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Anthropological Quarterly, Volume 91, Number 1, Winter 2018, pp. 133-171  
(Article)

Published by George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2018.0004>



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# Victims of Illicit Desire: Pentecostal Men of God and the Specter of Sexual Temptation

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## ABSTRACT

*For men in the context of urban poverty in the Dominican Republic, Pentecostal conversion may lead to conditions of gender distress: frustration stemming from the challenges of reconciling the conflicting gender ideals of the church with those of the street. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with members of a Pentecostal community in the town of Villa Altigracia, I discuss how many young men come to experience the initial trials of conversion as tormenting spiritual assaults on their manhood in the form of alluring succubi. At the same time, male converts adopt newly inspired antagonisms with women familiars whom they blame for their illicit desires. Elsewhere I have discussed the strategies Pentecostal men deploy in order to mediate the conflict between barrio masculinity and evangelical Christianity; here I am concerned with illustrating how this conflict is given personal and cultural expression and how the attending experience of gender distress and its symbolic elaboration shapes masculine identity and male subjectivity in the church and local faith communities. By focusing on male converts and their struggles to remain manly, this article contributes to a richer understanding of gender dynamics in Pentecostal churches and offers useful insight into how gender is variously troubled,*

*performed, and remade through conversion and religious practice more broadly.* [Keywords: Spirit possession, gender distress, conversion, masculinity, succubi, demonization, anthropology of Christianity]

Look, I would say that women are more sensitive to the call [of conversion]. Even though at the beginning Jesus called 12 [male] disciples, the whole time women have been more sensitive to the call. The culture of men is more of the streets [*más de la calle*]. A man easily has more than one woman, while the woman is more of the house [*más de la casa*]. Men use drugs more than women. There are many men and women who use drugs, but men use them more. If you go to a *colmado*, those that are drinking alcohol tend to be men. The man is more of the streets. Women go to the church first and later bring the men. Women have fewer ties [*ataaduras*]. It's not that God sees a difference between women and men, it's just that when God calls, women go faster to the call.

## Introduction

The epigraph above is drawn from a conversation I had with a local pastor in 2009. In it, he makes explicit two common observations familiar to anyone acquainted with Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America and the Caribbean (to those who study it, no less to believers themselves): 1) that Christian conversion appeals more to women than to men, and 2) that men's seemingly intrinsic relationship with the street (or public sphere) is antithetical to the church in ways that frustrate conversion.<sup>1</sup> Although men do indeed convert, they do so with less frequency than women and encounter more challenging obstacles to remaining in a congregation, and to realizing the faith's ideals (Martin 2001). The qualitative differences between the conversion experiences of men and women are frequently acknowledged but less often appreciated fully or fleshed out thoroughly in accounts of Pentecostal culture in the literature. Scholars tend to acknowledge gender differences between the sexes without taking seriously the varied challenges those differences pose for male and female congregants respectively, failing to note how those differences influence devotional practices, impact born-again identity, and sway overall commitment to the faith. Lindhardt (2015:254; see also 2012b:177) has proposed recently

that perhaps the most significant contribution of Pentecostal Christianity to processes of social and cultural change lies in the movement's ability to shape gender roles and identities in new ways. Ethnographers are uniquely equipped to uncover the specific contours of such changes and the exact directions that those transformations take in local settings through qualitative research methods calibrated to the nuances of social intercourse and alert to individual negotiations over identity, performance, authority, and native meaning-making.

Slow to materialize have been detailed studies that take seriously the predicament of masculinity occasioned by conversion and the unique struggles men encounter when joining the faith. Despite a wealth of research on how conversion shapes gender roles and relationships in ways that benefit women (e.g., Cucchiari 1990, Brusco 1995, Austin-Broos 1997, Mariz and Machado 1997, Smilde 1997, Soothill 2007), as well as a relatively robust literature exploring how the domestication of men in Pentecostal communities advantages women (e.g., Gill 1990; Burdick 1993; Brusco 1995; Austin-Broos 1997; Chesnut 1997, 2003; Martin 2001), outside of a broad focus on shifting gender roles within congregations—by focusing almost exclusively on women's apparent dominant interests and numerical participation in the church—thus far, the literature concerning gender and conversion in the Pentecostal context has largely ignored the culture's impact on constructions of manhood/maleness. Regularly overlooking gender dynamics as they relate to masculinity obfuscates the meaningful ways in which maleness, no less than femaleness, is a powerful social construct that motivates, disciplines, and confines human possibilities assigned to the universe of sexual difference. The gap in scholarship here is understandable, even if unsatisfactory, as maleness, almost always the unmarked category, stands in for the universal, obscuring the power relationships responsible for making gender differences meaningful to society's members. Recent scholarship on Pentecostal masculinities has attempted to right the ship in this regard by treating conversion as both a gendered and gendering process that effects men and women in demonstrably varied ways (e.g., Soothill 2007; van Klinken 2011, 2012, 2013; Thornton 2013, 2016; Eriksen 2014; Lindhardt 2015). In exploring further the relationship between gender and conversion, it is necessary to take a closer look at ethnographic data mined from the quotidian negotiations of men and women as gendered actors and the strategic practices they deploy in the context of gendered worlds manufactured by asymmetrical relationships of power.

At least since Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), scholars have been keen to acknowledge the performative and contingent aspects of gender, a fluid yet contested social category always open to interpretation, revision, and resignification through daily intercourse. We would be wise to keep this contingency in mind when considering in greater detail the complex ways in which evangelical religion shapes gender performance and expectation, together with the wide-ranging and profound ways in which gender informs religious experience for the faithful.

This article draws on extensive ethnographic research conducted in Villa Altagracia, an impoverished municipal home to roughly 84,000 urban and rural residents located 30 kilometers northwest of the capital city of Santo Domingo, in order to contextualize the poetics and politics of gender maintenance and transformation among male Pentecostal converts.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the behaviors and testimonies of men, this article reflects on the degree to which conversion experiences diverge between the sexes and is guided by several important ethnographic questions: How do the demands of born-again faith affect men in unique ways? How do their experiences of Christian fidelity differ from women? How exactly does conversion shape male identity and subjectivity in the church and local faith communities? These are important questions to consider, especially for understanding how the interests of gender maintenance and performance influence meaning and experience for male believers. Below, I measure the stakes of conversion for men in the urban barrio and the consequences of their attempts to construct Pentecostal masculine identities in this unique social context. The data shows that men manage their religious identities in very different ways from their female counterparts, in part because conversion represents a unique challenge for male converts and the ways in which they negotiate masculinity. The church asks them to do gender differently, but are converts more or less successful in assuming their new gender roles and expectations? The picture sketched below reveals an uncertain situation, one characterized not by effortless assimilation or relatively painless evangelical transformation but rather one of uncomfortable, anxious discord due largely to cultural expectations that situate male converts between competing and irreconcilable gender ideals: those of the street and those of the church.

In addition to contributing to an ongoing discussion in the anthropology and sociology of Christianity on the question of gender and conversion (e.g., Brusco 1995, Austin-Broos 1997, Burdick 1998, Smilde 2007,

Eriksen 2007, Soothill 2007, Lindhardt 2012b, Thornton 2016), this article's focus on masculinity links it with a parallel conversation about masculinity and society begun in anthropology several decades ago (see Brandes 1980; Gilmore 1990; Connell 1995; Gutmann 1996, 1997; Cornwall 1997). By focusing on male converts and their struggles to remain manly, the discussion here aims to contribute to a richer understanding of gender dynamics in Pentecostal churches with respect to men and masculinity and to offer useful insights into how gender is remade through conversion and religious practice more generally.

