 2002, p. 376). For this reason, the term will be used in this thesis as a collective label for related concepts such as millennialism, soteriological dualism, and eschatological dualism.

3.2.1. *Millennialism/ millenarianism*

The concept of the "millennium" in Christian theology refers to the prophesied thousand-year reign of Christ and his followers on Earth (Huber, 2024). This idea plays a significant role in many Christian eschatological beliefs. According to Hall et al. (2000, p. 1), many readers of Revelation expect Christ to return to Earth and lead in a thousand-year period of peace, joy, and divine order, effectively transforming Earth into a form of heaven. However, there is scholarly debate about whether this return will occur before or after the millennium. Stein (2002, p. 376) defines millennialism narrowly as "the belief in a 1,000-year period of earthly peace and prosperity," but notes that the term is often applied more broadly to describe any anticipated era of happiness or good fortune. In his broader discussion of millennialism in the American context, Stein (2002, pp. 187-211) distinguishes between two major theological positions: Post-millennialism, the belief that Christ's return will occur after a millennial age of peace on Earth (Stein, 2002, p. 199), and pre-millennialism, the belief that Christ will return before the millennium begins, and that his return will initiate this period (Stein, 2002, p. 200).

While the term originally referred to Christ's thousand-year rule as described in Revelation, it is now used more broadly to describe any utopian or eschatological future era brought about by a divine or superhuman force for the benefit of the faithful (Partridge, 2009, p. 191). This broader use allows scholars to apply the term to a variety of religious movements, although this generalization can obscure important differences. For example, Richard Landes emphasizes that "the key factor" in millennialism is its earthly orientation, but this definition is too narrow when applied to the wide range of beliefs present in new religious movements (Partridge, 2009). Such conceptual tools are vital when studying groups like the Peoples Temple, which can be seen as a modern millennial movement, particularly in light of the catastrophic end it experienced through collective suicide.

A millennial movement anticipates an imminent, collective transformation that will overcome the limitations of the current human condition, often for a select group of believers (Wessinger, 2012, p. 91). Some of these movements expect this transformation to occur through divine catastrophe (catastrophic millennialism), while others envision it as part of a gradual process facilitated by human cooperation with a divine force (progressive millennialism) (Wessinger, 2012, p. 91). Some groups await divine intervention passively, while others actively prepare for the chaos of transition, including through self-defense. Both progressive and catastrophic millennial movements may adopt revolutionary strategies aimed at dismantling the current world order to build a new one. This revolutionary element is evident in Jonestown, where Jim Jones framed the collective suicide as a revolutionary act, a point that will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Although millennialism is common among new religious movements, not all such groups are millennial (Wessinger, 2012, p. 91). Moreover, not all millennial groups have a prophet or messiah. However, when such a figure is present and claims a new revelation, heightened apocalyptic or millennial expectations often generate a sense of urgency. This urgency can motivate individuals to convert and radically reorient their lives and beliefs (Wessinger, 2012, p. 91). This sense of urgency is especially evident in Jim Jones's final speech, where the theme of imminent crisis dominate. Episodes of violence may also occur when a charismatic leader mismanages his or her charisma. (Wessinger, 2012, p. 91). From a biblical perspective, such events may be interpreted as signs of the approaching millennium. Even from a secular viewpoint, these acts are often framed as symptoms of an anticipated transformational crisis. Understanding these events requires familiarity with apocalyptic concepts. While the terms millenarianism and millennialism are sometimes used interchangeably, millennialism typically refers more specifically to Christian interpretations of millenarian belief. Over time, both terms have evolved and taken on additional meanings within broader eschatological and dualistic frameworks (Stein, 2002, p. 200).

3.3. Dualism

Dualism is a term first introduced in 1700 by the English Orientalist Thomas Hyde to describe philosophical and religious systems of thought characterized by a fundamental physical or metaphysical duality (Frey, 2014, p. 271). In later scholarship, dualism has also been associated with apocalyptic rhetoric and "us versus them" frameworks. It has been

applied beyond Zoroastrianism to a range of religious and philosophical traditions, including Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and biblical modes of thinking (Frey, 2014, p. 271). Scholars have proposed various typologies of dualism, distinguishing between radical and moderate forms, dialectical dualism, which is marked by a continual struggle, and eschatological dualism, which anticipates a definitive final confrontation or resolution. A further distinction is made by Frey (2014, p. 272) between *cosmic* dualism, where the world is created by a good principle, and *anticosmic* dualism, in which the world is seen as the work of a demiurge or evil being. However, the use of these categories is not always consistent (Frey, 2014, p. 272.

Frey (2014, pp. 272-273) discerns various dimensions within dualism. Metaphysical dualism refers to the opposition between God and Satan or Belial. In biblical literature, however, this dualism is relative rather than absolute; Satan is never portrayed as equal to or co-eternal with God. Cosmic dualism is expressed through opposing figures such as Michael and Belial, or symbols like light and darkness, with the world, both human and spiritual, divided into two conflicting forces. Spatial dualism contrasts the realms of above and below, or the heavenly and earthly worlds, although the pairing "heaven and earth" is often used inclusively to refer to the created order rather than a true dualism. Eschatological or temporal dualism distinguishes between this world and the world to come (Frey, 2014, pp. 272-273). Ethical dualism marks the opposition between good and evil, or the righteous and the wicked. Soteriological dualism refers to the division between those who are saved and those who are lost, often based on a salvific event or decision. Theological or creational dualism involves the distinction between the Creator and the created world. Physical dualism separates matter from spirit, while anthropological dualism divides body and soul or spirit. Finally, psychological dualism refers to the inner struggle between good and evil inclinations within the human heart or mind (Frey, 2014, pp. 272-273).

Although dualism appears in many forms across disciplines, it is particularly important to understand its function in religious contexts. In the sermons of Jim Jones, several of these dualistic categories appear, most notably eschatological, soteriological, and psychological dualism. In the context of this thesis, a broader understanding of eschatological and soteriological dualism is essential, as these are especially prominent in the case of Jonestown, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5 and 6.

3.3.1. *Soteriological and Eschatological Dualism*

Given the main focus of this thesis, it is useful to develop a broader understanding of both soteriological dualism and eschatological (or temporal) dualism. The term *soteriology*, derived from the Greek word *soterion* (meaning "salvation") and *soter* ("savior"), refers to the branch of theology concerned with the doctrine of salvation (Stetler, 2009). It addresses core theological questions such as: Who is saved? By whom? From what? And by what means? It also explores the ultimate purpose or goal of salvation. Stetler (2009) highlights how, in Christian theology, salvation traditionally refers to being saved from sin and granted eternal life in Heaven. However, there is considerable variation across Christian traditions. For instance, Western churches have often emphasized redemption from personal and original sin, while Eastern churches, which do not hold to the doctrine of original sin, understand salvation in different terms. Within the Peoples Temple, Jim Jones presented himself as a savior figure, referring to himself as a prophet (Jim Jones, 1978, 13:53–13:58) whose mission was to deliver his people from an inhumane and unjust world. The quest for salvation was central to the group's identity. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the concept of salvation has increasingly been interpreted across faith traditions as encompassing not only the afterlife but also liberation from injustice and violence in this world. Liberation theologies, for example, emphasize salvation from systemic oppression, linking faith with social engagement and human flourishing in the present (Stetler, 2009).

As previously discussed, terms such as apocalypticism, millennialism, and millenarianism all share an eschatological focus, namely, the expectation of the end of the current world order (Partridge, 2009, p. 191). Many new religious movements express dualistic worldviews in which the group is seen as good and society as evil. The term eschatology, from the Greek *eschatos* ("last"), refers to theological reflection on the end of things, both the end of the world and the final state of individuals (Walls, 2009, p. 3). Eschatology can be divided into two fields: personal eschatology, which concerns the fate of individuals, and cosmic eschatology, which addresses broader questions such as the millennium. Partridge (2009, p. 205) refers to the ideology of the Peoples Temple as an example of "dualistic millenarian eschatology," which he identifies as a key interpretive framework. This eschatology contributes to "semiotic promiscuity," elevates the leader to messianic status, and fosters a pessimistic worldview. Jim Jones positioned himself as a prophetic and even messianic figure and promoted a bleak view of the outside world. This worldview played a central role in the group's tragic end. Partridge also describes a hermeneutical cycle in which internal

(endogenous) beliefs give eschatological meaning to external (exogenous) threats, while external pressures further reinforce the internal worldview. Prophet (2016, p. 44) defines exogenous factors as "related to the hostility, stigmatization, and persecution that 'religious outsiders' often receive at the hands of forces in the social environment in which they operate," while endogenous factors include "properties of a movement: its leadership, beliefs, rituals, and organization."

This interaction between internal beliefs and external pressures can heighten perceptions of threat, especially within dualistic and apocalyptic worldviews. While eschatological belief does not necessarily lead to violence, studies have shown that many apocalyptic movements, often labeled as "cults", do develop violent tendencies (Partridge, 2009, p. 206). However, the presence of a dualistic millenarian eschatology does not by itself cause violence. Several variables must be taken into account, and even then, movements differ in their level of volatility. Jim Jones is a case in point: he prophesied an imminent apocalypse involving race war, genocide, and nuclear annihilation, while simultaneously claiming to be "the manifestation of the Christ Principle" with the power to heal. He even went so far as to declare, "I am God" (Partridge, 2009, p. 207). Thus, he combined soteriological and eschatological dualism in his leadership, presenting himself as both savior and prophet, while portraying the external world as an irredeemable threat.

3.4. Apocalypticism in America

In the 1970s, the United States saw a significant emergence of new religious movements. Various factors may have contributed to this rise. In the post-Civil War era, the development of modern America was shaped by social tension and cultural conflict, driven by industrialization, urbanization, immigration, territorial expansion, religious and racial bigotry, and eventually, involvement in international warfare (Stein, 2002, p. 203). In the following decades, many Americans sought to revive reform movements from antebellum America, using the tools and methods available to address the challenges of modern life. The rise of apocalypticism in the United States spanned from the Civil War through the Second World War and became increasingly evident after the Vietnam War, as American discontent deepened (Stein, 2002, p. 203).

Apocalypticism in America has also been discussed by other scholars. Stein (2002, p. 191) outlines ten key observations based on previous studies of American apocalypticism:

1. Apocalypticism appeals to the human desire to know the future and to be allied with the forces of virtue, no matter how defined.
2. Apocalyptic texts, images and symbols possess an amazing plasticity that invites and reinforces interpretation and reinterpretation.
3. Confidence, urgency and hostility are three of the most striking aspects that characterize apocalyptic discourse, whether religious or scholar.
4. American apocalypticism has a derivative character because it draws on texts and traditions much older than American society.
5. Apocalyptic movements in America often make use of new 'texts' and experiences in addition to ancient documents.
6. American apocalyptic traditions frequently identify a special role for the American nation.
7. American apocalyptic movements have not been particularly self-reflexive or self-critical.
8. American apocalypticism has prospered, especially in the context of alternative or outsider groups.
9. Religious apocalypticism and secular apocalypticism exist within a measured symbiotic relationship.
10. In America there is little likelihood that the interest in apocalypticism will diminish in the future.

These observations underscore the deep roots of apocalyptic thought in American culture. Apocalypticism appeals to fundamental human desires: to understand the future and to be aligned with the good. The symbolic flexibility of apocalyptic texts allows them to be continually reinterpreted and adapted to new contexts. While American apocalypticism draws from ancient traditions, it often integrates contemporary experiences and reimagines them with distinctly American elements, frequently casting the U.S. as having a unique role in the unfolding of end-time events.

Apocalyptic rhetoric is often marked by a tone of confidence, urgency, and hostility. It tends to thrive in outsider groups, as demonstrated by Jim Jones, whose teachings focused on

marginalized populations such as Black Americans. The coexistence of religious and secular apocalyptic visions suggests that fascination with apocalyptic themes will likely persist. Belief in an imminent apocalypse and one's role in a final judgment can offer a sense of fulfillment, providing life with a deeper purpose. As these observations show, there are many reasons for the enduring appeal of apocalypticism and its powerful role in shaping both individual and collective worldviews. While apocalypticism shaped the ideological worldview of the Peoples Temple, charismatic leadership played a vital role in unifying and mobilizing the group.

3.5. Charisma and charismatic authority

According to Dawson (2012, p. 115), many scholars criticize the concept of charisma and charismatic leadership due to its vague and difficult nature to define. Since the term will be used extensively throughout this paper, it is important to present various definitions to clarify how it is applied in this context. The word "*charisma*" originates from Greek, meaning "gift," and is understood as something bestowed by a divine source. Religious scholar Catherine Wessinger (2012, p. 80) defines charisma as a concept that may refer to characteristics attributed by believers to an individual, scripture, place, or social construct. The term typically refers to the qualities of a leader, which is how it will be used throughout this thesis, where the idea is that the leader holds an unusual or divinely inspired authority. Sociologist Max Weber, however, offers a social-scientific definition of charisma as:

> A certain quality of an individuals' personality, by virtue of which he [or she] is set apart from ordinary [people] and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.
>
> (Weber, 1964, as cited in Wessinger, 2012, p. 81)

In short, Weber describes charisma as a person's ability to evoke exceptional admiration and loyalty, based on the perception of being uniquely gifted, sometimes even supernatural. He presents charisma as a revolutionary force, contrasting it with what he calls "the sacred" as "the uniquely unalterable" (Riesebrodt, 1999, p. 2). Weber distinguishes charismatic authority

from “traditional authority,” which is based on customs and longstanding social structures, and “rational-legal authority,” which arises from formal roles and institutions (Dawson, 2012, p. 116). Unlike these, charismatic authority is based on attributes that followers assign to the leader, rather than any formal position. It is, however, common for charismatic religious and political leadership roles to intersect. Weber's reference to charisma as “exemplary” also shows how political leaders can be perceived as divinely endorsed until they lose favor. Similarly, charismatic religious leaders can become political figures, and political leaders may appeal to religious values and sacred authority within their culture (Wessinger, 2012, p. 82). I mention the connection between charismatic and political leadership because Jim Jones was involved in politics, specifically, the Human Rights Commission in Indiana, and gained notable recognition in American society. However, when he began attracting negative media attention, particularly from the magazine New West, he withdrew and initiated the Peoples Temple’s relocation to Guyana (Chidester, 1988, pp. 3-10).

Erin Prophet (2016, p. 44) points out that, according to Weber, charisma is inherently unstable and therefore needs to be “routinized” or institutionalized to be sustained. Wessinger (2012, p. 87) refers to sociologist Meredith McGuire, who follows Weber in defining the “routinization of charisma” as “the transformation of charismatic authority into some other basis of authority, such as tradition or the authority of office.” Dawson (2012, p. 114) identifies three focal areas within this process: (1) the conditions that give rise to charismatic leaders, (2) the social construction and management of charismatic authority, and (3) the institutionalization of that authority. However, charismatic leaders may resist routinization by continuously shifting their message or increasing demands on followers. They may also engage in “continual crisis-mongering” to sustain agitation and prevent their authority from becoming institutionalized (Wessinger, 2012, p. 88).

3.5.1. *Identifying a Charismatic Leader*

To clarify whether Jim Jones qualifies as a charismatic leader, several key attributes can be identified. Charismatic figures often emerge as natural leaders during times of intense psychological, physical, economic, ethical, religious, or political turmoil. The foundation of their charisma lies in a profound devotion to the extraordinary and unprecedented qualities that deviate from conventional norms, established rules, and traditions (Dawson, 2012, p. 119). According to research, there are five overlapping characteristics commonly associated with charismatic leaders. First, they are energetic individuals who radiate confidence and

determination and consistently express unwavering belief in their mission. Second, they are visionary and emotionally expressive. They lead by example, inspiring followers to make sacrifices, and they tend to prioritize doing the right thing over merely doing things right (Dawson, 2012, p. 116). Third, they are skilled in forming personal connections with others, even during brief encounters, and they show genuine interest in people's lives. They are attuned to the needs of others and actively engage in the group's daily struggles from the outset of their leadership, regardless of whether those struggles mirror their own background. Fourth, charismatic leaders are often recognized for their rhetorical skills and their ability to manage impressions both in personal interactions and in larger group settings. As visionaries, they excel at framing challenges and solutions in ways that are simple, compelling, and emotionally resonant (Dawson, 2012, pp. 116-117). Finally, they cultivate the impression of possessing extraordinary powers by linking themselves to historical or religious narratives within their cultural context. Many charismatic leaders present themselves as savior figures. These five traits, as outlined by Dawson (2012, pp. 116-117), are especially relevant for understanding Jim Jones and his charismatic authority. He exhibited all of these attributes, which will be further explored in Chapter 5, a rhetorical analysis of Jim Jones's final speech.

3.5.2. *Charismatic Leadership*

Weber wrote:

> The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life. If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles; if he wants to be a war lord, he must perform heroic deeds. Above all, however, his divine mission must "prove" itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well. If they do not fare well, he is obviously not the master sent by the gods.
>
> (Weber, 1946, as cited in Dawson, 2012, p. 118)

Charismatic leadership is often described as tenuous and unstable, marked by uncertainty and a constant need for social reinforcement. The charismatic leader's position depends not only on personal authority but also on a broader system of institutional or communal support. Even leaders who exhibit signs of delusions of grandeur require validation from their followers to maintain legitimacy (Johnson, 1979, p. 316). Weber recognized the need for charismatic leaders to continually demonstrate their exceptional qualities. If a leader claims to possess supernatural abilities, they must periodically provide proof through signs or "miracles." These

demonstrations validate their authority and help stabilize their position within the group (Johnson, 1979, p. 316).

