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The Cultural Politics of Evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Brendan Jamal Thornton

Committee in charge:

Professor Keith E. McNeal, Chair
Professor Robin L. Derby
Professor Sara E. Johnson
Professor Nancy G. Postero
Professor Joel L. Robbins

2011

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Cultural Politics of Evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic

by

Brendan Jamal Thornton

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor Keith E. McNeal, Chair

My dissertation, *The Cultural Politics of Evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic*, is broadly concerned with questions of religion, identity and culture. Through ethnography, I explore the dynamic intersections of religious identity, culture and morality as they are lived in the context of urban poverty. Based on over two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Villa Altagracia, Dominican Republic, my dissertation examines the lives of Pentecostal community members and the ways in which they negotiate identity, status and power in the context of religious heterodoxy and Catholic cultural supremacy. My dissertation contributes new insight

into the dynamics of religious heterodoxy and pluralism, religion as strategic identity, and Pentecostalism as an important social and cultural institution at the local level.

Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious denomination in the Dominican Republic. This dissertation is concerned with the social and cultural effects of this growth at the local level and the ways in which Dominicans put their faith to work in their everyday lives. Pentecostalism in the Dominican Republic, because it is an entrenched feature of barrio life, features prominently in everyday negotiations of identity, status, and power. As such, Pentecostalism is an important vector in identity politics at the local level as well as social process and communion throughout the country.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I explore exchange in the religious field and the relationship between Catholicism, Dominican *vodú*, and Pentecostal Christianity in the barrio and show how meaning is both shared and contested at the local level. In the second chapter I outline a politics of distinction at the center of local Pentecostal practice and show how Evangelical identity enables converts to transcend hierarchies of stigmatizing difference. In the third chapter I explore the relationship between the church and youth gangs. I explain the simultaneous popularity of both institutions for young men and conclude that both offer residents popular alternative spaces for critical agency and oppositional culture. In the last chapter I locate Pentecostalism within the context of Dominican ideas about masculinity, fidelity, and morality and explain how believers use Christian identity to claim respect in their communities.

INTRODUCTION

Christianity in the Dominican Republic

Christianity is the single most relevant cultural institution in the Dominican Republic.¹ The ‘discovery’ of the New World set into motion social dynamics that would create a Dominican cultural world characterized by a deep Christian spirituality and worldview. In conversation with African-derived beliefs brought to the island along with enslaved labor, and later informed by evangelical charismatic forms of Protestantism, Christianity, and indeed religious conviction, has been an undeniable locus of historical, political, and social change in the region.

As a feature part and parcel of Dominican culture, Christianity (broadly defined) forms the central organizing referent for Dominican moral worlds. Central to virtually every significant historical event in the country from discovery and colonization of the island to its struggle for independence, to political reform and rhetoric today, Christian culture is the frame within which the Dominican Republic has realized both its own identity as well as its historical and national agency. Christianity, as it has been in virtually every part of the New World, continues to be a structuring element so significant and pervasive in Caribbean life that we must take account of the growth and transformation of Christianities, and of the religious field, not solely as a project concerned with understanding religion in practice, but in order to understand culture and cultural change more generally. To not take account of the meteoric growth in popularity of the evangelical movement here or anywhere

¹ I make a distinction between generic Christianity, by which I mean a generalized all-inclusive notion of Christianity, and various divisions or denominations of Christianity such as Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, etc.

throughout the Western Hemisphere is to ignore an important, if not central course in the social and cultural history of New World societies and peoples.

In a study of the worldview of the public throughout Latin America it was found that 80.4% of the Dominican population sees Dominican politics as a battle between good and evil (From Vanderbilt University's "Latin American Public Opinion Project"). That was the highest of any Latin American or Caribbean country polled. This is a particularly striking example of the powerful influence of Christian thought on the Dominican Republic. The tendency to see politics as a battle between good and evil is indicative of a society that tends to see relations of power as having both righteous and wicked aspects. The tendency to divide social life into two opposing values, to perceive reality in terms of good and evil, is indicative of a deep and pervasive Christian worldview that permeates Dominican cultural and social worlds. This sentiment represents a profound orientation toward binary models of perception and explanation that figure everyday life in the Dominican Republic.

Evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic

Of course, the country's history of Christianity is importantly a Catholic one, at least initially, and it is upon this Catholic foundation that subsequent religiosity in the country is built. Catholicism has been at the center of the Dominican Republic's political, social and culture history from the beginning of colonization (Wipfler 1966). The observance of Catholic holidays, festivals, and saint's days throughout the year shape the flow of work weeks and vacation days and set the tempo for public celebration and communion. While the obligatory baptism of infants in the Catholic

Church is evidence more of the cultural impact Catholicism has had on the country than any indication of popular devotion or 'religiousness' of Dominican society, people who might not ever go to church consider themselves Catholic in the Dominican Republic because, it would seem, being Dominican means being Catholic. Catholicism is very much a part of national identity and the Catholic Church continues to be a powerful political force within the country at all levels of government.

While fundamentally Christian (historically Roman Catholic), Dominican religiosity is also broadly characterized by the influence of African-derived beliefs and institutions as well as those from neighboring Haiti. The influence of West African spirituality can be seen in widespread spiritual beliefs and religious orientations toward possession, magical healing, divination, polyrhythmic drumming/music, and a pantheon of African-derived spirits.

Ideas about what it means to be Christian in the Dominican Republic have changed since the expansion and entrenchment of evangelical forms of Protestant Christianity in the country. No longer the sole preserve of the Catholic Church, Christian authority is being seized at the local levels by Pentecostal congregations and pastors who claim true biblical inspiration and who profess to follow the divinely inspired teachings of Jesus. In an effective combination of austere religiosity, critical rhetoric, egalitarian worship practices, open membership policies, and cathartic emotional rituals, these churches have been embraced in every corner of the country (predominantly by the poor and popular classes) to fulfill the desires and to meet the material, emotional, and intellectual needs of Dominicans.

Los cristianos, in local vernacular, refers almost exclusively to evangelical Protestants and not, perhaps surprisingly, to practicing Catholics, clergy, or Catholic orthodoxy of any kind. In claiming (and in some cases taking) sole possession of ‘true’ Christianity, poor Pentecostals, most frequently from the popular classes, attempt to reconstitute themselves as effective and empowered spiritual agents, inverting Catholic orders of authority and hierarchy that deny religious titles, expertise and spiritual power to the general public. Pentecostals do this through discursive strategies aimed at redefining Catholicism as evil and through a politics of representation that attempts to validate Evangelical claims to religious authority and ‘true’ Christian provenance through ascetic practices and acts of differentiation and distinction. In this way, Pentecostalism participates alongside Afro-Creole religions in both its critical and revisionary potentials at the local level.

Today evangelical Christianity is everywhere in popular Dominican culture, from television, to movies, to popular music. Even Juan Luis Guerra, the most internationally renowned merengue artist of all, has converted! From popular movies like *Cristiano de la Secreta*, to television shows, to popular public events, to radio shows and evangelical Christian music channels, to “Jesus Saves” stickers, fliers and literature – Jesus, it seems, is everywhere you turn.

Evangelical Christianity is not a separate sphere, perceived as a foreign import, or regarded as an obscure marginal cult, rather, it is an integral part of Dominican society and culture, dynamically engaged in the social drama, and as much a part of

everyday life in the Republic (especially for barrio residents) as any other cultural, political, or religious institution.

Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious denomination in the Dominican Republic. It is becoming politically significant at national and local levels (for a good discussion of the Evangelical Church and national politics in the Dominican Republic see Betances 2007). This dissertation is concerned with the social and cultural effects of this growth at the local level and the ways in which Dominicans put their faith to work in their everyday lives. Pentecostalism in the Dominican Republic, because it is an entrenched feature of barrio life, features prominently in everyday negotiations of identity, status, and power. As such, Pentecostalism, and religious identity more generally, is an important vector in identity politics at the local level as well as social process and communion more generally.

Pluralism

As elsewhere, people in the Dominican Republic seek religious solutions to problems that cannot be solved by secular means (this includes the search for meaning as well as answers to life's problems). The proliferation of religious 'options', indeed what some observers have called the development of a 'religious market place' or 'religious economy' (Chesnut 2003), has dismantled the Catholic monopoly on faith in Latin America and the Caribbean and made available a panoply of strategic, supernatural options aimed at solving a myriad of life's issues. That such pluralism

exists is clear, however, what such pluralism means to everyday life and individual believers is less clear.²

Religious pluralism and heterodoxy play an important role in barrios throughout the country. Heterodoxy is nothing new to the Caribbean and has been the very thing that Caribbeanists have invoked to locate and characterize the socio-cultural and historical specificity of the region for years. Glissant (1995) has observed that for Caribbean people, meaningful and pervasive diversity is a “basic reality.” The heterogeneous nature of Caribbean cultural forms and productions are the result of the fantastically diverse populations that were responsible for populating the islands and their subsequent encounters in the New World.

Never quite fitting the ‘ideal’ subject for anthropological inquiry, Caribbean societies have long been viewed as awkwardly ‘complex’ (Trouillot 1992: 21, Mintz 1974, 1974a). Modern and not modern, Western yet non-Western, global and yet local, the Caribbean region is for the foreign anthropologist an elusive subject of many contradictions. Benítez-Rojo (1992: 1) maintains that the main obstacle to any study of the Caribbean’s societies are “exactly those things that scholars usually adduce to define the area itself: its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical continuity; its contingency and impermanence; its syncretism, etc.” Because of this complexity, the traditional analytic tools and taken-for-granted assumptions upon which social scientists and anthropologists have relied for so many years have

² For a very interesting and enlightening discussion of religious pluralism and what it means to the ethnomedical culture of Haiti, see Brodwin 1996.

undergone significant critique and revision when brought to bear on the dynamic cultural systems of the modern-day Caribbean.

Mintz (1971) has argued that Caribbean societies share more in the way of 'social-structural' features than any unified or shared 'cultural' tradition. Among a number of major commonalities, Mintz highlights the adaptive social practices that developed in response to intense westernization, lengthy colonial exploitation, diverse ethnic populations, and a rather 'special economic history' (41). These points of commonality shared across the Caribbean are socio-historical in character and reflect the major comparative contexts from which the Caribbean as a socio-cultural area might be read. The legacy of colonialism, slavery, and the plantation system form the nexus of modern Caribbean history and society and shapes both its internal similarity/unity and its diversity/difference (Mintz 1974).

The Caribbean has a long and complex history involving the intersection of Christian and African religious beliefs that have coalesced at different times and in varying degrees to shape the religious and cultural landscape. Three historical processes especially stand out in the religious development of the region: the establishment of Christianity as the preeminent religion in the colonies after European conquest and colonization; the development of syncretic religions based on African religious forms brought to the New World by slave populations; and the subsequent and relatively recent arrival and entrenchment of evangelical charismatic forms of Protestant Christianity, namely U.S. Pentecostalism. The mutual and inter-effective development of these domains reflects a history of domination and resistance based on

social stratification and hierarchical relations of power (Taylor 2001, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2003, Turner 1997, Khan 2003, Bolland 1992, 2005, Austin-Broos 1997, Burton 1997).

Christian orthodoxy has been the religion of status and power throughout the Caribbean since the establishment of the first churches nearly 500 years ago (Nettleford 1978: 20). The supremacy of the Christian orthodoxy is underscored by the prestige it enjoys as “the religion of advanced civilization” and reinforced by “the place of eminence Christian Church leaders enjoy in the hierarchy of Caribbean officialdom” (19). The Church’s historical alignment with the state and its association with esteemed European cultural values has sustained the privileged status it enjoys in relation to all other religious institutions. Raymond Smith (1976) argues that Christianity in the West Indies, following emancipation, came to symbolize “the stable integration of society around the core elements of the colonial social order,” while the persistence and growth of alternative or even opposed religious forms “have equally symbolized differentiation and conflict” (315).

The Cultural Politics of Evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic

The third important focus of religious change in the Caribbean, the growth of evangelical and Pentecostal Christian denominations, has received less attention and fewer studies have focused on the relationships between religious institutions at the local level and what this heterodoxy means to individual believers.³ How do

³ While studies of evangelical Protestantism, Pentecostalism, and conversion in Latin America are bountiful (see Burdick 1996, 1998, Martin 1990, Smilde 2007, Brusco 1995, Willems 1967, Lehmann 1996, D’Epinay 1969, Chesnut 1997, Stoll 1990, Steigenga and Cleary [eds] 2007, Corten and Marshall-Fratani [eds] 2001, Glazier [ed] 1980, Boudewijnse, Droogers, and Kamsteeg [eds] 1998,

Dominicans, for example, negotiate religious difference on a daily basis? How does religious heterodoxy shape religious and social life at the local level? What does heterodoxy mean to individual believers? These are important questions that still need unpacking. I address them here from the perspective of Pentecostalism: first, by exploring the relationships between religious institutions in the barrio; second by investigating the social and culture significance of evangelical identity at the local level; third, by outlining the relationship between evangelical churches and youth gangs; and lastly by locating evangelical Christianity within the broader socio-cultural milieu of the neighborhood and articulating its role within Dominican social and moral orders.

Chapter 1 examines how ideas about the divine and notions of good and evil are shared, negotiated, and contested across different religious communities. I am especially interested in how exchange occurs within heterodox/plural religious communities. In order to better understand the spiritual economy of the barrio, I triangulate the local religious field by mapping the symbolic and practical relationships between Catholicism, so-called Dominican *vodú*, and Pentecostal Christianity. In so doing, I illustrate how local patterns of belief related to the supernatural, particularly representations of spirits and demons, are interconnected and show how religious actors in the barrios constitute a diverse religious field wherein meaning is both shared and contested. I argue that Pentecostalism's critical, yet

Cleary and Stewart-Gambino [eds] 1997, for just a few examples), similar studies have been slower to materialize in the Caribbean despite similar patterns of growth and popularity across the region (a few notable examples are cited later). For the best (and to my knowledge one of the only) example of social science writing on Pentecostalism in the Dominican Republic, see the work of Marcos Villamán (particularly Villamán 1993, 1993a, 2002).

ironically dependent relation with other religious cultures is as productive as it is telling of social intercourse in the community. Such a view of the total religious field reveals a more fluid and flexible domain that both reflects and responds to the traumas, expectations, desires, and ambiguities of everyday Dominican life. As much about social relationships as religious discourse and symbolism, this section is a critical reflection on the meaning of religious heterodoxy and pluralism in context.

Chapter 2 concerns itself with the meaning of Pentecostal Christian identity in the context of everyday barrio life. I explain what it means objectively to be a *cristiano* for converts and discuss the ways in which an ‘in-but-not-of-the-world’ stance is cultivated by believers. In addition to outlining the politics of distinction and representation at the center of local Pentecostal practice, I show how important aspects of Christian identity in the barrio are negotiated publicly through the strategic modes of testimony, sanctity, and prohibition. I conclude that Pentecostal strategies of differentiation enable converts to claim new forms of self-worth and efficacy and that conversion facilitates new avenues of self-authorship otherwise unavailable to poor and politically marginal peoples. The oppositional posture of Pentecostalism vis-à-vis ‘the world’ engenders possibilities to transcend hierarchies of stigmatizing difference that condition life in the barrio even while enjoining believers to equally rigid forms of (self-)discipline and social sanction.

While Chapter 1 explores the church’s relationship with other religious institutions, Chapter 3 looks at the church’s relationship with an important secular institution: youth gangs called *naciones*. Both the church and youth gangs are

important and popular voluntary organizations in the barrio and both represent opposed yet complementary moral perspectives on life. I investigate their unique relationship in order to better understand the moral economy of the barrio, the particular character of community relationships, and the specific role Pentecostalism plays in the neighborhood for believers and non-believers alike. I show how both institutions function as structuring elements in the local community and how both, ironically, are interdependent. I explain, for example, why the only way out of a gang, once one has joined, is conversion to Evangelical Christianity. I also explain why Pentecostals and other Evangelicals are exempt from street violence and harassment from gang members. Considering the simultaneous popularity of both institutions for young men in the barrio, I conclude that both gangs and Pentecostal churches offer barrio residents popular alternative spaces for critical agency, oppositional culture, and identity construction.

Chapter 4, the final ethnographic chapter, looks more specifically at the church's relationship to Dominican social and moral orders. Locating Pentecostal and evangelical belief within the context of Dominican ideas about masculinity, fidelity, and morality, I chart the role of Christianity as it both shapes and is shaped by prescriptive value orientations at the local level. In exploring the significance of evangelical practice in the context of dominant orders of meaning, I show that Pentecostalism has social worth for believers and reveal the strategies by which *cristianos* claim respect in their communities. Drawing insight from Peter Wilson's dialectical model of Caribbean social relations, I outline a similar moral dialectic

obtaining in Dominican barrios based on the opposing and exclusive domains of *el relajo* and *el serio*. With a focus on men, I conclude that evangelical Christian identity enables believers to position themselves squarely within ‘respectable’ notions of masculinity where they are able to claim relative social rewards like prestige and respect based on hegemonic forms of social value. This chapter contextualizes evangelical Christianity in relation to Dominican society as a whole and articulates its role in shaping the moral economy of the barrio.

I have been, throughout this project, interested in how religious practice and identity shape social interaction and how social interaction shapes religious practice and identity. As I will show throughout this dissertation, evangelical Christianity, indeed the category of *cristiano*, is an important mediating factor in interpersonal and social relations. In the first section of this dissertation I show how religious heterodoxy and pluralism shape, and are shaped by, a politics of religious identity at the local level. In the second section I illustrate how the public performance of evangelical Christian identity is central to believers’ faith and strategies of self-representation. In the third section I explore the unique relationship obtaining between the church and youth gangs, explaining the role of Christian identity in local street politics and the simultaneous popularity of both the church and gangs with barrio residents. And, in the last section, I show how evangelical Christianity’s position within a bifurcated model of Dominican social relations plays a determining role in local meaning making schemes.

I do a lot here to dispel the myth that the Dominican Republic is by definition somehow essentially, totally, or irrevocably a Catholic country. In fact, to describe it as such is to say little if anything about the actual cultural organization of social life in many, if not most parts of the country and ignores important domains of meaning making for society's members. Even if less than 20 percent of the country considers themselves evangelical, the influence of Pentecostal and evangelical Protestantism is undeniably felt by everyone.⁴ I offer evidence here to suggest that evangelical forms of Christianity are deeply entrenched in the everyday social and symbolic worlds of Dominicans in complex ways, and most profoundly so for the popular classes.

Conversion

This dissertation is not about the origins of Pentecostalism or Protestantism in the Dominican Republic, its missionary history, or its historical expansion: that work has been done (see Lockward 1982, Platt 1981, Vega 1996, Wipfler 1966). This is also not specifically a study about why Pentecostalism is popular or why people convert. This dissertation is about religious identity, meaning making, and social dynamics in the Dominican Republic and beyond. It is about Pentecostalism in the barrios and what it can tell us about the cultural dynamics of social interaction, about the cultural strategies people employ for bettering their lives, and what it can tell us about how people put religion to work in the 21st century.

Since taking on this project I have been asked numerous times why people convert and why it is so popular in an otherwise Catholic country. Because people

⁴ Accurate estimates for the number of evangelical Protestants in the country are difficult to obtain or determine. Anywhere between 10 and 20 percent of the population is identified as having this affiliation.

convert for personal reasons, reasons that often vary dramatically from one another, it is difficult to give a simple or straightforward answer for why people convert. Scholars of Pentecostalism have offered a number of sociological reasons (e.g. Willems 1967), as well as cultural reasons (e.g. MacRobert 1988), as well as analyses of the structure of Pentecostalism itself, to account for its popularity in diverse locales all around the world. I myself have come to explain conversion in the Dominican Republic as a product of society and culture. Its popularity, I believe, can be attributed to a particular orientation toward receiving the message of conversion, an orientation that sees the church and conversion as both a reasonable and likely possibility in one's life. This orientation develops over time through living in contexts where the Pentecostal church plays an important role. I explore such a context in a neighborhood in Villa Altagracia, Dominican Republic where the church and its congregation contribute to a social environment that sees two legitimate and viable options for self-actualization and relationality – *la iglesia* and *la calle*, the church or the street. Through a process of social and cultural reproduction, this symbolic division of the neighborhood continues to limit and therefore influence life possibilities and the life choices of many barrio residents.⁵

Within this particular cultural environment, barrio residents have limited opportunities for social ascent and restricted access to social or political institutions that might enable this mobility. They do, however, have unlimited access to the

⁵ For a similar argument regarding religious conversion of young men in Caracas, Venezuela see Smilde (2007).

church and social institutions of the street, like gangs, and regular opportunities to join them.

In this dissertation I show the myriad ways in which Pentecostalism and Evangelical Christianity is an important and inextricable feature of the Dominican cultural landscape at the local level. In so doing, I also shed light on the social significance and purchase of evangelical identity and the pragmatics of religious identity in practice. This study shows part of what it means to be a Pentecostal Christian in the Dominican Republic, and part of what the institution means for members and non-members alike, highlighting the social and cultural impact of the church on local communities.

Religion, in fact Christianity, is critical in shaping the identity of barrio residents and the moral economy of the barrio. We see this in the relationship between official and unofficial members of the church, we see this in the youth gangs who derive their identity in opposition to and alongside that of evangelical Christians, and we see this in society's acceptance of a bifurcated reality, a Manichean worldview where good and evil are real forces that shape outcomes both socially and politically.

Research and Fieldwork in the Dominican Republic: Methods

Because I am interested here in popular culture and popular experience, I took seriously the words, thoughts, and feelings of my informants (all of whom come from the popular classes) and have chosen here to build the analysis principally on the words of my informants. This has, in my mind, always been the great potential and contribution of anthropology from the beginning: that is, an analysis of local

experience, of taking the ‘native’s’ perspective, listening to their story, and understanding meaning in context. It is what separates anthropology from philosophy (which too often, in my estimation, have been all too willing bedfellows). Anthropology is the quintessential interdisciplinary social science and its strength lies in its methodology and its modes of self-reflection. As such, I hope this dissertation *shows* more than it *tells* about the experience of evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic.

To shed light on ‘the cultural politics of evangelical Christianity in the Dominican Republic’, it was necessary to conduct ethnographic fieldwork.

With the help of a research travel grant, I traveled to the Dominican Republic for the first time in the summer of 2006 to conduct preliminary dissertation fieldwork. I stayed in the town of Ingenio Consuelo and in the capital Santo Domingo researching potential fieldsites, traveling the country, conducting preliminary interviews, and recording detailed observations. After returning to San Diego and advancing to candidacy the following year, I returned to the Dominican Republic to conduct my dissertation research in July of 2007, and remained there until March of 2009.

The bulk of my anthropological fieldwork was conducted with two Pentecostal churches in an urban barrio of Villa Altagracia, a municipality of the San Cristóbal province. I also conducted fieldwork in Pantoja/Los Alcarrizos and Santo Domingo. My research involved qualitative data collection and analysis using participant observation and ethnographic interviewing methods and procedures. I conducted and

recorded over 35 semi-structured interviews (of about an hour each) with 33 church and community members. My interview sample represented a cross-section of both churches and includes laity, leaders, recent converts, and visitors. I also interviewed local residents not affiliated with the church. I interviewed both men and women ranging in ages from 13 to 64 years old. I utilized a semi-structured interview approach using specific questions to help guide the data collection process and ensure a level of uniformity throughout. Interviewees were asked general and often open-ended questions regarding a range of topics from the nature and quality of social relationships, to patterns of identification and past and present associations, evaluations of self and community identity, statistical information, to questions about roles and statuses. I also collected narratives of conversion, personal histories, and asked people to reflect on their own values, goals, and positions in the community.

In order to understand the influence of evangelical Christian identity on certain forms of daily experience, interviews were conducted concurrently with extensive participant observation. I attended and observed church services, public and special events, informal community events, bible classes, prayer groups, ceremonies, and public and private gatherings. This level of participation was necessary to access the nuances of everyday religious life and to connect my broader theoretical questions to the lived experiences of my informants. In order to understand the full range of experience I observed the social interaction of church members outside of the church as well and surveyed relations in the public sphere and Dominican society at large. This meant spending a significant amount of time outside the church spending time

with members during the day, at work, in between jobs, and whenever possible.

Fortunately I was able to cultivate close relationships with many of my informants and was invited into many of their lives. This afforded me the opportunity to discuss informally many of the issues of culture and identity that are central to my informants' lives and central to the overarching theme of my research project here.

I lived in the Dominican Republic with my girlfriend at the time who is Chilean and a native Spanish speaker. Accompanying me on regular trips to the field, she generously served as an ideal and indispensable research assistant throughout the data collection portion of this project.

After returning to San Diego in March 2009, I began the process of coding my data, which consisted primarily of transcribed interviews and fieldnotes as well as other materials such as video, photos, literature, and DVDs. Through a process of 'open-coding' I identified themes and topics of particular interest and significance to my informants and myself. I then organized the data based on these groups of themes and topics. Reading them together, in this form, allowed me to see patterns and relationships within topics and across disparate sources and I began to piece together the story about Christianity in the Dominican Republic that I tell here.

Regarding Translation

All of the translations here and throughout are my own. The process of translation is not an easy one, as anyone who has been tasked to do so knows (and as the professionalization of translators attests to, as well as the existence of an entire discipline devoted to translation studies). People are trained professionally to do

translation – specialized training that I have not had the good fortune of receiving. It was my practice to balance as much an exact translation as possible while communicating what I understood to be the general intention and feelings of the speaker at the time of our communication. At times this has meant choosing clarity over specificity or exactness and at other times sacrificing coherence for honest reproduction. Block quotes and those within quotation marks are direct quotations, most of which were taken from transcriptions of audio taped discussions or interviews.

Almost all of the interviews that I conducted, along with a number of taped conversations, were transcribed in the Dominican Republic. It took over a year and more than three different transcribers to complete the transcriptions that I wished to use and analyze here. I would have liked to have been consistent and used only one transcriber but unfortunately time, resources, and other exigencies prevented this from happening. While all of the transcribers did, in my estimation, a phenomenal job, they did so within their own way and with their own expertise. None of them were professional transcribers and thus there were unavoidable differences and inconsistencies across transcriptions. For example, while one transcriber chose not to transcribe words that were repeated by a speaker, another did. While one transcriber may have transcribed the exact Dominican locution used by a speaker – *pa'* instead of *para* or *montao* instead of *montado* or *señol* instead of *señor* – another chose not to. This varied with experience and often times was not consistent even within a given transcription. Additionally, there was frequent and varied use of slang during some of the interviews and in some cases it was not transcribed to my satisfaction. Because of

these inconsistencies, I have chosen not to include the original Spanish alongside (above or below) my English translations.

There are, of course, some words and/or phrases that simply do not translate well into English from Spanish. So much so that at times I was left with no good options. In the event that I simply could not find a justifiable way of translating a thought or idea, I have chosen to leave it alone. Sometimes, however, a particular translation of a word or phrase is crucial to my analysis even while an 'exact' translation simply does not exist. In these cases I have chosen to include and discuss the idea in relation both to the original Spanish and my English translation.

The very act of translation is political, incomplete, never finished, and is a closing or destruction of meaning in as much as it is an opening, creation, and clarification of meaning. The politics of translation have been noted by a number of anthropologists as it relates to the project of anthropology (Rubel and Rosman 2003), and of course it was Clifford (1986) who was most effective at pointing out the constructedness and bias of ethnographic texts and the 'partial truths' these texts invariably tell in 'translating' one culture to the next. This does not mean that translation (of the spoken word, written text, or of cultural concepts, ideas, etc.) is impossible, or that it is impossible to know anything about any other people because of the practical requirements or literary conventions of 'doing ethnography'. Rather, one should be critical and upfront about the relations of production involved in creating an ethnographic account so that the reader might weigh, for him or herself, the relative merits of the account based on an honest rendering of the constructedness

of the knowledge produced within it. This means locating who, what, where, when, and how in relation to both one's self and his or her object of study (and his or her readers). In destabilizing the subjective/objective balance so characteristic of positivist anthropology (which continues to prevail today) we can still foreground the strengths of this methodology even while we recognize the limitations and conditions of ethnographic authority and begin to dismantle the historical relationship of exploitation between anthropology and the native Other (for a historical and critical discussion of the poetics and politics of otherness in anthropology see Trouillot 2003).

Translation, therefore, draws forth ethical concerns that are not easily resolved. The choices that I have made throughout, while honest and without malice, have done some violence to the original words and meaning I wish to reproduce here. That being said, it was necessary, within the norms of anthropology and the expectations and conventions of the academy, that do I so. I proceed at best with the understanding that it is better to say something, and allow the reader to take what they may from it, than to say nothing at all. Therefore, we continue on with the understanding that what has been recounted (or translated) here is my interpretation of meaning, and my interpretation alone.

Cultural Perspectives, Subjectivity, and the Etic Lens

What is to be described and analyzed in the following pages represents a perspective on the Dominican Republic from first a visitor, then a resident, then a researcher, but always an outsider. My perspective, informed by my education and personal experiences, colors the analysis found here. This is no different from the

influence or role my own subjectivity and identity played throughout the data collection process. My 'outsiderness' was both a boon and a handicap and room here does not allow for me to list what is perhaps an exhaustive account of how my identity helped and hindered data collection. Yet, despite my subjectivities, and my unique perspective, it does not mean that the data that I collected throughout my fieldwork is any more or less authentic, useful, or 'true'. My training as an anthropologist was as helpful in shaping my experience and understanding of Dominican culture as my upbringing, personal relationships, and commitment to understand and be a part of Dominican society.

Throughout this dissertation I use declarative sentences such as "Jesus heals those who believe" and "the devil tempts the living" for convenience's sake in order to avoid prefacing each such sentence with "people believe that" or "it is thought that," etc. I find it necessary to point this out because of the surprising number of scholars who write about Christianity, even from a social scientific perspective, that do so as 'believers'. Interestingly, many people assume, because I am writing about Christianity, that I must be a Christian. So, I offer the following anecdote to clarify my position:

I was fortunate enough in 2005 to take a graduate seminar with Melford Spiro on Psychoanalysis and Religion (it would be the last course he would teach at UCSD). Professor Spiro is, like other great intellectual minds, a skeptic of the highest order, and if not, a most serious methodological atheist. I remember him lambasting a student in class one day for proposing an alternative perspective on ghost beliefs:

“What would you rather we do?” he asked perplexed, “Pretend that ghosts are real?”

While I share Professor Spiro’s concern for objectivity and rigorous inquiry (after all, there is no empirical evidence for the existence of ghosts, yet people all over the world believe in them), I do not exactly share his unwavering confidence in positivism or scientism (Professor Spiro is in fact a devout atheist). There is no knowledge that can be derived about the world that is not conditioned by perspective or bias, and my insistence that ghosts are not real is as baffling to those who believe in them as such beliefs are to those who do not.

There is, then, something about the human condition which inclines (requires?) us to create a supernatural world. I am an anthropologist and my reading is that ghosts and other supernatural phenomena are ‘real’ because people believe they exist. As an anthropologist I credit culture with the existence of different systems of belief and perspectives on reality. As such, according to my socialization and enculturation, combined with my education as a social scientist, I have never and probably will never see a ghost and their relative existence will probably never challenge the taken-for-granted ways in which I see and interact in the world. I do not consider myself religious and do not claim to belong to a church or claim a religious community of my own. That being said, I do not naively believe that I have somehow figured out ‘what’s really going on’ or that I somehow inhabit a privileged perspective because I do not suffer from the ‘delusions’ of spirituality or religion. I have a situated and constructed worldview that both informs and is informed by my project as a social

scientist. That is, I have accepted as true a particular construal of reality that confirms and conforms to a Western-secular orientation.

My father is African American and my mother is white; her parents were Dutch and from the Netherlands. My skin tone is like that of many Dominicans and I was often if not regularly mistaken as a Dominican while conducting fieldwork. This had, from my perspective, both its advantages and disadvantages. For one, I was rarely harassed, followed, or otherwise taken advantage of by strangers. On the other hand, I was often confronted with awkward situations where I was expected to respond with cultural competence and aptitude, like a native Dominican, but failed to deliver. Such occasions were often embarrassing for me and at times insulting to others who thought I was somehow being rude, indifferent or pretending to be someone that they believed I was not (foreign, etc.).

My first visit to the Dominican Republic in 2006 was one of discovery and it opened my eyes to the unique shape of race, color, and ethnic relations in the country. I have spent my entire life in the U.S. considering myself black and when I went to the Dominican Republic I was not seen, identified, nor regarded as such. In fact, upon my first visit I was frequently described as *rubio* (blond) and my skin color referred to as *blanco* (white) (not to mention my hair, which was considered *pelo bueno* because it is soft and straight in relation to that of many other Dominicans). In the capital I was more often described as *indio*, the intermediate Dominican racial category between *blanco* and *negro/moreno* that is used to identify most Dominican skin color or racial

types. As an *indio* in the capital and frequently as a *blanco* in the countryside I was afforded a vast array of privileges (combined with those awarded by my foreign/American status) that gave me access, opportunity, and prestige almost everywhere I went. There were few if any places in the country that were off limits to me or that I could not go because of who I was and/or who I am. That was not the case for many dark-skinned Dominicans and others who found stores, clubs, taxis, schools, services, beaches, hotels, restaurants, bars, and homes closed to them because of what they looked like. Much has been written about Dominican racial categories and ideologies of race (Howard 2001, Sagás 2000, Hoetink 1970, 1985, Torres-Saillant 1998, Candelario 2007) but far less frequently have the implicit and explicit layers of racism in the country been discussed. It is not an easy place for dark-skinned people who are often harassed in public and treated poorly by neighbors and strangers alike. I have no doubt that my job as an anthropologist would have been significantly more difficult and my time in the country considerably less enjoyable if I had been born with darker skin. However, my light skin and privilege did carry with it its own challenges. Because of the marginalization and oppression of blacks, it was difficult to gain the full trust or confidence of those justifiably suspicious or resentful of my privilege – frequently dark-skinned Dominican men who are unfairly judged by a racist social structure and victimized by racist citizens. I found that telling others that I identify as a black person helped to ease discomfort in situations when my foreignness, light skin, perceived social status, and/or education weighed heavily on interpersonal interaction. Of course, all interactions with my informants became

easier over time as I became a regular feature at the church and became friends with members of the community.

Conducting Interviews

I found people to be very candid and honest in their interviews. Only very infrequently did I encounter any reluctance or hesitation in answering my questions and only in rare cases did I ever receive dodgy answers. Anthony, in particular comes to mind. A seriously reformed individual, I could see the uneasiness with which he approached questions about his past. He brushed them aside, did not answer them, or responded with a scripted, rehearsed, or programmed answer at best. But this was understandable. He feared reversion back to his old self and fought hard to relive the past through his testimony with any detail.

I wondered, before conducting fieldwork, if people were going to be honest with me. At that time I understood honesty to mean entirely candid and utterly self-reflexive. I found that people were honest, but not in the sense that I had initially thought. Importantly they told me what they wanted to tell me and what they wanted me to know about themselves. This self-reflexivity (and not the critical reflexivity I had naively expected) played an important role in the details and ways in which my informants discussed Christianity with me. The Christian ideas and practices that they discussed with me at times described an infallible belief system and utopian future. I often asked informants to describe themselves – not to record an objective description of identity but rather to understand how certain individuals came to see themselves in particular cultural worlds shaped by particular discourses of belief, faith, masculinity,

fidelity, and community. There were others, however, who were amazingly self-reflexive and who offered me a picture of themselves in the world that was ripe with contradiction and fallibility. Through our interactions, and through our structured interactions in the form of interviews, I learned a lot about my informants, not just from what they told to me, but also from *how* they told me, and what they chose to highlight.

Evangelical Christianity in the barrios is about positionality, distinction, and self-representation. Whether people are trustworthy or not is beside the point, it is that they represent themselves as such and whether, in turn, others will recognize them as such. This negotiation with me as an ethnographer was no different from the everyday negotiations over meaning and identity that Pentecostals partake in with others in the neighborhood. In all cases they drew from a familiar cultural script, made reference to difference and distinction, and tried to convince me of their enlightened and ameliorated alterity in terms of the church and conversion.

From day one of my fieldwork I explained to everyone the nature of my research and my reasons for being in Villa with them. I was candid from the beginning and my informants were told that I was not a Pentecostal and that I was not there as a believer or with the intention to convert. My main informants, along with the congregations of both churches, respected this fact and I was never asked to join the church and never asked to participate in any activity in any capacity other than as an observer. Having been met with such respect and hospitality, first as a stranger and

then later as a friend, I cannot help but be a sympathetic observer and analyst in the last instance.

House Keeping

I tend here to use Pentecostal, *cristiano*, Evangelical, and Christian as synonymous throughout. I do so in part for convenience's sake as well as to communicate the meaning and usage with which Dominicans employ the terms. Of course, depending on whether someone is referring to a male or a female Christian in Spanish, they would say *cristiano* or *cristiana*. Again, for convenience's sake I have used *cristiano* throughout (instead of *cristiano/a*, or *cristian@*, etc.). I have followed this same general rule with other Spanish words as well, choosing the masculine form over the feminine, but I could just have easily and happily have done the reverse. Quotation marks are used to denote a direct quote and apostrophes to mark emphasis, paraphrases, translations, and uncertainty.

Villa Altagracia: “Un Pueblo Caliente” / “El Pueblo Profético”

Villa Altagracia, named after the patron saint of the Dominican Republic *Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia* or “Our Lady of High Grace” is one of eight municipalities of the San Cristóbal province and is located roughly 30 kilometers northwest of the capital city of Santo Domingo. In what is considered the southwest region of the country, ‘Villa’, as it is referred to by residents, is located along *Autopista Duarte*, a 270 kilometer stretch of highway connecting Santo Domingo, Santiago (the Republic’s second largest city), and the northern coastal town of Monte Cristi. The municipality covers 426 square kilometers and is home to around 78,000 residents, with a little over half of the inhabitants living in rural districts and the rest in the ‘city’ itself.⁶ Thanks to rain that falls on an average of 200 days a year, Villa is lush and green with rivers and forests that neighbor residential communities. Villa is tucked at the foot of a small mountain range and is crisscrossed by three rivers where people bath, swim, and even fish. Interestingly, Villa can be found not only in a short wikipedia article, it also has its own website, which, according to the webmaster, was created in 2007 for residents, past residents, and “children of Villa abroad” who want to stay connected with the local community and keep up with local events and happenings (<http://www.villaaltagrancia.net/>).

I visited Villa for the first time in February of 2008. Moisés, a man whom I had met through mutual friends in the capital, had learned that I was interested in

⁶ I hesitate to use the term city because while the sheer number of people may qualify Villa as a city, the size, pace, and feel are more akin to that of a town.

Pentecostal Christianity and invited me to his church.⁷ I did not have a car so getting to Villa was a matter of public transportation. Anyone who has taken public transportation in the Dominican Republic, or the Caribbean for that matter, can appreciate the risks involved when trying to get from here to there. During my two years in the country I experienced a number of hair-raising moments and found myself in a few dangerous situations. None of them compared to the multiple trips I would take weekly to Villa in *carro publico*. The trip itself is notoriously dangerous. This particular stretch of highway takes the lives of motorists and passengers on a seemingly regular basis.⁸ It was common to see fellow passengers say a prayer before taking off from *Kilometro Nueve*, the last transit stop out of the capital, on our express route to Villa Altagracia. Joined by the *chófel'*, or driver, and no less than five daily commuters, we would pack into a rundown Honda Civic in the late afternoon heat and brave the chaotic and congested traffic out of town.

It takes about 30 minutes to reach Villa in *carro publico* from the capital. Just off the exit at the entrance of town is built a very large shrine devoted to the virgin Altagracia. The statue within is a three-dimensional representation of Altagracia as she is depicted in the “miraculous” image housed at the basilica in the town of Higüey. The shrine sits at the entrance to the main road that runs through town and cuts through most of the barrios. Along this road one encounters the central plaza, or ‘*el parque*’ as it is referred to, the main *colmado*s (large bars) in town, and most major

⁷ In the interest of confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect the identity of my informants.

⁸ 8,000 people died in traffic accidents in the Dominican Republic over a six-year period from 2003-2009 (CLAVE: May 7, 2009).

cross-streets. Along Duarte, the main road, are most of the central commercial businesses as well as the central baseball field, and the old *ingenio* (sugar mill). Merengero Sergio Vargas, perhaps Villa's most popular resident, was responsible for the public works project that saw many of the main roads in Villa paved. Despite this effort however, much of Villa remains unpaved and the streets that are paved remain in poor condition.

Villa Altagracia is a place of extremes. From the outer lying *bateyes* (some of the poorest communities in the country) to the *fincas* (estates, usually in the countryside) of Sergio Vargas and other wealthy citizens, a simple drive through town will reveal both extremes of poverty and comfortable opulence. But Villa is, on the whole, very poor, not only for rural residents who suffer the greatest conditions of poverty but also for most barrio residents in the city itself; life is a struggle for most. According to a 2002-2004 report by the World Bank, 41.5% of the province of San Cristóbal live beneath the national poverty line, compared with 36.5% for the country as a whole. According to a local study conducted in 1993 of poverty throughout the country (*Informe Focalizacion de la Pobreza Segunda Edicion*), Villa Altagracia ranked fourth among all municipalities with 10,344 homes in poverty, or 78% of all homes in the municipality. Of those homes 4,293, or 32%, were considered to be in extreme poverty. According to a national study (*Atlas de la Pobreza*) published in 2005 but citing information collected in 2002, 58% of homes in Villa were impoverished, and 9% in extreme poverty, down considerably from the decade before. Much of this transformation was due to the success of free trade zone factories and the

attending increase in employment opportunities. However, according to a 2008 publication (*Dominicana en Cifras*) based on studies by the national office of statistics (*ONE* or *Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas*), in the span of just 4 years, from 2003-2007, Villa Altagracia went from having 2,013 jobs (generated by free trade zones or ‘*zonas francas*’) in 2003 to having only 228 by 2007. This significant loss of jobs has led to an exodus of residents and an overall loss of population.

Before becoming Villa Altagracia, the community in and around today’s municipality was called Sabana de los Muertos (Geron 1980). Sabana de los Muertos was sparsely populated until 1926 when a developer, Ulises Henríquez, built the first permanent hotel in the area which in no time became an important area for social and commercial exchange. It was not until 1936, when the town was elevated to the category of ‘municipal district’, that the name was changed to Villa Altagracia.

For forty years Villa was a central town for sugar production in the region. Before the *ingenio* was built, Villa was a rural community where most people made a living doing light agriculture, raising livestock (primarily pigs), and small farming. Most people worked their own small land holdings until the arrival of the United Fruit Company, which bought up large plots of land for banana cultivation. Many people in the area stopped working their own land in order to work on the plantation as salaried employees of the banana company. Many people moved to the area during this time as well, which accelerated the process of urbanization in the area. By the late 1940’s the banana plantations were converted by Trujillo to grow sugar, and in 1948 the *ingenio* Central Catarey was built.

As well as being a central part of the Dominican economy at the time, the existence of the *ingenio* created relative economic prosperity in the region. The sugar mill provided jobs and economic security to many workers and was responsible for the influx of people and the raising of the town. It became a prosperous community. It was also during this time that many Haitians migrated or were brought as laborers (*braceros*) to work in the cane fields in and around the *ingenio*. They were housed in small, rudimentary settlements around the *ingenio* called *bateyes* that remain today. In 1961, a paper factory (*la Industria Nacional del Papel*) opened which further made Villa an attractive place to find work for people looking for better economic opportunities (the factory has also since closed).

Villa experienced considerable change in the 1980's and 90's due to the decline of sugar production and the change to garment export processing. The move from agricultural exports to that of manufacturing exports has had a great effect, not just on Villa, but the on the entire country. Since the original colonization of the islands, economic growth in the Caribbean has depended on the export of goods. Historically, the island of Hispaniola has relied on the production and export of sugar, primarily, as well as coffee, tobacco, and fruit. Since the 1960's, the Dominican Republic has moved relatively quickly from an agricultural economy based chiefly on sugar exports and import substitution industrialization to a service economy dependent on tourism, export manufacturing, and agribusiness (Safa 2002: 14, Safa 1995). With the fall of sugar prices in the early 1980s, emphasis quickly shifted to export manufacturing. The *ingenio*, or large state-owned sugar plantation, which sustained

Villa's economy for more than 40 years closed in 1986 due to decreased productivity, the fall of sugar prices, and a devastating cut in U.S sugar quotas to the country. The sugar mill was Villa's principal employer. A free trade zone took over the existing buildings, including a large, Korean-owned garment plant that employed about 2,500 workers (mostly women). Helen Safa, a sociologist of women and development in the Caribbean, has noted that Villa represents a microcosm of the changes from sugar production to export manufacturing that has occurred in the Dominican Republic on the whole since the 1980s (2002: 15).

Few jobs exist in Villa anymore. Many of the traditional sources of employment that residents in Villa have relied on in the past, either in the factories or in the fields, are no longer available or no longer exist. Wilfredo, a long time resident, moved to Villa in the early 1970's from *el campo* ('rural areas'). There were few houses in his neighborhood then, and Villa was still quite small. He began working at the *ingenio* at the age of 13 and made a very respectable two pesos an hour. It was also during this time that gold was discovered in a nearby mountain and a mine was built that brought more jobs to the area, at least for a short period of time. Wilfredo describes Villa as much more vibrant, and in fact more "crazy," 20 years ago when people had jobs and more money to spend. At one time there were six *fabricas* (garment factories), now there are two according to another informant. Today, *el Citrico*, or *Consorcio Cítricos Dominicanos*, a fruit processing company, along with *Agua Santa Clara*, a water bottling plant, are the largest employers in town. Companies such as the Korean owned *BJ&B* (which has since left and been replaced

by an apparel outfitter for universities named 'Alta Gracia' operated by Knights Apparel out of South Carolina) as well as *T.K. Dominicana*, who produce hats and other garments for companies like GAP and Banana Republic continue operations in the free trade zone, but have drastically reduced their number of employees.

The absence of local jobs has forced many residents to commute to the capital for work.⁹ Some work as taxi or bus drivers, national police or military, some as caretakers and maids, etc. A number of my informants made this commute everyday. Others worked further away in places like Higüey, Bona0, or at the resorts and hotels in places like Bavaro. They would leave on Monday morning and not return to Villa until the weekend to be with their families. Others worked more erratic schedules in the *campo* sometimes only seeing their families once a month. Maria, a mother of ten, looks after her children alone because her husband works in La Vega and returns home only once every 15 days. Alternatively many people have moved or migrated to the U.S., Puerto Rico, Argentina, Spain, Providencia, Martinque, or some other country with the hopes of making enough money to send back to their families. At least three of my informants had parents that lived abroad and sent money home to Villa. Juanita, a 16 year old girl whom I had met on my first trip to Villa, lived with her father, step-mother, and two younger brothers because her mother had moved to

⁹ Because of long commutes, parents are often absent during the day and frequently at night as well. Migration to the States and other countries also takes parents away from the home usually leaving their children with extended family members or alone with either their mother or father. Because parents usually must travel far to work, children are left at home to look after themselves. Consequently, it is common during the day to see kids as young as two years old playing by themselves in the streets while their six or seven year-old siblings plays with friends nearby. All ages of kids roam the streets. At any given time one will see groups of kids in the barrio playing.

Argentina to work as a domestic servant. Radames, a young man we will meet later, had very little contact with his father who had moved to New York when his son was just a child. Remittances from residents abroad are estimated to be about \$3 billion dollars annually and many Dominicans rely on these funds to cover basic necessities like food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and education.

Both Josefina and Maria worked at the Korean-owned garment plant or *fabrica*, when it was open for operations. Josefina began working at the *fabrica* shortly after moving to Villa at the young age of 14. She was not old enough to work there legally so she purchased an identification card (*cedula*) with a different birth date so that she could be hired. Her husband, Denny, was 25 at the time and made very little if any money. Josefina described her work at the factory as very taxing. She worked from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. without food and felt hungry and exhausted daily. She endured mainly out of necessity. Josefina and her husband were renting space in a home and after working nine months at the *fabrica* their first daughter Karla was born. Josefina's cousin took care of their daughter so that she could continue to go to work long hours. After their second and third children were born (Mayalin and Junior), Josefina and Denny moved into a vacant house where they live today. She left the *fabrica* after Junior, their third child, was born because it was too difficult to leave her children with someone else ("it is hard to find a place to put them when you go to work" she explained).

For the average worker at the *fabricas*, long hours and a demanding environment were routine. The Koreans were notorious for treating people like

animals and I heard nothing but contempt for them if ever they were mentioned. Factory rules emphasized high productivity, discipline, and obedience (Safa 2002: 18). According to both Josefina and Maria it was a great paying job where they made a minimum wage close to US\$50 a week. Today a typical week at the *zona franca* will net an average employee about DR\$1,529 or about \$45 dollars a week (*Oficina Nacional de Estadística* 2008, “San Cristóbal en Cifras”). Safa (2002, 1995) has noted the stark transformation of the gendered division of labor brought about by the introduction of export manufacturing jobs, an industry that chiefly employs women.

By 2008, when I met most of my informants, few of the women I interviewed worked traditional or wage paying jobs. Josefina, for instance, did just about anything she could to make money. Her husband Denny had lost his job as a taxicab driver because the car that he had owned and operated broke down and there was not enough money to fix it. As a result, Josefina took a greater role in the family’s moneymaking enterprises. She is perhaps one of the most clever, resourceful, and capable people I have ever met. It appeared to me that there was very little that this woman did not or could not do. Most of the time she worked from home doing a variety of tasks. Whether in the morning, afternoon, or evening by candlelight, I would regularly see Josefina at work. She would either be making curtains on her sewing machine, carving intricate designs into wax candles that she had shaped and molded, or literally making furniture sets by hand for people around town on the roof of her house. Ironically, Josefina explained to me that she only worked twice a week: Tuesdays and Thursdays when she gave classes on how to make curtains and bed sheets. She

occasionally gave classes on how to make candles as well. Additionally, about once a month Josefina would make a trip to the capital to buy clothing in order to resell it (for a slight profit) out of her home to neighbors and friends. All of this generated some kind of income in either the sale of furniture, candles, drapes and curtains, reselling marked up clothing, or through selling a skill or 'technique' to others like how to make candles, for example. She charges \$500 Dominican pesos (or about US\$14) per person for the class.

The informal economy is where most people make ends meet. For the San Cristóbal province, 60% of workers are employed in formal-sector jobs and 35% work in the informal sector (*Oficina Nacional de Estadística* 2008, "San Cristóbal en Cifras"). This statistic does not say, however, whether workers employed in formal-sector jobs also make money in the informal sector. Although people also rely on extended family networks to resist poverty and make ends meet, according to my observations, most households earn some income in the informal sector, be that through contract labor, looking for houses to clean, or just 'hustling'. Some of my informants had skilled trades like carpentry and masonry but often had trouble finding work. A young man by the name of Renato had worked as a cabinetmaker and mechanic at various different times but was unemployed for the greater part of the year I got to know him. He worked irregularly, assisting others with temporary jobs as they came up. And Wilfredo, who ran a successful body shop (collision repair, painting, etc.) out of his yard, supplemented much of this income by purchasing totaled cars, completely rebuilding them, and selling them off for a small profit.

Wilfredo's business was successful enough to allow him to employ at least three other people at any given time to assist him.

Lack of reliable employment opportunities in and around town is only one of the everyday challenges faced by Altagracianos. Despite occasional protests by residents, Villa, like much of the rest of the country, has severe shortages of electricity and regularly lacks both potable and running water. Most people have water for only a few hours a day and often do not have running water for days on end. People collect rainwater in buckets to drink, clean the house, and wash clothes. Many people store rainwater in big barrels because there is no relying on the fact of water on any given day. Blackouts (*apagones*) are an everyday nuisance and few people can afford their own generators. On good days the electricity would function for about 6 hours, usually for a couple hours in the morning, the late afternoon, and again after 9:00 p.m. However, one could never rely on the electricity to be on. There were weeks that people would only have electricity for a couple hours a day. I visited Villa regularly for over a year, usually visiting more than three times a week in the evenings (and on the weekends during the day). I would estimate that the power was out 80% of the evenings that I visited. Additionally, the sewage system is not maintained and garbage collection, if and when it is collected, has no place to go. At one point during my fieldwork the city mayor, or *sindico*, in somewhat of a scandal, started dumping large amounts of trash along the highway just outside of town. Otherwise trash just piles up on street corners or along the river. As in other parts of the country, much of the trash is burned along the highway because there is no collection or place to put it.

Barrio Francisco (pseudonym), where I conducted my fieldwork, was a typical poor neighborhood. Most homes are small, built by inhabitants themselves and were in various stages of repair, construction, or completion. Wood and concrete-block homes are the most common. Many if not most homes had corrugated tin or metal roofs. Homes are usually built on large concrete slabs but many, particularly in the poorer areas, sit on dirt floors. According to the 2002 census, 43% of homes in San Cristóbal have a toilet within the home itself, 50% share a latrine with neighbors, and 7% have nothing at all (*Oficina Nacional de Estadística* 2008, “San Cristóbal en Cifras”). This appeared to be the norm from what I observed in Villa as well. Bernardo, for example, a 24 year old who commuted to the capital for work, lived with his pregnant wife and two little kids in a tin-roofed shack made of wooden planks and built on a small concrete foundation. The home had two rooms – the bedroom and the main room. The stove was partitioned from the main room with a half-wall. They shared a latrine a few doors down with their neighbors. They were a young family and Bernardo did not make much money, his wife did not work at all. Alternatively some people could afford to build a home out of concrete. These construction materials were more expensive and generally functioned as status markers for owners. More than this, however, was the fact that concrete was safer in a tropical storm and hurricane prone area, and thus was more desirable. Juan Pablo and his wife lived in a two story exposed concrete (cinder block) home. They had ‘finished’ the home a few years earlier but the house remained half-built. They lived happily in what appeared to me to be only the shell of a home. There was no tile, no walls to cover the concrete,

no window frames, no doors, no rugs, nothing. Though not as finished as other homes such as Denny and Josefina's, Juan Pablo's house was an enviable structure for much of the neighborhood.¹⁰

It is difficult to assess exactly how much money people live off of a month because it often varies with the unpredictability of work and everyday expenses. The prices of food, transportation, gasoline, and propane gas change frequently and most of the neighborhood feels the effect of these changes immediately. Those who net between \$150 and \$200 month live comfortably in barrio Francisco. Most households probably make less than this and few people have a vehicle of their own. For most families owning a vehicle of any kind is simply out of the question but a few are able to purchase small motorbikes. Cars are prohibitively expensive throughout the country. New Cars can cost anywhere between 30% and 50% more than they do in the U.S. (a new Honda Accord purchased at a dealership in Santo Domingo in 2008 would cost US\$45,000). Motorcycles are the most popular mode of transportation in Villa. They are a permanent feature of the visual and aural landscape. Motorcycles abound in the streets morning, noon, and night. The *motoconcho* ('motorcycle-taxi'), sometimes pejoratively described as "*taxi de los pobres*" or "taxi of the poor" provide the central means of getting around town for residents. In fact, throughout the country this is the preferred mode of transportation for Dominicans. It is the cheapest and outside the capital one can take a *motoconcho* virtually anywhere. There are usually

¹⁰ Many of the nicer homes in Villa remain from the time of the sugar mill and when the *zona franca* was most productive and offered very good paying jobs to managers and administrators at the higher ends of the employment hierarchy. Most of these homes are restricted to a few specific barrios.

drivers waiting along the highways and exits to take people into town, at major cross streets, and also at the central plazas and bus stops.

Although barrio Francisco was not the poorest neighborhood in town, especially when compared with the neighboring *bateyes*, it was poorer than most other areas. As such, many of the social issues attending poverty had a profound effect on the community, including: high rates of HIV/AIDS, high rates of drugs, street violence and gangs, prostitution, corruption at the level of local government, underage pregnancy, high rates of domestic violence, and chronic or frequent malnutrition, just to name a few. Although HIV/AIDS is a problem throughout the country, the most vulnerable places tend to be the poorest or those places most affected by the sex tourism industry. Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean area has the highest rates of HIV infection in the world. Living just a few doors down from Josefina and Denny's house lived a 12 year old girl who had contracted the HIV virus at birth from her mother, who had gotten it from her boyfriend, the girl's father, who had died of AIDS after refusing to get treatment or even acknowledge the disease. According to World Vision, more than 66,000 people in the Dominican Republic were living with HIV or AIDS in 2009, around 3,600 of them were under the age of 14. Only half of those infected with HIV actually receive antiretroviral drugs (*la Dirección General de Control de Infecciones de Transmisión Sexual y SIDA*). Ramón, the pastor of *Iglesia de Dios, Inc.* in barrio Francisco, informed me that there were "a number" of church members who were HIV positive but it was not something that people really talked about. Other diseases like Dengue Fever also threaten the community. Because of

incomplete diets people often live with weak or compromised immune systems. Sadly, 20% of children in Villa between the ages of 6 and 59 months suffer from chronic malnutrition (*Oficina Nacional de Estadística* 2008, “San Cristóbal en Cifras”). Education, or lack thereof, is also a point of concern for residents and their children. According to a report by the National Office of Statistics in 2008, 68-73% of the population of Villa does not have any secondary education. One informant of mine, Pedro, a 22 year old completing his second year of high school, did not go to class for over a week because he could not afford a notebook. Few kids can make it to the university, let alone afford it. Technical schools are probably the most likely reality for residents, though a couple of my informants did go to the university in the capital (both of whom endured a weekly commute to the city center that would often take upwards of two hours during the day).

Although political corruption is a central feature of Dominican politics, the mayor of Villa, *el sindaco* Pedro Peralta, was exceptionally corrupt, even by Dominican standards (or perhaps he just was not wealthy enough to get away with it). The October 9th edition (2008) of CLAVE Digital weekly newspaper describes the mayor and city council as a center of corruption. He was charged with fraud and other crimes stemming from an investigation into a piece of land that was purchased, ostensibly, for the municipality, but at nearly eight times its worth. Even before this made national news, Peralta was famously cavalier and was known about town as a *tíguere* (or ‘macho-man’) of the highest order. Some of the stories I heard about him included a particular liking for younger girls; in addition to having a house and family,

he had allegedly impregnated a 16 year-old girl who he subsequently took care of and put up in a house of her own on the other side of town. He was also, allegedly, in bed with drug dealers and ne'er-do-wells.

Street violence in Villa tends to be related to drugs and gang activity in town. All manner of gangs exist in Villa and the town is carved up into turf that belongs to any one of a number of large gangs. Even the central plaza or public square, *el parque*, is divided between *lo sangre* ('the Bloods'), *los reyes* ('the Latin Kings'), and *los trinitarios*. Usually assaults are committed with machetes that are regularly carried and brandished by gang members. They use the tools to cut, maim, or sever limbs (or in the colloquial, "*dale un machetazo*"). They also use homemade guns called *chilenas*, and if they can afford them, they may carry shotguns, 22s, and other firearms. But gang members are not the only ones who are armed. Many residents of Villa, along with much of the country, have guns and carry them on their person. According to Veronica, Wilfredo's wife, "*todo el mundo 'ta armada*" ("everyone [in Villa] is armed"). It is common to see guns around town and any given day in the Dominican Republic. You often see a pistol tucked into the belt of men, and sometimes even women, on the bus, at a bar, even at a baseball game. Most stores in the capital have armed guards so it would be quite difficult to go an entire day without seeing one. Veronica told me a story one day which I believe sums up the general attitude of Villa residents toward guns: a few years ago a man was drinking in a bar near the center of town with his friends when another guy at the bar began to bother him. He told the man to leave him alone but he kept pestering him. This continued

for a while until the man became very irritated and told the other one that if he didn't leave him alone that he would shoot him. Despite the warning, the man continued to bother him so, true enough to his word, the man shot him dead right there in the bar. When the police arrived witnesses told them that the dead guy had been bothering the other man and that the man had clearly told him that he would be shot if he did not stop. Because the man did not leave him alone, he shot him. The police, so it was said, accepted this explanation and did not arrest the shooter. Although anecdotal, this story, I think, accurately reflects a sentiment toward guns that I found to be true in many parts of the country – they mark a certain status, and those wealthy enough to have them, tend also to be wealthy enough to use them without regard to the law.

