

List of Previous Publications

2013 *The Anthropology of Religious Charisma: Ecstasies and Institutions* (edited volume). New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.

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The Anthropology of Religious Charisma

Ecstasies and Institutions

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Chapter 5

Residual Masculinity and the Cultivation of Negative-Charisma in a Caribbean Pentecostal Community

Brendan Jamal Thornton

I left Nagua around the age of 16 and moved to la 42, in Capotillo [a depressed area of Santo Domingo, notorious for crime and violence]. You know what they move there, right? Anything and everything; it's a drug cartel. I arrived there as a jovencito (youth) with little experience. I had many dreams. I allied myself with the tigueros (macho men) in the neighborhood; the tigueros there are ruthless. When I arrived it was something else. There were many people there who knew me from Nagua and they said that they were going to kill me, because, you know, I was involved in the vices, the games, the drinking, the gangs. I remember like it was yesterday... I made a lot of money selling drugs there in Capotillo. Lots of money, but I would drink it... We would go to the club and, you know, we weren't thinking about anything... I was young... With machete in hand I would go out on the streets with my gang to fight. I knew how to "dance" the machete. Even on the twenty-fourth of December I was in the streets. I remember going up and down the barrio with a machete in hand and a bag of drugs in the other. Selling to people, and waiting for other gangs...

When I converted to the gospel the Lord immediately cast away my problems. I accepted the bible and I began to give testimony that God had indeed transformed me. Now I go to Capotillo, where I once sold drugs, and I preach. Where I used to sell drugs, now I go and I speak against drugs. When I go there the men say "But my God, you are different. You are much younger now! You look much better now, what is happening?" And I say that I have Christ now. Because remember, I used to spend 30 days a month in the streets, "smashed," with a machete in hand and with a .38 at my side. So now when I go there the men they say "but you are much younger now!" It's that I have Christ and I'm not in sin... Since converting I am a serious man, I work more, I am soon going to have ten

years in the gospel. I go to where I used to sell drugs, I preach and go with my bible and nobody desires to do anything bad to me, nor do I desire to have other women. God has done a cleansing in me... God has told me to be an example for other drug addicts and I want to be an example to other drug addicts. I want to go to different countries and testify to God, because there are people who are in this life that don't believe that they can change. I preach that there is still hope; everything is not lost... I was a drug addict and now I am free. I was a machetero, a bandolero, and today I am free.

Introduction

This chapter considers men, masculinity, and charismatic authority among Pentecostal Christians in the Dominican Republic. Above is a selection from the conversion narrative of someone I call Juan Carlos. Limited space here prevents me from detailing his testimony in its entirety, but what I have included are particulars that have become commonplace in the conversion narratives of Pentecostal men in urban barrios throughout the country.¹ Through these testimonies Juan Carlos and others like him claim a certain type of authority and male prestige that are critical, I propose, to the ways in which he and other male converts legitimate their transformation in Christ and shape their new identities as Christian leaders and as men of God.

In what follows I argue that male converts in the Dominican Republic reconcile the apparent antinomy between Pentecostal Christianity and barrio masculinity by exploiting their former identities in the streets as admirable and exemplary machos. Through detailed narratives of sin and redemption grounded in the particulars of their pre-conversion lives as so-called *tígueres* (or macho men), converts articulate and assert their maleness at the same time they satisfy the esteemed conversion ideal of transformation from sinner to saint. Those converts who demonstrate the greatest reversals of fate, those who best exemplify a personal transformation from severe depravity to unquestioned righteousness, are often attributed the most prestige and recognized as charismatic ideals and spiritual leaders in the faith community.

Men and Conversion

For some time now, scholars studying Pentecostal Christianity in the Global South have acknowledged the transformative and liberating aspects of the church for women and the significant manner in which membership empowers them in new and in crucial ways

(Martin 2001:54; Cucchiari 1990; Brusco 1995; Austin-Broos 1997; Chesnut 1997; Burdick 1998). The prevailing view has been that the movement appeals, in general, more to women than to men. Noting that, on average, women tend to represent the largest percentage of believers worldwide (Cucchiari 1990; Chesnut 1997; Martin 2001; Miller and Yamamori 2007), a number of studies on Pentecostalism have proposed that certain aspects of the church may advantage women over men and cite evidence that conversion improves gender relations for women, particularly in the domestic sphere, and provides for greater autonomy from and equality with men (Robbins 2004:132; Brusco 1995; Smilde 1997; Mariz and Machado 1997). Anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco (1995) has gone so far as to describe the movement as a form of "female collective action," and the discernable benefit that membership affords female converts has prompted one commentator to remark, "if there is a 'women's movement' among the poor of the developing world, Pentecostalism has a good claim to the title" (Martin 2001:56).

There are several features of the Pentecostal message that seem to resonate most with female converts; in particular, respect for the nuclear family and marital bond and the demonization of behaviors and practices associated with the male prestige complex (e.g., promiscuity, adultery, hyper-sexuality, drinking, gambling, violence, lewd and lascivious behavior, etc.) (Burdick 1993; Brusco 1995; Austin-Broos 1997; Chesnut 1997, 2003). Considering the latter, Brusco (1995) has argued that Pentecostalism "domesticates" men by demanding that they give up machismo and turn their attention and resources toward the home, the traditional center of female authority. Such a change benefits women who, with the support of the church, can demand that their spouses be faithful and contribute money to domestic concerns that otherwise would be spent on himself and his close friends (Brusco 1995). At the same time that men are enjoined to leave the profane world behind in exchange for a spiritual career in the church, they are asked to submit to the authority of God, surrendering the freedom and autonomy of the streets, and commit themselves anew to home and family. This reorientation appears to provide an incentive for women to convert, even as it creates an antagonistic scenario for the conversion and retention of men.

This "reformation of machismo" is the source of considerable ambivalence for men in the church as well as those on the outside looking in. Pentecostalism's ascetic moral commitments drive away many potential male converts by prohibiting behaviors that are valued primarily by men and asking them to take up seemingly feminizing

positions and attitudes upon joining the church. The autonomy men are asked to give up upon conversion is experienced as a significant loss (Martin 2001:55), and the repudiation of traditional sites and methods of male bonding viewed as a formidable challenge to converts locally.