To reinforce their position, charismatic leaders may adopt several strategies. One such approach involves fostering a deep dependence among members, socially, emotionally, and materially. Since many charismatic leaders attract followers who experience various forms of deprivation, this dependency can offer a sense of belonging and security. This helps explain the appeal of groups like the Peoples Temple, particularly to marginalized individuals such as Black Americans, who often faced systemic racism and societal neglect. Jim Jones, for instance, visibly prioritized his Black members, placing them at the front during services and emphasizing their importance to the movement. As Johnson (1979, p. 317) states, a charismatic leader cannot rely solely on personal appeal but must also ensure that the group fulfills both the physical and psychological needs of its members. Another common strategy is organizational expansion. However, growth beyond a certain threshold poses challenges. It becomes difficult for the leader to sustain personal relationships with all members, leading to fragmented, segmental involvement. Members may then engage with only parts of the organization, which weakens their full dependence. Nevertheless, larger groups often have increased resources, allowing them to meet a wider range of member needs. To manage this tension, leaders may delegate authority to trusted associates who help maintain loyalty among new or peripheral members (Johnson, 1979, p. 317).

Groups often exist in tension with broader society, creating further dilemmas. To effect societal change, the group must engage with external institutions, which can reduce tension but also expose the leader to unfavorable comparisons with mainstream authority figures. The degree of societal tolerance toward such groups is also crucial. In hostile environments, radical movements become vulnerable to persecution or violence. One way to mitigate this risk is to seek physical isolation, an approach common among utopian communities. Remote, rural settlements help members avoid external distractions and influences (Johnson, 1979, p. 318). The Peoples Temple's relocation to Guyana reflects this strategy. However, relocating to a remote area often proves more demanding than anticipated. Hard work and discipline are required for survival, prompting a shift in the leader's role, from primarily a socioemotional figure to an instrumental task leader. This transition may create discontent, as responsibilities are delegated and authority diffused. Therefore, new methods are needed to maintain the leader's charismatic appeal. Johnson (1979, p. 318) identifies two key strategies: The first strategy is reinterpreting and reinforcing the group's ideology, particularly by exaggerating

external threats. This fosters a sense of urgency and dependency, making members feel they cannot survive outside the group. And the second strategy is emphasizing motivational and emotional engagement over practical concerns. This may involve rituals such as group therapy, "marathon" encounter sessions, or dramatic loyalty affirmations. The leader often plays a central role in these rituals, transforming expressions of group loyalty into personal allegiance to the leader (Johnson, 1979, pp. 318-319).

While the leader plays a pivotal role in sustaining the charismatic bond, followers are also central to its development. Prophet (2016, pp. 41-42) identifies four dynamics in this process: Charisma is initially constructed and reinforced by elite followers. Through a process of "charismatization," this perception spreads to ordinary members. Individual followers bring their personal histories and needs to the charismatic bond. Over time, members' perceptions and experiences can reshape the nature of this bond. Followers are also key to the group's growth, as they often recruit new members. Thus, charisma is not solely produced by the leader, but is co-constructed in the dynamic relationship between leader and follower.

3.6. Critique of Weber's definition of charisma

As shown throughout this chapter, most scholars rely on Weber's definition of charisma when discussing the concept. However, it has also been subject to criticism, and it is important to address some of these critiques, given the central role Weber's theory will play in the following chapters. Dawson (2012, p. 119) notes that Weber's observations are often "rather sweeping, programmatic, and ambiguous," and highlights that several scholars have challenged these assumptions. In his definition, Weber emphasizes the supposedly supernatural origin of charisma, attributing the power of charismatic leaders to divine sources. While charisma was initially understood as a divine gift, Weber attempted, although somewhat awkwardly, to adapt the term for use in secular contexts (Dawson, 2012, p. 117). This attempt, however, has not been entirely convincing for all scholars.

One line of critique focuses on the persistence of religious and semi-divine connotations within Weber's definition. Historically, many charismatic leaders have been regarded as possessing semi-divine qualities, and charisma has often been viewed as a magical-religious phenomenon in its purest form. As a result, some argue that what is labeled as charisma in contemporary, secular contexts may better be described as pseudo-charisma. While this does

not constitute a direct contradiction of Weber, it does raise important questions regarding the coherence and applicability of his definition in modern settings.

Riesebrodt (1999, pp. 1-2) adds to this criticism by arguing that Weber developed two distinct uses of the term charisma, one within a sociological context and the other within a religious-anthropological framework, without clearly differentiating between them. According to Riesebrodt (199, pp. 1-2), the contradictions in the interpretation of charisma today stem largely from these inconsistencies already present in Weber's own work. In the sociological context, Weber builds upon Rudolph Sohm's concept of charisma in ecclesiastical law, while in the religious context, he draws more heavily on anthropological debates concerning magic and religion. In both cases, however, scholars have found it difficult to fully reconcile Weber's framework. Weber made notable modifications to Sohm's original concept, and some of these adjustments stand in direct opposition to Sohm's foundational ideas, introducing systematic challenges into Weber's theory (Riesebrodt, 1999, pp. 1-2).

Despite these critical observations, Weber's theory remains a valuable analytical tool, particularly in understanding the influence Jim Jones had within the Peoples Temple. As will be shown in Chapter 5, the rhetorical analysis of his final speech reveals how his charismatic authority played a central role in shaping the tragic events at Jonestown. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that charisma should not be understood as inherently divine or supernatural, as Weber initially suggested. Rather, it can be seen as a set of personal attributes that facilitate influence, admiration, and authority, especially in smaller, highly committed communities such as the Peoples Temple.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents and discusses the methodological choices made to answer the thesis question: "How are Jim Jones's charisma and apocalyptic beliefs conveyed in his final speech, and how were these aspects interpreted by former members and survivors of the Peoples Temple?" The selected methods are explained and justified, including how the data material and analysis were conducted.

To address the research question, the methodology is divided into two parts. The first part is based on qualitative methods, primarily semi-structured interviews, while the second part involves rhetorical and discourse analysis. Both rhetorical and discourse analysis are necessary to interpret Jim Jones's final speech and understand how it reflects his charisma and apocalyptic worldview. In addition to scholarly literature, I also include written testimonies by survivors, which offer valuable insight into how the speech was perceived.

To further explore the research question, I chose a qualitative approach, with particular emphasis on semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it allows for in-depth insight into the informants' experiences, not only with Jim Jones, but also with the Peoples Temple and life in Jonestown. Understanding the leader requires understanding his followers. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a predetermined set of themes and questions but allow for flexibility to follow the informants' responses and let the conversation develop naturally (Clark et al., 2021, pp. 425-426). This balance between structure and openness enables a deeper exploration of their perspectives and creates space for unexpected insights.

4.1. Semi-structured interviews

4.1.1. *Choosing an Interview as a Method*

It is important to choose appropriate methods, as they are crucial for both the design and outcome of the thesis. Initially, I did not plan to conduct interviews; the thesis was originally intended to be answered through existing research, along with rhetorical and discourse analysis of Jim Jones's final speech. However, during the last two months of my work, I contacted a few survivors who, unexpectedly, agreed to participate and share their personal experiences from the Peoples Temple. To gain a broader understanding of their subjective experiences within the Temple and with Jim Jones as a leader, a qualitative method was most

appropriate. Qualitative research allows for depth and complexity in the informants' perspectives, something that could be lost in quantitative surveys (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012, p. 78). Since the focus was on their lived experiences, interviews were the most suitable method. I chose semi-structured interviews because they give participants the freedom to tell their stories while still providing a thematic framework (Clark et al., 2021, p. 426). This format was preferred over unstructured interviews, as some structure was needed to keep the conversation focused on relevant themes.

The decision to use semi-structured interviews was also based on the need to capture a holistic picture of what it was like to be part of the Peoples Temple. Given the limited number of survivors and the lack of definitive answers surrounding Jonestown, interviews were more appropriate than a quantitative approach. Surveys would not have allowed for the same nuance or personal reflection. Since there are many perspectives and no single truth about what happened in Jonestown, the interview format allowed participants to share what they felt comfortable discussing, rather than being limited to predefined questions and answers. As Alvehus (2024, p. 120) notes, such interviews are useful tools for gaining insight into people's thoughts, motivations, and emotions. This is particularly relevant when researching a religious and political movement whose motives have been the subject of intense scrutiny, both during and after the tragedy.

4.2. Informants

4.2.1. *Selection of Informants*

For this thesis, three former members of the Peoples Temple were selected. Two of them remained in the movement until the tragedy of November 18, 1978, while one left in 1977. They were chosen because they held different roles within the Peoples Temple and had varying relationships with Jim Jones. Their connection to the Temple also sheds light on why people were drawn to its message and mission. Another key factor in the selection was their level of involvement in Jonestown and their physical presence during the tragedy. This makes them relevant sources for understanding changes in Jim Jones's behavior and the reactions of other members leading up to the final events.

The three informants were contacted based on their previous participation in media coverage about Jonestown, as well as through a recommendation from one of them. All three have

contributed personal essays to the website *Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and Peoples Temple*, which has been a valuable resource offering survivor stories and documents related to the Temple. I obtained their contact information from this website. Due to limited time and a late change in the research design, I chose to focus on three individuals who could offer distinct perspectives and reflections on the topic.

I would argue that this selection provides a strong foundation for an in-depth analysis. The varied backgrounds of the informants allow for a nuanced understanding of how Peoples Temple and Jim Jones were experienced and interpreted. Since all participants gave consent to be named in the thesis, it enables a more detailed presentation of their stories. Notably, one of the interviews was with Jim Jones's only biological son, who offers insight into Jones both privately and publicly. The other two participants are introduced below.

4.2.2. *The Informants*

As mentioned above, all informants have signed a consent form allowing their names and responses to be used in this analysis. This section presents the three informants, focusing on their relationship to Jim Jones and the duration of their involvement in the Peoples Temple. The reader must gain a clear understanding of who these individuals are, as their perspectives have significantly influenced this thesis. While they do not represent all former members of the Temple, their accounts provide valuable insight into life within the movement and Jim Jones's rhetoric as experienced from the inside.

The first informant interviewed was Stephan Gandhi Jones, the only biological son of Jim and Marceline Jones. Born into the movement, although it bore a different name at the time, he was involved from a very young age. Despite several attempts to leave, he remained a member until the tragedy. He was not present in Jonestown on November 18, 1978, as he was touring with the Temple basketball team in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana (Jones, 2021). Stephan lost nearly his entire family that day, except for two adopted brothers. His unique relationship to Jim Jones and his later reflections offer rare insight into both the inner workings of the movement and the personal dimensions of Jones's charisma.

The second informant, Tim Carter, first attended a Temple meeting in January 1973 and moved to Redwood Valley the following month. He was present during the final moments in Jonestown, including the start of the so-called "Death Tape." Carter held his wife, Gloria, and

their son, Malcolm, as they died from cyanide poisoning. He survived because Jim Jones assigned him, along with his brother Michael Carter and another Temple member, to deliver money and documents to the Soviet Union. This forced him to leave his deceased family behind and later return to identify the bodies. His account provides a unique perspective on the final events in Jonestown and highlights aspects that are often overlooked in public discourse.

The third and final informant was Michael Cartmell. He joined the Peoples Temple in 1959 at the age of 11 and developed a close relationship with Jim Jones. He eventually married Jones's daughter, Suzanne, and became part of the Temple's leadership. As a staff member, he was responsible for legal and organizational matters, including waiver forms authorizing disciplinary measures. At one point, Jones even named him as his designated successor. Cartmell left the Temple in February 1977, though his family remained. He later lost his mother, stepfather, sister, and adopted brother in the tragedy. Given his proximity to Jones and his leadership role, Cartmell's reflections provide critical insight into the Temple's inner structure and dynamics.

4.3. Interview

4.3.1. *Interview Guide*

To ensure the best possible outcome in semi-structured interviews, it is useful to prepare an interview guide. Such a guide includes themes, prepared questions, or keywords. New questions may arise during the interview, and the guide serves primarily as a tool for the interviewer (Bremborg, 2011, pp. 314-315). It can be challenging to know exactly what to ask and how to phrase the questions. Therefore, it is recommended to test the guide in advance, which helps identify unclear wording and prioritize relevant questions (Bremborg, 2011, p. 315).

In this study, the interview guide (see Appendix 1) was developed to gain deeper insight into the informants' experiences and reflections on Peoples Temple, Jim Jones, and the events in Jonestown. The guide aimed to balance structure and openness, ensuring that key themes were addressed while allowing the informants to bring forward perspectives they considered important. All participants received an information letter and consent form (see Appendices 2 & 3) prior to the interviews, which explained the purpose of the project, how data would be

handled, and their rights as participants. The form included checkboxes for approval and space for a signature. Each interview began with a short explanation of the thesis and how their input would be used, helping to establish a shared understanding and purpose.

The interview guide was divided into three parts. The first focused on charisma, with questions about Jim Jones. The second addressed apocalypticism and apocalyptic rhetoric, along with other relevant themes. The final part included three open-ended questions to capture additional input beyond the main topics. The wording and focus of the questions were adjusted throughout the process. Informants were offered the option to view the questions in advance, acknowledging that the topic could be sensitive. Tim Carter and Michael Cartmell chose to see the questions, while Stephan Jones declined. Although the guide contained specific questions, I clarified that these were intended as starting points, not strict requirements. The informants were free to decide how much they wanted to share and were encouraged to speak within their comfort zone.

4.3.2. *Conducting the Interviews*

Bremborg (2011, p. 316) emphasizes the importance of audio recording as a key tool in interviews. A signed consent form is essential, in accordance with ethical guidelines. Using audio recording allows the interviewer to be more present and engaged, rather than distracted by taking notes during the conversation. As mentioned earlier, participants received an information letter and a consent form explaining the project's purpose, data handling, and their rights. Some participants chose to wait to sign the form until after the interview; however, the form had to be signed before any material could be used in the thesis. It is important to note that audio recording can affect the openness and dynamics of the conversation. While it allows the interviewer to focus on the dialogue, it may also influence how freely participants speak (Alvehus, 2024, pp. 125-126). For that reason, it is crucial to establish trust and a safe environment.

Before conducting the interviews, practical aspects had to be considered. As all participants were located in the United States, we had to agree on a suitable time and platform, taking the 8-hour time difference into account. All participants preferred to use Zoom. Prior to the meetings, I tested sound and recording options. It is important to test all technical equipment in advance to avoid disruptions during the interview (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2012, p. 86). The conversations were recorded using Zoom's built-in tool, with an additional phone

recording as backup. Participants were informed at the start of each meeting that recording had begun. This setup worked well, and the audio quality was clear.

During interviews, there are several techniques the interviewer can use. Alvehus (2024, p. 125) highlights that active listening is key. Presence, thoughtful questioning, and the strategic use of silence all play a role. Bremborg (2011, p. 315) also underlines the value of silence, which can encourage participants to continue and reflect more deeply. Conducting interviews in another language can be challenging. All interviews were in English, which sometimes made it harder to phrase questions clearly. It was important that the participants felt heard and understood, and that I showed empathy while remaining objective. During the interviews, I used nods and affirmative sounds to acknowledge their responses. This is referred to as 'phatic' communication, non-verbal signals that indicate engagement and encourage participants to continue (Luhrmann, 2022, p. 362).

After the interviews, it was important to store the audio recordings securely and immediately, as they form the basis for much of the research (Luhrmann, 2022, p. 361). Privacy was a priority: the information letter made clear that only my supervisor and I had access to the files. The recordings were stored in the University of Bergen's secure system SAFE (Sikker Adgang til Forskningsdata og E-infrastruktur). No identifying information was linked to the files or transcripts.

4.4. Transcript and analysis

As an important part of the data material, in this section, I will explain the transcription that will be used in the analysis.

4.4.1. *Transcribing*

The transcription process was demanding. Due to the complexity of the topic, each interview lasted over two hours. All participants had extensive information to share, and I wanted to capture as much as possible, which made the follow-up work time-consuming. Since the interviews were conducted only two months before the submission deadline, I had to work with focus and intensity. After each interview, I wrote down reflections and noted key points during the conversation. To streamline the transcription, I uploaded the audio files to the website Autotekst.uio, which produced automated transcriptions. I then listened to the

recordings while reviewing the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. This allowed me to engage more deeply with the material and helped me identify significant points that might have gone unnoticed in real time. The time needed to process each transcript varied, depending on the length of the interview, but typically ranged from two to five hours, including color coding by thematic category.

Bremborg (2011, p. 316) notes that some researchers choose to send transcripts to informants, which can enhance credibility by ensuring that statements are represented accurately. Misunderstandings can occur, so confirming meaning with the interviewee is valuable. I chose to send Chapter 4, where their contributions were analyzed, to each participant. They were invited to request corrections or to remove content they found too sensitive or painful. This helped ensure their privacy and contributed to a respectful and ethical process. The approach worked well and resulted in stronger analysis. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, p. 109) argue that when interviewers transcribe their own data, they re-experience the emotional and social dynamics of the interview situation. As Bremborg (2011, p. 317) notes, this process can offer new insights, especially when listening multiple times. It was during this stage that I picked up on details and perspectives I had missed during the live interviews.

Transcription is a process of transformation, converting spoken language into written form (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 106). This can be challenging, especially when participants jump between ideas, which happened often. It sometimes made their answers hard to follow. Although I noticed this during the interviews, I chose not to interrupt but instead returned to certain points when appropriate. Brinkmann & Kvale (2018, p. 106) point out that spoken and written language follow different "language games," and what sounds natural in conversation may seem repetitive or disorganized in text. During the transcription, I also noticed that I had missed opportunities to ask better follow-up questions. Some participants spoke at length, making it difficult to interject or return to earlier topics, and as a result, some responses were not explored as thoroughly as I had hoped. Fortunately, the participants were open to follow-up questions by email. When something was unclear, I contacted them for clarification, which worked well and helped fill the gaps.