Villa has been described as *caliente* or 'hot' by outsiders and residents alike because of the both real and perceived high levels of violence and lawlessness. The characterization has merit if you consider the fact that at least twice (that I know of) at the end of 2008 the city was shut down by violent protests. Control of the city is, on occasion, taken over by street gangs who lock the city and do not allow cars in or out. Protests of this nature tend to follow weeks of excessive blackouts and/or water shortages. Although gang leaders are usually the ones who organize the protests, unaffiliated young men also join the unrest. Protesters block off intersections with burning tires and broken glass and prevent people from leaving or entering the barrios. If people are caught out on the streets they are assaulted. Businesses are closed and locked up and people are instructed to stay in their homes. The effort of protestors rarely has an effect on the electricity or the water but is a definite and effective

demonstration of power. It should be added that random robberies and muggings, though not unheard of, are rare. Gang members are blamed (if not responsible) for most of the thefts and assaults that occur around town and people tend to avoid areas where gang members are most active (particularly *puntos de drogas* or ‘drug points’).

Villa is *caliente* in another sense as well – people like to party. On any given day, Monday to Monday, the biggest *colmado*s (large bars that open up onto the street and play loud music) are filled with people, mostly men, drinking, dancing and having a good time. The central plaza is surrounded by four large *colmado*s. On most nights the crowds at the bar spill out into the neighboring plaza and surrounding streets. People drink heavily and fights are not infrequent. There is a police station at the center of town but there are few patrols and the police force responsible for the municipality is small.

Barrio Francisco is a small community a little less than a mile from the central plaza. People grow up together and know their neighbors very well. Like the rest of Villa, everyone seems to know each other. For children, most of the day is spent outdoors playing in the streets with other kids. Teenagers walk the streets visiting with neighbors and going to the park or the river with friends. Men and women, when not working, often sit outside their homes chatting, they frequently go to the bar to drink and/or play dominoes, and many go to church in their spare time. There are over 40 Protestant churches in Villa and a parish church (Roman Catholic) at the center of town. There were at least four small churches in barrio Francisco that I was aware of, three of them Pentecostal, the other Seventh Day Adventist. The churches

offer daily activities to residents. Most have *culto* ('worship' or regular services) five nights a week with doctrine and bible classes rounding out the rest of the week. They organize regular social activities for members, run prayer sessions, take fieldtrips, etc. Additionally, together the churches regularly organize concerts and *cultos* in the street for the public.

In many ways Villa is a microcosm of the Dominican Republic. Villa sits at the intersection of the decline in sugar production, the rise (and fall?) of export manufacturing, economic change, and popular Dominican life. In many ways barrio Francisco reflects popular culture, or rather, everyday life for most average Dominicans. They face the same problems, deploy the same solutions, and enjoy the same activities as Dominicans do all over the country. It was this character that drew my attention to Villa after my first visit. It was so 'typically' Dominican, in my mind, that I was instantly attracted to it. Unlike in the capital, however, where extreme class differences are brought into sharp relief by overt discrimination and a racist division of labor, people in Villa tend to see themselves in the same boat, as it were, "*somos un pueblo unido*" ('We are a united people'). Few people were rich in Villa, whether you were dark-skinned or light, you were probably no better off than your neighbor because of it. That is not to say that cultural preferences for light skin or negative stereotypes about dark-skinned people were not operative, they were, only that they held less power in the local context and that color, race, and ethnicity were less salient to most people's lives.

In stark contrast to the denotation “*pueblo caliente*,” Christian residents and visitors who choose to focus on the deep religious fervor that characterizes much of the town’s community often refer to Villa as “*el pueblo profético*,” supposedly because of its reputation in evangelical circles for having produced a lot of prophets. It is this sphere of life in Villa that I focus on in this dissertation – what is in other contexts, often referred to as the devotional or religious sphere. Both religious beliefs and devotional practices are intimately, dynamically, and inextricably woven into popular culture and everyday life in Villa, just as they are in the country as a whole. As such, it may seem arbitrary or even crude to separate the religious from the mundane, especially when there is often no clear division that can be discerned. Everyone’s life is complex and while religious identities and beliefs can be central to people’s lives and even have momentous effects on peoples’ thoughts and actions, they are never absolute; people draw from the totality of their experiences in life to create meaning and to act in the world. I think this dynamism is important so I wish not to ignore it. “*Un pueblo caliente*” and “*el pueblo profético*” are two different perspectives on the same place. Both refer to the same town but index a different sense of it – in one sense the sacred, in the other sense, the profane. At the same time both names reference different, opposed, and coexisting moral realities that obtain in the barrios and that are instrumental in organizing social life. Although people make these distinctions and create these divisions on a daily basis, I wish to see them as one complex dialectic that influences as much as it is influenced by either sense. What I hope will become clear is that popular culture and the mundane are deeply entrenched

in ideas about the sacred and are shot through and shaped by religious sentiment. But, just as ‘religion’ is part and parcel of everyday life, so the religious sphere is equally subject to the sway and stimulus of the profane, everyday world.

I conducted most of my fieldwork with people from two churches in barrio Francisco – both of them Pentecostal charismatic institutions. The first, *Iglesia de Dios, Inc.* (IdD), which was the larger of the two churches I studied with close to 80 registered members, is a Holiness Pentecostal denomination whose international headquarters are in Cleveland, Tennessee. *Iglesia de Dios* is the second largest Pentecostal charismatic church in the country (behind *Asambleas de Dios* or ‘Assemblies of God’) with around 80,000 total members, 640 churches throughout the country, and around 800 total ministries. The second church that I studied closely was *la Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal*, an independent Dominican Pentecostal charismatic church with around 40 registered members.¹¹ Although there were some apparent differences between the two churches, very few people acknowledged or even recognized dissimilarity between them. Both churches are considered ‘evangelical’, which in the Dominican Republic means that they are Protestant and usually charismatic. The term ‘*cristiano*’ or “Christian” is reserved for *los evangelicos* or ‘the evangelicals’ – Catholics are referred to as *catolicos*.

Iglesia de Dios was located a couple blocks off the central road through town and served the northwest area of the barrio. It was a small, one room church with a

¹¹ Because of the singular nature of independent churches, in the interest of confidentiality, I have chosen to use a pseudonym in place of the name of the actual church.

stage, lectern (*altar*), a few rows of pews, and a considerable amount of plastic chairs that filled out the rest of the space. The pastor, Ramón, lived above the church with his wife and two teenage sons in a very modest two-room wooden shack built on top of the roof. The church offered some kind of activity seven days a week. Sundays from 8:30-11:00am was a bible study class (*estudio biblico*) where usually neophytes, but often visitors and longtime members, would read and study passages of the bible under the guided instruction of the pastor. On the first Sunday of every month the bible class would be shortened and they would have a *retiro* or ‘spiritual retreat’ from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Participants of the *retiro* would typically fast and come to the church during the free time to pray with others. Otherwise there was no *retiro* and usually a women’s prayer group or a Sunday school class for young children followed the bible study. Every Sunday at 7:00 p.m. they held the formal *culto* (literally “worship”), which was the biggest and most popular service of the week. Often well over 100 people would pack into the small church filling up every corner and even setting up chairs outside to watch. On Mondays there was no formal *culto* at the church and many members took a break from daily church activities while others organized prayer groups around the neighborhood and met in a member’s home, and the youth group usually got together to socialize in an activity they called *compartir*. Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. they held regular *culto* at the church with the women’s group leading the services (*culto de las damas*). Wednesdays there was no *culto*, instead, a doctrine class (*doctrina*) was held for newcomers and those wanting to be baptized. The doctrine class was taught by the pastor and focused on topics like “what we

believe,” “what it means to be a Christian,” “how we should act,” and covered the rules and regulations of the church. On Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. regular *culto* was held but was specially geared toward adolescents. Friday *culto* began at 7:30 p.m. as well but was run by the men’s group (*culto de los caballeros*). *Cultos* on Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. were led by the church’s youth group (ages 18-35) and typically entailed a playful and creative aspect organized by the youths (*culto juvenil*).

Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal (IEP) offered the same services and activities but with a slightly different schedule. Bible classes were held on Tuesdays instead of Sundays, for example, and because IEP was smaller and was not as well attended, they did not have a group for adolescents. There were 45 regular members not including the children, of course, who were numerous and varied in ages from newborn to 16 years old.

CHAPTER 1: Religious Politics in *el barrio*

The Supernatural

In Villa, as in all other towns and cities across the country, the spiritual or supernatural is both hidden and visible. Although spirits, angels, or demons may not be visible to everyone, religious paraphernalia of all kinds can be found in homes and/or in storefronts. In a single visit to Villa one will find sites dedicated to supernatural beliefs such as churches, temples, altars, and sanctuaries. One may encounter mediums or specialists who have a special kind of relationship with the supernatural, or one may speak with a pastor, or a priest, or a witch, or a sorcerer. Much of everyday life for many Dominicans is committed to the spiritual realm. The supernatural world has a say in the everyday lives of Dominicans in important and interesting ways. In this section I wish to explore the spiritual economy of Villa, that is, the intimate and interdependent relationships between spiritual entities, their institutions, and the people who serve, revere, detest, control, ignore, and/or fear them. I hope to illustrate the sentiments and motivations around which spiritual and devotional practice is organized in the barrio. I further aim to lay bare the relationships of exchange that lie beneath both sacred and profane authority and the cultural mechanisms deployed to accommodate and contest them. I am particularly interested in the role of evangelical churches in shaping these relationships and the ways in which self-proclaimed Christians claim spiritual authority as they negotiate multiple supernatural worlds.

Spirits of all kinds play an important role in the everyday lives of people in the community. Most recognize the existence of a spiritual world and it is visible and present in their everyday lives. It is said that the spirits roam the streets at night; that there are spirits that govern the cemetery, parks, hills, fields and crossroads; that there are demons that accost people when they least expect; men and women battle demons in their sleep, are visited by angels in dreams, and many claim to see them when awake. Spiritual beings are called, consulted and propitiated regularly; residents commune with spirits that possess or mount them as riders do horses; saints bring good tidings to the faithful (if asked the right way, Saint Michael will bring you what you ask for). Others cultivate a relationship with the Christian god: 'the Lord' speaks to Christians through their dreams and through revelations; churches battle in tandem to rid the neighborhood of so-called evil spirits; the Holy Spirit touches the faithful and the non-believer alike; and God reaches out to all.

When asked about the character of Villa Altagracianos one informant frankly stated: "[Villa] has always been identified as a religious town, it even has a religious name: Villa Altagracia. Almost everyone believes in something. If someone says they don't believe they're called crazy because here everyone believes in something. People have always identified themselves by something. There are some that do not identify themselves with any [particular] religion but they believe in God" (Ana). According the pastor of a local church: "In the barrios, the people look for God." Another informant remarked: "The world is governed by spirits as different countries are governed by different people. *Baron del Cementario* rules the cemetery and those

who believe in him are at his mercy when they die.” These statements only hint at the centrality of supernatural beliefs in Villa and in the country as a whole. It is a Christian country in ways that will become clearer as we go, but for now, suffice it to say that most people identify themselves as Catholic or Christian generally, and, no matter what their beliefs, they tend to see themselves as believers in Christianity. But importantly many live in an enchanted world, one where magic and miracles exist. Where angles, demons, and spirits visit the living. A place where the powers of good and evil are real but are not always recognized or understood.

In Villa, as in other places in modern-day Dominican Republic, one hears talk of spirits, demons, zombies, and other supernatural beings and creatures. They are benevolent and malevolent. Many of these beliefs and stories have followed people from the rural areas of *el campo* to the cities, barrios and urban neighborhoods, and have even crossed national boundaries to find a home in Madrid, New York, and Miami (to name only a few). Once inhabiting the mysterious forests and mountains of the interior they have found expression in the streets and public squares of the city, *la capital*, and civilization.

In exploring supernatural beliefs in the Dominican Republic, Villa, and the local barrios, I hope to map a spiritual economy that reflects the traumas, desires, and ambiguities of everyday life for Dominicans.

Mapping the Religious Field

The role of the Evangelical church in relation to so-called ‘magical religions’ is well known, but I think, less well understood. What type of relationships obtain

between religious institutions at the local level and how people negotiate meaning in relation to one another as religious agents remains, to a large degree, unclear. One's religious life is not hermetically sealed off from everyday social life, nor is it kept separate from the religious lives of others. One's religious belief and practice at the local level is deeply enmeshed in the religious belief and practice of one's neighbors, friends, and family. The Pentecostal church has become an important local institution in neighborhoods all over the country. It has not replaced or extinguished popular Catholicism or local African-derived religion, rather it has been integrated into a local religious economy and in less than a century has become a significant and important feature of the local religious and socio-cultural landscape.

Ever since Protestantism arrived on the island of Hispaniola, it has played an important role in local spiritual and cultural dramas. A broad concept of Christianity based on Roman Catholicism in the Dominican Republic has provided a foundation or backdrop against which religious subjectivity is measured and played out. Under the sacred canopy of Christianity, religious communities struggle for legitimacy, authority, and followers. This relationship is important to map, particularly because meaning, as it is found in all other domains, is relational and dependent on context. That is to say, to understand any particular religious position, institution, or community in the Dominican Republic we must first understand the context or field within which it is understood and read against. For example, Crick (1976: 116) has pointed out:

The identity "witch" is only one on a [chess] board which contains other persons with differently specified characteristics. Moreover, this

one system intersects with others – with concepts of human actions, evaluatory ideas, and other systems of beliefs. We could say that to tackle “witchcraft” as if it were an isolable problem would be like someone unfamiliar with the game of chess, observing a series of movements and writing a book on “bishops.” The point is that the “bishop” cannot be understood apart from – indeed exists only by virtue of – the whole system of definitions and rules which constitutes chess. In Saussurian terms, the value of the bishop (or witch) derives from all the other pieces which the bishop (or witch) is not. Neither has any significance in isolation (as quoted in Stewart 1991: 15)

I consider these same factors to be relevant in understanding Pentecostals in the context of the barrio and in particular when considering the place of evangelical Christians in the local religious milieu. For example, the *brujo*, while an important cultural figure in its own right, stands in relation to other religious experts and operates within a cultural field that both informs, and is informed by, myriad spiritual practices and beliefs. The same goes for Pentecostals whose value in the local spiritual economy can only be read in relation to other religious subjectivities. Likewise, Catholicism ‘means’ something only insofar as it is understood in relation to evangelicals, local sorcerers, etc. The entire religious system is a dance of sorts, a complex interchange or exchange of meaning.

This chapter illustrates these relationships and shows how religious actors are mutually constitutive of a diverse religious field wherein meaning is both shared and contested.

Mariela Consuelo

Consider the curious case of Mariela Consuelo whose trajectory through the religious continuum tells us a story about spiritual life in Villa. Starting with possession through witchcraft, she was baptized into the service of *seres* or ‘beings’

(spiritual entities), worked as a *bruja*, then converted and now lives as a Pentecostal Christian. Her spiritual biography reveals interesting relationships and possibilities engendered by her religious career while highlighting the dynamic and fluid relationship of religious possibilities in everyday life.

Mariela grew up as a practicing Catholic, she went to church with her family regularly until the age of 13 when she separated from the church because, according to her, she was young and had “lost hope in God.” This separation from the church was only partial. She maintained her “Christian beliefs” and had a healthy “fear of God” that she claims never wavered but she stopped attending services regularly and it ceased being an important part of her everyday life. Her story of possession begins some years later when she was over taken with illness:

I remember perfectly, it began as a physical sickness. They brought me to various different doctors but they couldn’t find anything wrong with me. The [medical] analysis revealed nothing and there appeared to be nothing wrong with me physically, but everyday I would go to sleep without eating or bathing or drinking water. It could be a week like that, laying down feeling bad physically.

Her husband and family were concerned about her health because she was sick for weeks and was showing no signs of getting any better. She became weaker and weaker and started to neglect herself and her daily chores and other obligations. Shortly after falling ill she began to have bewildering dreams: “Sometimes strange things would happen and I would dream of people who I would later recognize as *seres* but who, after converting to the Lord, we call demons.”¹ Her dreams had no

¹ As a Christian today she relates her experience with the *seres* as a relationship with demons. Though she would from time to time refer to them in more neutral terms, as *seres* or saints, it was her present practice to refer to them as demons. I reproduce her own words here in order to more accurately

precedent, she was unfamiliar with this particular spirit world up until this point in her life and did not understand their presence in her dreams. Her husband recognized the signs and quickly sought the help of a *brujo*:

My husband was a believer in this [witchcraft] and he saw that I was always sick and that the doctors were unable to find anything. So he brought me to a *brujo* or *hechicero*. There the *brujo* determined the cause of the sickness and told me that someone had sent something to me. They say it like that here, “*que me habían enviado algo*.”

Brujos or *hechiceros* (‘witches’ or ‘sorcerers’) are local terms used to refer to particular religious specialists who may practice helpful or harmful magic and who work with the supernatural through spirit possession and other religious rites. There is no clear colloquial distinction between *brujos* and *hechiceros*, the terms are used interchangeably and applied liberally with positive and negative connotations.² Local terminology for this type of religious specialist varies and people may also refer to them as *curanderos*, *facultos*, *santeros*, *curiosos*, etc.³ Dominicans apply the terms *brujería* (‘witchcraft’) and *hechicería* (‘sorcery’) to similar or the same phenomena, generally: a complex of magical practices (whether good or bad, helpful or harmful, ‘white’ or ‘black’) that include but are not limited to variants of beliefs and practices

represent the way in which she tells her story and reflects on her own past. It is important to point out that she did not always see the *seres* as demons. She was quite open about the fact that she did not know that they were demons, but she maintains that this was misrecognition on her part, a failure to see the true nature of the ‘beings’ that she served. For her, they were always demons – she merely failed to acknowledge that reality until she converted. This is a perspective shared by many, not the least of whom are the Protestants who regard all devotional spirits as ‘satanic’. This issue will be taken up later when I explore local demonology.

² Because the terms are more neutral in the Dominican context than the English terms ‘witch’ and ‘sorcerer,’ I will use *brujo/bruja* and *hechicero* throughout.

³ Deive (1992 [1975]: 329) observes that *los curanderos* are, in particular, specialists in ‘folk medicine’ and are unlike *brujos* or *hechiceros* in that they are never possessed. However, I did not see this distinction made during my fieldwork.

associated with witchcraft, sorcery, divination, magical healing, or any other practice employing ritual means for magical ends.⁴

Brujos are the central human agents in what a number of observers have called *vodú dominicano* or ‘Dominican Voodoo’ (e.g. Deive 1992 [1975]).⁵ *Brujos* offer a variety of services to paying clients who seek their advice, consultation, and specialized skills and knowledge. As spirit mediums, *brujos* act as intermediaries between supernatural beings and the clients who seek their help. Most ritual practices within Dominican *vodú* revolve around this clientelistic relationship. A typical consultation consists of a private session between a *brujo*, a client, and the spirit who is called during the session (Deive 1992 [1975]: 200). After the spirit has been summoned and the *brujo* is possessed, or in local terms ‘mounted,’ the consultation begins. The client explains his or her problem to the spirit who then gives advice or a solution. When the consultation is complete the spirit leaves his or her host, or ‘horse’, the *brujo*, and the client is obliged to pay for the ceremony and to purchase any objects (candles, images, etc.) or ingredients needed for a particular magical recipe/remedy or other prescription given to the client during his or her visit. People seek the professional help of *brujos* for a variety of reasons, not the least of which: to obtain magical protection from dangers or threats; to diagnose and cure witchcraft afflictions; to obtain fortune or success in business or travel; to cure illness or

⁴ Dominicans also use the terms *espiritismo* and *santería* to describe similar practices – terms which emphasize spiritual work with spirits or saints respectively and which calls to mind a kinship or affinity with similar practices in Cuba, also called *santería*. Of course, in Cuba and other places throughout the Caribbean, terms like Spiritism and *santería* refer to specific practices with particular histories that may differ greatly from what Dominicans frequently use to gloss ‘working with spirits’.

⁵ The term ‘Voodoo’, as it applies to a specific constellation of practices and beliefs in the Dominican Republic is contentious. We return to this debate below.

indisposition; to procure spells or charms to protect against evil; to do harm to enemies; to counter malign magic; to win or control a lover; to divine the future; or sometimes simply to solve whatever quotidian problem that might come up in a person's life (Deive 1992 [1975]: 190).

Good or 'white' magic is used by *brujos* to protect themselves and others from curses, witchcraft and sorcery. Additionally this type of magic includes curatives. Among the methods used toward these ends are *resguardos*, *amuletos*, *oraciones*, *ensalmos*, *baños*, and *polvos*. Amulets and talismans are referred to as '*resguardos*' in the Dominican Republic. They are generally enclosed in small fabric bags and then placed or carried in bags, sewn into clothing, or put inside shoes. Some *resguardos* are swallowed and taken like pills, and still others are placed under the skin (Deive 1992 [1975]: 277). They are used for a variety of reasons including protection against witchcraft, bullet wounds, evil, and to prolong one's life.

Depending on the circumstances and needs of their clients, *brujos* may use 'black' or harmful magic if a situation warrants. According to Deive, most *brujos* make use of their powers for good – for curing and protection – but this does not stop them "working/serving with both hands" or, from using their powers (from time to time) to do harm; such as working with or calling *petroses* or *espíritus malignos* – 'evil spirits'. "Their role consists as much in protecting clients from the dangers and evils that come to them as it is in offering formulas and enchantments with which to bend the will of enemies and reluctant lovers "([my translation] Deive 1992 [1975]: 245). Should a *brujo* decide to inflict pain on an adversary, or do them general harm,

he or she may send or use *envíos* or *despachos de muertos* or prepare and dispatch a magical weapon called a *guangá*. This magic is used to hurt people or make them sick. *Guangás* are “magical instruments used to hurt a fellow human being. A *guangá* may be anything, organic or inorganic, but most common is the *enviación* (consignment), a magically prepared parcel buried in the path of the one you intend to hurt” (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 268). They are considered particularly powerful and can seriously harm or kill a target victim. More generally, *guangá* are enchanted objects that have been made ‘poisonous’ by a *brujo* through magical means, which upon contact with someone will produce or cause a desired effect – usually illness (Metraux 1972 [1959]: 285 also see Simpson 1940, 1954, Deive 1992 [1975]). An *envío* is also considered to be powerful ‘black magic’ and involves enchanting a target with the spirit of the dead or deceased (*los muertos*). The victim suffers for a protracted period of time and can die from it if it is not diagnosed in time and the spirit of the dead is not removed from the body quickly.

Not all magical acts, I should note, are the work of *brujos* or specialists. It is not uncommon for individuals to purchase cures or prescribe their own magical remedies or even to perform their own spells in the privacy of their own home – a practice both men and women participate in equally (Deive 1992 [1975]: 191-192). And, like *brujos*, anyone with the right specialized knowledge may prepare, not only their own *resguardos* and curatives, but also *guangás* and other harmful magic should they be so inclined.

In Mariela's case, she was brought to a *brujo* in order to discover the origins of the witchcraft that was making her sick. The *brujo* determined that the witchcraft that was being done to her was coming from her husband's girlfriend/lover:

My husband had another woman, besides me, and she envied me. Everything began because she had a little girl with him and the little girl died and this woman said that I had killed her. This woman also mounted demons ["ella montaba demonios"] and when the little girl got sick a demon possessed her and said to the people who were around that it was I who was killing the little girl. But it was she in fact who was killing the little girl. The little girl died of a sudden illness. She had been sick with bronchopneumonia, a sickness that infects the lungs, and when the demons possessed the woman she grabbed the little girl and put her in a wash bin full of cold water. Imagine doing that to a little girl! When the girl died she said that it had been I that had done it.

Envy or jealousy is commonly understood as the primary sentiment behind most witchcraft attacks and thus is cited as the reason behind most witchcraft accusations. According to Deive, particularly in *el campo* or the 'rural areas', people who occupy privileged economic and/or political positions are frequently associated with the practice of witchcraft: "When a farmer is successful in his harvest and this success increases his earnings, neighbors tend to suspect that he is a *brujo* or that he has acquired his success due to work with a *brujo*" ([my translation]192, also see Metraux 1972 [1959]: 287). Children who die young, or unexpectedly, are frequently thought to have been the victims of witchcraft or devil pacts [see section on devil pacts below]. Children are considered more susceptible to magical attacks and great care is taken in protecting them with protective spells or charms. It is not uncommon for *campesinos* or 'farmers' to believe that children who suffer from anemia and rickets are the victims of witches (Deive 1992 [1975]: 261). It is clear that Mariela's husband's lover

believed that her daughter had been the victim of witchcraft, due to the girl's sudden illness and subsequent death. A spirit who mounted ('possessed') the woman accused Mariela of the crime which led the woman to seek revenge. Mariela claimed to have had nothing to do with the child's illness or death and tried to absolve herself by claiming that the child had died of natural causes (pneumonia) brought about by the irresponsible, in fact wicked acts of a woman driven mad by demons. Nonetheless, the woman blamed her and, allegedly, conspired with demons to do her harm:

The *brujo* that my [husband] took me to [here she refers to her husband as the father of her child] said that someone was doing witchcraft to me [*“me estaba haciendo brujería”*]. He told my husband where [the witchcraft] was and where the *brujería* had been put in her [the husband's lover's] house. So my husband took me home and he went to the woman's house and began to look [for the witchcraft] where the *brujo* had told him it would be. There in her house he found it: a lit candle, along with my name. This was a scandal [*un rebú*] with the police and everything because he [the husband] was armed and began to hit her – it was something ugly! But I continued feeling bad because everything that she got was obtained in order to do [bad] things to me. That is what is spread here.

After learning that the witchcraft was coming from a woman who he had a relationship with, Mariela's husband went to her house and discovered an oil lamp that had been lighted along with a spell which included her name and perhaps a picture or an item of hers on the floor of her room. He was furious with the woman and supposedly beat her for it. But Mariela continued to feel ill and believed that the woman continued to perform magical spells and send magical attacks against her:

Later, then, they brought me to someone else [another *brujo*] who said that I had '*seres*' and that I would have to be baptized in order to put myself in a position to be cured. Initially I refused because I had my beliefs, I knew that it was bad, to do certain things was bad, to visit

brujos was bad before God. But my husband fought with me about it, about me always being sick, and eventually I accepted it.

The term *seres* or ‘beings’, refers to a category or type of supernatural being or spirit entity that is propitiated and/or feared by Dominicans. Also called *misterios*, *luases* (*luá* singular and from the Haitian *loa*), *sanses* or *sanes* (colloquial plural of *san* or *santo*) (Deive 1992 [1975]: 170), also *santos*, *santos magicos*, and *demonios* (saints, magical saints, and demons). The names vary by region and from person to person and are not always used consistently but generally refer to the same entities, so-called *vodú* spirits. Mariela had dreamed of these ‘beings’ shortly after becoming sick.

Witchcraft and spirit possession can and do occur together (Lewis 1995 [1971]) and they are closely connected in the Dominican Republic. The witchcraft that had been sent against her possessed her with malign spirits. The *brujo* informed her that the only way for her to get better was for her to be baptized into the service of the *misterios*; a process I.M. Lewis (1995 [1971]) has called ‘adorcism’ or, a procedure whereby a spirit is accommodated and revered rather than expelled (compare with ‘exorcism’) by the possessed. Particularly if the *brujo* is not powerful enough to excise the malign spirit or spirits, he may suggest this course of action. The other option available to afflicted persons is conversion to evangelical Christianity – see below.

All *brujos* must go through an initiation process (Deive 1992 [1975]: 194). Initiations do not tend to be extremely difficult or excessive. Usually initiates must pass a few tests and complete a number of tasks including fasting, constructing an altar, and performing a number of rituals (199). Mariela was brought from Villa to the

great basilica of *La Altagracia* in Higüey in the east of the island and was baptized there by a woman who she considered “a powerful and terrible *bruja*” and with this was initiated into service of the *misterios*. Shortly afterward, the sickness went away and she no longer felt ill. She started to hold consultations in her home and clients began to seek her services and the advice and wisdom of the *seres* who spoke through her.

I began to consult in the house and people would come by asking for me... People would come to my house and would say to me, for example, “call so-and-so demon for me” – a saint that they wanted to call who have their names and certain rites of how to invoke them. The demon would come, and they would tell him/her what they want (I didn’t know what they were talking about because you don’t remember anything when you are like that [possessed])... I had a great big altar with all the images [of saints/demons]. Eventually I had many clients and I made a lot of money because, you know, people will fight over any little thing but not to give their money to a *brujo*. Women would come looking to *amarrar* [bind] their husbands. In fact the majority of women came so that their husbands would not look for another [woman]... People would also go to my house for lottery numbers and people would play the numbers that the demons would give them... The demons gave the numbers through me. When the demons arrived and possessed me, they gave numbers to the people who were there [for a consultation]... They gave many lottery numbers to me as well. If this demon appeared to me and gave me a number I would play it because I was sure that it would be the winning number. He would appear to me and would say to me “look, tomorrow this number will be the winning number. [Sometimes the number] would appear to me on a wall and I would play all the money that I had and sit and wait for the winning number to come.

Typically *brujos* in the Dominican Republic work with more than one spirit and know how to summon or invoke a particular one depending on their needs and wishes. In the context of a consultation the *brujo* usually performs a simple rite in order to call the spirit into his head. An example given by Deive (1992 [1975]: 204) is a case in

point: “In order to call *Barón del Cementerio*, a *brujo* from the province of Moca explains that after saying three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys one must light a candle and then tap the ground three times with the right foot” [my translation], then offer the following prayer:

Come to me, spirit, and give me strength, will and courage to withstand your weight upon my neck; open understanding to me and put me in contact with my client in order to be able to prevail. This I ask of you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [my translation]

Deive also provides an invocation used to call *Anáisa* that was given to him by a *bruja* from Villa Altagracia (205):

Oh, *Anáisa*, *Anáisa*, save, oh, queen, we are waiting here for your blessing in order to transmit it to your servants and to do what you order [my translation]

At the end of this sequence the spirit mounts the medium and the consultation begins. While possessed, the *brujo*'s personality completely changes to that of the possessing spirit and he or she loses conscious awareness of what is happening until the spirit leaves again and the *brujo* regains consciousness. *Anáisa* is a popular female spirit or *metresa*. She is frequently solicited by women who are suspicious or fed up with their husband's cheating and who wish for her to *amarrar* or 'bind' them so that they stop being unfaithful (183). *Santa Marta* is another popular *metresa* who is frequently invoked because of her power to bind husbands and also to create money and wealth. Each *misterio* has their specialties and different ones are called depending on the needs or wishes of the client.

Brujos have their own altars which they construct inside their homes and adorn with flowers, candles, and images of saints.⁶ Altars usually consist of a cloth-covered table and the tabletop may be covered in a variety of different objects including lamps (usually small plates with wicks floating in oil), flowers, incense, bottles with holy-water or some special oils, soft drinks, *oraciones*, prayer books, bottles of rum, cologne, rosaries, and/or offerings of food (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 358). These objects are infinitely variable and some altars may have anywhere from many to only a few items (and of course the preceding list is not exhaustive). Prayers are said in front of them at least once a day: “prayers which may be the ones currently used by Catholics, like the rosario, novenas, Ave Maria and Padre Nuestro, or have been taken from missals and devotional manuals. Several, however, are ‘invented’ or taken from unorthodox sources and sold at any Dominican marketplace, either in the form of booklets or on loose sheets. The content of many of these prayers is purely magical” (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 358-359).

Oraciones are a type of prayer in the Dominican Republic that blurs the line between spell and prayer – they are seen by many to be ‘magical prayers’ or incantations of sorts. These prayers are used to invoke spirits as well as cast spells and establish *promesas*. They are also used to make *resguardos* and other magical charms. They have many uses and at times are combined with other rites in order to create a desired effect or to serve some magical end. For example, the *oración* to *Anima Sola* is prayed in order to *amarrar* or ‘bind’ lovers/husbands. *La Oración al Anima Sola*

⁶ Lay practitioners of *brujería*, or those who believe in the magical powers of the saints, usually have their own altars. Often they are built on the floor and tend to be less elaborate than those of the *brujos* (Deive 1992 [1975]: 208).

must be said at 12 o'clock noon or at 12 o'clock midnight and you must light an oil lamp and place it behind the front door of your house (Deive 1992 [1975]: 308).

Other *oraciones* are aimed at conquering one's enemies (*Oración a San Miguel*); some are more sinister and have evil ends such as those that are dedicated to *satanas* or 'Satan' and are intended to hurt or cause damage (*Oración del Puro*) (307). Still others are more benign such as those whose effects are aimed at acquiring luck (*La Virgen de la Altagracia*), achieving success in business (*San Expedito*), or seeking justice (*Justo Juez*).⁷

Popular booklets or pamphlets with *oraciones*, magical recipes and instructions on how to win over a lover, get a job, or 'bind' a cheating spouse, can be found throughout the country and in most towns. For 100 *pesos* (about 3 dollars) I bought a small book called "*Santos Magicos*" at a *botanica* in Santo Domingo.⁸ The book describes, in detail, how to prepare baths (*baños*) for sexual attraction or luck, as well as providing the specific operations to be performed in order to *amarrar* a husband or to *dominar* or 'dominate' a lover. For example, *la receta para dominar* requires a large cup, *mechas* (wicks), *aceite culebra*, *aceite dominio*, *aceite inglaterra*, *aceite ven a mi* (various special oils), and a photo of the person you intend to dominate. The instructions explain the preparation as follows: Put everything together in the cup and light the candle in front of so-and-so's picture. Do this on a Tuesday or a Monday

⁷ Interestingly, Deive notes that many people use selected psalms from the bible for similar purposes as *oraciones*. For example, one might use or recite psalm 41 to counter witchcraft or psalm 70 to protect against *guangás* (1992 [1975]: 315). Psalm 70, for example, begins with: "Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me. May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace."

⁸ The book provides next to no publishing information, only that it was published in 1995.

until that person is won over or dominated by you. The attending *oración* is to *Santa Martha* and goes as follows:

Santa Martha dominate the mind of [whomever] so that he has eyes only for me, so that the heart of [whomever] is only for me. Dominate him just as you dominated the ferocious [ones] that you have at your feet, do not let him sit or lie down with other until he comes as a tame snake to [before] me.

There are in fact two ‘Saint Marthas’ in the Dominican Republic: a ‘black’ one, and a ‘white’ one (Drewal: 2008: 159). *Santa Martha* (or the ‘white’ one) is usually portrayed as having tamed a dragon or monster who lies at her feet. *Santa Marta ‘La Dominadora’* (or the ‘black’ one) is depicted as a snake charmer with wild unkempt hair who is handling a large snake. Both women are considered powerful allies against unfaithful men, in part because both are depicted as dominating a beast. Some believers consider the two saints to be one in the same and others do not. What is interesting about the *oración* above is that it references the popular lithographic representations of both saints – the tamed beast beneath the feet of *Santa Martha* as well as the snake who has been controlled by *Santa Marta ‘La Dominadora’*. This kind of symbolic relationship between the iconography of saints and their individual attributes or powers is a common one. Other relevant analogies are made between the name of a saint and their uses. For example, appeals are made to *San Alejo* to ‘*alejar*’ or ‘dispel’ (or ‘distance’ oneself from) evil or eminent danger; *San Aparicio* is called upon to make lost objects ‘appear’; and *San Deshacedor* (literally ‘Saint Undoer’) is used to break or ‘undo’ curses (Deive 1992 [1975]: 308).

There is usually a correspondence of some kind between the saints' actual powers and attributes and the way they are depicted in devotional lithographs. These correspondences or relationships carry over into *oraciones* and other devotional texts and practices.

It is the *seres* who divine through the medium or *brujo*. In the Dominican Republic divination is practiced primarily through the *luases* but many *brujos* also divine with playing cards, cigarettes or cigar ash, urine, candles, coffee cups, etc. (Deive 1992 [1975]: 293). Divination also occurs through dreams and communication with the dead (necromancy). In the Dominican Republic, it is very popular for people to interpret symbols in their dreams in order to discover winning numbers for the lottery (295). This can be big business for *brujos* and Mariela made a living off of giving people winning lottery numbers. People would pay her a small sum of money to call a spirit who would give them winning lottery numbers. The lottery is a local institution of central importance to Dominicans of all classes. *Las Bancas* (where the lottery is played) are as common as *colmados* (convenience stores), often sharing the same building, and are found on next to every other street corner. People play as regularly as they receive their paychecks. I often would see lines of five or more people at any given *banca* on Friday evenings after the work week was complete waiting to play a number they saw in a dream or to play their mother's birthday, their lucky number, etc.

It is big business in the Dominican Republic and it provided Mariela with a steady client base. However, she too was inclined to play the lottery but soon became

disillusioned because her clients would get the winning numbers and she would lose out. With time she realized that her relationship to the *seres* was taking more than it was giving. She had few options; she had considered abandoning service to the *misterios* but this had its consequences and she was afraid of becoming sick again:

I had the pressure from my husband [the father of my child] who said that if I left it [service to the spirits] that I would go back to being sick again and go crazy.

The *seres* themselves are fastidious, jealous, and moody. They share the tastes and habits of their followers and like their servants they can be envious, lascivious, sensitive, vengeful, and given quickly over to rage (Metraux 1972: 94). Anyone who dares leave their side runs the risk of violent repercussions and spiteful retribution. Bad luck, illness or even death may be visited upon believers who choose to forsake the spirits they once served/revered (Metraux 1972: 352-356). Service to the spirits is not based on love and voluntary devotion alone, as we have seen, but may be based on fear or obligation as well. Mariela was quite adamant that she was ambivalent about the whole ordeal from the beginning:

I was never okay with it, maybe at first had I not known God it would have been different, but I had my Christian beliefs and I knew that the things I was doing were not good. To visit *brujos* was bad before God... Even though I practiced sorcery [*hechicería*] I never did it to hurt anyone because I had fear of God... Even though I did all of these things, I never clung to it [*nunca me aferré*] because I didn't like it... At the beginning I would always dream that I was falling from a cliff and I would ask God that he not loose me... But I was sick and I fought with my husband about it but he eventually convinced me. He was a believer in [witchcraft].

Perhaps separation from her husband provided just the impetus to leave her practice and the spirits behind and convert (on this point, however, she was silent). She had

made a living off of her practice and she also knew that to leave the spirits was to incur their wrath but she went ahead and converted anyway. One cannot just give up the spirits, especially *brujos* who have taken vows to serve them. The only viable option available to the reluctant or despondent adept is conversion to evangelical Christianity:

There is no other option to leave this but to convert. Many, many, many famous *brujos* are now Christian [Evangelical]... I am not the only one; there are many people who have been freed the same way. Today they are Christian and freed by the Lord. [Mariela]

Quoting an informant word for word, Metraux reports a similar finding among *vodou* practitioners of Haiti: “If you want the *loa* to leave you in peace – become a Protestant” (1972: 352). He cites that this same conviction was reported as far back as 1896.

Metraux recognized long ago that many *vodou* practitioners converted to Protestant churches, not because *vodou* failed to meet their needs of a more ‘legitimate’ or ‘loftier’ religion but rather because Protestantism offered a refuge from angry or spiteful *loa*. In Protestantism people were safe from malicious or taxing spirits and demons. People convert for a variety of reasons [see chapter 2] but illness, dissatisfaction and misfortune figure heavily in cases involving conversion due to witchcraft and/or spirit possession. Often conversion to Protestantism is the only way out of an oppressive relationship of service to a spirit. Metraux was told of a *vodou* priest who converted because he could no longer satisfy the demands of his *loa* who demanded offerings and sacrifices that depleted his resources and extended him well beyond his means (354). Metraux records the story of a man who converted as an act

of revolt or aggression against a *loa* who had let him down.⁹ The man had gone to see a *hungan* or *vodou* priest to consult with a *loa* about his son's odd behavior. The *loa* told him that his son was being ridden (possessed) by a werewolf. The *hungan* told the man that it was not serious and not to worry so the man sold two oxen to pay for the treatment – but his son died anyway. Furious he destroyed all of his cult objects and became a Protestant (353-354). Interesting still, Metreaux reports that sometimes it is even the *vodou* priest himself, faced with the ineffectiveness of his treatment and unable to solve his patient's problem, who advises the client to abandon the spirits and to “try Protestantism” (352).

Conversion is considered to be the only real (long lasting or permanent) way out of this lifestyle – the only true remedy. But conversion does not assure that one will be in the clear. Far from it, in fact one may be in the church for a while before truly escaping the spirits, who by conversion become, through an inverted transfiguration, demons:

For a time after I converted the demons continued to torment me, but they couldn't possess me because I had the seal of the Holy Spirit in my life. They couldn't touch me but they made war with me. I could see them and I could hear their voices where they told me ugly things. It was a battle, *muy fuerte*, where I fought body to body with them.

I have never been afraid. I felt tired the other day and everything but I have never been scared. I [would] hear voices, they [would] appear to me, like this, and they would say to me things like “kill yourself!” or “die!” I had many battles with them. They attacked me with sickness too. I had many experiences with them after I converted. I had more experiences with demons after converting than I did before.

⁹ See below for a comparison between Dominican and Haitian Vodou.

Listen, that's how life is. I had more encounters with them making war with me after I converted. On one occasion, [one of the demons] gave me something that made me sick and I was dying. They took me to the clinic and I confessed to the doctor that I was dying because I had this terrible battle [with the spirits/demons]...

They still attack me [today]. It has been 10 years since I reconciled with the Lord and yet the battle is never won because after one becomes independent they continue attacking. That is why I have had these experiences. It is not that one is more Christian than another but that where God takes one, you must stay united [with him] because if one separates [from God] just a little, Satan will try to destroy you. It is true that many people believe in this.

The spirits may take revenge on converts who turn their backs on them. This is how misfortune after conversion is often understood (see Metraux 1972: 355 for a number of examples). Mariela was confronted by the *seres* who attacked her with illness but who could no longer possess her. This is not, however, universal. Many converts may be possessed after conversion and everyone is potentially a target of demonic possession if one is not careful. Mariela is still, occasionally, bothered by the spirits whom she once served but they no longer 'mount' her or cause her great harm. They do appear and harass her from time to time but the threat is minimal.

The relationship to the *seres* is seen as one of dependence on the spirit, for that reason she refers to her break with the 'demons' as becoming free of them or becoming independent of them. For Mariela, as long as she stays connected to God she is protected from the malign spirits or demons/Satan. But if she 'separates' from him, perhaps like she did when she was younger, she opens a door to demonic influences. This will be explored more below, but suffice it to say now that her conversion incites the demons not only to do her harm but also to try and kill her.

Those who convert from servile positions to the spirits to evangelical Christianity tend to be more averse to their previous beliefs. This perhaps comes from a genuine fear of back-sliding (Metraux 1972: 352) a fear which takes the form of a demon attacks and constant torment. A lack of authenticity, fidelity or sincerity can lead to disastrous effects if one converts but has only ‘one foot in the church and one foot in the world’. It is believed that these people are the most vulnerable to evil spirits and demons who take advantage of this weakness.

Mariela has moved through the three major religious communities in the barrio. And while it is unlikely that she will change again (she has been a Pentecostal now for 10 years), her spiritual world continues to be informed by the cultural and symbolic content of all three. At every stage of her development – as a catholic, as a spirit medium, as a Pentecostal – her decisions and actions have been influenced and shaped by the existence of ‘other’ supernatural forces and possibilities engendered by the unique religious field as a whole. Her religious career, while possible elsewhere, is likely only in the Dominican Republic where the conditions of possibility have shaped her unique life goals and chances.

I turn now from Mariela to a more general discussion of the forms and functions of the predominant spiritual institutions in the barrio.

Supernatural Institutions at the Barrio Level: Local Forms and Functions

Largely due to the historical legacy of Christian and African-derived religious beliefs on the island, Dominicans, for the most part, are Christians of a particular type

who share the main tenets of faith in an all-powerful God and the existence of an effectual spiritual world. From there, people have somewhat different expectations, beliefs, and desires with regard to the spiritual realm. What unifies their beliefs, to the extent that they overlap, is not only a history of mutual antagonism, interaction, and evolution of spiritual ideas, but also the fact that Dominicans themselves share a cultural history as well as economic, political, and social dependence upon which a shared cosmology has been built. Barrio residents in Villa, for example, face similar economic challenges, share the same social spaces and inhabit the same cultural worlds as their neighbors and one another. As such, they share many of the same desires, moods, and concerns that motivate or inspire a relationship with the supernatural.

No matter what one's proclaimed faith or identity, people seek answers to the same kinds of questions and resolutions to the same kinds of problems – that is to say that they have similar goals. These goals include, but are not limited to: answers to poverty (success, money, jobs, etc.), love (boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, etc.), health (remedies, cures, prophylactics, etc.), happiness, and meaning (experiential, existential, etc.). Supernatural institutions at the barrio level address these various goals in both similar and different ways. For example, residents patronize local Pentecostal churches (which are found in every neighborhood and scattered throughout Villa) for many of the same reasons that they seek out a *curandero*, *cura* (local priest), *brujo* or *hechicero* – to assuage suffering and to pursue happiness. There are, of course, a number of options for fulfilling the aforementioned goals, not

all of them supernatural, but many of Villa's residents rely on client-based magic (including magical healing and prayer) or sorcery provided by local *brujos* and/or evangelicals. Whether one goes to the Catholic Church (*la iglesia católica*), a local Protestant church (*los evangélicos/los cristianos*), or visits a *brujo*, they often do so for the very same reasons.

These three spiritual communities provide a service to the public that is both similar in form and in function. For example, all three offer initiation for full benefits and all serve the public and non-members; all provide services that, in one way or another, must be paid for; all three institutions have been lasting fixtures in the communities they serve; and most of the public comes to these institutions by referral. Services are based on patron-client terms of association that tend to encourage or lead to long-term patronage. In addition to offering healing, meaning, and answers to poverty, love, and happiness to those who come for help, these institutions offer advice, counseling and advocacy for clients in the spiritual (and sometimes secular) world. Catholic priests (*curas*), Evangelicals, and *brujos* play an important role as mediators between the divine world and the human world. As mediums in a broad sense, they allow people access and communication with the divine or spirit world. As counselors they use prophesy, revelation, fortune telling, or divine insight to give advice and guidance. Prayer, like magic, is employed to accomplish or fulfill many of the requests made by clients and visitors, and like magic, prayer is based on similar assumptions: if I do this or that, it will have this or that effect. Prayer, like magic, is instrumental; people pray to achieve particular ends. The divine (whether that be God

or lesser spirits) are called to accomplish those things that humans cannot. In the Pentecostal church it is the Holy Spirit that heals and in the Catholic Church it may be the blessed Virgin Mary.

In the Dominican Republic, spells, incantations, charms, divination, invocations, prayer, special prayers, trance, *fiestas*, *velas*, *velaciones*, *oraciones*, and spirit possession are variously used by *brujos*, Evangelicals, and Catholics to make use of the spiritual realm. Specifically, requests are made of the spirit world through special prayers, namely: *promesas*, *propósitos*, *clamores* and *oraciones*. These are all special appeals made to the divine on behalf of human agents. We have already discussed *oraciones* in detail earlier, but have yet to define the unique character of other important types of prayers like the *promesa* and *propósito*.

A *promesa*, literally a ‘promise’, is a Catholic vow made by a believer to a saint (and sometimes to God). It is usually a promise to carry out an act of devotion if and when a saint fulfills the given request. The vow enters the believer into a contractual agreement with the divine. If one makes a *promesa* and the request is not fulfilled, the vow is annulled and the pledged act need not be completed (compare with *propósitos* below). Common *promesas* are pledges to make a pilgrimage to a holy site, to fast for a given period of time, or to pray for the duration of a promised number of days.¹⁰ It is also common to offer a vigil by an altar on the day dedicated to a certain patron saint (such vigils are also known as *velación* or *noche de vela*) (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 360). A *promesa* is made for a variety of reasons; a

¹⁰ It is also common for people to take an oath to convert to a Protestant faith as payment for a favor or request that was fulfilled by the divine patron.

devotee may enter into a *promesa* in order to secure a job, perhaps in order to cure a sick family member, or maybe just to see a long lost relative. One can do a *promesa* for just about anything. *Promesas* are made by Catholics of all types and they are an important feature of popular Catholic devotion as well as the spiritual practices of Dominican *vodú*. They are Catholic by origination and may be compared with a similar, yet different vow made by Pentecostals, the *propósito*.

Propósitos are vows that are made to the divine; in the case of Pentecostals, they are made to God only, but in contrast to *promesas*, the promised act of devotion is performed *before* the request is granted. Put another way, the fulfillment of a devotee's request proceeds from the devotional act. In this arrangement, acts of devotion are carried out *until* the appeal is granted. The Pentecostals that I interviewed would enter into any number of *propósitos*. Though it was not considered something to share with others (they are considered to be private/personal oaths to God) *propósitos* were made for reasons such as to find a spouse (particularly a wife), to heal a sick family member, so that a friend or family member convert, etc. Becoming Christian or converting constituted a generalized *propósito* to God that one would be saved if they continued to live a felicitous and righteous life in service to God. Some of the most popular *propósitos* that I observed were those made to God in hopes of finding a wife. Typically *propósitos* of this kind were made by recent converts and they made vows to sleep in the church until God provided them with a wife. Other common acts of devotion were to pray daily or non-stop until a request was granted, also to hold vigils in the church, or simply to pray for four days at a

spiritual retreat. When the *pastora*'s (from IEP) daughter got sick, she did a *propósito* that sent her to a retreat in San Cristóbal where she prayed for a month until her daughter got better. In order to 'erase' the sin of a tattoo which he had gotten while in a street gang, Radames spent three days "in *propósito*" – praying and fasting in the church. Radames, as well as José Luis, Héctor, and others had a *propósito* to sleep in the church until God provided them with a wife. *Propósitos* usually involve abstaining from something or doing without something until the requested is fulfilled. Balidoris explains how a *propósito* is made: "You say, 'Dear God, I have a *propósito*, and I will stop doing this or that until you fulfill it for me'. So I stop doing this or that until he completes for me the *propósito*." According to Radames, "It inspires you, gives you the knowledge that God is real, [that he] is the truth." *Propósito* literally means 'purpose' or 'intention', and such requests are thought to have a real effect on the world. It was Yamilca's understanding that she influenced her ex-husband's conversion to Christianity through the *propósitos* that she had taken for this purpose, along with prayer and fasting directed at this goal.

A *clamor* is a special prayer or petition for something in particular. *Clamores* are 'focused' or 'targeted' prayers that Pentecostals make for someone or on behalf of someone. Individuals or congregations would do a *clamor* for a family in need, for a sick child, or for any specific need or problem. Like *oraciones* they have a specific

objective but they are not written down and need not be recited or repeated in the exact words and order as an *oración*.¹¹

In discussing *promesas*, Lundius and Lundhal (2000: 359) point out that vows, such as the *promesa*, may be more common in societies where a form of clientship prevails between influential people and their dependents. This would be consistent with the prominence of *propósitos* that I observed, and may explain their popularity in the context of Dominican Pentecostalism. Not unlike the relationship between *brujos* and their customers, a basic form of clientship also prevails in the structure of solicitation between Pentecostals and the communities they serve.

Novenas are an important feature of popular Catholicism throughout the country. A novena consists of a prayer (or some devotional ritual) that is repeated for nine successive days in order to obtain special graces or favors. It is, therefore, somewhere in between a *promesa* and an *oración*. There are many established or ‘official’ novenas that are to be recited exactly as they are written. There are novenas for many different occasions and they may be public or private – i.e. performed in a group or by one’s self. Novenas are often done in front of altars and may be occasioned by a *promesa*. There are a variety of novenas from Marian novenas (Our Lady of Sorrows Novena) to saint novenas (Saint Jude Novena) to special novenas (Christmas Novena), etc. Novenas often precede or are performed in preparation for a *velación* on or near a particular saint’s day.

¹¹ Pentecostals consider both *oraciones* and *promesas* to be demonic and profess to do neither. Instead they use *clamores* and *propósitos*.

Velaciones (also *velas* or *noches de vela*) are found in almost every community around the country and celebrated in honor of a patron saint. *Velaciones* are celebrated annually and are communal celebrations accompanied by prayers, singing and dancing. During these ceremonies spirits (either saints or a spirits of the dead) may mount participants (see Deive 1992 [1975]: 220). In this way, *velaciones* are syncretic celebrations that combine catholic prayers and rites and African-derived beliefs and practices (particularly possession, but also music, song, and dance) in communal worship and celebration (Deive 1992 [1975]: 220-221). Lundius and Lundahl (2000: 361) describe a typical *velación*: Preparations for *noche de vela* begin weeks in advance with prayers carried out on Tuesdays and Fridays in front of an altar. *Noche de vela* begins with prayers in the afternoon and is followed by *palos* and *salves* in the evening. Typically *velaciones* are occasions for singing, dancing and communal sharing of food (362). *Velaciones* are typically accompanied by *palo* drumming and the singing of *salves* (361).

Velaciones along with *fiestas patronales* are the central religious festivals of popular Catholicism in the country. *Patronales* are parties that are celebrated annually on a holy saint day and are popular occasions for merrymaking, drinking and dancing. Every town, of any respectable size, celebrates at least one *patronale* every year. These are typically the biggest parties of the year and they may last several days.

Festivals *maní* and *prillé* are the collective or public celebrations of Dominican *vodú*. While consultations with a *brujo* are generally private, *maní* and *prillé* are occasions to socialize as a community and also to have fun. These festivals are

thrown in honor of the *luases* or saints, and occur on their holy days. *Bailes de palo* dominate these *fiestas* and the spirits may mount participants.

Gagá is a rural festival celebrated on the four days leading up to Easter Sunday. *Gagá* is the Dominican version of *rara* celebrated in Haiti. As such, it has become a popular, if not, important public festival for Haitian communities and their descendants in the Dominican Republic. *Gagá* is a highly stylized religious ritual and secular festival with both private and public aspects. Participants are organized into groups or bands (*bandes*) that parade through the streets of different towns singing, dancing, drumming, and stopping to attract fans and followers, performing rituals, and ‘doing battle’ with other bands. *Gagá* is funded and carried out to fulfill serious ritual obligations to patron *lua* but much of the four-day festival is secular, playful, and non-serious involving dancing, singing and drinking (see McAlister 2002 and Rosenberg 1979 for studies of Haitian *rara* and Dominican *gagá* respectively).

Pentecostals do not celebrate as many holidays as the other spiritual communities and they do not celebrate *fiestas*. However, they do hold a number of public events that serve the purposes of both community building and evangelization: specifically, *campañas*, *retiros*, and *cultos de confraternidad*. These large public events of worship are organized frequently and with regularity throughout the year.

A *retiro* is a spiritual retreat and can be anything from a handful of church members fasting and praying for an afternoon to a large gathering of hundreds of worshipers at a designated place. *Retiros* can be held in public spaces like parks or squares, or they may be held in hospitals or prisons.

Campañas (also called *campana evangelistica*) are spiritual ‘campaigns’ that involve large public *cultos* that are held in central plazas and major public squares to address and attract the public.¹² They are usually the fruit of a combined effort between local churches and the biggest *campañas* throughout the year may bring together hundreds of congregations from all around the country. For example, every year a confederation of evangelical churches descend on the capital at the *Estadio Olímpico* for a yearly event called *la Batalla de la Fe*. Billed as the biggest (Christian) event of the year, on the first of January leaders of all the *concilios*, organizations, ministries, and ‘*iglesias cristianas*’ from around the country fill the seats of the stadium for a day of prayer, singing, music, and worship. *Campañas* such as these may have upwards of 20 or 30 thousand people. Regular *campañas* are much smaller and are usually held in public spaces like a park or square. In Villa they would have *campañas* in *el parque*, *el club de la fábrica*, or at a cross street in the center of town. Typically a stage, lights, speakers, sound equipment and instruments are set up and the night consists of guest speakers, music, prayer and evangelization at the conclusion of the event. *Campañas* are important tools of evangelization and tend to be places where people first convert. Visitors or onlookers are called up to the stage or up to the front after the service and are asked if they want to accept Jesus Christ as their savior. We will return to this in more detail in later. Many of my informants converted in just this way – they were invited to a *campana* by friends, and afterward

¹² *Culto* means ‘worship’ (and also ‘cult’) and refers to any ceremony of religious worship. It can be used to refer to such worship in any number of contexts and across religious communities – both Evangelicals and Catholics “*hacen culto*.” In the Pentecostal church, however, *cultos* are daily services held at the church and the term is applied to any occasion of public worship. When Pentecostals “*hacen culto en la calle*,” they hold a normal church service in the streets to attract the public.

they converted. Lastly, *campañás* are theaters for collective effervescence and are occasions for people to be touched or moved by the Holy Spirit.

Also *cultos de confraternidad* (literally, ‘confraternities of worship’) are large semi-public gatherings involving numerous church groups from a number of local churches. Each church usually has a women’s group, a men’s group, and a youth group. A confraternity is a local collective formed by any one of these groups (*confraternidad de jóvenes, confraternidad de pastores*, etc.). For example, on the second Saturday of every month the *confraternidad de jóvenes* ‘the Confraternity of Youths,’ which includes the youth groups of over 50 churches from around Villa, would hold a combined *culto* at a pavilion next to the baseball field. Hundreds of members, participants, and visitors would come from around town to attend the large two-hour service which was run or organized by teenagers and young adults (ostensibly they were run for the youth as well but the *cultos* are always well attended by people of all ages).

These religious celebrations and events vie for public attention, consumers, and participants. *Fiestas patronales*, largely secular but religious in nature compete as well, particularly with Pentecostals and other evangelical groups who find the parties corrupting. Also *fiestas de maní, gagá*, and other monthly festivals in service or celebration of holy saints or the *misterios* are open to the public and often encourage their participation. These public festivals and activities are important features of all three spiritual communities and they represent the public face of the institution.

All three institutions allow for personal communion with the divine. For Catholics, the Eucharist is an important rite in this regard but also simple appeals to a personal, at times magical, saint are a manifestation of communion more generally understood. Evangelicals, and Pentecostals in particular, cultivate a personal relationship with God through prayer and worship and may be ‘touched’ by, or ‘filled’ with the Holy Spirit (the highest level of communion with God). Likewise, spirit mediums or *brujos*, themselves communing with the divine as vehicles for the spirit, allow clients to speak directly with spirit beings, while neophytes and others may be mounted and ridden by the spirits in both spontaneous and ceremonial contexts. Fasting is also variously used as a way to commune with the divine in all three communities, along with, clearly, prayer and in some cases even sacrifice.

‘Personal empowerment’ is also a central theme to spiritual practices in the barrio, Villa and the Dominican Republic more broadly. Evangelicals are empowered through prayer and the belief that God is with them in their endeavors and activities. Similarly, Catholics are empowered by the belief that, for example, the Virgin Mary is looking after them. Patrons of *brujos* who seek magical protection from witchcraft or evil spirits find personal empowerment in spells and remedies intended or expected to protect them. It follows that many people will not begin a new undertaking without consulting an expert or divinity in the spiritual realm. Counseling on affairs such as love, business, travel, family, relationships, and life, is business as usual for these communities. Advice, particularly good advice, is desirable and welcomed by almost anyone who seeks spiritual guidance. Many of the differences between spiritual

communities and institutions are found in the type of advice they give and the solutions they propose to certain problems.