Men in the Dominican Republic, for example, often find renunciation of the street and its associated values the most difficult obstacle to becoming and remaining a Christian. The freedom to pursue transitory relationships with women and to act on sexual urges as well as to get together with friends to socialize over alcohol and popular music are an important part of young male identity that believers are asked to forsake upon conversion. As one young man from a local church told me: "It is very difficult to be a Christian. How should I put it? Look, when you go out with a group of friends who are not Christian, the first thing they want to do to celebrate is to drink beer, to drink alcohol and flirt with women [*mujerear*], and do that kind of stuff. But you can't. It is very difficult. You want to hang out with your friends but you can't do those things." Moreover, he lamented the fact that he was prohibited from responding to the advances of women he liked: "It is difficult too when you are in a group and there is a girl who likes you, but she's not a Christian. You are a Christian and the bible says that this relationship cannot be. It makes it difficult for you because sometimes the girls are pretty and you even like them, but in order to be right with God one must reject it. It hurts you to reject them, but you reject the majority." Pressure from peers to socialize over a beer or to share a rum with friends at a *colmado* (convenience store), to flirt with girls, or sing along to popular *bachatas*, proves to be too great for most; the allure of the streets and the pleasures of assuming the masculine persona associated with street culture are usually more than enough to dissuade men from participation in a community that, according to some locals, "just doesn't like to have fun." In Brazil, Chesnut (1997:111) observes that male camaraderie in drinking and "whoring" is such an integral part of masculine identity that converts who withdraw from this type of male socializing often have to deal with considerable taunting and mockery from their former friends who view them as having surrendered to their wives' authority. Even years after conversion, male followers in Brazil still find temptation to indulge in "vice" to be one of the most difficult aspects of conversion and of keeping the faith (Chesnut 1997:111-112). In Brazil, as in the Dominican Republic, conversion is less appealing to and perhaps ultimately more demanding for men. At the same time, if men are able to make a full conversion, to break

with "the world" completely, they stand to gain more in the way of prestige than women who are thought less in need of saving and for whom the path to redemption is thought not as steep.

At issue here is the challenge of giving up common modes of socializing and the familiar signs of popular masculinity in exchange for a bona fide Christian identity. In the Dominican Republic, Pentecostal Christianity is emphatically opposed to a pervasive form of Dominican masculinity known as *tigueraje*, a lifestyle and attitude associated with the extreme traits of masculine street culture, namely: slyness, aggressiveness, carousing, womanizing, infidelity, and various kinds of delinquency (de Moya 2002:114, n. 7; Padilla 2007:134). A *tiguere*, someone who embodies or recalls these personal qualities, is the quintessential *hombre de la calle* or "man of the streets." He has a way with words, and with women, and embodies the values of public male culture found in bars, *colmados*, *discotecas* (nightclubs), and pool halls.² *Tigueraje*, in this sense, represents exactly those attitudes and behaviors condemned by the church and considered brutish and morally disdainful by followers.

Although a term typically reserved for the lower classes, the notion of *tigueraje* is, to a degree, central to the construction of masculinity for men of all social classes (Padilla 2007:134). A master of self-promotion and self-preservation, a *tiguere* is a hustler and savvy, street-smart macho-man of the highest order. According to Krohn-Hansen (1996), he is a "survivor in his environment," and, through his own cunning, he is able to "emerge well" from any situation (Collado 1992). Not unlike Peter Wilson's (1995) men of reputation on the island of Providencia (Padilla 2007:134), the *tiguere* persona in the Dominican Republic likely represents creative resistance to domination and reflects a subaltern response to exploitation and the scarcity of respectability. Derby characterizes the *tiguere* as the "classic dissimulator, someone who gains access to a station above his own through dressing for the part, through the appropriate style, but also through being bold, a smooth talker, and having a 'predatory masculine' presence" (2009: 186). He is an aggressively enterprising person, if not a social climber, and characteristically defiant of his social position and ascribed social status. Admired for his cunning and yet disdained for his methods, the rebellious and wily Dominican "tiger" contrasts sharply with the submissive image of repentant sinner who, with outstretched arms and complete humility, comes to the feet of Jesus, on his knees, and begs for forgiveness (cf. Brusco 2010:81). While a *tiguere* is the archetypal individualist (Derby 2009:187), relying on himself and his skills alone to get him through any situation,

Pentecostals, alternatively, rely on the will of God and the power of the Holy Spirit alongside a community of the faithful to overcome everyday challenges and to negotiate the difficulties of life, attributing any success or prosperity to their steadfast faith in Jesus Christ. According to believers, the *tiguere's* opposite is the Christian man, *el hombre serio*, a man of God who shuns worldly desires and rejects the pleasures of the flesh in favor of spiritual pursuits and the higher path to salvation. It is believed that when one truly converts, he ceases to be a *tiguere* and becomes a man of God. For many men in the Dominican Republic, then, their very masculine identity is experienced as an obstacle to becoming a Christian. As I was assured, time and again by believers, one cannot be both a *tiguere* and a *cristiano* (Christian) simultaneously; after all, they personify distinct moral perspectives.³

Yet, despite the antinomy between *cristianismo* and *tigueraje* and the potential that exists to be stigmatized as unmanly, and while the comparative literature on Pentecostalism in the Americas suggests a marked appeal for women (Chesnut 1997:22), Pentecostal Christianity still attracts men to its flock. In the urban community that I observed in the Dominican Republic, I regularly attended church services dominated in number and in enthusiasm by men, and frequently observed services where men represented more than 50 percent of the congregation in attendance. In fact, men were recurrently passionate and principal participants at most evening services and sermons often focused on topics that were directed solely at them.⁴ According to local congregants, alcoholism, delinquency, promiscuity, drug abuse, and gang affiliation are persistent problems that confront the men in town to a far greater degree than the women. Consequently, many local churches focus their efforts on the evangelization, retention, and spiritual education of young males who are commonly denounced by Dominican society as "delinquent" and who are perceived by the Christian community to be in particular need of salvation.