## **Background**

The expanding popularity of Pentecostal Christianity in the Dominican Republic is a relatively new phenomenon. Only 50 years ago, Protestantism was virtually unpracticed in the historically Catholic-dominated country with only about 1.6 percent of the population claiming affiliation. Today, Protestants, referred to locally as *evangélicos* or *cristianos*, are a ubiquitous feature of everyday Dominican life throughout the country.<sup>3</sup> According to statistics from the Pew Research Center (2014), 23 percent of the local population is Protestant, and of those, 81 percent are Pentecostal by denomination or identity.<sup>4</sup> The remarkable progress of this particular brand of Christianity in the Dominican Republic at the end of the 20th century parallels a trend observed throughout the global south (see Jenkins 2002). To date, many studies have attempted to chart the scope and reasons for this expansion along with endeavoring to explain the cultural changes associated with its widespread success, especially among the poor (see, for example, Martin 1990, Stoll 1990, Cox 1995). Like many other parts of the world, Pentecostal Christianity in the Dominican Republic appeals most to the popular classes and it is to them that evangelizing efforts are directed and their message of salvation fine-tuned. Originally a North American import, the Pentecostal movement is advanced most thoroughly today not by foreign missionaries, but by inspired local converts whose alluring message of forgiveness and redemption through moral transformation and ascetic discipline has enthralled a population long ensnared in poverty and upended by the familiar discontents of late-modernity. Thanks to uplifting rhetoric, open membership policies, egalitarian worship practices, and cathartic emotional rituals, Pentecostal churches have been embraced in seemingly every corner of the country.

Of central importance to Pentecostal Christian theology is the teaching of “Christian perfection” or “sanctification” (also known as “holiness”), the idea that it is possible to live free of sin thanks to an act of grace that purifies the soul and makes a convert holy. Pentecostalism teaches that once sanctified, believers assume “otherworldly” lives spiritually apart from the profane “worldly” existence of nonbelievers. This exceptional “in-but-not-of-the-world” orientation is furthered through rituals of differentiation such as conversion, baptism, the exercise of charismatic gifts, spiritual warfare, and especially the observance of behavioral prohibitions aimed at setting converts apart from the unconverted and helping them safeguard against sinning. Born-again Christians come to experience their inspired transformation in Jesus Christ in terms of a marked division or “dualism” between their life before and after conversion, represented by distinct moral orientations or “worlds” characterized in the local idiom as *el mundo* and *el evangelio*—“the profane world” and “the gospel,” respectively. The division between these two worlds, or “*dos mundos*,” is advanced and renewed through a strict ascetic moralism converts are enjoined to follow upon entering the church.

Thanks to daily church services, frequent spiritual retreats, a tightknit moral community, regular mentorship, recurrent prayer groups, required doctrine classes, and formal and informal policing of behavior, converts learn a new self-discipline that emphasizes discontinuity with their former lives in sin. So transformed, believers come to see themselves as the spiritual elect, religious authorities, blessed and saved by the grace of God. The incentives of a successful conversion are innumerable as they vary from person to person and ultimately depend upon the individual commitment and personal fidelity of converts. Nonetheless, according to my informants, a born-again Christian identity affords many things, not the least of which self-confidence, respect from others, and easy to follow guidelines for living happy, fulfilling, and prosperous lives (see Thornton 2016). These benefits, however, are not won with ease. The stakes are high, and because Pentecostal identity is rooted in the accomplishment of practical ideals—in the *doing* of the faith—(one cannot be considered sanctified and free of sin until one ceases to sin) converts must continuously reaffirm their commitment to the church and its values. Above all, they must comply with the faith’s proscriptions in order to secure the ultimate rewards promised to the faithful. Because converts can never be

assured of their salvation, they are constantly engaged in acts of fidelity and self-forgiveness that confirm their redemption.

### **Masculinity and Conversion in Villa Altrigracia**

For men in urban neighborhoods across the Dominican Republic, Pentecostal conversion requires that they abandon conventional barrio or street masculinity—colloquially referred to as *tigueraje*—and adopt an alternative masculine ideal rooted in the moral values of respectability (Thornton 2013). Exemplified locally by the notion of “seriousness,” respectable men of God mobilize substitute gender repertoires that draw on elevated cultural models of the stoic male breadwinner and the noble disciplined patriarch as catalysts for male prestige and authority. By prohibiting a range of behaviors tied to male gender politics and identity in the streets such as drinking, gambling, fighting, and womanizing, the church promotes a lofty moral alternative to *tigueraje* characterized by the values of integrity, temperance, maturity, decorum, and moral fortitude.

Contrasting with the subdued restraint distinctive of Pentecostal masculinity, *tigueraje* describes a brazen masculinity championed by the quintessential *hombre de la calle*, or “man of the streets.” He is admired for his wily evasion of discipline as he flaunts hyper-masculine values in the face of poverty and acute ostracism from respectability norms. A “*tiguere*,” or savvy, street-smart macho-man who embodies these traits, is a ubiquitous character in the Dominican social landscape. A man with *tigueraje* is a master of self-promotion and self-preservation. According to Krohn-Hansen (1996), he is a “survivor in his environment,” and, through his cunning, he is able to “emerge well” from any situation (Collado 1992). Derby describes him as the archetypal individualist, a “classic dissimulator” who claims a higher social station thanks to his slyness and having a “predatory masculine presence” (2009:186–187). Celebrated as often as he is distained for his brashness, the *tiguere* represents a lifestyle and attitude associated with the hyper-masculine traits of aggressiveness, carousing, womanizing, and delinquency (de Moya 2002:114n7). *Tigueraje* personifies the values of public male street culture found in bars, corner stores, and nightclubs; and, while stereotypically lower-class, is central, though in a complicated way, to the construction of masculinity for Dominican men of all social classes (Padilla 2007:134).<sup>5</sup>



Notwithstanding its uneven appeal, the Christian alternative to street masculinity is by no means shouldered with absolute certainty. In fact, it is fraught with ambivalence as Evangelical Christianity and *tigueraje* are coupled antithetically: conversion placing one's faith and one's gender identity at probable and perilous odds. An *evangélico* by definition cannot be a *tiguere* (macho man-of-the-streets) and vice versa. This local truism presents quite the dilemma for the male convert who, it is believed, must surrender his *tigueraje* in order to truly serve God. These former macho men are obliged to forsake the familiar modes of male-centered status competition and its attendant values in the streets in exchange for a Christian masculinity centered on the values of the church and nuclear family. The terms of this misalliance follow from Pentecostal Christianity's uncompromising demonization of a predominantly male street culture and the strident ubiquity of that culture in urban neighborhoods throughout the country. Obligations of the faithful to abide by the Word of God and to live ascetic lives clash with deep-seated attachments to popular forms of male gender performance that dominate everyday *barrio* life.

The church's prohibition on premarital sex and the authoritative injunction against acting on sexual desires are especially difficult for men to embrace and are among the more challenging demands of faith that male converts claim to confront.<sup>6</sup> Men in Villa Altagracia often cite this particular rule as the main deterrent to conversion and likewise it is named by the converted as one of the primary obstacles to adopting and maintaining a born-again lifestyle. An important feature of *barrio* masculinity is boasting of one's sexual conquests and prowess as well as professing one's appeal and success with women. The hyper-sexuality respected in the streets is debased in the church where a muted-sexuality is both valued and strictly observed. As Christian converts, overt displays of sexuality are reprehensible and forbidden; any form of sexual relations outside of marriage are considered illicit and are expressly discouraged. Instead, the avowed doctrine of the church demands a new form of bodily discipline from its members, one meant to set followers apart from their unconverted peers. The faithful learn a reformed *habitus* incompatible with the familiar modes of being masculine in the street. For example, the street life is associated with ostentatious self-indulgence, licentiousness, dogged self-reliance, and frivolity, where men are distinguished for their ability to overcome hardship through slyness and cunning. Alternatively, in the church, men are expected to humble themselves before God—to depend

alone upon faith and the power of the Holy Spirit for prosperity—believing that nothing is possible without the saving grace and divine will of God Almighty. In sharp contrast to the unmitigated freedoms of the street, the church enforces restrictive covenants with its members requiring that they observe a series of ascetic prohibitions in order to be saved. In this way, Pentecostal identity is distinguished by restraint, discipline, and modesty. These novel techniques of the body render believers spiritually transformed, ritually constituting the newly converted as sanctified disciples, born-again in Jesus Christ.