Both faith and fidelity in the supernatural world are also of central importance. Evangelicals, for example, must put their unquestioned faith in God and must be loyal to the church in order to be saved and that God will listen to their prayers. If you serve the *seres*, it is paramount that you do what is needed and desired by the spirit, if you do not, he or she might not listen, or worse, might make things more difficult for you. Catholic beliefs and teachings are so entrenched in everyday Dominican life that it is hard to challenge or go against many of the Catholic norms that are diffused throughout society. Many people, for example, baptize their newborns in the Catholic Church as soon as possible, whether they are practicing Catholics ('believers') or not. Many do so customarily while others believe that the child is in severe danger if they die without being baptized. This was the case of my roommate who had her daughter baptized at her mother's insistence. She herself was not religious but her mother insisted that the child would go to hell if she were to die without being baptized.

But, obviously, there is a difference between specialists and the publics they serve. You can join the priesthood or become a nun in the Catholic Church. One can become a *bruja* or a *curandero*. One can become a pastor or a deacon of a Protestant church. These specialists administer a variety of services, rites, spells, prayers, and healing, to each other and to lay people. All of these experts, in their own ways, propitiate the supernatural world. All specialists, in order to be successful, must nurture and cultivate a relationship with the divine, or the spiritual world. In this

client-based system the sick, hungry, or otherwise interested person will patronize any one of these institutions and/or their representatives with the hope of finding solutions to their problems. But like all institutions, these various spiritual communities have different niches, specialties, and, of course, different perspectives, goals, rules, and projects.

The Evangelical Church, for example, offers solutions for the cessation of drug and alcohol abuse, alternatives to gang membership, and provides both soothing and liberating alternatives to felons and prisoners. Although both *brujos* and the Catholic Church offer help for people suffering from these problems, the Evangelical Church actively seeks out people in this area and offers help (and, as we shall see, the Pentecostal church has a local reputation in this regard). José Luis, one of my informants, was brought to a *brujo* numerous times to deal with his drug problem. A Pentecostal today, he maintains that it was the only way for him to truly give up drugs and alcohol. Other people that I interviewed offered the same conclusions, mainly that secular drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, such as *Hogar Crea*, were only short-term solutions to addiction. The only totally effective treatment was conversion, which requires complete dedication and commitment to God.

It is important to note that the people who go to evangelical churches for help are not always the same people who patronize the Catholic Church or who may seek the help of a sorcerer – but they can be. All of the available options tend to be differentially effective and what is good for the goose, in this or that case, may not be good for the gander. Drug and alcohol abuse is one such niche or specialty of the

Evangelical Church. Should an individual want to ‘bind’, or rather, prevent a spouse or significant other from cheating on them, he or she is more likely to seek the help of a *brujo* than a Pentecostal. In this same fashion, for lottery numbers and fortune telling a *brujo* is usually consulted. If one would like to appeal to the Virgin directly for help, the Catholic Church perhaps provides the best option. The choice is dependent on a number of variables ranging from one’s familiarity with the community or spiritual institution, to one’s history with that institution, to one’s knowledge about their practices and beliefs, to the specific problem one needs to address.

Even though the spiritual economy of the barrio is diversified, these communities share the same spiritual ‘marketplace’ (see Chesnut 2003) so-to-speak, sharing similar aesthetics and basic cosmological assumptions. Drumming, singing and music, for instance, are used by both Evangelicals and *vodú* practitioners during *cultos*, *fiestas*, and other occasions of worship. Emically, drumming during *vodú* ceremonies facilitates the arrival of spirits to the cult house and the subsequent mounting of participants by the *seres*. In *vodú*, drummers play specific rhythms to call particular spirits to the area. Likewise, the evangelicals I studied used drumming in their services regularly and it seemed to facilitate the arrival of the Holy Spirit; although, they themselves did not see a direct connection to the trance states that they would attribute to the Holy Spirit and the furious drumming sessions that tended to precede its arrival. It was certainly an important part of daily services and worship and I never witnessed an event in the churches without them.

Many people attend religious festivities and events because they are “fun” and they make them happy. This is largely because music, drumming, singing, and dancing are a part of most religious festivities and conform to a cultural ‘taste’ for rhythm and song. Almost everyone that I spoke with at a *gagá* festival in 2009 said that they attended every year because it was fun. Similarly, people would often go to Pentecostal services, whether they were a member or not, because it was fun. And likewise, Catholic festivals, particularly *fiestas patronales*, festivals in celebration of local patron saints, are usually the most popular parties of the year and are generously attended.

Also, many participants, experts, and believers follow or observe a number of taboos. Whether they are dietary, sexual, or behavioral taboos, all restrict the total freedom of activity in some way. There are strict rules governing the practices and behaviors of religious specialists as well as members of congregations, parishes, or cult groups.

Importantly, there is a shared idea of or belief in the ‘miraculous’. In fact it is this unwavering belief in the miraculous that undergirds all belief in the barrios. The Holy Spirit is miraculous and can cure the sick and dying, the saints are miraculous and can do the same. Some *brujos* are believed to do miraculous things like fly or transform into animals. People seek the miraculous in their lives, not only to solve problems but also to provide stories, entertainment, gossip, and to garner notoriety (which may be exchanged for prestige).

People see the Pentecostal church and the ‘Christians’ within a field of religious possibilities. Pentecostals offer healing and problem solving just as the other practices do. Some work for some, the others work for others. Many people use the Pentecostal church for healing and other necessities but do not convert. Many people attend the church without becoming members. The institution is much larger and important than simply confirmed and baptized members. The church participates in a cultural drama, one in which it plays an important, and in certain circumstances central role, which will continue to be unpacked in the following chapters.

‘Voodoo’ in the Dominican Republic

The use of the term “voodoo” or related terms (*vodou*, *vodú*, etc.) to describe a domain of Dominican religiosity has been, and continues to be, controversial. The term is not used by Dominicans to describe their own practices and generally carries negative connotations. Throughout most of the Republic’s history, such practices have been outlawed and disdained, at times even meeting violent repression. Even today associated practices of witchcraft are still condemned and practitioners are the targets of stereotypes, ridicule and violent threats.

Magical beliefs and practices can be found throughout the country and across the island and it is not uncommon to see people of all classes consult a *brujo* for remedies or to see them attend the rites and ceremonies of *voduistas* (any practitioner of *vodú*) (Deive 1992 [1975]: 16).¹³ However, Dominican writers, intellectuals, and

¹³ Deive claims that believers in *vodú* and magic are increasing. Whether or not this is the case, such beliefs and practices tend to be stronger in the countryside and rural areas (365). This fact was not lost on my informants who often pointed out to me that such practices were far more common in *el campo*, despite their own immediate concerns about such practices in their own neighborhood.

historians have consistently denied the existence of *vodú* in the country (163).

Witchcraft, magic, and *vodú* are all discouraged by official discourse and many people are reluctant to admit to practicing or participating in any of them. Most of these practices are seen as evil and are denounced by the Catholic Church and their official representatives. Even though folklorists in the Dominican Republic have argued for years that there exists a vibrant folk religion, particularly in the rural areas (Lizardo 1982, Dominguez, Castillo and Tejada 1978, Andújar 2006, 2007, Davis 1987, Rosenberg 1979, Miniño 1985, along with others), it has yet to be legitimated by elites or raised to the status of 'respectable' religion. *Vodú* in particular is often practiced in secret, if not outside of the public gaze, mainly because of its association with Haiti and by extension barbarism, evil and backwardness.

Much of the negative perception of *vodú* in the Dominican Republic is based on the country's historical anti-Haitian sentiment. The 'backward' practices of *vodú* represent, the argument goes, the backward culture of Haitians: *vodú* is something that Haitians do, not what Dominicans do, and it is just another example of the corrupting, in fact, polluting influences of the neighboring black country to the west whose black hordes have been crossing the border for years trying to reunite the island and drag the Dominican Republic back into the dark ages. This myth, and others, has little basis in reality but the beliefs are common enough and are used as markers of difference and form the foundation upon which racism and discrimination against Haitians in the Dominican Republic are built.

Enough has been written about the antagonistic relationship that the Dominican Republic nurtures with Haiti (e.g. Sagás 2000, 1993, Wucker 1999). I need not delve into these issues here but suffice it to say that so-called voodoo practices are both the target of and constitutive of anti-Haitian rhetoric and discourse.¹⁴

Deive (1992 [1975]) in his study of *vodú* and magic in the Dominican Republic argues that Dominican *vodú* differs from Haitian *vodou* in a number of significant ways. Although a number of Dominican scholars and ideologues over the years have argued that spirit possession and witchcraft along with other so-called “black arts” came to the Dominican Republic from Haiti, popular religion in the Dominican Republic is more accurately understood as the product of European, African, *and* Haitian influences. Despite a common belief that *vodú* came recently to the Dominican Republic from Haiti, it has in fact a much longer history and most likely developed parallel to, or in tandem with, Haitian *vodou* (161-162).

Different historical and social factors contributed to the development of a unique Dominican version of *vodú* (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 375) and the practices and beliefs themselves are both similar and different from those in Haiti.

For one, *vodú* in the Dominican Republic is intimately tied up with magic and its distinct variants *brujería*, *adivinación*, *curanderismo*, etc., in ways that the practice of *vodou* in Haiti is not (Deive 1992 [1975]: 189). Simpson (1954: 395) defines

¹⁴ In contrast to the disavowal of *vodú* in the Dominican Republic, the Dominican press gives regular coverage of evangelical events and official statements, press conferences, and opinions of evangelical leaders and organizations.

Haitian *vodou* as “a syncretistic cult based upon West African religious traits, Catholic theology and ritual, items from the storehouse of European witchcraft, and local innovations, [and] includes a wide range of magical beliefs and practices as well as a variety of religious ceremonies.” What distinguishes *vodú* from other religions is a belief in spirit possession. Spirit possession is a fundamental feature of *vodou* doctrine in both countries. *Voduistas* maintain special relationships with one or more spirits and a devotee of a particular *misterio* has certain obligations he or she must fulfill to them (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 376).

In the Dominican Republic *voduistas* and *brujos* operate autonomously and often isolated, each with their own style of practice and interpretation of rite. There does not exist a uniform body of beliefs, rites or practices (Deive 1992 [1975]: 17). *Vodú* beliefs and practices are not fixed and may vary by location and practitioner.

Compared with Haitian *vodou* ceremonies that may have a large number of participants in addition to the priest and/or priestesses (*hungan* and *mambo*), in the Dominican Republic, consultations are usually private (even though collective meetings are also held on occasion). According to Simpson (1978: 71), possession in Haiti is occasioned by the “religious atmosphere” of a *vodou* ceremony (namely drumming, music, and dancing), while in the Dominican Republic it is generally necessary for the officiant to induce spirit possession, particularly because consultations are one on one. In this way, Dominican *vodú* shares a number of affinities with *santería* in Cuba as practices tend to center around the consultation

house and sessions with a spirit medium. As such, what we have called Dominican *vodú* up to this point is often referred to as *santería* by practitioners and believers.

According to Deive, the mythology of Dominican *vodú* is not as rich or developed as that of Haitian *vodou* and many myths that exist about individual spirits are “personal creations” or characteristics and attributes invented by someone for themselves and their clients (182). Significant amount of loss, reinterpretation and modification particularly in ritual have occurred from Haitian *vodou* to Dominican *vodú*. Deive claims, in fact, that Dominican *vodú* practitioners are not too concerned with the myths of the *luases* whose protection and help they seek (183). Dominican *vodú* does not have a shared doctrine or central creed, rather, it is understood in terms of its rituals, ceremonies, and magical assumptions (to which people subscribe variously, inconsistently and may not believe in possession all together but participate in syncretic catholic practices all the same).

Of Saints and *Luá*: the Dominican Pantheon and the Catholic Correspondence

There are a number of identifications and correspondences between the *loa* and catholic saints of Haiti and those of the Dominican Republic. According to a number of observers, the majority of Dominican *luá* come from the Haitian pantheon – or they generally share the same names (Deive 1992 [1975]: 171). Additionally there are local *luá*, ‘real’ or men and women who in their lifetime distinguished themselves as religious or military leaders and have been incorporated into the Dominican pantheon of spirits (171). There is also a category or division of Dominican *luá* that is unique to Dominican *vodú* and that is the division called *india* (171). This category does not

exist in Haiti. There is no uniform criteria of classification for *luá*. Which division one belongs to depends on who you ask. Some divide the spirits into ‘black’ and ‘white’ - that is, by origin or whether they are Dominican/European, or, Haitian/African (179). Some even speak of rural *seres* – who are wild spirits and not well educated – and compare them to urban spirits who are refined and civilized (179). The most common categorization of *luases* is into four groups: earth, air, water, and fire (179). Though many Dominican *voduistas* count or refer to 21 divisions, they often only know a few (usually 7 or 8) (180). Female *seres*, female spirits, are known as “*metresas*” and some *voduistas* categorize them as their own group (181).

A lot has been said about the relationship or correspondence in Haitian *vodou* between Christian saints and their so-called African counter parts or *loa* (see Herskovitz 1937, Metraux 1972 [1959], Bastide 1978 [1960] and 1971, Desmangles 1992, de Heusch 1995). Many of the *loa*, in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic, have two identities: for example, Saint Michael Archangel is known as both San Miguel and Belié Belcán; San Pedro is identified as Tiyán Petró; San Elías is Barón del Cementerio. Even *La Virgen de la Altagracia*, the patron saint of the country, has a corresponding *luá* who is Alailá, according to Deive (1992 [1975]: 227). In Haiti, where she is also venerated as the national patron saint, she is Maitresse Erzili (231). Much of the confusion around whether a spirit is to be regarded as a saint or a *loa* (often they have both identities) comes from the fact that practitioners and believers themselves hold differing and inconsistent beliefs in this regard. As such, few can be certain as to the extent of identification or ‘syncretism’ between the two. While a

Haitian *voduista* interviewed by Metraux could claim that “all saints are *loa*, but not all *loa* are saints,” in practice, such rules are far less fixed.

For many devotees in the Dominican Republic, it is the saint who possesses them and the saint who rides them like a horse. Many claim, for example, to work with San Miguel, not Belié Belcán (Deive 1992 [1975]: 225). And, while there might exist a corresponding *luá* to every saint and perhaps vice-versa, many people are ignorant of the other identity or simply do not use it. Remember, in the Dominican Republic the particular mythology surrounding the *misterios* is far less important or elaborated as they are in Haiti. An additional reason for not accounting for the alternative identity may be related to the negative association of Haitian and African identity in the Dominican Republic. It would seem much more advantageous to privilege or put forward the European, Catholic, Christian image of the saint over the other which has historically been associated with evil and backwardness. Regardless, most believers do not impart too much significance to the difference between saints and *misterios*, they are seen as one in the same, spirits between man and God.

Popular Religion?

Generally speaking, most people do not receive much religious instruction. For many in the popular classes, the virgin and saints are “*muy milagrosos*” or ‘miraculous’ (Deive 1992 [1975]: 212). Devotion to the saints, inherited from the colonial period, is one of the most typical religious characteristics of popular Catholicism in the country. Devotion to the saints and particularly Marian devotion is popular throughout the island (as it is in other Latin American countries) and popular

piety is very much wrapped up in these beliefs (Lundius and Lundahl 2000: 365). Lundius and Lundahl (2000: 339) argue that present-day Dominican popular religion derives in part, not from the exalted and sophisticated Roman Catholicism of the conquistadors but rather from isolated Spanish settlers and the common man taking part in the conquest; “uneducated and with his roots in rural society and peasant religion”. They enumerate five significant practices that derived from medieval Spain: one, ‘pagan’ features that were connected to peasant farmers who were concerned with fertility; two, though not exclusively, the desire for intermediation between a supreme yet distant God and mortals/men/human beings by the saints; three, the Spanish practice of building *ermitas*; four, the presence of the devil and/or a particular conception of evil as embodied or represented by the devil; and lastly, five, the establishments of *cofradías*.

The *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, explains how the witchcraft beliefs of Spain came to the Americas and were taken up by local populations: “Three different notions of witchcraft converged in Spanish America, incorporating Spanish, Amerindian, and African concepts of witches and sorcerers. The conquistadores carried contemporary Spanish ideas on witchcraft and sorcery to the New World. Missionaries and educated men were familiar with the demonological witch concept, while most colonists understood popular traditions about sorcery (*hechicería*) and harmful magic. Because frequent communication of Spaniards with Native Americans and Africans usually occurred among lower social strata, mostly concepts from popular Iberian tradition were transmitted” (2006: 1071). The belief that witches can fly and can transform into

animals probably comes directly from Spain. Interestingly, according to the encyclopedia entry for witchcraft in Spanish America, the predominant type of witch in colonial Spanish America was “a sorceress engaged in love magic, divination, propitiatory rites, and magical healing” (1072). “Love magic,” it continues, “included invocations, especially to Saint Martha, who, as in Spain, was believed to be most helpful in love affairs” (1072). This, as we have seen, continues today in the Dominican Republic. Also, the conjuring of demons, especially the ‘limping devil’ (*diablo cojelo*), tracing magical circles and using special items such as earth or other objects from a graveyard are important aspects of the magical dynasty Latin America has inherited from Spain (1072). Historically, witches in the New World worked almost exclusively as individuals and “Male Spanish and Creole sorcerers generally engaged in seeking treasure or conjuring luck when gambling by invoking the Devil or specialized demons and offering to make a pact in order to fulfill their desire” (1072) [see section on Devil Pacts below].

Popular Catholicism, a term which could be used to describe the popular beliefs and practices of many townsfolk, peasant farmers, and others, is distinguished from Dominican *vodú* in that believers may or may not regard possession by spirits a good or desirable thing. These individuals can have negative views of *brujos* and wish not to propitiate any spirits other than their beloved saints or virgins.

Overall, ‘popular religion’ in the Dominican Republic is heterogeneous, and as such, cannot easily be categorized as *vodú*, Catholicism, Spiritism, *Santería*, or even Christianity, without some kind of erasure or omission. It is all of these at once and is

the interactive product of primarily European, African, and Amerindian spirituality. There is no uniform or hegemonic doctrine that unifies the various beliefs and practices at the local level. Rather, an idea of ‘Christianity’ provides a moral framework (a set of ideas based on moral precepts) upon which or within which spiritual practices are read and evaluated. Some broad generalizations can be made about some shared beliefs and practices but few if any are fixed or static. People put the spirit world to work for themselves and are often creatively interpreting, reinterpreting, and creating as they go. Christianity offers a guiding assumption for popular practices, a foundation upon which to draw legitimacy, power, meaning, and history. For centuries, Christianity has provided believers in the Caribbean with a toolbox of symbols from whence people have borrowed from and used to act on their worlds and interpret their experiences. While Christianity provides the stage, the floorboards, the curtains, the backdrop, the scene, for everyday spiritual dramas and religious practices, it also provides the chairs of the theater; that is to say that it informs the perspective from which these practices are then read by believers as well as non-believers and the public at large.

In light of this heterogeneity/heterodoxy I will at times refer to Dominican *vodú*, as defined by Deive, and at other times adopt a more general language of ‘Dominican popular religion’, which I understand to be predominantly informed by Catholicism and partially derived from African religious forms. Dominican popular religion has been influenced by Haitian *vodou* to a large extent as well. It is, perhaps, wisest, both emically and etically, to conceive of popular religion in the Dominican

Republic on a scale or continuum. Along this continuum of identity and practice we can place Evangelical or Protestant religious practices as well as Haitian *vodou*. There are a number of reasons for this. One, attention must be paid to the fact that Haitian *vodou* is practiced in the Dominican Republic with regularity (by Dominicans and Haitians alike) and to highlight the important role of evangelical churches at the local level in shaping the spiritual economy of the country. In addition, there does exist a constellation of practices that have been identified by Deive which we should recognize somewhere between either poles. Along this continuum is Haitian *vodou*, what has been called Dominican *vodú* by various authors, ‘folk’ or ‘peasant religion’ (Lundius and Lundahl 2000), popular or folk Catholicism (cult of saints and popular Marian devotion), Catholicism ‘proper’, and the various protestant faiths in the country which are generally glossed as ‘evangelical’.¹⁵

The distinction that is often made by observers as well as religious practitioners themselves between Christianity and what is sometimes called ‘traditional religion’ is arbitrary and spurious. This distinction is made both emically and etically in many different contexts but tends to confuse or obscure a view of the religious field as a whole and the relations that obtain between religious communities and institutions at the local level. This particular opposition tends to be based on the perceived differences between ‘official’ church doctrine and popular practice.

¹⁵ I should note here that it is not my intention to include along this continuum all religious identities, institutions or practices that exist in the country. I include only those practices, institutions and/or identities that compose or make up ‘popular religion’ in the country. I define popular religion as that complex of beliefs and practices that inform to a great extent the worldview of a significant percentage of the population.

The relationship between ‘official’ church doctrine and popular religious faith or practice has always been one of separation and inequality. The two have rarely if ever overlapped. This causes a problem of definition when trying to define and/or locate different religious subjectivities in any given context. What exactly is Catholicism in Latin America is a common question. We know, for example, that the Roman Catholicism espoused by the Pope is quite different from the diverse practices and beliefs held by Latin American peasants as a whole. Many social scientists have sidestepped this issue by employing terms like ‘popular religion’, ‘folk religion’, or ‘peasant religion’, to refer to religion in practice or ‘unauthorized’ or ‘unofficial’ religion. This has not always been the case for places like the Caribbean, however, where popular religion is often given its own name and positioned in opposition to the official religion of the state. *Vodou*, for example, has always been opposed to Catholicism by outsiders despite the fact that *vodou* practitioners consider themselves to be Catholic. In fact the term ‘*vodou*’ is itself rarely if ever used by the people it is said to describe. When we as social scientists adopt, uncritically, these categories we participate in privileging official or elite discourses about the relationship between belief and identity. This is never an idle or disinterested act and it necessarily has political ramifications.¹⁶

It is, of course, relevant that so-called *voduistas* consider themselves to be Catholics (and not, say, Protestants, or ‘*voduistas*’). And, this same way, it is also

¹⁶ Historical attempts to write Christianity out of *vodou* reflect a broader more racist effort to purge *vodou* of its legitimacy and to discipline ‘native’ Christians. Rarely are *vodou* practitioners seen as Catholic even though all of them are.

important to recognize that those individuals have ideas about the divine and what constitutes religious service that differ significantly from those held, by say, the Pope.

Popular religion in the Dominican Republic does not exist outside of Christianity. That is to say that popular or 'traditional' religion in the Dominican Republic is always already Christian. So, how can we empirically assess the relationship between different Christian subjectivities in the context of a Christian country? This is, I think, a substantive difference between studying Pentecostalism in Africa, for example, and studying it in the Caribbean or the New World in general.

Who is Christian, what does being Christian mean, and who gets to determine those answers are important and contentious issues. They are eminently important in the New World where Christianity as a cultural system shapes moral worlds, figures local value systems, and structures relationships of status and privilege/prestige.

Christianity and 'Traditional Religion'

The heterodox religious field in the Dominican Republic is both in conflict and in agreement. Many scholars have studied the relationship between Christianity and 'traditional religion,' particularly the consequences of missionization and the ways in which Christianity has rejected or accommodated local religious practices and beliefs (e.g. Meyer 1999). Studies like these have a long history in the Caribbean starting with the ways in which many Christian beliefs have fused or 'syncretised' with slave religion and/or indigenous Amerindian beliefs (Herskovitz 1964 [1937], Bascom 1950, Bastide 1978 [1960]). Anthropological studies of Pentecostalism around the globe have noted the particularly aggressive ways in which this form of Christianity

has attacked and rejected local beliefs – equating all ‘paganisms’ with demonic forces, Satanism, and abject evil (Burdick 1998, Meyer 1999). In Africa, for example, Birgit Meyer (1999) has shown how a particular form of mission Christianity has demonized traditional African religious practices and redefined local spirits as demons or the devil. She has done an amazing job of tracing this relationship from the missionizing efforts at the turn of the 19th century among the Ewe of modern day Ghana, Togo, and Benin, and linking it to greater movements toward modernity in Western Africa.

Compared with Africa (as explored by Meyer and others), the Caribbean offers a unique place to study relationships between so-called traditional religion and new Christian religious formations because of both the similarities and differences between the two regions. Particularly important is the fact that Christianity has always been a part of the modern Caribbean, ever since the colonization of the New World, and until only very recently have non-Christian or heterodox practices of any kind even been authorized by elites. Various Christianities evolved in the Caribbean alongside as well as intertwined with African-derived beliefs and practices. In the Spanish Caribbean (but not unlike the originative churches of the Anglophone and Francophone islands), the Catholic Church has always demonized such practices and has attempted to do away with them through violent anti-superstition campaigns and propaganda (see Laguerre 1989, Hurbon 2001, Mintz and Trouillot 1995). The introduction of Protestant forms of Christianity in the early part of the 20th century, particularly of late in the form of Pentecostalism, put into motion a process of religious or spiritual transformation that has only in the last few decades received attention from scholars.

I would like to add that the effects of Pentecostalism's aggressive stance toward African-derived religion is probably over-stated in the literature, at least as far as it concerns the Caribbean and Latin America. The Catholic Church has always condemned these practices yet they have endured. Part of the reason it appears this way is because the Catholic Church in Latin America has made certain concessions with local beliefs to try and incorporate a native understanding of Christianity, a compromise many suggest has not been made by Protestants. I find this suggestion curious for a number of reasons. For one, part of the transferability of Pentecostalism from one place to another is the fact that it is quick to localize and take on a unique local flavor wherever it takes root. As I suggested earlier, Pentecostals in the Dominican Republic have incorporated local music, feasts, and a consultation structure into their services that makes a typical *culto* look more 'local' than Sunday Mass at the Catholic church. Two, Pentecostals are certainly outspoken about their disapproval of faiths other than their own, but in the Dominican Republic (and no doubt in other places as well), they are no more outspoken than the Catholic Church, who has consistently taken an aggressive stance against *vodú* and other syncretic practices.

Demonizing Catholicism

Here I would like to focus on Pentecostalism's rejection, not of the 'traditional', but rather Pentecostalism's rejection of the 'standard' – Catholicism.

Much has been made about Pentecostalism's rejection of the 'traditional' – that which typically refers to 'native', 'local', 'indigenous', or non-Christian beliefs – yet

little has been said about Pentecostalism's rejection of Catholicism as part of this process. While the Pentecostal church is no more aggressive than the Catholic Church in its rejection of popular African-derived beliefs, it is equally critical of and aggressive toward Catholic beliefs. Evangelical Christians may be just as critical of Catholics and the Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic as they are of any other beliefs.

There are a lot of reasons for this. For one, 'traditional' culture and religion in the Dominican Republic is fundamentally Catholic. As a Catholic country, Catholicism in the Dominican Republic represents a normative cultural identity. That is to say that people see themselves as Catholic because they see themselves as Dominican. One need not 'believe' in Catholicism – go to mass, confession, take communion – to be Catholic. Additionally, those people who actively participate in African-derived beliefs and practices do so as Catholics. For believers, the two practices are often not separate and can be impossible to pull apart – analytically or in practice. *Brujas* of Dominican *vodú*, for example, consider themselves Catholic and participate in Catholic services and celebrations. *Brujos* use catholic prayers and rites to call and propitiate catholic saints. This complex set of relationships places Catholics, in the eyes of Evangelicals (particularly Pentecostals), alongside 'heathens' and other 'heretics'. In fact, for the Pentecostals that I worked with, Catholics were just as involved with demons and the devil as were *santeros*, *brujos*, and the like. Most of these Pentecostals see demon worship and witchcraft as Catholic practices and Catholicism proper as idolatry (in fact the same idolatry committed by *brujos*

who, like all Catholics, all worship the “*Dios de los cuadros*” – ‘a god of pictures’). Catholicism is seen as idolatry, and Catholics are seen as satanic because they propitiate saints, behind which, or who Pentecostals believe, are demons. The same saints that are called on in Dominican *vodú* are many of the same saints that Catholics patronize. Because Pentecostals consider those spirits, who are saints, to be demonic, they consider Catholics, who call upon the saints, worshipers of demons and idols.

Saints and Demons

The Pentecostals that I worked with considered the Catholic saints demons. If pressed they tended to say things like, “Mary was the mother of Jesus, that was it, she is not a God.” I cannot help but think of a sign I once saw at the entrance of a *batey* that explains quite clearly and in no uncertain terms:

THE EARTH IS CORRUPT; YOU ARE A PART OF IT; WHEN A TOWN CELEBRATES FIESTAS TO IDOLS – patron or patroness like – *la mercedes* – *san antonio* – *la altagracia* – *la candelaria* – *palo* – *rezos* – *novena* – *gagá* – *priyé*. [HE] WHO RECEIVES THIS GLORY IS SATAN AND THE DEMONS AND NOT GOD: 1 Corinthians 10-20-21-22 Deuteronomy 32:17 Psalm 106:28

In other words, if you participate in any popular celebration (*fiestas patronales*) you are praising Satan not God. The invocation and juxtaposition here of practices associated with *vodú* (*gagá*, *palo* [which is often associated with the calling of spirits], *priyé*) with Catholicism (*novenas*, *rezos*, and celebrations to the various patron saints, *la Mercedes*, *la Candelaria*, etc.) is indicative of the kind of conflation Pentecostals (and others) make with popular religious practices. They see nothing in common between themselves and so-called Catholics because the practice of Catholicism in the

Dominican Republic is, to them, idolatrous, demonic, and sinful. Consider the following examples.

During an interview with Moisés, a Dominican of Haitian descent and a baptized Pentecostal who attended IdD, he described the Catholic Church in contrast to the Pentecostal church as follows:

I don't want to criticize the Catholic Church, just that when one is there, one feels more liberal. Like my wife said to me not long ago "no, you are a brother [*hermano*] you can't go wherever you want." But she can, she believes in Christianity but she is Catholic. That is to say that Catholicism permits... It's more open, liberal we would say. It's more like the Haitian or African culture, Afro-Haitian. It's the mixing of *vodú* with Catholicism, it's more like – I want to be clear on this point – it's like that in Haiti but even here. For example, when they celebrate *fiestas patronales* it's something that is related to the Catholic Church, but *behind* this is... We also see a culture imposed by the organizers, that this culture is supposedly Christian of the saints, San Judas, Saint this, Saint that, Saint here, Saint there, so after some time there has been a mixture celebrating this. For example here, in the Dominican Republic there is a place called Najayo where with drums they go into trance. That is to say that they feel possessed by a spirit that we call evil spirits, even though in the [Pentecostal] church the people also go into trance, the people move a lot, we call that the Holy Spirit.

Moisés was an educated (one of only a few of my informants that was attending or had attended the university), articulate and thoughtful man, evident here in his carefully weighed thoughts on the issue. To Moisés, Catholics are too permissive, they allow their flock to steal from work, sleep around, and disobey laws. Here he tries to put into words the fact that Catholicism, as it is practiced in the Dominican Republic, is syncretic. To him it is a mixture of *vodú* and Catholicism, and importantly, a mixture that the church permits. Additionally, he points out that while *fiestas patronales* are

billed as Catholic celebrations, “behind” this, or perhaps hidden by the organizers who claim that it is Catholic, is something else – namely, *vodú* or service to the spirits.

Pastor Ramón, a very well educated man and an indispensable guide and host to me throughout this project, put it to me this way one afternoon when discussing the popular practices of (Catholic) people around town:

Look, sometimes people make pacts that are binding, they appear Christian but they are not. For example, people who offer a child to whomever: “if you heal me I offer the child to you, San Miguel.” But San Miguel is demonic, *los brujos*, all of them have saints, they are the same from the church, these demons manifest through these saints.

It is Ramón’s view that the saints in the Catholic Church, such as San Miguel, are the same saints that are venerated by the *brujos* and others. San Miguel, he insists, is a demon. The saints are merely just a cover for demons who “manifest” through them. From this perspective, the appearance of a saint is merely a façade that conceals their true demonic nature. Upon considering the practices of the veneration of saints and the practices of *brujos* (which he refers to here as *santería*), he further reasons:

The bible speaks against *santería* because they are idols distinct from God. So the people begin to use this, sorcerers [*hechiceros*] use this to deceive, when you go to visit [a *brujo*] what is it that you see? *The same Virgin Mary and the same saints that are in the church!*

The worshipping of saints is understood as idolatry by local Pentecostals. Ramón suggests that *brujos* use these saints “to deceive” others. His evidence is the fact that when you go to a *brujo*’s home you will see the same images of saints that you see in the Catholic Church. His wife, Lizette, put it more succinctly:

Santería and these things come from [the Catholic Church]. The pictures that [*brujos*] use, and all of these things, are the same as in the Catholic Church. If they have a San Miguel, then they have one too.

The image of *la Virgen de Altagracia*, the *brujos* work with the Virgin and do fiestas for her. There are some who work with San Miguel, some with *el Gran poder de Dios*, or whomever, *they are the same saints as in the Catholic church!*

Lizette's insistence here that *brujos* work with the same saints of the Catholic Church is not to point out the confusion or deceptive techniques of scheming *brujos* but rather to establish the fact that the saints of the Catholic Church themselves are demonic and to link, indeed, to equate the practices of *brujos* with that of Catholicism. After all, in her estimation, such practices derive from the church.

Discussing a Catholic neighbor down the street from their home, Lizette explains that devotion to the saints is not what it appears to be and suggests, just as Ramón and Moisés, that something more sinister exists 'behind' such worship:

There are many people, for example from Mexico, who worship the Virgin of Guadalupe. The virgin has many names. *Virgen del Carmen* is the same as *Virgen de la Altagracia* and they have their altars, but *behind* this, they come to practice other things...

...Yes, through this belief they practice other things. For example there is a *señora* next to the *colmado* [convenience store] down the street that is a *bruja* and the same virgin that they worship, *La Altagracia, Guadalupe*, whomever they have in their altar, and to this they light candles, put there things there [on the altar], their gifts, and they worship with their saints. If you go this way, behind this there are manifestations of demons.

...everywhere they do this, its like that everywhere here, all over the world they practice sorcery, this is the problem. People believe that it is a saint who helps them but it is what is behind this that is the problem.

Pentecostals in Villa believe that the saints are truly demons – that the names and images of saints betray their evil nature. Because behind the image is not saintliness or grace, but rather evil. According to Josefina, “Even though they are names of the

bible (they like to use the names of the prophets) they are demons.” Mariela, who we met earlier, employed a similar metaphor of ‘disguise’ to explain the true nature of the Catholic woman who baptized her into service of the saints:

The *brujos* have a tie with the Catholic Church. When they baptized me with these saints they brought me to Higüey [*la basilica*], everyone that they are going to baptize they brought to Higüey. They are ‘undercover Catholics’ [*son católicos tapados*], they show themselves as Catholics but the woman who baptized me is a totally satanic woman who eats candles, glass, and does terrible things.¹⁷

Much like the images and saints themselves, *brujos* are seen as masquerading as Catholics. The fact that one can be Catholic and practice witchcraft, and the fact that most *brujos* consider themselves Catholic is not lost on the Evangelicals. Pentecostals see that many Catholics practice magic and “*se montan demonios*,” and other things that they themselves are divinely prohibited from doing. While Catholics may practice *vodú* and other related beliefs more freely or openly, Protestants may not, and must break with all such relations.

Much like in Haiti, with few if any exceptions, all Dominicans who practice Dominican *vodú* are Catholic. They have been baptized and they participate frequently in Catholic services (Deive 1992 [1975]: 211). In Haiti, a peasant was recorded as saying: “To serve the *loa* you have to be a Catholic...” (Metraux 1972: 323). Even those *brujos* who “serve with both hands” or rather who do ‘black’ magic claim to be devote Catholics “whose commandments they strictly obey” ([my translation] Deive 1992 [1975]: 211). In fact, some *brujos* may take offense to the

¹⁷ The phrase “*son católicos tapados*” is not easily translated. *Tapados* comes from the transitive verb *tapar*, which means ‘to put a lid on’ or ‘to cover up’ or ‘to block’. I have chosen to translate it as ‘undercover Catholic’ to reflect the meaning I believe she was trying to convey.

accusation that they practice witchcraft; “They vehemently affirm that their gifts have been granted by God and that they heal in his name” ([my translation] 211). But evangelicals are quick to question the truthfulness of such claims:

There are two places, you are with God or you are with the devil, if you are doing the correct, you are with God, if you are dealing with altars [*bregando con altares*] then the devil is there because I cure in the name of God, God doesn't want anything to do with divination. The bible says that those who practice such things will not see God. Many say that they are not *brujos* but ‘clairvoyants’ and that they have positive energy, but that is a lie! The bible says that God does not want anything to do with that. You know the people who read astrology? The bible says that if you do not repent you will not see God. I'm not saying what we evangelicals say, I'm saying what the bible says. Many [*brujos*] say they don't work with Satan and they teach them a picture, supposedly of *El Gran Poder de Dios*, and the people believe it, they bring them money, if you go and you want to do some witchcraft to your neighbor. This is of God? God is not in these things. [Josefina]

Pentecostals in the Dominican Republic endorse and promote a Manichean worldview and are quick to read what people do as essentially good, or essentially evil. We will return to this idea later but here it should be clear that if you are not doing the right, you are doing the wrong, and if something is not of God, according to Pentecostals, then it must be of the devil.

Pastor Ramón knew a man a lot like Mariela who “manifested terrible demons” until he was put to work in service of the spirits:

I had an experience with a *brujo*, he would always come to the place where I used to work. I knew him in his normal state, when he was normal, but when he ‘manifested’ this [demon], he took nails from the wall with his teeth. He always manifested something strange. Later he began to do witchcraft and he was fine. Now, with that, he doesn't manifest. He was a famous *brujo*.

My friend and I were Christians at the time and we told him that what he had was not a saint but a satanic demon. Sometimes we would

argue with him that this wasn't his saint but a demon and he would say no, it's my saint. He would always initiate the attacks, but later apologize to us. One day he asked us why we were inviting him to the church. He told us that he could go to the Catholic Church but not the Evangelical Church because of what he worked with. *Los brujos* go to the Catholic Church because the saints they use are in the Catholic Church.

José Luis a member of IEP who we will meet later, goes as far as to claim that people work with the spirits know that they are demonic:

Brujos have demonic beliefs, because they know that they are demons. [I know] because a girlfriend of mine also mounted demons, or rather, the demons used her. She would say to me "the demons visited me." I understand this now that I am Christian, before I believed that what they told me was true. *Brujos* answer to demons.

This is certainly the case for some. As mentioned earlier, there are beliefs about summoning demons in both Haitian and Dominican forms of *vodou*. In Haitian *vodou* there are a particular class of spirit or *loa* that are called *diab*, which people generally regard as demonic. However, most who serve the *seres* do not see them as demonic and, like Mariela, do not regard them as demons until they convert.

Promesas are also understood to be demonic by Pentecostals. When intending to ask about *propósitos* one day while visiting with Denny and Josefina at their home, I used the term '*promesa*' and was corrected immediately by Denny, "No," he said, "those are not *promesas*, *promesas* are diabolical, they are made to images and the virgin. We do *propósitos*."

For Pentecostals, it seems that it is the ambiguity related to the correspondence between saints and *seres* that is the very thing that is understood as evil and deceptive. When Pentecostals perform exorcisms in Villa often they are exorcising a saint, such

as San Miguel, who has taken dominion over someone's body. Importantly, they do not distinguish between them. The spirit is understood as a demon who has taken the name of a saint, a deceptive move associated with the deceptive nature of the devil himself. That the demon represents itself as a saint – as good – in order to trick people into serving it, is analogous to the types of challenges Pentecostal Christians claim to face on a daily basis – distinguishing between what is of God and what is of the devil.

The images of saints are understood as both powerful and powerless. On the one hand Pentecostals say that the images themselves are nothing, but on the other hand they impart power and agency to the demonic powers behind it or associated with it. Anyone believed to have an image of a saint in his or her home is believed, by Pentecostals, to practice witchcraft or at least be guilty of idolatry. Because demonic power lies behind such images, the images themselves can be dangerous and it is thought must be avoided. The demon whose power manifests through the image may transfer or be passed on to one's body if they are not careful. Thus, anyone who has an image of a saint in his or her house is in danger of demonic possession.

But how are they so certain that the power derives from the devil and not God? The provenance of the actual powers behind the images is evinced, according to Pentecostals, by the consequences of such actions. According to Pastor Ramón, “*brujos* heal, but with consequences,” which might be illness, the death of a loved one, bad luck, and/or ultimately one's own death. When evangelical Christians refer to whether people believe in witchcraft, they are referring to whether or not they believe in the power of witchcraft. Pentecostals fear witchcraft because they regard the

powers behind it has dangerous and powerful. It is believed that witchcraft works, but that it comes with conditions, conditions that if the practitioner knew the truth about the power's provenance, they would not want to get involved in it.

Some of the Pentecostals that I worked with made a distinction between those Catholics who feared God, and those who did not – e.g. those that practiced or believed in witchcraft, who had altars, who went to see *brujos*, etc., and those that did not because, ostensibly, they feared God. People who lived without fear of God and who practiced witchcraft were often understood to be ignorant of Satan's existence and power over their lives. I heard Pentecostals say “*lo malo existe, existe un Diablo*,” or “the Devil exists,” almost as often as I heard them say, “*Dios es real*,” or “God is real.” Part of becoming a Pentecostal in the Dominican Republic is believing not only in the righteous power of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but also of the power of Satan in the everyday affairs of mankind.

Because there already existed an elaborate discourse about the demonic in the Dominican Republic before the arrival of the Protestants, it is unclear to what extent these churches have contributed to developing local demonologies. It is clear that Pentecostals have adopted existing beliefs in devil pacts, malign spirit possession, and ‘demonic’ witchcraft that existed on the island before their arrival. And they, much like the Catholic Church before them, explicitly denounce the veneration of spirits they see as demonic – the *seres*, and other African-derived spirit beliefs.

Los Cristianos y Los Brujos and Spiritual Warfare in El Barrio

While one might think that local Catholics, Pentecostals, and *brujos* would have strained or antagonistic relations, in barrio Francisco, and in Villa more generally, they get along with few incidents. Most of the Christians that I spoke with claimed to be civil to everyone and I observed nothing to the contrary. In fact, most people maintained friendships across these lines and did not typically quarrel or fight with each other. *Brujos* would avoid churches and Christians would avoid their celebrations and ceremonies. Essentially, they cultivate a relationship of mutual respect in so far as each allows the other to do as they please without too much harassment. As a general rule, for every church in the neighborhood there is a cult house or place where a *brujo* holds consultations. I found this to be the case wherever I went in the country.

However, the fact that everyone lives relatively peacefully together does not mean that conflict never arises. The problem of witchcraft was a present one in the barrios of Villa and Pentecostals believed themselves to be engaged in a spiritual battle over control and supremacy of the neighborhood – a spiritual war between God and Satan, good and evil. For Domingo, a deacon at IEP and the resident of a barrio on the other side of town, the greatest problem faced by his neighborhood was that of witchcraft:

The problem that affects us the most here, in this neighborhood, is a center of witchcraft that is here where they practice *spiritism* and summon spirits. It has brought certain problems. Why? Because even though this is a calm area, as you can see, although the lights go out (usually there is no light), it is a calm area. Over there, down the road, is where the issues begin, where they practice this, where there are centers of witchcraft, where they summon spirits, the neighborhood is

always under some influence. This has the effect of shortages, there are shortages of employment, often it also affects health, many times it affects unhappiness in marriage, [it causes] innumerable difficulties. We look to intercede and pray. Through this we have been able to maintain some control over the neighborhood. People who live over there have told me that they feel these evil spirits walking at night, they don't let them sleep, they enter the house and knock over everything in the home. The Lord has given us the authority, the dominion and control to maintain a hold over the neighborhood.

Gabriela, a resident of barrio Francisco and *hermana* of IdD lamented the same fate:

“There are bad spirits that we are constantly having to contend with here.”

Offering an example of how this conflict may be played out on any given day, Pastor Ramón recounted a story to me one day about when he lived in the capital and lived beside (in fact shared a wall with) a *brujo*. Ramón explained that he would get up in the middle of the night on Tuesdays and Fridays, “when *brujos* do most of their spiritual work,” and would pray, “to protect [his] family from the witchcraft and evil spirits that the *brujo* worked with.” One Tuesday night, he had a dream “that seemed real” where he battled with a demon. In the dream the demon said to him, “Fine, I can't [fight] with you but now I go to your son,” and the demon left to go to the cradle where his son lay asleep. When the demon touched the cradle, his son awoke and began to cry. Ramón woke up from his dream at that same moment to hear his son crying and the sound of something on the other side of the wall. He could hear that something fell in the *brujo*'s house at the same time the demon touched his son's cradle and woke him up. That day the *brujo* packed up his things and moved out of the house. “So,” Ramón finished, “there exists a fight in the spiritual world that even though we can't see it, it exists.”

Later during our interview he explained to me that this spiritual war is not new and that it has been going on for a long time according to the bible. He likened the struggle of today's Christians against demons and witchcraft to Jesus' struggles with demons in the New Testament.

While neighbors live with each other side by side without incident most of the time, relations between *brujos* and Christians tended to worsen during special events, holidays, and celebrations.

Down the hill on the other side of barrio Francisco, members of IEP organized fairly regular opposition to fiestas that were put on by one of the better-known *brujas* in the area. Melinda, the so-called *bruja*, was notorious among the Pentecostals in the neighborhood and they watched her closely. She had many clients and did consultations out of her home. As a *brujo* she offered clients magical protection as well as spells for many different occasions. She was also considered a *curandero* (clients referred to her as "*la medica*") and as such many came to her for cures and remedies. Every year, on the 24th of September, she would celebrate *dia de las Mercedes* and people would come from all over to attend the celebration that she would host. Melinda was allegedly *mestiza* or half-Dominican and half-Haitian. Though she claimed to be Dominican, neighbors deduced her specific ancestry by her last name 'Pierre' – a name from Haiti.¹⁸ Josefina, who lived down the street from her, described the parties she would throw as such:

¹⁸ There is a widespread belief in the Dominican Republic that Haitian magic is more powerful than Dominican magic. Perhaps for that reason Haitian *brujos* are often highly respected and just as greatly feared.

When she celebrates the day of *Las Mercedes*, her to this picture, she would do a fiesta for her every year where they sacrifice pigs, spill blood, and they eat this food. The area is full of vehicles with people from all the surrounding areas, people fall *montados* [possessed] with many different demons. It was a terrible thing.

Four years ago the congregation at IEP began to hold vigils in advance of the fiesta, not to prevent her from throwing the party, but rather so that few people would attend. They would pray all day and all night a day or two before the party and, according to Denny, since the church has coordinated this effort, the fiestas are not nearly as large as they used to be and few people attend.

Generally, that is on most days, everyone seems to get along with little incident. The evangelicals invite Melinda to the church from time to time and she refuses gracefully stating that since they do not go to her church or attend her fiestas she will not attend theirs.

Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Magic

Importantly, many people in Villa widely believe themselves to be vulnerable to witchcraft, demonic possession, as well as related misfortune and sickness resulting from such procedures. As in many other parts of the world, witchcraft and the acts of malevolent spirits are frequently blamed for illness, misfortune, and death.

Supposedly beliefs such as these tend to be more common in rural areas in the Dominican Republic but people in Villa seemed just as anxious or quick to suggest that an unexplainable illness, an untimely death, or a suspicious accident was not the result of chance, fate, or natural causes, but instead some malevolent force.

Witchcraft in Villa explains unfortunate and otherwise unexplainable events (compare with Evans-Prichard 1976: 18-33). For example, those who transform into objects or animals are considered to be witches; people who are said to have the ability to fly in the air are witches; people who do not die under circumstances when they should have died are said to have used witchcraft; witchcraft is often thought to be behind people who die unexpectedly or without a clear medical cause; people whose children die young are thought to have been the victims of witchcraft or shady deals with the devil; people who become rich without proper cause are said to have used witchcraft or be witches themselves; and people who become rich apparently out of thin air are accused of using witchcraft. If a perfectly 'reasonable' explanation can be found for an event or illness, it is rarely considered to be witchcraft or demons. But, of course, it depends on the perception of the viewer and their stake in the accusation.

Witchcraft can also be understood as any folk practice aimed at increasing one's luck (as in lighting candles, or preparing anointments or 'baths'), finding or binding a lover, etc. For the Pentecostals in Villa, witchcraft is everywhere and many people are involved in it:

50 percent of the people who are not Christian [evangelical] believe in [witchcraft]. They pretend not to but if you go to their house you can see a branch of *sabila* behind the front door or a saint called San Miguel. Others apparently do not believe in it but you always find a glass of water and loaf of bread in their house supposedly to protect them. So these people say that they do not believe in this but if their foot hurts they go to a *brujo*, when they have pain they say that it is witchcraft and instead of going to a doctor and taking a pill they go to a *brujo*. They believe in this.

Many people will go to a *brujo* when they have pain, particularly if they believe the cause of the pain or illness is witchcraft. Remember, Mariela first went to a doctor when she began to feel ill. The doctor could not make her better so they reasoned that the cause must not be ‘medical’ but rather ‘spiritual’ – the result of witchcraft.

“Here in Villa there is witchcraft everywhere. There are witches, or rather, sorcery in all areas. Some say that they can even fly (but I don’t know if this is true). There was a woman over here that people said would fly (but I don’t know). There are many strange things, it is true” [Ramón]. Rumors of this sort are not uncommon. I heard of a man who lived in the adjoining barrio who was said to be a *zombí*. Allegedly he had died in Villa and his family brought his body to Haiti where they did some ‘witchcraft’ that brought him back to life. He returned to Villa alive but was not in a normal state – he was “strange.” Fear of powerful *brujos* is often expressed in claims that they have the ability to transform or shape-shift into different forms. After performing an exorcism at IEP one night in February of 2009, a visiting guest preacher said that he had seen the possessed girl’s mother, on one occasion, transform into a cat and her father into a tree stump! It was explained that because the girl’s parents were powerful *brujos* that worked with witchcraft, she had been possessed by the demon for no fault of her own but rather that of her parents.

Pentecostals and others in Villa believe that evil spirits or demons – among them the saints and *seres* – can come to possess an individual through contact with witchcraft, or enchanted images, or inherited from family members. They also believe that one is always susceptible to possession by malign spirits if one is not careful –

particularly at night. Children, because they do not know better, or because of the practices of their parents, are more susceptible than adults.

Demons (demonic possession) can pass from one person to another as well. Johanny, a member of IEP, became possessed when she came into physical contact with a possessed person. A number of years ago Johanny would visit with a woman “who manifested demons” and would read her passages from the bible. One day a demon manifested in the woman and she hit Johanny across the face. Johanny returned home trembling, her skin cold like ice, and she quickly realized that the demons had passed from the woman on to her, entering through her skin. After that Johanny “had problems” and suffered a long battle with the demons, allegedly “spending days on the floor possessed.” At times the demons would send her into fits of rage and she would try to strangle her husband and destroy her house.

I once asked why some individuals were attacked with demonic possession more than others and the answer was that some people inherit it from their families:

Why do they attack some people more than others?

Because there are people who inherit it from their relatives, their ancestors have been involved with it. This type of person receives more attacks than someone who has never had to see it. For example I had no idea what it was to be tormented by a demon. However there are some who, if they are neglectful in the church, fall to these demons.

Josefina explained to me that the girl who they had performed the exorcism on in the church had inherited the possessing demon from her parents, and explained that:

People inherit demons, there are legions that people inherit from their families, since very young ages people are involve with witchcraft and that stuff and the children inherit it... this the kids inherit it from their families, and when the child wants to be free it will manifest.

What a shame that kids suffer the faults of their parents. Because the parents have their pacts, work with witchcraft [*bregan con hechicería*], and the first one they call is Santa Marta, Anaísa Pie, San Elías, even though they are names of the bible (they like to use the names of the prophets) they are demons that like to fight... Parents give their children little *resguardos*, they take them to a high priest [*brujo de altura*] to cure them by spells. Even though the kids are small their parents wrap them up in it. And later when the children grow up they have to pay for their parents' faults.

Metraux observed that the *loa* of Haiti often visited the sins of parents upon their children: “The death of a little girl who was being treated at the sanctuary of *mambo* Lorgina, was attributed to Linglessu. In this way the god was thought to have punished the girl's mother for some sacrilegious theft” (1972: 99). The same is often the case in the Dominican Republic. I was told that Melinda too had problems because of her work with the *seres*:

On one occasion she had problems with some demons and they killed four family members there in her house because, like I told you, these demons they give [things] to you but if you do not fulfill certain things, give them what they want, they will take things away from you. Each one of her kids died [this way]. Four grand children one after the other, look: one burned, the other vomited blood and died this way, the other's fever raised and died, the other boy died as well. Each child, like that, one after the other.

I was also told the story of a man who used to visit IEP who was possessed by a spirit named Petró (probably Tiyán Petró). The spirit was said to have killed both his parents in automobile accidents. When Petró would manifest, he purportedly would try to throw the man into the river at night or into a gully or ravine. The Pentecostals that I worked with believed that one must not die in this condition, lest their soul become Satan's upon death.

Lastly, consider Patria's story of her childhood. Patria's mother often looked to witchcraft because her husband, Patria's father, had another woman. She was concerned about the envy that this woman might have had for her and/or her daughter Patria and (not unlike what Mariela was accused of) she was concerned that the woman might use witchcraft to hurt her. So from a very young age Patria was brought to a *brujo* and given *resguardos* and other magical spells to protect her. She was very young at the time and barely remembered the incidents years later. As an adult she avoided the church because her stomach would turn and ache every time she would visit. When she converted she purportedly vomited and expelled all of the *resguardos* that she had taken as a child. Ramón told me a similar story about a woman in his church when he was pasturing in the capital that had lived with a stomach illness for years until one day she fell on the floor of the church and vomited "a strange black substance." The stomach aches never returned and she became a pastor. She was healed from something that had been making her sick since she was little – presumably the small amulets given to her by a *brujo*.

Pentecostals believe that such incidents are the result of two contrary forces meeting in one place at the same time. It is believed that the devil cannot be in the same place as God. When people convert they vomit *resguardos* that they had taken in years past, thus acting out the metaphor of being filled with the Holy Spirit which displaces the evil or bad within. This was also the reasoning given for why *brujos* do not go to the Evangelical Church.

“Los brujos no van a la iglesia” / “Witches do not go to the [evangelical] church”

According to the Pentecostals that I worked with, sorcery and witchcraft are not compatible with devotion to Jesus and fidelity to God. Evangelicals understand that sorcery and witchcraft are evil and the works of the devil. Juan Pablo, a resident of barrio Francisco and a deacon at IEP explained to me once that “a person who practices witchcraft is a server of Satan,” along with those who “fornicate, lie, and are adulterous.” Others similarly described evil or the devil in terms of idolatry, witchcraft, blasphemy, fornication, adultery, and lying. Others added false or slanderous statements about people, gossip, corruption, and addiction.

As it was explained to me, *brujos* do not go to church “because there cannot be two forces [God and Satan, good and evil] in the same place.” This was evinced a number of ways. Many people “manifest demons” when they enter the church, this is because, as it was explained to me, “demons do not like to come close to God.” Sometimes people do not know they have a demon until they go to the church and it manifests. There were a number of women in the neighborhood who joked about not going to church because they knew that they had a demon that would manifest. One Pentecostal explained, “If a person lives completely apart from God when they come close to God they [the demons] manifest.”

One need not be a witch to manifest an evil spirit. Anyone might learn of a possession by a malignant spirit simply by entering a Pentecostal church or passing by a church service in the streets. I often heard stories about *resguardos* being vomited on the floor of the church or on the street when people “hear the word of God” or “are in the presence of the Holy Spirit,” though I myself was never witness to such events.

This usually gruesome sight involving choking, gagging, and vomiting is used as evidence of God's purifying power as well as the putatively wrong or evil acts conducted by the persons who have taken such 'evil' precautions. In Josefina's words:

It is very common to see people with demons. Also, there are those that have *resguardos*. *Resguardos* are things that *brujos* give people with a prayer [*oracion*] written on them (a prayer that Satan has taught). They fold it up real good in something plastic, and the people swallow it. Supposedly in order to protect themselves from enemies, to protect them from witchcraft so that if somebody does something to them that with this swallowed, nothing will happen to them. With this they are protecting themselves. What has happened is that in the streets people have vomited it, and also in the church they [the *resguardos*] fall on the floor in a foamy spit that has gathered for the many years that they have taken it, but it is made plastic so that it stays there [in their body] because the people who visit sorcery [*hechicería*] and *santería* use it. It's like a demon protecting you but when people get close to God they vomit it [the *resguardo*].

Supposedly, prayer angers the devil and his demons. A woman at IEP explained to me that a *bruja* down the street from her home hated when the church prayed because the demons would punish her by making her pull her own hair and knock her on the floor. Another woman adds, "As Christians we pray and reprimand the demons that she calls" she continues, "that is why she is angry and wants to leave." It is unlikely that anyone is that concerned with what the Christians are doing at any given time, but it is important to recognize that these stories are an important part of constructing a narrative about spiritual warfare and in particular, a narrative that sees the Christians as victorious. These stories are also used to discipline neighbors and to claim spiritual authority and power over other communities and institutions.

At times this same idea – that there cannot be two forces in the same place – caused divisions within households and between family members. Where, for example, some family members are evangelical or Catholic and others are not. I was told this story of a *brujo* whose son converted to Christianity:

When I was young like Karla my mother and I lived in front of a house where a *brujo* named Pedrito lived. He was into all manner of witchcraft and whatever else, I don't know exactly what because I was an adolescent. His son was a Christian and I would hear him fighting with him, "leave my house! Since you converted, I am cursed! I can't get work anymore!" He would slap his son around. He would get a machete and threaten him with it, but the son would stand his ground. [The son] moved out of the house and now they live separately, he being Christian and his father *bregando su hechiceria*.

Josefina explains that the man could not live with his son who had converted and became a "very good Christian" precisely because of the antagonism between their differing beliefs. José Luis of IEP as well as Miguelito a young man from IdD, no longer lived at home with their parents, in part, because their parents "worshipped idols," or "practiced witchcraft," or even, "mounted demons."

According to José Luis, his family was very involved in the practice of witchcraft and that he grew up with very different beliefs than he has today as a Pentecostal:

I knew another God before who is not the one that I know today. I knew a God of pictures. The majority of my family practices witchcraft [*brujería*], [they are] people who believe in pictures, people who believe in María, in Saint whomever, they believe in that stuff. I also [believed] in it. My family would bring me to a *brujo* and all of that.

Although he gets along well with his family, particularly with his mother now, there are times that he feels uncomfortable. He no longer eats or sleeps at his home mainly because, as a Christian, he cannot participate in their activities:

So for me it's a little difficult [to be at home], at least to be there with my family. Because according to my understanding, demons infiltrate them. I can't see a demon because they are spirits, but for them, well, it's nothing for them. I go home and I feel uncomfortable being in the house, they don't use the same language I use, they speak as if they don't care about anything. But not me, I meditate in order to speak because I am Christian. When I am there I am seated, and if I have to share something with them I do. Sometimes they get together with the entire family to speak of their things, and they are mounted by things [*se le montan cosas*], they are possessed ["demonized"]. This is what people that don't know God do, they are possessed, a demon infiltrates them and uses them like a horse, as they say. So, sometimes they get together and the only one missing is me, and they say to me, "Stay," and I say to them "I cannot share in what you are doing." Now, if I hadn't been taught by the bible I would stay, but I am sinning if I share in what they are doing. Today I don't eat in my house because [of this].