Although most men find the demands of conversion daunting, many, clearly, do not find them insurmountable. Some of their concerns are mitigated by taking up formal leadership roles in the church (Austin-Broos 1997:123) and asserting a more authoritative status in the domestic sphere as formal heads of household (Chesnut 1997). As pastors, deacons, and evangelists, men assume institutional positions of power in the church that may counterbalance or compensate for the loss of esteem, authority, or respect in "the world." As church leaders they exercise considerable influence over congregations and local neighborhood politics, and the prestige of their institutional

roles provides for more than a modicum of deference and generalized public approval. Even while women find equality with men in the Spirit (Martin 2001:54; Brusco 2010:81)—that is, equal access to the spiritual gifts and graces of God—men continue, on the whole, to fill official leadership positions in the church and to wield institutional authority. With respect to the nuclear family, a Pentecostal husband may adopt a more patriarchal stance toward his wife and children. According to Chesnut (1997:113), conversion takes a man from being "king of the street" and makes him "master of the household." Legitimated by Pauline principles of patriarchy (Martin 2001:54), conversion solidifies his authoritative status at home (Burdick 1993:114) with the support and sponsorship of the church. With this institutional backing, men may exercise more authority over the domestic sphere provided that they fulfill the moral expectations of a Christian husband and father.

Just because a man converts does not mean that he will be seen as less than a man. This is due in large part to the fact that converts commit themselves to alternative definitions of masculinity based principally upon culturally specific notions of respectability. By demanding that congregants respect the sanctity of marriage, secure employment, pursue home ownership, and provide for their families, Pentecostal identity empowers congregants to claim respectable status (Thornton n.d.), albeit within the limits of their socioeconomic position (Wilson 1995:103). In championing the ideals of respectability, converts are able to associate themselves with the dominant values of family, fidelity, and seriousness that are not prominent in the street, but which represent trenchant and desirable hegemonic ideals (Thornton n.d.; de Moya 2002:114–115; Wilson 1995). Cultivating values distinct from that of the street, Pentecostal men replace *tigueraje* with the ideal of "seriousness" or what I call *el serio*: a value orientation characterized by a telos of work, order, discipline, honesty, responsibility, reliability, maturity, industry, decorum, integrity, and moral fortitude (Thornton n.d.). Their relative prosperity and respectable status, validated by their material possessions, employment, marital status, and fulfillment of social obligations, becomes the standard alternative with which to measure a man's worth in the *barrio*.

Residual Masculinity and Narratives of Sin

Nonetheless, even as men in this context may come close to respectable status the more fully they embrace the church's teachings and conform to its standards, they cannot, as largely poor, under-educated,

non-white Dominicans, fully claim the respectability reserved for the upper classes (e.g. Wilson 1995:99). Furthermore, even while a man in the church may assert authority over his wife and assume positions of influence over congregants in the church, he cannot be certain of his status with peers in "the world" who continue to operate under the values and precepts of the street. As a result, the symbols of male identity represented by *tigueraje* continue to be important markers of maleness among converts just as they are for their unconverted male associates. Consequently, even while Pentecostals strive to attain prestige based on a new set of values rooted in respectability, they do not abandon the street completely. The powerful modes of sociality that shape Dominican men in the *barrio* and the practices that give meaning to their gendered identities do not cease to be relevant upon conversion; rather they continue to hold sway over converts and the ways in which they understand themselves and the world around them. The difficulty in assimilating Pentecostal norms and a novel born-again lifestyle may be seen in the high incidence of backsliding or disaffiliation in evangelical churches (Gooren 2010b:124), particularly among men (Bowen 1996:73).

One way of reconciling the conflict of values between the church and those of the street is through the development of testimonies that function to parlay male prestige from the streets and transform it into personal charisma and masculine identity in the church. This is possible because converts retain, as part of their new identity as Christian, an important residual identity based on their previous lives as so-called sinners. Developing and promoting this former identity becomes as important to converts and the production of their evangelical identity as the maintenance and promotion of their new identity as saint (or "sanctified believer"). Pentecostal Christians substantiate their identities as former sinners through testimonies and conversion narratives that give an account of their pre-conversion lives. By invoking their previous lives as *mujeriegos* (womanizers), hustlers, thieves, and gangsters—indeed, their former lives as *tígueres*—converts assert their manliness and claim authority in the streets without transgressing the rules of the church. The enduring or "residual" identity buffers the potential loss of respect by constituting converts simultaneously as both men of the streets and saintly men of God.

Consider briefly the rhetorical work accomplished by the following selection from a young man named Renato's testimony:

Look, I had something that we call here "open" or "informal" relationships. When I say this I mean, "fuck them and leave them." I had

a few relationships like this. I don't want to say a number because I don't know exactly how many... I'm one of those people who loves to party. When hanging out, I had a real problem with this... As for more "formal" girlfriends, I only had two. But from the streets, that were not formal, that I didn't bring home, I believe there were many. I had a "sack" of them, *muchísimas*.

Rhetorically, Renato's confession accomplishes several noteworthy ends. One, by discussing his former relations with women as overwhelmingly successful, he characterizes himself as someone who excelled at one of the most valued measures of *barrio* masculinity—the pursuit and conquest of women. Interestingly, he models this accomplishment with the metaphor of a sack—a receptacle to collect his countless sexual triumphs. In so doing, he essentially "saves" the meaning of these achievements for later when he resignifies them as sinful and brought-to-an-end as a part of his conversion testimony. Two, by framing this behavior as something sinful and that no longer characterizes his new life today as a *cristiano*, he fulfills the Pentecostal imperative of moral transformation, even as the symbolic value of his former accomplishments with women (and success as a *mujeriego*) bleeds into his new identity as Christian convert. Here Renato claims the associated prestige of success with women, marking himself as manly in the language of the *barrio*, without actually transgressing the rules of the church. He represents himself as someone who has *voluntarily* conceded women in favor of a higher calling, and thus establishes himself as both moral victor and as chaste, humble Christian follower.