It has been observed in the academic literature on gender and conversion in Latin America that the prohibitions of the church function to “domesticate” men by demonizing behaviors associated with the male prestige complex (*tigueraje*, for instance) and by retraining their attention on the domestic sphere and the material and emotional concerns of the nuclear family (see Burdick 1993; Brusco 1995; Austin-Broos 1997; Chesnut 1997, 2003; Martin 2001). For many male believers, this domestication is experienced as a “feminization” inasmuch as their former obligations to the street and to their male friends are replaced by a new set of commitments to faith and family, values usually associated with the prerogatives of women and the feminized domestic sphere.

Elsewhere I have discussed the ways in which hyper-masculine men (former gang members, drug dealers, macho men-of-the-streets, etc.) reconcile the conflict between barrio masculinity and evangelical Christianity and mediate the threat conversion poses to the maintenance of their masculine persona (Thornton 2013).<sup>7</sup> Here, I am concerned with the personal and cultural elaboration of this conflict. That is, how this conflict is expressed in the lives of converts locally and its role in shaping masculine (and consequently feminine) identity and male subjectivity in the Pentecostal faith community.

For Pentecostal men in Villa Altagracia, ambivalence toward sexual modesty and restraint combined with the uncertain renunciation of masculine street values (barrio masculinity) leads to a kind of gender distress: frustration stemming from the challenges of reconciling the conflicting gender ideals of the church with those of the street. Expressions of this distress are the result of cognitive dissonance and may be seen in the resentment converts foster with their spouses, the blame they assign to women for their struggles to avoid sin, and, most notably, the menace of nocturnal she-demon attacks that purportedly threaten to lead good

men of God astray. Through idioms of resentment, blame, and demonic assault, male converts make explicit the difficulty in assimilating the (new) gender frameworks advanced by the church and actively work to cope with them. In turn, the all too common demonization of women becomes part and parcel of male subjectivity in the faith community and comes to contour the gendered attitudes and behaviors of male believers in remarkably apparent—and notably misogynistic—ways.

### **The Challenges of Conversion and the Foils of Sexual Temptation**

What is sometimes lost in speaking to enthusiastic Pentecostal believers, skimming the academic literature on conversion, or taking note of the staggering growth of Evangelical churches globally, is how incredibly difficult conversion can be for many people. It is not uncommon for people to convert, backslide, and return to the faith several times before actually settling in to make a lasting or full conversion. This trend is not unique to Dominican barrios, but is likely a characteristic of evangelical churches globally (see Gooren 2010:124, Bowen 1996:73). Conversion can be difficult, especially when it necessitates considerable personal transformation and cognitive upheaval. Undoubtedly, life in the streets as a drug dealer or gangbanger requires a personal makeover considerably more severe than that required of a God-fearing preacher's son.<sup>8</sup> Difficulty adapting to life in the church is a matter of degree—in some cases more than several degrees. Many young men in Villa Altigracia, for example, lead lives of violence and excess, and turn to Pentecostal conversion in order to escape gang affiliations, drug addiction, and street crime.<sup>9</sup> Few, if any, of my informants who followed this path would describe their conversions as having been “easy” or “care-free,” and nothing I have observed in my research suggests that becoming a Pentecostal is without its myriad trials—the values of the church are not assimilated quickly, thoroughly, or consistently.<sup>10</sup> Conversion is difficult because it often requires sizeable, perhaps even excruciating, strides to transform their lives and assimilate new values and convictions. Adapting to the church's rules can be difficult, even if, for many converts, “*vale la pena*” or it is “worth it” in the end.<sup>11</sup>

Young men convert for innumerable reasons; in Villa Altigracia, that means anything from meeting women, to leaving gangs, to fulfilling a genuine desire for spiritual transformation and enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> Whatever

brings them to the church often differs from what keeps them coming back. Their ability to stay in the church is dependent on a number of factors, not the least of which is their ability to make lasting internal changes and their success in effecting a convincing transformation before their congregation and local community. In order to be saved, converts must make a public profession of faith, accept Jesus Christ as their savior, repent, and assume a virtuous spiritual life ostensibly free of sin. Redemption is continuously at stake as converts are enjoined repeatedly to prove their sanctity and confirm their salvation in Jesus through demonstrations of holiness and probity by following the ascetic prohibitions laid out by the church (for more on this, see Thornton 2016).

Perhaps it bears mentioning that the rules of the church are guidelines for behavior that spell out the ideal conduct of members. While everyone is encouraged to follow them dutifully, in practice few people adhere to them perfectly. Héctor (discussed below) fell short of this ideal by having sired children out of wedlock, but he is certainly not exceptional in this regard. No one is expected to be flawless in his or her pursuit of salvation, and the congregations that I observed were forgiving and supportive of members who struggle or lose their way. As one informant remarked to me:

To be a follower of Christ and to walk in the way of the Lord is costly. It is more than just worship, going to church, doing good, and preaching the gospel. It is to be a mirror of Jesus. But there are many commandments that we don't live by. We are sinners. Despite how Christian you might be, you are imperfect, and that is why He demands that we pray and ask for forgiveness.

The conversions of men I refer to here are marked by particularly acute reversals of moral identity.<sup>13</sup> Men like them leave the comparatively permissive and indulgent streets and take up ethically demanding and restrictive lives in the church. The transformation these converts attempt to make is by no means easily achieved. In some cases, they must forsake their former friends, move from their natal homes, procure alternative employment, and create entirely new lives for themselves apart from the streets—the cradle of cultural values they know best. As a precondition for salvation, converts are forbidden from sinning and are directed to follow a number of rules or prohibitions in order to realize this ideal. Among the many prohibitions the

church stipulates are no fighting, no swearing, no dancing, no gambling, no drinking, no patronizing bars, nightclubs, or street festivals, no smoking, no fraternizing, no stealing, no lying, no infidelity, and no sex outside of marriage. Conversion for some requires profound changes in dress, countenance, behavior, language, attitude, and emotion. Of course, external, physical transformations are easier to undertake and quicker to realize than the deeper, more substantial internal changes that require sincere commitment and considerable time to crystalize and become salient for believers. Emotional investments in popular forms of masculinity are not simply suspended upon conversion or miraculously disappear with an intellectual turn to ascetic religious observance. These transformations take time. Through doctrine classes and the mentorship of seasoned congregants, junior and recent converts get the practical spiritual guidance they need to supplement the divine inspiration understood to have been the impetus for their call to the faith. Until a genuine conversion is fully realized—when a convert is baptized in water and later in the Holy Spirit—these Pentecostal believers are in some ways no more than provisional members, eagerly awaiting the official rituals of the church to confirm their salvation. Not yet fully incorporated as full or “true Christians,” but not exactly heathens either, these men and women of God are in the process of consolidating their faith and authenticating their claims to holiness. It is at this stage that we find converts who, despite exhibiting the appropriate drive, may be too immature in their convictions or lack the requisite knowledge or experience to overcome pronounced spiritual and moral conflicts of the type discussed below and the challenges that come with accepting a new life in Jesus Christ.

Rarely in Villa Altagracia do those new to the faith complain about not being able to drink, smoke, curse, or carry on as they once did in their pre-conversion lives. These former behaviors are typically overcome with little embellishment or at least no difficulty to which they make explicit reference.<sup>14</sup> Male converts rarely report rules against drinking, swearing, or fighting as taxing or hard to comply with. On the contrary, conquering such vices is a point of pride and prestige and figures as an important measure of a convert’s charismatic new identity as free of sin and necessarily transformed and redeemed (Thornton 2013). However, the prohibition on sexual matters such as fornication, womanizing, explicit or aggressive sexuality, and other so-called desires-of-the-flesh, inspire a range of responses that indicate considerable ambivalence. “Giving up women,”

as it is often construed, is cited by young unmarried men that I spoke with as far and away the most challenging requirement of Pentecostal faith. Consider this young musician's assessment of the church's rules and the challenges confronting his own conversion:

The most difficult thing to avoid here are the women. The women are a problem. They are a serious issue for me. Wherever I go, wherever I go to play [music] or something, women always approach me, they offer themselves to me. But in the end you should avoid these things. It only suits the body; it is a desire of the flesh, not the Spirit. This is the most difficult thing for me. I swear: if this did not exist I would be the best Christian in the world, really.