Though differences in beliefs and practices can be managed and/or reconciled in the day to day, José Luis believes that "there will always be problems between the two beliefs or both institutions."

Some people (like Juanita from IdD and a number of others) are aggressively punished by a family member if they want to convert. Juanita's mother was furious when she told her that she wanted to go to the Pentecostal church down the street from their house. Her mother prohibited her from going, but she would sneak out and attend services without telling her. When her mother found out that she had been going behind her back she was enraged and threw a glass at Juanita's head. The glass broke across her forehead and left her bruised and scarred.

This conception extends from dualistic notions of heaven and hell, lightness and darkness, good and evil, God and the Devil that structure the Pentecostal worldview. You are either with one or the other. This kind of compartmentalization really restricts the freedom to transgress religious and moral boundaries as well as certain practices. This particular Manichean worldview does not allow for ambiguity: a person, a practice, a belief is either one or the other, it is either of God or it is of the Devil.

Evil Spirits and Demonic Possession

Demonic possession is an important issue to many barrio residents and especially the Pentecostal church. People who are around bad people and bad things (images, various different forms of witchcraft, cemeteries, etc.) can get possessed – in this way possession can be dangerous, contagious, and around every corner. One can pick up a bad spirit in and around the streets much like one can catch a cold. Also, according to Pentecostals, you can get sick or possessed by simply having images of saints in your house. People who are ‘spiritually’ careless and/or weak are vulnerable. Evangelicals are equipped with prayers and invocations to recite in order to protect them from evil (incantations to rebuke the devil such as “*el señor reprenda*” [‘the Lord rebukes you’] which is sometimes said after using the devil’s name), the Catholic church offers similar prayers as well as rosaries and other amulets such as crucifixes, and *brujos* provide spells, amulets, potions, *resguardos*, and baths to protect against the evil eye or malicious spiritual attacks.

Pentecostal churches have become popular in the context of barrio life, in part, because they offer people practical solutions to the threat of malign spirits, demonic possession, and witchcraft assaults. Prayer is considered a powerful tool in spiritual warfare, and many Pentecostal specialists are seen as particularly powerful people. Evangelicals with the powers to heal or prophecy are sought out at least as often as their spiritual cousins the *curanderos* and diviners.

The Pentecostal church has earned a lot of respect as well as numerous followers with the practice of exorcism. Exorcisms are performed primarily by *brujos* (also referred to as ‘*desmontadors*’ or ‘dismounters’ or ‘*liberador de espíritus*’ [Labourt (n.d.)]) and local Pentecostals. As discussed earlier, sometimes the only effective way of dealing with a maligned spirit or demon is to convert. But that is not the only option. The church conducts exorcisms on visitors and on the general public. The laying on of hands in the church can detect and expel evil spirits. Often people convert after the demons or evil spirits have been cast out of their bodies – sometimes their family members convert.

Shortly before finishing my fieldwork an exorcism was performed at IEP on a girl who was a frequent visitor to the church. Karla and Mayalin, Josefina and Denny’s daughters, invited the girl to the church one night for a special *culto* that was to feature a visiting pastor from a neighboring town. Shortly after the *culto* began and the congregation started to preach and sing, the teenage girl fell to the ground and began to scream. As she rolled on the ground, flailing about on the floor, members of the church in attendance cleared away chairs so that she would not hurt herself. Her

eyes rolled into the back of her head and she began to speak in a wretched incomprehensible voice. The attendees watched while the preacher asked who she was. She said that she was called Santa Marta. As the preacher began to preach the girl covered her ears and tried to leave but was restrained. The visiting preacher, along with Denny, Juan Pablo, and Josefina surrounded the girl with their arms stretched out above her and demanded that the demon leave in the name of Jesus. After some time of this, the girl finally collapsed and laid still. She did not remember anything of what happened at the church that night.

The girl was restrained during the whole ordeal so that she would not leave the church. Church members were genuinely concerned that if someone manifesting a demon were to leave that they would do themselves or others harm:

When they are possessed they want to go to the river at night and throw themselves into the deep because what they want is to kill you because when this demon is in your body, the people can't control themselves, the owner of the body doesn't know what is happening, when they talk they don't even talk with their voice, they talk with the voice of another. Their eyes are frightful, it scares you.

I was also told that people who manifest demons in the church like to throw stones at the preacher and if they get loose and run out of the church that they may turn over parked cars.

The possessing demon, Santa Marta, is a popular *metresa* or *misterio* who is venerated by many followers who seek her power and gifts. This was different, of course, from a controlled possession or one where a *brujo* intentionally invokes the spirit. In fact, the possessed girl was not a *bruja* at all, she did however have an image of Santa Marta in her home and this, the congregation from IEP believed, was where

the possession had come from. The next day members of the church followed up to determine where the demon had come from and confirmed that the girl indeed had the image in her home and had allegedly lighted candles to her. Santa Marta is considered to be a powerful ally against unfaithful men and for her devotees a symbol of extraordinary female power over negative, destructive forces (Drewal 2008: 165).

This description is in sharp contrast with that given by Pentecostals who do not regard her as benevolent but rather as profoundly evil:

Santa Marta is a demon that likes to prostitute women. Those that have this demon will never have a home [*no paran con hogares*]. The majority prostitute themselves because they are made to hate their husbands. They don't stay in a relationship, with a partner, they like all men no matter how short they may be, because they do not value themselves, they don't love themselves.

I heard other 'alternative' stories about other *seres* as well. Not only do Pentecostals in Villa regard them as demonic but they also invent stories about them that fit such characterizations. In this case, Santa Marta's powerful independent nature is inverted by the Pentecostal myth that asserts that she is the antithesis of respectable femininity and is profoundly threatening to the home, family, and respectable behavior. She is associated with prostitutes and loose women and is seen as threatening to both men and women.

While the girl did not come back to the church for the remaining few weeks I was there, her cousin, who had come with her that night when she manifested in the church, did. In fact I saw him return numerous times before I left. What he had seen in the church clearly terrified (or impressed) him. Probably both. Either way, he quietly began attending regular services. Often he would come with friends.

Sometimes he would only stay for a little bit but he would always put money in the collection basket. I imagine if one day he decides to convert, the main impetus for it will have been the possession and exorcism of his cousin.

Evil spirits not only inhabit bodies and roam the streets, but they also haunt homes and other dwellings. The church and its congregation are often called upon, usually by one or two of its own members, to cleanse a home of evil spirits. Usually in these cases *cultos* are held in someone's house or a special prayer group is brought together to expel the evil spirits from a home. Sometimes this is done on a rotating basis, as was the case for the *Confraternidad de Iglesias*, where once or twice a month a group of pastors from around town would hold a special prayer session in one of their homes to pray for their house and family. A *culto* was held at Wilfredo's house in October 2008, for example, because "a few strange things had happened" to him that week, including a car accident. It was surmised that the best way to deal with this sudden stroke of bad luck was to nip it in the bud and hold a *culto* at his house. If there were spirits that meant to do him ill will they would surely be chased away by Christian prayer and worship.

Wilfredo and Veronica were well off compared to the other members of IEP. Wilfredo's auto-repair business was profiting and they could afford to host a *culto* at their home. They used the opportunity to show off their home (they lived in a much nicer neighborhood a mile or so away from Barrio Francisco) and they made everyone sandwiches and fruit punch for the gathering that evening. It was a combined *culto* so

members from a number of churches were in attendance. It was quite the event in fact, with between 80 and 100 attendees.

Demonic possession is so over-determined in the church that a demon need not manifest in you for you to have one. Demonic possession is often revealed in the church, either someone manifests what is identified as a demon and attempts are made to exorcise it, or, a deacon or pastor with the gift of sight might ‘see’ evil spirits or look at someone and identify demonic influences in or around them through visions or revelations. Others are simply suspected of having demons based on their behavior or some other sign (bad health, bad luck, etc.). In fact, one might not know they have demons at all, unless of course they are told that they do, or it happens to manifest at some point.

Exorcisms should be conducted by experienced members of the church. Again, an attempt is made to keep both worlds – that of Satan and that of God – separate. If there is any ambiguity or slippage, there is potential for disaster:

[Only Christians who are prepared and who are strong in the faith should conduct exorcisms because] there are Christians that are not Christian, they go to the church but they do everything “*un poco los demonios*” as they say, they [the demons] say to you that “you cannot throw me out,” and they smile. One time Johanny (when she had these demons) was in another church and a person tried to throw them out and the demons said: “You can’t throw me out, because you go to *brujos*.” Because the demons know when people are bad. Another one said, “you can’t throw me out because you are nothing,” they smile in the face of people... An evangelical that is not good should not try to do it because the demon will shame them, they will smile in your face because the devil knows who is good and who is bad [Josefina]

If it is found that the possessed person has an altar or images of the saints in their homes, it is often thought necessary to burn them. Although the images

themselves are not thought to be powerful, they are considered to be vessels of the spirits/demons and burning them is thought to leave them without a home. Destroying the demon's "nest" is believed to anger the demons greatly and so only an experienced Christian, strong in the faith, should be sent to destroy an altar:

A person who is not right with God cannot go to burn one of these altars because these demons will torment them. For example a new believer, one or two months after converting was sent to burn an altar, let me just say that the demons moved to *his* house and tormented him! The pastors know what type of person from the church should go and burn them – people strong in the faith, that do not open breaches to the demons.

When the altars and images are burned and the person converts, the demons tend to continue to torment their victims, not allowing them to sleep (see discussion of Mariela above). But the process is said to be brief because "they have already made their decision, even though they [the demons] attack, they want to serve God and the demons must leave."

After Johanny converted she continued to be tormented by the demons that had possessed her. Conversion alone was not enough to "free" her. Members of the congregation at IEP spent 15 days fasting and would meet everyday at 9:00 in the morning and pray until 3:00 in the afternoon in order to free her, "we had to pray a lot in *propósito* to free her." She is free now, that is, she is no longer under the influence of the possessing demon, but if she is neglectful and separates herself from the church, the demons can attack her again.

Generally a person who converts to escape a maligned spirit must take extra precautions not to backslide or to be won over again. In many cases they attempt to

stay in the protective presence of God, typically in the church, in order to fortify or strengthen (*fortalecer*) their spiritual constitution. People spend as much time as possible in the church to *edificar* or ‘edify’, morally and intellectually, as well as to strengthen themselves, mentally, in the presence of God (this was one reason that many young men sleep in the church after conversion). The Evangelical Church has become a sanctuary and a place to fortify oneself from spiritual and moral contagion, particularly in the form of demonic possession and spiritual attacks. According to Anthony, prayer and fasting is necessary in order to persevere in the spiritual war:

So a Christian person is someone whose enemy is Satan. You don’t have to overcome him, because he is defeated by Christ, but in order for you to persevere against his attacks, you have to look for tools, [such as] integrity, prayer, fasting, and nothing more than for you to hold your wild emotional desires in check, under control.

Being in the company of other Christians, *congregando* or ‘congregating’, is an important part of this edifying process. According to Josefina:

In order to be free one cannot just accept Jesus Christ. The only way to be free is by accepting Christ in your heart because when Satan enters into someone’s life it is because they have given him the opportunity. So the only way that one is free is being in a congregation and accepting God.

The Devil Made Me Do It

For Pentecostals in Villa, the devil (known by various names including; *el enemigo*, *Satanás*, *lo malo*, etc.) is to blame for the bad and evil acts that people commit. No one is essentially evil; they are only tricked, persuaded, or forced to do bad deeds by the devil and his minions. He is also thought, as we have seen, to be the evil force behind witchcraft and sorcery. This is the reason why one must be careful

not to make oneself vulnerable to the devil, lest he take control and lead you away from salvation. According to the *pastora* of IEP, “all evil comes from Satan”:

He is the enemy and does not want souls to be saved. That is why he brings problems to man, so that they don't go to the church, so that they get upset and fight with their brothers. It is Satan that brings conflict to men so that they don't obtain salvation of the soul.

According to José Luis, people do things that they do not want to do because of a “*fuerza contraria*” (‘contrary force’) that makes them do things that they would not otherwise do. Juan Pablo explains, “There are people who do bad, not because they want to, but because this negative force makes them do bad.” Sonia, a member of IdD says, “It is the devil that pushes people into vices, corruption, and bad things.” And Danilo, a Pentecostal from across town, concludes along similar lines, “it's not that kids are bad, just that the devil makes them do bad things.”

Domingo, a deacon at IEP, explains that it is Satan's role to keep man from God:

Satan is the prince of this world, the deceiver, the role he plays here on earth is to interpose, or put himself between God and man... Satan has an army of evil [impure/unclean] spirits who float about in the air with the goal of distancing man from the presence of God.

Denny says that in order to resist the devil, Christians must submit themselves entirely to God.

The Pentecostal worldview sees Satan and his agents as forces to keep man from salvation. Because all bad is the provenance of the devil, all things leading to evil must be tools of Satan or tricks that he has used to deceive man or to make them turn their backs on God. If Satan is the deceiver, he must be behind anything that

causes impure thoughts or actions that are not “pleasing to God.” It is believed that Satan will use anything and anyone to lead man astray. This has important consequences in the barrio.

Women, the Devil, and Temptation

Pentecostal men (and women) are instructed to control their sexual desires and not to act on them. They are expected to refrain from sex before marriage and encouraged to find a wife and to marry. After marriage, they are expected to remain faithful to their wives and not to cheat or divorce. Lustful thoughts and desires are considered evil and thus the provenance of the devil. One of the hardest things for recent male converts to deal with is the requirement to abstain from sex and to control their sexual desires.

Women, because they are the objects of men’s sexual desires, which they are told to control, are by extension often demonized and seen as tools of Satan. Women are often seen as tools of Satan sent to persuade men to fall from grace or leave the church. This is particularly interesting in terms of the ways in which men project their sexual desires for females, which they are told to control, on the women themselves by referring to them as demons and seductresses.

In some cases, Pentecostal men refer to flirtatious or desirable women as ‘Delilahs’ – a treacherous or cunning femme fatale, a seductive and wily temptress, one of several temptresses of the Hebrew Bible and the one who betrayed Samson and led him to his downfall. This may be used in reference to women both outside the church as well as with in it.

Pentecostal men, in order to deal with the guilt of desiring someone they are told they should not, rather than blame their own thoughts and feelings blame the women upon which they are based. Often, then, innocent women who happen to gain the forbidden favor or desire of a Pentecostal man might be labeled an agent of the devil. The church asks men, particularly young men, not only to be celibate, but also not to act on sexual desires of any kind. Rather than deal with the guilt of sexual desire, the pain and ambivalence this prohibition causes is displaced and projected onto the women themselves. They become the embodiment of the sexual desire that threatens to take men away from grace, God, or the church. They become temptresses, demons, *succubi*, or, local terms, *metresas*.

New members of the church are taught to be suspicious of flirtatious women who “*andan por las calles*” (‘hang out in the streets’). Radames, an 18 year old who had converted from the gang *los trinitarios* only 5 months before I met him, learned quickly to be suspicious of women, particularly *mujeres de la calle* or ‘women of the streets’:

There are many Delilahs, many women that say to me now you are somebody because you are in the church. But they look to [mess] with you; they look for a way to knock you down from grace. This is so that you are confused and see things not as they really are. The word of God says that you have to see things the way that they really are.

Since converting, Radames only spends time with women at the church; in fact, the pastor must approve of the girls that he dates and the girls must be evangelical Christians. But even women in the church can be suspect and he is suspiciously guarded of all of them:

So now I relate to [girls from] the church, but not all of them, because there are many who are in the church but who are [really] Delilahs because they only want to persuade you to fall from grace and to take you from the church. They begin to love you. There was one that was sending me letters. Getting the letters was pleasing to me and I told her to come to the other side of the church because, well, this is what they do. But this didn't come from her, it comes from the demons that are put inside of her, *la metresa*. So what they do is say to you things until you fall and you leave the church. After that they never spend time with you again.

This woman that he knew, who clearly liked him, and was pursuing him, was identified as a temptress because any relationship with her would not have been allowed. He may have come to this realization himself, or another member of the church may have warned him, but his desire for this woman was re-signified as her wicked and deceitful pursuit of his fall from grace. She was a member of another church but rumor had it that she also “*andan ahí en el mundo*” (that is to say that she did things that Christians are not supposed to do). He was quick to point out, however, that it was not the woman, per se, but a demonic influence from within her. This not only maintained her ultimate availability as a spouse in the future (should she desire to change her ways), but also reiterated the inherent innocence and forgivability of people and their actions. Also, he is not responsible for the feelings of lust for her because she, or rather, the *metresa*, was tricking him. The flesh they say is weak, and subject to demonic manipulation. This idea becomes clearer in Radames's interpretation of a masturbatory experience in the church one night where he sleeps:

There are times that you are thinking that you are having sex and you are doing this and you wake up wet and sweaty. José Luis saw me one day and said to me that he had seen the *metresa* that was pursuing me. He said “I saw the *metresa* that was doing all that to you.” They use you and your own hands. I would wake up with the zipper [of my

pants] open with everything unbuttoned. But it was [the *metresa*] that unbuttoned if for me. The demon used me without me realizing. And I told her “I rebuke you in the name of Jesus.”

Sexual desire is personified as a demon mistress, a *metresa*, who comes into the mind of a man and ‘makes’ him have sex with her. Radames denies any will, agency, or wrongdoing, or culpability for what happened in the church that night. In fact, or rather, he describes being forced to have sex against his will.

Many of my informants similarly explained that the “battle ground of Christians is the mind” and that the spiritual war is a mental war. Anthony says that the devil uses “mental manipulations” to eliminate youths and trap them in prisons. Denny explains that the devil comes in the subconscious of person in order to deceive and kill:

The Word says that [the devil] comes to kill, to destroy. He plays like a spirit; he doesn’t come with horns; he comes into the subconscious of people. If you as a Christian have filled your mind during the day looking at women, then you have been adulterous mentally. The devil operates from 12 o’clock at night until 4 o’clock in the morning. This is the point at which his spirit arrives in the conscience of a person. If he sees that someone has spent all day desiring [women] then [he] penetrates [their conscience] and the person begins to have relations with a *metresa*. So, the devil operates in the mind of these people and does things to them. This is because you filled your mind with trash but if during the day you prayed and humbled yourself, then he is not going to find anywhere to enter. If you prayed, humbled yourself to God, you went to church, he would not be able to enter in you.

For him it is a mental war, one in which you are most vulnerable at night, that is when a spirit may arrive in your conscience and do things to you. If you spend the day looking at women and desiring them, he says, you will begin to have sexual relations with a *metresa* at night.

While Pentecostals struggle to defend against these mental attacks, they are also faced with the specter of the demon itself. One's thoughts open a door from which the devil may enter and reveal himself. Radames was sleeping in the church along with Héctor and José Luis. On this night, Radames explains how Héctor saw the demon following him to the bathroom:

There are many people that have demons that are against them. Look, even today in the church. Demons start to roam the streets after 12 o'clock, they begin to do all sorts of things. What they do at night manifests in the day, this happens a lot I have realized. The other day I wanted to sleep and I woke up around 9 o'clock and still couldn't sleep by 3 o'clock in the morning because I had thoughts of a woman in my head: those are Delilahs. What I wanted was to go to my house. Had I gone home I would have called a girl to come over. So what happened is when I got up to go to the bathroom, Héctor, he realized what was happening. Next to the church is a house where a demon was living and the house was shaking, the dishes were falling on the floor and the house was collapsing, and the demon came into the church and when I went to the bathroom the demon, a black shade, came up behind me. Then the Holy Spirit said to Héctor "look toward the door." So when he looked he saw the demon behind me and he stopped and said "I rebuke you Satan." I was in a frenzy, I thought that he had rebuked me, but it was the demon that I had inside me... If I go to where the girl lives it is to commit fornication. The bible says that you should not commit fornication or adultery.

There is a dynamic relationship between sin, guilt, temptation and the appearance of the demonic. Radames could not sleep one night because of this women/*metresa* who got into his head. He had wanted to go to his house and call up a girl to have sex with but, as he explains, it was just a demon in the church who had gotten inside of him.

The threat of invasive *succubi* – female demons believed to have sexual intercourse with sleeping men – is not a belief uncommon to Christian cultures around the globe and probably came to the Dominican Republic via Spain during the colonial

period.¹⁹ The *metresa* has become a local manifestation of this threat. It is interesting that local Pentecostals have taken established local spirits, the female *seres* known as *metresas*, and reinscribed them as demon temptresses. In doing so they are leveling a critique at local spirit belief and veneration. Perhaps the greatest victims in this system, however, are local women themselves. Sexual temptation is for Radames, Denny, José Luis, and others, the greatest barrier to being a good Christian. Women, the objects of sexual desire and the source of sexual temptation, thus, are understood to be potential obstacles to salvation. I might also add that I never heard about women being visited by demons (*incubi*) at night only to be seduced – this was something that, apparently, only victimized men.

Women have internalized this system as well. They tend to be possessed by demons or evil spirits more frequently than men. And women, ironically, are the ones that tend to be seen as morally suspect, not men. Additionally, women are also most often the solicitors and purveyors of love magic, a particularly abhorrent practice in the eyes of Pentecostals and one which only adds fuel to their myths and mistrust of women.

Of course, this symbolic connection of women with the devil is not new and is as old as the bible itself, beginning in the book of Genesis with story of Eve, the original temptress. From the perspective of Pentecostal men, the symbolic chain of association in Villa looks something like this: if women = temptation and temptation = the devil, then women = the devil.

¹⁹ According to the *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft* (2006a) succubi originally played a major part in hagiography illustrating temptations of church leaders such as Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome as well as played an important role in medieval theology.

The social pressure imposed on women to conform to normative values of respectability require that they marry, be faithful or celibate, have children, and submit to male domination in both their sexual and social lives. Those that do not, are sanctioned by rumors of prostitution, accusations of witchcraft, and branding as she-devils. In this way women's freedom, as well as their social power, is put in check and controlled by men (and other women). When a woman is possessed by a *metresa* such as Santa Marta or Anaísa Píe, who Pentecostals believe to be the spirit/demon preferred by prostitutes and loose women, they implicitly label or mark the possessed as morally suspect. The girl mentioned earlier who was possessed by Santa Marta was said to be someone who liked the street life or "*ha cogido mucho la calle*" ("had taken to the streets"). The fact that these *seres* are believed by others to represent the very opposite – feminine power, strength and assertiveness – is the very thing these demon accusations are claims against. As we saw earlier, women who do witchcraft are susceptible to demonic possession. What better way to critique and literally put the fear of God into young girls than to suggest that they may be possessed by an evil spirit if they play with witchcraft.

Discourses about the demonic in the church are ways in which Christians teach each other right and wrong behavior. Consider the claim that people who are not "good Christians" are more susceptible to witchcraft and possession. Unfortunately, Pentecostal discourse is so androcentric that in practice, demon beliefs tend to focus more on women than on men. The diffuse cultural idea that women are cunning and treacherous both reflects and is reflected in she-devil beliefs.

Devil Pacts: Local Demonology

Although Pentecostal Christians have an elaborate notion of evil and its personification on the island, they are not the only ones. Pentecostals have only added to and elaborated on an already existing rich and complex local demonology informed by Catholic beliefs. While many Catholic churches, particularly in *el campo* have appropriated and accepted local practices which are ‘syncretic’ in kind, they still maintain a discourse of evil but one that does not demonize *all* local, divergent or heterodox practices. Still many, if not most Catholics in the country regard local *vodú* spirits as evil or demonic. Pentecostals add the ‘miraculous saints’ to this demonology and have adopted much of what already existed. An important part of local demonology is the belief in pacts with the devil.

As in many other parts of Latin America (e.g. Taussig 2010 [1980], Seda 1966), there is a widespread belief in the small towns and rural areas, among villagers and especially among peasant farmers, that people will make deals or contracts with the devil in order to become rich and successful. To some local observers, devil pacts such as these are not uncommon in Villa:

Did you know that there are people who do business with the Devil so that he gives them money? To get money they sell their kids, it's true they sell their kids to the devil. This happens a lot in *el campo*. It is true; children die easily like that, one after the other. It's because they sell them to Satan. It's true! Look, when I was pregnant with Karla, across the street from where we lived with Denny's mother, there lived a man who had bought a house there and had another one further away. He was a very prosperous man and nobody knew why. He was a man with a whole sack of money and he was always looking for anyone who wanted to sell land or a house and he would buy it. But this [prosperity] was a deal for his kids, because later a child of his died. [The boy] got skinny, skinny, and the doctors didn't know why but it was because Satan had bought his soul. The man knew what he had

done and wanted to save his son so he brought him to Haiti, because there they work with much stronger witchcraft. But there was no going back on the deal; he had [been paid and had] taken his money. His son died and after a few months his daughter got sick in the same way and died, and later his other child died. Within three months he himself died. This happened because he did business with Satan. This was the richest man in *el campo* and he didn't have anything [in the end]. This happens a lot in *el campo* because they don't see money; they don't want to work; they want it easily; and they do that; it is common to see this here in Villa.

I didn't believe it but I saw it! At night I couldn't sleep because his child was crying because she didn't eat. But this is what made her skinny, white. They don't eat and they get really skinny and look like they have HIV but this happens in a matter of days – they sleep today and tomorrow they can't get up because of so much fever and the doctors do an analysis and they don't find anything. This is true. I didn't believe it but this I saw it. I am a little incredulous if I don't see for myself, but this man did this! [Josefina]

It is believed that any individual who makes a pact with the devil must trade the life of a loved one in return for the rewards of wealth that are bestowed upon them.

Ultimately the pact ends with the death of the original solicitor. It is not uncommon for people to attribute the wealth or success of others to shady dealings with the devil.

This is seen on the other side of the island as well where Metraux observed that “there are always people ready to pretend they know the exact nature of the contract with a *diab* [demon] by which such and such a *grand don* was enabled to complete his fortune” (287). It would seem that many people in Villa knew someone, or knew someone who knew someone who made a pact with the devil:

Pentecostals believe that anyone who works with the *seres* are working for the devil or with one of his minions. Thus, if someone is healed by this, or becomes rich through this, they have become so through a wicked contract with the devil whose fee

is great – typically sickness and the death of one’s children. Pentecostals believe that Satan has power, but for people to take advantage of that power it will cost them dearly.

The devil pact beliefs discussed above likely came to the Dominican Republic from Spain and can be found in many other Latin American countries. There are other, similar beliefs that come from Haiti and are unique to the island; in particular a belief in an evil being or entity called a *bacá* (or *baka* in Haiti) that is used by evildoers or depraved individuals to rob others of their wealth. A *bacá* is a demonic entity purchased from the devil or a *brujo* that is used to make the purchaser rich – typically at the expense of their neighbors and family. In Haiti, *baka* often refers to *zombi* souls and bought *loa* as well as a particular class of evil spirit in the form of cats, dogs, pigs, cows, or monsters (Metraux 1972: 288).²⁰ The possession of a *baka* puts its owner at great risk:

Once you are ‘committed’ to him, a *baka* never lets you go. You think you are its master, only to discover you are its slave. Always thirsting for human blood, a *baka* keeps asking, every time it opens its mouth, for fresh victims. Nothing can bend its will. Sooner or later it ends by killing its partner who, tired of giving it human beings, tries to get out of his commitment (Metaux 1972: 289)

²⁰ Harold Courlander (1960: 95) reports that *baka* in Haiti are small, evil creatures that are human in form and can change into animals at will. Animals seen behaving strangely in the countryside are frequently suspected of being *baka* in disguise (95).

But, of course, once a contract is made, it is seldom undone and the greedy owner of the *baka* is eventually eaten by his own monster – a beast begotten of greed and short sightedness.²¹

The moral here, I think, is clear. Greed and envy are destructive to the individual and are not productive socially. Particularly in labor intensive work such as farming, to take shortcuts or to be lazy is to threaten one's own livelihood and also potentially that of one's neighbor's. Devil pact stories are a warning to those who would steal or profit from their neighbor's hard work. They are also reminders that there are no shortcuts to prosperity, which should only be attainable through hard work. Interestingly, accusations of devil pacts tend to be directed solely at men rather than women. The implication perhaps is tied to the cultural expectation leveled at men to be providers and breadwinners for their families. A highly valued trait for men and women in the Dominican Republic is that they are hard or "good" workers. My informants in Villa would often point to one's work ethic as indicative of one's good or bad character. Interestingly, the phrase "*sin oficio*," which literally translates 'jobless' or 'without trade', in the Dominican Republic it has the connotations of being 'lazy' or 'worthless'.

Prosperity theology, or the idea that God provides material prosperity to those who need only to ask for it, while present on the island, particularly in churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (a Pentecostal organization established in Brazil popularly know as *Pare de Sufrir* or 'Stop the Suffering'), has yet

²¹ Similar variations of the *bacá* exist elsewhere in the Caribbean and have been observed with some local variation from St. Lucia and Dominica down to Surinam (See for example Beck [1979: 224-228] for a discussion of a similar creature called a *bolum* in St. Lucia).

to garner widespread support, following, or acceptance, in part, because of the cultural emphasis on work and individual responsibility. The Pentecostals who I worked with criticized *Pare de Sufrir* precisely because it claimed to offer a ‘quick fix’: “people who go to *Pare de Sufrir* need not convert, only make an offering after they are healed”; “life is suffering, not the color of roses”; “Christians need to sacrifice”; etc. People in the Dominican Republic are inherently suspicious of get rich quick schemes. The appeal of *Pare de Sufrir* is that it promises wealth without sacrifice. But Dominicans know that such promises are familiar and share all too familiar an affinity with the devil pact.

DISCUSSION

Triangulating the Religious Field: Saint Michael Across Three Horizons

San Miguel, as we have seen, is an ambiguous supernatural being (as in fact are all the saints and *seres*). He is at once *santo* or saint – the archangel and patron of biblical tradition; he is a *misterio* – a powerful spirit-being known for his strength and valor; and he is feared as a *demonio* or demon – a wicked spirit who intends to deceive and destroy mankind. San Miguel may be any three of these things, and yet, he is one or the other depending on your perspective.

Though differentiated, all spiritual practices in the barrio are linked together in a single total field. San Miguel is a fine example of the interrelations between spirit beliefs and religious institutions in the barrio. He plays a role in all three systems, traverses all three spiritual terrains, and evokes the continuum of emotion.

Saint Michael, interestingly enough, is depicted as slaying a dragon, or a demon of the devil, and so for many devotees he offers protection against evil. Ironically, however, in the context of Pentecostal belief, he represents the exact inverse – he is not the protector but rather the evil aggressor, a fallen angel in the service of the devil who takes the name of Saint Michael to confuse and mislead. The ambiguous syncretic relationship between San Miguel the Catholic Saint and Belié Belcán, his *luá* identity, is the very thing that is understood as evil and deceptive to Pentecostals. In representing San Miguel as a demon, Pentecostals cast doubt on the legitimacy and authority, not just of syncretic beliefs, but also that of Catholicism in general which has had a significant cultural and spiritual hold on the country from its beginnings. In exorcising a ‘demonic’ saint from the body of an afflicted individual, Pentecostals critique not only spirit cults or what we have called up to this point African-derived religion, they also contest Catholicism and their claims to religious authority. Ultimately what is being excised from an afflicted individual is the manifest religious content of both Catholicism, which is perceived as evil and contaminated with beliefs in the devil, and that of local spirit cults like Dominican and Haitian *vodou*. Thus, the Catholic Church and associated beliefs and practices become not only morally suspect by implication, but also demonic, as far as they have been framed by local Pentecostals.

Who is the real San Miguel and who gets to decide are contentious questions and they are played out, as we have seen, in everyday negotiations over representation and spiritual authority. San Miguel is mutually constituted, and as such, cannot be

defined solely in relation to Dominican *vodú*, Pentecostal Christianity, or Catholicism alone. Who is San Miguel is a question whose answer depends on who you ask. The relative nature of supernatural beings in the barrio points to the general utility of spirit beings to individual believers. Believers have used similar symbolic content in their own ways for their own meaning making schemes. Thus, San Miguel is an important figure in the Dominican Republic because he is used across the religious continuum as a diverse idiom of good, evil, danger, protection, etc., and serves as an important sign post in a morally structured cosmos informed by a Catholic Christian framework.

All of these religious positions (which are created through relationships to spiritual practices and institutions) are drawn into a relation with one another through practice and are integrated into a field of moral positions legitimated by a sacred, or rather Christian, moral order. Although at times antithetical, these beliefs are complementary and form only parts of a single whole together performing an important cultural drama or 'text' about Dominican society. The continual playing out of this drama serves to support and underline a Christian worldview and morality that has become central to Dominican constructions of self and nation.

All of these categories are situated in a field of social positions largely defined by forces outside of their control. Christianity has been the source of a hegemonic discourse on the island since the Spanish colonized the New World long ago. This event set the stage for relationships of codependence and development in all aspects of socio-religious life that followed.

The situation of such beliefs (*vodú*, witchcraft, sorcery, spirit possession) within a Christian framework, although implicit or generally stated in accounts of *vodú* throughout the island (as well as across the Caribbean), has not entirely been fleshed out or properly understood. Scholars tend to view *vodú*, *santería*, and Catholicism as separate spheres of belief, practice and identity without acknowledging their symbolic and practical interrelations. There exists, as I have shown, structural interrelations of Pentecostalism, Catholicism, and *vodú* such that no meaningful understanding may be derived by studying each institution individually as if they were isolated phenomena. They must be studied in relation to each other.

Here I am thinking about the symbiotic relationship between religious institutions in the *barrio*. Although in practice, in the minds of believers, and at any given time conflict may arise between them and/or their constituency, the conflict is always a negotiation and productive in some sense. None of them will be the undoing of the other. The Catholic Church, anointed as it is as the nation's official religion is not in any real danger. Nor are the African-derived religious practices that persist after hundreds of years. The evangelizing spirit of evangelical religion will see its success into many future generations but it will not be the undoing of Catholicism. Pentecostals need demons to excise; sin and temptation are constitutive functions of being an evangelical Christian in the Dominican Republic. Without an evil against which to define themselves, Pentecostals could not claim spiritual sanctity or moral superiority.

Unlike in places like Africa and Asia, on the island of Hispaniola, the demonization of spirits and African-derived elements had already been cemented by the time Protestant churches arrived. Protestantism did not bring the devil and demons to the island, they were already there – *los cristianos* just became a force to be reckoned with. They were incorporated into the local religious economy in a number of important ways. They offered a way out of service to the *luá* through exorcism (something the Catholic church rarely if ever does anymore). They offered healing and protection from evil spirits without paying tons of money to a *brujo* or being locked into a relationship of servitude to a vengeful spirit (as in the case of service to the *seres*). And Evangelical Christian prayer became a legitimate force to be reckoned with.

By convincing others that they themselves represent ‘real’ Christianity, Pentecostals have used Catholic’s own discourse on the demonic to condemn their practices and claim a piece of legitimacy for themselves. By making Catholicism complicit in witchcraft, spirit veneration and possession, Pentecostals have cast doubt on the fidelity and righteousness of the beloved national church. It is these associations that Pentecostals manipulate and use to gain followers and support from the public.

Which of these institutions deals with the problems of the people, of barrio life, the best? Who addresses poverty, demons, relationship strife, access to resources, hunger, unemployment, and envy the best? All of these problems are addressed by religious institutions in the barrio with varying degrees of success. The fact is that

they will all remain because they all have strengths and weaknesses and they all offer somewhat different solutions. This means that the church might be the right thing for one person while the *brujo* the best for the other. People are not afraid to try things out either. Many people will go to have their children healed at the Pentecostal church, pray to their favorite saint and light a candle at night, or bring their children to the *brujo* down the street the following day with virtually no contradiction. A person may visit or consult a *brujo* for protection against an envious lover or go to the church to have them pray for their protection. People tend to go with what works the best for them. If it does not work, they try something else.²²

This particular constellation of supernatural beliefs and practices creates a certain amount of ambivalence for those who find themselves ambiguously situated between opposing camps. Consider the non-member. All of these institutions are claiming authority and superiority over the others, but none claim the illegitimacy of the other (that is, they recognize each other's power and influence – *brujos* recognize the power of the church and that of prayer, Christians see the power of *brujos*, and especially recognize the power of Haitian magic, they just regard it as evil), depending on your own subjectivity, which is highly determined based on where you live and

²² *Brujos* have an ambiguous reputation. Many people rely on them for medical cures and solutions to a variety of problems and malaise. But at the same time they fear their potential power to do harm and perform wicked acts. While the majority of *misterios* are considered benevolent, some can and do put them to work for evils ends (Deive 1992 [1975]: 163). *Brujos* are at times merely considered charlatans, out to take advantage of the poor, desperate, and down and out; at other times they are considered sincere and a necessary fixture in any neighborhood or community. It would be wrong, of course, to see all Dominicans as feeling one way or another about them. It is true that many do not pay them any mind and dismiss them as panderers of superstition and old wives' tales. Others dare not make an important decision without consulting the spirits first. However one may consider the *brujo*, with distain or approval, they no less play an important part in the micro-politics of everyday life in the barrio.

who you know and where you grew up, you may see the church as a more viable option or you might see the *brujo* as a better choice. Who is in your social network, who do you know, where do they bring you? Chances are you know someone doing something everywhere.

So there is seepage and blending and people live in a complete social field where all of these supernatural forces are at work. The country is Catholic and that shapes the foundational assumptions that most people have. Everyone for the most part is baptized and has a cursory idea of what they believe Christianity to be. Of course that is always contested (in the public, in the news, at the pulpit). Some people are mounted by spirits and because of their ‘Christian beliefs’, they understand it to be evil. They may deal with it, wait for it to go away, have it exorcized, or maybe even serve it (adorcism). Some do not want to have anything to do with it but become possessed anyway. Some cultivate a relationship with the spirits that visit them. Others call on them for assistance, help, and advice. For some it is voluntary for others it is involuntary, as we have seen. ‘Christians’ are not the only ones who get possessed, everyone, it seems, could be possessed. Some people are tormented by spirits, which they regard as evil and demonic, but do not go to church. There are people who have “bad spirits” who choose to live with them or ignore them. Many people avoid the church because they know that the spirit or demon will manifest. Others, for example Pentecostal Christians, will not go to places where they expect to find evil spirits or be around images that may contain evil spirits, the thought being that if they expose themselves they might get possessed. One is vulnerable at night

and in certain places, especially around places of witchcraft. Juan Pablo, a deacon at the church, did not believe himself to be as susceptible to witchcraft as others explaining “I maintain myself like a fish. What I mean is that the water of the sea is very salty, however, if you take a fish from the sea to eat it, you must still salt it, that is to say that it is not contaminated by the salt of the sea.” Though others see themselves as particularly susceptible, avoid the church at all costs in fear that the demon or spirit might manifest there.

Religious institutions develop alongside one another and in relation to one another. They influence social relations as much as they relate to supernatural phenomena. Communities are not hermetically sealed and it is precisely the interaction between religious communities and their beliefs that make religious practice at the local level dynamic. Heterodoxy is a fundamental characteristic of Caribbean religion and society and it continues to structure meaningful interaction between people at the local level.

CHAPTER 2: Evangelical Christian Identity in the Barrio

Who are *los cristianos*?

If you were to go to any barrio in the country and ask about *los cristianos*, you will be understood as asking about the evangelical Christians in the neighborhood. The term 'Christian' is reserved in popular speech for Protestants, mostly Pentecostal, in the Dominican Republic, just as it is in many countries throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. In order to ask about a Catholic, for example, you would need to be more specific. Being Catholic in the Dominican Republic is a distinction that carries little significance within the country itself because everyone, ostensibly, is Catholic.

Being Dominican is very much tied to the country's Catholic heritage and a historical consciousness about its relationship with the rest of the world. Despite the relative merits or accuracy of such an association, the country itself is advertised locally and internationally as a Catholic country.

One can be a Catholic without ever going to the Catholic Church, and for many in the country, being Catholic has little to do with actually practicing Catholicism. Almost all Dominicans who do not claim a formal faith are nominal Catholics. Compliance with church expectations and rules are lax for parishioners who do not attend Mass regularly, if at all. Many Dominicans consider themselves to be Catholic simply because they have been baptized. One need not be devout to call oneself Catholic.

As for the term *cristiano*, despite the diversity of belief even across so-called evangelical churches, *cristiano* is reserved for people who act and carry themselves a particular way and for those who fulfill the expectations of the faithful and follow the prohibitions of the church. Claiming sole possession of ‘Christian’ identity is significant for what it says about the ways in which evangelical Christianity has claimed legitimacy and religious authority in historically Catholic countries.¹

Membership is an important question because it is this category that confers official in-group status. Meanwhile, there are varying levels of membership in the church itself. According to Pastor Ramón, there are baptized and unbaptized members. Presumably all members of the church, whether they are baptized or not, have converted, and all converts are expected to work toward the goal of baptism. A convert is baptized when senior members of the church decide that he or she is ready. There is no specific time frame – for some it is a matter of months and for others it may be a matter of years. In order to be baptized one has to show a ‘true conversion’ by offering a testimony and demonstrating to others that one is “truly different.” Both IEP and IdD require converts to attend *la doctrina* (doctrine classes), which last most of a year. The doctrine classes, taught by the pastor or deacons of the church, provide instruction on Pentecostal beliefs and how members are expected to act and conduct themselves in accordance with those beliefs. Even though many of the adolescents that I knew wished very much to be baptized (some were ready and some were not, according to the standards of the church), it was a general practice not to baptize

¹ ‘Evangelical’ is a broad-reaching term used to describe or refer to a number of Protestant churches loosely characterized as sharing an emphasis on the literal interpretation of the bible and the importance of adult baptism and conversion.

young children because, it was said, they lacked the maturity expected of them to make such an important decision. It was not enough to want to be baptized, show up to church everyday, and pray; both IdD and IEP required that members attend doctrine classes before they could be baptized and demonstrate that they had experienced a fundamental change that made them reformed spiritual persons. In doctrine classes, members learn how to be *cristianos* – where ‘being a Christian’ means ‘acting like a Christian’. One also has to prove one’s conversion through acts that would confirm to others that one had truly made a divine transformation.

An official member of the church, baptized or unbaptized, pays *el diezmo*, or ten percent of their monthly earnings to the church. Among other things, the money goes toward maintaining the church and paying the pastor’s salary. While there are baptized and unbaptized members (unbaptized members participate in all the activities of the church – play instruments, preach, etc.) there are others who regularly attend the church, but seem to have no interest in converting or becoming official members. There were several young men and women at IdD who were regulars during weekly services but who were not official members of the church. They attended services regularly because they liked to “listen to the word,” as they said, but apparently wished not to make the full commitment of membership.

Mayalin was one such youth from IEP who, despite the fact that her parents and older sister were quite active in the church, did not wish to be baptized and become a full member of the church. The challenges of being a Christian are highlighted by Mayalin’s reluctance to convert:

If you are baptized you have to do this and that and go to *culto* all the time. You have more responsibility. You can't go 'running around' as they say. I like to run around and do what I want. I like it like that.

Whether or not one must attend *culto* every night is up to the individual. I saw many baptized members of the church attend no more than once a week, if that. But Mayalin wished not to be held to the same standard of expectation that a baptized member is. She was considered a *crisiana* by her friends and she identified herself as such. However, she did not take an active role in the church or its activities and she preferred to skirt the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. By her own admission she liked to listen to music that was prohibited by the church (bachata and reggaeton) and hang out with her friends in the streets. However, she did so ambivalently, because she respected the church and enjoyed being associated with the faith.

Conversion means accepting Jesus Christ as one's savior. This usually means a public profession of faith followed by practices that reflect and confirm one's new identity as Christian. Conversion requires a significant lifestyle change, particularly for men who must forsake the values of street culture for the prerogatives of church and family. There are many demands put on Christians, perhaps the greatest of which is the requirement to follow the prohibitions of the church, which put heavy restrictions on the freedom of congregants. These prohibitions are at the center of Christian identity in the barrios and because Pentecostals define themselves and other evangelical Christians based on what they do *not* do, one cannot by definition be Christian if he or she is *doing* that which is prohibited or 'un-Christian'.

If being a *cristiano* is defined by what one does *not* do, and because this is not only evaluated by church members and other Pentecostals, but also by the public at large, a profession of faith and acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's savior are only part of a number of procedures required of converts to be considered Christian.

People join the Pentecostal church for a variety of reasons, but 'belief' is not a necessary condition to join or even to start attending a church – in fact, one may become a *cristiano* before one truly 'believes'. As I was informed, a convert must "learn how to be a Christian" through doctrine classes and guidance from senior members of the church. Regardless of an individual's level of belief, faith, religious knowledge, or ritual expertise, he or she assumes and shares a Christian identity first with other believers. Pentecostalism in Villa is an important achieved status for barrio residents that is organized around a set of cultural values based on a Christian ethical framework and negotiated socially with the general public.

Below I explore what it means for Pentecostals to be Christian in Villa. What is apparent is that Christian identity is fundamental to Evangelical Protestant Christianity in the Dominican Republic and the moral and cultural politics of the barrios.

Identity and the Diversity of Belief

I should first explain why this chapter focuses on 'Christian identity' and not, for example, more specifically on Christian belief, doctrine, ritual, liturgy, or some other aspect of Christian experience (though I will address each of these to varying degrees in the following pages). It is difficult, I think, to study the significance of

belief in a sufficiently nuanced way because no one, even if they share the same church, pastor, teachers, or family, shares exactly the same beliefs with another person. While conducting this research I found that many of my informants held ideas about Christianity that were at times at variance from one another, even though these same individuals lived in the same neighborhoods, attended the same churches, and saw themselves as believing in the same things. What does it mean to be a ‘believer’? Does it mean that someone has a religious conviction? That one has ‘faith’? That a person has accepted a religious doctrine as true? And who is to say?

No one shares the exact same ideas about the church or reasons for joining. In almost all of the interviews that I conducted I found that people hold very personal ideas about their religion and have developed personal symbols related to their interpretation of biblical texts and sermons. A type of standardization of belief occurs over time as members learn from one another and shape and adapt their beliefs to reflect a more normative set of community understandings. I was more likely to get predictable responses from more senior church members who had learned ‘the right answer’ to questions about belief and what it means to be Christian.

It was apparent after interviewing a number of church members that the more years people spent in the church the more likely they would be to explain that they became a Christian because, for example, they wanted to save their soul, or that they wanted salvation. This answer was considered a ‘correct’ answer by pastors and church leaders who often found it necessary to admonish their congregation for saying anything to the contrary (this way congregants would learn to say the ‘right’ thing

when discussing their conversion with others). In interviews I found that people joined the church for a variety of reasons ranging from ‘I wanted to go out with a girl at the church but I couldn’t because I wasn’t Christian’ to ‘God fulfilled a *promesa* for me, so I converted’ to ‘God called me to the faith in a special way’ to ‘It is fun, it makes me happy’ to ‘I converted because my husband [or wife] converted’ to ‘We joined the church because we were poor and new in town and needed help’. And others, as we have already seen, convert to avoid spirit or demonic possession as well as ‘to serve God more completely’. This variation suggests that belief, in itself, does not explain – cannot explain by itself – conversion or interest in the church.

Many broad sociological explanations for the increasing popularity of evangelical Protestant Christianity in Latin America and the Caribbean treat conversion (and thus frequently by extension, belief) as if it were the same for all members. The movement itself is often imagined to act on and through an analytically homogenous social grouping – usually a social class or marginal section of society where Pentecostalism finds most of its adherents. It seems curious to me that explanations for the growth of Pentecostalism would treat the conversion of a 17 year-old gang member as substantively and conclusively the same as the conversion of a 50 year-old widow, or for that matter, the conversion of a reformed convict and the baptism of a preacher’s daughter. Particularly explanations that relate to broad economic or social changes that affect a specific class of people, evident for example in arguments about the role of deprivation and anomie, it seems strange to pretend as if internally such groups were without dissimilarity; especially when these same

economic and social forces tend to act on and through cross-sections of social groups in different ways and to varying degrees. Who could (would?) argue, for example, that modern liberal economic and social reforms throughout Latin America have affected men and women (young and old, rural and urban, white and black, etc.) the same?

Converts and potential converts have a wide range of differing ideas and levels of expertise with regard to knowledge about Christianity and although they may share the same conditions of poverty, a diverse range of people come to the church for a wide variety reasons. However, what they do all share is an idea about what it means to be a *cristiano*. In other words, despite the variability of experience and knowledge about Christianity, and despite the diversity of reasons that bring people to the church and the individual differences between them, most people share the same expectations about what constitutes being a Christian – that is, who is and who is not a *cristiano* (and what that person is expected to do and not do; say and not say; and where that person is expected to go and not go).

While differences exist between evangelical churches in the Dominican Republic, particularly at the institutional level, few people recognize as significant any differences between themselves as evangelical Christians. While, for example, there are significant doctrinal differences between say 7th day Adventists and Pentecostals, participants at IdD and IEP consider both to be ‘true’ Christian churches and thus see few significant differences between them.

When I asked members of IdD and IEP about differences between Pentecostal churches as well as other evangelical churches, differences were pointed out but care was taken to note that such differences were usually trivial and what mattered most was that they all lived according to the bible and followed the teachings of Jesus Christ (which meant that they were subject to the same general rules). It is significant that whenever I inquired about differences between churches, my informants would mention those between the rules of their church and another. For example, people would often make comparisons such as ‘our church is more conservative; the women over *there* are allowed to wear pants, *here* they are not’ or ‘some churches are more liberal; *we* must wear skirts’. Such comparisons highlight not the significance of personal belief or the import of biblical teachings, *per se*, but rather they demonstrate the importance and centrality of public acts of faith and demonstrative practices of fidelity.

My informants often spoke of the differences between Pentecostal churches in terms of being more or less conservative or more or less liberal. In this context, conservative meant that there were more rules, reflecting a more traditional approach. Liberal meant more relaxed rules (“more modern” they would say) where members were allowed to dress more freely (e.g. women could wear pants), perhaps drink wine, or maybe even dance on occasion. The Assemblies of God (*Asambleas de Dios*) was often referenced as a more permissive, ‘liberal’ church in relation to both IdD and IEP (which members considered more or less conservative on the whole). Allegedly, female members of *Asambleas de Dios* were allowed to wear pants and jewelry. Such

practices were frowned upon, if not disallowed in IdD and IEP. Interestingly, liberal, permissive churches were frowned upon or opposed by many of the Pentecostals that I met, namely because such churches did not require significant differentiation of their members from the rest of society. Diego recounted a story to me one day about a church that disbanded after the *pastora* tried to liberalize the church and loosen the rules and restrictions on the congregation by allowing them to wear pants and jewelry. The longtime members of the church were not interested in this change, so they took their families and went to other churches. After losing most of her congregation, the *pastora* had to close the church. Many of the members of IdD and IEP were critical of so-called liberal churches, though many were not, particularly the youth who wished to wear the most stylish clothes and listen to their favorite tunes on the radio but could not. Others were proud of the fact that they complied with a more abstinent and austere code of conduct.

Pentecostals in the Dominican Republic do not regard the Catholic Church as a true Christian church and oppose it in much the same way as they do all other secular and thus vulgar worldly things, for two main reasons. One, nothing was required of a person to be Catholic, if you did not claim a religion you would claim to be Catholic; after all, in the Dominican Republic, even non-believers are Catholic. Two, Catholics were not subject to any rules or regulations that prevented them from doing sinful things. This distinction was based on the fact that most Pentecostals were subject to significant prohibitions on their behavior and Catholics were not. Catholics, it was said, could do as they pleased without recourse to anyone, free to sin without

repercussions, and if needed, could always be forgiven by a priest. This was frequently juxtaposed with the austere practices of Pentecostals and the rules they would follow as members of the church. For my informants, it was not acceptable for them to do the many things that Catholics did and this distinction in behaviors was frequently the main argument against the Catholic Church.²

Despite the diversity of belief, even within churches that shared the same name, everyone at IdD and IEP, despite their differences, shared one thing in common: their mutual identity as *cristiano*. Membership in the church and the associated Christian identity is that which binds the neophyte with the pastor, the newly converted with the veteran deacon, the 7th Day Adventist with the Pentecostal, the reformed gang member with the baptized mother of ten children. People interpret their own beliefs a variety of different ways and the structure of the church allows for differences of interpretation, opinion, and expertise. It does not, however, have loose rules regarding the behavior and image of its followers – which it guards jealously.

A focus on identity here allows me to address what is important to my informants – empirically – at the same time enabling me to speak to an important intersection of meaning and signification that is relevant to a demographically and experientially diverse range of informants.

² It is not uncommon to hear priests, as I did on occasion, remark about the destabilizing effects of ‘sects’ (by which they mean Protestant churches) on the country as a whole. During the baptismal ceremony of my goddaughter Brianna, the officiating priest commented that Pentecostals (in his words “*sectas*”) “use the name of God, which is sacred and should not be spoken,” challenging, of course, evangelical claims to biblical expertise. The Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic no doubt feels the pressure, as it does all over Latin America, to respond to the increasing popularity of Protestant, and particularly charismatic forms of Christianity but has little control over shifting perceptions of the church from below.

“In the world but not of the world”: *dos mundos*

Central to evangelical Christian identity politics in the Dominican Republic is the imposition of a Manichean dualism on everyday life – the tendency to organize perception, social life, and experience into binary oppositions related to good and evil, sacred and profane. From this flows all other modes of differentiation related to evangelical identity and forms the basis from which Christians claim difference from others. It provides a framework for Pentecostals to interpret the world around them, the people they know, the things they do, and the events that occur in their lives.

For Pentecostals in Villa, there are *dos mundos* or ‘two worlds’. One world, to which they belong, is the spiritual realm ruled by ‘righteousness’ and ‘the good’. It is opposed in kind to the mundane, earthly world ruled by human lust, greed and sin (so-called ‘desires of the flesh’, and the ‘earthly pursuits of mankind’). To be a Christian means to live a spiritual life, categorically apart from the profane world. Pentecostals in Villa often say “*estamos en el mundo pero no somos del mundo*” or “we are in the world but we are not of this world,” by which they mean there is something that sets them apart from the others in their community whom they share the world with (that is, that they are ‘of the spirit’ and others are ‘of the flesh’). Such language is drawn from the four Canonical gospels of the New Testament, in this case, particularly that of John 17:13-18: “13 But now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not

of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world.”

Conventionally, when Pentecostals refer to *el mundo*, they are referring to the bad or evil things that exist in the world, and the behaviors that are against or not pleasing to God. One is considered to have left the world for higher, spiritual pursuits when one converts and becomes a Christian; thus, *el mundo* often stands for ‘that which is not Christian’. For Pentecostals in Villa, it signifies the practices of non-believers, and among other things means: to live in sin; to not follow Christ; to not obey the bible; to do as one wishes as if one has no fear of God; to walk a twisted path; or to live a disorganized and/or undisciplined life. The tendency to divide the world into two opposing halves finds traction among believers and scriptural support in 1 John 2:15-17: “15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

The spiritual versus the earthly, sanctity versus sin, good versus evil dichotomies are characteristic features of Christianity and elaborated in a variety of ways locally. Some examples of common oppositions made by Pentecostals in Villa include the following: *las iglesias* and *los colmadones* (churches and bars); *la iglesia* and *la calle* (the church and the street); *el evangelio* and *el mundo* (the gospel and the [profane] world); *los cristianos* and *los tigueres* (Christians and ‘macho’ men);

congregaciones and *naciones* (congregations and gangs); *el gozo* and *el vicio* (joy and vice); *el espíritu* and *la carne* (spirit and flesh); *la oración* and *la brujería* (prayer and witchcraft); *la santidad* and *el pecado* (sanctity and sin); *el creyente* and *el impio* (believer and nonbeliever); *el bien* and *el mal* (good and evil); *adentro (la iglesia)* and *afuera (la calle)* (inside [the church] and outside [the street]); *arriba (el cielo)* and *abajo (la tierra)* (above [heaven] and below [earth]).

Significantly, these divisions are fast adhered to and do not allow for ambiguity nor transgression. An individual is either on one side of the fence or on the other, inside or outside – a Christian or not. You are either in the church or in the world, but there is no in between.

Christians are charged, not only with establishing that they as individuals belong to the ‘righteous’, spiritual world as ‘ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven’, but also they must mark, confirm and maintain a clear demarcation between the sacred (*la iglesia, el evangelio*) and the profane (*la calle, el mundo*) worlds.

Pentecostals see themselves as “ambassadors of God” on earth and as “representatives of the government of heaven,” as spiritual guides to the godless. As such, they seek to differentiate themselves from others, to mark themselves, not simply as different, but necessarily as transformed. This differentiation is symbolic as well as physical. Pentecostals in Villa strive to mark discursive, philosophical, moral and physical divisions between themselves and others. This means changing where one goes, what one wears, what one says, how one acts, and in general, who one is in relation to others and frequently oneself.

Transformations: Being Christian means Being Different

“The difference is that I don’t do what they do” – Yamilca

“When man serves the Lord he must mark the difference. He must be something different.” – Domingo

Establishing oneself as a Christian requires a transformation of the self from the way one was, to the way one will be in the future. This is confirmed by a notion of difference in both spatial and temporal senses as well as symbolic and physical terms.

I asked José Luis one day what it meant to be Christian and he, like others, cited ‘difference’ as the most significant or salient feature. He also employed metaphors of transformation and rebirth:

I understand that to be Christian is to be something different; to be a new man; to be a new creature; to be something... at least to be a mirror for other youths who can’t reach what I could not reach at one time.

Sonia, from IdD, echoed the same sentiment when she explained to me that, “When one looks for God he or she has to be a new creature. Those that are in the world continue in the world, but we have to separate ourselves from all worldly things.” For Sonia and others, it is precisely this transformation, this rebirth as it were, as something new, that makes her different from her neighbors: “Because I am a new creature in Christ, they see me differently.”

It is the mark of difference that *la pastora* and members from the congregation of IEP insisted distinguish Christians from all others:

[To be Christian] is to belong to the family of Christ because the family of Christ is different in all senses of the word and different from those that have not accepted him. That is why we have to be different.

Likewise, Karla had learned that being Christian meant being different:

There is no comparison [to being Christian]. [To be Christian] is to walk a different path, a different life. It is a new life, to be born anew. The way one acts is different. One's way of speaking, of walking, of expressing oneself is different in all ways.

The emphasis on transformation and difference is exemplified by the moment when people decide that they want to convert at the end of a *campaña*. Attendees and visitors are not asked if they want to convert, per se, but whether or not they want to change. People have to raise their hands and say that they 'want to change' and/or alternatively, that they want to accept Jesus Christ into their lives as their lord and savior. Those that do not make the permanent or sustained transformation later (after the *campaña*, the next day or the next week) are the ones that leave and do not remain in the church. The committed transformists are the ones that ultimately become *cristianos de verdad* (true Christians).

So central are the notions of rebirth, difference, and transformation to Christian discourse that all are necessary to establish oneself as a Christian in the barrio. But what does difference, rebirth and transformation really mean to individual converts and participants in the church and in local contexts? What does it mean to be different?