You know, I was from the streets... Before I was a Christian my thoughts were always in *tigueraje*... My life project used to be *tigueraje*. That is what I knew, that is what I saw everyday. Machetes, fights, this and that, I saw this everyday. My head was programmed. I used to practice the machete. I knew how to wield it. I knew how to make an illegal gun, a homemade firearm. I believe that if I had not become a *cristiano* I would be dead or on file in every part of the country. I have been close to death two times, but thanks to God I don't appear in any police reports.

Such admissions are important to the ways in which believers constitute themselves as legitimate Christian converts and simultaneously as authorities in and of the streets. Converts are encouraged to develop precisely these kinds of stories in conversion narratives in order to demonstrate the positively miraculous transformation in Christ that

is promised by conversion and achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit. The restraint that Renato alleges to show in denying himself opportunities to collect more women for his “sack” demonstrates the strength and maturity of his faith and is commended by his congregation. His successful transformation from “ladies man” to “man of God” shows that change is possible, even for the most unlikely sinners. His claim to experience and success in tigueraje and victory over such vices through conversion and the power of the Holy Spirit permit him to claim authority on matters of the church as well as those of the streets.

I was introduced to Juan Carlos (quoted above in the introduction) through a friend. Before converting to the gospel, Juan Carlos claims to have been known as *el verdugo*, the “executioner” or “tyrant.” He limped from repeated *machetazos* (blows from a machete) to his legs and he had been stabbed numerous times in the back, which had left gnarly scars. Juan Carlos was 38 years old when I met him back in 2009, but the hard life of drugs and violence had taken its toll and he instead looked to be in his mid- to late-forties. At age 30, he was caught and arrested in the city of Higüey for drug trafficking. He spent three years in prison in Higüey and then La Victoria, the most notorious prison in the Dominican Republic. He converted while in prison in Higüey and ministered to inmates while interned at La Victoria. Today he calls Pantoja (a municipal district just outside the capital) his home and paints furniture to get by. His mother, his brother, and his wife have all converted since hearing his testimony. Juan Carlos claims to have received the gift of preaching and evangelization from God subsequent to converting and he is held in high regard throughout the area as an evangelist. He lives relatively simply and certainly has not made it rich off his conversion, but his testimony has made him a person of respect in the barrios of Pantoja. Juan Carlos’s testimony of extreme hardship, of a violent street life, immoral and dissipated in almost every way, not only defined him as a man-among-men, but also made him the perfect example to others of the power and virtue of conversion. Today he claims to be nothing like he was before and gives all of the credit to Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Juan Carlos’s testimony detailing the wicked and debauched state of his previous life gave him the spiritual credibility he needed to be a leader in the church and established his credentials in the streets that he needed to be respected in the barrio as a whole.

Both Juan Carlos and Renato, along with other male converts, shield themselves from accusations or suggestions of femininity

through similar narratives of sin and violence. By emphasizing the wickedness, brutishness, and indeed “manliness” of their pre-conversion lives, converts assert their masculinity and resist the feminizing potential of church membership.⁵ Recalled in testimony but forged in the streets, male converts retain the enduring male prestige that was earned primarily in their pre-conversion lives, but which they carry forward in their testimonies and narratives of change. If successful, respected Pentecostal men are referred to as *varón*: a title of esteem that serves to underscore their maleness and acknowledge their achievement of respectable status (the term *varón* literally means “male/man”).

José Luis, a convert of two years whom I got to know back in 2008, exemplified the transformation from quintessential tiguere to model Christian follower and was able to translate this image of reform into considerable prestige within the local faith community and significantly beyond it. Having spent the better part of his youth on the street corners selling drugs and gang banging, José Luis transformed his tigueraje into spiritual legitimacy through his testimony—the lyrical representation of his transformation from drug-addled gang leader to bible-toting evangelical preacher. José Luis embodied the ideal of conversion since his previous life in the streets could be represented in such a way as to exemplify the backward and destructive nature of “the world” and frame, in contrast to it, his new life in the gospel where he no longer embodied fear, violence, and intimidation, but instead joy, charity, and submission to God. In exemplifying the Pentecostal ideal of transformation from sinner to saint, he was considered by many to be a spiritual leader and barrio hero, and was granted a great deal of prestige both in the church and in the streets.

Before I converted I was a failure. Before converting I had the opportunity to study at a technical school (I am a repair technician in welding), but afterward I was running in the streets. I was a tiguere in the streets. I used drugs, I robbed, I mugged people; I did *everything*. I was the leader of a gang. I had my own clique. I belonged to a gang called *los kings*. My life was nothing before knowing Jesus Christ. I did countless things that maybe God did not like, but after I met Christ, now I am different... Before, the most important thing for me was to have a .45, to be in the streets causing trouble, to have the biggest drug point in town. That was my vision before, but not now. Now I’m Christian and things are very good. Now my vision is to finish school and to study at the University. I have everything under control.

José Luis's testimony appealed to those in the streets with whom he identified himself. His history as "one of them" formed a symbolic bridge of identification that he used to connect with the gang members and drug dealers he wished so very much to save. "They listen to me," he insisted, "They listen to me because they know who I was. They know that I wasn't always a cristiano, that I was once a tiguere from the streets." His friend Héctor concurred, "There are people who see me, José Luis, and other young men who have converted and they say 'truly God is real'. They say 'look at that *muchacho* over there, you should be like him'. And I say to them, 'I have allowed God to do his work in my life and I want you to permit God to do the same'. They see a transformation in us."

The respect accorded José Luis by those in the streets may be seen in the high regard held for him by Angel, a local gang leader whom I met, not coincidentally, through José Luis himself: "I know José Luis as *Quico*. I think highly of him. He was a tiguere; he was 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 [do those things]. I think well of him because he has continued being a follower, he has stayed stable, that is why I think highly of him." José Luis's exemplification of the Pentecostal ideal of transformation paved the way for esteem ("respect" or *respeto* in the local idiom) wherever he went. Even Héctor, who otherwise was more articulate, better educated, and equally involved in the church, was simply not as popular and did not garner the same regard as José Luis whose transformation was considerably more stark and by comparison far more astonishing. He went from being a ferocious gang leader who exemplified the ideals of tigueraje, to becoming a popular spiritual leader virtually overnight, and the sheer sinfulness of his past provided that his conversion would be seen as extraordinary, exceptional, and divinely inspired. He was what others describe as a living testimony, an exemplary illustration of God's transformative power and infinite grace. He represented the Christian ideal and was frequently cited as an example to others of right Christian practice and the remarkable power of conversion.