4.4.2. *Coding and Analysis of Material*

Bremborg (2011, p. 317) explains that coding involves categorizing transcribed material into meaningful units. I developed a set of categories and used color coding to mark relevant

passages from the interviews. Initially, I created broad categories, which I later refined into more specific subcategories. This structure allowed me to compare the informants' responses across themes and conduct analysis on a broader level. It was challenging to decide what to include and what to leave out, as well as to determine which categories to emphasize. Since much of the material was insightful, I chose to include most of it in the analysis, with only minor edits for brevity. My personal interest in the topic also influenced this decision, making it harder to omit certain content. To ensure the quality of my selection, I consulted my supervisor, and together we identified which sections were most relevant and worth prioritizing.

To clarify my focus, I created mind maps during the selection process. These helped organize the analytical framework and informed my decisions about which interview excerpts to include. When selecting quotations, I made minimal changes to the original wording, as it was important to preserve the intended meaning. Bremborg (2011, pp. 318-319) notes that while direct quotes should generally be left intact, small adjustments may be necessary to avoid misrepresenting informants or portraying them negatively. In my case, changes were only made when informants felt their statements could be misunderstood. I believe that the use of color coding, combined with input from both my supervisor and the informants, contributed to a well-grounded and ethically sound selection process that accurately represents their perspectives.

4.5. Discourse and Rhetorical Analysis

In this thesis, I use a combination of rhetorical and discourse analysis to examine how Jim Jones employed language to persuade, control, and construct meaning in his final speech. I analyze how he appeals to emotion (pathos), credibility (ethos), and logic (logos) to justify the collective act of revolutionary suicide, along with his use of situational timing (kairos). Through discourse analysis, I explore how apocalyptic beliefs are produced and reinforced through language. This combined approach provides insight into both Jones's rhetorical strategies and the broader ideological and social meanings embedded in his speech. It also enables a deeper understanding of the Peoples Temple as a group and their internal dynamics. Although rhetorical and discourse analysis are not widely used in religious studies, I find this dual method especially useful for capturing the complexity of both the speech and the group behind it.

4.5.1. *Discourse Analysis*

Discourse analysis is the study of language use and investigates how actions are given meaning and how identities are constructed through language (Hjelm, 2011, p. 134). Although discourse analysis has not been widely or systematically adopted within religious studies, it has emerged as a relevant methodological tool in the field. Hjelm (2011, p. 140) highlights critical discourse analysis, which focuses on power and ideology in language, and emphasizes the relationship between discourse and its broader social and material contexts. This approach is particularly relevant for this thesis, as power is exercised through persuasive language.

Discourse analysis involves a critical stance toward language, with a specific focus on spoken language. The concept of representation is central: language does not mirror reality, but rather offers one of several possible ways of constructing it (Johannessen et al., 2018, pp. 52-53). In this sense, language represents or frames a phenomenon rather than simply reflecting it. A key concern in discourse analysis is to understand how specific ways of speaking legitimize certain forms of action, actions that help create, sustain, or transform social reality (Johannessen et al., 2018, pp. 67-68). In this thesis, discourse analysis is used in Chapter 5, where Jim Jones's final speech is examined in detail. Both Jones's and his followers' words are analyzed to shed light on their worldview. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how Jim Jones framed the group's reality, and how this may have contributed to the justification of revolutionary suicide.

Although discourse analysis is more commonly used in social and political contexts, it is also well suited to this religious setting. The method helps uncover how religious concepts are deployed in Jones's speech and how they intersect with his charismatic authority. Since charisma is a complex and abstract concept, analyzing how Jim Jones articulates himself and how his speech is received offers insight into the mechanisms of charismatic influence. However, verbal expression alone does not account for a speaker's full effect. This is where rhetorical analysis becomes crucial.

4.5.2. *Rhetorical Analysis*

Rhetoric provides analytical tools for understanding how people attempt, often successfully, to persuade others (Johannessen et al., 2018, p. 185). To fully grasp Jones's final speech, it is essential to analyze rhetorical elements such as ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), logos (logic), and kairos (the rhetorical situation). These contribute to a deeper

understanding of Jones's word choices and communicative focus. Johannessen et al. (2018, p. 186) note that rhetoric is often dismissed as "empty talk," yet it concerns fundamental aspects of how people communicate and coexist. Through rhetorical utterances, one seeks to persuade through language. Rhetoric can be oriented toward the past, present, or future. Jones's speech is both present- and future-oriented: he addresses the current situation while urging his followers to act in a specific way. He constructs the moment as one of crisis, positioning a particular action as the only viable solution. Johannessen et al. (2018, p. 188) argue that rhetorical analysis involves treating statements as intentional attempts to persuade an audience to bring about a specific outcome. This makes rhetorical analysis particularly relevant for this thesis, as Jones's speech is aimed at producing action through persuasive language.

In this study, I argue that combining discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis is effective, as the methods complement one another. While discourse analysis focuses on how meaning and identity are constructed through language, rhetorical analysis highlights the strategic use of language to influence and motivate. In a speech aimed at persuading people to take drastic action, both what is said and how it is said must be examined. Together, these methods offer a broader understanding of Jim Jones's rhetorical and ideological world, especially concerning his apocalyptic beliefs.

4.5.3. *Coding*

To best analyze Jim Jones' speech, specifically his charisma and persuasiveness, it is important to look also at how members of the Peoples Temple viewed and reacted to him. The members had different reactions throughout the speech, and although it is not unusual in a sermon to react with applause and cheering when the preacher is preaching, and it will be important to differentiate these various ways of response. Therefore, I have created codes that will be in brackets "[.]" when I refer to the speech where there are reactions. The table is divided into three parts, where the first column deals with the reaction itself, the middle column is the code that will be used, and the last column is a broader description of the reactions, i.e. what I put in the different reactions.

Audience reaction	Code	Description
Regular applause	*Moderate applause*	Standard clapping, indicating agreement or appreciation.
Soft applause	*Light Applause*	Gentle clapping, showing mild approval. Could be a result of less people applauding.
Loud applause	*Strong Applause*	Intense clapping signaling support or enthusiasm. Often combined with cheering.
Mumbling "mhmm"	*Affirmative Murmur*	Low vocalization expressing agreement, common in certain religious settings.
Approval by saying "yeahh"	*Vocal Agreement*	Clear, verbal confirmation of approval.

4.6. Limitations

There are three main limitations to this thesis. First, the audio quality and possible edits of the final speech pose challenges. It is difficult to determine the length of applause, as the recording appears to be edited, applause is at times abruptly cut when Jim Jones begins speaking. While the extent of editing cannot be confirmed, several survivors mentioned in interviews that Jones frequently paused or manipulated recordings during services. It is therefore plausible that the final speech was also edited. As a result, the full and original version of the speech from 1978 cannot be examined. Furthermore, it is impossible to determine who is applauding or reacting during the recording. However, one informant who was present stated that those responding audibly were mainly seated on stage with Jim Jones, potentially creating a misleading impression of widespread agreement. Still, the audible reactions are relevant, as they highlight what aspects of Jones's rhetoric elicited responses from at least part of the audience.

Second, the thesis is based on interviews with only three former members, raising questions of reliability, the trustworthiness of the data (Thagaard, 2019, p. 187). While the three informants provide valuable insights, the limited number inevitably narrows the diversity of experiences represented. Moreover, all interviewees are white men, whereas the Peoples Temple was a predominantly Black movement, with women making up a large portion of the membership. Gaining access to more diverse voices proved difficult, as few survivors are

willing to participate in research of this kind. Although the perspectives of these former members greatly enrich the thesis, the lack of demographic diversity among the informants must be acknowledged, particularly given that racial and cultural diversity was a defining characteristic of the Temple.

Third, semi-structured interviews can introduce interviewer bias, as the interviewer's questions may shape the responses. I sought out informants with different perspectives, and I believe this contributed to some variation in the data. However, the thesis might have benefited from a broader range of views. Many members of the Peoples Temple are no longer alive, and others are reluctant to revisit or discuss their experiences.

Finally, memory must be taken into account. The events under study took place several decades ago, and memories of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown are inevitably influenced by time, trauma, and extensive media coverage. All three informants have written essays for the website Alternative Considerations of Jonestown and Peoples Temple and have participated in documentaries and news reports. In this sense, they may be viewed as "professional survivors," with established narratives that help them make sense of the past, but that may not always fully reflect the complexity of events as they occurred. Rather than questioning the validity of their memories, this thesis treats them as valuable sources shaped by both personal experience and the passage of time.

4.7. Ethical Reflections

A key ethical consideration in this study was the informed consent process. All informants were fully informed about the nature of the research, including their role and rights as participants. Given the potential for emotional distress when discussing traumatic experiences, it was essential to emphasize that they were in full control of what they chose to share. If any part of the conversation felt uncomfortable or was later regretted, it would be excluded from the thesis. Any questions or concerns they raised were welcomed and addressed. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the informants were asked in advance whether they felt comfortable discussing the events in Jonestown. Most of the interview questions did not focus directly on the tragedy. To avoid potential re-traumatization, I was especially mindful in how I introduced certain topics and ensured that the participants retained full control over their narratives throughout.

Another central ethical concern was maintaining confidentiality. Although the informants gave consent to use their real names, care was taken to avoid including sensitive or identifying details beyond what was approved. Each participant received a written agreement outlining how their data would be used and stored, including assurances that their responses would remain secure. As previously noted, the recordings and transcripts are stored in the University of Bergen's SAFE system, ensuring that access is strictly limited.

Finally, given the deeply personal nature of their testimonies, I was attentive to the risk of misrepresentation. To prevent this, each informant was invited to review the quotations used and the context in which they appeared, to confirm that their views were accurately understood. Particular care was taken when citing emotionally charged statements, ensuring that these were handled with respect and sensitivity, as they represent a part of the informants' lived history.

4.8. Critical Reflections

A critical reflection in this study, which also involves ethical considerations, concerns reflexivity and the potential biases I bring into both the interviews and the analysis. Thagaard (2009, p. 190) highlights that in qualitative research, validity, understood as the accuracy of the interpretations, is essential. It refers to whether the researcher's interpretations truly reflect the informants' perspectives and experiences. As a researcher with a background in religious studies, I must remain aware of how both my academic training and personal beliefs may influence my understanding of the informants' testimonies and Jim Jones's rhetoric. When researching a sensitive topic involving individuals who experienced a tragedy firsthand, it is crucial to approach their testimonies with both objectivity and respect. I have therefore aimed to balance my interpretations with openness to alternative explanations and perspectives.

Another important reflection concerns the use of the term charisma. While this concept is further discussed in the next chapter, it is relevant to mention here that charisma remains a debated and evolving term within religious studies. Since it appears frequently throughout this thesis, it is important to acknowledge its contested nature. The same applies to the concept of apocalyptic rhetoric. Jones's speech can be interpreted in several ways, and for that reason, defining the analytical terms is vital to avoid confusion. These terms are complex and used

differently across disciplines. As a researcher, it is important to demonstrate an understanding of both existing research and the insights provided by the informants. Together, these perspectives can contribute to a more nuanced analysis and deepen our understanding of charismatic leadership.

5. Rhetorical Analysis: The Final Speech

This chapter conducts an in-depth rhetorical analysis of the final speech by Jim Jones, the leader of the Peoples Temple. As outlined in Chapter 3, charismatic leadership involves rhetorical skill, crisis framing, and savior positioning (Dawson, 2012). These elements will guide the analysis of Jones's final speech. The chapter explores the days leading up to the event, the speech itself, and how apocalyptic dualism and charisma are illustrated through it. The speech was delivered following a visit from Congressman Leo Ryan, his assistant, and several journalists. The visit led some members to express a desire to return to the United States and leave the group, an act Jones perceived as betrayal, as he considered defectors enemies. The recorded speech provides insight into Jones's repeated claims that mass suicide was the only solution. It was delivered in Jonestown, Guyana, on November 18, 1978, where over 900 members died from cyanide poisoning, while others were shot and killed at Port Kaituma by gunmen allegedly sent by Jim Jones. In the aftermath, several questions have been raised: How and why did this happen? How did Jim Jones persuade people not only to end their own lives, but also the lives of their children? Why did the members follow through, and was it voluntary? The combination of Chapters 5 and 6 aims to provide the reader with alternative perspectives on these questions. While the full picture may never be known, a close reading of the final speech can shed light on some possible answers.

The analysis is divided into three main parts: the buildup to the speech, a close reading of the speech itself, and an examination of how charismatic authority and apocalyptic dualism are expressed. Topics in the subchapters include the tensions building up to November 18, 1978, followed by a breakdown of the speech, and finally an exploration of Jones's charismatic leadership and apocalyptic dualism. Examining the reactions of others is crucial for understanding the extent of Jones's charisma, especially in light of how he responded to emerging opposition. Analyzing the speech is important because it reveals the mechanisms Jones used to instill fear of the apocalypse and persuade a community to take their own lives. As illustrated in earlier chapters, Jones had long used apocalyptic dualism and charisma as tools. These features in the speech are therefore not new but rather the culmination of his years of leadership. The apocalyptic worldview did not emerge overnight, the tension had been building, eventually reaching its peak on November 18, 1978.

5.1. Built Up Tension

Speeches always occur in context, and two rhetorical situations can therefore be identified to better understand Jones's final speech. In this case, both the narrow and broad rhetorical situations are relevant (Johannessen et al., 2018, p. 188). This section focuses on the broad rhetorical situation, which Johannessen et al. (2018, p. 191) define as the occasion for the speech and the historical and cultural backdrop. In other words, why the speaker wants to speak, the historical and cultural conditions that shape the speech, the way it is presented, and whether it succeeds in persuading. This section outlines how tensions escalated prior to the speech, providing essential context for understanding why Jim Jones chose the course of action he did.

To understand why the tension peaked on this specific day, it is necessary to examine both the visit by Congressman Leo Ryan and prior events that Jim Jones perceived as threatening. While Ryan's visit may have been the "last straw," earlier incidents also likely contributed to Jones's growing sense of crisis. One such event involved Deborah Layton Blakey, a former member who defected from the Temple on May 13, 1978, citing fears of a planned mass suicide. In an affidavit submitted to the U.S. government, she described her role as financial secretary in the Temple and detailed her growing concerns after arriving in Jonestown. According to Blakey, residents were not allowed to leave Jonestown unless assigned specific tasks. Her own assignment to Georgetown provided an opportunity to escape, which she seized (Blakey, 1978). She submitted the affidavit in June 1978, but the U.S. government did not act on it until November that year.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the group Concerned Relatives also played a significant role in drawing media and governmental attention to the Peoples Temple. Their persistent advocacy led them to contact public officials, eventually gaining the support of Congressman Leo Ryan. In December 1977, Ryan wrote to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance requesting an investigation into Jim Jones and Jonestown (Hall et al., 2000, p. 34). The State Department initially dismissed the matter as a legal controversy not requiring political involvement. Nonetheless, Ryan persisted. In May 1978, he formally expressed support for Tim Stoen's effort to regain custody of his son from Jonestown and began organizing a visit alongside members of Concerned Relatives (Hall et al., 2000, p. 34).

On November 17, 1978, Ryan, several journalists, and members of Concerned Relatives arrived in Port Kaituma, near Jonestown. Aware of the upcoming visit, Jim Jones reportedly instructed members on what to say and how to behave. Despite this, several members approached Ryan's aide, Jackie Speier, and NBC reporter Don Harris to express their desire to leave. Harris was even handed a note reading "Help us get out of Jonestown" (Hall et al., 2000, p. 35). Although Ryan later told Jones he would issue a positive report, the situation quickly escalated. A Temple member attempted to stab Ryan, unsuccessfully, but the act visibly changed the atmosphere. Jones reportedly asked, "Does this change everything?" to which Ryan replied, "It doesn't change everything, but it changes things" (Hall et al., 2000, p. 36). Ryan and his group departed for the airstrip along with the defectors, unaware of what was to come. Once there, gunmen from the Temple, one of whom had pretended to defect, opened fire, killing Ryan and others (Hall et al., 2000, pp. 35-37). For Jones, this confirmed his fear that the visit would trigger further accusations, media attention, and legal intervention (Hall et al., 2000, pp. 35-37). The combination of escalating tension and imminent governmental involvement likely contributed to the final speech and the ensuing deaths of 918 people (Hall et al., 2000, p. 15). With this context established, the following section turns to the speech itself to examine how Jones frames the crisis and mobilizes the group toward action.

5.2. The Final Speech

This subchapter focuses on the speech itself, where the narrow rhetorical situation becomes central. The narrow rhetorical situation refers to the specific context in which the utterance occurs (Johannessen et al., 2018, p. 189). In this case, the aim is to break down the speech and provide the reader with a clearer understanding of its content and the rhetorical strategies employed by Jim Jones. Particular attention will be paid to shifts in tone, language use, rhetorical devices such as kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos, as well as identifiable patterns throughout the speech.

As previously noted, Jim Jones harbored deep animosity toward defectors and the U.S. government, whom he believed were actively seeking to destroy Jonestown. As these perceived enemies became more prominent, Jones increasingly framed the situation as an existential threat to the community. Jonestown thus became a zone of heightened crisis, where the group was repeatedly mobilized to defend itself.

Within this broader crisis framework, Jones introduced specific terminology to describe critical moments of danger, including terms such as omega, alpha, and black night. In alignment with the Peoples Temple's practice of reappropriating racial language, Jones renamed these moments "White Nights" (Chidester, 1988, p. 143). Some have therefore referred to the final speech as a White Night (Smith, 1982, p. 108). However, survivors of Jonestown do not use this term when referring to the event. Thus, in this thesis, the speech is referred to simply as Jim Jones's final speech. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that its content was not unfamiliar to the members, as Jones had rehearsed similar rhetoric and crisis framing many times before.

5.2.1. *Structure of the Speech*

It is essential to examine the speech directly to understand how the events unfolded, particularly how the speech is structured, what information is conveyed, and how Jim Jones uses specific language. By identifying rhetorical devices and linguistic functions, we gain deeper insight into how Jones exercised charismatic authority, an analysis that will be developed further later in the chapter. The speech centers on Jones informing the members of the Peoples Temple that their time has come to an end, and that they have no alternative but to carry out a mass suicide. He outlines what he claims will happen if they refuse, insisting that dying is the better option. To ensure his followers acted, he employed various rhetorical strategies and linguistic functions.