On one hand, it is relatively easy to avoid the sin of intemperance by eschewing alcohol and steering clear of bars and nightclubs. Similarly, if one only wishes, it is a fairly simple task to stop cursing, fighting, smoking, or breaking the law. On the other hand, illicit sexual desires are of a different order of sin altogether and are much more difficult to manage. One need not *do* anything to have lustful and therefore illicit thoughts about a neighbor; simply *thinking* or having such thoughts is deemed sinful and reprehensible. Desire is itself an abstract idea, difficult to grasp conceptually but easily felt nevertheless. To dispense with sexual desire is in some ways akin to ignoring a hungry, empty stomach—one can deny it, but at what expense to his own comfort? Furthermore, unlike other sins that one can cease committing entirely, sexuality is disciplined by the faith, but not completely forbidden or eliminated. The church delineates permissible and impermissible sexual expression; sanctioning sexual contact for married couples alone. Converts are not asked to extinguish sexual desire entirely, only to regulate it, to parse the acceptable from the unacceptable, and to demonstrate mastery over temptation. The converts that I came to know struggle with those demands of the church that require a unique kind of self-restraint and impulse management, in this case those that require the suppression of sexual desire and resisting the social pressures to chase and involve oneself sexually with women. Sexual temptation is feared to be a great threat to young male converts who are taught to regard lustful thoughts as sinful and therefore the provenance of the Devil. If left unchecked, prohibited desires can keep the faithful from achieving holiness and thwart their bid for salvation. For these young men, illicit desires

are a thorny obstacle to achieving sanctity and the salvation of their soul; thus from their perspective—and by dubious implication—therefore so are women. Suspect coquettes are reviled for their blasphemous manipulation of impressionable men, scorned for their culpability in distracting them from spiritual pursuits, and, perhaps most damning of all, derided for consorting with the Devil.

## **The Demonization of Women: Idioms of Blame, Resentment, and Demonic Assault**

### ***Blame***

By way of a peculiar if predictable kind of logic, one that finds inspiration and scriptural support in the Bible itself, women, the objects of male desire and the focus of sexual temptation in the barrio, are frequently cast by the faithful as adversaries to good Christian men, seductresses used by the Devil to lead men of God from the path of righteousness and salvation. “It’s not the drugs but the women,” explains one young convert who had left the street life, “the Devil uses them to persuade you to fall and leave the church. But once you leave the church, the women leave.” Likewise for Radames, a 17-year-old ex-gang member who converted in 2009, women are unscrupulous and not to be trusted:

There are many Delilahs, many women who say that I am *agentao*, that I think I’m a somebody now that I’m in the church. They look to take advantage of you; they look for a way to knock you down from grace. This is so that you get a false sense of pride and do not see things as they really are. But the Word of God says that one must see things as they really are...These same Delilahs are the women who come into the thoughts in my head and tell me I can have a woman, secretly, so that the congregation doesn’t find out.<sup>15</sup>

The characters Eve and Delilah are popular female antagonists from the Bible who are invoked in reference to allegedly deceitful women whom male converts perceive to be threatening to their spiritual objectives. Delilah, a treacherous and cunning femme fatale, is known for having betrayed Samson and notorious for having led him to his downfall. Church leaders instruct neophytes to be wary of “Delilahs,” not just outside of the

church but within it as well. Since converting, Radames tries only to spend time with born-again Christians, but even of these women he remains suspicious and guarded:

[Since converting] I mostly interact with women from the church, but not all of them. There are many who are a part of 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 who was sending me love letters. Getting the cards was pleasing to me...but one day I said to her "look, I cannot accept this," and she said to me, "but why? I am from the church too." In truth, she is still attached to worldly things. What they want is to take you away. They say things to you until you fall and you leave the church. After that, they never spend time with you again.

In order to protect against the lure of "worldly" women and to fortify themselves spiritually against temptation and the call of the street, it is not uncommon for young men after joining the church to take up residence within it, to sleep on the floor of the church at night and return to their homes during the day. Radames slept in the church along with two others, Héctor and a young man named José Luis, all three of whom had converted from notable lives as drug dealers or gang members and who had taken a vow known as a *proposito* to sleep there until marriage, that is, until God provides them with a wife.

For those converts who are married or cohabit with domestic partners, conversion can spur new antagonisms as husbands struggle to assimilate revised expectations of married life put forth by the church and adjust to their new responsibilities as Christian spouses. Now expected to invest significantly more time, resources, and attention into wife and children than ever before, the new accountability demanded of the faithful can be perceived as a weighty burden, especially alongside the other accommodations converts are expected to make almost immediately upon joining the church.

Women, for their part, do not generally have to make as sharp or acute a transformation as men. When women convert, they likely encounter few if any significant changes to their gender role expectations.<sup>16</sup> As Elizabeth Brusco (1995) and others have pointed out, Pentecostal churches promote the interests of women as mothers and as wives by domesticating



men and aligning their interests with those of the household and nuclear family, even while supporting traditional gender roles that reinforce male authority (see also Burdick 1993, Chesnut 1997, Mariz and Machado 1997, Martin 2001). Usually restricted by powerful cultural norms that limit the scope and degree of their sinfulness, women in Villa Altigracia are generally perceived to be less sinful than men and, as a corollary, their conversions are thought not to be as profound (Thornton 2013). Because conversion appears to come at a greater personal cost to men, since it potentially requires greater sacrifice and investment to realize, from a certain point of view, it is husbands who appear to have made a more earnest spiritual transformation than their wives (who, ironically, are otherwise understood to be more involved in the church, have a greater command over its doctrine, and who convert at higher rates and probably with more general success than their husbands). Elsewhere I have suggested that this difference leads to alternative configurations of charismatic authority in the church (Thornton 2013). Here, I want to point out that this lopsidedness has the inconvenient effect of persuading some men to believe that (or, perhaps, more cynically, gives them evidentiary grounds to claim that) they are indeed more serious—and therefore more genuine—Christians than their wives.

Despite being married for all intents and purposes (though not officially or legally), Héctor, a 35-year-old convert who had three years in the church when I first met him, expressed on more than one occasion that his commitment to his longtime girlfriend Juanita, herself a convert, was hampered by their unequal faithfulness to God. He reasoned that he could not marry her, despite being pregnant with his second child, because they were on markedly different spiritual paths and that, in his estimation, his spiritual transformation was deeper and sincerer than hers. He suggested to me one day that she had yet to give herself over fully to God:

Sometimes we accept Christ in the same way but not everyone is transformed by God at the same time. Sometimes there are people for whom it takes a while. For others it is instantaneous. God does in our life what we permit him to do; for our part, we give him the opportunity.

Implying here that he was more willing to receive God's message of salvation, Héctor further indicated that Juanita, despite her membership in the church, had not made the same significant spiritual change that he had

made upon conversion. Perhaps to avoid making a long-term commitment to her, he used this excuse to explain why they had, until that point in time, put off getting married:

We have not decided to get married because, how do I put it, sometimes in the Way of the Lord you have to make difficult decisions, but it's for the best. In order to persist in the gospel, you have to make them...The Bible talks about the unequally yoked, for example. When you have a conviction about something and I have a different conviction, there is no agreement. We disagree. The Bible says that to be unequally yoked is to have a burden that is steeper on one side than on the other. That is to say that the burden is uneven. It's like when speaking with another person about God and the topic makes them uncomfortable. God often says that if you are aware of living in this state, even if you are not married, he gives you permission to separate. If you are married already then perhaps there is no one [else] for you.

Here, Héctor invokes a popular biblical metaphor of the unequally yoked, drawn from 2 Corinthians 6:14, that believers interpret to be a directive to shun conjugal relations with nonbelievers, the idea being that unbalanced relationships of this kind are not conducive to holiness and spiritual uplift. Despite the fact that Juanita was a Christian and pregnant with his child—indeed, from the perspective of many in his congregation she was a highly appropriate spouse and as regular sexual partners they were expected to marry—Héctor maneuvered to avoid marriage by suggesting that she was simply not as serious or as dedicated a follower, likening her to a nonbeliever by oblique reference to the metaphor used to discourage relationships with heathens.