As José Luis's case illustrates, as well as many others, because of the unique emphasis on conversion and the considerable value put on personal transformation in the Pentecostal church, those individuals whose lives demonstrate the greatest change as a result of conversion are regarded as the ideal and most coveted converts since their unlikely conversion best illustrates the transformative power of God. These exemplary converts are seen as more unique than others and their

transformation more extraordinary because of the apparent unlikelihood of their conversion in the face of such terrible sinfulness. They are understood to be closer to God, or to have a special relationship to him; they are said to be living testaments of Jesus' infinite mercy and are frequently said to reflect his grace in their lives. Celebrated as Christian ideals, they are awarded the respect and authority reserved for leaders in the faith. They are invited to lead congregations of their own, to evangelize in public squares, to testify around the country, and to lead spiritual retreats.

This particular dynamic creates an incentive to represent one's previous life to have been as broken, as sinful, and as debauched as possible so that one's conversion appears all the more miraculous and divinely inspired. This is most readily apparent in the testimony of converts who attempt to extend or exaggerate their transformation in Christ and embellish the conditions that led to their successful conversion experience. By highlighting the acute sinfulness of their previous lives, converts claim the legitimacy associated with championing the transformation ideal, all the while maintaining respect in the streets.

A characteristic feature of popular male conversion testimonies in the barrio is not so much that they give an account of sin, per se, but rather that they recount overwhelmingly successful *campaigns of sin*. Male converts do not just emphasize the sinfulness of their pasts, they underscore their mastery of ungodliness with measured detail and no small amount of embellishment. Renato did not just pursue women from time to time, he *sacked* countless numbers of them; José Luis was not just a member of a gang, he was a gang leader; Héctor was not just an abuser of drugs, he was a prominent seller; Juan Carlos was no mere drug dealer, he was a notorious drug trafficker; and so on. Even individuals whose previous lives seem less mired in sin are quick to insist that, for example, they did not just drink the occasional beer, they were, in point of fact, alcoholics. Juan Carlos, Renato, José Luis, and innumerable others testify to more than just being bad: they profess to have been *really* bad, indeed, exceptionally accomplished sinners. Despite the fact that José Luis claims to have been a failure before converting, he was not a failure from the perspective of the street and norms of tigueraje, which he at one time championed like no other. He rose through the ranks of his gang by excelling in the streets, not by failing in them. The same went for Juan Carlos whose criminal record and some may say street savvy made him a *tiguerazo*, or "top dog" among his friends. These individuals were no mere sinners—they were above all, *successful* sinners. I do not wish

to suggest here that all converts necessarily offer untruthful or exaggerated testimonies. Rather, I wish to point out that a believer has a choice of how he represents his previous life and chooses what details to highlight and foreground and which details he wishes to be vague about or simply to avoid. These expository accounts bear directly on the image of reform converts look to promote through their impressive descriptions of sin and redemption.

Protestant conversion narratives have been observed to follow a standard formula wherever they are encountered (Gooren 2010a:93; Brereton 1991); this context is no different in that regard. The most successful narratives follow some variation on the following theme: lost or broken soul finds Jesus Christ through divine intervention, converts, and sinful life is transformed into a sinless life in the service of God. A typical conversion narrative describes the bad or negative state of a person's life before his or her conversion and the fundamental transformation that has occurred since accepting Jesus Christ as one's savior. The testimony explains how one's conversion to Jesus Christ changed him or her from a sinner to a saint, a nonbeliever into a believer, an immoral being into a moral one. While the structure of these testimonies tends to be shared, the content, the character and quality of sin, for example, is open to creativity and variation. It is up to the convert to decide how they want to represent their sinfulness and subsequent transformation in Christ, so long as the theme of redemption endures.

It is relevant to note that the categories of sin that are emphasized by male converts in this context are somewhat circumscribed. Converts construct testimonies that describe their previous lives as sinful, but not infinitely so. The degree and quality of sins professed are constrained by cultural norms of civility and local standards of humanity. One does not often hear, for example, that a person was physically abusive to his wife, that he was a rapist, that he abused children, or that he was responsible for killing others; nor, in a totally different sense, that he had engaged in homosexual relations or visited male prostitutes. Although these examples are all considered sinful by the church, these offenses are not culturally approved outlets for aggression or youth and do little to authenticate a convert's macho image. The cost of confessing such sins, it would seem, appears to be too great. Rather, converts draw on images of the ubiquitous *tiguere* in order to construct a persuasive and compelling narrative; in part, because the moral ambiguity of such a character (alluring yet undependable, admirable but immoral) provides the ideal material to invoke a sufficiently wicked persona (with the added benefit of being

unquestionably masculine) while remaining within the acceptable bounds of deviant behavior.

To recapitulate, through narrating stories of past sinfulness and demonstrating a profound transformation from profane worldliness to ostensible spiritual perfection, male converts fulfill the cultural myth of forgiveness and redemption and constitute themselves as spiritual and moral leaders. By demonstrating a miraculous triumph over sin, converts characterize themselves as special products or recipients of divine grace and favored subjects of God. Only by emphasizing the backwardness of their pre-conversion lives can reformed sinners be said to have truly overcome the darkness and epitomized the biblical trajectory from sin to sainthood. This transformation is most apparent and awe-inspiring when it can be shown that a convert was particularly wicked before converting and that he has only truly turned his life around with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The greater the transformation, the greater the prestige, with those who demonstrate the most profound reversals of fate accorded the highest regard. With these credentials, converts are enjoined to share their testimony with the world, empowered to lead as exemplars of the faith and as recognized spiritual authorities—or, as believers maintain, as living testimonies and God's representatives on earth.