Three linguistic functions can be identified in the speech: informative, expressive, and appellative. Jones alternates fluidly between these functions to deliver a message that is dynamic, persuasive, and emotionally charged. First, he provides information (informative); then, he expresses his own perspective (expressive); and finally, he issues a call to action (appellative). These functions are interwoven throughout the speech, often appearing in the same passage, as in the following excerpt:

> Not only– We're in a compound situation … not only are there .. those who have left and committed the betrayal of the century … some have stolen children from others and their in pursuit right now to kill them .. because they stole their children … and we are sitting here waiting on a powder keg. I don't think it is what we want to do with our babies.

> I don't think that's what we had in mind to do with our babies. It was
> said by the greatest of prophets .. from time immemorial,
> "No man takes my life from me, I lay my life down. [vocal agreement]
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 00:44-01:22)

Here, Jones first informs them of the situation, "we're in a compound situation", then expresses his interpretation, "those who have left and committed the betrayal of the century", and finally, indirectly calls for action, "we are sitting here waiting on a powder keg". Although he does not directly instruct the members to commit suicide, he frames the act as inevitable and even honorable, echoing religious martyrdom: "No man takes my life from me, I lay my life down." This pattern recurs in another passage:

> (…)If the plane gets in the air even … so my opinion is that we be kind
> to children and be kind to seniors and take the portion like they used
> to take in ancient Greece … and step over quietly, because we
> are not committing suicide, it's a revolutionary act. We can't go
> back they won't leave us alone … they're now going back to tell more lies,
> which means more congressmen, and there's no way, no way we can survive.
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 03:26-03:58)

In the passage, Jones explains that even if the plane gets in the air, which was supposed to be shot down according to Jones (1978, 02:51-02:54), he advises his members to be kind to their children and seniors, and not let them suffer at the hands of their enemies. He references ancient Greece, potentially referring to the suicide of Socrates, who, according to Plato (1928, p. 9), drank a quantity of poison hemlock. Similarly, the members of the group are on the verge of taking their own lives by drinking poison. Jones's efforts to normalize and minimize the consumption of the poison are evident. The imminent occurrence is characterized as voluntary utilizing a metaphorical gesture of quiet departure, thereby implying that the act in question does not constitute suicide, but rather a revolutionary act.

A noticeable shift in Jim Jones's tone can be detected when listening to the final speech. At the outset, he appears sincere and sorrowful as he informs his followers of what he frames as their inevitable fate. However, as the speech progresses, particularly as children begin to scream and cry, his tone becomes increasingly impatient and agitated. This tonal shift

intensifies following a brief dialogue with Christine Miller, one of the few who voiced opposition to the mass suicide and attempted to suggest alternatives. Her resistance may have made Jones feel vulnerable to further dissent, which could explain his urgency in compelling the community to act before others began to question the plan. The speech opens with the line, "how very much I've loved you" (Jim Jones, 1978, 00:10–00:12). The use of the present perfect tense suggests a sense of finality or closure, framing the speech as a farewell. He continues: "how very much I've tried my best to give you the good life" (Jim Jones, 1978, 00:14–00:17). These early remarks reinforce his self-presentation as a caring leader who has sacrificed for the well-being of his followers. Yet, embedded in this narrative of care is an implicit message: despite his efforts, their shared vision has come to an end. The speech thus begins with emotional appeals that establish Jones as a provider, a role he continues to emphasize throughout. As the speech nears its conclusion, however, this persona begins to unravel. His tone becomes harsher, particularly as emotional distress escalates among the children. At one point, he commands: "Stop this hysterics" (Jim Jones, 1978, 36:06). The background sounds of crying children starkly contrast with his demand for composure, revealing a growing disconnect between his rhetoric of compassion and the traumatic reality unfolding.

> But children, it's just something to put you to rest.
> Oh, God.
> [Babies crying in the background]
> mother, mother, mother, mother, mother, please, mother,
> please, please, please, don't, don't do this, don't do this…
> Lay down your life with your child, but don't do this … (…)
> please, keep your emotions down, keep your emotions down …
> children, it will not hurt if you will be, if you'll be quiet,
> if you'll be quiet.
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 36:38-37:04)

This passage illustrates a notable shift in Jones's demeanor, as he no longer acknowledges the suffering unfolding around him, particularly the audible distress of the children. Despite his repeated claims of care and devotion to his followers, his failure to respond to their pain undermines the image he has constructed throughout the speech. His rhetorical persona as a compassionate provider begins to unravel as he minimizes the agony of the dying children,

urging his followers to “keep [their] emotions down” and insisting that “it will not hurt if [they’ll] just be quiet.” In doing so, Jones not only silences their suffering but also reinforces the illusion of a peaceful death, which stands in stark contrast to the harrowing reality taking place. His demand for composure, even in the face of evident horror, raises critical questions about the sincerity of his leadership and the true nature of his charismatic authority.

5.2.2. *Rhetorical Devices*

Rhetorical devices are frequently employed to reinforce a message. The four classical appeals, kairos, ethos, logos, and pathos, are central to both written and oral rhetoric. Kairos is described by Eide (2004, p. 84) as “the speech situation as the determining principle for the speaker’s choice of arguments, rhetorical devices, style, etc.” This concept addresses both what to communicate in a given situation and how to communicate it. Jim Jones’s final speech was delivered in a highly volatile moment, immediately following the visit from the U.S. congressman and journalists. At this point, members of the Peoples Temple were in a vulnerable state, a vulnerability exacerbated by Jones’s continuous emphasis on external hostility, particularly from the U.S. government. Kairos challenges the speaker to respond to the emotional and situational context, to “read the room.” As demonstrated earlier, Jones adapted both his tone and rhetorical strategy in response to the unfolding events and the emotional reactions of his followers, particularly the distress and cries of children after consuming poison. His rhetorical shifts reflect an effort to maintain control and justify the act as necessary.

In addition to responding to the situation, Jones employed emotionally charged language throughout the speech. For instance, he stated, “I don’t think it is what we want to do with our babies. I don’t think that’s what we had in mind to do with our babies” (Jim Jones, 1978, 01:07–01:13), framing the situation as inescapable and morally urgent. Such language is a key example of pathos, the rhetorical appeal to emotion. Pathos aims to stir specific feelings in the audience that can influence judgment and action (Johannessen et al., 2018, p. 197). In Jones’s case, he sought to evoke both fear and concern. While fear is a powerful motivator, it can also provoke resistance; hence, rhetorical precision is essential (Johannessen et al., 2018, pp. 198-199).

To intensify emotional engagement, Jones repeatedly invoked vulnerable individuals, children, and the elderly, as symbols requiring protection. By appealing to the group’s sense

of duty toward its most defenseless members, he attempted to mobilize compliance. Additionally, emotionally weighted terms such as “happy” and “love” were used by both Jones and the followers. For example: “And everybody was so happy when they made that step to the other side” (Unidentified man, 1978, 27:10–27:15), and “Show your love for one another” (Jim Jones, 1978, 33:44–33:45). The word happy appears four times, exclusively from unidentified members, while love is used ten times, by both Jones and others. Notably, the word hurry is repeated seven times, six of those by Jones in rapid succession, heightening the sense of urgency and pressuring members toward immediate action.

> (…)I’m glad it’s over… Hurry, hurry my children,
> hurry. All I say, let’s not fall in the hands of the enemy.
> Hurry, my children. Hurry .. there are seniors out
> here that I’m concerned about. Hurry, I don’t
> want to leave my seniors to this mess.
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 39:08-39:25).

By employing positive and emotionally affirming language, Jones attempts to reframe the mass suicide as a noble, even celebratory act, what he repeatedly refers to as “revolutionary suicide.” In doing so, he deflects attention from the tragic and violent nature of the act and instead presents it as a meaningful and empowering choice. The term “happy,” notably used only by unidentified members, serves to reassure others that this is something they should embrace with pride: “(...) And everybody was so happy when they made that step to the other side” (Unidentified man, 1978, 27:20–27:23), and “(...) We can be happy about this. (...) I tell you, you should be happy about this. (...) We should be happy. At least I am. (...)” [strong applause] (Unidentified woman, 1978, 28:57–30:34). These utterances suggest that Jones’s ethos, his perceived credibility and trustworthiness, is still intact at this critical moment.

Ethos pertains to the audience’s perception of the speaker’s reliability. As Johannessen et al. (2018, p. 193) emphasize, ethos is not necessarily rooted in the speaker’s actual character, but in the impression they project. Trust is crucial: when someone is perceived as credible, the audience is more likely to believe that they are truthful and acting in their best interest. In the case of Jonestown, Jones had cultivated his authority over many years, building a foundation of loyalty and trust. This is evident in his insistence: “I’m telling you just as plain as I know how to tell you, I’ve never lied to you… I never have lied to you” (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:57–

03:02). Moreover, his arguments about the horrors awaiting them if they do not act now rely heavily on this credibility, his ethos strengthens his logos.

Logos, the appeal to reason, involves presenting arguments that are intended to be rational and fact-based (Johannessen et al., 2018, p. 200). In Jones's case, however, his logical appeals are inseparable from his personal authority. For outsiders, his reasoning may appear irrational or unfounded. Yet, for those within the Temple, many of whom had been repeatedly exposed to apocalyptic warnings, his logic may have seemed plausible. Johannessen et al. (2018, p. 200) also include exhortations and commands as legitimate rhetorical assertions. Jones's directives to drink the poison are framed as necessary and urgent, justified by his claims that they would otherwise face torture or destruction at the hands of their enemies. This urgency, paired with the trust he had cultivated, rendered his appeals persuasive to many.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that this trust was not universal. As survivors have pointed out, and as explored in Chapter 6, not all members shared the same perception of Jones's credibility or accepted his reasoning. Some resisted, hesitated, or attempted to leave. With the rhetorical dynamics now established, the following section will explore how these strategies intersect with the construction of charismatic authority, drawing on the theories of Weber and Dawson.

5.3. Charismatic Presence

This section explores how Jim Jones expresses charismatic authority through his speech, drawing on Weber's and Dawson's definitions of charisma. By analyzing selected passages, I examine how Jones's language, demeanor, and audience responses reflect the traits of a charismatic leader. While some rhetorical elements have already been discussed in section 5.2.2, this section will revisit selected examples where charisma is particularly evident and explore how Jones's authority is constructed in the speech.

5.3.1. *Establishing Authority*

Jones's ability to inspire exceptional admiration and loyalty comes from within him, as charisma is not viewed as a learned ability. Charismatic authority, as Weber refers to it, stems from an individual's perceived possession of extraordinary qualities, which separates them from ordinary people (Weber in Wessinger, 2012, p. 81). This form of leadership is

unstable and must therefore continually be reaffirmed through action and recognition. The first two types of authority, traditional and rational-legal, are seen as more stable, but the third, charismatic authority, is transient, meaning it normally lasts for a short time unless the leader actively demonstrates their exceptional status. As the power is in danger of collapsing, the leader has to demonstrate their extraordinary qualities to ensure their charismatic power does not disappear (Dawson, 2012, p. 119; Prophet, 2016, p. 44). Jon Jones attempts to do so in his final speech, where the urgency of the situation not only demands persuasion but proof of his messianic and moral clarity.

In chapter 3, different factors of identifying a charismatic leader were presented. Some of these abilities are shown through his speech. By listening to Jim Jones, it is clear that he is a confident and determined person by his articulation to his members. He does not rush; rather takes his time to inform his members as he awaits the applause, and he talks with determination in his voice. He has already determined the outcome. He focuses on visionaries and emotional expression, as illustrated in the previous subsection. He uses emotionally charged language and is focused on what is to come. He has been leading by example, and has sacrificed for his members, which makes his people willing to do the same for him. His connection to his members is obvious as he refers to them by name, and it seems as though they have a tight relationship to him, as multiple unidentified members is heard speaking on behalf of Jones, supporting his decision of the mass suicide: “If you tell us we have to give our lives now we´re ready” [strong applause] (Unidentified man, 1978, 18:19-18:23). A fourth ability by such leaders is their rhetorical skills, and their ability to frame difficulties and resolutions in simple and appealing terms (Dawson, 2012, p. 116-117). In the speech, Jones is heard talking about the difficulties they are facing, as well as giving a resolution to the upcoming problem. As shown in previous passages from the speech, he appeals to the children and seniors, creating an image of protection, and how he wants to protect the weaker links in the group, and presenting himself as the savior for his people. Not all charismatic leaders are violent, however, Jim Jones is an example of when the leader feels threatened.

There are multiple sections where Jones’ charisma is evident, however, some parts should be emphasized. “How very much I´ve loved you. How very much I´ve tried my very best to give you … the good life” (Jim Jones, 1978, 00:10-00:19) is the first sentence in his recorded speech. This is a good example of how he places himself as a loving, almost parental-like leader for the members. He positions himself almost in a parenting role because of the way he

has tried to give them the good life, just like parents do for their children. By saying "I've tried" is makes him a person who has sacrificed and struggled for his people, and by using the phrase "How very much I´ve loved you" he evokes the personal and intimate connection he has established with his members. He does not use the word "cared", but he uses a word that evokes strong emotion within most people: love. A leaders charisma thrives on dependency, and they want their followers to feel dependent on them. When Jones says "how very much I´ve tried my best", he points to his devotion to them, which again reflects back to his members. They are reminded of his leadership, which may affect their reactions to the coming events.

5.3.2. *Framing the Crisis*

As previously mentioned the tone in his speech changes throughout. At some point he demonstrates the control and authority he has over his members by commanding urgency: "Please. For God´s sake, let´s get on with it. We´ve lived – we´ve lived as no other people have lived and loved. We´ve had as much of this world as you´re gonna get." [strong applause] (Jim Jones, 1978, 31:08-31:19). This statement is not only a plea, it also exemplifies what Wessinger (2012, p. 88) refers to as "crisis-mongering", where charismatic leaders invoke a sense of urgency to maintain emotional engagement and prevent routinization of their authority. Jones heightens the emotional pressure and limits the possibility of disagreement by portraying the situation as critical and irreversible. In addition to the first sentence demonstrating urgency, he says "for God´s sake" which creates a moral urgency, almost as if not continuing is offensive or dishonorable. He frames the mass suicide as inevitable and as a logical conclusion. He then acknowledges the lives they have lived, and hints at them achieving something greater than ordinary people as they have "lived as no other people have lived and loved". In doing so, he positions the act of death not as tragic, but as honorable and final. Johnson (1979, p. 316) notes that charismatic leaders often remain composed in crises, presenting themselves with calm confidence to strengthen their hold on followers. Jones's calm tone, in contrast to the surrounding distress, reinforces the perception that he is in control and knows what is right, even at the brink of death. This strategy forwards dependence, as followers interpret his calm as confirmation that the group is doing the right thing. The end of the sentence removes hope from the future when he says, "we´ve had as much of this world as you´re gonna get", and he closes off alternative paths. Some might argue that he insinuates that they have nothing left outside of his leadership and presence. By

looking at this part of the speech, he can acknowledge the members as well as closing off any future opportunity for a life.

Although Jones' tone and harshness change, he does remain eerily calm for the most part. Instead of expressing panic, his calmness strengthens his control, as his calmness affects the members, but also, it shows his confidence in the members following through. "Lay down your life with dignity. Don´t lay down with tears and agony. There´s nothing to death. It´s like stepping over into another plane" (Jim Jones, 1978, 35:53-36:02). To keep his followers composed he reframes death as peaceful, "like stepping over into another plane". Although Jones is using his charisma and choosing his words carefully, it is important to note that during this part of the speech, he is referring to the children crying and screaming in pain from the poison, which is heard in the background of the tape recording. He is getting aggravated, yet calm, by the crying, and wants them to "lay down your life with dignity".

5.3.3. *Rhetorical Strategies as Expressions of Charisma*

As analyzed in section 5.2.2, Jim Jones extensively used rhetorical strategies such as kairos, pathos, logos, and ethos. Although these rhetorical devices serve to persuade his audience, they also function as crucial expressions of his charismatic authority. Dawson (2012, p. 116) notes that one of the central traits of a charismatic leader is the ability to communicate a convincing vision and reverse a situation in a way that feels both emotionally significant and morally clear to followers.

He frequently appeals to emotion (pathos), particularly by his repeated references to children and the suffering they might endure, which contributes to his portrayed image as a protector and a savior, a role consistent with Weber's definition of a charismatic figure. He combines urgency with affection by repeating the phrase "hurry, my children", and reinforces the emotional bond between leader and followers while also framing him as someone who knows what is best in a moment of crisis. The use of kairos, the rhetorical principle of seizing the moment, also plays a key role in how Jones performs his charisma. As Eide (2004, p. 84) points out, kairos involves the speaker´s ability to adapt arguments to the situation at hand. Jones does this repeatedly as the situation in Jonestown escalates. He adjusts his tone from sorrowful and calm to firm and commanding, reflecting not just strategic persuasion, but also flexibility and presence expected of a charismatic leader in moments of existential threat (Johnson, 1979, p. 316). Moreover, Jones's consistent reminders that he has "never lied" to

his followers strengthen his ethos, not just as a persuasive tactic, but as a fundamental of his charismatic character. As Wessinger (2012, p. 81) explains, charisma is often sustained by the perception that the leader has access to unique truth or insight, and Jones's repeated statements of honesty help deepen the members' emotional and spiritual trust in him. Thus, rhetorical devices in the final speech are not merely tools of persuasion; they are also manifestations of Jones's charisma, reinforcing his exceptional status and strengthening the bond between him and his followers during their final moments.