Opposing the clear expectations of the church that he formalize his union with Juanita, Héctor dodged his marriage obligations to the probable dismay of fellow congregants. In our interactions, however, and from what I observed in his dealings with others, Héctor did not appear to be troubled by this obvious contradiction. He seemed content to put off marriage with Juanita by employing an excuse he knew to be valid in the eyes of the church, even if his regular sexual contact with her was not, as a rule, condoned. However contrived it might look to an outsider, Héctor justified

his reluctance to marry Juanita based on the faith's injunction on "unequal unions" and the imperative to marry a spiritually suitable partner.

I am tempted to interpret Héctor's maneuvering as opportunistic. In avoiding marriage to Juanita, he could more reasonably (though not without some rebuttal or grief) skirt domestic responsibilities and the tethers of monogamy that would likely prevent him from looking for a new partner or spending what little money he made elsewhere. Instead, he preserves his eventual availability should he meet a woman with whom he would rather be with and he is freer to allocate his income where he sees fit. Friends of the couple informed me that the two had been having trouble in their relationship because Héctor was not purchasing important items for the home. In particular, at issue was the expense of a new kitchen stove. Our mutual friends were in agreement that if Héctor expected to eat with Juanita regularly (food she prepared for him at that!), he should at least be responsible for provisioning this necessary appliance. From Héctor's point of view, not to mention that of several others in the church, he was not responsible for providing for her or her home in the same way that he would if they were married. He no doubt believed that since he did not sleep in the house regularly (he slept in the church otherwise) he was not responsible for its upkeep and because he was not technically married to Juanita he was not compelled to support her as if they were husband and wife. Membership in the church and commitment to its primary values would otherwise have ensured his investment in the household had they been married. By avoiding this contract, Héctor could maintain an orientation centered not on the home or domestic sphere but more selfishly on himself and his own salvation and, as a further matter, retain his availability to other women should the opportunity arise. Moreover, Héctor made it clear that he was not interested in assuming the responsibilities of husband and father, and this was further supported by the fact that he did not live with or look after his son who was being cared for in the home of fellow congregants.

Some Pentecostals find that with conversion their prospects for meeting and winning the favor of women increase, observing that women who were never interested in them before now "offer themselves" freely to the born-again faithful who as evangélicos are now perceived to be responsible, honest, hard-working, and, thus, desirable men of God who can more reliably be expected to remain faithful and to support their immediate family (see also Brusco 1995; Burdick 1993, 1998). A well-regarded pastor from a local church explained to me one day that despite being married

with several children, he had to be careful while counseling female members of his congregation since women who are unhappy in their marriages were likely to fall for him. For some converts, it is the revelation of their newfound desirability as born-again Christians that has the potential to taint otherwise strong committed relationships with resentment and newfound antagonisms. This may drive particularly brazen husbands to seek a way out of marital commitments along with their domestic responsibilities to hearth and home instead of fostering greater fidelity to them.

### ***Resentment***

Marriage, an ideal in the community if seldom a reality, sanctions sexual relations and enjoyment in the church and ensures that converts invest in the nuclear family. It does not, however, ensure that the role of husband and father will be embraced with enthusiasm or competence or that marital relations will proceed harmoniously and unaffected. An illustrative example is Mariano—a quiet, occasionally employed young man in his 20s attending, along with his wife and two young children, the same Pentecostal church as Héctor and Radames. Mariano seriously entertained ending his marriage with his then-pregnant wife because, as he claimed, he wished to be closer to God. His pastor is a woman and it was she who told me the story. Mariano told her that in order to be closer to God, he felt like he had to leave his wife. He felt like she was holding him back spiritually and that she was getting in his way, and that regretfully as long as he was with her he could not be the good Christian he wished to be. The pastor advised him that he could not leave his wife because he had a responsibility as a Christian to take care of his family. He protested further that he was not in fact in love with his wife, rather, she was in love with him. The pastor countered and reasoned that God would not be happy with him leaving a woman with two kids and one on the way. She asked him why they were no longer in love and Mariano suggested that it was not really love that had brought them together in the first place but that his wife had fallen in love with superficial things like his clothes and his sartorial style. In her characteristically blunt and comically earnest way, the pastor scolded him for what she considered to be pure rubbish, declaring: “Last time I checked, you don’t sleep with [your] clothes [on]!”

Mariano may, or may not, have been using this as an excuse to get out of his domestic responsibilities as husband and father. In any case, it is clear that he had come to view his wife, for better or worse, as an obstacle to

spiritual fulfillment, if not his individual freedom. By proposing that his wife represented a hindrance to his more mature spiritual aspirations, Mariano expressed his discontent with the marriage pact and by extension the institution's domestic gender and sex role expectations, in effect cultivating a resentful dynamic built on the premise that in order to truly be saved he and his wife would have to live apart. The stakes, as he construed them, were high: salvation of his soul or faithfulness to his wife, a presumably difficult choice, but clearly in his mind, an easy one to make. Mariano's maneuvering thus invokes, with Héctor, a complex dynamic of gender, faith, and agency germane to conversion and evangelical marriage relations in the barrio and decisive in constituting male autonomy and authority within the church community where men's freedom and license are more often felt to be under siege than defended or supported.

Scenarios in which husbands resent their wives for being obstacles to spiritual fulfillment are curious to say the least. For one thing, such declarations belie a taken for granted idea locally in the greater spiritual inclination of women and the moral innocence normally ascribed to female converts in Dominican society.<sup>17</sup> It also questions the presumed stability and contentedness of evangelical partnerships observed throughout Latin America (see Burdick 1993, Mariz and Machado 1997). Moreover, they invert a widespread assumption that it is women who must bring their husbands to the faith and rarely the other way around. This is especially true in contexts like Villa Altigracia where women are generally acknowledged to be more religious (expressed emically as more "spiritual") and more likely to take to the church and its activities with greater frequency and gusto.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to married men, married women are incentivized to endure unhappy or imperfect marriages in hopes that their husbands might someday find Jesus and turn their lives around for the better. Women are told to pray for their husbands' conversion and for them to one day see the fault in their errant ways and repent.<sup>19</sup> Wayward husbands are a miserable occurrence for many wives, but rarely if ever is this cited as an impediment to spiritual fulfillment.<sup>20</sup> In fact, many women find solace in their faith and in their personal relationship with God, in addition to embracing immeasurable assistance from a community of sympathetic supportive allies in the church who aid them in weathering marital strife. Testimonies abound about how conversion has improved married life for both sexes by making husbands and wives better spouses to one another; nevertheless, these assertions obscure the very real tensions that smolder as a

result of dissimilar expectations applied to men and women that threaten to undermine contented unions.<sup>21</sup>

Pressure on men to live up to the expectations of virtuous Christian husbands and fathers is perhaps greater than the burden put on women to meet the parallel ideal of femininity, if for no other reason than the values of motherhood and respect for the marital bond espoused by the church are rarely in conflict with traditional domestic concerns that benefit wives and mothers. Some of these details may seem unremarkable but I mention them here so as to draw attention to several points of comparative interest. One, to emphasize the often-overlooked fact that men and women, particularly in the context of urban poverty, construct drastically different spiritual paths (or testimonies) and establish, in many cases, radically different spiritual objectives—even if framed in similar terms such as achieving the goal of sanctity or actuated in the same manner as through prayer, fasting, and repentance.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it would hardly be reaching to suppose that, in most cases, men and women come to the church, remain within it, or leave a congregation for a multitude of varied reasons, even if some of these reasons overlap. This is important because it shows that the church comes to function quite differently for men and women whose goals and aspirations cannot be said to coincide in each and every instance, chiefly because of the radically different gender expectations for men and women outside of the church just as within it. The conversion of a 17-year-old gang member, for example, cannot be said to mirror or even to approximate the conversion of a 60-year-old widow—neither in kind nor in course. With this in mind, it is much easier to understand the frustrations expressed by men in the church and the instances of distress that shape the experience of male converts in directions quite dissimilar from that of women, as they work toward the goal of salvation by adopting radically reformed gender expectations and attempt to fashion themselves anew as charismatic servants of God.