Spiritual Authority and the Cultivation of Negative-Charisma

Max Weber defined charisma, or what he called "charismatic authority," as legitimacy based on exceptional or extraordinary characteristics exhibited by or imputed to a particular individual. Borrowing from the original Christian conception of charisma (or *charismata*) as denoting the gifts of grace conferred by the Holy Spirit, in Weber's sociological formulation charisma became a property of one's personal character that is regarded by others as "a manifestation of endowment with, or possession by, some divine power" (Shils 1965:200), or, as Parsons rearticulated more generally, "the quality which attaches to men and things by virtue of their relations with the 'supernatural'" (1964:668). What separates charisma from, say, simply prestige, or some other form of legitimacy, is that it derives authority because of its supernatural/divine (and therefore utterly extraordinary) provenance.⁶ As extraordinary individuals produced by divine favor or grace, the men referred to here become charismatic ideals, not simply through positive affirmations of piety, or necessarily through reception of charismatic gifts (charisma in the original sense), but importantly,

through a miraculous moral transformation and the apparent triumph over wickedness.⁷ In representing this transformation as severe and fundamental (through testimony and conversion narratives), converts cultivate a kind of legitimacy that might be referred to as “negative-charisma” (cf. Aberle 1966).⁸ Only by characterizing their previous lives as particularly depraved and ungodly (as negative or in negative terms)—emphasizing the distance from or absence of the divine, in fact, the inverse of positive charisma—can converts truly shape amazing, awe-inspiring testimonies of exceptional and exemplary value and lay claim to the distinction of special divine favor. If believers are appraised for their triumph over wickedness, then the greater their former wickedness, the greater the miracle of their perceived triumph, and thus, the greater their charisma as recipients of that divine grace. The charismatic authority derived by converts through popular narratives of former sin may be called negative-charisma because legitimacy in this context is constituted as much by assigning negative value to one’s previous identity as sinner, as it is to assigning positive value to one’s present identity as sanctified believer.

Conversion narratives are an important site for the legitimation of spiritual authority, indeed charismatic authority, because they establish a convert’s relationship to the divine and set the terms for his or her future as a recipient and possessor of God’s grace. Without a “good testimony,” converts will not be baptized in the church and cannot become full members of the congregation. They must demonstrate, alongside a convincing personal transformation, that God has miraculously changed them for the better. Although tales of sin are a necessary component of any testimony, they are not sufficient on their own and must be accompanied by a verifiable moral reformulation. As narratives, tales of sinfulness may be manipulated in ways that other more embodied forms of charisma may not, yet if former sin is not redeemed by present sanctity, the stories go for naught. Individuals like José Luis, Renato, and Juan Carlos define themselves as “true Christians” and claim spiritual authority by cultivating negative-charisma in their testimonies while at the same time achieving a sanctified born-again identity through their manifest moral and spiritual transformation. As one local deacon maintained, “There are people who, even after some time, you see them 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.” Such persons are living and sanctified evidence of God’s transformative power.

The Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual and moral transformation creates the conditions under which negative-charisma becomes salient and converts may exchange the transgressions of the past for spiritual legitimacy in the present. This unique emphasis means that individual transformation, more than piety or virtue alone, is part and parcel of one’s charismatic authority. Given this, it is doubtful that negative-charisma will be encountered in religions not driven by conversion or predicated on profound personal change. Should one wish to become a priest in the Catholic Church, for example, his past history as a sinner is likely to be de-emphasized. He would gain little by calling too much attention to his former misdeeds; in fact, his authority in the church may be compromised rather than strengthened or affirmed should revelations of fantastic sinfulness be made public to parishioners. Unlike the Pentecostals discussed here, his spiritual authority is one based largely on the perception of *inherent* piety rather than on the perception of *achieved* piety and the impressive conquest of mortal sin.

Pentecostal Christianity has been described as a “charismatic movement,” not because a powerful magnetic leader dominates an excited following (which is often what Weber’s concept of charisma is invoked to explain), but because of the significant emphasis on spiritual gifts (again, charisma in the original sense) and the primary importance put on the direct experience of the divine (see Robbins 2004). Without conventional ecclesiastical mediation, every member of the church is understood to have equal access to the power of the Holy Spirit, in addition to direct, unmediated communion with God. Consequently, unlike several of the charismatic movements discussed in this volume, the Pentecostal church cannot properly be described as an organization of simply leaders and followers: all believers are potential recipients of divine grace, and thus, all are potential bearers of charisma.⁹

By making the faith’s greatest assets available to every believer, regardless of his or her office or station, Pentecostal Christianity looks remarkably egalitarian. Any member may claim divine inspiration or favor and need not possess formal qualifications to preach, evangelize, consult, et cetera. Absolute authority by any one individual seems always to be mediated by this fact. And yet, despite the apparent equality between the faithful—everyone, after all, is said to be equal in the eyes of the Lord—real differences obtain between average, unexceptional followers and those who stand out in the faith as spiritual leaders (preachers and others who are looked to for inspiration and guidance). It is plain that some individuals are regarded

as having more grace than others and have set themselves apart from their fellow congregants as exceptional or "extraordinary" in this regard.

José Luis and Juan Carlos are extraordinary because of the spiritual transformation they are said to embody by virtue of God's favor and the distance they have traveled to conquer sin. Their miraculous salvation from the clutches of evil entitles them to exceptional status and special regard among the faithful. As persons endowed charismatic authority, they are not to be followed or obeyed so much as they are to be held up as examples to others—Christian ideals to be emulated rather than served. Pentecostals lead by example, and through their example they become moral and spiritual leaders in their communities.¹⁰

These leaders, then, are considered spiritual authorities in so far as they are sought out for advice, healing, preaching, evangelizing, and generally recognized as special agents or representatives of God on earth (regardless of their institutional position or official role in the faith community). As certified "technicians of the sacred," they are conferred a unique prestige and authorized to administer the Word to others and, by dint of their distinction, to lead by example. José Luis's charisma is evident in the respect he commands in the barrio; in the sincerity with which people seek out his advice and guidance; in the responsibility with which he is entrusted; and not the least in his status as a favored preacher and evangelist.