5.3.4. *The Prophet and the Martyr*

Some charismatic leaders portray themselves as saviors, and some saviors have to make sacrifices. In his speech, Jones frames himself not only as a leader but also as a martyr, someone who suffers and dies for a higher cause. This framing resonates with Stetler's (2009) discussion of soteriology, where salvation is not only personal but collective, and the leader acts as a mediator of that salvation. By insisting that "death is a million times preferable to ten more days of this life" [strong applause] (Jim Jones, 1978, 07:31-07:36), Jones positions death as a saving act, a necessary step toward liberation from an inhumane world. He can maintain control by projecting unwavering conviction. He repeatedly dismisses fear: "death is not a fearful thing, it´s living that´s treacherous", which reflects the soteriological dualism outlined in Chapter 3. This form of dualism separates the saved from the lost, the redeemed from the condemned (Stetler, 2009). By elevating death over life, Jones presents himself as the gateway to salvation, in line with Partridge's (2009, p. 207) description of messianic leaders in millenarian movements, who claim to possess ultimate insight into the path toward redemption. Moreover, as Weber (1946, in Dawson, 2012, p. 118) argues, charismatic leaders must "prove" their divine mission, either through miracles or heroic acts. Here, Jones's ultimate heroic act is his willingness to die alongside his people. By expressing his determination to suffer the same fate, he reinforces his authenticity and deepens the followers' perception of him as a divine and guiding leader. The use of hyperbolic language, such as "a million times", again adds emotional intensity and urgency, making the decision feel not only justified but inevitable.

5.3.5. *Collective Confirmation*

Though charismatic leaders may often center the attention on themselves, Jones also actively turns the focus toward his members, affirming their role and their unity in the act. When he states, “We didn’t commit suicide, we committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world” (Jim Jones, 1978, 42:30-42:37), he reframes the group’s action as meaningful resistance. This is a reflection of what Prophet (2016, pp. 41-42) refers to as the charismatization process, where the charisma of the leader is co-produced and reinforced by the followers. Jones’s identity as a revolutionary leader is not only asserted by him, but also confirmed and upheld by his people. He presents his members as chosen ones, which exudes a sense of being special and exceptional.

A noticeable tactic is how he redefines reality. “We didn´t commit suicide. We committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world.” (Jim Jones, 1978, 42:27-42:37). Suicide may be seen, by some, as defeat. Therefore, by using the term “revolutionary” he creates a sense of collective identity and shared purpose. As Dawson (2012, p. 117) points out, charismatic leaders create maximum dependence on the group by offering existential meaning and emotional security. By redefining suicide as heroism, Jones removes the stigma and fear traditionally associated with such an act and replaces it with pride and purpose. This strengthens group unity and makes opposition more difficult, as refusing to participate would imply betrayal of the cause and community. A revolutionary suicide, however, is viewed as a heroic act. Furthermore, the audience’s reactions, such as applause or verbal affirmations, help to socially validate Jones’s framing of the event. As Wessinger (2012, p. 81) points out, charisma is not maintained in isolation, but through reciprocal recognition between leader and followers. When a few people challenge his sense of reality, but rather affirm it, his authority is confirmed in real-time. The followers' belief in the narrative of “revolutionary suicide” is, in many ways, what transforms Jones's charisma from potential to actual power.

5.3.6. *Short Summary of Charismatic Authority in the Speech*

The final speech of Jim Jones shows a clear example of hos charismatic authority operates in its most extreme form. Jones exhibits many of the traits described in chapter 1; presenting himself as a protector, a visionary, a savior, and a martyr. His relatively calm and composed approach during the speech, in addition to his ability to frame collective suicide as both necessary and honorable, both contribute to a perception of him as an extraordinary

leader accessing the higher truth. His charisma is not only communicates through words, but is further confirmed by the reactions of his members. The loyalty, applause, and verbal affirmations he receives reinforce what Prophet (2016, p. 41-42) refers to as the "charismatization" process, where followers play an active role in sustaining the leader's perceived authority. Through rhetorical strategies such as pathos, kairos, logos, and ethos, Jones frames death not as defeat but as salvation. The analysis of this speech illustrates how charismatic leadership, especially when combined with emotional urgency and isolation, can lead to catastrophic outcomes. In the next section, I will examine how Jones's use of apocalyptic rhetoric and dualistic worldviews further shaped the final act in Jonestown.

5.4. Apocalyptic Elements in the Speech

Pointing out charisma in the speech is somewhat more challenging than identifying the apocalyptic dualism. Apocalypticism, as discussed by Stein (2022, p. 376) and Svenungsson (2022), is a collective term for various end-of-times beliefs, often involving the expectation of an inevitable catastrophe, followed by judgment and salvation. While the Peoples Temple can be described as a social and political group, it is evident that religious rhetoric plays a significant role in Jones's final speech. In this context, I use the term apocalyptic discourse to refer to the specific language and phrases used by Jones to legitimize collective suicide through religious contexts. This section will only include parts of the speech deemed fitting, which shows prominent use of apocalyptic rhetoric, while also exploring these elements in detail and connecting them to relevant theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 3.

5.4.1. *Prophecy and Determinism*

A common theme in the speech is prophecy and determinism. He refers to himself as a prophet repeatedly in the speech, while also talking about a determined future that they cannot escape. The following three passages are examples of prophecy and determinism.

> That's what's going to happen here in a matter of a few minutes …
> is that one of those people on that plane is gonna, gonna shoot the
> pilot. I know that. I didn't plan it, but I know it's gonna happen.
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:33-02:47)

This passage describes the upcoming event, which we know today, is where members sent from Jonestown by Jim Jones stormed Port Kaituma and, among other things, shot Leo Ryan, the newsmen, and several others on the airstrip. Jones, however, appears clueless about the planned event, and refers to it here as something he did not plan, but knows it is going to happen, presumably based on his divine powers. Jones presents a future apocalyptic scenario as inevitable, and he appears as a prophet who knows what will happen. This reflects apocalyptic determinism, a theory that suggests that apocalyptic events are predetermined and cannot be avoided. According to Svenungsson (2022), apocalyptic determinism is the idea that the world is heading towards an inevitable catastrophe, and that certain individuals have insight into this fate. The theory suggests that the course of history, especially in apocalyptic movements, is seen as inevitable and predestined, and that those in a position of authority are the only ones able to understand and communicate this fate to their followers. Jones uses this belief to create a sense of urgency, which in turn coerces members to act accordingly. Jones solidifies his role as the bearer of truth by making the airplane event seem inevitable.

The two following passages both reflects the vision Jones has of himself, and how he portrays himself: “I will take your call, we will put it to the Russians, and I can tell you the answer now cause I’m a prophet” (Jim Jones, 1978, 10:53-10:59), “I am speaking here not as the administrator, I am speaking as the prophet today”(Jim Jones, 1978, 13:53-13:58). In the space of three minutes he refers to himself as a prophet twice. In this example, Jones emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of his leadership. Prophetic speech is common in apocalyptic movements, and it serves to create a sense of urgency and absolute truth. According to Partridge (2009, p. 207), apocalyptic rhetoric often elevates the leader to the status of a divine messenger whose pronouncements are seen as the direct will of a higher power. Jones’s statement underscores his position as a prophet who not only interprets the future but also controls the future by directing the actions of his followers based on this knowledge.

The three presented passages reflect Weber’s concept of charismatic authority, where the leader’s charisma is bound to their perceived access to hidden or superior knowledge, in this case, knowledge of the apocalyptic future. Jones’ prophetic portrayal gives him an appearance of authority. He creates a sense of anxiety and necessity, making his followers feel like they have no time to think critically, only to act on his vision to avert the impending disaster. The certainty Jones expresses also reinforces the fatalistic mindset within the group, an indication

of apocalyptic movements. Followers are convinced that they have no control over these events and must accept the leader's vision, as it's framed as the only correct and inevitable path. Stein (2002, p. 376) suggests that such a deterministic worldview often leads to followers believing that their only agency lies in aligning themselves with the prophecy, rather than attempting to change the course of events.

5.4.2. *The Imminence of Catastrophe*

The imminence of catastrophe is also a common theme in the speech, in addition to Jones' preaching in general. He believed in a nuclear apocalypse, as well as emphasizing the belief in us vs. them. The following passage is from the beginning of the speech, where one sees clear signs of eschatological dualism. He refers to their situation as compound, which can be considered a metaphor for them being in a closed society, with no way out. The following example can also be used to refer to his prophecy, which will be discussed below.

> Not only– We're in a compound situation … not only are there … those
> who have left and committed the betrayal of the century … some have
> stolen children from others and then seek right now to kill them
> because they stole their children … and we are sitting here waiting
> on a powder keg … I don't think it is what we want to do with our babies …
> I don't think that's what we had in mind to do with our babies. It was
> said by the greatest of prophets … from time immemorial,
> "No man takes my life from me, I lay my life down." [Vocal agreement]
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 00:44-01:22)

Jim Jones creates a clear division between those who are loyal, the "good", and those who have betrayed him, the "bad". This is a typical example of eschatological dualism, where an apocalyptic battle between the two sides is imminent. According to Frey (2014, pp. 272-273), eschatological dualism is a belief that there is an eternal struggle between good and evil, which will be decisively resolved in an apocalyptic event. In this case, there is no doubt that Jones portrays himself and his followers as the "good" ones who stand against the "evil" ones, represented by those who have left, as well as external enemies. This creates a black-and-white reality, where the world is divided between these two fundamentally different groups. Jones uses the symbolically powerful phrase "waiting on a powder keg" to describe a world

on the brink of disaster. He conveys a volatile, end-of-the-world scenario, urging followers to see immediate action as it is their only option to avoid catastrophe.

In this passage, Jones emphasizes his proclaimed role as a prophet by drawing a comparison between himself and historical religious figures. By using words such as “greatest of prophets”, a reference that could imply figures such as Jesus Christ and other prophetic leaders, Jones not only aligns himself with these figures, but he also creates a connection between their actions and the current situation. Through allusions to the Bible and Jesus, Jones uses prophetic imagery to make their suicide a religious act, a “holy” sacrifice. By drawing parallels to great religious leaders, he makes their impending death a righteousness rather than a tragedy. He makes it something more than just a political or social act, giving it religious and moral significance. He frames the act of death as something voluntarily chosen and carefully controlled, opposed to something forced upon him, by using phrases such as, "No man takes my life from me, I lay my life down". When comparing their imminent deaths to those of great prophets who sacrificed for the greater good, Jones attempts to legitimize the act of mass death within the framework of a broader religious context. Such a comparison might instill a sense of divine purpose in the members, where they feel as though they are a part of a long line of sacrifices made by revered leaders.

In the following example: “We can’t go back… there’s no way we can survive” (Jim Jones, 1978, 03:47-03:55), Jones reinforces the "us vs. them" mentality by eliminating any possibility of reconciliation with the outside world. In his rhetoric, there is a clear dichotomy: his group cannot return to a hostile society that has turned against them. This represents a classic us vs. them mentality, where there is no in-between. For Jones’ followers, there are only two options: be with him or be destroyed by the outside world. He creates a sense of isolation and exclusivity, where those who have left the temple, as well as those who oppose him, are seen as “enemies” who cannot understand the “right” reality. According to Stein (2002, p. 191), such a division contributes to an apocalyptic understanding of the world, where there is no room for discussion or nuance. The faithful are the only ones who have access to the truth, and the rest of the world is the enemy that must be fought or overcome.

5.4.3. *Fatalism and Reframing Suicide*

Throughout the speech, Jones continually tries to portray their upcoming situation as something honorable, namely by reformulating suicide into revolutionary suicide. In this

section, two parts of the speech that refer to this reformulation and how he refers to fatalism and urgency will be presented.

“We didn’t commit suicide, we committed an act of revolutionary suicide protesting the conditions of an inhumane world.”(Jim Jones, 1978, 42:27-42:37. In this part of the speech, he tries to transform "ordinary" suicide into a revolutionary suicide, that is, he tries to turn something negative into something positive. When he talks about the "inhumane world," he is talking specifically about America and its society. As previously mentioned, the Peoples Temple is considered a social and political group by many, especially because of their work against racism, sexism, etc. In this example, Jones redefines collective suicide as a “revolutionary act,” as if creating a new category for death as a positive, heroic act. This ties into soteriological dualism, where the individual’s salvation depends on a separation from a world perceived as immoral or evil. According to Stetler (2009), soteriological dualism is about separating the saved from the lost. In this case, death is seen as a necessary act to escape the corrupt and unjust world outside. Jones gives death a purpose and presents it as a way of protesting against an “inhuman” society, as a final act of purity. This immediate solution to the world's suffering, death as salvation, reflects how soteriological dualism can arise in apocalyptic movements, where members feel they must "clear themselves away" from an immoral world to achieve salvation.

> that's what's going to happen here in a matter of a few minutes … is that one of those people on that plane is gonna, gonna shoot the pilot. I know that. I didn't plan it, but I know it's gonna happen. They're gonna shoot that pilot and down comes that plane into the jungle … and we had better not have any of our children left when it's over, because they'll parachute in here on us … I’m trying to just as plain as I know how to tell you. I’ve never lied to you, I never have lied to you … I know that's what's gonna happen, that's what it intends to do, and he will do it. He'll do it … Fortunately being still bewildered with many many pressures on my brain seeing all these people behave so treasonous, it was just too much for me to put together, but I.. now know what he was telling me and it'll happen. If the plane gets in the air even … so my opinion is that we be kind to children and be kind to seniors and take the portion like they used to take in ancient Greece .. and step over quietly .. because we are not committing suicide, it's a revolutionary act. We can't go back .. they won't leave us alone. They're

> now going back to tell more lies, which means more congressmen, and there's no way, no way we can survive.
>
> (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:33-03:55)

This part intensifies his convincing nature by furthering his mix of prophecy, urgency, and justification of there not being an escape. Jones speaks with absolute certainty about a coming catastrophic event that he claims is going to happen, namely, the plane being shot down. He portrays this event as something inevitable, and because of his tone and the way he presents this message, by taking long breaks and giving his members time to take in the information that is given, he can reinforce his authority and positions himself as a knowledgeable and protective figure, who can see danger when they are not. The members of the Peoples Temple view him as a legitimate person who only wants the best for those involved, and can create this immediacy, which might heighten anxiety and diminish their ability to think critically, and they blindly follow Jones by believing they are doing what is best for them. He creates immediacy by using phrases such as “in a matter of a few minutes” (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:33) and “down comes that plane into the jungle” (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:45-02:47). They only have a matter of minutes to escape their doomed future. As much as he creates this immediacy, he tries to reassure his members by focusing on his honesty and how he has “never lied” to them. Jones probably tries to eliminate any doubts or resistance his followers might feel, and appeals to the trust he´s cultivated. He continues by presenting their act as a form of revolutionary act, not suicide. By doing that, he reframes their potential death as a dignified and necessary response, instead of an act of defeat. This is their way of taking control of their fate and defiance against their oppressors.

5.4.4. *The Role of Rhetoric and Discourse in Apocalypticism*

Jones uses rhetoric to strengthen his charismatic authority and apocalyptic vision, dividing the world into two clear groups: those with him and those against him. His emotional appeals, particularly to parenthood and protection, combined with his religious legitimization of death as a prophetic act, create an atmosphere of necessity and moral obligation. The rhetoric creates a sense of fate and isolation, forcing members to believe that they have no choice but to follow his lead to ensure a "right" and "holy" future.

By using phrases like "waiting on a powder keg" and "compound situation," he creates a sense of extreme danger and tension. Both phrases could be rhetorical images that effectively evoke

a mental state of high risk and uncertainty. This makes the members feel like they are in a desperate situation that cannot be resolved ordinarily. This is a form of apocalyptic rhetoric that builds on the sense of disaster imminence (Svenungsson, 2022), where Jones portrays the situation as critical and inevitable, and where he uses language to manipulate the emotions of his followers, reinforcing the feeling that they are facing an impending disaster that only he can guide them through.

Jones says, “not only are there those who have left and committed the betrayal of the century”, describing those who have left the temple as traitors. He uses strong, negatively charged words like “betrayal of the century” to make the betrayal serious and to intensify the belief that those who have left are enemies. This rhetoric plays into the "us vs. them" mentality, where followers are further isolated from the "outside world," and those who left are seen as unfaithful and hostile. This reinforces the idea that they must be loyal to survive, which is a clear example of eschatological dualism (Frey, 2014, p. 271), where the world is divided into two groups. This strong dualism is reinforced through Jones’ rhetoric, which creates a divided reality for its members.

Lastly, when Jones says, “I don’t think that’s what we had in mind to do with our babies,” he rhetorically appeals to parental instincts. This addresses their responsibility to protect their children, setting an emotional tone that ties together feelings of love, protection, and survival. This appeal makes his audience more likely to accept what he wants them to do, as he creates a sense that he cares about their children and their future. Here again, one can draw on the theory of soteriological dualism, where those who follow him are seen as the chosen ones who protect the children and save them from the dangerous world outside. In this context, suicide becomes in his eyes an act of protection, a form of liberation from the immoral world that threatens the safety of their children.

5.4.5. *Short Summary of the Apocalypticism in the Speech*

To summarize, the analysis of Jim Jones’s final speech reveals how Jim Jones presents himself as a prophet and savior, framing the impending collective suicide not as a defeat but as a necessary revolutionary act. He portrays the outside world as hostile and irredeemable, and cultivates a dualistic worldview in which his followers are chosen alongside him in comparison to the opposers, who are the enemy. This "us vs. them" mentality strengthens his control over the group, as followers feel isolated from the outside world and increasingly

dependent on Jones for guidance and survival. The fatalism in Jones's speech, reinforced by his determination on the certainty of their fate, further isolates the followers and makes it seem as though their only option is to comply with his advice. By claiming that they will face a violent and unavoidable future, he removes any room for doubt or resistance. Jones's apocalyptic discourse and rhetoric, combined with his charismatic authority and the apocalyptic dualism he promotes, creates an environment where his followers believe that their survival is directly tied to their willingness to comply with his vision. The speech illustrates how charismatic leadership, when mixed with apocalyptic rhetoric and emotional manipulation, can lead to extreme and catastrophic actions.