Christians in Villa go out of their way to set themselves apart from others and to demonstrate that they are not like other people. Being Christian in Villa is differentiation itself. To be Christian requires, for Pentecostals, a fundamental transformation of the self, a reordering of who one is in relation to oneself and others. From the perspective of other *cristianos*, it is not sufficient to have made a personal change within oneself if it cannot be seen or confirmed by others. Thus, an important

aspect of being a Christian is not simply personal or individual belief but significantly how one is viewed by his or her neighbors and local community. Ultimately, the social role one plays as a Christian and the way one behaves in public are far more important in the context of barrio life because the rewards of membership (of conversion, of transformation) are directly tied to one's acceptance as a Christian in the public sphere. According to Ana, a young girl from IdD: "In order to be Christian you have to try to differentiate yourself and *demonstrate* that you are Christian." While Miguelito explains that, "the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that a Christian, wherever they go, has to *demonstrate* that they are Christian." To be different, one must mark oneself as different by demonstrating, through acts, behaviors, words, and signs that he or she is unlike other people. José Luis put it to me this way one day:

I don't think like them [people in 'the world'] anymore. It's one of the things that makes me different from them. I don't have the mentality that they have. They only have thoughts of *tigueraje, el coro*. I have a developed mentality, I want to walk on another level. I want to see from another level. That is to say that what makes me different from everyone else is the way that I talk, the way that I walk, and my way of seeing.

This distinction is frequently emphasized by Christians and is often the contrast that converts make between their former and newly adopted lives as Christians. For Domingo, the distinction between people "who serve the lord" and "those who do not," is a fundamental part of being a member of the church:

Because a difference must be made between people who serve the Lord and those who do not serve him. There must be a change... So there is where the difference is marked. As the slogan goes here, "Between the Christian and the non-Christian, the difference must be marked."

Therefore, public demonstration of a kind of (Christian) difference is a necessary condition to being Christian in Villa. That marked social difference is central to Pentecostal Christian practice means that an important function of one's Pentecostal faith is public and social.

According to Anthony, "Here, in order for someone to become Christian, he or she must present to society a life of great moral quality." Such a project requires active steps by the believer to represent themselves in a particular way to society, even if that way is not entirely authentic: "The difference" says Moisés, "is the behavior, not the joy, but the action, how [Christians] act when faced with whatever problem." Domingo insists that followers must act happy, even if they are not, in order to represent that life is better in Christ: "So that you see my beaming face, 'look, this man is always joyful', but only God knows what I am thinking." Both Moisés and Domingo's comments during one-on-one discussions point to the heart of the issue: they insist that Christians must represent the best – happiness and joy – regardless of what might be going on in their private lives or 'behind the scenes'. Despite how one might be feeling at any given time, Christians are asked to represent their best in order to advertise to others the goodness of God; or, put another way, to advertise to others why it is better to be Christian. It is not just other *crístianos* who are watching to make sure a member is representing a felicitous life and following the prohibitions of the church; it is also, importantly, the public. According to Radames, "God sends us to be saints inside and outside the church – more outside than inside, because outside the church they watch you, they are watching what you do." And Sonia, much like the

others, seemed to attribute the reason behind much of what she and other Christians did to their relations with the public: “A Christian must walk decently and dress decently so that they treat you with great respect.”

The idea that followers must act or be a particular way in public is discussed often in sermons and impressed on new converts in doctrine classes and in private consultations between members. As *la pastora* explained to me one day, the primary reason for insisting that all new members attend doctrine classes is so that they learn how to act and behave correctly (in accordance with Jesus’ teachings). It may be the case that more effort is put into teaching new members how to behave than is actually put into any other religious instruction. According to Domingo and Juan Pablo, two deacons at IEP, the most important lessons that must be taught to the congregation regard how members should behave and carry themselves before the rest of society:

What are the most important lessons you try to teach to the congregation?

For me, all [topics] are important. In general we focus on how to manage ourselves, Amen! Our behavior [*la conducta*]. We teach what are sins and what is not agreeable to God – things that God rejects. We insist on teaching individuals to have good behavior before society, first, so that they [may] maintain their testimony before society, their family, and before the church. Because through this, what we call sanctity and purification of our life, our soul before the Lord, is transmitted. [Domingo]

We try to educate the people when they enter the congregation with respect to their pasts. [Some have worse pasts than others]. Some come from prostitution, witchcraft, drug addiction etc. We teach the word of God, how people must behave, what people must do, what they shouldn’t do in order to leave, to get out of those things. If a person converts to Christ and doesn’t make an effort to change or to leave whatever custom, to separate from those things, I would say that [their

conversion] was in vain because one has to make an effort. [Juan Pablo]

Because of this primary emphasis on acts over beliefs or feelings, and particularly the emphasis on how those acts are perceived by the public, Pentecostalism in Villa would seem less personal, less individual and more characteristically public and social. The focus on teaching members the right and wrong ways to act points to a central concern of the church for the regulation, not just of the religious lives of believers, but all aspects of their daily lives.

I will discuss later how this social feature shapes the ways in which Christian identity is negotiated in relation to others and how it in turn shapes the moral and social milieu of the barrio. Suffice it to say now that the status of Christianity in the barrios is negotiated between and amongst one's neighbors and it is never a completed process. That is, one does not complete, with any finality, the transformation to Christianity after conversion. Converts must prove to others, through public acts, that they are to be respected by the public as religious people and in order to do this they must continuously remaking themselves as Christians through daily interactions with the public and their congregations.

Pentecostals in Villa are acutely aware that they are representatives of their faith and they work very hard to protect it by maintaining an enviable public image. Members are reprimanded and sanctioned if their transgressions are found to be particularly damaging to the image of the church. Offenses that occur in the public eye are dealt with swiftly and publicly in order to show others that the church disapproves of such transgressions. Disciplinary action is taken in order to

demonstrate that the church has high standards and rules that must not be crossed. Such was the case with Diego, who was suspended from participation in church services indefinitely for ‘doing something that he should not have done’ with a young woman at the church. The young woman’s mother (who was not a Christian) found out about the incident and went to Pastor Ramón for answers as to why a member of his congregation had ‘done something that he should not have done’ with her daughter. In order to demonstrate to other members of the congregation as well as those in the neighborhood that Diego’s behavior was unacceptable, Pastor Ramón was forced to take action and punish Diego for his misbehavior.

Miguelito’s story of coming to the church is not a unique one but it highlights the importance of Christian public identity and the differentiation involved in becoming a Christian as well as the appeal of Christianity to many younger and even perhaps older members:

When I was twelve years old, before I was a Christian, I cleaned shoes in the streets [for money]. I would leave the house dirty and barefoot; nothing was important to me. Becoming Christian has made me proud because now when I leave my house I always look good. I fix myself up real good and everything. It makes me proud.

Miguelito converted because of his experience seeing another young man of his age and liking the way that the boy looked and acted: “When I saw another youth who had converted I saw a brilliance, I saw his behavior and said ‘I want to be like that, I want to be like him’. That’s why I converted.”

The following sections explore the various ways in which Pentecostals transform their behavior in order to differentiate themselves and highlight their

affiliation with the church. This differentiation is accomplished through a variety of signifying practices such as the clothes one wears, the things one says and talks about with others, the places where one goes, and the things one does. Such acts serve not only to reform the individual, but also, importantly, to signal to others that one claims to live a felicitous and righteous life in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

“We don’t go where they go...”

By not going to places that others frequent and enjoy, such as bars and clubs, Pentecostals seek to differentiate themselves from so-called *impíos*, or *mundanos* (‘people of the world’). Christians are rarely seen in such places unless they are giving a *consultorio*, preaching, or evangelizing. Pentecostals are, on the whole, discouraged (if not outright prohibited) from visiting, spending time at, or going to bars, *discotecas*, pool halls, or places of prostitution. While this is an unwritten rule, most Pentecostals know the places, events, and activities that they are expected to avoid. And, it should be unsurprising by this point that Pentecostals do not go to religious ceremonies that are not evangelical (or at least they are expected not to).

In avoiding certain places, by maintaining distance and thus separation from the symbolic centers of spiritism, secular merrymaking, and sexual hedonism, Pentecostals make it difficult for others to accuse them of, or identify them with, witchcraft, alcoholism, infidelity, and other negatively ascribed behaviors that threaten one’s social standing in the community. Because Pentecostals do not ‘hang out in the streets’, ‘*andando en la calle*’, they may not be perceived as ‘up to no good’ or worse, as scheming *tigueres* or ‘shameless women’. Indeed, a recognized member of the

church is unlikely to be suspected of witchcraft (and perhaps just as unlikely to be cheating with someone else's husband...). While it does not entirely remove one from the sphere or influence of gossip and rumor, it certainly makes it more difficult for others to accuse one of witchcraft, drunkenness, or unfaithfulness. Both Burdick (1998) and Austin-Broos (1997) note similar benefits of conversion to Pentecostal Christianity in Brazil and Jamaica respectively.

By avoiding centers of so-called witchcraft, be they cult houses, consultation homes or festivals, ceremonies, altars or certain churches, Pentecostals stay away from what they consider to be spiritually dangerous places. Recalling that there is believed to be a contagious element to dangerous and evil spirits and magic, Pentecostals remain spiritually clean by avoiding the potential for contamination through contact or proximity to such threats. In order to remain clean, pure, and sanctified, Pentecostals must not go to the same places as everyone else, especially those places that are deemed treacherous and corrupting (bars, centers of witchcraft, etc.).

Changes in Language and Speech

“It doesn't matter what social class they are from, they can be illiterate, but they will not speak a single obscenity” – Moisés

Pentecostals differentiate themselves through speech acts and linguistic variation. It was impressed upon me by my informants that *cristianos* did not use obscene words or discuss vulgar things, and that others around them, out of respect, would take care not to say disrespectful things to or around them.

The transformation in the way that one speaks is as important as any other change converts attempt to make. *Cristianos* pride themselves on ‘speaking well’.

Consider Flaco’s evaluation here:

I’ve earned respect from my friends by being myself and acting like a Christian [*actuando como cristiano*]. My way of speaking. Because I can’t talk as everyone else does. I have to speak coherent things, things that make sense, things that help. So that when people see you are different and that you speak in a suitable way, that all the things that you speak are positive, then people begin to see you in another way. They can respect you because you don’t say everything, because you don’t say every little thing that comes to mind; you speak of important things.

It is through speaking differently that Flaco differentiates himself from others. His way of speaking was the primary means by which he asserted his Christian identity and earned respect from others. Speaking well, as Abrahams (1983) has observed for the Caribbean in general, is a highly valued trait, something that the Pentecostals I observed exploit and attempt to convert into respect. In speaking well, Pentecostals align themselves with values associated with respectability that are highly regarded by society.

Speaking bible passages is another way that Christians shape their identity through speech acts. It is not uncommon for Pentecostals to reference the bible in casual conversations or to quote passages from time to time in order to make a point. This signals to others that the speaker claims to be a Christian and claims to have special spiritual or religious knowledge. Also locutions like “*dios le bendiga!*” [God bless you] a popular salutation among evangelical Christians is a common way to signal to others one’s claim to a Christian identity.

Physical Transformations

“Every time I look at myself in the mirror I say “wow! This man is not the Juan Carlos of yesterday” – Juan Carlos

Importantly, Pentecostals not only claim to *do* different things – go different places, say different things, dress differently – but also they claim to *be* different people. A change that should be so profound that one’s physical image may even change. The goal, it was said, is to be so different that people no longer recognize you as the person you were before. According to Héctor, people who had not seen him in a long time would see him now and be in disbelief at how much his appearance had changed since converting. Domingo and others claim that when people convert, they change physically and a person can see this transformation in their face:

That is why, when a person comes to Jesus Christ, he/she changes. When the Lord comes into the life of a person it must change, that is why, I don’t know if you have noticed that when a person, can be any type of person, comes to the feet of Jesus Christ, they change: they become more beautiful, they change in all aspects, they look very different. Because we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is the light of the world, if we are representatives of the light of Jesus Christ it must shine on our faces. That is why one sees a change. There is always a change in the person.

The change that Pentecostals claim attends conversion to Jesus Christ and is thought to be a visible, physical transformation. According to Héctor: “People say to me ‘look at you, physically, I didn’t want to say anything but I noticed a change in your face’.” And José Luis’s transformation was often remarked on when such discussions of looking different arose with members of IEP. So stark was his transformation that others insisted that I would not have recognized him as being the same person. His hair, jewelry and clothes were said to be different; supposedly everything was

different about him. They wanted to show me a picture so that I could see for myself his remarkable change but I never did see a picture. I did not really need to see a picture for confirmation, I knew the José Luis of today and even non-Christians around town would remark about his transformation. No one, that I knew, regarded José Luis's transformation as anything other than profound.

Changing Clothes

An individual's symbolic transformation upon conversion (accepting Jesus Christ as one's savior) into a new and/or different person is followed by a physical acting out of the transformative metaphor. Nicol's story illustrates this exact point. Her clothes signified her previous life and her previous identity. When she converted, she removed her old clothes and bought new ones to reflect the new person that she had become. When she was *descarriado*, when she backslid and left the church for a time, she gave away her dresses and went back to wearing jeans:

The minute I converted, the first thing I did was I changed all my pants and bought skirts... The very next day I took all my pants and gave them away, all the blouses I threw out, the earrings I gave away to my nieces, the skirts that were too short I gave away... Yep, that week I did all that. I also bought lots of [long] skirts. I had many long skirts.

When I left the church, I gave all the skirts to other Christians... I didn't think that I was going to return to the congregation. I only kept two that I wanted, but I didn't wear them when I left. I went back to wearing them when I converted again and returned to the church. For me it wasn't difficult to change.

The clothes, for Nicol, were personal symbols of her transformation. She felt compelled to give away the dresses that she bought to wear after conversion when she left the church – not because the clothes ceased to have a function but because she did

not think that she would be a Christian again. When she converted a second time, she bought more long dresses and began to wear them yet again.

Pentecostals in Villa are encouraged to ‘look nice’ in public. This usually means that girls wear long skirts and blouses and men clean pressed button-up shirts, slacks, and clean leather shoes. Neither men nor women were supposed to wear jewelry, but this was less strictly enforced. Miguelito suggested to me one day that, in his estimation, about 90% of *crístianos* were recognized because of their clothing and the other 10% by their behavior. It was something that Pentecostals take pride in. I was told, by more than a few Pentecostal men, that the reason why women were attracted to Christian men was because of their clean look, clothes, and the way that they took care of themselves (some also liked the way they talked). Whether or not this was really the case is unclear, however, it does show that Christian men do see themselves as desirable and the way that they dress is a big part of that equation.

Clothing signals an outward transformation of identity and represents an attempt to demonstrate a sensibility more in line with dominant articulations of social distinction. Interestingly, most people did not see Christians as dressing stylish or fashionable (*la moda*) per se, but rather ‘nice’, ‘clean’, and ‘put together’. Brodwin (2003: 91) suggested that Haitian Pentecostals in Guadeloupe took care to have shined shoes, coats and ties in order to project the “bourgeois norms of stability and civility” that Haitians by reputation were thought to lack as stereotyped migrant laborers to the island. Similarly, in the Dominican Republic, dress shirts, ties, and leather shoes project an air of respectability for those stigmatized by poverty and/or plagued by

ethnic and racial stereotypes. Additionally, for women, the use of long dresses and modest blouses are a signal to others that they are to be regarded as respectable women.

It is also common for Pentecostals to carry bibles with them everywhere they go as a public symbol of their transformation. It signals to others that one claims to be a Christian and allows Pentecostals to ‘share the word’ with others. While many are encouraged to carry bibles, not everyone or even most members of IEP or IdD did so. While everyone was encouraged to purchase a bible, not everyone had the resources to do so. In any case, the sudden presence of a bible in someone’s hand, like the change in someone’s clothes, was a public or outward symbol of that person’s transformation and conversion to Jesus Christ and signaled to others that one was to be regarded with respect.

What’s in a Name? The Signification of Pentecostal Naming Practices

Frequently a person’s transformation is represented or symbolized by a change in nickname or title. Residents of Villa, from all walks of life, like Dominicans all over the country, are not afraid to use nicknames or to go by three or four names themselves. It is common for people to go by a name other than their given name and sometimes it was difficult to know whom someone was referring to if that person were known to go by different names. Few if any of my informants were known by their given names and most went by a nickname or some other name given to them by family or friends. Such was the case with José Luis. Significantly, however, it was not until after he converted that he used his given name. Before converting he was

known as Kiloa by his friends and Titico by others. After converting, he started to go by José Luis, his given name:

Those that know me they have a name for me, some call me “*aleluyasa*,” others call me “*la gloria son de Dios*,” others call me José Luis, and some call me “Abreu” [his family name]. I have friends that are both believers and non-believers that know me as such.

Today José Luis was proud of being referred to as *varón de dios* or ‘man of God’.

What his experience suggests is that because people know him by different names, by proxy, they know him by different personalities. His various different names reflect his various different selves before and after converting. José Luis no longer sees himself as Kiloa or Titico, those represent selves of the past that no longer pertain to him. As his conversion represented a renunciation and abandonment of that lifestyle, so too it meant leaving who he was and adopting a new self-identity. People today no longer refer to him by the names of his former selves, further articulating a marked break from his past and underlining his rebirth and transformation as a new person.

Similarly, before converting, Juan Carlos was called Matica in the streets as well as *el verdugo* by his enemies. He was proud of those names at the time but regrets them today and finds them shameful. In a number of conversion narratives I noticed that many of the speakers were quick, without being prompted, to cite former nicknames that characterized their former lives: ‘Before converting they called me...’, ‘Before I became a Christian I was known as...’, were common formulations. Such details provided conversion narratives that greater emphasized the changes that have occurred in a person’s life since converting and mark the division Pentecostals wish to make with their past lives.

It is also well known that Pentecostals refer to each other as *hermano/hermana* ('brother/sister'), *varón/varona* (terms of respect), and *siervo/sierva* ('servant of God'). Such terms acknowledge a shared Christian identity and indicate mutual respect for one another's beliefs. The public also use such terms to refer to *cristianos*, typically as a form of respect. The use of the term *varón* to refer to Pentecostals is a common way that non-Christians show respect and approval to and for evangelical Christians. Pentecostals themselves use such terms to build solidarity with one another and to create community within and across congregations.

Just as Pentecostals have naming practices for themselves they also use special terms to refer to non-Christians such as *impíos* (someone who lacks god or mercy – is 'ungodly' or 'unfaithful'), *mundanos* ('people of the world'), *inconvertos* ('the unconverted'), and *no creyentes* ('non-believers'). Such language helps realize the Manichean worldview of converts and emphasizes the important division Pentecostals make between believers (themselves) and non-believers (others). While at times these terms may be used negatively, they are not necessarily in themselves offensive, or at least in most cases they are meant to be neutral descriptors.

Gente del mundo or 'people of the world' as they are called by Pentecostals, in this case are non-Christians, and 'sanctified people', also known as *gente disciplinada* ('disciplined people') are Pentecostals who claim to be 'true Christians' because they, more than any other church, follow the bible and the teachings of Jesus. In naming differences between people, Christians further mark themselves as distinct from others and elaborate a politics of identity central to local social relationships and interactions.

Physical Metaphors of Transformation

Internal transformation, the spiritual transformation in Christ, is to be reflected externally, or followed by in physical metaphors of difference, change and transformation. We have discussed behavioral, linguistic, and symbolic transformations but such transformations are not only reflected in or on the body but also are projected out into the world, for example, on or in the form of the physical structure of one's home.

As discussed so far, modifications of hair and clothing style are important physical changes that Pentecostals make to reflect their internal transformations but we can also consider at a person's home, the construction of which – the layout, form, and interior design – to see what it says about concepts of person, status, and identity.

As discussed earlier many homes in Villa are small and made of wood and/or corrugated metal and, as in barrio Francisco, were constructed by their current or former owners. Other homes are made from concrete or cinder blocks. Few public displays of success and wealth are more visible than the home that a family or an individual maintains. Concrete homes are the most desirable and prestigious, owing to their greater strength and endurance in inclement weather as well as the higher cost of materials to build. Home ownership, as opposed to tenancy, is also highly valued, making one's home a key symbol of status and prosperity in the barrio.

Pentecostals, after conversion, are encouraged to marry and maintain, if not construct, a home of their own. This was the ideal, not only in the church but also Villa and throughout the country more generally. Home ownership is one of the most diffuse goals found in Dominican society. In comparing the U.S. to the Dominican

Republic one day, Renato stated confidently that he wished never to move from his country because he was free to do as he liked and, unlike what he had heard about the U.S., he could own his own home in Villa.

In the context of the church, one's home becomes a reflection of one's conversion and a physical symbol of her or his testimony. The order of one's home was representative of the order of one's life. Converts frequently made comparisons between their homes before and after conversion. When people described themselves before and after accepting Jesus they often referred to how their housing situation had changed; how today they own their own lot and no longer rent; how they have a house of their own; how they built a good home with the help of members from the church. Additionally, the state or quality of a person's home was often used as a measure of his or her prosperity since converting.

Building a home out of concrete or strong materials was often connected with the fortifying metaphors used in the church to refer to Jesus Christ's influence on individual lives. The verbs *edificar* (to edify, to build, construct) and *fortalecer* (uplift spiritually, to strengthen, reinforce) were repeatedly invoked to describe reasons for attending *cultos* and congregating at the church (as well as sleeping in the church). Just as one's spirit/constitution was said to be strengthened and edified in Jesus Christ, so too was the literal reinforcement and construction of a new home as converts matured in the gospel.

A good home, a strong home, ultimately functioned as a testament to one's faith and fidelity in the church. If one's home was a mess or out of order it was

typically seen as a reflection of one's rocky relationship with God, or at least indicative of one's struggling faith. Thus, working on or building one's house was a popular metaphor for working on and building one's relationship with Jesus. The house functions as a concrete symbol of one's transformation in Christ and also suggests to neighbors that perhaps they might be 'better off' with Jesus.

The home functions as a both a public and private symbol of one's conversion. The interior of the home, the personal and familial are private and the exterior of the home, the public external symbol. The condition of Juan Pablo's home is exemplary here. That the floors, fixtures and windows were unfinished, that the walls were barren from the inside out (it felt to me much like a cave), was relatively inconsequential; it was the façade, the external, the outside of the house, that signaled to others success. Much like the expectation that Christians be seen smiling and happy in public (despite what might be going on inside) it was important for Pentecostals to demonstrate to the world that they were better off than their neighbors (particularly those who drank or visited with *brujos*) and the house was an important physical example to others of their relative prosperity.

If it was not clear enough who lived in such a house, people would advertise to others that their home was Christian with slogans such as "*que dios bendiga este hogar*" or "*cristo viene arrepientete*" painted alongside a bible, dove, or other Pentecostal symbol directly on the house itself. Perhaps even more familiar were the bumper stickers and vinyl windshield decals of Jesus and various bible verses that were almost obligatory adornments on the vehicles of evangelical Christians

everywhere in the country. A car, of course, if one could afford a vehicle, like the home, was also an important physical testimony of one's transformation and prosperity.

Despite the fact that Josefina and Denny's house was unfinished (and looked to be so for the near future), and Juan Pablo's home was barren and unfinished, both family homes were envied because of the nice materials (primarily concrete) that were used in their construction. Domingo and his family lived in a much nicer neighborhood a couple miles from barrio Francisco and his home, along with that of Wilfredo and his wife Veronica, was envied by other church goers and frequently cited as a blessing from God.

The health and growth of the church is often conceived of in terms of the same metaphor of construction. *La pastora* began telling me the history of her church, IEP, first by explaining to me that at the beginning, when she was sent by her church in Pantoja to raise a church in Villa, she first gave *cultos* out of a member's home, then, as they began to "convert souls" they bought a lot (where IEP is today) and built a small house of wood where they held services for several years. Later they decided that "the house of God should be prettier" so they worked harder and "by the grace of God" and the help of the growing congregation, it became "a proper temple," a concrete structure with electricity and a generator, "with some small details here and there still to be finished." The success and permanence of the church and the congregation are reflected in the building itself and it has become a living testimony to the success of IEP.

In one's home, the construction and maintenance of one's home, we see reflections of being and becoming a Christian. What a convert's home says about his or her transformation in Christ, ultimately, is as important as what he or she says and how he or she behaves. Additionally, the focus on the home is also indicative of the church's association with and investment in that sphere of life particularly as it is opposed to the 'worldly' sphere of life, otherwise conceived of as *la calle* (the street).

Apartarnos del Mundo: Testimony, Sanctity, and Prohibition

The Pentecostal church is the place where one encounters what is called a testimony. A typical testimony describes the bad, or negative state of a person's life before their conversion and the fundamental transformation that has occurred since accepting Jesus Christ as one's savior. Popular testimonies often take the following formula: 'I used to be a ... [drinker, adulterer, etc.], I didn't have anything, now I've changed, now I have ... [happiness, peace of mind, money, etc.]' or 'I was like this before, now I'm different, now I'm free, now I'm saved' or 'I was sad, now I'm happy, I was sick, now I'm healthy, etc.' It is, fundamentally, an explanation, a story of how a person has turned their life around from bad to good. The testimony explains how one's conversion to Jesus Christ changed him or her from a sinner to a saint, a non-believer into a believer, an immoral being into a moral one.

To give testimony is to bear witness to the greatness of God, to demonstrate to others the power of God to transform individual lives for good (and therefore revealing to others the true providence of God). For others to believe, it is thought necessary to maintain and regularly give your testimony. It is also necessary in

establishing your Christian identity so that others can see and be convinced of the transformative power of God. In this way testimonies do the work of evangelism. *Cristianos* give testimonies and are encouraged to give testimony whenever and wherever possible. As a requirement of the church, you must maintain a testimony because it is central to being Christian. According to Juan Pablo, being a *cristiano* means giving a testimony:

It means to give a new testimony, a good testimony so that with time people can convince themselves of the certainty that you are different. There are people who, even after some time, you see and say “no, there has been no change.” If I speak to you the gospel and I live doing things that are not like a person who says they are Christian then I have not converted. It is to be convinced that Christ is the lord that changes us and transforms us.

At least from the perspective of the church, the testimony is perhaps the single most important confirmation of one’s true conversion. One’s testimony is verification that he or she has truly changed and become a new person. People who give a bad testimony (*mal testimonio* – *cristianos* who do not live righteous lives) are viewed as a threat to the church because they give Christians a bad name and threaten their relationship with the public. A bad testimony leads people to think poorly of Christians and puts into question whether or not the person really changed as he or she claimed. It is not until converts maintain a good testimony that the church will decide to baptize them.

For followers in Villa, the idea of sanctity or ‘holiness’ is essential to creating and maintaining distance from corrupting and contaminating influences and thought

necessary to confirm one's fundamental transformation before society. Pastor Ramón explains that sanctity means to separate oneself:

The Pentecostal movement has had great growth, today surpassing other churches in places where no traditional churches exist. In some places, if there are churches at all, they are Pentecostal. So other churches have had to say, "We have to live a more austere life. We have to separate ourselves a little bit more." I believe that after people enter the movement where sanctity of the human being is promoted – and the word sanctity means to separate oneself, to separate oneself in order to look for God in a more effective way – there is more emotion because the people get excited and the emotional part makes people change. If you feel something in you, it's the Holy Spirit. You think that you are doing the right thing and it is this that fills you. You don't feel the need to look for something else. The difference is marked not just by the churches but by the fervor that exists in the Pentecostal churches. We work with drug addicts and when they convert they go to the Pentecostal church and the emotion that they feel separates them from the drugs.

For Domingo, sanctity means purity and purification:

We try to teach the congregation that we should look for a way to guarantee the salvation of our soul. That's why we insist on what is called sanctification, purification of our soul... Sanctity means not being impure, from impurities or filth. Sanctity means purification. When we speak of sanctity, we are talking about removing something. Before [I was a Christian], I drank liquor regularly, but finally I looked for a way to sanctify myself, my body. I left drinking, because [the bible] says that drunks do not enter [the kingdom of heaven]. So it's a way of sanctifying. Sanctity is to separate oneself from filth, from contamination, from that which can contaminate my soul. I try to remove it from within me.

This metaphor of contamination is often used to relate ideas about the danger of witchcraft, possession, and moral corrosion associated with going to certain places like bars and nightclubs. In order to sanctify one's body, or in order to live a sanctified life, to live as a saint, one must not contaminate or soil the body with 'worldly' things. Alcohol, because it is ingested, is emblematic of such polluting substances.

The maintenance of sanctity or holiness is the official key to salvation according to *la pastora*:

Since I was little I liked the gospel because I liked ‘the spiritual cleansing’ [*la limpieza espiritual*], recognizing since I was young that God is holy and he says in his word that without sanctity nobody will see him, and I want to see him!

As sanctity is seen as a precondition to salvation, Sonia reasoned that when she was Catholic she could not obtain sanctity because she was allowed to sin, in her words, “they did not prohibit anything.” She reasoned that ultimately she could not obtain salvation as a Catholic because the church itself was corrupt and there was too much corruption associated with it. She likens her time frequenting the Catholic Church to living in sin.

In order to establish and maintain sanctity or holiness, to ensure salvation, to distance oneself from the corrupting, polluting and contaminating elements that abound in society both secularly and spiritually, Pentecostal Christians maintain a strict regimen of prohibitions (rules or divine laws) that ensure sanctity and prepare converts for salvation.

What are also called the norms or rules (*las normas* or *las reglas*) of the church, prohibitions are a feature of membership in Pentecostal congregations just as they are in many other institutions and organizations – at least this is how Renato understood his subjection to and compliance with the rules of the church:

It is difficult [to follow the demands of the church], but one tries, because one has to try... Let me give you an example: when you are in school, in an institution there are rules that one must follow, if you do not follow these rules you can’t be there. In this case, the gospel is a rule that you have to try to comply with because if you want to get to

where you want to go, to the final stage, you have to try to do it. There are rules that you will realize are good and bad.

Renato, for example, liked gold chains but did not wear one because the church frowns upon it. However, sometimes he wears ‘sporty, comfortable clothes’ because he does not like to wear ties and he does not think that God will condemn him for it. This is in contrast with *la pastora*’s reasons for disallowing women from wearing pants, saying that she did not want to risk salvation over such a minor detail:

There are churches that don’t have *doctrina* and they accept whatever clothing and any haircut. We do not accept any of that because we do not want to loose ourselves for a ‘silly’ or ‘stupid’ thing [*tontería*] we would say.

For Renato respect comes from following the rules and prohibitions, from “inhibiting” himself. It is precisely this restraint that makes him a Christian: “In the end they come to know that I am Christian because I ‘inhibit’ myself many things that I know are bad; I restrict myself.”

Pentecostals are discouraged from marrying or dating *gente del mundo*, ‘people of the world’. Drawing from the ‘unequal yoke’ metaphor found in 2 Corinthians 6: 14-18, they claim that “*Dios no da yugo desiguales*,” by which they mean to suggest that God does not support marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian. Once an individual converts and becomes a member of the church, they are expected to conform to church regulations and find a Christian spouse. If married, they are encouraged to pray for the conversion of their spouse.

What all of these perspectives suggest is that the prohibitions are instrumental for Pentecostal Christian faith in the barrios. Not only do they facilitate alternative

modes of conduct that function to separate *cristianos* from others in both time and space, but also they create symbolic differences between individuals based on actions that are then used to justify spiritual or religious differences. *Cristianos* are often considered *personas serias* ('serious people') and *gente disciplinada* ('disciplined people') because they try to live ascetic lifestyles and deny themselves things that most others find enjoyable. Additionally, the prohibitions further support the division of reality into good and evil: the prohibitions establish a phenomenal difference between discipline and freedom, law and lawlessness, saintly and earthly, chaste and flashy. The flesh they say is weak, and according to Sonia, "one must govern the flesh."

Relevance of Specific Prohibitions: Why Can't Pentecostals Drink?

Alcohol is a master symbol in Pentecostalism. It often takes the form of the central protagonist in conversion narratives and testimonies as the symbol of one's previously troubled life. It is a particularly effective symbol because most people can say that they have had a relationship with alcohol. As something that virtually everyone can relate to, alcoholism is often and readily used in testimonies. While one could argue that there is nothing inherently evil about alcohol itself, drinking becomes the object upon which feelings of resentment, hatred, and unhappiness may be projected. Alcohol can be found everywhere and can be used to draw people into the church because it is diffuse throughout society and as an object of desire, it works well in this context.

Prohibitions against alcohol are a strategy used by churches all over the world to make sinners, and thus potential converts, out of the public. This strategy works in many contexts worldwide, especially heavily moralistic and guilt societies like Catholic ones. I wondered how an otherwise ‘good’ or upstanding person could have a compelling testimony if they really were not that troubled to begin with. I found that many men, who otherwise lived virtuous lives before converting, would say that they drank too much or that alcohol was an impediment to their flourishing. In other words, if one did not have a testimony of striking magnitude (from convict to saint), he could always say that he used to be a drunk or that he drank too much, which led him to sloth and complacency.

Women rarely used alcohol as a central focus or symbol of their testimonies. It was far more common to hear from women themselves in fact that they were combative or argumentative wives, or that they were shameless and liked to ‘run around the streets’. Some of these testimonies were as equally vague as those of some men who probably did not live particularly destructive or shameful lives before converting. This does, however, point to the import and significance of maintaining a testimony and the shape and overall tenor such testimonies should take.

In the context of Villa specifically, and the Dominican Republic generally, what is it about drinking alcohol that makes it so abhorrent to Pentecostals? Is drinking alcohol really such a bad thing? One possibility locally might be that it is seen as having connections with Afro-Dominican religiosity where alcohol and tobacco play a significant part in ritual and ceremony. In this context alcohol and

tobacco are ambiguous symbols of the sacred and the secular/profane. Both commodities are closely related to the spirit world of the Caribbean and tend to be items that facilitate communion with the divine (a divine Pentecostals perceive as evil and demonic). While Pentecostals do not drink or smoke, *brujos* use cigars and rum to conduct important spiritual work. The spirits themselves are said to desire both tobacco and alcohol in whatever form: they are the things they most desire. This fact is not lost on Pentecostals who argue against such items and their use as a sin or as inherently evil. They use such associations in turn as additional arguments against the spirits to characterize them as malevolent rather than benevolent.

Being a Pentecostal in Villa is about discipline and self-control, the antithesis of this, of course, is intoxication – a state of recklessness, immodesty, a state of being out of control. Additionally, alcohol and tobacco are considered polluting agents along with other illicit drugs, and therefore are perceived as posing a treat to sanctity. Worldwide campaigns against cigarettes and tobacco draw on a similar discourse about pollution, filth, and immorality to discourage people from smoking.

The symbol itself ultimately functions to draw people into the church and answer the call to conversion. If people are convinced that drinking alcohol is wrong or evil they are more likely to see themselves as needing to be saved. The compulsory use of alcohol and tobacco in Afro-Dominican religious rituals and festivals is frequently contrasted with the sober yet ecstatic services and celebrations of the Pentecostal church and thus serves to organize opposition to both drinking and so-called witchcraft.

Being Christian Requires Sacrifice. Being Christian is Suffering

“To be Christian is to suffer, it is to endure the suffering that Christ endured, to endure it within our lives” – Domingo

“Being a Christian is a sacrifice” – Ana

People struggle with following the demanding prohibitions of the church and forsaking the many things they find desirable in life. It is also difficult to give up many of the activities one enjoys doing with friends and family. Believers sometimes understand this sacrifice as ‘suffering’ – that is, dealing with the constant desire to do things that the Church prohibits. This was particularly the struggle of young converts who felt pressure from peers to drink, party, and have sexual relationships with others.

Being Christian requires sacrifice, one gives up a kind of freedom in order to enjoy another kind of freedom. This was understood by many of my Pentecostal informants as the justification for enduring in the church. Those who could not fulfill the prohibitions and keep away from the trappings of ‘the world’ would leave the church, perhaps to return again some day, perhaps not. One of the biggest complaints of devout members was that some people come to the church, convert and then leave, only to come back again if they wished. I got the sense that converts who stayed in the church felt like they themselves had made significant sacrifices, which they understood as enduring, and were dismayed by what they perceived to be the callous betrayal of an oath to change one’s life for good. For many of my informants being a Christian was difficult, a sacrifice, and the meaning of that sacrifice seemed to be challenged when followers ‘lost their way’ or backslid. For Radames and others, the sacrifice was worth it:

Everything is a sacrifice, it is worth it to remain [in the church] because if you fail you are going to return to the world where you came from. It is tough, after you have done so many things, and people are going to treat you differently. After a while [in the church if] you return to drinking and doing other things that you were doing [before], its tough. That is why I'm afraid. I'm afraid that someone will say to me "after speaking all those things about the bible and now you leave the church?"

Suffering and sacrifice were considered together to be functions of barrio life, in order to deal with suffering, a sacrifice was necessary. For a particularly telling example, consider here Josefina's remarks about *Pare de Sufrir*, a Brazilian neo-Pentecostal church whose doctrine of prosperity has gained some popularity in parts of the country:

Look, in my opinion, this church isn't bad, but I do not think that one should talk as if everything is pretty when in reality it is not. For example they sell things to people there to "stop the suffering." The church is telling people something that is not true, that is not the way that things are. When I converted my life changed, however, there continue to be difficult moments in my life. There have been moments as a Christian that I have cried for things that have happened to me and I have felt bad. There have been times that I want to be alone because sometimes in life there are difficult moments. So, *Pare de Sufrir* says whatever the problem, if you want to change your life go here, if you want to stop the suffering, easily, even if you do not believe in God, if you want to stop the suffering you make an offering. I think that they should speak to people about a plan of salvation, and not talk to people about stopping the suffering because there will always be suffering in this life, because life is not the color of roses.

Josefina and others rejected the premise of *Pare de Sufrir* – that one need only to come to the church, make an offering, and be free of problems there after. To enjoy or benefit from the church it was believed that members had to congregate, pray, and worship along with others in addition to following the prohibitions and letter of the bible. *Pare de Sufrir* was suspicious to many because it did not require membership.

It was a place where people did not have a community, per se, and were not accountable to others. Believers, it was thought, could go to the church one day, fix their problems (at least temporarily) and leave, and were not subject to the policing of a congregation or reconciliation with Jesus. Juan Pablo suggested to me that this was not, in his opinion, how God works and such an approach was ultimately not amenable to living a felicitous life. Life is suffering and it takes constant work and edification in the church to maintain a straight path (against *descarriar*).

There is an emphasis on ‘congregation’ as an essential component of Christian identity and practice in the country because it means that one is part of a collective with a communal responsibility to the image of the group and support for one’s faith. The doctrine of prosperity – that believers need only ask to be blessed with riches – was rejected by the congregations of both IEP and IdD mainly because it ignored this emphasis on communality and interdependence between believers (and others) as well as worked under the basic assumption that suffering could be eliminated in this life, a presupposition rejected by Pentecostals in Villa. While people understand their conversion as bringing better things to their life, frequently *el gozo* (joy), at IEP and IdD they rarely if ever connected this with extravagant material gain. At best, congregants might testify that they have been blessed with a beautiful home since accepting Christ as their savior, but explicit claims of making it rich off of Jesus were reproached and explicitly preached against in both churches. Both pastor Ramón and *la pastora* lived quite modest lives, even more so than most of the congregants at their

churches. Pastor Ramón put this in terms of sacrifice and understood his role as pastor to guide and educate people about the ‘true’ nature of Christianity.

It is difficult to be an estimable *cristiano* in the barrio because of the demands and prohibitions of the church. Ultimately this difficulty served to be one of the more obvious deterrents to conversion or longevity in a congregation. Being a *cristiano*, for some, is simply too much work and personal investment and required too great a sacrifice. Why uproot a relatively stable life in order to join a congregation in search of salvation? The benefit was not always clear to outsiders and the trade off not always worth it.

People who convert from drugs and alcohol addiction, drug trafficking and gangs (see Chapter 3) have more to gain from conversion. Even as conversion to the Pentecostal church requires converts to adapt new modes of practice and in some cases to separate from their past selves and established new selves in new social networks, conversion enables deviant or marginalized people the opportunity to reintegrate with normative society and build upon a new, integrated social foundation. Additionally, the church provides a relatively safe and accepting space for those stigmatized by disease (particularly HIV and AIDS) as well as those with criminal histories that follow them from prison. This new relationship with society brought about through conversion creates strong local relationships of expectation and dependence. As a result, conversion also occasions greater subjection to one’s community and the expectations thereof connected with being a *cristiano*. It means that one will no longer be ‘anonymous’ per se, or free to do as one wishes as an individual with a

private life, but held to a new standard and judged by his or her peers in the congregation and one's neighbors in the barrio. Conversion to Christianity puts converts into a new relation with their community where they are beholden to standards of behavior that are monitored by both the congregation and the public.

Ideally Pentecostals reject a quick fix. If everyone could do it, then everyone would. There is a space for that in the church though: they welcome non-members and many people come to church for special healing and consultations only. It is not until you desire 'transformation' that you start the path to becoming a *cristiano*. And, as we have seen, this transformation requires a commitment to change both one's private and public lives, so much so that Pentecostal religion in this context cannot be understood as primarily personal or private, but must be understood as fundamentally public.

DISCUSSION

Self-Narration and Representation: Taking Control of One's Own Identity

The idea of acts over beliefs is consistent with what Hollenweger (2004) calls Third World Pentecostal theology, which he argues operates with categories of early Christianity such as: "not the book, but the parable; not the thesis, but the testimony; not the dissertation, but the dance; not concepts, but banquets; not a system of thinking, but stories and songs; not definition, but descriptions; and not arguments, but transformed lives" (130). Pentecostal faith in the barrios of Villa is rooted in disciplined acts and behaviors aimed at establishing empirical differentiation and a division between the so-called earthly and the spiritual. These practices, which

function to transform the individual, emphasize ‘discontinuity’ with past identities and former lives. Such practices, or “rituals of rupture,” perform a kind of ritualized social disjuncture characteristic of Pentecostalism globally (Robbins 2003, 2004). Acting different leads to being different, and being different leads to changes in one’s relationship to family, friends and neighbors – and indeed oneself. Being Christian becomes the status that converts claim most important in their lives and becomes the most significant personal and public symbol for claiming identity that they maintain. Being a *cristiano* structures how converts act, talk, dress, and think. So profound, all-encompassing, and transformative is conversion to Jesus Christ in the Pentecostal church that ‘being different’, rather than say ‘salvation’, is for members the most significant and salient feature of Christian identity. One only becomes Christian through acts and signifying practices – not through words or belief, per se. The criterion of Christian membership in the barrio is based on more than just *what* one believes but importantly also on *how* one believes.

Testimony, sanctity, and prohibition are practices of separation, distinction, and transformation and are unique to Pentecostals. I have shown here that prohibitions in particular are instrumental to Pentecostal faith in the barrios and that they help to define evangelical identity in negative terms (by what it is not, rather than by what it is) based on a politics of representation and recognition. Certain prohibitions, as I have shown, may even have specific functional utility for converts, as in for example, prohibitions on alcohol. However, the specific prohibition need not be functional: the efficacy of evangelical identity comes from signifying practices and

the power to (re)present the self in relation to society and others and the prohibitions are a central feature of this process.

In order to be successful in establishing a Christian identity or claiming status as *cristiano*, one has to demonstrate, in fact convince, others to accept his or her claim to sanctity and spiritual authority. It is not enough to have made a personal or private change: Pentecostals are required to demonstrate through public acts that they are something new and somehow different. As such, I have endeavored to show that Christian identity is negotiated publicly through a variety of signifying practices that are either recognized as valid or invalid by observers. One is either recognized as a *cristiano* or not, and such evaluations are always a negotiation. The emphasis Pentecostals in Villa put on the public image of the church shows that Christianity in the barrios is at least as much a social project as it is a personal one and thus a key component of Dominican social life.

Pentecostal Christian identity is a process of being, and becoming. Local Pentecostals view Christian identities as projects continually at work, constantly made and remade anew through social interaction. One never arrives at a finished Christian identity, one does not just convert and become a Christian; rather, being Christian is a process that constantly needs to be affirmed. Consider the fact that when asked what it meant to be a Christian, my informants answered most often using active verbs such as 'being in the gospel,' 'following Christ,' 'acting like a Christian,' 'doing good,' 'not doing bad things,' and 'serving Jesus'.

As I have shown here, Christian identity is made real through practices of signification that turn on difference as a master trope. Being a *cristiano* in Villa means being different in specific delineated ways that signify positively appraised social values. Because of this association, Pentecostal membership may help converts re-inscribe negative identities or statuses with alternative categories that resist or deflect harmful stereotypes and debilitating labels (see Austin-Broos 1997, Toulis 1997, Wedenoja 1980, Burdick 1998, Brodwin 2003).

An individual's spiritual transformation is to be reflected in his or her behavior and also represented by changes in one's material life (clothes, house, etc.) and in some cases the name by which one is referred. A change in one's name or title represents a transformation of the self through a meta-statement bearing the message "I am someone else." Through such techniques of (re)classification, converts construct a narrative of difference and transformation through the (re)naming of themselves and others in order to create new categories of recognition that valorize believers and critique others.

Because of the centrality of conversion, a doctrine of self-transformation, salvationist religions like Pentecostalism tend to appeal most to individuals at the margins of society or those who are stigmatized and stand to gain the most from changing their identity and 'becoming someone else' (see Weber 1963 [1922]). The Pentecostal church offers an alternative language to define oneself, the external world, and others within it. In the moralistic world Pentecostals construct for themselves, they are the saved, the holy, the brave, the sacrificing, the strong, the giving, the clean,

the friendly, the trustworthy, and the liked. Through a self-defined Christian way of being, the church enables converts to reorganize self concepts that valorize the individual, throw evil and wrong to sin and Satan, and give the poor the ability to claim moral authority by providing a language that validates and valorizes what they do, and invalidates and demonizes the practices and behaviors of what others do.

Race, religion, class, and ethnicity, are key idioms of identity construction and important cultural distinctions in the Dominican Republic's stratified society. They are also principal foci for the distribution of status, wealth, opportunity and privilege in the country. Religion, in various guises, provides exploited, and more often than not poor groups the ability to claim some amount of agency over their own identification. They are able to contest negative stereotypes through forms of religious practice that allow them to exercise choice in creating their own self-concepts. Because conversion is a choice, conversion to Pentecostal forms of Christianity may be viewed as liberatory for converts, even if grounded in parallel discourses that secure their subordination to dominant orders of oppression. For example, even while Pentecostals succeed in claiming for themselves a degree of individual moral self-worth based on the fulfillment of ascetic prohibitions, they fail to challenge the underlying structures of inequality that perpetuate poverty and distribute resources and privileges asymmetrically. Through a discourse of 'life is suffering', Pentecostals accept their lot in life as 'God's plan' and fail to criticize the very real labor and social divisions that make life difficult in the barrio.

Just as the dominant and powerful have used religion to control and oppress, those same mechanisms have been used throughout history to contest power from below. A rich and long history of religious contestation and protest obtains in the symbology and cultures of Afro-Creole religions like *vodou* throughout the Caribbean (see Burton 1997). Pentecostalism's popularity with the poor and popular classes indicates that a similar dynamic is at play. Just as magic and sorcery have functioned as 'weapons of the weak' for the poor and exploited who must find means at their disposal, in this case the supernatural, to claim power and exercise agency, the Pentecostal church and specifically the doctrine of conversion has given a measure of self-determination to economically, socially, and politically marginal peoples who wish to be effective in social life and who seek to fulfill basic human needs and desires. By reordering the convert's moral world to allow for perfection to be realized in the form of sanctity, Pentecostalism breaks with oppressive social ascriptions and empowers members to contest, question, and control their own self-identity.

Scholars highlighting aspects of resistance and/or opposition argue that Pentecostalism is revolutionary in the sense that it promotes a radical equality among people in the face of a social order that favors hierarchy (Martin 1990). Paul Brodwin (2003) has argued, for example, that for marginalized Haitian migrants in Guadeloupe, Pentecostalism offers alternative idioms to contest negative stereotypes through a counter-identity rooted in obeying certain codes of behavior. Austin-Broos has keenly recognized that although Pentecostals cannot redefine in and of themselves the social order of which they are a part, they can sustain a critical view of it and at least realize

to some extent their ideals within the church itself (Austin-Broos 1997: 237). The spiritual equality to which Pentecostals subscribe is not only realized at the level of doctrine but also in practice. Pentecostal churches maintain a relatively egalitarian division of labor with respect to positions within the church and the work followers perform during services (Austin-Broos 1997). Additionally, everyone has the potential to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and everyone may be sanctified.

This practice of identity as resistance is an important leitmotif throughout the Pentecostal literature. The concept itself has many dimensions, some considered here, but suffice it to say that Pentecostal conversion and participation are basically and fundamentally about the transformation of identity – in Toulis’s words, “the transformation of the individual with received categorical identities to an individual with a self-ascribed and self-achieved identity as a Christian” (1997: 168). Pentecostal membership is voluntary in a social world where many things are not and as such may represent a crucial space for contesting negative ascribed identities. Because one chooses to join the church and the respect one receives is entirely dependent on the acts of the individual, Pentecostal faith represents a powerful moment of agency and self-determination.

Drawing from her work on a Jamaican immigrant congregation in Britain, Toulis (1997: 206-207) observes that Pentecostalism enables members to deal with the “non-negotiable facts of racism and sexism” by providing them with the means necessary to control their own thoughts regarding themselves. According to her, such means are a process of symbolic transformation: “members transform the symbolic

code of the wider secular society in which they are disadvantaged and replace it with a new spiritual code in which they are advantaged” (207). Similarly, being a Christian in Jamaica, Wedenoja (1980: 39) argues, involves identification with a social status and group that implicitly denies or rejects the statuses of lower-class, black, African, Jamaican or peasant. In Christ, all human beings are said to be the same. By encouraging believers to see themselves as belonging to a transcendent worldwide brotherhood of the saved, Pentecostals position themselves at odds with ethnic or racial discourses that rely on categorical group membership and ascribed social statuses (Burdick 1998: 123).

Pentecostals are equipped with a toolbox of Christian symbols framed by a doctrine of morality that they themselves access, control, and embody. As Austin-Broos (1997) has argued for Pentecostals in Jamaica, practitioners are able to wield a measure of control over their own suffering by claiming moral perfection. She argues that this was integral in transgressing a central Jamaican symbolic representation of being black and lower class – particularly what she calls ‘concubinage’. By permitting a clear break with their former identity, Pentecostalism enables followers to forge a new moral identity that counteracts the dominant stereotype of the unmarried black woman in Jamaica.

Similarly, dominant representations of the ‘mature black woman’ in Brazil, for example, deploy images of the self-effacing black maid, the affectionate, self-deprecating black mother, and the malevolent practitioner of black magic (*macumbeira*) (Burdick 1998). Conversion to Pentecostalism, Burdick (1998) argues,

has the effect of disarticulating these stereotypes when applied to the female practitioner. One of Burdick's black female informants proclaimed: "my neighbors were always accusing me of being a *macumbeira*. Since I passed into the church, I never hear that anymore. They know that a child of God cannot mess with that stuff" (141). Her visible identity as a Pentecostal disarms suspicion of witchcraft because her faith denounces it publicly. Here, mere association with the church is enough to dispel the stereotype.

Socially ascribed identities like nationality, race, and ethnicity, antedate converts' identities as Christian and do not merely disappear after conversion. Instead, they are qualified by a convert's new identity as Christian and interpreted in relation to a Pentecostal worldview. Therefore, becoming Christian does not mean erasing prescribed identities or even denying them, rather, participation in a Pentecostal or evangelical community allows converts to reinterpret the meaning of these identities within a larger frame that includes possibilities previously unavailable or inaccessible to them as non-believers. Through particular "genres of practice," converts are able to generate "distinct modes of identity" that offer an alternative basis for the construction of difference (Austin-Broos 1997).

Contesting Prescriptions of Race and Poverty in the Dominican Republic

Pentecostal Christians hyper-cognize and foreground their Christian identity in order to reposition themselves vis-à-vis a transnational personhood based on religious beliefs and shared moral values. Stigmatized racial or ethnic identities as well as 'lower-class' identities are hypo-cognized by believers, meaning that they bury the

painful associations that these social identities carry in the context of Dominican society. The most salient distinction Pentecostal Christians make is between Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. Believers are more likely to identify as ‘Christian’ than as ‘Haitian’ or ‘black’ for example, more than likely because such self-identification in the Dominican Republic carries no social reward (only social penalties). Why identify yourself as *negro/a* or *moreno/a* if you gain nothing from it? I found this to be the case with my informants, none of whom identified openly as ‘black’ or ‘Haitian’ despite many having very dark skin and being (mis)taken as *negro/haitiano* by neighbors and acquaintances. Considering popular anti-Haitian sentiment in the country, this is not surprising (see Wucker 1999, Sagás 2000, Howard 2001). Indeed, there are no benefits for claiming such an identity.

What this means, ultimately, is that people with darker skin can claim new forms of social worth and equity based on an egalitarian notion of humanity espoused by the church in the face of a racist social structure and everyday forms of racial violence. Taking on a new identity as ‘Christian’ is a way for devalued ethnic groups to claim an alternative basis for identity even while they may continue to be the targets of daily acts of racism.

Not unlike Pentecostalism, Haitian *vodou* and the Dominican variant *vodú*, are egalitarian and a vehicle for egalitarian social interaction through communion with the spirit world – after all, anyone can be possessed by a spirit, just as anyone may be possessed by the Holy Spirit. However, the social cost of membership and association within the ranks of *vodou* are far more costly in the context of the anti-black, anti-

African, anti-Haitian culture of the Dominican Republic. That the church is not associated with Haiti, Africa, or any other devalued cultural form in the Dominican Republic makes it socially acceptable in ways that *vodou* is not. People may use conversion as a way out of being associated with such practices. José Luis's conversion, for example, allowed him to critique his family's propitiation of spirits and served as the prime reason for him to leave his house and regularly sleep in the church.

In criticizing both Catholicism and practices associated with Dominican *vodú*, Pentecostals in Villa attempt to define themselves as *the* legitimate religious authorities and in so doing claim a divine specialty and indispensable role in barrio life. In claiming important spiritual roles in the neighborhood, Pentecostals are able to demand respect and prestige for their practices and their services to the community.

The position offered here suggests that Pentecostalism offers adherents a critical perspective on social order that allows individuals to critique their social position through a critical identity politics and a fundamental transformation of identity (that may counteract the image of moral turpitude applied to poor blacks in communities throughout the country).

CHAPTER 3: *Naciones y los Evangélicos*

After several months of fieldwork in Villa Altagracia, I was struck by the number of former gang members who filled the pews of small neighborhood churches and who claimed membership in congregations around town. I learned that most who convert from gangs tell a similar story – that the only way to leave a gang, apart from death or severe punishment, is to convert to Jesus Christ, possible only by becoming an evangelical Protestant. From my perspective this seemed like a strange compromise: why would conversion be the only way to leave a gang whose membership, ostensibly, is for life? Why would street gangs, who tend to follow their own rules and their own rules alone, respect a member's decision to convert and allow them to leave? What is it about evangelical churches, particularly Pentecostal churches, that make them possible alternatives to gang membership? I would come to learn that evangelical Christians enjoy a privileged relationship with local youth gangs who regard Pentecostal Christianity with respect in the streets. In fact, Pentecostals and other Evangelicals were exempt from much of the street violence that plagued many parts of town. Why is it that Christians receive this form of regard in the public sphere? In seeking answers to these and related questions, I learned that an important local relationship obtains between youth gangs and Evangelicals in Villa.

What I found was a local relationship between gangs and the evangelical community that was far more sympathetic, in fact mutual, than I had first imagined. Street gangs revere Evangelicals, and to this end, participate in creating a moral economy based on 'respect' that at once strengthens Christian claims of moral and

religious authority while ensuring their own validity in relation to local forms of power and legitimacy. Evangelical Christians have an interesting, in fact, unique relationship with street gangs, and vice versa, and their relationship tells us a lot about what Christianity means in the context of barrio life.

Biographical Sketches: José Luis, Danilo, Radames, Anthony, Juan Carlos, Angel

José Luis, Danilo, and Radames are three young men who converted to Pentecostalism from youth gangs known as *naciones*. Anthony and Juan Carlos were involved in gangs and drug trafficking in the 1990's and both served significant periods of time behind bars, but are older than the others and were not in groups that are today thought of as *naciones*. Angel, who is also discussed at length here, is not a *cristiano*, but a local leader of a *nación*. I begin this section with six brief biographical sketches to introduce the primary sources for the following discussion.

José Luis was an exuberant 26 year old completing his second year of high school (he had dropped out in the 7th grade) when I met him in the fall of 2008. He was working as a baker while going to school and it was his hope to attend the university and study computer repair upon completion of his studies. By almost everyone's account, José Luis was a well-mannered, clean-cut and driven young man. However, according to José Luis himself, and those who knew him before he became a *cristiano*, he was once a picture of deviance and delinquency. José Luis's reputation preceded him. Almost everyone I met in Villa knew him to one degree or another. He was notorious for having been the epitome of a gangster, *tiguere*, and 'man of the streets'. He was equally widely known for having converted and by most accounts

having turned his life completely around. José Luis, like many other young men that I met during my fieldwork, had converted from a *nación*.

José Luis had converted on New Year's Day, 2006 at the annual banquet thrown by IEP in the neighborhood just outside the church. He is the only one in his family who has converted and he is the only one of his friends who converted that night that remains "in the gospel." He is an active member of the church and enjoyed preaching and evangelizing. He was the president of the youth group at IEP and president of his class in school. Perhaps not coincidentally, he was also at one time the local leader of his gang *los reyes* (also known as *los king*, the street gang known in the U.S. as 'the Latin Kings') before converting. According to José Luis, "*Dios me llamó para ser cabeza, no cola,*" or "God called me to be the head, not the tail."

José Luis rarely went anywhere without his bible and he was often giving *consejos* (counseling sessions – 'advice') in the neighborhood. I never saw him without a dress shirt, tie and clean pressed pants – no matter what the weather – and he prided himself on exactly how different he had become from his former self.

I met Danilo at the end of 2008. I was introduced to him by Pastor Ramón from IdD. Danilo was a member of another IdD across town and like José Luis, was once a member of a *nación*. Before converting to Christianity, Danilo was the leader of *los sangre* (or 'the Bloods' in the U.S.) in Villa. He is originally from Villa but had lived in various different towns and cities across the country and was 27 going on 28 years old when we met. Danilo was eager to talk with me, especially about his life before converting. I found our talks to be honest and without embellishment. He

provided details when prompted and he tried his best to be forthcoming about his previous life in the gang.

Perhaps the most striking detail about Danilo was the highly visible scars he wore on both his face and arms. His left eye in particular was blind and cloudy, highlighted by a long scar across his brow that drew down his cheekbone. He had lost his eye to a machete that struck him across the face during a fight. He had a number of other scars from similar assaults on his legs and arms. On his lower back he had a scar from a stabbing which disabled one of his kidneys. Additionally, a few round black scars marked his arm and stomach from bullet wounds that had healed in previous years.

At the age of 15 Danilo became involved in drugs and the street life. He attributes most of the ten years of his life involved in gangs and violence to his drug use and addiction. He began using marijuana at age 15 and quickly changed to crack and cocaine. According to Danilo, drugs were a central feature of gang life, and drug use was obligatory:

I said many times “I’m not going to use [drugs]” and it would last a month, maybe even two, but when you are [in a gang] you are forced to use drugs. If I didn’t, the others would have seen me as a *pariguayo*, a ‘chump’, someone who is all talk and no action. Everyone who is in a gang, who is hanging out, has to use drugs. If not, you can’t hang out with them. So, if I was the leader, I was the head, the organizer of *huelgas* [protests] or whatever mischief they went to do, the first person that had to use [drugs] was me because I was supposedly *el jefe*.