In both cases referenced above, faith and spiritual commitment figure prominently in the concerns of men who struggle in their relationships with women following conversion. Neither Mariano nor Héctor, however, were able to articulate exactly how it was that their wives' alleged lack of faith was a hindrance to their own spiritual growth—only that it was. The difficulties of living up to the requirements of married life as Christian husbands, nevertheless, are clearly apparent. Both Héctor and Mariano grappled with the responsibilities of taking care of children, providing

financially for their families, and meeting the minimum expectations of good Christian husbands and fathers. It is much easier, it seems, to skirt around the dullness of monogamy, the difficulties of financial stewardship, and the accountability of fatherhood if one is not married in the first place. Put a different way, the demands of the church are much easier to negotiate for those not bound by matrimony as they encounter fewer burdensome claims on their time and have fewer restrictions imposed on their personal freedoms. The autonomy men surrender upon conversion is experienced as a significant loss (Martin 2001:55) and it is my contention here, based on observations in Villa Altagracia, that this loss is not simply or easily accepted by converts but is resisted, vented, or negotiated in ways that indicate considerable ambivalence and resentment.<sup>23</sup>

Despite their most sincere efforts, men in the barrios of Villa Altagracia struggle to accommodate the transformative demands of the church and the ubiquitous masculine values of the streets that seem always to pull them in the opposite direction. The situation is further complicated by the social and economic situation of converts who are often incapable of financially supporting families of their own or exemplifying the role of Christian husband as provider, dependable patriarch, and moral exemplar. This is commonly the case for men who have children from multiple unions and are therefore fettered with competing obligations to various women. This might include, for example, potentially conflicting commitments to a wife and her children, possibly to the mother or mothers of his other children, as well as responsibilities to his natal home and also to his male friends and extended family.<sup>24</sup> With moral and financial obligations in so many directions, and the ethical imperatives of the church obliging men to satisfy them all, it should come as no surprise that male converts often find themselves drowning in responsibilities they cannot possibly fulfill and failing to manage expectations they do not truly believe they can meet. Although conversion resolves some of these conflicts by prioritizing a focus on the needs of the nuclear family over those of say one's male friends (or perhaps one's mistress or mistresses), it does not solve the larger issue of divergent commitments outside the home that burden men with responsibilities that make it difficult to accomplish the Christian ideals set forth for husbands and fathers. Men may come to resent women to whom they have strong moral commitments (the mothers of their children for instance) because they fault them for their struggle to attain these

ideals, coming to view them as troublesome obstacles to achieving the prized rewards of the faith and meeting its masculine ideal.

In Villa Altigracia, allegedly obstructive wives are in this way likened to the Devil himself. By hindering their husbands' spiritual potential and impeding his wish to be closer to God, these married women are cast in the role of malevolent Christian adversaries, accused of keeping man from God and frustrating his attempts at redemption. Through expressions of resentment, no less blame, married converts in the barrio do more than just convey their discontent with the marriage pact. Indeed, they negate their wives assertions of moral and spiritual superiority and negotiate space to exercise male autonomy and domestic authority more freely, in no small part, by equating women with the illicit spiritual power of *el enemigo*, the local term for Satan the enemy of God, meanwhile associating themselves with the virtue of *el bueno* and divine communion with Jesus Christ.

### ***Demonic Assault***

Lastly, and perhaps most strikingly, the demonization of women in the church takes its most literal and arresting form in the specter of sexual temptation itself and the menace of nocturnal she-demon attacks that threaten to spoil the holiness of converted men. For both married and unmarried converts alike, the specter of sexual temptation is possibly the most conspicuous expression of the gender distress attending conversion from the street life and the most explicit symbol of their struggle against illicit desire. At this end of the spectrum, converts come to experience their conversions quite literally as predatory assaults on their manhood. In these instances, sexual desire takes the form of a demon mistress, whom Dominican Pentecostals call a *metresa*, who comes into the mind of a man and "forces" him to have sex with her.

The term "metresa" refers to a female division of local spirits (variously known as *misterios*, *santos*, or *seres* by their servants) that has its roots in the highly syncretic Catholic, African, and Haitian inspired spirit pantheon of Dominican *vodú* (Deive 1992, Patín Veloz 1975, Davis 1987). The term has been appropriated by Pentecostals who associate this class of spirits with perverse sexuality and malevolent femininity (loose women, prostitutes, and witches), commonly casting them as demon seductresses who prey on impressionable men and who torment vulnerable women through (demonic) possession.<sup>25</sup> Believed to be among the Devil's most treacherous minions sent to thwart the salvation of man,



they are said to be spirit entities that enter the thoughts of the converted who are unwary in their pious discipline or who may have succumbed, however briefly, to the temptation of illicit desire. Here, a local deacon explains the demonic operation:

The Word says that the Devil comes to kill, to meddle, and to destroy. He plays like a spirit. He doesn't appear with horns, he comes into people's subconscious. 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 when you sleep. 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 that person's conscience and the person begins to have sex with a metresa. So, the devil operates in the mind of 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, if you went to church, he will not be able to enter you. It is a mental war. No one can avoid an evil thought, but if we can avoid it then we can keep him out.

For believers, war with the Devil is a mental war over contrasting moral values, a battle between good and evil in which the faithful are most vulnerable at night when malevolent spirits come to assail their sleeping victims on account of their daylight transgressions. Several of my informants explain that "the battle ground of Christians is the mind" and that the spiritual war is a mental war; it is believed that one's thoughts open a door from which the Devil may enter and reveal himself. Men must therefore fortify themselves spiritually and mentally through prayer, congregating in a church (some even choosing to sleep there), and fasting, striving always to be vigilant in the face of pervasive depravity and the Devil's manipulative designs. They say the flesh is weak and ever subject to demonic manipulation. If you spend the day lusting after women, the Devil will turn your sinful thoughts against you in the form of evil spirits who have sexual intercourse with sleeping men. The specific mechanics of these assaults become clearer in Radames's interpretation of a masturbatory experience in the church one night where he slept:

When I began to sleep in the church there was a metresa that visited me. These are Delilahs that take hold of the mind. There are times that you are thinking you are having sex 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 woke up with the zipper of my pants open with everything unbuttoned. But it was the metresa that unbuttoned it for me. The demon used me without me realizing.

In this retelling of a personal encounter with a native succubus, Radames casts himself as a sympathetic victim, powerless to oppose the unsolicited sexual advance of the demon mistress. Blaming the metresa for using his own hands to commit the illicit act, Radames denies culpability for the midnight affair by locating blame, not with himself, but with the treacherous she-demon who as a wicked external agent seized upon his forbidden desires and maliciously used them against him. The vulnerability he expresses in this account is suggestive of the powerlessness men are believed to exhibit in controlling their own desires; the she-demon attacks symptomatic of the moral torment typical macho men experience upon joining the church. Here, or more broadly in the Dominican Republic, men are charitably viewed as incorrigible flirts who are regularly, if begrudgingly, pardoned for moral lapses attributable to their insatiable attraction to women.<sup>26</sup>

The assaults themselves are a powerful inversion of dominant sex role imagery in Dominican society: the demon mistress, or so-called metresa, subjects her male victim to a passive sexual role where, distressingly, he becomes a supine and submissive recipient rather than a dominant, active initiator of the coital act, in essence feminizing him for sex. The encounters can be interpreted, thus, as performing a kind of symbolic undoing of male sexual prerogatives in a manner analogous to the harm inflicted upon the masculine ego by the ascetic prohibitions of the church that feminize male converts through the renunciation of masculine street values, and by seemingly requiring men to submit to a range of feminine interests including, presumably, obliging them to acquiesce to their wives' authority at home. The portrayal of aggressive female sexuality is an inverted Dominican social ideal, one that reflects the feminizing experience of conversion for reformed men-of-the-streets and the loss of barrio masculinity

for those once rewarded (now punished) for their impressive drive to sex. The denial of virility is of course profoundly conflicting for male converts; a principal vector in dominant configurations of masculinity in the streets (and, more generally, in the Caribbean as a whole; see for example Wilson 1995:150), unchecked virility, if not refuted by the faithful, offends their fidelity to the church, threatening any hope of salvation.