6. "We Moved There to Live, Not to Die": Perspectives from Survivors

Some events can be studied using theories, while others are best learned from those who have experienced them. Such is the case with this thesis. To fully grasp how Jim Jones actualized his apocalyptic beliefs and charismatic leadership, it is fundamental that individuals who regularly encountered it contribute their experiences. To further expand on the analyzed material from chapter 5, I decided to include a chapter focusing on the perspectives of (ex-)members of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown survivors. Due to the late stage at which the interviews were conducted within the master's program, they will not constitute the primary focus of the analysis for my own master's thesis. Nevertheless, they have been incorporated into the study as their experiences can be compared with my analysis, which is presented in Chapter 5. To understand how followers experienced Jones's authority, I also draw on the framework of routinized charisma and apocalyptic dualism discussed in Chapter 3. The interviews are significant as they provide insight into how the theories of charisma and apocalyptic dualism were experienced. Proudfoot (1985, p. 216-217) explains how the term *experience* is ambiguous. When discussing experience and their perception, one has to consider two aspects: how it seemed to that person at the time, and the best explanation that can be given of the experience. These were two aspects important to keep in mind when interviewing the (ex-)members, especially since the tragedy happened 47 years ago.

It is essential to emphasize that the interpretations presented here are subjective, however, I acknowledge the diversity and complexity inherent within the experiences. Their antithetical positions about Jim Jones, Jonestown, and Peoples Temple are accurate because they are individual experiences. As Prophet (2016, pp. 41-42) notes, a leader's charisma is developed and maintained by the followers, and relies on social validation, and in this chapter, I examine it "from below". Meaning how charisma was experienced, interpreted, and maintained by the members themselves, i.e., from the followers' perspective, not just from the speaker or the theoretical top. Each member contributed valuable information, and the amount of input varied, with some speakers discussing particular topics more extensively than others. It is therefore necessary to reintroduce the members.

6.1. Life in the Peoples Temple: Charisma and Collective Identity

There are numerous reasons for joining a movement, such as community and cause. This subchapter explores the (ex-)members' reasons for joining the Peoples Temple and their

positions within. Additionally, it explores how Jim Jones's charismatic leadership was experienced by each individual, as well as Jones's various practices to remain in leadership. The individuals' perceptions of Jones's charisma are analyzed and compared to the findings previously outlined in Chapter 5. In addition, the study will consider relevant theories on charisma and charismatic bonding.

6.1.1. *Why They Joined and Stayed*

In my conversation with Stephan, he explicitly mentioned how the Temple gave many a sense of belonging. As Kulik (2024) stated about cults, they are usually a small group devoted to a person, idea, or philosophy. Within the Peoples Temple, which Cartmell referred to as a cult in our conversation, the followers had a devotion to both a person as well as an idea. Carter was on a spiritual journey in his 20s when he joined the Peoples Temple. Carter explained:

> I was looking for something that spoke to me while at the same time going through all this spiritual journey. So when I got to the temple, and I actually thought this is legitimate, this is real, I can put my time and energy in this.

Later on, he expressed a feeling of belonging and feeling at home in the Temple. The sense of belonging, as mentioned, was also central for Stephan. Although Stephan was born into the Temple, he chose to stay because of the people. During the conversation with Stephan, he explained how feeling at home with a community consisting of multiple cultures was essential, as many did not feel this sense of belonging in the American society at the time. During the uprising of the Peoples Temple, there was an increase in Black Power movements, and Jim Jones marketed himself and his church as a movement against racism. He drew on aspects from the Peace Mission movement and the Black Panther movement, which seemingly appealed to many. Jones's followers became an important part of the Temple as they received various tasks. Tim Carter, for instance, was a part of the planning commission, which he explains, consisted of people who worked three times harder than the general populace, as well as their knowledge of "John John", Grace and Tim Stoen's son, being Jim Jones's son – there was a legal battle about this after Grace and Tim became defectors. Although Carter was not a part of the inner core, he was a visible member as a part of the planning commission. Michael Cartmell, however, was a member of staff, meaning he had

important tasks on a higher level. He was on the second level of staff; there were two levels, where the top level included Jim Jones and trusted members, such as Carolyn Layton. Cartmell's main tasks were legal matters, especially handling the so-called waivers – written approvals of the punishment for a given individual, signed by the individual or, in the case of children, their guardians. The given punishments and why will be discussed in the next section.

The distribution of tasks among the various Temple members can be argued as a factor in the strengthening of their sense of belonging, as their contribution provides a sense of affiliation, thus integrating the individuals into the community. It is suggested that this sense of contribution may have resulted in a form of acceptance and appreciation that was not equally experienced within the larger society. A leader of a group has a significant role in maintaining the charismatic bond, as Prophet (2016, p. 41) argues. A charismatic bond is the relationship between the leader and their followers, and as Prophet highlights (2016, p. 41-42), the followers have four important ways of directly influencing this charismatic bond. One way is the individual's own perceptions, which they acquire during their involvement, and how these may change the charismatic bond over time. Therefore, the follower's involvement is crucial for a charismatic leader, as the charismatic bond is developed and maintained, especially by elite followers. Dawson describes various attributes of a charismatic leader, which were further discussed in Chapter 3. One attribute Dawson (2012, p. 116) acknowledges is how they are known for making personal connections with whomever they meet, and how they are sensitive to others' needs. A charismatic leader engages in their daily struggles, which may be different from the people they typically encounter. As the Peoples Temple mainly consisted of a marginalized group within American society, it shows how Jones was able to engage in their struggles, as a white male. He presented himself as a source of faith and compassion while also providing them a community urging for change. He promoted black power and a change in societal norms. In the final speech, Jones highlights the importance of his Black members, and continues to highlight black power as he states: "Who walked out of here today? Did you notice who walked out? [affirmative murmur] Mostly white people. Mostly white people walks." [vocal agreement] (Jim Jones, 1978, 18:47-18:58). By pointing out race, he creates the image of how the majority of the larger society, once again, abandons their shared responsibility. He acknowledges the power dynamic of race within the American society, and by further recognizing the Black Americans' weakened position in the larger society, he makes it a point in the speech to give them power, as "mostly white people walked". The

members are doing it in unity, as they have done within the Temple from the beginning. This rhetoric restates Jones's power, which he has worked for since the Peoples Temple was created, which is shown in various practices he used within the Temple.

6.1.2. *Practices and Power: "I was a moral coward"*

Jim Jones used different practices within the Temple, which were highlighted by the three (ex-)members. Cartmell recalled the Temple having disciplinary sessions, somewhere between 1972-1974, which became violent. According to individuals, there were three forms of punishments or disciplinary sessions, although there could have been more that were not mentioned. Being "paddled" was one way of discipline, and it was a term used within the Temple referring to an individual sustaining powerful swats to the posterior with a wooden tool shaped like a cricket bat. Boxing matches were also a form of punishment. The boxing matches were not as common, according to Stephan, but it included two people fighting until one was on the floor. Cartmell explains that the boxing matches included a person being punished by fighting a stronger component for three rounds. Paddling and boxing matches were the physical punishments highlighted in the conversation, but Carter additionally mentioned being "called to the carpet". This punishment was based on humiliation, as the individual would be brought up in front of the congregation, where their secrets and failures would be exposed. According to Carter, being exposed to that nature worked well, although this form of discipline increased in Jonestown, where the physical punishments decreased. There were different reactions to these punishments, where Cartmell called himself a moral coward, whereas Carter did not react as badly, considering his background in the Vietnam War and in the Marines. Cartmell said:

> They certainly would have had a legitimate claim.
> So my job was to make sure that everybody who was
> getting beaten one way or another signed. And if it was
> children, these beatings were given to kids who were five,
> six years old. They get their parents to sign off. That was my job.
> And to keep all those files organized. Now, did I actually hurt anyone?
> No. But, I mean, I was a good little apparatchik.

Cartmell explained that he controlled the waivers, which were made to minimize any legal liability in case anyone sued the Temple or Jim Jones as a result of their injuries. He viewed

himself as a moral coward because of his involvement in the disciplinary sessions. Carter, however, explains his lack of reaction during his first observation of a boxing match within the Temple. Carter's lack of reaction towards the punishments was due to his upbringing and his civic duty in the Marines and the Vietnam War, therefore, discipline was not unfamiliar to him. A common reason for the lack of reactions to the punishments was the idea of "the end justifies the means". This idea consists of believing that unethical occurrences are necessary components of a greater good. In this case, the individuals shared a belief that the punishments served a purpose for the greater good, which was an improved society for all. Some did, however, leave, and Carter acknowledges how some were "smarter than him" and that he ignored some yellow and red flags. What these yellow and red flags were was not further mentioned; however, as the conversation revolved around the punishments in the Temple, one could assume Carter viewed that as a yellow or red flag. Although various practices were viewed as red flags to some, it is important to note how each of the (ex-) members explained how reactions were less common, as the individuals around them did not react. Stephan explained how he believed that he was the only one reacting to some aspects, as no one noticeably reacted as well. This was also highlighted by Carter and Cartmell.

The punishments may have been a tool for Jones to routinize his charisma. Dawson (2012, p. 114) points to three foci within routinization, where "the social construction and management of charismatic authority" is one of them. The focus of this point is on the practical maintenance and management of charismatic authority. That is to say, it explores how leaders and their movements actively work to maintain the impression of the leader's power, control, and "extraordinary" status. By subjecting members to violence or public humiliation, Jones maintained a strong power hierarchy and instilled loyalty through fear, a strategy that reinforced his control and authority. At the same time, one can highlight how exposing individuals' "secrets" strengthens the group's loyalty to Jones by deterring others from objecting. Loyalty to Jones increases as he can appear as a leader who wants the best for his members, and thus, by exposing the individuals in front of the group, members feel the control Jones has over his members. It's worth mentioning how family members and others in the group were encouraged to expose each other to Jones. The members were set up against each other, according to the three informants. Hall et al. (2000, p. 24) explain how the most enduring communal groups have fostered solidarity and commitment through practices such as monitoring behavior through methods like confession. And among the various types of communal groups, those with apocalyptic orientations have a particularly strong foundation to

justify their demands for loyalty, as they frame their existence in opposition to a society they view as fundamentally evil (Hall et al., 2000, p. 24). On the other hand, the séances also functioned as ritual confirmations of Jones' position as an all-knowing and infallible leader, an active construction of charismatic authority.

Cognitive dissonance – the conflict between two or more cognitions, such as their thoughts, knowledge, values, attitudes, or actions – may have been a struggle for multiple members. One could argue that Christine Miller showcases the struggle during her conversation with Jim Jones, as she tries to convey her concerns for the children, while also expressing her fearlessness of death (Christine Miller & Jim Jones, 1978, 05:12-09:55). Miller conveys the conflict of wanting to save the children and the members by suggesting various options aside from collective suicide, while also expressing how she is not fearful of death, which could be argued as an expression of loyalty to the mission. She tells Jones that "As long as there's life, there's hope" (Christine Miller, 1978, 09:30-09:32), however, Jones responds "Without me life has no meaning … [strong applause] I am the best friend you will ever have" (Jim Jones, 1978, 10:00-10:07). Although the members may have struggled to understand how to deal with the situation they were in, they still believed in their mission which led to some immoral choices along the way, which Stephan explained in our conversation.

6.1.3. *Charisma in Practice: "We believed in our mission"*

Jim Jones was a wonderful speaker and was able to portray himself accordingly. Stephan described his father as a chameleon, "He could make himself whatever he thought you needed to see and hear. And he did that brilliantly". He furthers his claim by exemplifying how Jones could go from a meeting with the John Birch Society, a conservative right-wing party, to meeting the Communist Party, and leaving both feeling as though he was the best thing they had ever met. " You know, my father in an instant could read what was most important to you and convince you he was the one to give it to you. Or at the very least, speak intelligently to it". This specific example was also highlighted by Carter, who explained how the head of both parties attended a Temple meeting simultaneously, without the knowledge of each other, where both stood up and applauded at two or three instances. Carter describes Jones: "He was the best public speaker I've ever heard in my life before, since. He was a great public speaker. He reached people. I'm not just talking about [only] Temple members". Further on, Cartmell compares Jones's rhetorical abilities to Martin Luther King:

> I mean, everyone likes to point out Martin Luther King as being this great speaker. And truly he was. But Jim was every bit as equal. The problem Jim had was that he would just go on and on and on and on and on. He loved to hear himself talk. So, you know, the meetings would go, I mean, he would go on. If he were in another venue than the church and there were, you know, people other than church members there, the reporters, he could keep his remarks down to, let's say, a half hour or less. He was a brilliant speaker. Very charismatic. You wanted to be on his team. He had that kind of personal goal. He seemed to be, you know, working diligently to accomplish all these wonderful social goals.

The informant's perceptions of Jim Jones as a charismatic leader and a brilliant speaker are consistent with the conclusions drawn in the last chapter regarding rhetoric and discourse. Jones could persuasively convey his message with little to no resistance from his followers. As referred to by Dawson (2012, p. 116), a charismatic leader radiates confidence and determination and constantly displays faith in their mission. Jim Jones was consistent in his fear of a nuclear apocalypse, as well as his focus on the government and defectors as enemies. Jones portrayed confidence in his practices, as he, according to Carter, was among the first individuals to get "paddled" because he wanted to ensure his members did not endure anything he had not personally encountered. This example also shows how he leads by example, another attribute discussed by Dawson (2012, p. 116). By getting paddled in front of the congregation, Jones portrays himself as a role model. Should he demonstrate an ability to withstand pain, it stands to reason that you should be able to do the same. When leading by example, it makes people willing to make sacrifices for them, according to Dawson (2012, p. 116). Another attribute discussed by Dawson (2012, p. 116) is how a charismatic leader can make personal connections with whomever they meet, no matter how long the encounter is. Stephan mentioned how Jones was different in his message during public and private congregations. In public congregations, Jones shared a message of social justice framed in religious terms. As previously mentioned, Stephan described his father as a chameleon, a person who knew what to say and how to say it with every encounter. In his final speech, a switch in tone and urgency was noticed. As discussed, an increased tone of urgency is noticed after Jones's conversation with Christine Miller. Stephan described his father as insecure and always wanting to be in control, and when a leader has resistance, that could create a

vulnerable place for the leader, as it creates room for more resistance. During the final speech, one could argue that after Miller´s resistance, Jones became stressed and therefore had to change the message. Jones's stress probably increased as Miller was not the only resistant party among the members. According to Carter, he recalled how Marceline, Jim Jones's wife and Stephan mother, was very resistant on the fatal night in November 1978. In the speech, Jones is heard saying "mother, mother, mother, mother, mother, please, mother, please, please, please, don't, don't do this, don't do this … lay down your life with your child, but don't do this." (Jim Jones, 1978, 36:38-37:04). Jones is, apparently speaking to Marceline at this point. This encounter is towards the end of the speech, and his increasingly urgent discourse is especially evident. From Jones's message to Marceline, he is heard telling the children "to hurry" (Jim Jones, 1978, 39:11). This part of the speech shows how Jones's charismatic leadership is changing for the worse, as more people are resistant to his power.

The finalized analysis in Chapter 5 shows how charisma is seen from above, while discussing the experiences from individuals, one can see it from below. When considering charisma from above, the focus is on the leader and their abilities, meaning how the leader appears charismatic. In Chapter 5, I analyzed Jones's use of rhetoric and discourse, and how he portrayed himself as a prophet, savior, and protector. Although the analysis discussed how he appear charismatic in his final speech, this chapter has been able to discuss how they experienced his charismatic leadership. The relationship between a leader and their followers is very crucial. A charismatic leader is not able to withhold their power unless they have loyal followers who contribute to maintaining their charisma. Dawson (2016, p. 116) describes charismatic authority as relational, not something the leader has, but something that arises in the relationship between leader and follower. Prophet (2016, p. 41-42) furthers Dawson's description when she highlights the process of charismatization. This process explores how charisma is created and maintained by followers who confirm the leader's special status, both through actions and beliefs. Followers are deemed important as they generally bring in recruits to the group. Likewise, Johnson (1979, p. 316) points to how charismatic leadership requires continual social reinforcement. An example used by Johnson (1979, p. 316) is how a leader claiming to have magical powers, the leader has to demonstrate miracles periodically. Stephan and Cartmell recall how Jim Jones would use healings and psychic powers as a hook to draw in new members. Cartmell describes how Jones's "powers" convinced Cartmell's mother it was real:

> In order to gain reputation, he basically put on this whole act about being a psychic. And that was, he was good enough at it to really fool a lot of people who, they sort of, like my mother, she felt that Jim had it all. He was a great con man. He was great at it.

According to Stephan, Cartmell, and Carter, the healings were, however, a hoax. Although they were not real, some members did believe in them, and according to Stephan, members who did not believe in either healings or other practices, knew that Jones's had to do it for "them" – defined as those who were required to observe it to maintain their belief in the mission. There were, apparently, various practices done for various groups within the Temple to ensure everyone's needs were recognized. Another method to reinforce his power was to foster dependency of members on the leader and their group to fulfill their social, emotional, and material needs. According to the three individuals, the dependency was fostered due to many families being involved in the Temple, meaning, if you left, you left your entire family. Additionally, many members moved their families to Redwood Valley to contribute more to the Temple. Considering the Temple provided food and community, the individuals may have felt, after a while, a dependency on the group. Especially since a large percentage of the Temple included a marginalized group whose needs were more fulfilled within the group than in the larger society. Another important note is the various exoduses. As seen in other religions, such as Moses and the ancient Jews searching for a land of "milk and honey" or the Puritans who fled to North America from religious persecution in England to find a "city upon a hill", Jones sought redemption for his followers in collective religious migration to a promised land by leading his congregation to California (Hall et al., 2000, p.28), and then later on the exodus to Guyana. Cults are vulnerable to violence by society, and therefore, as a solution, they seek an isolated environment, which is not unfamiliar with utopian communities as well (Johnson, 1979, p. 318). Many Black Americans had experienced racism and violations towards them by the American society; therefore, when Jones promoted "The Promised Land", Jonestown, he promoted a new society, excluding, i.e., race. Stephan and Carter acknowledge how Jones would make the American society an enemy to the Temple, but it did not need much convincing, as many members felt misunderstood and marginalized within the larger society. Jones made a real situation worse.