Los sangre are one of the more violent *naciones* in the country. In order to join the gang, one must commit an assault on someone – one must, in effect, spill blood:

I was in the *nación* called ‘*los sangre*’ – those that have to cut people. In order to participate in this *nación* one has to at least attack or hit someone with a machete [*darle un machetazo*], otherwise shoot someone. If not, you can’t be in the gang. We also had red and blue handkerchiefs, which we used along with two small earrings. This was the signal that we belonged to the gang, but we would hide them so that the police did not see. But even if the police came, they wouldn’t say anything because we were a gang; not just one or two people, we were many, and nobody wants problems with a group of people.

According to Danilo, as a gang member he was always armed because he had “enemies everywhere.” Usually he would carry a knife, machete, and/or a homemade gun called a *chilena* for special occasions (typically emergencies, planned attacks, or *huelgas*). A *chilena*, also called a ‘*chagon*’ (‘shotgun’), is a zip gun – a homemade or improvised firearm that fits regular ammunition and is made by fusing two or more metal tubes together to form a barrel and muzzle.

While in the gang, Danilo was responsible for leading 15 people below him (including women), a small number compared to some of the other gangs around town. Considering the country as a whole, *los sangre*, as an organized street gang, were quite large. It is, of course, very difficult if impossible to estimate the actual number of youth belonging to gangs because of their sworn secrecy. Part of this secrecy comes from their constant struggle with police, but is also maintained by the internal rules of the gang.

Radames was once a member of the gang the Trinitarios, also known as *DPL* (‘*Dios, Patria, Libertad*’) and/or *la trinitaria* (‘the Trinity’). He had joined the gang when he was just 12 years old. He was 17 years old when I met him at IEP in 2008 and he had only been a *cristiano* for 5 months (he had converted at a *campana* in

Villa). He had been kicked out of a trade school two years earlier because of his association with the *nación*. He was waiting to matriculate again once his paperwork went through the system.

Radames, like many other young converts that I met, was very enthusiastic about the church, its teachings, and being a *cristiano*. But, as youth would also have it, he struggled with many of the demands of being a Christian and the prohibitions that all members were expected to follow. Radames slept in the church along with Héctor and José Luis. His father lived in New York and prior to his conversion and subsequent arrangement to sleep in the church, Radames lived on his own with other members of his gang. He now splits time at home with his mother and his two younger sisters. Domingo is Radames's uncle and Angel his cousin from the other side of his family.

It was difficult if not impossible to speak with gang members about being in a gang because of the shroud of secrecy surrounding the associations. It was explained to me that if anyone were caught talking to me about the gang or their membership in it, they would be punished – typically beaten by members of their own gang. However, one local gang leader, Angel of *la trinitaria* (the Trinitarios), readily spoke with me about the gang, Christians, and pretty much anything I wished to speak to him about. I assume his willingness to speak with me had to do with the fact that he had nothing to lose because he was *el jefe supremo*, the local leader of the gang in Villa.

I met Angel through José Luis, a former member of the rival gang *los reyes*. I had asked a number of my informants if they would introduce me to gang members

because I wanted to understand how they viewed Evangelicals around town. I had initially asked Radames if he would introduce me to Angel, because they were cousins, but he was unable to set up a meeting. José Luis asked Angel if he would speak to me and he happily and speedily obliged.

Angel was a skinny 18 year old on the verge of turning 19 when I first spoke with him one afternoon in 2009. Angel's younger brother is a Christian but he and his other four siblings are not, nor are his parents. Angel worked in a *colmado* (convenience store) in the capital and had dropped out of school before his first year of high school in order to work. In an observance reminiscent of the original Scarface movie (1932), he carried with him a coin that he would flip back and forth from time to time in his pocket. The coin was from the Trujillo dictatorship, with Trujillo on one side of the coin and the Dominican shield or emblem on the other. The coin was given to him by his grandmother and he carried it because of the slogan "*Dios, Patria, Libertad*" – the motto of the Trinitarios – emblazoned on the back.

Anthony lived and worked in Pantoja, a town about halfway between Villa and the capital. Pantoja is much smaller than Villa and considerably poorer. Only a few roads through town are paved. *La pastora* of IEP also lives in Pantoja and I spent many days and evenings there visiting with both her and Anthony. I visited a couple churches there as well, including Anthony's church and *la pastora's* original church, where she first converted.

Anthony was one of 13 children and 5 of his siblings had converted – most after he became a Christian. He was a community leader who was respected and

admired by many people. He, along with a business partner, organized a public market every Sunday morning in a park only a block or two away from his house. The market allowed farmers from around the area to sell their goods directly to the people, allowing residents to purchase food at better prices. Typically people must purchase their food and cooking supplies from *colmados* who markup food an additional percentage to make profits. At the market they sell everything from clothes to vegetables, fruit, rice, oil, salami, beans, yams, and plantains. It was the only *feria* of its kind in Pantoja.

Anthony was a charismatic preacher (in both senses of the term). Throughout my fieldwork I never met anyone with quite the same charisma or appeal. He could send a crowd of hundreds of people into an ecstatic frenzy with his preaching and he was said to be successful in getting people to convert, or as they say, “accept Jesus Christ as their savior.” He was often invited to prisons, as well as other towns and churches to speak because of the effectiveness of his preaching and evangelizing. He had earned the name *evangelista* or ‘the evangelist’ because of this, and was also known throughout Pantoja as *el predicador* (‘the preacher’).

Anthony frequently preached in prisons and he was well known for having orchestrated a cease-fire between opposing gangs in Pantoja during a particularly violent and bloody gang war. I met Anthony on New Years day, 2009 at IEP’s annual banquet where they had invited him as a guest preacher. While Anthony was always giving and outgoing with me, he was reluctant to provide me with details about his life before converting. I attempted to illicit more information from him in a structured

interview but to no avail. He was reluctant to elaborate on anything having to do with his life before Christianity and would become quiet and curt if the topic was broached.

Most of what I know about Anthony's life before he converted came from his friend Cristóbal with whom he ran the farmer's market. Cristóbal was a retiree from the government where he had worked as a narcotics inspector and for a time in security and intelligence. It was Cristóbal who told me that Anthony had been one of the most sought after drug dealers in Santo Domingo. According to Cristóbal, Anthony was involved in organized crime and was the leader of a gang of more than 50 people called *Los New Yorquinos* (although, Anthony claims that he was not the leader but rather second in command). Anthony knew that the police were looking for him and were going to kill him if they found him so he tried to run away to Puerto Rico. He drifted out at sea for more than a week before the police found him burned by the sun and dying of hunger and thirst not far off the Dominican coast. They put him in jail, but because they could not convict him on drug trafficking charges, he only spent a year in jail.

After that year in jail, Anthony took a job at Planeta Azul, a water bottling plant, where he worked with a number of Christians. He converted soon after. His initial conversion brought him to a charismatic Catholic church (who are called *carismáticos*), but later, along with the rest of the congregation, the church became a Pentecostal church, to which he belongs today.

Anthony introduced me to Juan Carlos, who before converting was known as *el verdugo*, the 'executioner' or 'tyrant'. He received this name because he would

carry around a jar of acid to burn his enemies. He would throw it in their faces leaving them scarred or blind. This, according to Juan Carlos himself, was in addition to the machete that he carried at all times. Juan Carlos limped from repeated *machetazos* to his legs. He had also been stabbed numerous times in the back, which had left gnarly scars.

Juan Carlos spent most of his life in the streets trafficking drugs across the country. Originally from Nagua, he took up the street life at the age of 14 or 15 years old. By his late teens he had become a big time drug dealer and user. He sold drugs all over the country from Higüey, Bani, Santo Domingo, la 42, to Capotillo, and elsewhere. So convincing was his transformation after conversion that his own mother converted shortly after. Juan Carlos was 38 years old but the hard life of drugs and violence had taken its toll and he looked to be in his mid- to late-forties. At age 30, he was caught in Higüey for drug trafficking. He spent three years in prison in Higüey and then La Victoria, the most notorious prison in the Dominican Republic. There he converted.

He is established now in Pantoja and paints furniture to get by. His mother, brother and wife all converted after seeing his testimony.

‘Naciones’: Dominican Youth Gangs

Youth gangs in the Dominican Republic are referred to locally as *naciones* (and less often as *bandas*, *pandillas*, or *gangas*).¹ *Naciones* are prevalent in Villa as they are in most urban centers around the country. Although youth gangs have always

¹ *Naciones* are usually distinguished from *bandas* and *pandillas* in that they tend to follow the model of organization found in foreign street gangs like the Bloods, Latin Kings and Trinitarios that have come to the country from the U.S.

existed in the Dominican Republic, it was not until recently, the last decade or so, that the country saw a proliferation of these particular gangs (*Las Naciones por Dentro* – CLAVE: January 15, 2007). These youth gangs have become a common feature of urban barrios and, according to local police, a major source of delinquency and lawlessness.

The gangs themselves are brotherhoods based on a structure of loyalty and mutual aid providing members with protection, security, prestige, money, and friendship (and, I think, quite simply something to do), in exchange for complete allegiance and devotion to the gang. Youth gangs are typically hierarchical and are subject to explicit rules and laws of their own creation. Outside of their own rules, *naciones* offer members a kind of freedom to “do what they want” subject to the laws and wishes of the gang itself (*Las Naciones por Dentro* – CLAVE: January 15, 2007). The internal rules of the gang must not be violated and one must not reveal the internal rules of the group to outsiders – transgressions will be met with punishment (in some cases punishment can be as severe as death) (*Las Naciones por Dentro* – CLAVE: January 15, 2007). As such, *nación/naciones*, which translated literally means ‘nation’ or ‘nations’, live up to their name as autonomous groups, united by a common culture within a particular country or territory.

Most gang members are between the ages of 14 and 20. All members must be initiated into the gang and initiation rituals differ between gangs. Many *naciones*, such as *los sangre*, use violent initiation rituals in order to ensure the recruit’s commitment to the gang and resolve to join. Once initiated, a recruit becomes a

member for life and submits to the will of the gang and its laws. The laws of the gang supersede all other laws and members are expected to follow and uphold the rules and principles of the gang without exception. A member not living up to the expectations of the gang, or any member that is found to have violated one of the laws, will be disciplined by the gang. In addition to gang signs like tattoos and clothing, gangs use secret codes as well as colors to identify each other, friends and foes.

There are many active and popular youth gangs throughout the country, many of which have come to the island from the United States, such as: *los Blood* or *los sangre* (the Bloods); *los King* or *los reyes* (The Latin Kings); and the Trinitarios or ‘DPL’ or ‘*la trinitaria*’. Other gangs include, *los Pantera*, Black and White, DDP (‘Dominicans Don’t Play’), *la 42* (‘*la forty tu*’), *Amor y Paz*, *Ñeta*, and the humorously named group, *los Taliván* (‘the Taliban’). It is difficult to estimate the total number of active youth gangs in the country but some estimates suggest that there are more than 60 active *naciones*. According to my informants there were some 15 *naciones* in Villa.

Violence is a common feature of gang life as *naciones* defend territory and are often involved in illicit activities such as drug trafficking, illegal sale and distribution, assault, and robbery. In the context of poverty and high unemployment, the illicit activities of *naciones* may provide urban youth viable means for achieving modest economic gains, but this alone does not explain the appeal of such a lifestyle, particularly because of the dangers involved with membership. Many gang members will spend time in jail and many lose their lives to violence. Most of the former gang

members I spoke with had spent some time in prison (anywhere from 5 days in jail to over five years in prison). In fact, a number of my informants converted to Christianity while serving time in prison. While inter-gang warfare accounts for much of the violence in youth gangs in the Dominican Republic, youths associated with *naciones* are frequently the targets of violent state repression and police and/or military violence.

Urban youth, often described by police as ‘delinquents’, are the most vulnerable and targeted group by the state’s strategy of ‘*la mano dura*’ (‘heavy-handedness’) to combat delinquency. The number of civilian deaths at the hands of national police has risen steadily since the beginning of the last decade. From February 1999 to January 2002, more than 2000 civilians died in what the national police call ‘*intercambios de disparos*’ (shooting deaths; literally ‘exchanges of gunfire’) or ‘*acciones legales*’ (‘legal actions’) (CLAVE: April 24, 2008). Between August 2005 and August of 2007, no less than 1,275 people were killed in supposed *intercambios de disparos* (a rate of about 53 deaths or killings a month) (CLAVE: April 24, 2008). In 2008, such *intercambios* rose 189% from the year before (CLAVE: October 22, 2009). According to the National Commission of Human Rights (*Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* or CNDH) more than 500 civilians were killed by police patrols in shootouts that year – 75% of which died in what the commission claimed were “extrajudicial executions” (CLAVE: January 8, 2009). Between January and October of 2008, police killed 378 people according to a report from *la Procuraduría General*. The same report indicates that in the first 10 months

of 2008, there were a total of 2004 recorded violent deaths in the country meaning that 19% of all violent deaths recorded during that time were the result of police shootings (CLAVE: January, 8 2009). According to police statistics, between January and August of 2009, 226 civilians died in “police actions” and according to the CNDH, there have been around 5,000 such “police executions” in the past 8 years (CLAVE: October 22, 2009). While it is difficult to find totally accurate or complete statistics for just how many violent deaths are the result of police actions, according to their own reports, members of the national police were responsible for killing at least 24 civilians in *intercambios de disparos* in just 11 days from the 26th of December 2008 to the 6th of January 2009 (CLAVE: January 8, 2009).

Over the last decade, the national police have increasingly attempted to deal with crime through violent means. According to a former security and intelligence officer for the government with whom I spoke with, a special unit of the national police is charged with taking care of (rather, eliminating) certain juveniles that they deem too dangerous or delinquent to bother arresting. Police are told to shoot such individuals on sight. According to one study cited in a joint report by the United Nations and the World Bank (March 2007), 23 unprovoked killings of street children by *los cirujanos* (‘the surgeons’, a police unit that conducts night sweeps) occurred in three neighborhoods of Santo Domingo over an 8-month period. Notably, the police have tended to use this violent mechanism of law enforcement – *intercambios de disparos* – more often against people from poor neighborhoods (CLAVE: April, 24

2008). Poor neighborhoods are more frequently the target of police sweeps of this nature and young male residents tend to be their predominant victims.

Those identified as gang members are targeted by the police with such measures and are often not arrested, given a trial, or a chance at due process of law. The ruthlessness of local police and rampant corruption throughout the national police is well known and feared. The gangs themselves avoid police as best they can and conceal their affiliation so as not to draw unwanted attention from the law.

At times, in coordinated efforts, gangs openly defy police and flex their control over local neighborhoods in demonstrations or ‘protests’ called *huelgas*. During a *huelga* local gangs take to the streets after nightfall and prevent people from leaving or entering the city and/or neighborhoods. Local businesses close and people retire to their homes until morning. Roadblocks of broken glass and burning tires are set up at intersections to prevent cars from entering or leaving. Armed young men, usually in small groups, cover their faces and patrol the streets to make sure no one is out walking around or trying to leave. Anyone attempting to leave is likely to be stoned, shot at, chased, or attacked with beer bottles or machetes. Such nights are planned in advance and residents are informed ahead of time and know when the *huelgas* are going to occur. Those not obeying the unofficial curfew become combatants with gang members and others who temporarily assume control of the neighborhoods. Relative lawlessness reigns. Local police are typically far outnumbered and have little recourse to establish their authority and/or regain control. Typically *huelgas* follow long periods of water or electricity shortages and may last consecutive nights of a

week or more. During my fieldwork in Villa there were more than three such ‘protests’ in the last couple months of 2008 and the beginning of 2009.

While *naciones* are a relatively new phenomenon in the Dominican Republic, their popularity continues to grow and it is unlikely to abate anytime soon. These organized youth gangs, though similar in many ways to street gangs in other countries, are unique to the Dominican Republic and have become local in their own ways. In this chapter I am concerned with their relationship to local Pentecostal churches and Christianity more generally and the ways in which the church and gangs help construct opposing, yet complementary, subjectivities.

Representing *una nación*

For Angel and others, being in a gang was more than just passing time or a way to be cool and get respect. Indeed, for whatever else being in a gang meant to him, being a Trinitario for Angel was a way of representing his Dominicanness and, in his mind, being patriotic: being a Trinitario was about being a proud Dominican. He claimed to have joined the Trinitarios in order to represent the nation at a deeper level:

Some friends of mine saw me and told me that there were groups representing a nation. They first asked me if I knew what a *King* was; I said no. *A sangre?* I said no. “But do you know who the Trinitarios are?” I said yes, “The Trinitarios were Duarte, Sánchez and Mella.” [They told me] that this is where we come from, “we are Trinitarios,” but this is another way of representing *el pueblo*. The Trinitarios here do not rob; they don’t attack anyone or anything like that. But the others do. So I got involved when he said to me “I am a Trinitario, and I would like it if you were as well so that you can represent more what you are and when you see abuse you, you don’t turn away, you get involved so that they don’t [continue to] abuse [others].” I said great, that’s cool, no problem.

For Angel, the Trinitarios exist to protect cities, towns and neighborhoods from the corrupting influence and violence perpetrated by foreign youth gangs that have come to his country. He suggested to me that the Trinitarios were something good for the municipality because they defended the interests of a free and independent country. While the other gangs sold drugs and perpetrated violence, Angel maintained that the Trinitarios were against such things and were concerned with protecting residents from exactly those influences:

We [the Trinitarios] have problems with *los sangres*, with *los King*, *Ñeta*, 42, with many of them because all of the *naciones*, except *la trinitaria* [the Trinitarios], are foreign. And we have problems here because those who are from here, Dominicans, are not foreign. None of them know what country their gang comes from but everyone knows where *la trinitaria* comes from: Duarte, Sánchez, and Mella, the Dominican Republic, *la bandera* [the Dominican flag/nation]. But nobody knows where *los sangre*, *King* or *Ñeta* come from. But that's no good; you have to know the background. Everyone knows why *la trinitaria* came here; it was to establish a free and independent republic. But the others don't know why they came. That is why there is always war between them.

Although all of the youth gangs have become Dominican, at least insofar as their members in the Dominican Republic are Dominican and not primarily of another nationality, the Trinitarios are unique in appropriating national symbols and putting them into service for the gang. For example, each gang celebrates a special day to commemorate their collective ties. *Los reyes*, for example, celebrate on the 6th of January (on *el dia del los reyes* or 'Three Kings Day'). *Los sangre* celebrate on the 14th of February (Valentine's Day – no doubt because of the association of hearts with blood). The Trinitarios celebrate on the 27th of February – the day of Dominican independence.

The primary colors of the Trinitarios are red, blue, and white matching the colors of the Dominican flag (green and black are also used, however inconspicuous such colors may be in the flag itself). The hierarchy, rank and titles within the gang are based on famous Dominicans with the founding fathers Duarte, Sánchez, and Mella making up the top three positions in the hierarchy. Gang leaders in the Trinitarios are given the title of Duarte, second in command are Sánchez, then Mella, then Luperón, after that Caamaño and so on. The symbolism here is important and highly elaborated. The gang's motto – "*Dios, Patria, Libertad*" – is gleaned from the national slogan, *Dios, Patria, Libertad* ('God, Fatherland, Freedom') that can be found prominently displayed along a banner adorning the national crest at the center of the Dominican flag. The crest itself is similar to the flag design and features a bible, a cross of gold and six Dominican flags hanging from spears. The crest sits at the center of a white cross. The red and blue colors of the Dominican flag symbolize the struggle for independence and liberty respectively and the white cross represents Christianity.

The flag itself was designed by Juan Pablo Duarte who is considered a national hero and the founding father of the Republic. Along with Duarte, Francisco del Rosario Sánchez and Ramón Matías Mella are considered *Padres de la Patria* or 'Fathers of Patriotism'. As the story goes, *la trinitaria* was the name given to a secret society formed by Duarte and others in 1838 with the goal of destabilizing Haitian rule over Dominicans during the Haitian occupation of the Spanish side of the island. Their subversive efforts would lead to Dominican independence in 1844. Duarte,

Sánchez, and Mella are also the names representing the principal order of merit of the Dominican Republic.

The *nación* Trinitarios are also known as *DPL* (*Dios, Patria, Libertad*) as well as *la trinitaria* ('the trinity'). This is a key symbol for Trinitarios: *la trinitaria* indexes not only the Holy Trinity (God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – see Radames quote below), but also the Dominican triumvirate – Duarte, Sánchez, Mella – as well as the country's three founding principles of God, Fatherland, and Freedom (*Dios, Patria, Libertad*).

Trinitarios often get tattoos of the flag, as well as the national shield. Radames had the letters DPL tattooed on him – something that at the time, for him, represented in three letters his gang, his country, and his faith. Angel had a tattoo of a dove with a clover in its mouth – the dove, a popular symbol of the Holy Spirit and the clover represented the trinity, the gang, DPL, and Duarte, Sánchez, Mella.

Most of the symbolism used by the Trinitarios involves the number three which adds an element of mystique to their principles, beliefs, and practices. Through this mystique the gang takes on an aura of transcendence that serves to unite members and ensure their allegiance.

Ideologically, the Trinitarios hold *DPL* as their highest principle. Angel insisted that because God came before fatherland and freedom, one had to respect conversion as well as *cristianos* because "Christianity puts God first" and "*cristianos* are with God." Patriotism was next and Angel saw the gang as something good for the country, a group singularly and admirably concerned with the defense of justice and

liberty in the face of tyranny perpetrated by ‘foreign’ gangs. The irony of such a take can be found in the fact that the Trinitarios did not originate in the Dominican Republic. Like many other youth gangs, the Trinitarios began as an ethnic prison gang in New York City. They were initially and primarily concerned with protecting Dominicans from the abuses of other ethnic gangs like the Latin Kings (primarily Puerto Rican) and the Bloods (primarily African American). The gang quickly spread from the New York state prison system to New York City streets and neighboring New Jersey in the 1990’s and has within the last few years become one of the fastest growing street gangs in the New York metropolitan area. It appears that the deportation of Dominican convicts back to the island has played an important role in enabling the Trinitarios and other street gangs from the U.S. and Puerto Rico to take root in the Dominican Republic (see Brotherton 2008).

Angel’s rank is Duarte. As such, he enjoys the privileges associated with a position of power – namely that he need not get his hands dirty committing crimes or disciplining others because he has 52 other people willing to do it for him. He was aware that he could not be *el jefe* forever – few gang members are much older than 25. Angel rose to the position of Duarte because one of the previous leaders went to Spain and the other was sent to prison. Angel figured that he would remain in the gang for another four years and retire, so to speak: “Today I am Duarte until death or until I want to be a Christian.”

Las naciones y los evangélicos

All of the *naciones* that I became familiar with claimed to believe and revere God such that the only way for one to leave a gang after joining was to convert to Christianity. According to Radames (who explained to me the rules of the Trinitarios in particular), upon entering the gang, new recruits take an oath:

The only way to leave [the gang] is to convert or they kill you?

Well, or if they don't kill you they do something to you... you take an oath when you join – you say that only death will free you and/or converting to Jesus Christ... In order to join they give you a 21 day test to enter. After these 21 days they give you a role and you swear that if you leave [the gang] they kill you or they make an X on your back. Only if you convert in Jesus Christ are you saved from this. This is what saved me, I converted.

José Luis, a former member of *los reyes*, explained to me that conversion in order to leave the gang was simply a general rule that his gang and others followed. Speaking specifically about the laws of *los reyes*:

[The others in the gang] have to accept [one's conversion] because it is one of the rules that they follow. After that, nothing. They respect [your decision to leave] when you marry and when you are a Christian. If you marry and have your wife and you've separated yourself [from the streets] they respect it because you are no longer involved in those things... If you are a Christian they fully respect it, they don't talk to you [about the gang stuff], none of that.

[After I converted] I went to a meeting with the gang, [turned in my notebook of rules/laws] and they said to me: "What happened?" I said, "Nothing, I converted to Jesus Christ and I feel good." They hugged me and said "Is it true that you converted *varón*? Wow, great, good for you, keep it up!" One takes a side, and I have chosen to stay here, in the gospel.

Conversion is not just accepted as a way out of a *nación*, it is applauded. Fellow gang members embraced José Luis when he converted and they happily accepted his resignation.

Quite early in my investigation of conversion from youth gangs, I was faced with the question as to why membership in a *nación* is for life, unless one converts to evangelical Christianity. I asked Radames why he thought the gangs deferred to Christianity in this way and his response was interesting:

Because they understand that to convert to Jesus Christ is something greater than what they have. This is what *they* told me. They said to me that we respect you in your conversion to Jesus Christ because that's just the way it is, something greater. Also, *Dios, Patria, Libertad* is the motto of the *nación*. It means *Padre, el Hijo, and el Espiritu Santo* [Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit]. *Dios, Patria* and *Libertad*, they say that, or *DPL* which is the same thing.

For the Trinitarios, being in the gang meant that only one power existed above all others (even that of the collective gang itself), and that was the Christian God.

Evident here is Radames's understanding that because of the gang's invocation of *Dios, Patria, Libertad*, they necessarily respect Christianity. He makes the explicit connection with the Holy Trinity as well. The gang itself was conceived of as an association with God at the heart or head of service. The apparent contradiction, that between the violence of gang life and the gang's simultaneous profession of love for and deference to God, was clear but rarely explicitly mentioned. Being in a gang does not mean that one 'serves God' but rather simply that one respects God above all other things, and in the last instance, that one's last recourse is to God alone. I was told over and over again by those who had converted from gangs, quite matter-of-factly, that it

was just what was understood: conversion was an acceptable way out. One's choice was to serve the gang or to serve God.

The rules of the *naciones* are strict, and there are few, if any exceptions. If someone converts and officially renounces the gang, they are held to their decision. If they do not make a full conversion, the gang will punish them. From the perspective of the *nación*, you are either serving the gang or God; you must serve one, there is no in-between:

Now [the gang] tells me not to leave [the church]. If I leave the church I will have problems with [the gang] because I left them in order to put myself in the church. That is to say, I have to take one of the two things that are required. I am not going to leave [the church]. I am going to stay here. [Radames]

This, of course, is the same position maintained by the Pentecostal churches: you cannot be in a gang and serve God. It was exactly on this point that Radames, Angel, and others explained to me why one had to convert to a Pentecostal church or another evangelical church, and why a Catholic church would not suffice. They reasoned that if one could party, fight in the streets, use drugs, or swear – in other words be an active member of a gang and then attend mass at the local Catholic Church every Sunday – then one could not be a ‘real Christian’. Radames explained that he went to the Catholic Church regularly when he was in the gang and that it was not until he joined the Pentecostal church that they told him that it was not okay to do many of the things that he was doing. Angel suggested that such a move was simply unreasonable because Catholics were not prohibited from doing any of the things that gang members do – in his mind, Catholics were just as ‘bad’ as anyone else. If one is to leave a gang

one must leave the street life completely and for Angel and others, the only vehicle for such a transformation was the Pentecostal church.

I asked Angel why people were allowed to convert and leave the gang and he answered in much the same way as Radames: “I really accept it because they are with the Lord. If it weren’t for him there wouldn’t be *los trinitarios*. He is the one who created us all. Because of him we all exist.” It is this sentiment, the total and unquestioning acceptance of a Christian worldview that is behind much of the discourse and symbolism found in the *naciones*. It is also that which sustains a certain respect for Christianity and in particular *cristianos* in the barrios.

The respect for Christianity extends far beyond conversion alone. Even while Angel refused to speak for other *naciones*, he insisted that the Trinitarios respected *cristianos* and that Christians were to be respected above others because of their proximity and service to God:

[We respect Christians], it’s a Dominican thing. [The Trinitarios] are a Dominican association. The Trinitarios are *Dios, Patria* and *Libertad*. You have to respect Christianity because it puts God first; they are the only ones with God... The fact is, *la trinitaria* must respect Christians... I respect it, they are with the Great One; they are with Him. One has to respect them. They are with God; one has to respect it. They have always had my respect. If they are Christians who are with him, that want to be with him, then I respect it.

Danilo explains a similar sentiment shared by the Bloods gang (*los sangre*) that he was a part of before converting. As a member of the gang he respected *cristianos* because they were, in his terms, representatives of God on earth:

Before converting I always respected *cristianos*. I never lacked respect for a Christian because I knew that the Christians were the part of God that was on earth. When I would see a Christian person I respected

them. I remember one time I was on the corner hanging out with a friend; we were down in La Mella. We were on the corner and a young girl came walking by and the friend who was with me said “Lets snatch her necklace, you go to the other corner and I will go steal the necklace so that she doesn’t realize who it is. Because they know you, but they don’t know me.” And I said to him “no, not her because she is Christian” and my friend felt bad but I said to him “I respect the Christians.” I know that in the course that I walked there that day God freed me from death because I had respect toward the Christians, because I knew that the Christians were a part of God in the world... I had a fear of Christians. I never... whomever wasn’t a Christian I would attack with a machete.

Exemption from Violence

So serious are the rules of the gang in regards to conversion and Christianity that when one converts one is no longer tied to the reciprocal exchange of violence that attends gang membership. Conversion provides complete exemption from retaliation and revenge. After converting, Danilo no longer had to worry about the debts that he had incurred while being in the gang. Rivals, who were looking to avenge an assault that he had committed, forgave him. Had Danilo remained with *los sangre* he would have continued to be a target of enemy gangs and thus at risk of daily violence. Conversion brought with it an exemption, a ‘free pass’ so to speak, to a new life.

Once Danilo converted, remarkably, all of his transgressions against enemy gangs were forgiven. He made peace with those who he had wronged or offended while in the gang. After converting he visited with a man whose arms he had crippled with a machete during a fight. He asked for the man’s forgiveness and, according to Danilo, the man accepted his apology and no longer looked to do him harm.

Necessarily, on the flip side, Danilo also had to forgive the people who had wronged or injured him and could no longer seek revenge against those who had once attacked him, including those who were responsible for blinding him in one eye. After converting he, along with his wife and a few other family members, met with the men who had assaulted him the night that he lost his eyesight. He explained to the young men that he had converted and wished not to do them any further harm. They did not believe him at first and insisted that he would come after them sooner or later. After the meeting, however, some time passed and, according to Danilo, the men saw that they would not be having problems with him again. Danilo sees the men on occasion in passing, but harbors no ill will towards them. In reciprocal form, they leave him be and neither party is too concerned about the other.

Part of what continues the cycle of violence between gangs is the requirement to be on top and to return violence with violence. ‘If you attack or kill one of ours, then we must attack and kill one of yours’ is a common prescription employed by youth gangs everywhere. Angel explained to me that the Trinitarios have a saying “*sangre de tu sangre, sangre de mi sangre, sangre que corre de la tuya, va corriendo de la mía,*” which is to say that if you attack one of them, you attack all of them, and they will defend any one of their members because they consider each other family. This potentially endless cycle tends to perpetuate animosity between gangs and encourages warfare between them. The cycle continues until one group agrees to leave things as they are, not trying to one-up the other. This is the challenge to

establishing peace treaties and cease-fires because no one wants to be the first to give in and accept a loss because someone must always be left in debt.

Evangelical pastors are often asked to be mediators between gangs because of the respect youth gangs have for evangelical Christian authority. Anthony, no doubt because of his sordid history and impressive conversion, was one such preacher. Some years previously, the town of Pantoja was crippled by a violent and bloody gang war. Anthony was able to set up and mediate peace talks between the opposing gangs because, in his words, he had the respect of both groups. It could not have been the police because they are the enemy of all gangs. Pastors, particularly those who have a past in gangs and violence, command the most respect on the streets and are regarded highly. They are believed to be fair and trustworthy because of their relationship to God and the gangs themselves.

According to Anthony's account of the proceedings that led to the truce, he was the one that approached the gang leaders to see what could be done. He went to them and explained that violence was not the way to proceed and he guaranteed that if they agreed to make peace in Pantoja that neither side would attack the other. They were willing to listen because:

When I am around them they know that I am a Christian and they automatically give you respect, even more so preachers and people who they recognize as being leaders in Christianity. Society gives one respect in all senses of the word.

Anthony explained further to me that because many of their parents, many of their mothers, were Christians, they “understood what was best.” I do not know whether that was the case or not, but what is significant here is that in his capacity as a pastor

he was empowered to mediate talks between rival gangs and as a result of his success he enjoyed notable renown in and around Pantoja.

Likewise, while giving me a ride to the *carro público* stop one evening after a *culto*, Pastor Ramón explained to me that he was friends with the most powerful drug dealer in town and (not with a little bit of pride) claimed that because of this connection, he was assured that nothing bad would happen to him: “He has said to me, if there is anything that you ever need, come see me and I will take care of it.” Ramón said that because of this association, people in town could not touch him. It is likely that Ramón was telling me the truth, though there was no way for me to corroborate his story.² It is important to note, however, that Pentecostals believe themselves to be above or outside of street violence precisely because they are respected as Christians.

The idea that *cristianos* are exempt from street violence was made clear to me in bold fashion one night during a *huelga*. Because I could not leave Villa this particular evening I stayed with Wilfredo and his wife at their home in barrio Esperanza. After some time sitting out on their porch listening to gunfire ring out around the neighborhood with unnerving regularity, surprisingly to me, Wilfredo decided to leave the house and go look to see if he could find us some food a few blocks away. Considering the unofficial curfew and the proximity of their home to a major roadblock (just down the street), I was concerned that a trip to find a late night

² Perhaps it bears mentioning here that I myself encountered no hostility in Villa from anyone during the more than 12 months that I spent going there. Even walking a mile most evenings (sometimes as late as 11:00 or 12:00 at night) through town in the dark just to take a *carro público* back to the capital, I never found myself a target of theft or harassment. I was of course seen and seen often. But it was also obvious with whom I spent most of my time. I cannot be sure that my association with the Christians in town ensured my safety, but it is certainly an intriguing thought in relation to some of the claims of my informants discussed here.

snack was probably not worth it. His wife agreed, but despite both our pleas to forget about the food, he left anyway, along with a friend of his. As he walked off into the darkness he raised a bible over his head and looked back at us declaring with the utmost confidence, “This is all the protection I need. I have my pistol right here.” He returned 15 or 20 minutes later with his bible in one hand and a bag of fried chicken in the other.

Although many of the Pentecostals that I knew often carried a bible with them, Wilfredo was not one of them. He would bring his bible to church but I did not see him with it otherwise. He took the bible on his walk that night, not out of habit or because he was planning to use it, but rather as a sign to others. The sign was that he was a Christian. The bible signaled to others that he was neither a threat nor a combatant: indeed, it signaled to others that he was not to be targeted. Wilfredo was confident that if he were identified as a *cristiano* the young men patrolling the streets with rocks, guns, and machetes would leave him alone. What appeared to me at the time to be an unnecessary risk, in Wilfredo’s mind was no risk at all. He understood something that I did not: *cristianos* were not to be touched.³

Perhaps I should have known better, considering events that transpired only a few hours before. Earlier that evening Wilfredo had held a *culto* at his house, an auspicious gathering occasioned by a series of unfortunate events that had happened to him the previous week. Toward the end of the *culto* men from the *colmado* down the

³ I thought at the time that perhaps his faith was so strong that he considered himself invincible. I have since revised this consideration based on the fact that the Pentecostals that I knew rarely took chances or put themselves at risk. They did not believe that faith (blind or otherwise) would protect them in all circumstances. Things could happen to anyone and because evil lurked around every corner, one needed to be careful, as well as vigilant.

street, where they had set up a roadblock, came by the house and told everyone to hurry up and finish because they were waiting for them to start the *huelga*. After the *culto* finished the men allowed everyone to leave before commencing the protest in that area of the neighborhood. Unfortunately for me, while we were able to leave that immediate vicinity, we could not leave the barrio itself because of other roadblocks that had been set up at the entrances to the main road out of town. What was striking about this incident is that the young men who would later that evening aggressively defend the roadblock on the corner, waited for the *culto* to finish and allowed everyone the chance to go home before they began. The protest had begun in other parts of town and in other parts of the neighborhood, but despite this, the *culto* was allowed to finish and the 80 odd attendees were allowed to leave unharmed and not harassed.

People Look after Christians

Gangs respect both the Church and Christians in Villa. *Cristianos* are exempt from street violence and, even within gangs, find supporters and people who look after them. Their relationship is one based on mutual aid and respect. Danilo explains:

Here in Villa Altagracia they respect Christians. Christians are respected. Their homes, the Christians, the evangelicals, the pastors, they are respected. The *tígueres* better take care of them [*los tígueres mejor los cuidan*].

Here, there is this fear, there is this dogma – the Christians are respected. You can go anywhere and I can introduce you to someone who is of this life [*tigueraje*, gangs, etc.] and I say to them “look, she is Christian and he is Christian, wherever you see them, take care of them.” And wherever you go they are going to look after you because I introduced you... “no, no, he is Christian, they were with Danilo the other day, they are *cristianos*.” They better take care of you because

they know that we are the ones who pray for them and that you are the ones that can bless them with whatever bread they may have any given day. In other words, the people that are Christian are taken care of.⁴

The idea that being a *cristiano* in Villa meant that you are less likely to be harassed was intriguing to me and I asked a number of young women from the church if they felt less pestered by men because of it. When I asked Karla what some of the advantages to being a Christian were, she stated that:

Around here none of the men cross the line with me. If someone wants to try, their friend will say “this is the *hermana*” or whatever, “don’t cross the line with her” ... Yes, people treat me very well in the street.

Such a perspective was widespread in both IEP and IdD and consensus was that as Christians, followers were under the watchful and protective eyes of others around them and mistreatment or disrespect of respectable *cristianos* was frowned upon or simply not tolerated.

DISCUSSION

What the relationship between gangs and Pentecostals shows is that evangelical Christianity has value – social relevance – in the barrio and that certain aspects of it have been adapted, taken up and used in unique ways by local culture. It is an important structuring element in the local community: it shapes the ways in which relations in the public sphere are realized, it colors those interactions, and shows that one need not be Pentecostal, or even evangelical, for the church to have an important and substantial effect on everyday social life in the barrio.

⁴ This quotation is from my first meeting with Danilo. He assumed at that point that I was Pentecostal. I informed him later that I was not.

Far from being a marginal sect or fringe cult, then, Pentecostal churches play an important social role in day-to-day life in the barrios and, interestingly (perhaps even surprisingly), contribute not to social ostracism but rather to the reintegration of gang members into mainstream society through renewed social responsibility, renewed obligation to family, and a new focus on personal and social revitalization in the form of charity, compassion, and good works.

Pentecostals have succeeded in representing the church as the foremost Christian authority in the barrios. Gangs recognize and respect only evangelical authority when concerning conversion to leave the gang life. They also validate Pentecostal claims to sanctity by permitting exemption from retribution, retaliation and violence. In professing Christocentric values, and in promoting a relationship with the church, the gangs validate Pentecostal claims to religious authority and in so doing endorse evangelical Christians as legitimate spiritual leaders. They validate Christian claims to spiritual authority and co-construct, along with the church, a two-sided moral view of social life. They do this by respecting Pentecostals in the streets, by looking out for their best interests ('looking after them'), by shielding them from violence, and by applauding conversion as a way out of the gang. Gang members recognize evangelical Christian claims to sanctity and in so doing contribute not only to a bifurcated worldview but also to the promotion and sponsorship of evangelical modes of Christianity.

The division between social worlds, that of the gang and that of the church, is maintained by both institutions. You cannot participate in both at the same time – you

must be in one or the other. This division is realized in space so that both gangs and *cristianos* have their own local places. Because Christians rarely, if ever, spend time in places where gang members go, there is little antagonism and *cristianos* do not represent a threat to the thriving of the gang.

In recognizing conversion as the only way out of service to the gang, gangs make implicit statements about ‘the order of things’ at the same time they endorse a Christian ethical hierarchy that sees the ultimate service to God in terms of evangelical Christian practice.

Cristianos are exempt from violence and looked after in the streets because they are regarded as sacred persons and as sacred persons are thought to be ‘off-limits’ or out of bounds (‘taboo’), somehow fundamentally apart from the sphere of gang influence. Gang members are taught to regard the gang as the most important and highest authority, eclipsed only by that of God himself. Members of the church are seen as God’s representatives on earth and because of this, to do something against a Christian is, in effect, to do something against God.

Why Join a Gang?

Political participation has waned over the past few decades, particularly for young males who have found it difficult to find a place in the rapidly changing republic. The type of nationalism found in youth gangs like the Trinitarios is popular precisely because it allows young Dominican men to claim a greater stake in the country and a shared identity with something greater. Popular views of gangs and gang members seem to suggest that they are pathological or that they are somehow

maladaptive strategies that ultimately fall victim to shortsightedness and immature goals. Quite the contrary, youth gangs are meaningful and rational; they must be for participants and others to get anything out of them and for them to continue to hold sway over and capture the attention of young recruits. The Trinitarios in New York provide members a sense of pride and connection to the Dominican Republic as well as community and solidarity with other Dominicans in the context of the diverse national ethnoscape of New York City. In the Dominican Republic, the Trinitarios allow disenfranchised youth the opportunity to claim a measure of social power and prestige in an otherwise emasculating and dehumanizing social environment. Through acts of violence and aggression gang members earn respect for autonomous acts of power and agency. Through the submission of other men by violent acts, gang members win psychological rewards as well. Gangs allow young men a type of freedom they do not enjoy in the Dominican Republic; that is, not only a freedom from family and family obligations, but also a freedom from work, state and political repression, and a freedom from history and life circumstance – a freedom from the chance circumstance of birth that gave them poverty.

Gang members seize power, they take resources, they are autonomous in ways that others only dream of. This is the appeal of such institutions in the barrios. Kids from a young age want to join gangs because they like the way gang members dress, they like the way they talk, they like the things they do to have fun; and, as members of a gang, they are able to do these things because they claim a type of freedom and power otherwise not available to them.

Critical Agency and Oppositional Culture

As in most contemporary liberal democracies, while the state and media set the goals and objectives of citizens at the same time they shape the culture of desire for residents, they do not give everyone the means to reach such goals or enable everyone to fulfill such desires. The poor are frequently the social class most likely to be denied both the objects of dominant cultural desires as well as the means to obtain them. In situations where material wealth, political status, and power are only made available to a select few, and the desire for such objects is diffuse, people are left to their own devices and means to take that which is not given to them or to seize that which is kept from them. In such contexts cultures of opposition may flourish.

An exemplary example of such cultures may be the ‘inner-city street culture’ of East Harlem observed by Bourgois in the late 1980s. According to Bourgois (1995: 8), street culture, or “a complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society,” offers inner-city youth an alternative forum for “autonomous personal dignity,” a cultural creativity, he suggests, arising in response to and in defiance of social marginalization, persistent poverty, and racial segregation.

Both the church and gangs might be understood as oppositional cultures because both attempt to redefine the terms of their own identification, exercise agency, and claim self-representation against ascribed statuses and identities. In assuming control of their own representation, representations frequently at odds with ascribed statuses, and in some cases taking positions frequently in opposition to, critical of, or

against the established normative orders of being, both institutions participate in creating social spaces of critical agency.

Such positions may be opposed to and/or complicit with dominant culture values. The Pentecostal church, as opposed to youth gangs, is able to provide a socially sanctioned space for such critical agency because it does so under the rubric of sanctity and comes up short of physical or material confrontation with the state apparatus. Youth gangs, in contrast however, take up critical positions of agency outside the bounds of acceptable or socially sanctioned behaviors, and thus frequently find themselves in physical conflict with police and state institutions charged with maintaining order and ensuring compliance with normative social values.

Interestingly, the Trinitarios probably have some of the most elaborated ideas about what it means to be Dominican of anyone in the neighborhood. This nationalistic element is important, not only for explaining the relative appeal of this gang in particular, but also for what it suggests about the ways in which gangs claim authority and legitimacy in the context of liberal democracies. The gang functions as a sort of alternative national identity, one where members play an important role in the future of the republic. Similar to the authorized political organization and hierarchy of the country itself, youth gangs also have leaders and important offices, only in this scenario, it is the young men of the barrios who rule and make decisions. Their power and authority is not simply local, interpersonal, or imaginary; real contests over power can be seen in protests such as the *huelgas* that put gang members in direct and violent confrontation with the state and public.

Nationalistic and Religious Discourse

The gang is organized and constructed around powerful polyvocalic symbols that condense a variety of different meanings into one, and as a supra-individual organization, can inspire the same kinds of passionate devotion and fanaticism that nationalism can arouse in citizens of a nation state.

In order to justify much of the violence that obtains in gang life, and street life in general, gangs mobilize the same kinds of nationalistic discourses that function in much the same way to justify interstate violence. Their claims to serve or respect a higher power are also employed for the same reasons. Angel says that as Trinitarios we are for peace in the municipality, we are against corruption and violence, we are about freedom, which are official positions used to color the Trinitarios as good, others as evil, and to justify any act of violence in which they may participate. But gangs, like nations, are really about power, control, domination, defense of territory, and expansion. In the context of dominant moral and cultural values (as well as an expansive criminal justice system) that define gang activities as deviant, it is necessary for gangs to find authenticating, convincing, and legitimating reasons for why they act and claim agency in the way that they do. After all, flashy clothes, parties, and girls might not be enough to convince a twelve or thirteen year-old kid to join, but if he can be a part of something bigger, something greater (recall Angel's story of joining), the appeal and pull factors might be just enough.

In response to marginality, exclusion and state oppression that is felt by urban youths throughout many contexts in Latin America, Cerbino and Rodríguez (2008) suggest that it is no surprise such youth wish to create in the form of gangs an

alternative political order (within or on the margins of the dominant order) and to imagine a utopian “nation” where they are the one’s with political power and influence. As we have seen, poor urban youth in the Dominican Republic are regular targets and victims of violent state repression and frequently blamed for social ills they did not create. The gangs have developed an oppositional identity to state and military police, which further marks their external relationship to dominant forms of power.

It is, of course, difficult to be good if you do not identify a bad (or in this case an enemy) against which to define yourself. Gangs have chosen a somewhat obvious and appropriate enemy – police, corruption, poverty, hunger, and violence – even if not always articulated as such. The gang functions as a surrogate family for members, perhaps in place of an ineffectual kin network or government, providing means to ends that neither their parents nor the state may be able to offer. Even if it is difficult to explain the exact reasons for why a *huelga* may take the shape that it does in Villa in response to electricity and water shortages, they are commenced for reasons of public good and civil rights. The relative ethical merits of how gangs earn money may be debatable but it does reveal a clear rejection or refusal of poverty as a social condition. Gangs are certainly not against using violence in service of their own ends, this is clear; but what is also clear is that the state is just as violent (if not more so) in their dealings with urban youth as the youth themselves.

The gangs need Christianity, not only because it provides an out or escape from allegiance to the gang, but because it gives meaning and purpose to activities and lives characterized by violence and lawlessness, particularly in relation to an

authorized discourse. The gangs can legitimate themselves by employing or invoking the authorized symbols and discourses of Christianity in the Dominican Republic as well as those of the state itself. For those at the margins of society, what better way to gain power and legitimacy than to use the symbols of power and legitimacy that are the stimulus of prestige and respect already established in the social domain?

Consider the Christian symbolism employed by Angel to describe the plight of the Trinitarios and the rhetorical work it performs:

They also play like that here in Villa, but there are many who don't have the resources 'to go with the iron' [use a gun]. There are some. There is a Blood whose father is the police captain. He has a 12 [gauge] and a 9 [millimeter]. We [the Trinitarios] don't have those kinds of resources. We use something here they call a *chilena*. With this we try to defend ourselves. But we shoot at them every time they shoot and miss. Because they are with evil/Satan [*el malo*], and we are with good/God [*el bueno*], that is why they will lose. We are always winning, even if some days we lose, if we lose it's because God wants it, but we continue to win because we are with Him, we are going to win because that is what He wants. He knows that when we go out, it is He that goes before us and we who follow.

There is lots of tyranny here within the country, amongst ourselves. That is why we go by everything that is necessary in order to represent God. We follow the bible, we carry the shield, we carry the flag of freedom and independence.

In claiming to put God first, to fight for good, gang members construct a narrative wherein they are soldiers of virtue, fighting a righteous and just war. This is a discursive inversion of popular representations of gangs and urban youth in the Dominican media that portrays them as scourges, delinquents, and obstacles to social development and community thriving. Within this alternative frame, disenfranchised

urban youth take on an effectual role in the future of the nation – a role in which they wish to be thanked rather than punished.

Naciones also have a unique link to religion, particularly, and to my knowledge, only, Christianity. ‘Christianity’ is the authorized and ‘legitimate’ religion of the people. Youth gang claims to spiritual authority over secular authority (Church over State, religion over the secular) is another way in which to circumvent, or contest, established hierarchies and conventional relationships of power and to gain moral superiority in relation to established local authority like police and military. This only works if Christianity in the barrios has established a moral authority greater than that of the state, which, because of its incorporation into gang practices and ideology suggests, it already has. If this is the case, then it makes sense why gangs and gang members are invested in protecting the legitimacy and authority of Christianity: their own legitimacy and authority is based on it.

But why are youth gangs invested in this particular moral/social order? Perhaps it is because they benefit from it. It provides a way out of service to the gang, but more importantly it provides forgiveness of transgressions that are otherwise unforgivable or come with a prison sentence. If gangs can cloak their practices in an ideology or discourse of divine provenance (even if only to convince themselves), not only do they draw authority and legitimacy from popular cultural symbols and texts, but also they justify their own existence, make themselves relevant to the communities in which they function, and justify morally ambiguous practices. This is not any different than what groups have been doing for ages. Christianity has often been used

as a reason for, or way of justifying, atrocities, murder, theft, and morally vacuous practices for centuries. Also being subject only to a higher God allows gangs to do what they want and be ‘above the law’, if the only law they must abide by is that set by God.

Exemption from Street Violence

Based on ethnographic fieldwork on Pentecostal youth in Honduras, Jon Wolseth (2008) observed that one way in which youth negotiate violence in their communities is through conversion to the church. Not unlike findings discussed here, Wolseth found that in Honduras once involved in a gang, the only way to leave was to convert to evangelical Christianity. Gang members and others in Honduras similarly respect *cristianos* because of their closer relationship to God (101). And, as in the Dominican Republic, a convert’s behavior as a Pentecostal is monitored, and if that person is found to have not lived up to their “Pentecostalness,” he may be punished by his former gang. Drawing on Pentecostalism’s doctrine of separation, Honduran youth claim exemption from everyday violence and retribution from gangs. Wolseth observes that Pentecostalism in Honduras is a resource for young men and women seeking to escape everyday social violence, the church, he contends, effectively provides a “protective social space” or “sanctuary” to gang members escaping violent lives in the streets:

Pentecostals invoke the protective symbolic power of the church in concrete ways. They and other young men extend the refuge offered by evangelical churches in two ways. First, they are able to negotiate their way out of potentially harmful situations through an implicit social contract with gang members predicated on their demonstrating their ‘Pentecostalness.’ Only through the continued practice of their

identities is their safety guaranteed. Second, they have marked out a social space for themselves in the materialization of their new social status as Pentecostals. This social space is essentially one that resides *in the mind* and is invoked in encounters in which their safety is called into question. The sanctuary of the ‘church’ (as a building, as a community) becomes a device with which they can travel safely (107)

As in Honduras, gang members in the Dominican Republic are able to step out of the cycle of violence and retribution that follows gang life and find ‘sanctuary’ in the church. This sanctuary of course is conditional and based on fulfillment of the expectations of what it means to be a devout Pentecostal. Assuming a Pentecostal or evangelical identity allows converts to claim exemption from violence through appeals to a sacralized identity.

Conversion as Reintegration

The church functions as a way for gang members to reintegrate with society in ways that complicate Pentecostal claims of otherworldliness and discontinuity. Rather than epitomizing a retreat from society, the conversion of gang members exemplifies a return to it. They go from being marginal criminals, deviants on the fringes of society, to productive, valued citizens and respectable barrio residents.

Many analyses of the growth of Pentecostalism have suggested that conversion represents a stepping out of, a renunciation, a dropping out of, ‘the world’ (drawing from the actual claims and language of converts that distinguish between ‘the world’ and the spiritual realm), such that conversion tends to emphasize or be associated with metaphors of ‘discontinuity’ and ‘rupture’ with former lives (Robbins 2003, 2004). In order to model this relationship scholars have used metaphors of liminality and worlds within worlds. Martin (1990) refers to “free social spaces” and “protective social

capsules” that insulate converts from the “outside world” (284). Elsewhere he describes conversion as a “walkout” from the hierarchical mediation of wider society (1994: 86). Evangelical Protestantism, he argues, “creates an *enclave* of a people seeking emotional release, personal empowerment, mutual support, and self-government” (86, emphasis added). Similarly, Austin-Broos speaks of Pentecostals constructing “a world within a world, a creativity, shaped by constraint” (1997: 238). Sometimes such characterizations obscure rather than clarify exactly what such discontinuity means in practice and to the lives of individual believers.

In Africa among the Ewe, Birgit Meyer (1999) argues that Pentecostal Christianity brings members into the modern individualized world by cutting them off from tradition and family ties that bind them to lineage and spirit worship. It is the rupture and disconnection that is enabled by conversion that explains its appeal to modernizing Ewe.

While Pentecostals in the Dominican Republic emphasize difference and distinction from facets of the social world which they refer to as *el mundo*, there are other aspects of Pentecostal practice in the Dominican Republic that fit uneasily into the language of discontinuity, precisely because conversion, even while creating the conditions of separation from one’s former self, binds converts to their local communities in new ways. An analytic emphasis on discontinuity that ignores this fact might miss the very meaningful negotiations (perhaps concessions) between Pentecostal Christianity and secular institutions like the youth gangs at the local level.

Conversion for some in Villa represents as much a ‘stepping out of’ the local social order as it does a re-situation within it.

Because Pentecostals are critical of local/traditional cultural practices some observers are quick to interpret this as a “severing of ties to the local social world” particularly because of the strong transnational links that Pentecostal churches elsewhere in the Caribbean have been observed to maintain with countries like the U.S. (e.g. Brodwin 1996: 186, and also Hurbon 2001a, Conway 1980, Austin-Broos 1997). Brodwin (1996: 187), for example, has suggested that for Pentecostals in Haiti “Protestant conversion erodes people’s ideological and sentimental attachments to the village as well as sedimented memories of their extended family [as it] reorients people to new tropes of identity, new social ties, and new sources of material aid located in national and even transnational spaces.” In Villa there is very little if any regular connection with the foreign church and most local churches are run by Dominicans for Dominicans. Membership in IEP and IdD did not facilitate a real communion with congregations off the island, only an imaginary one (if at all) with a worldwide Christian brotherhood, and my informants who converted from gangs described their conversion as enabling a return to their home and a renewal of loving and caring relationships with their families. Indeed for some, conversion occasioned a triumphant homecoming.

During my fieldwork I observed no such erosion about which Brodwin speaks. In fact, I interpret the reinvestment in family ties and neighborly relations to be a product of conversion that indicates a return to local investment and integration rather

than a retreat from it. The conversion of gang members suggests precisely this point. Rather than stepping out of ‘the world’ and social relationships and ties, gang members are brought back into the fold of the community where as Pentecostals they are beholden not only to their friends and families, but also to the church, congregation, coworkers, and neighbors as they are expected to live up to the expectations of the converted. The Pentecostal church fosters this because the new identity that ex-gang members assume is one that is supposed to be generous and selfless (based on notions of Christian charity). As gang members, individuals reject familial and social responsibility (law and order) in favor of brotherhood and friendship bonds. Ties to family and one’s neighbors and friends become reestablished as converts are brought into the fold of the church where they are expected to help out other congregants and recommit themselves to their nuclear family. They are expected to follow the legal order as if it were God’s law and to help their neighbors as they would their own family.

Evangelical churches, more than any other institution, allow gang members to reintegrate with normative society and establish relationships with people they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to interact with. Personal and public forgiveness attends conversion. Through this forgiveness, gang members are accepted back into their communities as ‘normal’ people. They return to following standards and rules of both the community and the church. People begin to trust them – a position wherein converts are expected by others to behave responsibly and/or

honorably so that others might place their confidence or faith in them. In essence, they once again enter into the social contract.

What the conversion of gang members tells us is that conversion to Pentecostalism in the Dominican Republic is not about renouncing society outright, or the ties of kinship, *per se*, but rather it is about embracing them and assuming greater responsibility and obligation to one's peers and neighbors. As Pentecostals (as shown in Chapter 2), converts are in constant public negotiation over their spiritual claims and identity, and as such, many converts become more a part of the world *after* conversion than they ever were before.

The disjuncture and discontinuity that Pentecostals enact through conversion, ironically, permits gang members to be a part of their communities again and makes possible a (re)suturing of familial bonds. They go from being social pariahs and 'delinquents' to, not incidentally, 'brothers' and 'sisters' (*hermanos/hermanas*) of the church. Frequently this form of 'continuity' enabled by conversion is overlooked when over-privileging the emic framing of 'difference', 'otherworldliness' and 'transformation in Christ'.

Ultimately, discontinuity and rupture is realized at the individual and interpersonal level, enabling converts to realize new modes of practice and self-realization that play a fundamental role in identity politics at the local level. Structurally, conversion remains complementary with social continuity and reflects a compromise or conciliation with dominant social and moral orders that bind followers to their local communities. From this perspective, Dominican Pentecostal

formulations like “we are *in* the world but not *of* the world’ (*estamos en el mundo pero no somos del mundo*), reveal themselves to be relatively accurate native sociological truisms as they highlight the uneasy relationship between claiming otherworldliness and being very much ‘this worldly’ subjects.

Gangs and Masculinity

Gangs are primarily male associations concerned with enacting and/or claiming a type of masculinity in the context of an emasculating environment for men – namely one of poverty, unemployment, and frequent cuckoldry.⁵ The appeal and popularity of youth gangs may be a reflection of the so-called ‘crisis’ of masculinity facing urban youth in the Caribbean today (see Lewis 1990, 2004). Gangs allow ‘men to be men’, so to speak, to perform masculinity and to participate in masculine games and contests outside of a social order that denies them both such opportunities.

Members of *naciones* carry machetes as their preferred weapon of choice. The symbol of the machete has a long history in the Caribbean and is employed in a variety of religious rituals, festivals, games, and theatrical performances. The machete itself is perhaps most readily associated with secular work and the backbreaking labor of sugarcane cultivation. As a symbol of labor and work more generally, the reappropriation of the farmers tool and the symbol of his toil as weapons of will and liberating/individual power is as significant in the ritual sphere (as in the *rara* and *gagá* ceremonies) as it is in the more utilitarian space of the urban streets and barrios

⁵ It is not uncommon in the Dominican Republic or the Caribbean in general for women to have sexual relationships with another man or other men while in a union with a spouse or significant other.

(see for example Burton 1997 on the symbolism of sword in Caribbean ritual and expressive culture).

The machete itself is a masculine symbol. Used primarily by men in labor-intensive agriculture, the machete is used to clear land for crops and cut sugarcane. As a field tool the machete is symbolic of men's work (as opposed to the type of work historically performed by women). Because the tool is used for cutting, clearing, removing, or, in another sense, 'destroying' other objects, the machete may be associated with another range of cultural symbols associated with men – objects of destruction (compare with objects of creation as female symbols). Linguistically, the term machete is most likely a diminutive of *macho* 'male' an alteration of *mazo* 'sledgehammer' or 'club' which according to some etymologists is probably a dialectal variant of *maza* 'mallet', from the vulgar Latin *mattea* meaning 'war club'. In a sense, then, originally an agricultural tool native to Central America and the Caribbean, the machete's use value has returned to its linguistic roots in the hands of gang members, once again being taken up as a modern-day war club in the service of contemporary urban warfare.

Just as the machete is/was used to fell sugarcane stalks in the hands of workers in the fields, it is used today by urban youth to sever limbs and fell other male opponents in violent masculine contests over territory, women, and money, and for the purposes of male goals such as conquest, bravery, reputation, renown, and prestige.