While Pentecostal men labor to defend against these nocturnal demonic attacks in their quest to achieve sanctity, on occasion they are also faced with the phantom of the demon itself. Here, Radames describes yet another late-night encounter with a metresa at the church, this time in the form of a dark shade:

There are many people who have demons that are against them. Look, if you give them just the slightest opportunity they are going to take advantage. Demons start to roam the streets after 12 o'clock. They begin to do all sorts of things. What they do at night manifests during the day. This happens a lot I have realized. The other day I went to bed around 9 o'clock but couldn't sleep because I had thoughts of a woman in my head. Those are Delilahs. What I wanted was to leave the church that night and go to my house. Had I gone home I would have called this girl to come over. Héctor realized what was happening when I got up to go to the bathroom. In the house next to the church there was a demon. That night we heard the house shaking and dishes breaking on the floor and the demon came into the church. As I made my way to the bathroom the demon, a black shade, came up behind me. Right 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. I was going to go to my house and call that girl, but that would have been a mistake because if I go to where the girl lives it is to commit fornication. The Bible says that you should not commit fornication or adultery.

Notably, the appearance of the demonic coincides with his illicit wish to pursue a sexual encounter with his female friend, a wish he knew to be forbidden under the church's rules pertaining to sexual conduct. Radames

understood this encounter as an unmistakable warning to avoid fornicating and to rebuke the Devil's attempts to entice him to sin. His trying efforts to evade prohibited desires are expressed in vivid detail in his endeavors to elude the instantiation of dangerous forbidden sexuality in the form of a demon mistress. The encounter itself delineates a trenchant local phenomenology of guilt and forbidden desire as experienced by male churchgoers and read through a gendered moral framework figured by Pentecostalism's ascetic Christian message. The appearances of these lascivious beings are with little doubt corollaries of the deeply ambivalent acceptance of the church's prohibition on sex and the unique experience of being male and Christian in the barrio churches.

To be sure, the verisimilitude of these accounts lends credibility to the men's reports of victimization described above. Whatever the metresas' ontological status, their existence is not questioned. After all, local Pentecostals claim that these are the same beings observed to possess the unfortunate and godless and are the same entities served by their misguided neighbors who mistake them for saints and helpful spirits. Whether a metresa can be observed empirically or whether the spirit operates alone within the mind of their servant or victim—whether she appears as a shade, a beautiful woman, or merely a figment of the imagination—is not entirely consistent. If some of these beliefs appear to be contradictory, it is because as living folk-beliefs their bearers exchange coherency and consistency for flexibility and expediency. This does not seem to bother believers in the slightest for in any event the message to them is all but ambiguous: illicit sexual desire is a threat to salvation and the achievement of holiness, and must be resisted in much the same way as any other instance of sin—it must be rebuked.<sup>27</sup>

The demonic encounters discussed here are therefore at least metaphorically true, if not empirically so, for some leading to a literal assault on their manhood. It is hardly a coincidence that converts encounter demons who accost them sexually and rarely if ever discuss evil spirits who, for example, make them use drugs, force them to drink alcohol, or coerce them to lie and cheat or steal. Although, this is not unheard of, it would be viewed with far more skepticism by the congregation who otherwise sanction stories of metresas and accept them as examples of a broader demonic plan to lead men from salvation.

These sinful erotic encounters are hardly unique to the Dominican Republic. They have an obvious historical precedent in the early Christian church where erotic thoughts were held to be demon-inspired and eliminating them often took the shape of a dramatic battle against seductive demonic spirits (Stewart 2002:298). According to Charles Stewart (2002:303), early Christian ascetics—not unlike the Pentecostal men discussed here—sought to eliminate erotic dreams as part of their quest for spiritual perfection.

Whether expressed as blame, resentment, or demonic assault, gender distress and the frustration attending male conversion in the barrio can be observed in the wide-ranging and variable reproach of women familiars and the professed threat they allegedly pose to the sanctity and salvation of Christian men. Implicit in these admonitions is a sweeping indictment of femininity, a forewarning of the dangers of female sexuality to men's holiness, and a not-so-oblique endorsement of male-centric gender values in the defense of male autonomy.

### **Translating Illicit Desire**

The blame and resentment male converts direct against their perceived female antagonists function to denounce—in fact, to demonize—female authority and to license attitudes of mistrust by drawing on biblical precedent to locate fault with women familiars. Facing the threat of a potentially feminizing conversion and the guilt of their own intractable desires, male converts translate their distress into a spiritual battle for salvation—not exactly against their own deep-seated conflictual desires or moral failures—but against concrete objects of culturally legitimate, socially acceptable scorn and public antipathy; that is, of course, treacherous seductive women. In the most extreme cases, men animate their illicit desires in the form of unwelcome demonic assaults; the personal threat of forbidden desire becoming the personified threat of erotic sin in the form of alluring succubi. As a particularly punitive result of this dynamic, one that openly defies female probity and moral authority in the church, women in the eyes of anxious beguiled male converts are transformed into demonic temptresses (Delilahs), encumbering troublesome wives (Eves), and the embodiment of temptation and illicit desire itself (she-demons or metresas).

These, what I.M. Lewis (1966) might call “sex-war” aspects of conversion, are revelatory instances of the sexual tensions characteristic of Pentecostal gender relations in the barrio and the novel gender politics of

evangelical faith that frame male conversion and religious behavior locally. While the church attempts to resolve domestic strife and the contentious husband/wife relation by consolidating their mutual commitment to the nuclear family and dissolving men's antagonistic commitment to the street and extramarital affairs (Burdick 1993, Smilde 1994, Brusco 1995), it simultaneously creates new antagonisms based on the strong persecution of normative masculine values and the imposition of a nearly unattainable Christian ideal of manhood. This is particularly so for impoverished barrio residents who neither have the financial resources nor the cultural capital to embody the much-vaunted values of respectability esteemed by the country's elite and affirmed by the church's doctrine of holiness.

It should be noted that believers themselves do not associate the difficulty of assimilating Pentecostal gender norms with the demands of the church, its prohibitions, or the faith itself, but instead attribute their struggles to the putative presence of the demonic and the intractable spirit of male sexuality. In this way, male converts transpose their frustrations with conversion requirements (and, by extension, necessarily the church itself) to objects of more appropriate scorn like the cultural symbols of dangerous sexual aggression such as prostitution and loose women along with so-called *metresas*, the devious temptresses who embody the perceived dangers of unbridled sexual power.

Considering the ethnographic evidence presented here, men who convert from the streets do not always willingly submit to their own domestication but often accept it begrudgingly, ambivalently, and in some cases, refuse to accept it all together, evading their feminization-through-domestication by avoiding marriage relations entirely. Perhaps surprisingly, then, conversion may create as much—if not more—antagonism between sexes than it usually purports to solve. This appears to be especially the case in the context of impoverished urban communities like Villa Altigracia where masculine street values compete with the church to determine the parameters of respect in the barrio while vying to delineate the only feasible possibilities for status acquisition and distinction among one's peers in the absence of formal titles of prestige and conventional markers of material plenty.

The victims of malevolent spirit attacks in the form of native succubi tend to be men who grapple with the demands of the church and who likely have the most to lose if they backslide and return to their former lives in the streets. Concern about Radames in particular was frequently

expressed by fellow churchgoers who worried about his commitment to the faith and his long-term prospects for remaining with the congregation after having left a particularly brutal street gang and having been observed laboring to abide by the rules of the church. They pointed to his seeming inability to completely relinquish “*las cosas del mundo*,” the so-called desires-of-the-flesh forbidden to believers, and wholly embrace his new life in Jesus Christ. Encounters with *metresas* along with treacherous women are sometimes blamed for backsliding men and the difficult adjustments to church life that male converts commonly face. I propose, however, that these examples are more profitably read, not as the *stimulus* preventing men in the *barrio* from being good Christians (as is sometimes claimed by believers themselves), but rather as the evocative *result* of their attempts to be good Christians and the frustration of adopting new gendered modes of being required to do so successfully.