6.2. Apocalyptic dualism

In addition to Jones's prominent charismatic leadership, is his ability to use apocalyptic dualism and religion. This subchapter explores how the (ex-)members experienced Jones's "Us vs. Them" and siege mentality. In the final speech, the apocalyptic dualism is evident; however, for the interviewed individuals, it was not as prominent. The experiences of the individuals are analyzed and compared to the findings previously outlined in Chapter 5, in addition to relevant theories from Chapter 3.

6.2.1. *The Peoples Temple as a Religious Group*

Tim Carter's first reaction to my thesis was its focus on apocalypticism, as he does not view the Peoples Temple as an apocalyptic movement. As a survivor, you may want to distance yourself from simplistic or negative labels. It is understandable that the Peoples Temple is not perceived as an apocalyptic group in the traditional sense. However, in light of academic theories of apocalyptic thinking, there are clear features of the rhetoric and developments in Jonestown that make this category relevant analytically, without reducing the complexity of the movement. As mentioned in Chapter 3, apocalyptic rhetoric is marked by confidence, urgency, and hostility, thriving in alternative or outsider groups. The urgency and hostility towards the larger society were evident when Jones decided to move the Temple to Guyana and create a new society. Post-apocalyptic 'other-worldly sects' distance themselves from a society they believe is in its final days, retreating to an isolated utopia where they view the present world as a thing of the past (Hall et al., 2000, p.24). Hall exemplifies here how the group fits under apocalyptic groups, as they wanted to create an isolated utopia. They distanced themselves from the larger society during the impending exposé (Kilduff & Tracy, 1977) on Jones and the Temple. Jones's leadership was about to be exposed, and therefore, he moved his group to Guyana. Carter acknowledged in our conversation that the exposé was the ultimate reason for the move. Although Carter does not recognize the Temple as an apocalyptic group, multiple aspects of the group are relevant within categories of apocalypticism.

The final speech discloses various religious discourses. As discussed in Chapter 5, he proclaimed to be a prophet and a savior multiple times during the speech, and both Stephan and Cartmell recall Jones claiming to be a prophet, or even God, multiple times in his sermons. Hall et al. (2000, p.19) explain how Jones increasingly took on the mantle of a prophet warning of an impending capitalist apocalypse. He worked towards creating a

socialist utopia for those who embraced his message. In chapter 3, the concepts of post-millennialism and pre-millennialism are discussed in the light of theory. If you look at them as apocalyptic worldviews, and not in the classic Christian theological sense, you can argue that Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple went from one view to another. The Peoples Temple began with post-millennialist ideals, characterized by the belief that a better society could be built through social justice, community, and political activism. Jonestown was the culmination of this vision. But as Jones' worldview became more characterized by paranoia and enemy imagery, it evolved into a premillennialist narrative, where the world was doomed and only death could bring true salvation. Wessinger (2012, p. 91) highlights how new religious movements are often associated with millennialism, but they are not inherently millennial. A millennial movement may, or may not, have a prophet and/or a messiah. Jones claimed to be a prophet, and whenever a prophet proclaims a new revelation, heightened millennial or apocalyptic belief helps to create a sense of urgency. This motivates people to join the movement and radically change their faith and lives. Wessinger's descriptions are valuable to understand the Peoples Temple in terms of apocalypticism, as it points out aspects that are relevant to Jones and his leadership, which has also been acknowledged in the interviews. Jones promoted a new utopian community and claimed to be a prophet leading his people to salvation, which became much more prominent in the speech, which will be further discussed in section 6.3.2. The promised utopian community was ruined by defectors, according to Jim Jones.

6.2.2. *Us vs. Them*

In the final speech, Jim Jones blames Deanna Mertle (later Jeannie Mills) and Timothy Stoen for what is about to happen (Jim Jones, 1978, 04:38-04:55). "He brought these people to us, he and Deanna Mertle" (Jim Jones, 1978, 04:52-04:55) – referring to Timothy Stoen. Both Mertle and Stoen were early defectors and were a part of the Concerned Relatives, where Mertle was a co-founder. Stephan explains how Jones instinctively knew he had to avoid alliances within the group, as it could lead to sharing concerns regarding his leadership, which could have resulted in more defectors. Jones spoke of many threats, according to Stephan, where fascism and a police state were some prominent threats. Stephan expressed how the Temple had many members of color who had evidence that the government did not care for them, "My father certainly fanned those flames, but I think people picked the message they wanted to latch on to", Stephan said. Carter explained how the community was on edge and paranoid, not because of Jim Jones, but because Jones took something real and

magnified it with something not real. Carter exemplifies it by explaining how the members believed mercenaries were a threat, as, according to Carter, members of the Concerned Relatives had previously mentioned how they would hire mercenaries to collect their children. In the final speech, Jones used this information to further the threat to the members when he explains how "they will parachute in here on us", meaning the mercenaries (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:57-03:02). Jones had an increasingly pessimistic view of the outside world, and utilized the us vs. them which created a siege mentality, an impression of constantly being attacked and oppressed.

Carter explains how "he [Jones] wanted to create a state of siege mentality. He wanted to create an us versus them mentality. And he succeeded. He even told his son, Jimmy Jr., always give them a crisis. He was a master at diversion". Carter exemplifies Jones' tactics of further creating a siege mentality, and furthering the enemy image of defectors. An event in Jonestown, later referred to as "The September Siege", consisted of gunshots being fired into the Jonestown community. As the Concerned relatives had previously mentioned hiring mercenaries, the members, apparently, believed the Concerned relatives were behind the gunshots. Carter explains that he believed they were behind it until he got out of Jonestown, and the survivors shared their experiences. According to Carter, a survivor shared details on this event and how he was ordered by Jim Jones to fire the gunshots into the community. Jones wanted to create crises to ensure the members' focus did not divert, so the focus was not on the real issue, which was Jones himself, according to Carter.

Jones adopted an eschatological dualism. Although the focus within eschatology revolves around the end of the present world, many new religious movements encourage the good-evil dualism (Partridge, 2009, p. 191. Partridge (2009, p. 205) describes the Peoples Temple as characterized by a dualistic, millenarian eschatology. This worldview divides the world into two: a good, saving inner group and an evil, threatening outer world. In this context, the members are the good saving group, while the American society and defectors are considered the evil and threatening. This worldview serves as a key to interpreting the world, i.e., a hermeneutic key, which affects how leaders and members understand events around them (Partridge, 2009, p. 205). This leads to what Partridge refers to as semiotic promiscuity, meaning that the group sees signs and threats everywhere and interprets all external events as confirmations of their beliefs. This reinforces Jones's role as a messianic figure, reinforcing a

pessimistic view of the world. Jones saw himself as a savior, portraying the outside world as broken and dangerous.

As previously mentioned, the members of the Peoples Temple knew of negative connotations towards themselves, and as mentioned by the individuals, the fear and belief that American society did not prioritize them was not unknown. Jones did, however, use those fears and beliefs to his advantage. How Jones used that information to his advantage is evident in the experiences explained by the (ex-)members and in the final speech. The following examples presented in Chapter 5: "We can't go back… there's no way we can survive" (Jim Jones, 1978, 03:47-03:55) exemplify how Jones reinforced the us vs. them mentality, as he eliminates any possibility of reconciliation with the outside world. Jones presents their problem in the speech as if the followers only have two options: choose to die with him or be destroyed by the outside world. In the final speech he continues persuading the followers by saying "I´ve lived for all, and i´ll die for all" [strong applause] (Jim Jones, 1978, 06:13-06:16), and "I´ve always taken your troubles right on my shoulders" (Jim Jones, 1978, 10:23-10:25). These examples from the speech show how Jones presents himself as a leader who want the best for his people, so why would he lie? As Jones himself expressed in the speech: "I'm telling you just as plain as I know how to tell you, I've never lied to you… I never have lied to you." (Jim Jones, 1978, 02:57-03:02). As Jones has worked to ensure their loyalty for him, these examples are not just examples of his rhetorical skills, they also present a real part of their worldview which Jones acknowledges and intensifies to create a greater threat.

6.2.3. *Invisibilization of Alternatives*

The worldview created by Jones intensified during their move to Jonestown, as the group became isolated from the larger society. The worldview and the members' isolation, however, started when they were located in America. Stephan explains how he had little knowledge of the outside world and how to manage it. Similarly, Cartmell explains how it was difficult to leave the church and start a life in the regular society, as many knew only of the society within the Temple. Stephan, as previously mentioned, tried to leave multiple times without success. Stephan explained multiple times how it was difficult to leave the positives from the Temples behind, as well as family and friends from within the Temple. Additionally, Stephan highlighted that one of the reasons for his struggle to leave was his lack of knowledge of the "real world". He and others only knew of what his father preached. As defectors were considered enemies of the Temple, it can be highlighted how Jones wanted to

antagonize various aspects that could contribute information and clarity about American society. This could contribute to more people wanting to leave the Temple, which was a fear for Jones. He was concerned that the members would gain a real understanding of the community, and became even more concerned when several of the defected contributed to the exposé of Jones. This article emphasized the practices of Jones and the negative aspects of his leadership.

As Jones's position as a leader became threatened by the exposé, he moved his congregation to Guyana. As already discussed, the move may have reinforced his position of power and further created a fear within the Temple. In the final speech, the soteriological dualism is evident. Soteriological dualism concerns salvation (Stetler, 2009). During the speech Jones confidently emphasizes that their solutions are within the Temple and not "out there", he is the only one who could save them. Jones says in the speech:

> If the plane gets in the air even … so my opinion is … that we be kind to children and be kind to seniors and take the portion like they used to take in ancient Greece … and step over quietly, because we are not committing suicide, it's a revolutionary act. We can't go back they won't leave us alone … They're now going back to tell more lies, which means more congressmen … and there's no way, no way we can survive.
>
> (Jones, 1978, 03:26-03:58)

In this passage, he explains to the followers why they do not have any other choice. He includes presumable enemies, defectors, and congressmen. When discussing how "they are now going back to tell more lies" Jones refers to the defectors and members of the Concerned Relatives, which means more congressmen, referring to how the Concerned Relatives brought in Leo Ryan to the community, and now they are in this predicament. Jones carefully blames earlier members for the fatality that is about to happen, and confidently exemplifies how they are not able to survive in the real world. The only salvation is drinking the poison and be "free at last" (Jim Jones, 1978, 37:13). In the presented passage, Jones mentions Greece and how they used to take the portion in ancient Greece. One could argue that Jones is referring to Socrates' suicide, as he drank a portion himself (Plato, 1928, p. 9). Socrates met his death "without fear, as if divinely guided" (Plato, 1928, p. 12), which may have been the reason Jones mentions it in his speech. Jones uses various religious and philosophical aspects to

justify their fatal destiny. By then, also referring to himself as a prophet, he presents himself as a guide towards salvation, wanting to save his followers from an inhumane world.

6.2.4. *Tim Carter's Narrative: "The last thing in the world I ever thought was that the biggest enemy of the group was the leader itself"*

Although Jones tried to present himself as a savior, some of the survivors did not see him as that. Tim Carter was one of the members who joined the Peoples Temple because of the cause, and not the leader. Carter survived the fatal event in Jonestown, and provided an emotional description of his experience on the day of. He conveyed a deep feeling of betrayal as he said "the last thing in the would I ever thought was that the biggest enemy of the group was the leader itself". He expressed how he moved to Guyana because he believed in what they were building, and could see his son living there and eventually having children [referring to his son having children].

As previously stated in the methodology chapter, a limitation of the analysis was the tape itself. According to Carter and Stephan, Jones would stop and start the recordings during his sermons, which, according to Carter, he also did during his final speech. He would stop the recordings if anyone disagreed with his message.

> I can tell you that the sounds that I heard, specifically
> Jones and Marceline, where Marcy was screaming, stop this,
> you have to stop this, you have to stop this.
> This was at the very beginning. That does not show up on the tape.
> And I know because Jones had control over the tape recorder itself.
> He would give a signal to the person who was recording whether to
> turn the tape on or off at the time.

Carter further explains how Jones referred to Marceline when saying "mother, mother, mother (...)" (Jim Jones, 1978, 36:38-37:04). Therefore, although Christine Miller seems to be the only resistant member during the tragedy, some parts may have been edited out by Jim Jones and his elite members. Carter further explains that the applause heard on the tape came from Jones's trusted members on the stage. Carter explains:

> The only people who were applauding were the people

on stage with Jones. There were no big cheers in the background.
Nobody was going, yeah, yeah, Christine, shut up.
You know, which is another reason why the tape can be so misleading.
The people who were up and around Jones and security and stuff,
they were the ones who were shouting her down and applauding and stuff.

This indicates possible issues when analyzing the speech. As previously analyzed, Jim Jones employed several rhetorical strategies in his final speech to reinforce his charismatic authority and justify the apocalyptic vision he had for his followers. Through pathos, logos, and kairos, he manipulated the emotions of his members and created a sense of immediate threat that could justify the violent act of collective suicide. In the reflections of Tim Carter, who witnessed the beginning of the mass killings, we see a clear picture of how Jones' rhetorical skills contributed to the shock reaction of his members. Carter describes how he became "out of his body" in his experience of seeing his son being poisoned. This is a powerful illustration of how Jones' words and his presence on stage, combined with the psychological pressure he exerted, had a total impact on his followers' ability to act critically in the moment. Carter said: "I asked a question and from the time I asked the question to the time I got off the stage, was just seconds, and Gloria had tears just streaming down". When we look at the rhetorical analysis of the speech and the personal testimonies, it becomes clear that charismatic authority is not just about the words spoken, but how they are designed to play on the emotions of the member and undermine their ability to think critically. As Carter experienced, when Jones spoke as if he were "the only salvation," it became difficult to understand the alternatives that existed outside his authoritarian framework. Closure of the events is impossible as there is a lack of necessary data (Smith, 1982, p. 111), which is illustrated by analyzing Carter´s experience with the tape itself.

6.3. Reflections in Retrospective

Concluding the interviews with the (ex-)members, the following question was raised: "If you were to formulate a sentence or two that captured either the entirety of Peoples Temple, Jim Jones, or your experience, what would it be? What would you want people to understand about your experience?" The purpose is to reflect on the respondents' responses. It is significant as it has the potential to convey wisdom that will benefit the reader, whilst simultaneously offering insight into the respondents' reflections following their experiences.

> I appreciate the question. I think the most important is encouraging people to allow themselves to see themselves in a story. I presented my writings in a way which is: this is how I see it, and I think it makes them approachable.
> So that's one example. But step out of being a judge or a voyeur. And allow yourself to see yourself in the story. Not that you necessarily have to say that you could have been one that would have gone through with suicide or anything like that. But I think we have a lot to learn from what happened in the temple.
> And if we allow ourselves to see ourselves in it and how we could be in it. And I think we have a lot to learn that can inform us in this time especially as to how we want to show up, how we want to find our voice, what's the most effective way to trust ourselves and speak up for ourselves and talk to each other.

Stephan's answer can be interpreted as self-reflection and collective learning are important aspects which is often forgotten. Stephan invites empathy and reflection. He wants people to see themselves in the story instead of judging from the outside. This challenges the reader to recognize that everyone has the potential to end up in extreme situations, an important point when studying sects and apocalyptic groups. The statement can be interpreted as an attempt to comprehend how individuals can become carried away, not because they are weak, but rather because they are human. Individuals involved in cults often express a desire for change, whether on a personal level or in the broader societal context. Should the desire for change be strong, there is a risk of being carried away. Although Stephan opposed his father's leadership, he was able to comprehend the reasons why people were captivated by the facade his father maintained. The response provided offers a valuable insight into the extent of this understanding.

Tim Carter answered: "I would say that the only true teacher, master, guru, and leader is within, period.". He emphasizes inner authority and doubts external conductors. Tim says that the only true teacher is within ourselves. It is an expression of inner authority and can be seen as a critique of external, charismatic control. As Carter found Jones through his spiritual journey, one can point out how he has subsequently gained a growing understanding of

considering himself his teacher. This can be seen as a confrontation with external charismatic authority. He sees charisma as potentially dangerous, a way of handing over personal responsibility to someone else. It rejects the idea that anyone outside ourselves should have the power or wisdom to lead us. Charisma is an illusion that people should see through; true authority comes from within.

Lastly, Michael Cartmell expressed his skepticism towards self-proclaimed "great men":

> Do not believe in great men. There are no such beings. At best, there
> are only ordinary people who confront, out of necessity, great challenges.
> And anyone who thinks other than that is someone you should stay away from.
> There are no great people. Just ordinary folks like you and me.
> Be very suspicious of anyone doing that. Why do they need to say they're great?
> They want to control.

Like Carter, Cartmell highlights skepticism towards leaders, especially people who call themselves "great men". This can be seen as a fundamental distrust of charismatic leaders, where it is emphasized that "greatness" is often linked to the need for control. He reveals charisma as a power strategy disguised as vision or inspiration. Anyone who claims to be "great" should be met with skepticism. Cartmell's statement refers to some of the criticism of Weber's definition of charisma. Dawson (2012, p. 117) and Riesebrodt (1999, p. 1-2) point out how Weber's concept of charisma is both unclear and somewhat based on religious and "magical" notions. Cartmell's statement contributes to this criticism by showing how charisma in practice can be used as a tool for control, rather than as a legitimate, "natural" leadership quality. When Cartmell says that one should be skeptical of those who claim to be great, he suggests that charisma is something that is often constructed to legitimize power, and does not necessarily come from something genuinely "extraordinary" within the individual. In this way, Cartmell's reflection functions as an afterthought to Weber's theory, seen from the inside.