The rural field tool in the hands of unemployed urban street kids and teenagers represents a new form of autonomy from the demands of work and historical ties to

the land and its cultivation. With it, urban youth enact a type of masculinity associated with power, strength, physical and mental domination of other men. It is no accident that just as rural labor is becoming a less viable way of life that such tools are now used in the barrios of cities by individuals seeking to make a name and a living for themselves in the streets.

In a sense, the machete may be considered ‘the poor man’s sword’. Machetes are cheap and readily available to anyone and are just as good weapons as they are innocuous tools. Just in case further evidence is needed to demonstrate a link between the machete and masculinity, anecdotal evidence suggest that there is at least a passing association between the machete and the male sex organ. Angel assured me that he had a great big one at home: “*si, en mi casa tengo yo un machete grandisimo,*” (with a nod and a smile). Of course, the association of clubs and bats with the male sex organ is also well established in the psychoanalytic literature.

Final Remarks

Both the church and the gangs represent alternative modes of sociality and promote different visions of social relatedness and of the public good. Yet both play important roles in the barrio when it comes to providing alternative spaces for identity construction and/or social critique and critical agency.

The implication of gang members recognizing the separateness and in some senses ‘otherworldliness’ of evangelical Christians suggests that the Pentecostal church has made significant inroads into the cultural construction of popular Dominican moral worlds. It is well-known that Pentecostals imagine themselves to

live spiritual lives symbolically ‘apart from’ the rest of society, but it is significant that non-evangelicals, or others, reproduce this claim and support it through discourses and practices that recognize and validate such claims.

Gang members imagine themselves to live lives apart from everyday society. They are ‘above the law’ they make and enforce their own rules, and in a society where poor young men are increasingly marginalized and victimized, they build for themselves social worlds where they claim power and prestige for themselves (not unlike the evangelicals). In a public world where wealth and social status are difficult to achieve despite desire or effort, gang life, as well as that of the church, allows equitable chances of ascent and betterment. In this way, gangs as well as churches are truly merit-based organizations. It does not matter where you were born, how much money you have, or whether or not you have an education. Expertise, advancement and renown are open to anyone with the desire and industry to pursue it. It is not a coincidence that those who find great success and respect in the streets and in the gangs are those who are the most assertive and likely those who have the least to lose. In this way, it is not surprising that the church and the gang provide spaces for the disadvantaged, the least likely to succeed, or that the most derelict find homes in the church and in gangs. It does not matter where you come from or what you have done, both gangs and the church will accept you as one of their own, provided you follow their rules.

If one is successful in gangs, he might find himself successful in the church. Both institutions value and promote strengths such as persistence, loyalty, and

brotherhood that may be transferred successfully from one institution to the other. Oratory skills, for instance, which are valued and developed in the streets are transferable to the church where they are put to use in preaching and evangelizing. It is no surprise that Danilo, José Luis, Juan Carlos, and particularly Anthony had become successful preachers in their own right having excelled previously in gangs as former gang leaders.

As *naciones* literally mean ‘nations’, gangs represent alternative corporate groups from whence to construct identity and build social relationships. Gangs are perhaps one of the most accessible institutions for young men in urban barrios to build such voluntary identities and relationships – the church is the other.

While there exists differentiation within both types of institutions, insofar as both accept, ostensibly, anyone, both institutions are egalitarian and progressive.

The ability to transform one’s identity completely is an appealing prospect for people with few other opportunities for advancement or betterment (at least economically). The church, and the gang, are prominent institutions in the barrios of Villa and have become important and likely options for neighborhood residents. Both have become significant features in the horizon of possibilities for Dominicans of the poor and popular classes. When going to the university or having a career is not a likely option for most, both the church and gangs offer people something to do, and importantly, an avenue to create themselves anew in ways that they may not enjoy otherwise.

Gang members and Pentecostals in the Dominican Republic maintain a complex and reciprocal relationship at the barrio level that is indicative of social dynamics that involve processes of globalization and transnationalism, moral economies of poor urban communities, and material relations between residents.

CHAPTER 4: “yo no relajo con las cosas de Dios”

el tigueraje

In many respects, being in a gang provides Dominican youth the opportunity to express, flaunt, and enact a kind of idealized masculinity, one exemplified by the local notion of *tigueraje* and the diffuse iconic cultural figure known as *el tíguere*. For José Luis, being in a gang was about “representing *el tigueraje*.” In regards to law, order, and respectability, being in a gang represents an opposing moral stance; one exemplified by the notion of *tigueraje* and the most popular masculine cultural type, the *tíguere*.

A *tíguere*, generally, is a hustler, someone who knows how to make something out of nothing and a manipulator of the system. A *tíguere* may refer to someone who is successful without working hard or working at all. A *tíguere* is manipulative; he is a womanizer and a ladies’ man (in local terms a *mujeriego*); he is also a man’s man and an incorrigible flirt; in essence, a *tíguere* is an incorrigible macho-man of the highest order. A *tíguere* is a man with style, with ‘flow’; a cunning *flâneur*; a modern *bricoleur*; he is seen as the most ‘Dominican’ of Dominican men. Anyone may be referred to as a *tíguere*, even women, as long as they appear to embody any one or combination of these traits.

In his discussion of masculinity and political legitimacy in the Dominican Republic, Krohn-Hansen (1996: 121) notes that: “The *tíguere* is not only a dominant symbol that flourishes on, and condenses different notions of masculinity (so that it

may be used in a wide spectrum of situations, and with highly flexible meanings). It is also a sort of ‘meta-image’ or an image of a kind of masculine ‘daily hero’: an image of a man who is able to resolve, in an acceptable way, the dilemmas which have to be faced as a consequence of a tough environment and the ideals of masculinity.” As such, according to Krohn-Hansen, the central meaning of the label *tiguere* is “survivor in his environment.”

While on any given day anywhere in the country one might hear a friend refer to another as a *tiguere* with admiration and respect, it is just as likely one will hear disparaging remarks and women are often avoiding the unsolicited advances and catcalls of “*tigueres en la calle*.” In practice, it is sometimes unclear whether the use of the label *tiguere* is meant to denote approval or disapproval, as the label itself has polyvalent meanings and represents both positive and negative qualities (but most often context will dictate the intended meaning). Mark Padilla, in his discussion of popular cultural models of Dominican gender relations, notes that, “In daily discourse, *tiguere* frequently indexes a kind of self-serving opportunism, deception, or avarice that is simultaneously disparaged and valorized. Men who take advantage of others for their personal gain are likely to be labeled *tigueres* by their social peers, a designation that can serve as both social critique and admiration” (2007: 135). He goes on to explain that “*tigueraje*, then, is associated in important ways with the

ability to ‘*aprovechase de otros*’ (take advantage of others), whether the context be sexual, economic, or political” (135).¹

The notion of *tigueraje* (the essence of a *tiguere* – that which makes one a *tiguere*) is morally ambiguous: on one hand it represents an idealized masculinity, a style, attitude and demeanor that many Dominican men strive to attain; and on the other hand it is considered a negative trait, one that denotes irresponsibility, laziness, womanizing, and dishonesty. A *tiguere* is a man of the streets (*hombre de la calle*), he has a way with words and with women; he embodies the values of public male culture found in the bars, *discotecas*, pool halls, and *cabañas*. Like the *rude bwoy* of the Anglophone Caribbean, the *tiguere* is associated with ‘bad’ or ‘foolish’ behavior. He is, from this perspective, not reliable or trustworthy, nor is he considered responsible. While some people strive to “represent well in *tigueraje*,” others view it with disapproval. Many people do not like *tigueres* and do not like to be referred to as *tigueres*; for them it means something negative, that they are lazy or that someone disapproves of their way of being. *Tigueres* are often considered charlatans and/or delinquents. The notion of the *tiguere* as a hustler – a person willing to do just about anything to get ahead, even things that are morally suspect – conflicts with cultural ideals of the male breadwinner, decorum, mutual aid and cooperation, as well as man as hardworking provider and financial caretaker. From this perspective, one’s masculinity is judged on whether he is an honorable and upright individual. Those that subscribe to this particular model of masculinity tend to emphasize or favor traits

¹ Collado (1992) offers a relatively detailed exposition of the Dominican *tiguere* in which he further delineates a variety of different types of *tigueraje* such as *el tiguere gallo* (a *tiguere* that likes to drink and enjoys bodybuilding) and *el tiguere cinturita* (a *tiguere* who is a great dancer and ladies’ man).

like industry, seriousness (as opposed to joking around), respectability and responsibility.

These two differing perspectives on the Dominican *tíguere* reflect two distinct models of masculinity that operate in Dominican society. Two different and opposing moral standards obtain within the *tíguere* mythology and dominant models of Dominican masculinity more generally. A similar dialectic has been observed elsewhere in the Caribbean, particularly in the conflict between the moral value systems of ‘reputation’ and ‘respectability’ outlined by Peter Wilson (1995[1973]) for the island of Providencia. Wilson’s model is an attempt to explain the apparent fractures found in Caribbean social systems and reconcile two prevailing analytic models – pluralism and functionalism – that have dominated sociological and anthropological debates about the Caribbean region (Besson 1993: 15). According to Wilson’s model, the values of reputation, championed by men, reflect values associated typically with lower-class public street life and represent an indigenous (local or ‘creole’) response to domination and the scarcity of respectability. Respectability, on the other hand, rooted as it is in the Eurocentric colonial social structure, reflects the predominant values of social hierarchy, order, and upper-class Christian-European culture. The key values of both reputation and respectability can be summarized as a series of binary opposites: street/home, public/private, play/work, mobility/stability, trickery/honesty, self-dissipation/self-restraint, equality/hierarchy, male/female, chaos/order, etc. (see Burton 1997: 162 for a more complete schema). According to De Moya (2004: 76) these two distinct, at times opposing yet

complementary, ideals constitute guiding principles that dominate most political and social life in the Dominican Republic. The division may also be usefully mapped onto the classic *casa/calle* distinction found elsewhere in Latin America, as well as divisions between sacred and profane, class or labor divisions such as those that obtain between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and perhaps even patron/client dyadic relationships as well as historical symbolic oppositions between white/black, European/African and Dominican/Haitian.

Of course, not all men subscribe to one or all of these discourses about/of masculinity. That is to say that Dominican men (and women) endorse and/or contest *tigueraje* in myriad ways. If there is a hegemonic notion of masculinity in the Dominican Republic it is contentious, unstable, contingent, and contested. What constitutes the ideal man depends on one's opinion and perspective, which is informed by one's social position, historical circumstances, and moral positioning (which may be informed by one's religion, education, employment, etc.). And yet, the label *tiguere* indexes a distinct type of man in the Dominican Republic who is unmistakable to anyone who has spent even a moment traveling or living in the country.

el tigueraje y el cristianismo

In the barrio where I did my research, and Villa more generally, *los tigueres* were opposed, in kind, to *los cristianos*. That is, one represented 'the world', *el mundo*, and the other represented the spiritual or 'otherworldly' space of Christianity. One could not be both a *cristiano* and a *tiguere* – they were considered two categorically opposed identities. One was either a *tiguere*, “*en la calle*,” “*en*

tigueraje,” or a *cristiano*, “*en la iglesia*,” “*en el evangelio*” (a state of being in the gospel or a state of being in *tigueraje*). The comparison of being *in* the streets or *in* the church was often made in reference to *tígueres* and *cristianos* respectively. *Tígueres*, frequently translated as ‘Dominican Tigers’, were not associated with domesticity but rather the wild, untamed and undisciplined freedom of the urban public landscape where they are free to roam and ‘*andar en el coro*’ (see below). In contrast, *los cristianos* referred, ideally, to ‘cultured’, disciplined men and women. The association between nature (*tíguere*) and culture (*cristiano*) is implicit and reflected in ideas about *tígueres* as being egoistic, self-satisfying and driven by hedonistic (or primal) desires while *cristianos*, conversely, are expected to reject such desires and, essentially, as it has been argued elsewhere, through rigid behavioral requirements, domesticate men (see Brusco 1995 for what she calls the reformation of *machismo*). This division was shared, for the most part, by Christians, *tígueres*, and importantly, the public alike.

One knows what to expect from *tígueres*, and similarly, one expects a rule bound *cristiano* to act in accordance with their beliefs. A *tíguere* is expected to cheat. He cannot be relied on and he is inherently not trustworthy because he is out for himself. The *cristianos*, in contrast, are expected to be trustworthy, generous, they cannot tell lies, and they are supposed to be responsible. There is a sense that when dealing with a *tíguere* one is likely to be taken advantage of or ripped off. It is not surprising, then, to hear that many people (Christians and non-Christians alike) prefer to deal with evangelicals in certain business situations.

These are, of course, only ideals, cultural models of behavior or archetypes. Not all evangelicals meet or fulfill the ideal. That is also to say that not all so-called *tigueres* are dishonest or manipulative or that just because you claim to be a Christian you are trustworthy. The point remains, however, that such behaviors are expected of each group and in order to fit in, one must at least try to live up to the standards and norms of their respective communities.

It is not possible to be both a *cristiano* and a *tiguere*. According to Mayalin, when José Luis converted at IEP's annual banquet on January 1st, he ceased being a *tiguere* and became a *cristiano*:

[Some say that there are *cristianos* with *tigueraje*] but if they are *tigueres* than they are not true *cristianos* [*cristianos verdad*]. One has to see a difference between a *tiguere* and a *cristiano*. But there are *cristianos* who *were* *tigueres*. Like José Luis, he was a *tiguere* but not anymore. He converted at a dinner that they do for all the *tecato* [a *tiguere* that uses drugs] on the first day of the year. They do a dinner for all the *tigueres*.

Just to be clear, I asked her if it were possible to be a *cristiano* with *tigueraje*, and the answer was a resounding no:

One that has converted to Christianity is no longer a *tiguere*... If one is a *tiguere* he is not Christian, but if he is Christian he is not a *tiguere*.

Ah, so one can't be both things?

No, of course not!

Tigueraje was considered a way of life, a way of being. It was marked by life in the streets and doing as one pleased. It meant a kind of freedom, a certain kind of anti-authoritarian individualism and a kind of hedonism. *Tigueres* drink, they dance, they may be involved in illicit activities, they fight, they have multiple sexual partners,

and above all, they are singularly concerned with themselves and their own success and prosperity (they do what they want). This was contrasted with the religious asceticism of evangelical Protestants who, through prohibitions (that is, a certain *lack* of freedom, even if voluntary) imposed by the church, lived lives, ostensibly, according to divine rules and commandments and through the denial of ‘earthly pleasures’ (alcohol, drugs, women) were thought to be closer to God. Evangelicals are to be monogamous, they are to marry, take care of their family, not ‘play around’, but be serious (in local terms *serio*). Evangelical Protestants, particularly Pentecostals, do not drink, do not dance, and do not listen to the music most often identified with *tigueraje* (bachata and reggaeton). Conversely, *tigueres* are not attached, they may have a number of domestic commitments or responsibilities but they need not fulfill them. They may have as many women as they like (or can seduce, *conquistar*) because a *tiguere*, ideally, is a *mujeriego* (a ladies’ man).

Tigueraje and *el evangelio* (‘the gospel’) represent opposite poles on a moral continuum mirroring the opposition between reputation and respectability respectively. These divisions, in practice, are maintained through discourses and acts that attempt to make explicit the separation between different modes of moral conduct. In so doing, both Christians and *tigueres* alike contribute to the maintenance of social boundaries that structure meaningful interaction between neighbors, barrio residents, and beyond.

‘Descarriado’ and the Parable of the Lost Sheep

The idea that *cristianos* inhabit separate social worlds, that one cannot be both in the gospel and in *tigueraje*, is further emphasized by the fact that when a *cristiano* does something ‘un-Christian’ or ‘separates from the church’ they are considered *descarriado* or ‘lost’. The term itself comes from the verb *descarriar* which means ‘to lead astray’ or ‘to put on the wrong road/path’. The term is used by *cristianos* to refer to a time when they were ‘not doing things that were pleasing to God’ or were doing things that *cristianos* are not supposed to do (when converts backslide to their previous lives and/or relapse into bad ways or error). There is an obvious, if not even explicit connection to the ‘Parable of the Lost Sheep’ or ‘*la Oveja Descarriada*’ as told by Jesus in the New Testament (Mathew 18: 12-14 and Luke 15: 3-7). The term also has related cognates such as *descarrilar*, ‘to derail’ or ‘be derailed’ as well as *descarada* meaning ‘shameless’ and *descaro* meaning ‘audacity’ or ‘nerve.’ People who convert, but then leave the church, only to come back again, refer to their time away from the church as *descarriado*.

This was an important discourse within the evangelical community I observed in barrio Francisco. In a strict sense, the notion of *descarriar* has to do with fidelity to the church and the evangelical Christian community; one must be ‘serious’ and compliant with the rules and norms of the church. This is important, not only for one’s own sanctity and personal salvation – to give a good testimony – but also for the image of the church. Christians wish to gain the trust and respect of others, to be *descarriado* threatens that. Through doctrine classes (*doctrina*) members learn the rules and norms of the church and how to act in public. One must learn to be *fiel*, or

faithful/loyal to the church and its teachings. Importantly, therefore, ‘people of the world’ or *mundanos* are not considered *descarriado*. One must convert, that is, accept Jesus Christ as one’s savior, and then go back to ‘the world’ (backslide) or a life where one does not submit to the laws and rules of the church, to be considered *descarriado*.

This particular framing insulates the church and an idealized notion of Christian identity from being tarnished, challenged, or undermined. Whenever a Christian does something that is not ‘Christian’, they are distanced from the church and considered lost. If they repent, seek forgiveness, and return to the fold of the congregation and its sanctioned practices, they will be re-evaluated and their identities as Christians restored by the church.

There is a respect for following the rules of the church. Those Christians who consider themselves to be *descarriado* stop going to the church, for reasons of shame and embarrassment as well as out of respect for the standards and rules of the church. It is not uncommon, particularly for recent converts and younger members to be *descarriado* one or more times before finally staying in the church or abandoning it for good. This was certainly the case for members such as Moisés, Diego, Nicol and others who I observed during my time with IdD. It is very difficult for people to remain in the church and associated with the congregation if they are doing things that the church disapproves of. Members may be shunned or sanctioned by the church. Diego, for example was caught ‘doing something that he should not have been doing’ with a girl in the church and was prohibited from participating in the *cultos* until the church leadership decided that he had learned the error of his ways. Diego found it

difficult to return to the church because he felt judged by the other members and he felt shunned by his peers in the youth group. Moisés, who regularly attended IdD for much of 2008, all but disappeared from the church by fall of that same year. Moisés was married to a woman who lived in Miami, and it came to my attention that he had a girlfriend whom he would visit in the capital. Neither woman was Christian and this was expressly discouraged by the church. I am almost certain (although I have nothing more than suspicion to confirm such a claim) that Moisés wished not to return to the church until he became right with God again and sorted out the behaviors that he knew were not accepted by the church.

I was told the story one day of a man in Villa who was making 10,000 pesos a day selling drugs. When he converted he stopped selling drugs, but when the money ran out, he left the church and went back to selling. What is significant about this story is that the man did not try to remain in the church and sell drugs. He was well aware of the moral conflict and respected the church such that when he returned to selling drugs, he stopped going to the church. I noted that this was the general practice of most. If they were *descarriado* they would stop going to church until they worked it out. Some people would convert one day, realize that they had made a mistake, and leave the church the next, rather than carrying on as if they were faithful to the rules.

Public Sanctions and Policing the Boundaries of *el mundo*

The church and the public at large sanction those who are *descarriado*, thus policing the boundaries of *el mundo* and *christianismo* (*el tigueraje* and *el evangelio*). It is not uncommon to hear people criticize evangelicals for being hypocrites or charlatans. Christians failing to fulfill public expectations of behavior and comportment assigned to *cristianos* (such as not lying, cursing, etc.) are mocked and given as reasons for why *cristianos* are not the spiritual authorities or saints they claim to be. A convert who participates in something that the church disapproves of is probably considered *descarriado*, but for the public it appears to be a two-faced *cristiano* – someone who is not who they claim to be.

Because Christianity is supposed to represent the ideal, a fear of Christians who are not really Christian or, more specifically, who do not fit this ideal, arises. In Villa there was a fear of this particular possibility, someone who claimed the respect and deference of a Christian but someone who had not earned it through observing prohibitions and living a righteous life according to the divine commandments in the bible.

There is a sense, a fear, of the inauthentic or insincere Christian. Someone who represents him or herself one way, but in reality is another way: a ‘fake’ Christian. This idea came up over and over again. The idea of being a Christian and participating in *tigueraje* was simply indefensible because no ‘true’ Christian would act in such a way.

The incompatibility of these domains, the idea that one cannot be Christian and ‘in the world’, in the gospel and in the streets, was reiterated by a popular comedic

film released in 2009 called “*Cristiano de la Secreta*.” In this, one of the biggest Dominican film releases of the year, an evangelical man attempts to live two lives: one as a Christian, and the other as a *tiguere* by acting on desires that are forbidden by the church. He must hide his Christian identity from friends in order to flirt with girls, go to the bar, dance, etc. Much of the humor in this comedy is based on the ruse wherein a Christian falls to the temptations of the world and attempts to pursue them while not breaking from the church (all while keeping his real identity as a Christian a secret from others). He is ultimately unsuccessful, primarily because he cannot do both – he is either a Christian, who doesn’t do those things, or he is a *tiguere*, who does and can do those things. The main character realizes in the end that he will be accepted for who he truly is, a *cristiano*, and that he need not pursue a social identity as a *tiguere* to gain acceptance or approval.

A generalized notion of Christianity shapes Dominican ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, and informs ideas about acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Because of this, the notion of a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ Christian, a ‘real’ or ‘fake’ *cristiano* has social significance. The issue of whether someone is a ‘true’ Christian arises because being a respected *cristiano* has social capital in barrio Francisco, Villa, and the Dominican Republic at large.² It appears that if one is going to accord an individual the respect and prestige associated with Christian religious asceticism and observance, they must earn it, and the public is always watching. One only deserves to access this social capital if he or she follows the prohibitions of the church to the

² Here and the following refer to Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of ‘social capital’ – resources one may access as a member of a group that may be exchanged for power in an economy of practices (a form of symbolic capital).

letter. If they prohibit or ‘restrain’ themselves they are considered ‘*serio*’ and thus earn the respect and prestige associated with being a trustworthy, upstanding neighbor. If not, you are distained for being weak, a trickster, or sorely misguided charlatan. Such ‘fakes’ are sanctioned by those invested in the predominant moral order – evangelical Christians and others (importantly, as discussed earlier, youth gangs).

The particular cultural character, the two-faced or ‘fake’ Christian, is a threat to the moral integrity and social dynamics of the barrio, and in particular to the legitimacy of the Pentecostal church. That is why the church attempts to discipline and sanction those members who break the rules. They can damage the image of the church and the reputation of *cristianos*. In order to maintain an image of trustworthiness and righteousness, the church cannot have members of its flock ‘*andando en la calle*’ or ‘playing around in the streets’. Especially from the perspective of those who might put their trust in *cristianos* because of who they claim to be. The potential for fraud is great and people take care not to be tricked or taken advantage of.

Trust or *confianza*, leads to important social capital. *Cristianos* cultivate trust through speech and acts that inspire the confidence and respect of others and that demonstrate reliability. In the context of the barrio, trust can be more valuable than gold because it can lead to business prospects or other opportunities. Particularly in a context where many or most people make some or all of their living in the informal economy, trust is crucial. ‘True’ Christians are thought to be trustworthy and the church and its followers promote this ideal. A Christian who does not follow the

prohibitions or wishes to be both in *tigueraje* and *el evangelio* is categorically not trustworthy and threatens the delicate balance of trust. It is thought that Christians are trustworthy because they hold themselves accountable to God and his laws and therefore are less likely to lie, cheat, or steal. *Tigueres*, as we have seen, because they are out for themselves and are beholden to no one, cannot be trusted and are thought always to be taking advantage of a situation. Social rules and conventions are to be bent if not broken by *tigueres* who look for social advantages in every interaction.

I was truly surprised by the assertion of many of my informants that there were devious segments of the population that claimed to be Christians so that they could claim the benefits of membership. I did not understand what this meant until much later when I realized that such claims were related to a discursive conflict over who was to be regarded as true Christians. The benefits about which they spoke of were not ‘salvation of the soul’ or the favor and protection of Jesus Christ, but rather, practical rewards like the trust and confidence of one’s neighbors, the admiration of one’s friends and family, and respect in the streets.

Ultimately *cristianos* are held to a high standard of behavior. If they do things that others know Christians are not supposed to do, they may be sanctioned or shamed through gossip and/or rumor. Gossip and rumor function to mediate Pentecostal claims to superiority and spiritual perfection. Pentecostals’ claims of holiness or sanctity are tolerated as long as they are seen as making significant sacrifices in their daily lives in the name of spiritual perfection. But, while Pentecostals are allowed to

claim a certain degree of social prestige related to assuming an evangelical identity, there is a limit to how much.

Evangelical Christians are not permitted to act as if they are ‘too good for everyone else’. Such followers are challenged frequently in the public over their knowledge of the bible and their claims to spiritual perfection. Many people perceive *cristianos* as acting like they are better than everyone else and assuming (and sometimes claiming) that they are the only ones who will be saved. Evangelicals have been accused of claiming to be ‘*la botellita del desierto*’ or the ‘the water bottle in the desert’; which is to say that they claim to be the only one’s with the answer to salvation. Pentecostals are aware of such claims and many work against such critiques of the church (my informants, for example, claimed not to make such assertions). However, the public puts such claims in check by sanctioning backsliding and grandiose claims of superiority. Few regular members of the church can claim authority over others because they run the risk of alienating themselves from the neighborhood and their friends. As such, few that I knew would make it a point to preach to strangers. As José Luis pointed out to me, he knew who was open to the message and who was not, he did not push the issue with those he considered ‘not yet ready for the Word’. This typically took the form of not preaching to one’s neighbors or coworkers. Proselytizing at one’s job could cause strain or division in the work place if pushed too far or if a Pentecostal is too openly critical of another person’s behavior. For those that I knew, it was enough for them to represent Christianity through their acts and behaviors so that others might ‘see another way’.

The demands that are put on people who claim to be *cristianos* is great, and a language exists to talk about those who do not live up to the expectations of the church and the public at large. Christianity is serious business in the Dominican Republic and conversion a serious matter. Where the spiritual realm is concerned, things of God are not to be taken lightly and there is no room “to play around.”

“No relaja con las cosas de Dios”: Seriousness, Fidelity and ‘True’ Conversion

Angel explained to me that there were some Christians that liked both Christianity and *tigueraje*, this, according to him, was clearly a mistake:

Can you do both things, do you think? [*tigueraje* and *cristianismo*?]

No, no... for me, that’s why I don’t convert, I can’t be playing around [*no puedo estar relajando*]. I don’t want to joke with the Word of God or with any other thing of God.

José Luis expressed similar reservations the night that he converted at IEP’s annual banquet. While wanting to become a Christian, he was concerned with not taking it seriously. He explains here how he struggled to stay committed because “*uno no puede relajar con las cosas de Dios*” that is, “one mustn’t joke with [or play around with] things of God”:

[During the *campaña*] I was sitting *jevi* [‘cool’] with my friends, having fun, laughing, meanwhile people were singing, I was also singing. When the preacher came out they called me up to the front and asked who wanted to accept Jesus Christ today. My buddies with me said, “Hey, let’s convert!” and I said, “No, no, I cannot right now, I can’t convert, I am not prepared for this.” “Look,” they said, “Lets do it, you can convert, it’s going to go well.” And I said, “no way, I don’t joke with the things of God, *yo no relajo!*”

After everyone had left that night I said to my friends, those that were from the streets with me, those who converted with me, I said to them “I have some money and I am going to buy drugs, *como quiera*,” and

they said to me “look, we already converted, we are already Christians, one does not mess around with this [*con eso no se relaja*]. I said, no, look, I have converted many times and I have not stayed [*aguantado*] in the gospel. They said to me “no, you can’t do it like that, we already converted, and one mustn’t play around with this.” Truthfully I was scared. I wanted to be Christian, I wanted to, but I was afraid of what I had to do to be Christian. [I was afraid] I would not be able to leave the drugs or leave the things of the streets – this was my fear. Each time I got together with one of them I would say, “I converted last night, but how come today I don’t want to?” With God, *no se relaja*, one cannot joke with things of God because you can have problems...

This fear, that one should not take things of God lightly because there could be problems, was further substantiated through stories such as the one recounted to me by Radames about a man who was punished by God for leaving the church:

There was a man who did not believe that God was real. He kneeled before God in ‘*un clamor de guerra*’, a spiritual war (when one speaks in these terms it means that you are fighting not in the flesh but in the spirit). So he said to God “Lord, if you heal my son and my nephew I will convert and never leave the church again.” After two days his son and his nephew were healed. The man lasted two months going to the church and then one day he left. After leaving the church he had a bad accident and burned his entire body. Afterward the Lord gave him a revelation: “If you would not have left me, this wouldn’t have happened to you.”

The notion that one does not ‘mock’, ‘joke’, or ‘play around’ with things of God is representative of the respect accorded evangelical Christianity in the barrios and reflects the division of everyday social life into distinct moral spheres that are to be respected as separate. Christianity is considered ‘serious’ and conversion a serious matter. One does not convert only to turn around and return to the streets. This is also tied to the idea that Christians are *serio* as opposed to *tígueres* who are playful/not serious. This belief is carefully guarded, not just by Christians, but also by perhaps their most unlikely allies: the gangs themselves.

It is common to hear phrases such as “*yo no relajo con las cosas de dios*” which generally means, “I don’t play around with [or joke with] things of God” and “*con dios no se relaja*” or “One doesn’t joke [or play] with God.” In standard Spanish, the verb *relajar* means ‘to relax’ or ‘to ease’. There is a sense here that one does not ‘rest on one’s laurels’ or ‘slack off’ when dealing with spiritual things, or, that one should constantly be vigilant because spiritual things are not to be taken lightly.³

In Villa, and throughout the country, the term *relajar* also means ‘to joke’ or ‘to play around’ as in “*que yo todo lo cojo a chiste, que yo soy ‘relajao’*” (“[they say that] I take everything as a joke, that I am a joker”) [Renato]; and “*yo ‘chercheo’ mucho, relajo mucho, nunca me van a ver guapo*” (“I party/have fun a lot, play around a lot, they are never going to see me as a serious person”) [Renato]; and “*yo era relajado, todo era un chiste*” (“I was a joker, everything was a joke”) [Héctor]. According to Miguelito, “*aquí tenemos lo que es el relajo, lo que le decimos la chercha, aquí hay mucha gente que relaja mucho*” (“Here we have what is ‘*el relajo*’, what we call ‘*la chercha*’, here there are many people who joke/play around a lot”). *La chercha* is a Dominicanism or Dominican slang for ‘party’, or in the verb form *chercheo*, ‘to have fun/party.’⁴

³ Incidentally, in parts of the Anglophone Caribbean, Jamaica in particular, the term ‘slackness’ refers to acts and behaviors that are considered lewd or vulgar – the opposite of respectable behavior.

⁴ According to asihablamos.com ‘*El Diccionario Latinoamericano*’ online dictionary – a forum/online dictionary for users to input unique definitions of terms from different parts of Latin America – offers the following definitions of *relajo*: In Bolivia the term means ‘to not take things seriously’; in Colombia it means a person of few values/morals; in the Dominican Republic it is synonymous with *broma* or ‘joke’ and they give the example “*Deja el relajo, que esto es serio*,” “Stop joking, this is serious” and list ‘*serio*’ as an antonym; in Mexico and Ecuador it can mean ‘disorder,’ ‘mess,’ or ‘joke’.

La chercha and *el relajo* are associated with the playful and jovial free-time activities of *tigueros* and youth along with the notions of *el coro* or *hacer coro* meaning ‘a get together’ or ‘to hang out’ respectively, as in “*yo soy una gente que le gusta el coro, como joven me gusta la chercha*” (“I’m a person who likes to hang out, like the youth I like to party”). ‘*Andar en el coro*’ means to hang out or pass time in an unserious/unproductive, playful way. *Coro*, in standard Spanish, also means ‘togetherness’ as in ‘they acted in chorus’.

When one is not *relajando* or *cherchando* – ‘joking’ or ‘playing around’ – one is serious, ‘*una persona seria*’ or ‘*un hombre serio*’. According to Juan Carlos, “Since I converted I am a serious man, I work more.” While the street life and that of the *tiguere* is associated with play, jokes, and loose rules (*el relajo*); the Christian world is rule bound and is considered serious, associated with work (secular or spiritual) and productivity (*el serio*). The terms *relajando* and *cherchando* are not typically used in reference to evangelicals, except for when an individual is being criticized for not being Christian enough. Being Christian in Villa means being serious – which means following the prohibitions and not ‘playing around’. Being serious can mean a number of things including being responsible, mature, reliable, and trustworthy. *Un hombre serio* is a respected man who is regarded highly by his neighbors and acquaintances. *Un hombre serio* takes care of his home, wife and kids, and fulfills his obligations to family, friends and acquaintances. Pentecostals strive to be seen in this light. Renato, a young man from IdD considered himself a devout Christian, and necessarily, a serious man: “I am known for being serious and for being

a Christian. Everyone knows that I am Christian, that I attend the church, and that I am a serious person.” For Renato, in order to be considered *una persona seria*, to be a respected person, an individual needed to follow the prohibitions imposed by the church and “walk a straight path”:

For me being serious comes from inhibiting yourself or staying away from the things that you see are bad. So if you inhibit yourself things and walk a straight path, without twisting yourself, without looking from side to side, for me this is the concept of *ser serio*, ‘being serious’.

Cristianos are expected to comport themselves in accordance with the rules of the church as well as the streets. Christianity is considered serious business as it relates to one’s salvation and requires complete allegiance and constant vigilance. Such stakes require total submission. To *relajar* with things of God means to not take them seriously – to not accord God the highest position in one’s life. For Pentecostals in Villa, to *relajar* was to party with alcohol and sing salacious songs as if one had no fear of God. It was to swear and speak crudely. It meant to hang around the bars and on the street corners. *Relajando* meant *haciendo y deshaciendo* (‘doing whatever one wants’). If one follows the prohibitions, and submits oneself to the rules of the church then he or she is serious.

Cristianos strive to be taken seriously by their neighbors, to be considered reliable and trustworthy, primarily through prohibitions and living an ascetic lifestyle. According to Nicol, her friends accepted her conversion because, or rather only when, she was serious about it:

[My friends] were cool with it because they accepted me as a *cristiana* – they did not accept me for playing around with the gospel [*por estar*

relajando con el evangelio]. If I am a Christian I cannot leave the church and go hang out with them [*hacer coro con ellos*]. I already left the church [before] and they understand this.

If one follows the prohibitions closely, and others see that you take the rules of the church seriously and are not doing what you ‘shouldn’t be doing’, that is, doing what the *impíos* or *mundanos* are doing, you will be accorded respect as a Christian.

To the degree that Christians are able to follow the rules of the church and demonstrate to others that they are serious Christians, they are considered *gente disciplinada* (‘disciplined people’) who are regarded highly in the barrios and in return receive prestige and respect. To be a disciplined person means to avoid using obscene words and to act mature, civil, and upright (to uphold the values of respectability). Pentecostals talk explicitly about controlling human or ‘earthly desires’. Sonia proclaims: “I don’t want anything to do with the pleasures of the World, the pleasures of the flesh. You have to govern the flesh.” It is within such governance, in the refusal of many desirable things (drinking, dancing, smoking, etc.), that Christians gain the respect of others.

Leaving a Gang

Gang members who have converted and left the gang are not allowed to be *descarriado* according to the rules and standards of *naciones*. One will be punished if seen ‘playing around’ or doing things unbecoming of a *cristiano*. Membership in the gang is for life, unless you decide to commit your life to God, in which case you have one opportunity to do so. Should you fail, you will be punished and your life

threatened by the gang you once considered your family. When you enter a gang you take an oath, that only death or conversion will free you from allegiance to the gang. A person may convert one night, and the next day return to the gang. However, if that person renounces the gang to join the church, his or her decision is considered final and therefore binding.

When one leaves a gang to join the church, he (and sometimes she) needs only to inform the members of the gang that they have converted, truthfully (*de verdad*), hand in their notebook of rules/laws and the money they are asked to hold for the gang, and walk away. As long as a convert demonstrates a complete conversion, that he appears to all as being a true follower of Jesus Christ – that is, they see him preaching in the streets (not playing dominos), evangelizing (not selling drugs), wearing different clothes (not baseball caps or earrings), they see a physical transformation (a new haircut), he stops drinking alcohol, hanging out at bars and clubs, partying, etc. – then he is left alone and allowed to leave the gang freely and entirely.

Despite being cousins as well as one-time members of the same gang the Trinitarios, Angel did not think highly of Radames. Initially he was happy that Radames converted, but shortly afterward he was concerned that Radames was not acting like a Christian should. He believed that if Radames did not clean up his act, he would be in a lot of danger. In fact, he was already in danger:

How has your opinion of Radames changed since he converted?

Well, I was happy that Radames converted, I thought well of it, but there are still some things that I don't like about him. He wants to play,

I have had to reproach him many times: “You are a Christian. You have to be in Christianity. Don’t stand out. You are Christian, without *tigueraje*, take it easy.” He wants to stand out, [he wants to be] Christian in the church and then *impío* [ungodly] in the streets. But I see what’s really going on, Radames hasn’t realized because he is my cousin. He wants to play [*jugar*] with Christianity and I have some dangerous friends that want to... Look, if he wants to get out of it... He is Christian, but if he leaves the church it’s going to look very bad, they are going to hurt him. The other day at the *patronales* they would have done it there because supposedly he was there. They would have hurt him.

Radames had gone to the yearly *patronale*, a festival that they throw in virtually every town in honor of a patron saint. While religious in origin, most *patronales* are secular in nature and religious in name only. Typically the festivals are big parties that are thrown for residents on a given city block, square, or park. They involve music (bachata, merengue, reggaeton), concerts, dancing, eating, drinking, revelry and merrymaking. Because of the secular nature of such events, *cristianos* are not to attend, primarily because of the music and drinking that occurs at them. Radames had been seen there with friends enjoying himself and that was looked down upon because he claimed to be a Christian and, more than that, he had left the gang to convert and thus had renounced such earthly pleasures, at least in the eyes of gang members and his newly adopted Pentecostal lifestyle. Angel made it clear to me that one of the only reasons why Radames had not been seriously harmed by fellow gang members was because of Angel’s rank and his desire not to see Radames hurt, but he was concerned that there was only so much that he could do to protect him:

Radames was in an association called a *nación*, if you leave this association there is nothing else but being Christian. Christian permanently. If you leave Christianity, you die. Here in Villa they don’t kill you, Villa is small, they hit you here, leave you crippled.

When it comes we'll see... There are friends of mine that speak to me first, because they have respect for me, I tell them no, I'm going to talk to him. I am going to say to him follow Christianity *tranquilo*, because I know what is happening, I speak with him and he says "these people are not going to do anything, I am with God," and I think this is wrong, I'm not Christian but still find this bad. Another Christian would find this even worse still.

Radames had violated a cardinal rule: if one decides to leave a gang to become a Christian, one gives up a secular life for a spiritual one, in its entirety. The seriousness with which this violation is dealt (possibly physical punishment) indicates the magnitude of such a violation. The end of this quote is interesting as well as it points to the assumption that many people have: that is, while they may not be Christian themselves, they know how Christians are supposed to act. Everyone is an expert because everyone, to one degree or another, believes they know what being a *cristiano* means and how *cristianos* should act. Everyone receives some religious instruction at home, in churches of various denominations, at school, in the media, and on the streets. As 'experts', people judge the behaviors and claims of *cristianos* on a daily basis. If the public is going to recognize Pentecostal claims to religious authority and spiritual perfection then Pentecostals must earn it. This means fulfilling public expectations of Christian behavior. If Pentecostals wish to be regarded with respect, they must earn it by living up to their own claims and the expectations of the public.

José Luis was able to get me my first interview with Angel. I asked Angel what he thought about José Luis and why he respected him more than his cousin

Radames:

I know José Luis as "Titico." I think highly of him. He was a *tiguere*, into drugs, robbing, smoking, he did everything. I don't know how

many years he's been a Christian now, but since he accepted Christ I have not seen him go out, or play, but there are many who have left [the church]. *El varón* Carlito has joined and left [the church], my brother has joined and left, there are many. There were something like four more that entered with him that are no longer Christian. There is another cousin of mine that entered with him but left. Anyway, I think well of him because he has continued being a follower, he has stayed stable, that is why I think highly of him.

It is difficult, as they say, to stay in the gospel, because of the demands of faith and membership. Many individuals convert and then leave only to come back and then leave again. José Luis represents the ideal. He transformed from a gang member to a pious Evangelical. He has remained in the church and has demonstrated to others a 'true' conversion. Even though he was a member of a rival gang, Angel respected him enough that he would agree to meet and speak with me. This was something Radames was, in the end, unable to do. At issue here was Radames's conduct and his alleged violation of societal norms and gang rules regarding the public behavior of *cristianos*. Radames wished, allegedly, to have it both ways, to enjoy the benefits of church membership and the freedom of street life. This was not okay by anyone's standards, not the least of which those of the church or the gangs.

Testimony as Narrative Capital in *el barrio*

"It depends on one's testimony, [but] wherever one goes they give you respect" – Arturo

José Luis exemplified, for Pentecostals as well as gang members, the appropriate path to a reformed life in the church. He was an example of what Christians call a living testimony. His obvious transformation from street thug to bible toting Christian was 'evidence' to others of God's transformative, and ultimately just, power. José Luis's stark transformation translated into respect. He did not lose

respect after converting because in some ways he is still the *tiguere* he once was – but inverted. He returns occasionally to his old hangouts to evangelize and the men at the bars listen to him preach:

No [the preaching] doesn't bother them. I tell those that it bothers "If you don't want to listen, leave," and they listen to me because they know [who I was], they know that I wasn't Christian the whole time, [they know] that I was a *tiguere* from the streets. I have had the opportunity, a few times, to take them by the hand and say to them "Get out of here if you do not want to hear the word of God." And if it isn't the same ones that say "Hey, be quiet, don't you see that the *varón* is here, give the man respect!" Sometimes they discuss amongst themselves and I say no, there is nothing to discuss, if everything is fine, they finish everything there, I leave and if I have to hug them, I hug them and I say to you nothing happens. Now, if you are stepping out bounds or crossing the line with them, it's a problem. If not, then it's "fine *varón*" there is no problem.

José Luis continues to be respected for who he used to be ("they listen to me because they know who I was") and for who he has become. The respect and prestige he once earned in the streets is carried into the church because of the magnitude of his transformation and the recognition of his commitment to this change. The church welcomes his example because it proves for them, and perhaps others, that the gospel is the only transformative power in the world worth pursuing. For gangs he represents the proper order of things – once a man of the streets who did as he wished and lived only according to the gang's rules, now lives as a reformed Christian who lives by the law of God. Angel expresses something similar when discussing with me the fact that the streets will always be a part of him:

There is a saying, you can take a man from the streets but you can't take the streets from the man. That is to say, for example, if you take me from the streets, I am Christian, and I am not in the streets, but you can't take the streets from me; that is going to be impossible.

Here there is a sense that even after conversion many people retain the street credibility and respect that they obtained in ‘the world’. They respect who you used to be and who you have become. The transformation is regarded highly by those who acknowledge the difficulty of giving up such a life. José Luis has lived a life of extremes, from one distinct sphere to another. His transformation was abrupt and the transition immediate. Yet, it is in the magnitude of this transformation that José Luis earns a level of respect both in the streets and in the church. Above all, because his transformation was complete (because he did not backslide or ‘play around’), and because he took his conversion seriously, the church and his former friends in the streets recognized and celebrated his transformation.

José Luis’s friends from before his conversion, with whom he enjoyed the street life, see him differently but accord him the utmost respect:

Since converting they see me with respect. If they are drinking and I am passing by and they want to greet me, they say to me “*varón*, excuse me for drinking, but look *varón*, you look good.” They greet me, that’s how it goes. After that, “*varón*, take care of yourself, whatever you need, whatever problem you have don’t hesitate to come see us, we will resolve it for you.” And I say to them “There is no need for that, God is my shelter and strength, God fights for me, you all don’t have to raise your hand against anyone because God is with me.” And they say to me, “*varón*, but you always have a bible verse to speak, I like speaking with you *varón* because you always have something good to say” and I say no, “This is what I have learned.”

José Luis’s conversion, in his mind, only strengthened his relationship to his friends, “because now I want to help them and they know the truth.” They respect his conversion because he was able to do something that they admire. He also did it

within the rules and expectations of the church, the gang, and society. Because of this, he is admired and respected wherever he goes.

Danilo's transformation can also be understood as a living testimony and his story is similar in many ways to that of José Luis's:

When people saw me after one year, after two years, seeing me as I am, people say, "Truly God exists because look at what God has done with this man." But it is my wish that all of the youth that are like that come to the feet of Jesus Christ... But look, after becoming Christian, I have had to adapt myself to a wife, you know because of the drugs and stuff I had different types of women. I didn't have respect, but now I do. Now I have a formal home and I have my two girls, I have my wife, I have my mother-in-law, God has blessed me. I mean, it's something different. When I walk with my wife here, we walk hand in hand when we go to an activity to preach and everyone says, "Look at Danilo go, look how God has changed him." Even non-Christians preach to one another and say "but you can change because he changed, look at how he is, he is truly Christian [*es cristiano de verdad*]." I say, "The glory is the Lord's" because God's love has saved me.

Like José Luis, Danilo sees himself as an example to others. Someone that they can see has made a change for the better. This has even affected his relationship with the police who use him as an example of change:

Now [my old friends] they see me like a father and like a brother. There are people that when they get sent to prison they send for me and say "Tell the *varón* Danilo that I am in prison, tell him to come, and tell him to come with his wife to see us and speak with us." Because the police hear a lot about you because the police are also aware that you were a delinquent and now you provide an example to society. So, they see you as a father, they call you with respect because they know that you are the one that can take care of them.

Danilo has been able to use his new identity to access important social rewards like trust and respect from authority as well as from those who now see him as a resource and/or an example to others.

The testimonies of people like Danilo, José Luis, Juan Carlos, and Anthony become valuable narrative capital in the context of the barrio where respect is accorded to those who have made the transition from *tiguere* to *cristiano* (or from convict/criminal to saint). Having moved from one social position to another meets the cultural expectations of respectability and fulfills the cultural myth of forgiveness and redemption. According to Radames, it is through one's testimony that one gains respect:

With the testimony [you can insure and gain respect]. When they see that you are Christian, they say "what happened to you, you look different?" And I would tell them that it is because I am now a Christian, I truly converted. When you convert you say "Lord, write my name in the book of life and let it never be erased." God gives you grace, he makes you something different, and they say "wow, I see something different in you."

Now [my old friends] don't bother me; they don't say anything to me; now they call me '*varón de dios*', they say to me '*dios le bendiga*'. The same people who I used to hang out with respect me better now. They ask me, "How is the church? Don't leave from there, continue there; I would like to be like you; I would like to get to where you are." And I tell them that they can.

The greater the conversion, the greater God's works seem to be for believers and observers alike. There is a specific effort, particularly on the part of IEP, to recruit gang members and drug dealers, alcoholics and drug abusers, criminals and convicts. The church's greatest weapons in this "battle for souls" are evangelists who have lived the lives of those they are trying to recruit. People like José Luis, Danilo, Juan Carlos, and especially Anthony tended to be the most effective evangelists, at least from my observations, precisely because their transformation and message seemed to resonate with others who had lived similar lives. Their testimonies became tools of

evangelization that went further than just convincing people to join the church. Their testimonies served as narrative capital, which was exchanged for respect and prestige in the barrio and made it possible for gang members to see themselves as potential converts.

One's testimony determines the amount of respect and credibility that one will be accorded. If a convert does not maintain a good testimony, he or she will not be respected, because, after all, a person is not respected for 'playing around' with the gospel. That is why former gang members, drug abusers and alcoholics have the most prestige within the church and in the streets because they have had the most to overcome (and if successful, they showed the most resolve). This is also why Radames was not as respected as he claimed to be. He did not seem to have made a complete transition to the church that is expected or required. Some viewed Radames as maintaining a bad testimony, and because of it, he did not demand the same respect as José Luis.

Searching for Respect

There is a respect, you know that when you are in 'the world' many people respect you because you were who you were and you could at any moment, you know... There are people who convert and nobody respects them in the barrio and you know why? Because they keep doing illicit things and people don't have respect for them. People say, "This guy is a fraud, a charlatan." But when a *tiguere* sees that you have converted, truthfully [*de verdad*], they say "wow! This was a *tiguere* and he truly converted." They are going to respect you. More than the respect God puts in you, because now God puts respect in them. You can go places where people say bad words and they will say, "*varón* excuse me." I say "wow, but who am I?" Thanks to the grace of God they want to offer you a soda, they want to offer you a juice; they invite you in and ask you to pray for them. [Juan Carlos]

For many *cristianos* in Villa, it is the respect they receive from others that makes them proud to be Christians. For members of both IdD and IEP, one of the most desirable and practical benefits of Christian identity was the respect they received from the public. According to Ana, “The greatest advantage to being a Christian is that people respect you.” Many of my informants, without being prompted, described their experience being Christian as getting respect from others. For Danilo, the newfound respect that he received from others was a personal triumph. His relationship to local authorities reversed after conversion:

There is a respect and consideration in the neighborhood [for Christians]. Before I became a Christian, the police did not respect me. They treated me as if I were a criminal. After I accepted Christ, I would say that they see in me something like a divine authority; something to which they owe respect. One time there was a [police] raid here in Villa and there were protests. I was there, speaking with a man (and I had my bible with me but it was hidden) and the police force they call SWAT (who are very dangerous) came and took the man I was [talking] with away. He was riding his bike around without papers and I wanted to speak for him but they put him in a truck and they didn’t say anything to me, just “varón, go home.” They didn’t even see my bible because I had it behind me. They knew that I was Christian and something that is a part of God. I have gone, and other Christians have testified that they have gone as well, to dangerous places and the authorities don’t have a problem with them – without them having to say anything or even to identify themselves. They don’t do anything. They see something distinct in you.

His transformation to bible-toting Pentecostal enabled a new relationship to local authorities that he has come to read in terms of respect. As a ‘divine authority’ he commands respect in the streets by both the law (police and military) and the lawless (gangs and *tigueros*).

Like trust, respect is a valuable commodity in the barrio and something that *cristianos* and others take quite seriously. Both gang members and Christians alike seek respect, but the ways in which this respect is earned may be quite different. *Tigueres* and gang members are afforded a certain level of deference, based on fear, and prestige based on an idea of respect that draws on notions of brotherhood, solidarity, resourcefulness and cunning, and the fulfillment of alternative masculine ideals (*tigueraje*). Similarly, Pentecostal men are respected for their asceticism, compliance with church rules, adherence to scripture, respectable behavior, and their fulfillment of hegemonic masculine ideals (*el serio*).

Cristianos understand respect to be a number of things, particularly related to how people treat and relate to them as individuals. If strangers listen to them preach, it means that they are respected. If others seek their help or advice, it means that they respect them. If acquaintances refer to them by labels or titles of esteem and respect like *varón*, then they are respected. If people show consideration for their beliefs and the prohibitions that they follow, they feel respected. This was repeated to me over and over again in interviews when I asked my informants what the advantages were to being Christian. Here Flaco explains how he earns respect from his friends:

I've earned respect from my friends by being myself and acting like a Christian [*actuando como cristiano*]. My way of speaking. Because I can't talk as everyone else does. I have to speak coherent things, things that make sense, things that help. So that when people see you are different and that you speak in a suitable way, that all the things that you speak are positive, then people begin to see you in another way, they can respect you because you don't say everything, because you don't say every little thing that comes to mind; you speak of important things.

This is only one of many examples of how Christians earn respect or feel respected. Another important way by which *cristianos* earn respect is through such titles like *varón* and *varona*. The term *varón* literally means ‘male’ as in ‘*un hijo varón*’ meaning ‘a son’. When used in reference to an adult, in particular, the term emphasizes the masculinity of the person that is being referred to as *varón* and takes on a sense of reverence. To refer to someone as *varón* is to emphasize his masculinity, but it is above all a term of respect. While anyone may be referred to as *varón*, it was often used in Villa and in other places as a term of respect for *cristianos*. Women may be referred to as *varona* as a similar term of respect, in which case it does not mean ‘a mannish woman’ but rather a respected (respectable) female. Karla explained to me that in school, the other students respected her because she was Christian. She knows this because they called her *varona* or *varonita*:

In school [they respect me a lot], they call me *hermana*, *varona*, *evangélica*, it’s cool! It’s cool when another youth asks you for advice and she goes and follows the suggestions that you gave her...

Hermano and *hermana* are also used as terms of endearment generally between friends or strangers who wish to establish rapport. Within the church itself, members refer to one another as *hermano*, *hermana*, as well as *varón*, *varona*, *sierva* (and less often *siervo*). Men in the church most often refer to each other as *varón* and sometimes as *hermano*, while women are more frequently referred to as *sierva* (as in ‘*sierva de Dios*’ or ‘servant of God’) and *hermana*. On occasion women in the church are also called *hembra*, which tends toward the female equivalent of *varón* for women (*hembra* means ‘female’). *Varón* and *hembra* are terms of respect and admiration, for

this reason, many of my informants were happy to describe their dealings with non-Christians as relationships of respect because non-Christians would refer to them as *varón*, *varona*, or *hembra*.

Another form of respect garnered by *cristianos* is the respect others show in their consideration for the beliefs and prohibitions that they follow. This takes the form of avoiding obscenities when in the presence of a *cristiano* and offering them a juice or a coffee instead of a beer or rum. Additionally, people respect *cristianos* by listening to what they have to say. I was continually surprised at the patience and gratefulness that met evangelists in the street. In the capital it was not uncommon to receive a pamphlet or flyer from an evangelical Christian in passing, often on the corner or in public transportation. It was more likely to see people accept and read what was given to them than to see them reject it out right or throw it away. People would listen to sermons given on the street as well as attend special church events, *campañas* and *retiros*. Often *campañas* were occasions of entertainment and reflection for locals who enjoyed listening to the sermons and singing along with the music. Such events tended to be the main attraction in town when they occurred.

Christian music was very popular as well. So much so that even popular *bachateros* and *merengueros* recorded and performed explicitly evangelical music. Anthony Santos, perhaps one of the most famous *bachateros* of all, whose mother was said to be a *bruja*, recorded an immensely popular song in 2008 called “*Muchos Cambios en El Mundo*,” (“Many Changes in the World”) a cover of the original song

“*Algo Grande Viene a la Tierra*” (“Something Great is Coming”) by Stanislao Marino, a Christian singer and evangelical pastor.

Many of my informants explained to me that *impíos* or *mundanos* respected them because they would make an effort not to swear around them or if they did, the offenders would ask for their pardon or forgiveness. Even Angel admitted that he tried not to use obscenities around Christians:

When you speak with a *cristiano*, do you try to speak differently or no? For example, in terms of bad words, do you try not to use them?

No, I do not use them. I mean, when I am speaking with a *cristiano* I try not to say bad words. But if I am talking with a person that thinks that they are a *tiguere* then yes, they come out, I say them. But when I am speaking with disciplined people, I try not to say any bad words.

Garnering respect is of central importance to *cristianos* in Villa, not solely for those who have converted from gangs but for everyone, male and female alike. After converting Radames asked José Luis what he should pray for now that he was a Christian:

At the beginning, if I didn't know how or what to pray for, I would ask José Luis how it is that one should pray. This was the first thing that he told me: “Ask God that people respect you in the streets, ask God to keep your testimony, ask God to protect you, to have dignity, respect people so that they respect you, because you have to respect for them to respect you.”

Now people respect me. Even those who wanted to start problems with me before, now say to me “*varón dios le bendiga!*” and that's it! They can see the angels that exist around me. I can't see it but they can see it because the Lord covers us. When you say to him “Dear God, I want you to protect me in a special cover,” the respect for you will be greater than before.

For Pentecostals, male and female, to act respectable is to earn respect. According to Sonia “as a Christian one has to walk decently and dress decently so that they treat one with great respect... I have learned how to obtain respect and that to be a Christian is a great and good thing.”

This kind of regard for Pentecostals was seen in other contexts as well, not just interpersonally. It was not uncommon for *comadones*, who typically boom music out of huge loudspeakers, to turn the music down or even off completely for special church events and/or *cultos*, particularly those held out in the streets. Whenever there were large *campañas* or *retiros* at the center of town, in the park or on a stage near by, the *colmados* in the area would turn off their sound systems until the events were over. According to Mayalin, they once even held a *culto inside a colmadón*.

DISCUSSION

What might be deemed ‘traditional Christian values’, predominate in the barrios of Villa and to a greater or lesser extent the country as a whole; and while marriage, stability, righteousness, and honesty, remain cultural ideals for most citizens, they are difficult to attain for the majority of Dominican men (and women) who, as victims of a divided social structure, cannot seem to access the same social capital available to white, rich, and entitled Dominicans.

Participation in *tigueraje* is open to all and allows Dominican men access to a type of masculinity: one which has cultural value, but within defined limits, and represents an alternative to hierarchical forms of masculinity that are not made available to poor men. When compared with ‘respectable’ notions of masculinity,

tigueraje falls short as it fails to consolidate ‘legitimate’ modes of behavior in relation to dominant class hierarchies and ‘respectable’ cultural values.

The Pentecostal church, on the other hand, makes certain values of respectability accessible to the poor. For example, the church makes available respectable notions of masculinity by the demands the church makes on men to recommit themselves to family and home. This reaffirmation of respectable values can be seen in the emphasis Pentecostals put on marriage, fidelity, trustworthiness, and Christian charity.

While the Pentecostal church makes certain forms of social capital available to barrio residents based on cultural values of respectability, the social capital gained, while significant, is not spectacular, and social mobility is limited by the durable class divisions that structure Dominican society. It should be clear that negotiations over status and prestige that occur in the economy of respect that I have discussed so far, occur at the local level and between social class equals. What individuals gain is symbolic capital that may be exchanged locally amongst their neighbors and between peers but such capital has less value outside the context of one’s barrio. Local Pentecostals are probably as likely to become rich as a result of conversion as they are to become famous. The social rewards of conversion are relative and negotiated locally and tend to coalesce around relative status claims to moral and/or spiritual/religious authority.

What the young *tigueres* of Villa and elsewhere have realized is that while both *cristianismo* and *tigueraje* are mutually reinforcing, they are distinct and the

values of one are fundamentally in conflict with the other. Therefore, one cannot be a Christian and a *tiguere* because they represent two social roles representing two distinct moral possibilities. One cannot have it both ways – precisely because they are opposed. Individuals are recruited, pushed and pulled, by both domains. Those joining gangs move to fully embody the values of the street and Wilson’s reputation. Those joining the church embrace the opposing domain of respectability, or in local terms *el serio*, and look to satisfy the values of the home and respectable behavior, values conforming to the hegemonic moral order.