By drawing on Weber's extension of charisma as a type of legitimacy, one that is intrinsically tied to the numinous or divine relation, and acknowledging at the same time the dynamic range of that relation (from spiritual gifts to miraculous salvation), the concept of charisma provides a useful analytic for identifying a kind of spiritual authority in the church: that something resulting from divine favor that makes one a member of an admired few, a spiritual elect who lead by example and inspire a community of believers. Many studies that invoke Weber's charisma tend to focus on the character of powerful captivating leaders rather than on the form of legitimation that renders their authority salient and valid. In the Pentecostal context, charisma identifies more than just the extraordinary magnetism of dominant leaders or the familiar graces afforded by God; at its most dynamic, the term locates a form of legitimation whereby any individual based on his or her real or perceived favor with the divine is attributed special or extraordinary status. It is in this sense that the individuals discussed here are charismatic, not merely because they are the products of divine grace, but importantly for the varied

and creative ways in which they leverage their favor with God in the service of their own legitimacy as Christian elect. Men in Dominican barrios are charismatic, not by the gifts of grace alone, or even at all, but by establishing themselves as exceptional converts through extraordinary testimonies of sin and redemption. For these male converts, the cultivation of negative-charisma (legitimacy established by way of negative terms and associations) becomes a crucial site for the manufacture of spiritual authority in the church and the comprehensive achievement of a born-again identity as exemplary men of God.

Gender and Charismatic Differentiation in the Barrio

I would like to conclude with a few comments and observations related back to gender difference and differentiation vis-à-vis Pentecostal conversion in the Dominican Republic. A very significant difference between male and female testimonies in the barrio is that women do not emphasize the same qualities or degrees of sinfulness as men. This is due chiefly to the fact that sinfulness, as defined locally by the Pentecostal church, is by and large a sphere of male activity. Because men presumably drink, smoke, and fornicate more than women, the process of repentance appears to be more full for them (although, as I mentioned, certain sins are forbidden to them as unmanly), and forgiveness and salvation take on a greater force and significance (Mintz 1956:409). This is not to say that women do not sin, only that the transgressions of women tend not to be seen as severe as those of their husbands or brothers.

A notable consequence of this particular constellation of relationships, when considered in the context of urban barrios in the Dominican Republic, is that Dominican women are not as free to claim what I have referred to here as negative-charisma and the prestige associated with exemplifying the conversion ideal. While women can, and certainly do sin according to the church, their sins are frequently understood as of a different order than those of men because they are thought incapable of the most deplorable offenses. While promiscuity and prostitution may be transgressions that women escape through conversion, they are rarely if ever broached in testimonies where cultural norms of decency do not allow for the airing of such sins publicly. For women to proclaim a past history in the streets, apart from a mere passing association with its freedoms, is quite unacceptable to most barrio residents (women's symbolic association with the home and the values of respectability prevent it). Women here simply do not have the same liberties to extend, exaggerate, or even profess a range

of sinfulness that men are not only free to acknowledge, but also are actively encouraged to develop and promote.

However, witchcraft, sorcery, playing the lottery (gambling), and insolence toward one's husband, along with laziness, lack of ambition, cavorting or visiting with spirits, are all popular and indeed "suitable" topics of female testimonies that I have encountered in the Dominican Republic. These confessions are typical in the barrios where women are commonly the purveyors and consumers of Afro-Dominican and Haitian religions (in addition to Catholicism) and where poverty, unemployment, and patriarchy antagonize and regularly victimize female residents. The solicitation of saints in the Catholic Church, for example, along with the invocation of spirit beings in the context of Dominican *vodu* (Deive 1992) are activities demonized by the church that become the popular sins of female converts.

The differences in the social symbolic value of male and female testimonies are significant to the diverse ways in which men and women claim spiritual authority. With former sinfulness as a special path to legitimacy all but closed to them, women approach other avenues to authority and upward mobility in the church. For example, women are quick to gain respect and renown in congregations by leading prayer groups and by conducting the church's outreach and charitable endeavors. But perhaps more notably, women are perceived to be more attuned to spiritual matters. It is widely held throughout the Caribbean and Latin America that women are "more open to matters of the spirit" and that their predominance in congregations is a function of their "greater sensitivity to the Spirit" (Chesnut 2003:142). In the congregations that I observed in the Dominican Republic, women were more likely to be "slain in the spirit," just as they were more likely to be possessed by malevolent spirits. As several scholars have noted, while men routinely monopolize formal institutional positions of authority in the church, women, who are largely excluded from such positions, tend to claim the authority of inspiration through reception of the Holy Gifts such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy (Robbins 2004:132; Cucchiari 1990:693-694; Martin 2001:54). While reception of the Holy Gifts represents the most viable way for women to access spiritual authority in the church (Brusco 2010:81), for men it appears to be through negative-charisma and exemplary fulfillment of the Pentecostal conversion ideal. Not associated, like women, with an inherent calling to the spirit, young Dominican men derive spiritual authority in the church by recalling the wickedness of their pre-conversion lives and satisfying the Pentecostal ideal of transformation from sinner to saint.

Men are able to claim divine favor relative to women by establishing themselves as exceptional converts miraculously saved from evil. By making their amazing transformation the locus of their legitimacy, male converts acquire charisma in lieu of spiritual gifts and the embodied spirituality that has become for women the primary source of their religious authority. Of central importance to Pentecostal identity is the path believers took to become Christian and the fundamental moral differences that they now exhibit as a result of their conversion. The emphasis on conversion and moral transformation serves to exclude women from the holy grail of Pentecostal deliverance because they cannot exemplify the ideal to the same degree as men. The gendered division of charismatic manifestations means that women have less authority within the church than men, even though they participate more in congregations, demonstrate greater religious knowledge, show more evidence of charismatic gifts, and are considered less likely to leave the church or to backslide.

The type of charisma associated with conversion and cultivated in testimony, then, is by virtue of cultural considerations to a large degree outside the grasp of female converts. It explains why men tend to exaggerate their conversion narratives more than women and why they tend to communicate qualitatively different testimonies. It also helps to explain the unequal distribution of a certain kind of authority within the church (along lines of gender) without relying entirely on reductive appeals to the "simple fact" of patriarchal domination. There is more of an incentive for men to exaggerate their conversion stories as well as fewer restrictions. The authority they gain in doing so is readily apparent in any congregation where many of the most prized converts—and most prestigious among them—are ex-drug lords, gang members, thieves, and former tyrants of the streets. It should be no surprise that the most charismatic Pentecostals that I came to know had the most tumultuous pasts, mired in bloodshed and sin, and whose testimonies frequently took on impressive airs of fantasy.