6.4. Conclusion

This analysis has explored the various perceptions and experiences of three survivors of the Peoples Temple, namely Stephan Ghandi Jones, Tim Carter, and Michael Cartmell.

Their reflections have given profound insights into Jones' charismatic leadership and apocalyptic dualism, as well as their lived experiences within Jim Jones' group. Each survivor provided unique perspectives shaped by their personal roles, relationships with Jones, and their positions within the Temple, while also contributing to an understanding of the dynamics at play in Jonestown.

When Stephan Jones explained: "We had to create threat. We had to create drama, ways for him to present himself as the great revolutionary leader as he hid out in the jungle". He was able to explain how the rhetorical technique that Jones used to strengthen his charismatic authority created a constant sense of threat in order to maintain the drama and his role as the only solution to this threat. Through apocalyptic imagery and his control over how information was presented to members, he achieved a form of total control over their thoughts and actions, which made it easier for him to push his followers to the extreme actions they eventually took. Jones needed to manage people's perception of him and wanted to keep his image. When this image was threatened after the visit from Leo Ryan, and some of the members wanted to leave, he created a situation that needed an extreme solution.

In retrospect, however, the (ex-)members have gained a broader understanding of Jones's leadership. A common comparison made by all three individuals was the similarities between Jim Jones and the sitting president of the United States, Donald Trump, specifically their ability to converse with anyone and know how to reach their audiences. It is thought-provoking how three individuals who experienced a charismatic leader intimately all acknowledge the same attributes in an active political leader in America. This comparison perfectly demonstrates the importance of this thesis, as it creates an outline of how to recognize charismatic leaders today.

7. Summary and Final Reflections

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing key findings and discussing how the research question has been addressed through theoretical perspectives, rhetorical and discourse analysis, and qualitative interviews. It also reflects on the broader implications of the study. As Jim Jones once said, “Those Who Do Not Remember the Past Are Condemned to Repeat It.” Ironically, this quote captures the aim of this thesis. As outlined in the introduction, this project set out to examine the significance of charismatic leadership and apocalypticism when applied by influential figures. Jim Jones served as the primary example to demonstrate how such influence can be used destructively, concluding in mass death. This thesis sought to explore the following questions: *How are Jim Jones’ charisma and apocalyptic beliefs conveyed in his final speech, and how were these aspects interpreted by former members and survivors of the Peoples Temple?*

To answer these questions, three methodological approaches were employed. To investigate how Jones’s charisma and apocalypticism were expressed in his final speech, rhetorical and discourse analysis were conducted. These methods were influential in assessing both what was communicated and how it was conveyed, both of which were essential to understanding Jones’s charismatic authority and apocalyptic worldview. The speech analysis revealed his strategic use of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos to foster emotional loyalty and justify collective suicide. He repeatedly referred to children and the elderly to generate sympathy and moral urgency. Although the speech began in a calm tone, it shifted to frustration as the situation escalated, evident when he ordered his followers to “Stop this hysterics” (Jim Jones, 1978, 36:06). Through rhetoric, Jones succeeded in framing mass death as a revolutionary, even honorable, act. His authority was not only projected, it was actively sustained through the process of ‘charismatization’, as described by Prophet (2016, pp. 41-42).

Apocalyptic rhetoric was also strongly present in the speech. Jones referenced ancient Greece, possibly alluding to Socrates, to legitimize their collective suicide. He employed an "us versus them" narrative to portray the outside world as evil and irredeemable. By presenting himself as a prophet and savior, he offered his followers an apocalyptic worldview in which survival required total compliance. This fatal combination of charismatic authority and apocalyptic belief was central to the tragedy.

These themes also emerged in the interviews with three former Peoples Temple members. They described Jones as a skilled and manipulative communicator who developed his authority over time. Their accounts offered nuance to the speech analysis in Chapter 5. For instance, Stephan and Carter suggested the tape was edited, and that supportive voices came primarily from elite members near Jones on stage. This casts doubt on the interpretation that most members gave enthusiastic consent. The interviews emphasized the contrast between rhetorical implementation and lived experience, reinforcing the need to analyze such phenomena from multiple angles.

The theoretical perspectives from Chapter 3 proved valuable in framing these findings. Jones clearly embodied many aspects of charismatic leadership described by Dawson and Weber. However, the thesis has also emphasized how charisma and apocalypticism are mutually reinforcing; neither fully explains Jones's power on its own. His charisma was intensified by the urgency of the apocalyptic narrative, while the plausibility of the narrative depended on the credibility he had cultivated. The combination proved to be fatal. The interviews also introduced more critical insights into how charisma functioned as a form of control, not only inspiration. This supports the view that Weber's framework, though useful, benefits from supplementation with more contemporary and critical perspectives.

Theories of apocalyptic dualism also contributed meaningfully to the analysis, as Jones clearly positioned the world in dualities: good versus evil, salvation versus damnation. Yet, the interviews reveal that not all members internalized this worldview in the same way. Some acted out of hope, others out of fear or resignation. This underlines how theological or ideological systems intersect with psychological and social dynamics. In this context, apocalypticism became not only a belief but a device for control and justification for violence. The potential manipulation of the speech recording further demonstrates the importance of combining rhetorical analysis with interviews and source criticism.

In the end, this thesis has shown that the relationship between charisma and apocalyptic belief is dynamic, multifaceted, and deeply consequential. While rooted in the case of Jonestown, the findings point toward broader implications. Charismatic leadership intertwined with end-time rhetoric continues to surface in contemporary political and religious movements. Future studies might examine how such mechanisms manifest in today's authoritarian regimes, cultic movements, or digital communities. Moreover, the challenges of memory, source material,

and retrospective testimony suggest the value of interdisciplinary methods and ethical sensitivity.

By combining rhetorical analysis with survivor testimony, this thesis has demonstrated how language, belief, and power can converge in ways that reshape reality for followers, at times with fatal consequences. Jones's leadership was not merely emotional or irrational; it was strategic, methodical, and reinforced through isolation and discipline. Including the voices of those who lived through Jonestown has added complexity and depth to the study, reminding us that charisma and apocalyptic belief are not abstract concepts; they are experienced and lived. By understanding these forces better, we not only gain insight into a historical tragedy, but we also equip ourselves to recognize and respond to similar dynamics in the present.

To answer these questions, three methods were chosen. In answering how Jim Jones's charisma and apocalyptic beliefs were conveyed in his final speech, both a rhetorical and discourse analysis were utilized. These methods were essential in analyzing not only what Jones communicated but how it was communicated, critical to understanding both his charisma and his apocalyptic worldview. The speech analysis revealed how Jones used rhetorical devices such as ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos to emotionally connect with his members during a crisis and ensure their loyalty. He used emotionally charged language, frequently invoking the vulnerability of children and the elderly to frame the group's collective suicide as merciful and necessary. Although his tone was at first calm and composed, it shifted to one of frustration as the situation unfolded, exemplified in his command to "Stop this hysterics" (Jim Jones, 1978, 36:06). Through these rhetorical strategies, Jones framed mass death as an honorable act of defiance. His charisma was not simply innate; it was reinforced by the charismatization process described by Prophet (2016, p. 41-42), which emphasizes the crucial role of followers in constructing and sustaining charismatic authority.

Apocalyptic rhetoric was likewise evident in Jones's speech. He employed religious references, including parallels to ancient Greece, perhaps alluding to Socratic suicide, to give historical legitimacy to the group's actions. His message was consistent: death was preferable to capture or submission. He created an us vs. them mentality, presenting the outside world as evil and irredeemable. This polarizing worldview intensified group cohesion and isolation. Jones presented himself as a savior and a prophet, claiming exclusive insight into what was

best for his followers. Together, his charismatic leadership and apocalyptic vision fostered an environment where loyalty equaled survival, and questioning him became unthinkable. The speech is a case study in how language can be weaponized to justify extreme actions.

These rhetorical themes were not only apparent in the speech but were echoed and complicated by the perspectives of former members of the Peoples Temple. In interviews with three survivors, it became clear that Jones had developed his authority over time. They described him as a chameleon, an adaptable and persuasive speaker who built trust gradually. Their reflections challenged some interpretations made in Chapter 5. Both Stephan and Carter, for instance, suggested the tape had been edited and that the enthusiastic voices heard were those of elite members on stage. These insights challenge the surface reading of the speech, which suggests broad member consent. The interviews reveal a more fractured, complex reality and underscore the limitations of treating the speech as a complete account. Through this juxtaposition, the thesis highlights the gap between rhetorical performance and lived experience, reinforcing the need for a multi-perspective approach to understanding power and control in closed communities. By studying the past through these lenses, we may better understand and perhaps prevent similar tragedies in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Control questions:

1. Name
2. When they joined the Peoples Temple
3. Relation to Jim Jones
4. How long they were a part of the church, and why they left

Questions regarding charisma:

1. How would you say Jones' charisma was present during sermons, his preaching etc.?
2. Were you ever convinced of his message, or were you always opposed to it? Seems as though you are against it in your writings and interviews.
3. A charismatic leader's position is always in danger, and therefore, they always need to adjust to make sure they do not lose their power. Do you feel like Jim Jones had to do this? In what ways, if so?
4. Can you recall a specific moment where Jones's charisma had a profound effect on you or others? What happened?
5. Did you notice any change in his charisma from the early Peoples Temple days to Jonestown? If so, how did it evolve?
6. Did you notice any switch within his charisma, for example, in private and public? What happened?

Questions regarding apocalypticism:

1. Jim Jones had a clear vision of the society you lived, but how did he convey this view to his members? Did he express them in sermons?
2. Did Jim Jones have a clear vision of the afterlife and the apocalypse? In what way?
3. Did he have to convince his members of his own beliefs, or do you feel like most people believed him from the get-go? (If the last one, why do you think they just believed him?)
4. How did Jim Jones use fear of external threats (e.g., government persecution, nuclear war, racism) to strengthen his apocalyptic messages?

5. Did he ever express doubts about his apocalyptic visions, or was he fully convinced of them?
6. How do you see the relationship between his apocalyptic views and the final events of Jonestown?
7. In Jonestown, do you think isolation from the outside world intensified members' belief in his apocalyptic teachings?
8. He did present himself as a prophetic figure or someone with a divine mission regarding the apocalypse, but in what ways did he do this?

Final question:

If you were to formulate a sentence or two that captured either the entirety of Peoples Temple, Jim Jones, or your experience, what would it be? What would you want people to understand about your experience?

Extra questions – Tim Carter:

1. Is it true that Jim Jones would alter with the tapes, meaning he would ask the people recording to stop and start at various points during his speeches?
2. Would you characterize the last meeting, as a white night meeting or no?
3. Do you know who he is referring to when he's saying "mother mother mother please" in the tape?
4. Did you survive because Jim Jones gave you a mission where you had to leave the pavilion etc.?

Extra questions – Michael Cartmell:

1. What were these beatings you controlled the waivers of? Did they stop at some point? Did the people being beaten have to sign that it was okay? Could you clarify this point
2. In your reflection on "why we left" you mention these catharsis meetings where people were punished and criticized in public. Do you remember ither ways of punishment than beatings, and when did these meetings happen? From the beginning? Did no one react in that moment?
3. In addition, you mention your lost faith in Jim's leadership. Did you ever witness anyone question his tactics and beliefs in public? Or were everyone silent, and therefore one did not know who was against and who was for?
4. Could you explain what designated successor means in Temple terms?

Appendix 2: Information Letter

Would you like to participate in the research project

On Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic conviction?

This is an invitation for you to participate in the research study on Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic conviction. In this document, I will provide you with information about the goals of the project and what participation will entail for you.

Purpose of the project

My name is Marthe Grindheim and I am a teacher education student at the University of Bergen, at the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies, and Religion (AHKR), where I am currently writing a master's thesis in religious studies. In this thesis I am exploring how Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic conviction/rhetoric is present in his final white night speech, as well as in his everyday speeches and sermons.

The purpose of the project is to get a better understanding of the interplay between charisma and apocalypticism. The project aims to get a deeper understanding of his charismatic leadership, as well as his apocalyptic visions and conviction, which he shared with his members. My current working thesis goes as follows: *How is Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic rhetoric portrayed in the final White Night speech, and what is the interplay of charisma and apocalypticism?*

Some of the recordings will be saved for later use if the recordings contribute to a deeper understanding of the religious leader, as well as the religious group. This is on the basis that it may be interesting for later students to have a greater understanding of later events and of the concepts of charisma and apocalypticism.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are receiving this request because you are a survivor of Jonestown, or because you were a part of the Peoples Temple. I believe your insight would be valuable for my master´s thesis, and that you would contribute with valuable information on the topic.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural and Religious Studies at the University of Bergen is responsible for processing the personal data in this project.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. There will be no negative consequences if you choose not to participate or if you later decide to request the deletion of your data.

What does participation involve?

I will gather the data through a semi-structured interview. This means that we will have a conversation with a flexible interview guide that allows for deeper discussion around relevant topics. The interview will last around 30-45 minutes, however the time is flexible.

The interview will, with your consent, be recorded and transcribed. The following personal data will be collected: name, age, and relation to Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple. Recording the interview will make it easier for me to participate in the conversation.

Privacy and data protection

We will only use your information for the purposes described in this document. Your personal data will be handled confidentially and in accordance with privacy regulations. You can read more about privacy protection below.*

Sincerely,

Marthe Elin Axland Grindheim
Master's student. University of Bergen
E-mail: Marthe.grindheim@hotmail.no / pum016@uib.no
Phone: +47 415 81 690

Supervisor:

Alexander van der Haven

Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, AHKR
E-mail: alexander.haven@uib.no
Phone, work: +47 555 88 600

You can read more about SAFE by clicking on the link below.
https://www.uib.no/safe

Further details on privacy – how we store and use your data

Access to personal data during the project period: During the project period, only the research group at the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural and Religious Studies at the University of Bergen will have access to your personal data. This includes me as researcher and supervisor Alexander van der Haven. My supervisor will also have access to relevant information where necessary for guidance and assessment of the research work. No other researchers or external institutions will have access to your personal data during this phase, unless agreed in advance and approved by the relevant ethics committees.

Access to personal data upon archiving: As the project enters the archiving phase, access to personal data will be restricted. Only institutions conducting research will be able to apply for access to the archived material. It will be accessible to research institutions all around the world, however, access will only be granted after thorough assessment and approval. Any sharing of data will follow strict requirements for privacy and data security.

Disclosure of personal data: The following information may be disclosed in a research context: Gender, age, religious affiliation and other demographic data necessary for the analysis. This information will initially be anonymized before further use and disclosure. No personal information that can directly identify you, such as name or contact information, will

be disclosed without your express consent. It is important to note that this information would be available if the master's thesis were to be published, as the names will be in the thesis.

Securing personal data: To ensure that no unauthorized person has access to the personal data, all data will be stored on a secure research server at the University of Bergen, which is encrypted and access restricted. Names and contact information will be replaced with a code that is stored separately from the rest of the data material. This list of names will be stored on an encrypted server, separate from the research data, and only I as a researcher will have access to both data sets during the project period. All physical documents, such as consent forms, will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university.

Publication of research results: The names, ages, workplaces and positions of the participants will be published in the final publication, in line with the purpose of the research project and the consent of the participants. The participants will be identifiable in published works, and no other personal data than those mentioned above will be published.

Data processor and processing outside the EU: If it becomes necessary to use an external service for transcription or data processing, we will only use suppliers that comply with GDPR regulations and guarantee the security of your information. It is, however, not planned that personal data will be processed outside the EU/EEA.

What gives us the right to process personal data about you?
We process your information for purposes related to scientific research, and because the research project is considered to be in the public interest. We have taken measures to safeguard the privacy of those registered.

On behalf of the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural and Religious Studies, the privacy services at Sikt – the Knowledge Sector's service provider, have assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

What happens to your personal data when the research project ends?

The project is scheduled to end on May 15, 2025. The information will then be stored further with the consent of the participant. The information will be stored on the basis of teaching purposes. The information will be stored at the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural and Religious Studies. The data material may be made available to a selection of students. The data will be stored indefinitely, unless the participant does not wish it to be stored.

Your rights:

As long as it is possible to identify yourself in the data material, you have a number of rights, including the right to request access and deletion. Read more here: https://www.datatilsynet.no/rettigher-og-plikter/den-registrertes-rettigher/

Questions

If you have any questions or would like to exercise your rights under the privacy regulations, please contact:

- Supervisor:
  Professor Alexander van der Haven
  Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural and Religious Studies, University of Bergen
  Email: alexander.haven@uib.no
  Work phone: +47 555 88 600

- Master's Student Researcher:
  Marthe Elin Axland Grindheim
  Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural and Religious Studies, University of Bergen
  Email: Marthe.grindheim@hotmail.no / pum016@uib.no

- Data protection officer at the University of Bergen:
  Janecke Helene Veim
  Email: personvernombud@uib.no

If you have any questions related to Sikt's assessment of the project, please contact us by email: personverntjenester@sikt.no, or by phone: 73 98 40 40.

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Consent Form

I have received and understood information about the project Jim Jones' charisma and apocalyptic conviction, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I consent to:
[**tick those you agree with**]

- ☐ Participating in a semi-structured interview
- ☐ Allowing the student [Marthe Grindheim] to provide information about me for the project – if applicable
- ☐ My information being published in a way that makes me identifiable, such as name and connection to Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple – if applicable
- ☐ That my information is stored after the project is finished to be used in a teaching context

I understand that:

- The supervisor is Professor Alexander van der Haven, and he can be contacted for questions regarding data privacy.
- My information will be treated confidentially, and security measures will ensure that no unauthorized persons gain access to my data.

I consent to my data being processed until the project is completed.

Signature of participant, date