In Pursuit of Respect

The pursuit of barrio residents for advancement within the structure of a moral order through conversion makes sense if one considers the fact that advancement and upward mobility through the socioeconomic and/or political orders is simply unattainable for most poor barrio residents. The predominant institutions in the barrio offering respect and social prestige are the church and street gangs. One appeals to the requirements and expectations of the streets and awards prestige and respect based on the values of *tigueraje*; and the other enables members to claim respect and prestige based on the values of respectability exemplified by the ideals of *el evangelio*. Both require a kind of sacrifice but it is through this sacrifice that prestige is won. Most regular people are unwilling to make the sacrifices in their personal lives required to become Pentecostals, it is a significant commitment and considerable lifestyle change and it means giving up a great deal of freedom and comfort. If a person does so successfully, he or she will be respected as *un/una hombre/mujer de Dios*, a

‘man/woman of God’. Similarly, the average person is unlikely to risk their freedom (and potentially their life) by joining a gang. However, should one choose to commit, there awaits a world of rewards, including respect and admiration, for boys even as young as twelve years old.

Christianity has social capital because it is difficult to obtain. To be a Christian requires a significant amount of sacrifice, if it did not, it would not have value, that is why the ‘fake’ Christian is such a threat. On the flip side it requires that others recognize this value. Thus, in everyday symbolic exchanges Christians must not violate certain norms. In order for others to recognize and value their identity they must represent it as true – or *cristiano de verdad*. Power and status as a Christian can be obtained a number of ways, through preaching, consultations, healing, giving advice on the streets, and also helping out others financially. But along with this they must ‘inhibit’ themselves from enjoying desires of ‘the flesh’. Corruption, shady dealings, and an ethic of everyone out for themselves threaten the integrity and stability of social relationships and undermine community solidarity, two relationships of significant import in barrio life. Christians win social capital by representing themselves as more ‘trustworthy’. In the context of regular uncertainties regarding the prices of essential goods, electricity, water, and the unpredictability of weather and natural disaster, anyone can be up one day and down the next. For this reason, ‘reliability’ has cultural value; no one ever knows when they will need assistance from others.

Many new converts and young people attending the church speak about all the great things that come with being a Christian, namely respect. But for many of them it is difficult to remain in the church or follow the prohibitions as they should. For many of the young men it was difficult to stop listening to their favorite bachatas, to stop seeing girls, and to avoid going out with their friends to the clubs and bars. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most people who convert at *compañías* do not remain in the church. It is typical for people to convert multiple times before eventually staying, if returning at all. José Luis had converted a number of times before finally sticking with it, as did many others.

Social Sanction and *Cristiano de la Secreta* vs. *Cristiano de Verdad*

Trust has social capital and is important in this context and areas where there is an informal economy where reliable social relationships are far more significant. Evangelicals may be successful in contexts such as these if they are able to establish a complete and totalizing Christian identity that is recognized and validated by others. But they are constantly under supervision by the public and their own congregations. Though they claim to be all-forgiving and non-judgmental, when I heard of people slipping away from the church or doing things that the church frowned upon, they would typically be shunned until returning to the congregation for forgiveness. Much of the policing of Evangelicals comes not from the congregation but the public at large. Consider Radames's concern that if he were to slip back into his old life he would not be able to face the fact that he had told people one thing, only to turn around and do the exact opposite in the end: "It doesn't take much to go back to

drinking and doing the things you used to do, this is what I am afraid of. I am afraid that someone will say to me ‘after you talked about the bible so much, now you leave the church’.” Non-Christians, or rather non-evangelicals, know, in general terms, what is expected of evangelicals and do not let them claim the trust and social capital associated with membership unless they follow the rules, particularly because one does not ‘play or joke with God’. A ‘true believer’, a *cristiano de verdad*, follows the prohibitions, and ‘acts like a Christian should’ by appealing to norms and values of seriousness (*el serio*).

This same argument is mobilized in local contexts in contests over moral authority and in the context of scarce social capital where individuals attempt to claim prestige and esteem within a social system with divided claims. But much like crabs in a barrel (cf. Wilson 1973), those who attempt to access the prestige associated with Christianity are often critiqued the most, making it difficult for even the poor to access any type of capital associated with spiritual authority, try as they might. This is part of the role played by youth gangs and others who punish and sanction people who claim to be Christian but do not follow the rules. The other is gossip and rumor that limit significant or ambitious social ascent and prohibit any meteoric rise in wealth and/or prestige through social sanction.

Not everyone can be accorded high social standing and respect, of course, these are social commodities that have value only in so far as others do not have them, but want them. People desire to be looked up to, respected, highly regarded, and

admired. The reason why converted gang members and drug dealers have more social capital is because they accomplish what is not easy for other people to attain.

Reputation and Respectability in the Dominican Republic

One of, if not *the* most important dimensions of social organization in the barrio are the alternative worlds of order and discipline (*el serio*) and of disorder/freedom and play (*el relajo*). These divisions operate in constant opposition and reflect the value systems of the home/church (*el evangelio*) and those of the street (*el tigueraje*) respectively. This binary mirrors a similar division of social life described elsewhere in the Caribbean by Peter Wilson as respectability and reputation.

These oppositions are historical and the product of the dialectal relation between the cultures and values of the colonizer (external, European) and colonized (indigenous, African) (Wilson 1973: 9). The evidence I provide here demonstrates that Wilson's theory has comparative utility across the Caribbean and can help elucidate a deeper understanding of Dominican social relationships, sentiments, and organizing moral principles and their relationship to local Christianities.

In Villa the distinction between these worlds (between reputation values and respectability values, between the values of the *la calle* and those of *la casa*) is quite pronounced and so shares a number of significant cultural and social characteristics with those found in other Caribbean countries. *El relajo*, *la chercha*, *el coro*, are activities characteristic of the street, pool halls, bars and domino games, and thus, unserious, playful, and in some cases, considered foolish behavior (or sometimes described as *tontería*). This domain is the antithesis of work and thus is in opposition

to the productivity associated with the home and serious matters. This is not unlike the notion of play found elsewhere in the Caribbean where ‘play’ refers to anything deemed nonsense or foolishness. Abrahams (1983: 50-51) discusses the contrasting notions of European American and African American notions of work and play, where work in the West Indies, tends to be identified with family and by extension with the home and its relative privacy and play with the street or public where masculine reputation-centered values may be celebrated:

In this sense play means highly unruly behavior noisy oral dueling, and using a dramatic speaking style known in the West Indies as *talking bad* or *broken*. When the noise, unruliness, and speaking style are brought together, the result is called *nonsense* and *foolishness*, evaluative terms derived from household values but usually accepted by the male speakers themselves. Because it is public and individual, play is regarded as inappropriate in areas dominated by respectability values, especially the home (51)

And, according to Abrahams, “in the African American order of behaviors, ‘play’ is not distinguished from the ‘real’ or ‘work’ but from ‘respectable’ behavior” (54). It follows that in the Dominican Republic the activities of *tigueres* are rarely if ever evaluated as ‘respectable’ and even the proudest and most narcissistic *tigueres* recognize the limits and scope of appropriate behavior outside the context of the street.

The spatial divisions between the values of reputation and respectability are sometimes blurred in practice as the values of respectability may be taken up at anytime in the streets. However, there is a recognition that such behaviors only be realized in specific places and in predetermined domains. Men go to the bar to participate in behaviors that are not allowed in the home. Pentecostals rarely if ever go directly to a *colmado* or *discoteca* to evangelize. Those spaces are clearly marked

in opposition to the values of the church and the home. It is more likely that social intercourse will occur in passing between *cristianos* and *tigueres* in public transportation, around where they live, and in places of work. These areas are far more ambiguous and lend themselves to both peaceful interaction as well as potential conflict.

Reputation values are more closely associated with the world of men and masculinity because such values tend to be rewarded and celebrated in predominantly male spaces like the bars, streets, etc. This is not to say that women do not participate in such activities or that they are excluded from the economy of reputation. They are, however, culturally associated more with the home and the values of respectability. As the traditional keepers of the home and family unit, women are by extension the primary bearers of respectability.⁵ *La señora* and *la patrona*, are central figures in the domestic domain of Dominican families and exercise considerable authority and influence over household affairs (which tend to be governed by the values associated with respectability).

Social structurally speaking, the two value systems are antagonistic to one another and are compatible only if they are kept apart. The intrusion of one on the other threatens a delicate balance. Maintenance of this boundary is crucial. Gangs and others are invested in maintaining a division because they see Christian conversion as representative of this divide. Conversion is, as some of the quotations have shown, quite explicitly linked by gang members to a reorientation to the home

⁵ The basic social organization of the household in the Dominican Republic, like the Caribbean in general, has been described as matrifocal because fathers, for a variety of reasons, tend to be peripheral and marriage bonds unstable, so mothers tend to be the focal point of the home.

and to respectable values (consider that the only *other* way to get out of a gang, in some cases, is to get married and have kids).

A relationship between moral values inheres in social organization at the local level and, the organization of which, shapes and is shaped by religious orientations. Dominican Pentecostalism fits comfortably within the defined limits of respectability; indeed, it modifies it, clarifies it, and expands it, mapping a clear and distinct Christian dichotomy of right and wrong, good and evil, earthly and spiritual, directly on top of this dialectic (cf. Manning [1980] who concludes somewhat bafflingly that Pentecostal forms of Christianity in the Caribbean should be understood on the side of reputation).

The church is associated with the home and *el serio*, and the street is associated with *el relajo*, *la chercha*, *el coro* and *tigueraje*. There is often an invasion of the street by the church in the form of *campañas*, so-called ‘campaigns’ or street sermons. These events, while intruding upon the sphere of the street, take precedent (*colmados* turn down their music, people attend quietly and watch, listen, and in some cases actively participate). This is indicative of the authority with which respectable values of the home and Christianity claim over those of the street. There is an implicit recognition of the authority of respectable values. Consider the fact that one is applauded from going in the direction of *tigueraje* to *cristianismo* and punished or sanctioned by going the other direction (consider, for example, the reaction against people who are *descarriado*). Positive transitions between domains are unidirectional and it is not socially acceptable to move from *el evangelio* to *tigueraje*.

Abrahams (1983: 99) points out that these competing value systems coexist in complementarity and only conflict over the distribution of men's resources and/or when men insist on bringing reputation values (behaviors of the street) into the home. Besson (1993) has critiqued, and rightfully so, the sex specific dimensions of Wilson's model pointing out that women indeed participate in contests of reputation in the streets. She offers examples of from Jamaica that challenge the assumption that reputation is strictly a male domain. The examples that I provide here suggest that men too participate in the values of respectability and are not simply passive observers of unattainable respectable status. Men contribute to the construction, promotion, and perpetuation of respectable values, particularly endorsing the authority of such values in the streets and in opposition to Dominican male youth culture through preaching, proselytizing and giving *consejos*.

Men and women have a different relationship to the values of respectability and reputation. For one, while women may participate in some contests over reputation, they are excluded from most. For example, while a man may gain considerable prestige by fathering children from a variety of different unions, or sleeping with numerous partners, women are not rewarded for promiscuous behavior, quite the opposite; women who participate in such behaviors are negatively evaluated by their peers and frequently become the targets of rumor and gossip.

Men, on the other hand, may participate fully in the values of respectability and in some cases may even out perform or supersede women as ideal representatives of the respectable. Men are not expected to be respectable in the same ways that

women are (men, for example, are more likely to be forgiven for their marital transgressions than women). The transformation from *tiguere* to *cristiano* is a championing of respectable values and the subsequent status achieved by men as a result will be much greater than that of women, mainly because women, unlike men, are not rewarded for the magnitude of their transformation. Conversion makes men respectable. Not only does the Pentecostal church emphasize respectability and make it available to men of all social groups, it invites, as its most prized members, those individuals who most epitomize the values of the street and *tigueraje* (gangs, fighting, drinking, gambling, etc.).

Pentecostal men seek to take advantage of the values of respectability that the church promotes. The church's association with respectable values provides Pentecostal men the opportunity to intrude upon the authority of the home, the traditional sphere of female authority. While men are ordinarily peripheral to the effectively female domestic domain, the church encourages men to take a leadership role in the home, to marry and put family first. In this way men assert their influence in the home with the encouragement and backing of the church.

If the values of reputation are pursued by men because of the scarcity of respectability (or lack of access to it) it makes sense that the Pentecostal church would be appealing to men in the community because it provides them access to respectability all while bestowing a new authority in the home where they can make certain and perhaps further demands on their wives.

The apparent threat to masculinity in assuming a potentially feminizing identity in the church is mitigated by their newfound authority in the home, leadership roles in the congregation, and continued respect in the streets (a similar observation has been made by Austin-Broos [1997: 123] in regards to Pentecostals in Jamaica). The move to hegemonic forms of masculinity that value reliability, decorum, honesty, demeanor, and seriousness, are all promoted by the church. The rub of course is that men are expected to give up all other forms of street life and forsake the values of *tigueraje* upon conversion. They do so begrudgingly even as they may continue to reap the benefits of respect that they earned in their pre-conversion lives.

Essentially, conversion to Pentecostal churches in the barrios can be seen as a strategy for maximizing the values of respectability that govern much of everyday social life and interaction. Even if a convert's reason for joining is not explicitly instrumental, practicing Christianity and being a Pentecostal in the barrio means embodying the values of respectability.

Masculinity and the Evangelical Church

Here I have shown that because of Pentecostalism's association with the values of respectability, evangelical Christian culture is set in opposition to an aspect of Dominican (male) culture – that of *tigueraje* – and thus, an aspect of Dominican male culture more generally. This does not mean that Evangelicals do not compete in masculine contests over prestige and respect. They do so, but tend to draw on hegemonic forms of masculinity rooted in respectability.

It is not insignificant that terms like *varón*, which are used as titles of respect, invoke gendered categories that emphasize, particularly in the case of *varón*, masculinity and/or maleness. This is tied to the respect with which the term is extended to Christians. I am reminded of a bachata song by Aridia Ventura, one of the first great *bachateras*. In the chorus of “*Tu No Eres Varón*,” (‘You are not a *varón*’) a song in which she rebukes a former lover, she states confidently, “*Tengo que decirte, busco hombre macho, y tu no eres varón*” (‘I’m looking for a macho man, and you are not a *varón*’). She equates *macho* with *varón*, *macho* meaning ‘male’ or ‘manly’ (from ‘male animal’). In Aridia’s song she calls out a man who is an irresponsible drunk; she has had enough of the delinquent lover and kicks him out of the house. What she wants is a *macho* man, *un hombre serio*, and her man was not this, not as she says, a *varón*. A lazy, cheating husband is not (cannot be) a *varón*. A real man does right by his woman. From this perspective, then, the term *varón* indexes a type of masculinity associated with respectable values, a type of masculinity that evangelical Christian men seek to fulfill. Pentecostals earn titles of reputation like *varón*, not by sleeping with numerous women or fathering many children, but rather by living up to the ideals and values of respectability like responsibility, dependability, and reliability.

The term *varón* is not reserved for Christians and is used as a title of familiarity, deference, or respect in the streets by friends and neighbors as well. Therefore, depending on the context, the term *varón* may be used to index two distinct types of masculine values, from those exemplified by the street, to those championed by respectability. Its use among Christians indicates that masculine ideals continue to

be important in the church and are validated even after conversion through terms of respect that invoke and feature masculinity.

Cristianismo and *tigueraje* represent alternative modes of being. A *cristiano* acts one way, and a *tiguere* another. However, both Christians and *tigueres* have and maintain similar social and material goals as a result of shared social and material environments. Both are motivated by cultural desires for monetary success, social prestige or respect, the support of friends and family, and to be effective in interpersonal relationships and business. Because of this, Christians and *tigueres* often share a similar style or “*flow*.” I mistakenly (or so I was told) thought that I had observed *cristianos* with *tigueraje*, mainly because they were charming flirts or because they ‘talked a big game’ and moved with swagger. What I saw, rather, was cultural competence that must be mastered and cultivated, not by *tigueres* alone, but by everyone, Christians included. Just because a man converts does not mean that the importance of his masculine identity disappears or that he no longer finds it necessary to compare himself to other males or compete for female favor and attention.

Being desirable to the opposite sex was one such goal of male barrio residents and displays of success or competency in this realm were highly valued. This was no different for evangelical men who, despite being told not to act on sexual desires, still prided themselves on looking good and being desirable to women. Most of the Pentecostal men that I knew would boast of how many more women were after them since they converted. Otherwise they would tell stories about how many different

women they had been with *before* converting; which, curiously I thought, performed the same rhetorical work as a *tiguere* declaring their own sexual conquests.

Pentecostal men see themselves as desirable to the opposite sex. Many Pentecostal men claim that since converting they are even more desirable because women like their clean clothes, the way they dress, and the way they act. They tend to see themselves as good hardworking Christian men who women can rely on and who women desire as ideal husbands. Pastor Ramón boasted to me one day that women were constantly throwing themselves at him and that he has had to be careful because he often elicits the contempt of jealous husbands.

Certain activities in the church allow for men to perform masculinity in ways that challenge and yet at times may even acquiesce to the values of the street and reputation. Included in the vast array of expressive skills that contribute to a man's prestige are musical ability, learning and erudition, verbal prowess, sexual conquest, and cultural competence. Men can earn renown (*fama*) within the church and evangelical circles through their mastery of bible quotes, lectures, preaching, *consejos*, healing, intercessions, evangelizing, singing ability, and mastery of instruments (particularly drums). A believer's prestige may be judged by how well he is known around town, how often he is asked to preach at other churches, and how frequently he is invited to evangelize in places like prisons and hospitals.

A man's virility, an aspect of machismo, may be read in terms of one's energy or *animo* as demonstrated during *cultos* and other church events. Young men, and consistently the available and unmarried ones, tended to be the loudest, most

boisterous, and most engaged individuals at any given *culto* at both IEP and IdD. Héctor, José Luis, and Radames were consistently the most animated during *cultos* at IEP; and at IdD, male members of the *sociedad de jóvenes* also tended to be the most animated particularly Pedro, Diego, Flaco, Miguelito, and Renato. I asked Héctor why he was so much more active than other congregants and he said to me:

I have gone to congregations that look at me and say “this guy has so much spirit. Why am I not like that?” One night José Luis and I went to a vigil and we got a lot of attention. It lasted until the dawn and we never sat down from when we arrived to when we left.

The emphasis here on energy and vigorous endurance is likely a way in which to display desirable masculine (sexual) traits. In recounting the story, Héctor suggests that observers admired their ‘spirit’ asking why they were not like that themselves. They “got a lot of attention,” something that can lead to meeting eligible girls at other churches as well as adding to their reputation around town as firmly religious men. As Wade has pointed out for elsewhere in the Caribbean (1973: 150), virility is more than sexual potency alone, it also includes charisma to attract women, and it is on this foundation that a man’s reputation and respect rests. Pentecostal men, like those in ‘the world’, participate in, or at least keep tabs on, precisely this score.

Verbal prowess, cultural competence, and the ability to ‘emerge well from any situation’ (Krohn-Hansen 1996: 126) are individual attributes that are valued in *tígueres*. These same attributes are also valued by *crístianos* and are both validated and cultivated in the context of the church through outlets like preaching, giving testimony, evangelizing and giving *consejos*. The fact that one gains more prestige the greater his transformation in Christ, reflects the cultural significance of ‘making it

against all odds' and succeeding despite difficult circumstances. Conversion represents the ultimate triumph of individual will over adversity and thus is viewed not as man's defeat or surrender to feminine values but rather the fulfillment of autonomy and therefore the achievement of (hegemonic) masculinity.

Popularity among Men

Although some of my informants suggested to me that women were more involved in Pentecostal congregations generally, I regularly observed men outnumber women during *cultos* (this was repeatedly the case at IEP). Furthermore, their participation was frequently the most central and, particularly at IEP, sermons often focused on topics that were directed solely toward men. A typical scene at IEP reveals intense and active participation by men and infrequent, passive participation of women. IEP, it would seem, had chosen to focus their efforts on the education and evangelization of young men. The annual banquet on January 1st is almost exclusively put on for men and men are the ones who are taken from the streets, bars, and parks and brought to the special event. The significant numerical and qualitative participation of young men in both IEP and IdD was remarkable and somewhat unique.

While the comparative literature on Pentecostalism in Latin America suggests a marked appeal for women, this has not been observed universally in the Caribbean. According to Mintz's observations of Cañamelar, a rural town in Puerto Rico, "The majority of both the barrio and the municipio congregations is male, and it is mainly to men that the appeals of the Pentecostals seems directed. Presumably women rarely

drink, smoke, or fornicate so that the process of repentance would be less full and rewarding for them than for their husbands. What is more, the public confession of sins committed is almost impossible in local terms for women but is culturally permissible for men” (Mintz 1966: 409). This was certainly true in Villa where men were rewarded with prestige and respect for having the greatest conversion testimonies, where the more perverse and debauched one’s previous life the better. On the other hand, women infrequently if ever gave testimony of infidelity, prostitution, or excessive alcoholism, and had little to gain if they did. That I never heard such testimonies points to the difference in the social symbolic value of male and female testimonies (and says just as much about gender differences in the Dominican Republic).

Women could earn respect and prestige through testimony, but they were earned under different circumstances and typically drew from gendered ideas about recklessness and debauchery (and were given in the context of male approval) such as: being insolent wives, coquets, neurotic or hysterical women, or misguided witches (but rarely devious temptresses, lecherous or promiscuous women, or drunkards). This in fact was how Josefina understood her conversion: she went from having what she described as a “strong character” and always in a “hysterical condition,” frequently “enraged” and “always fighting” with her husband Denny, to being calm, collected, and forgiving. It is quite interesting in fact that women were less likely to elaborate or embellish the sins of their lives before conversion. This was the opposite for men who were rewarded with prestige the greater and more fantastic their

transformation. Women tended to discuss how much better their lives were *after* conversion rather than emphasizing or elaborating on how bad their lives were before. Men, in contrast, tended to exaggerate the wickedness of their previous lives in order to emphasize their transformation as truly remarkable.

Claiming Hegemonic Masculinity for the Masses

According to Matthew Gutmann, work and financially supporting one's family are central defining features of hegemonic masculinities throughout the Americas (Gutmann 2003: 13). The increasing inability of 'lower-class' males to fulfill the role of 'provider' and thus make persuasive demands on their wives and to deflect objections and criticisms from their domestic partners, represents a present and diffuse threat to male authority in the household. Pentecostal men, in assuming an evangelical identity, are enabled by the church to claim status and authority over the family with the backing of the church. Despite being without a job or money, Pentecostal men can still assume to be respected as head of the household and expect deference and utter compliance from their wives.

What has been described as the 'crisis' of masculinity facing Caribbean men today is the result of structural changes that have transformed traditional gender roles and identities in the region (see Lewis 1990, 2004). In the context of the increasing feminization of work (as seen in export manufacturing and the proliferation of service industry jobs), the loss of formal-sector employment and the increasing inability of men to find regular and stable paying jobs, it continues to be increasingly difficult for

poor men to meet cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Lewis (2004: 251-252) describes this 'crisis' as both economic and social:

The economic crisis is the result of global restructuring of capitalism which has the effect of reducing and displacing significant segments of the labor force and engendering fear and insecurity among workers. The social crisis is related to the problems experienced in civil society, itself the product, at least in part, of the economic restructuring. Here, unemployment coupled with bleak prospects of future work, dwindling chances of realizing the goal of home ownership, for example, and a growing recognition of one's powerlessness to control one's own social reproduction, among other things, have tended to dislocate familiar gender roles for men, leaving them groping for ways to negotiate this new territory.

Lewis's observations are stimulating and lead us to ask what mechanisms exist in Dominican society for men to cope with this purported crisis. It would seem that the church as well as youth gangs offer men strategies to combat this loss of power and provide them with the symbolic tools to respond in productive ways to the systemic marginalization that has accompanied relatively recent economic restructuring.

A move to Pentecostalism allows men to (re)claim control of the domestic sphere. By joining a congregation men may claim their position as the head of the household with the support of the church. In the context of vanishing traditional formal-sector labor and the potentially emasculating effects of not being the primary income earner, men in recent decades may have used the doctrine of the church to their advantage in order to claim authority over women at the home. Conversion is frequently about claiming respect at home, not just in the streets.

Christianity, as discussed earlier, offers an alternative means of accessing social capital in the barrio. Conversion to Christianity allows young men to claim

another form of masculinity, one that is rooted in respectability and is valued today in a variety of contexts and locales. In claiming the hegemonic form of masculinity, poor evangelical males contest established hierarchies of maleness, particularly those related to wealth and the ability to purchase prestige by acquiring commodities with social capital (cars, homes, clothes, etc.). *Cristianos* must earn their prestige, just as everyone else who lacks financial resources must. If successful, evangelical men become respected men, *varones*, *hombres serios*, accorded respect and deference where applicable, the affection of women, and the admiration of other men.

Evangelical membership allows men to make certain demands of sexual exclusivity on their partners and reasonably expect that they should be faithful (assuming they are Evangelical as well).

While Pentecostals still face the same challenges of unemployment and poverty as others, they are encouraged to find work when and where possible and are often assisted by the extended social network of the church. Money that might otherwise be spent outside of the home is channeled back in to support the family. As such, Pentecostal men are frequently seen as responsible and supportive spouses because they do not squander important resources in pursuing reputation values in the street. Their relative prosperity and respectable status, as evaluated by their marital status, possessions, employment, and fulfillment of social obligations, becomes the hegemonic alternative with which to measure a man's worth in the barrio.

CONCLUSION

Pentecostalism and Social Order in the Barrio

I have been concerned here to draw attention to fundamental underlying principles of social and moral importance to Dominicans in the barrios and the webs of signification that articulate important social processes in everyday barrio life. Dominant dimensions of social organization in the barrio are the alternative worlds of order and discipline (*el serio*) and of disorder, freedom and play (*el relajo*). These divisions operate in constant opposition and reflect the value systems of the home and church (*la casa* and *el evangelio*) versus those of the street (*la calle* and *el tigueraje*) respectively. *El serio* and *el relajo* represent alternative modes of being and becoming within the structured social and cosmological orders of the barrio. These two modes, opposed and complementary, work in conjunction with one another setting the conditions of social stability while presenting the range of human possibility in the barrio through contrasting binary opposites.

These two dimensions of social order represent distinct types of relationality, or ways of relating to the world and others in it. Pentecostalism offers a teleological and ‘serious’ orientation to the world and is unambiguously situated at one end of this binary scale characterized by discipline and reflecting dominant forms of social value and order like respectability, responsibility, and the primacy of the nuclear family. On the other end are oppositional and/or incompatible orientations and practices represented by *el relajo* and the values of the street, the gangs, the playful/non-serious

behaviors of *tigueres*, ambiguous conceptions of the demonic, and the religious practices of so-called Dominican *vodú* (to name only a few).

Abrahams has remarked about similar communities of the Caribbean that “the oppositions between such forces as good and evil, men and women, reputation and respectability, even life and death, are never played out to any sort of resolution. Rather such oppositions are seen to be the essence of life, and their enactment through dramatization can have no real conclusion, only temporary states of truce through a balancing of these contrarities” (Abrahams in the Forward to *The Windward of the Land* by Jane Beck, 1979).

While Afro-Dominican religious practices may represent one pole on this binary scale, and evangelical Christianity another (or the gangs on one hand, and domestic life on the other), the average person may move back and forth between these poles, going from a *brujo* one day to an exorcism in the Pentecostal church the next. Just as people tend to negotiate both divisions of society – *el relajo* and *el serio*, reputation and respectability, dominant and alternative modes of masculinity – one is neither solely nor exclusively a subject of one or the other, but implicated in both. Barrio residents are the subjects of both possibilities and they derive meaning in relation to the co-existence and interrelationship of both spheres. At the same time these spheres are kept separate – one cannot be both in a gang and a member of the Pentecostal church; one cannot be a *brujo* and go to the Evangelical church.

The tension that exists between both spheres of relationality finds expression in the uneasy cooperation and at times antagonistic relationship between the church and

the cult house, the congregation and the *naciones*, the saints and the spirits/*seres*, the pastor and the *brujo*, the *cristiano* and the *tiguere*. But it is in this relationship of tension, where we would expect to see violent division, discontinuity and conflict, that we see, rather ironically, continuity and harmony, renewal and agreement.

Just as the only way out of service to the *seres* is evangelical Christianity, the only way out of service to the gang is conversion. In this way evangelical Christianity has succeeded in representing something altogether different from those spheres of activity associated with *la calle* and has demonstrated complete and utter incompatibility with such domains. At the same time conversion means a ‘stepping out of’ certain social and symbolic relationships, it involves assuming and stepping into a series of other, equally binding social relationships embedded, in this case, in local hierarchical orders of meaning. Conversion represents a withdrawal from a defined social role into another defined social role – a change of perspective and a relational change, but well within established and defined categories of behavior and orientation and therefore, not a stepping out of social structure or the dominant order of things but a reintegration with it. Pentecostals withdraw from ‘the world’ not so much to leave it but to critique it. They wish to reposition themselves in order to articulate new representations of themselves as effectual and valuable beings, enabling them to be critical of local culture, social practices, and interpersonal relationships. The disjunction and discontinuity that Pentecostals achieve is realized at the individual and interpersonal level where they are able to claim new modalities of personhood, albeit within the authorized social world.

No matter what one's orientation or leanings in the barrio, he or she is subject to a moral order that pushes and pulls at the individual in either direction. It would seem that both sides have agreed to disagree: Pentecostals assuming a role and social location antagonistic to the values of the street and the propositions of popular spirit veneration in the neighborhoods, but never reaching outright conflict. The barrio is small and strained relations threaten the harmony of everyday life. The separate spheres dividing social life are never allowed to cross entirely and so never allowed to reach a point of devastating conflict, upsetting the balance of a relatively tidy (if contradictory) moral order.

Conflict is frequently played out symbolically as in the imaginary/symbolic 'spiritual warfare' between the church and some defined evil, be that a *brujo* next door or a cunning she-devil in the church. Tension within a divided social system can be seen in the curious ambivalence of gang members with regard to violence and their simultaneous declaration of the primacy of God and Christianity. This paradoxical position is indicative of a social system with divided claims. We can see a similar relationship obtaining in the symbology of local spirits, between the *seres* and the saints. Both the duality and moral ambiguity inhering in the spirits themselves (representing both dominant Catholic and African/Haitian identities) is in part representative of this divide and indicative of moral uncertainty. Their capacity to perform (be?) both good and evil, their dual identities as saints and *luases*, their ability to both harm and heal is a product of this tension. That people who claim to have *demonios* avoid going to the church because they fear that simply being there will

cause the demons to manifest is also an example of this conflict and reiterates the incompatibility of the two spheres. We can also see this tension in the anxiety aroused in Pentecostals who go near or enter places deemed prohibited, such as ceremonies for the spirits, *colmados*, and *discotecas*. That people vomit *resguardos* upon conversion to the church; that people cannot be both *tígueres* and *cristianos*; that people do not joke or play around with things of God; that Christians must stay away from the contamination of spiritually unclean places; that Christians must remain close to God so that Satan does not enter their lives; all demonstrate an uneasy yet productive tension between contradictory moral domains.

My informants and others have maintained that being a *cristiano* in the barrios is not easy. Converts are constantly struggling to meet the demands of the church and to live up to the rules of the congregation while constantly being pulled in the opposite direction by the desires and trappings of ‘the world’. The anxiety related to transgressing the boundaries of the church are significant, as we have seen, with people choosing to leave the church rather than stay and live a ‘double life’. Those who live double lives, the ‘fake’ Christian, or, like the deviant and transgressive Pentecostal portrayed in the film *Cristiano de la Secreta*, the guilt is consuming and the pressure to conform to the dominant moral order overpowering.

The division is as productive as it is provocative. Such an organization of relations bears a clear message to members of the barrio: “If you’re going to act like this, do so here and during these times” and “If you’re going to claim this, do so within the context of this, and only this.” Thus, the dominant dimensions of social

order in the barrio are not just restrictive, they are prescriptive and determine how social interaction and social process will proceed.

Even where arguments or direct confrontation do occur, such conflicts proceed within an established order without questioning or destabilizing the order itself. In fact it confirms that order because the divisions are never resolved (or dissolved). The conflicts that do occur often have everything to do with power and authority but never the disillusion of power and authority. In the context of the exorcism in Pentecostal churches, for example, congregants are brought into direct conflict with the opposing perspective in the form of a demon. While the demon may be expunged, the threat of reappropriation or repossession remains. The devil himself is never defeated but locked in an eternal spiritual war with Christ. While some maintain and remain in the church after conversion, others succumb to 'the world' and return to *la calle*.

As we have seen, the dominant divisions in society are both reflected in and reflective of the religious sphere. Within the politics of religious identity we have seen the expression of tension and conflict between opposing moral spheres as well as an attempt to manage this uncertainty through both religious and secular means. Individual believers navigate the moral order in strategic ways and are the product as much as they are the producers of this order. One strategy of barrio residents has been to embody and fulfill one or the other dominant values, in some cases to the fullest by joining the church or a gang in order to claim relative social rewards by most exemplifying the goals and projects of either domain.

In the barrio, religious belief gives way to a series of moral positions represented by religious affiliation and membership. One's chosen position in relation to others becomes a significant choice in determining how one will interact with and regard his or her neighbors and how they in turn will relate to him or her. Religious difference then, in the context of Villa, the Dominican Republic, is less about conflict and existential disagreement and has more to do with social positioning, strategic relationality, and ways of playing with and within the strictures of social/moral order. Cultural competence in this regard provides significant social rewards: prestige, privilege, and respect. The ability to navigate and exploit the system is rewarded, whether you choose to do so as a *cristiano*, a *tíguere*, a *brujo*, or as someone in between.

Recalling from the introduction of this dissertation, a recent study of the Dominican worldview found that 80.4% of the Dominican population sees Dominican politics as a battle between good and evil. The tendency to divide social life into two opposing moral values, to perceive reality in terms of good and evil, is indicative of a deep and pervasive 'Christian' worldview. This sentiment has been embraced and elaborated by Evangelicals in the country and represents a profound orientation toward binary models of perception and explanation.

Also, at the beginning of this dissertation, I introduced Villa as both *un pueblo caliente* and *el pueblo profético*. This division represents two perspectives on life in Villa and both are rooted in this historical dialectic. Both are accurate insofar as they

describe real aspects of barrio life and both say something about meaning, sentiment, and everyday life for Altagracianos. While reflecting the dominant moral orders of the barrio, both recruit, with varying degrees of success, the participation and fidelity of barrio youths.

Pentecostalism in the Dominican Republic

Because the moral order itself is based on Christian propositions, it seems to make sense that evangelical forms of Christianity have been able to adapt and find space within the moral and religious economy of the country. Despite forecasts of great social upheaval or transformation, 60 years of evangelical growth in the Dominican Republic may have changed the way the local game is played, so to speak, it has not overturned the game itself.

Other observers have noted that rather than denying outright or eliminating traditional beliefs, Pentecostalism, where it has found particular success, preserves those beliefs and in some cases gives them more power. In places around the world where modern industrialization and urbanization threaten traditional beliefs and values, the Pentecostal church while promoting orientations compatible with modern individualism, at the same time reinvigorates traditional folk beliefs by validating their power even as they redefine them as demonic and evil (Meyer 1999). In Villa and throughout the Dominican Republic, the Pentecostal church has not eradicated the spirits, only made them demonic, and in some cases this has made them more powerful as a result.

It is significant, I think, that the Pentecostal church in the Dominican Republic is not generally regarded as a foreign institution but rather as a local one (compare with Haiti [Hurbon 2001a], Jamaica [Wedenoja 1980, Austin-Broos 2001, 1997], and Trinidad [Glazier 1980a]). This confirms for believers a sense of authentic Christian practice. In the barrios there is only one ‘real’ Christianity, one ‘true’ and ‘pure’ Christianity that is represented or thought to be exemplified by the Pentecostal or Evangelical church. This general sense of Christianity, broadly, is not foreign but universal, and as such, thought to be as Dominican as it is American, Japanese, or Spanish, at least from the perspective of believers. Pentecostals are seen as ‘true Christians’ (*cristianos de verdad*), representatives of God on earth, and divine authorities, as long as they are able to demonstrate to others a certain level of seriousness and fidelity to Christian doctrine.

The powerful history of the Catholic Church is responsible for laying the possibilities of this realization. Only where Christianity finds respect throughout society at all levels of culture and social organization would this possible. It also shows convincingly the capacity of Pentecostal forms of evangelical Christianity not only to become local and significant, but also to successfully represent ‘true’ Christianity in a country that has claimed Catholicism proudly as its historical and cultural progenitor for hundreds of years.

Pentecostalism just makes sense in the Dominican Republic – and it makes sense to believers and others who accept the propositions of the church as the legitimate authorities on Christian spirituality. Dominicans easily accepted the severe

Manichean division of life because it already existed (the framework for which laid long ago by Catholicism); it was already a familiar dichotomy. Pentecostalism moved right into the spaces provided by an already divided social structure, taking up the banner of respectability with a vengeance and casting the values of the street (once again) as demonic, evil, and/or 'this worldly'. In positioning themselves firmly within the paradigm of respectability and in opposition to the streets, the church allows members to claim respectable status in a local context where respectability is difficult to attain and has historically been denied to the popular classes.

Evangelical modes of identity construction and differentiation relate to the production of new forms of sociality. Christianity is learned, negotiated and performed within a specific context and economy of morality in the barrios where prestige and respect may be earned through compliance with the standards of respectable behavior. If successful, converts from the popular classes are able to claim for themselves a measure of social status while contesting negative stereotypes and ascribed social identities.

The ability to completely transform one's own identity or status amongst one's peers is quite remarkable. Considering the prescriptive and sometimes debilitating outcomes imposed identities can have on the poor and marginal in society, there really are very few opportunities to change one's social circumstance and status. Class is a powerful social divider and the division of labor in the Dominican Republic is such that few can access the resources (socially, culturally, politically, or economically) necessary to move up the social ladder. Many dreams are built (and dashed) on the

hope of playing professional baseball in the U.S. because it represents one of the only familiar ways that poor Dominicans have to exchange a life of poverty for considerable economic prosperity. Women are often cajoled and/or manipulated into various forms of prostitution as a way out of rural poverty. The options, it seems, are bleak for both men and women.

It should come as no surprise by now that Pentecostalism reflects class divisions and finds most of its popularity among the poor and popular classes. In fact, most of the vocal resistance to the growth of Pentecostalism in the country comes from Catholic authorities and the elite who perhaps see a challenge (if not, a threat) in 'common' people's claims to specialized religious authority, knowledge, skill, power and expertise in the name of Jesus and Christianity.

Like gangs, the church also functions as an alternative or intra-national association. Not only do church members imagine themselves to be members of a universal brotherhood of Christ, members of a transcendent citizenship of the world united in spiritual equality with like Christians all over the planet, but also they see themselves as promoting a specific plan for the future of the nation (in fact ultimately, the world). This spiritual or Christian 'citizenship' takes precedent over all other political affiliations and the laws of Christ are thought to be greater than any other earthly rule or dictum. In this scenario, church members are responsible for the salvation of the planet and the fate of earthly souls resides in the hands of each and every congregant in the church. Members of the church may be poor and politically insignificant or ineffectual in their daily lives, particularly with regard to the state and

political process, as Pentecostals they play what they understand to be a pivotal role in the cosmic future of humanity.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Pentecostal churches play an important role in the barrio for non-Christian residents who seek healing, prayer, and advice about a range of issues and problems. This role is taken seriously by members of the church who see themselves as vital agents of peace in the neighborhood. This has encouraged a number of members of the church to take up important positions within neighborhood councils called '*la junta de vecinos*' as well as unofficial roles as spiritual guides and mentors. According to Juan Pablo who along with Denny (the president of the *junta*) is a member of the neighborhood council, they are empowered to take action when or if they observe something of detriment (such as drug sales and distribution sites) occurring in the neighborhood. Juan Pablo believed that others trusted Christians with positions in the council because they could be trusted and were seen as responsible leaders in the neighborhood.

The emphasis Pentecostals put on practices of differentiation (prohibition, testimony, sanctity), is revelatory of a local politics of distinction. The debate over difference gives way to an economy of trust, prestige, and respect that is negotiated in the public sphere. Whether *cristianos* are trustworthy or not is beside the point, rather, the crucial point is whether or not that they are thought to be so. If an individual is given the deference accorded a 'true Christian' they are expected to act in accordance with the rules and expectations there of. Should this trust be challenged, put into question by dubious behavior, mechanisms are in place to sanction the offender.

Pentecostal discourse creates new categories of difference (such as believer/non-believer, sanctified/unsanctified) that draw on existing moral divisions extant in Dominican culture and hyper-cognizes them: makes them super-visible and elaborates those differences in new ways. The gang member or the *tiguere* become sinners, or rather, sinners in need of saving. So much so that this has become an integral part of gang life and affiliation, the ultimate resolution of the violent freedom one enjoys on the streets becomes the disciplined rule bound church and obligations and responsibilities to one's family and local community.

The sacralization of identity, evidenced here by public regard for Christian sanctity and authority, is established through signifying acts that articulate differentiation and distinction. Public recognition of this sacralization is a constant negotiation with *cristianos* insisting on their own sanctity and convincing others of it, and others validating or challenging such claims. The gangs in Villa and elsewhere throughout the country seem to validate them.

Respect is a central trope in the moral economy of masculinity, social capital, and negotiations over spiritual authority in the neighborhood. Through the idiom of respect gang members, *tigueres* and *cristianos* nurture a relationship of mutual aid and attempt to negotiate prestige and social approval within the strictures of a social order with divided claims. Respect is central to the maintenance of important status negotiations over reputation. Earning respect is so central because it means social prestige and access to social rewards like trust and positive renown. Respect is a commodity with social value that is attainable to anyone, including the poor. Respect

is a form of prestige and can be obtained in various ways. People can gain this prestige through their association with and participation in both gangs and the church. The respect they gain is different but similar. Each corresponds to a different moral orientation within a bifurcated moral order and is evaluated differently. Both have social value but different outcomes. Both must be earned or won rather than bought or inherited. One cannot earn the same kinds of respect in a gang as you can in the church, and vice versa. In order to earn respect in the streets one must violate or contradict the values of the home and the church. In order to earn respect in the church one must violate or contradict the values of the street. Neither sphere of action would be very useful in promoting prestige and respect if these divisions were blurred so they are defended and maintained with passion and at various different levels and in myriad ways.

I have endeavored here to explain the simultaneous popularity of both gangs and the church for urban youth in barrio settings. While both youth gangs and the church are products of important transnational and global processes, they both offer realistic options at the local level for social communion, autonomy, agency, and self-determination. Functioning as surrogate families for barrio youth, both institutions offer alternatives to unstable or ineffectual families, local governments, and/or disaffected communities. Both represent examples of local youth responses to the dislocations and discontents of social, political, and economic marginalization and uncertainty where the promises of modernity and neoliberal democracy have not been fulfilled for most of Latin American and Caribbean peoples. Both institutions feature

prominently in the barrio and represent two clearly lit paths for self-actualization at the local level.

In many ways both institutions are diametrically opposed, however, both have developed a coexistence that is reciprocal, entrenched, and meaningful in urban barrios. I explored the centrality of Christian discourse in the context of local youth gangs and the respect with which they accord both Christians and evangelical Christianity in the streets. I explained why, for example, in the Dominican Republic, membership in a *nación* is for life – unless one converts to evangelical Christianity. In so doing, I showed the unique ways in which originally foreign institutions like the Pentecostal Church and the youth gang the Trinitarios have become ‘indigenized’ or transformed in unique ways to meet local expectations, needs, and cultural desires. Because both institutions have enjoyed a relative spike in popularity over the past couple of decades, and because both represent important features of cultural globalization and processes of transnationalism, they provide a unique lens for analyzing local responses and adaptations to cultural change in the Caribbean and beyond.

Negotiating Space, Place, and Identity

Space is intimately tied to identity. Both *la casa* and *la calle* and the associated values of each are deeply embedded in the moral ecology of the barrio. Certain behaviors are acceptable in certain areas and not in others. Dominoes, drinking, flirting/catcalling, and boastful chatter, for instance, are reserved for the street, bars, and pool halls. Such spaces are associated with masculine values

championed by the iconic cultural figure of the Dominican *tiguere*. Space is connected to popular religious devotion as well and reflects similar symbolic divisions between inside/outside, and orthodox conceptions of good/evil. For example, every February the streets become the domain of carnival bands made up of *diablos* (devils) in several towns and cities across the country. The activities and behaviors of the wild and exuberant festivals are reserved for the street and do not breach the sanctity of the home (or church). A similar division was observed by Abrahams (1983: 100) on St. Vincent where carnival is considered “the Devil’s holiday” and must be kept “on the road” because it represents an overt threat to the social order represented by “the yard” or home.

The Latin root of the Spanish term *carnaval* is *carnis/caro* meaning ‘flesh’ and *lavare* meaning ‘to lighten’, or ‘to raise’. Historically, carnival has been celebrated immediately before Lent when Christians are expected to spend the following 40 days devoted to fasting, abstinence, and penitence. The excess and celebration of carnival stands in stark contrast to the modest reserve of evangelical Christians who renounce ‘the pleasures of the flesh’ in favor of ‘the gifts of the spirit’. Of course, while Christian identity is associated with restraint, modesty, seriousness, order and control, *carnaval* represents the opposite: uninhibited, licentious frivolity that mocks, inverts, and plays with social normativity and order.

In Villa the politics of place is in fact, a politics of identity. Where you go and with what areas you are associated are directly connected with the way in which the public sees you. The denotation of *gente de la calle* and *en la calle* as personal

descriptors is indicative of this, as is the term *hermano/hermana* to refer to Christians, a term that invokes family and kinship, an extension of the home.

Space and proximity may at anytime become contentious. Those values of *la calle* and the public sphere may clash with those of *la casa* and the private sphere if crossed. However, public space is shared, for the most part, and respect is shown for the place of others. *Cristianos* do not hang out at the park at the center of town where *tigueros*, gang members, and just about everyone else seems to hang out. They do not go to the yearly festivals and ceremonies for the spirits and/or saints and do not participate in *carnaval*.¹ They do not go to the *colmadones* to drink and listen to music. In avoiding such places they do not often find themselves in antagonistic encounters with others who do frequent such places.

Cristianos and gang members inhabit different yet complementary social worlds. They are not antagonistic to one another, in part, because they inhabit different public spaces and represent alternative moral positions. *Cristianos* do not go to bars, clubs, *discotecas*, etc. They do not ‘hang out in the streets’, ‘*andar en la calle*’, and as such, do not represent a threat or competition to gangs. The transgression of these boundaries represents, as I have shown, a threat to social order. Just as the streets are not allowed in the home, so to speak, neither are the values of the church or home allowed to interfere or impinge on those of the street.

Cristianos and others do, however, engage each other in the streets from time to time and in particular, public transportation as well as places of work. It is most

¹ Incidentally, while Villa did not have its own carnival celebration it was the site of *gagá* processions during the four days leading up to Easter.

often in contexts such as these where the boundaries of territory are less marked where conflict may arise. Public space is a field for negotiating this boundary, a theater for identity performance, critique, and positioning. Pentecostals hold large *campañás* in front of *colmados* and in the center of town. They throw feasts in the roads of neighborhoods to draw attention to their activities. They preach in the streets and give consultations on the corners. *Gagá* ceremonies bring Haitian and African-derived religion into the public sphere. They parade down the streets at times attracting crowds of close to a hundred people.

This contest over space is not limited to area alone, secular *colmados* take dominion over the local soundscapes by booming music through loudspeakers that carry sound throughout the neighborhood. Local Pentecostal services are frequently amplified through a microphone and speakers are placed outside of the church from time to time in order to share the music and message with the barrio. Pentecostal services are at times raucous affairs so loud and energetic that one can hear the festivities from a distance. It is no surprise that some refer to Pentecostals as *los bullosos* or ‘noisy people’ (from *bullá*, ‘noise’). Similarly, when the *gagá* festival hits the streets in February with singing and dancing with drums, horns and other instruments in tow, their presence cannot be ignored. *El gagá* derives from the Haitian term *rará*, which Yonker (1988: 151) suggests comes from the Yoruba word meaning ‘noisily’ or ‘loudly’.

In 2009 I followed two different *gagá* bands, one of which boarded the night in Lechería, a *batey* on the outskirts of Villa. Around nine o’clock at night the *gagá*

band, *Gagá* Apolinar from Mata Mamón, arrived with 40 or 50 followers in a number of buses. The festivities dominated in sight and sound the small *batey* that is no larger than a small city block. The only other event occurring that evening was a Pentecostal service in the small local church. The cult house and lawn where the activities and rituals of the *gagá* coalesced was little more than a few houses away from the church: they stood nearly back-to-back on the small settlement.

While that evening both competed for public attention, there was no open conflict between either group that night and both carried on with their services without so much as a complaint, as far as I could observe. There was no one at the local *colmado* that evening. Residents stayed at home, attended the service at the church, or joined the festivities of the *gagá*, which went into the early hours of the following morning.

Speaking, Language, and Oratory

It is interesting, for a variety of reasons, that the act of speaking, and oratory in particular, plays such a central role in the church and Christian practice in Villa. Preaching, prayer, testimony, *consultorios*, singing, speaking in tongues, prophesying, are perhaps the most important ritualized activities of the church and all of them are centrally, that is first and foremost, about the spoken word. Amongst the church community, competence and skill at any such activity is highly regarded. The most successful and respected members of the church tend to be the one's who have the most linguistic skill. The greatest evangelists are those who have mastered the art of oratory and rhetoric. One's mastery of language is ultimately tied to one's mastery of

‘the Word’ as pastors and preachers are expected to recite bible verses from memory and relate stories and biblical anecdotes to any situation. The same is demanded of regular church members who are expected to ‘speak the word’ with non-believers.

There is, in the Dominican Republic and throughout the Caribbean, a cultural emphasis, an aesthetic ideal, on linguistic competence and performance. In fact deftness of expression and one’s ability to manipulate language is highly regarded and rewarded. According to some observers (see Abrahams 1983), linguistic performance is an integral part of African American expressive cultures in the Caribbean and beyond. Scholars have suggested that this value (or aesthetic) is part of a larger cultural trend in African American verbal/oral cultures (perhaps stemming from African oral traditions) and can be seen in cultural forms as diverse as liming, hip-hop and rap, dancehall deejaying, Rastafarian speech, and ‘playing the dozens’.

The successful Christian, like the *tiguere*, has a way with words. The insatiable preacher, the successful and convincing evangelist, and the cunning *tiguere* rely on their linguistic abilities to accomplish their respective goals. It should be no surprise that those who once excelled in oratory in the streets (as gang leaders, for example) now excel in the church as preachers and evangelists.

Language, because of its power, then, can also be dangerous. Some, for example, considered gossip and ‘murmur’ explicitly evil along with spells and incantations. Words could be contaminating and polluting too – this was the main reason behind the Pentecostal prohibition on genres of music that discuss sex and/or violence. Of course, words can be dangerous in the form of spells or in the conjuring

of spirits as well. Words are the primary vehicle used by pastors in the church to conduct exorcisms and cast out evil spirits. The devil must be rebuked verbally in the event that his name is spoken so that he not suddenly appear. Words, in this case, are powerful and language can be used to highlight, express, and promote a particular identity project. It is through words that the evangelist incites conversion and through words that one accepts the call. Speaking well is a virtue esteemed in the church and rewarded with prestige.

The Caribbean and the Dominican Republic

Similarities between social systems across the Caribbean reflect a common history of slavery and forced labor and the dominance of the plantation economy. When comparing rural Caribbean peoples Mintz (1974: 226) sees cultural homogeneity, noting that “[while] the Jamaican people speak one language, the Haitian people another, and the Puerto Ricans a third is plainly due to the respective metropolitan cultures to which their people were subject, rather than to any general feature of economic history, or to any contemporary difference in rural life-style.” The division between scholarship across the Caribbean has tended to follow linguistic categories. This is perhaps a mistake considering the deep and far-reaching similarities socially and historically across the islands. Here, for example, with regard to the relation between values of the *la calle*/street and *la casa*/home, the dialectic appears to be operative in many similar ways across the Caribbean.

I would like to suggest, based on much of the data and evidence presented here, that far more comparative work within the Caribbean and across islands would

be of great intellectual benefit to the sociology, anthropology, and the comparative histories of these societies. Studying popular movements like Pentecostalism across the Caribbean may represent exactly the type of cross-regional studies that are needed to bridge this intellectual divide.

Creating Conditions of Conversion: Making Christian Subjects

Of course, religion is not just about identity and evangelical Christianity not just about a transformation of identity, but it requires a certain identification of the self in order to come to one or another religion. In order to convert, one has to see oneself as a particular kind of person – that is, the kind of person that converts or ‘needs to be saved’. In order to be interpellated, or ‘hailed’ as it were, one has to see oneself as a particular kind of person. Am I the kind of person that converts? That needs to be saved? These are questions that are fundamentally organized around where one locates oneself in the world and how one sees oneself in relation to others.

The success of religious institutions in the barrio requires a particular type of subjectivity, a condition of possibility engendered by the specific social, institutional and cultural matrix in which people live. Personally I have certain understandings and experiences that make it unlikely that I will convert, be possessed by a spirit, cursed or healed by magic. However, for individuals in Villa, these options form real, meaningful possibilities in their day-to-day lives.

At the end of a *campana*, visitors are asked if they would like to come up to the front stage or microphone and accept Jesus Christ as their savior. What makes some people come forward? What makes some raise their hands and convert? Why

do some hear the message and understand that it was intended for them? People are set up or prepared, conditioned by a cultural script they learn from birth that defines the limits and contours of possibility for barrio residents. People are conditioned to respond to the call at a *campaña* long before they even step foot in such an event. They are interpellated even before the event comes around. Conversion represents a real possibility because the building blocks of this belief were already present all around. In almost every neighborhood there is a church, and in most families somewhere there is a *cristiano*. Put another way, for many if not most converts, the church, Christian morality, and God were implicit beliefs before even joining a congregation.

Angel, the local leader of the Trinitarios, for example, is almost certainly bound for conversion one day. Not only does he have multiple family members who are Pentecostal, he sees this as his only alternative to the current life he enjoys in the gang. For Angel and his friends, conversion is what people do – it is as common as any other social practice in the barrio.

In order to be possessed or to manifest spirits in the church one has to already be a subject of the spiritual world. In order to get sick with *seres* one has to at least subconsciously believe that one is susceptible to attack. After conversion, many converts come to reflect on their lives and interpret a precondition to accepting the message in terms of God ‘calling them’ or ‘communicating with them’ (*tratando*), as in ‘*Dios estaba tratando conmigo*’, literally, ‘God was *trying* with me’), even if they did not know it. “*Dios trata conmigo*” is a familiar way in which Pentecostals refer to

their inclination to convert and is an emic description of cultural push factors that incline people to join or not join the church. This seems always to be a reinterpretation of their pasts before conversion. Converts learn to understand later through sermons and *doctrina* that they came to the church because of God, not on their own accord.

Consider, for example, Juan Pablo explanation of what it means when '*Dios trata con alguien*':

What are you referring to when you say God had been '*tratando*' with you?

It's a little difficult to explain. You have to have had the experience. I had done everything in my life but there was something that I was missing. I felt uncomfortable. I didn't feel peace or tranquility. I say that was God was '*tratando*' with me because one begins to feel this restlessness, unhappiness, anxiety. It is because God is already opening a space in order for you permit him to enter your life... I want to explain something to you: God 'works with you' or 'calls you' [*trata con uno*] in different ways. It could be through dreams. Sometimes you dream that you are in a church; I dreamt that I was preaching. I dreamt that I was going to fall and someone came, a pastor... These are signals that God is '*tratando*' with a person.

As converts look back on their lives before conversion, they frequently reinterpret events in their past to confirm or support their newly adopted beliefs. This is one such example. However, such reinterpretation tends to take on a local flavor as dreams are frequently referenced as examples and authoritative illustrations of one's trajectory toward conversion. That dreams are a source of legitimate knowledge about the world is a common point of view in the barrio. So common in fact that at times Pastor Ramón would have to admonish his congregation not to take dreams so literally.

Regardless, dreams themselves provide material for understanding conversion as well as preconditioning individuals to receive the message.

Additionally, through discourses about God and Christianity, youth gangs create a kind of person that will see him or herself as needing to be saved. The gangs create evangelical Christians because it creates individuals who will answer the call of conversion and the hail of the evangelist. Ultimately, gang members begin to see themselves as people who need to be saved. This is accomplished by 'putting God first', maintaining and promoting a close and intimate relationship with the church, and building rules in to the laws of the gang that see Christianity as the only other option.

In the same way that gangs create evangelical Christians, the Pentecostal church, because of its collusion with a particular type of social structure and moral order, contributes to the possibility of a flourishing youth gang community. By embracing a conditional freedom apart from the church, gangs are able to take part in and exploit an alternative value system apart from that of the church. As long as those values and associated behaviors do not encroach upon the home, the church, or other spaces of respectability, they are able to flourish. It should not be surprising then that when you join a gang, you must move out of your natal household. According to Radames, who lived with other gang members after he joined the Trinitarios, a requirement to being in a gang is that you cannot live at home.

Both institutions are established in Villa and in particular the barrios. Both contribute to a cultural script that limits the horizon of possibilities for those who are

born in the neighborhoods. What a youngster does or decides to do in his free time is largely circumscribed by cultural institutions like the church, the bar, the streets, and the gangs. There are few elective identities made available to barrio residents: they are, for the most part, poor, unstably employed, under-educated people. They are, however, intelligent and quite practical, and, given the circumstances, imaginative, resourceful, and spectacularly keen. The church and gang represent cultural resources, as I have shown, to strategically maneuver within a limiting social structure and to claim agency and control over identity.

Dominican barrio culture establishes the conditions to accept the propositions of the church and religious field more generally. People join because they see themselves as subjects of the Christian call to conversion. While this is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient on its own to persuade conversion – only to predispose one to it. The other necessary condition required to be sufficient for conversion is the actuality of access and opportunity. Only if one finds oneself in a position to convert will one be inclined to convert. Evangelical churches are available and accessible at the local level and are a significant feature of the neighborhood. Not only are they established in virtually every barrio, but also they hold public events, *cultos* and *campañas*, regularly in public places around town to create multiple opportunities for people to convert.

To clarify, consider the following example. Why are there not as many Dominicans in professional basketball as there are in professional baseball? Dominicans are represented by disproportionately high numbers in the Major Leagues.

Why is this? The reason for this is because Dominicans have access and opportunity to play and perfect baseball skills, and basketball skills, they generally do not.

Baseball is played everywhere in the country. Baseball is popular in the Dominican Republic for various historical reasons and not because it is objectively more fun, but because it has become a part of a cultural style that meets an aesthetic preference for this or that type of sport. Baseball is played everywhere in the country and residents have both access and opportunity to play it and excel in it. The same is the case for Pentecostalism and conversion in urban barrios and rural towns all across the country. The church is present and has become a common feature of local culture and residents have regular access and opportunity to join and participate.

People convert for a myriad of reasons, many of them diverse and quite different from one another. What converts in the barrios of Villa share is a cultural orientation that sees conversion within the world of possibilities for meaning making and problem solving in their lives.

Ultimately, the role of the Pentecostal church in the Dominican Republic is a social one as much as it is a religious one. The focus of sermons and bible classes tend to coalesce around pragmatic concerns of daily life and managing behaviors and relationships that tend to be more material than spiritual. Supplicants learn how to navigate the moral terrain of life as a Christian through bible classes and peer counseling (and learn only later the importance of salvation). People tend to go with what works, and as the data that I have provided here suggests, the church is a realistic institutional option for dealing with life's problems, challenges, and difficulties.

People join the church for practical reasons; they also join the church for so-called ‘impractical’ reasons (such as those that join because they had a ‘religious’ experience, because they want to fulfill a *promesa*, or because they like the way that Christians act). Either way, Evangelical religion in the Dominican Republic is here to stay and will continue to be an important locus of meaning and possibility in the barrios for years to come.

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