The cultivation of negative-charisma is, perhaps counterintuitively, directly related to the promotion of spiritual authority and legitimacy in the church. In an exchange where the worst become first, so to speak, the most depraved sinners become evangelical select. By exemplifying the conversion ideal, Pentecostal men in the barrios of the Dominican Republic justify their position in the church, validate their spiritual claims, and establish themselves as Christian elites. An artifact of this production is the residual prestige that converts gain when performing their conversion narratives for others. The hyper-masculinity

attached to their former identities in the streets functions to bolster converts' masculine qualities in the church and counter the perceived feminizing potentials of evangelical piety.

Notes

1. Research for this chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted primarily in an urban barrio of Villa Altagracia, Dominican Republic, from 2007 to 2009. Additionally, fieldwork was conducted in a barrio just northwest of Santo Domingo proper in the municipal district of Pantoja, part of the municipality of Los Alcarrizos.
2. The notion of *tigueraje* in the Dominican Republic is complex and little room exists here for a suitable treatment of such an important but equally slippery concept. For more detailed expositions see Collado (1992); Krohn-Hansen (1996); Padilla (2007:132–140); and Derby (2009:184–194).
3. The division between *cristianismo* and *tigueraje* maps well onto the classic distinction between *la casa* and *la calle* found elsewhere in Latin America (Manners 1956; Mintz 1956; Scheele 1956) and also the opposing but complementary cultural values of *respectability* and *reputation* prevalent in the Caribbean as outlined by Peter Wilson (1995). Similar comparisons may also be made with the incompatibility of “black churches” and “black clubs” in Bermuda as discussed by Manning (1973), and the discordant values of “the yard” and “the road” in St. Vincent as recorded by Abrahams (1983).
4. To my knowledge no surveys have been conducted in order to determine the percentages of male and female congregants in the Dominican Republic. Despite my observations of several Pentecostal communities to the contrary, most people affiliated with the church would affirm that women tend to be more involved than men, and that women represent a greater percentage of most congregations.
5. This dynamic is not unique to urban barrios or even the Dominican Republic. See Brereton (1991) for a parallel account of male conversion narratives in the United States.
6. Weber appears to have drawn inspiration for his idea of charisma, at least in part, from Le Bon's notion of prestige (Baehr 2008:111–112, n.56; Le Bon 1952:129–140). Weber did not restrict his use of charisma to manifestations of divinity alone, sometimes he attributed the term to “extraordinary” individuals who do not necessarily understand their actions as being related to or motivated by divine inspiration (Shils 1965:200).
7. These so-called charismatic gifts or *charisms*—also variously referred to as “spiritual gifts,” “Holy Gifts,” or “gifts of the Holy Spirit”—are important to Pentecostal theology and serve several functions in the church and faith communities (see Anderson [2004:187–205], for

- his summary of what he calls a “theology of the Spirit”; see Wacker [2001:35–57], for the importance of speaking in tongues to the early Pentecostal church; see also Hollenweger [1972:3–20] and [2004] for a discussion of whether a coherent Pentecostal theology even exists). According to many observers, as well as believers, reception of the Holy Gifts, in particular glossolalia or “speaking in tongues,” is that property which distinguishes the Pentecostal church from other Protestant, evangelical and/or mainline denominations (see Robbins [2004] who defines Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity as “the form of Christianity in which believers receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit”; see also Wacker [2001:40–44]). Their very appellation comes from the biblical Pentecost when the Spirit of God descended upon the Apostles “and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). This same experience is said to have been repeated in 1906 with the “out pouring of the Spirit” in Los Angeles at the Azusa Street revival, the original birthplace of the worldwide Pentecostal movement (Hollenweger [1972:26, n. 1]; see also Synan [1997:84–106]; Cox [1995:45–65]; Wacker [2001:35–57]; and Hollenweger [1972:21–28]). From its early beginnings, speaking in tongues appears to have been what defined Pentecostals' religious identity more than any other belief or practice (Wacker 2001:42). According to Wacker, “when early Pentecostals wanted to explain themselves to the outside world—indeed when they wanted to explain themselves to each other—they usually started with the experience of the Holy [Spirit] baptism signified by speaking in tongues” (2001:35). Charismata, or these charismatic gifts, continue to be at the center of Pentecostal enthusiasm and play an important role in its current popularity and distinctiveness.
8. My definition of negative-charisma differs from Aberle's (1966) who understands it as the negative valuation of otherwise positively valued charismatic leaders. His paradigmatic example is Adolf Hitler, who was valued by those who endowed him with charisma, his supporters, and disvalued by his opponents and detractors. As I. M. Lewis (1986) has pointed out, the attribution of grace or of sin to an individual can shift, according to context. One person's savior is another's devil. I would add that the present case illustrates the fundamental relation between sin and sanctity, each necessary for the true expression of the other. That is to say, sanctity can only have meaning in a world of sin, and vice versa.
 9. In other words, there should be no “superiors” because every believer, in theory, has equal access to the power of the Holy Spirit and everyone is considered equal in the eyes of the Lord. Furthermore, salvation may only be achieved by and for oneself; it is the individual who must answer the call and accept Jesus Christ as his or her savior, and it is the individual who must choose a new life. Redemption cannot be achieved on another's behalf.

10. These Pentecostal leaders do not see themselves as objects of praise, but believe that their charisma should be understood as by and for the glory of God and not for their own exaltation. Personal authority is actively refuted in favor of crediting divine inspiration and leadership of the Word. Inquiring minds are told first to consult the bible (believed to be the infallible word of God) before they seek the advice of church leaders or elders. Even in prayer healings and the laying on of hands, it is never the believers themselves who heal, but rather it is God, through the Holy Spirit, who is thought to be the active agent.

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