Stories of seductive Delilahs, obstructive wives, and devious succubi, dramatize the difficulty male converts face in managing and overcoming their will to sex and properly assuming the reformed gender expectations of the church that are compulsory for achieving sanctity. These varied demonic encounters, along with their accompanying testimonies, are a product of male believers’ attempts to live virtuously in accordance with the gospel despite the tremendous pressure to transform their lives within a cultural environment (the urban *barrio*) that rewards men authority and prestige in terms profoundly incongruous with the church and its mission. As rhetorical genres, testimonies of this nature illustrate the challenges of living a born-again lifestyle in urban poverty and the difficulties former men-of-the-street face in achieving and preserving holiness.

Of course, the demonization of women in Christianity is nothing new; it is as old as the Bible itself—beginning in the book of Genesis with the story of Eve, the original temptress. From the perspective of Pentecostal men in Villa Altigracia, a chain of associations continues the historical and symbolic link between women and evil itself. The interpretive formula that makes witches out of women—demons out of dames—looks (in admittedly simplistic terms) something like this: if women are the cause of temptation, and temptation the preserve of the Devil, then women must be in a league with the Devil himself. The simultaneous attraction and repulsion to women that the church engenders makes a surprisingly cogent parallel with the concurrent wish for and denial of “worldly” desires expressed by its flock. Pentecostal moral commitments draw men into new relationships

with women that at best promote greater equity and harmony (especially within the household) and at worst create trying antagonisms between the sexes based on structural contradictions that define moral expectations for men and women in asymmetrical terms. Believers make sense of this conflict by reference to the Biblical accounts of Adam and Eve as well as Samson and Delilah whose stories bear out the taken-for-granted opposition between male and female morality.

Not incidentally, women are rarely, if ever, the victims of incubi, male demons who have sexual intercourse with sleeping women. If they are, I have never heard such stories and they cannot be said to feature prominently in popular Pentecostal discourse or demonology in the Dominican Republic. To be seduced sexually by demonic spirits is something that apparently only victimizes men (something psychoanalytically informed observers will note is a particularly convenient reaction formation or “projective inversion”—an inappropriate if unconscious wish revealing itself as a terrifying nightmare).<sup>28</sup> This may be indicative of the stress peculiar to exceptionally macho men and the crucial role played by conflicting gender norms in shaping new male identities in the church. In any case, women are no strangers to the demonic idiom in their own right: usually possessed (inhabited or controlled) by demonic spirits more often than men, women have been observed to utilize the demonic idiom as a way of negotiating their own gendered interests (Lewis 1966, 1971; Boddy 1989, 1994; Bourguignon 2004). Even if in the barrio it is uncommon for women to be visited in their sleep by sexually aggressive male spirits (or at least rare for them to speak about it openly), it is not unusual for women to experience demonic possession and to rely on such diagnoses to challenge the authority of men (see also Lewis 1971).<sup>29</sup> It is probable, as I have suggested here, that male converts too may advance gender projects of their own through strategic appeals to Christian sanctity and the alleged impiety of their female counterparts.<sup>30</sup>

Occasions of blame, resentment, and demonic assault are not simply expressive evocations of gender distress or simple manifestations of sexual frustration attending conversion from the street life; but, as such, they are also transformative idioms that, through their occasioning, inform Pentecostal male identity and subjectivity in the church as much as they influence the perceptions of gender within the broader faith community. It can be affirmed that the renunciation of sexual desire represents an important site of ambitious moral self-making (Stewart 2002; also see Foucault



1990), especially for devoted male converts, a decisive cog in the constitution of gendered church subjects. It might also be claimed that by fostering new antagonisms with women, based especially on their newfound piety, men fashion gendered spiritual identities emphatically apart from and in opposition to women. Their sizable efforts at moral transformation, to define themselves anew as reformed saintly servants of Christ, are facilitated by the active observance of ascetic prohibitions and the antagonistic relationships they inspire. Not unlike the spirit possession idiom interpreted by Crapanzano (1977:10, 1980) and others (see Obeyesekere 1970), it seems likely that the demonic idioms figured here provide male converts a way of articulating or construing their experience of gender distress; that is, rendering it meaningfully concrete and therefore manageable by providing a basis for directed action and an anchor for purposive redress. By realizing their inner conflict as demon-inspired and aided by women, Pentecostal men make sense of their conversion anxieties, creating in them dramatic contests of spiritual fidelity conceived in terms of a moral struggle between God and the Devil, good and evil, man (coded as good, pious, victim) and woman (coded as troublesome, immoral, adversary), enabling them to tackle enigmatic sin head-on in order to manage it, defeat it, and, maybe even, to resolve it.

Evocative instances of blame, resentment, and demonic assault, articulate the experience of being male and manly in the church and enunciate the struggle encountered by the penitent to remain faithful amidst sin and sexual temptation. In describing these encounters, and in eliciting their regular occurrence, the convert qua victim draws attention to himself and his plight as a male servant of Christ and the trials that forge him as an enviable and pious man of God—a repentant reformed sinner turned saint from the wicked barrio streets who by the grace of the Almighty defeats illicit desire by literally conquering his own demons through impressive spiritual discipline. Penitent macho men replace conquering sexual partners with conquering sexual desires as the primary mode of their reformed virility. To be an admirable man of the church, *un hombre de Dios*, necessarily means to struggle with one's own demons of reform and to declare eventual victory over them through divine grace and ascetic discipline. Pious and principled, the victorious are esteemed as vigilant champions of the faith, spiritual victors who by conquering evil have established themselves as models of Christian manhood. Described by the faithful as virtuous, disciplined, trustworthy, and respectable, *el hombre serio*—the

quintessential man of God—is simultaneously victor and victim, the height of his accomplishments are only as spectacular as the depths reached by the failures he has overcome. His spiritual triumph is matched only by the extent of his victimhood reversed. ■

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>The symbolic association of men with the street and public life in general in opposition to women and their association with the home and private sphere (including the church) is such a common observation throughout Latin America and the Caribbean as to likely constitute a definitive social fact (see, for example, Mintz [1956], Wilson [1995], Abrahams [1983]).

<sup>2</sup>A primary focus of my research to date has concerned Pentecostal Christianity and the intersecting themes of gender, cultural change, and religious authority in the context of urban poverty (see Thornton 2013, 2016). I conducted sustained ethnographic fieldwork in Villa Altigracia between 2007 and 2009, with significant follow-up visits in 2010 and 2012. This research centered on members of a Pentecostal community from two small neighborhood churches (one independent, the other a Church of God [Cleveland, TN] denomination). For this article, I have focused on the stories of several men between the ages of 17 and 35, but draw from ethnographic data collected among a larger group of males ranging in ages from 16 to the start of middle age. In addition to sustained participant-observation and “deep hanging out” with individual converts and unconverted members of the community, I conducted structured and semi-structured interviews concurrently with regular informal conversations that were recorded and evaluated along with fieldnotes and other ethnographic data. I cultivated close relationships with my informants and was invited into many of their private lives. This afforded me audience to matters not often shared in public, or with unfamiliar, and provided me the opportunity to discuss informally the issues essential to my friends and informants’ lives. It was primarily through these informal, unstructured day-to-day interactions with community members over the course of my fieldwork that I learned the most about them and collected the most useful data discussed herein.

<sup>3</sup>In Dominican parlance, the term *cristiano* or “Christian” is most often applied to Protestants as distinct from Catholics. This tendency is common throughout Latin America (Stoll 1990:4). Although more or less a ubiquitous term for Pentecostals locally, it can be a point of contention, a site of *Christian identity politics* or “a complex of relations relating to and concerned with the definition, status, and reckoning of Christian identity” (Thornton 2016:223).

<sup>4</sup>In Latin America, where Pentecostal growth began in earnest in the 1950s, it accounts for 80 to 90 percent of all Protestant growth (Jenkins 2002:80). The Pew Research Center (2014) estimates that nearly one-in-five adults in Latin America consider themselves Protestant today, and of those, two-thirds identify as some form of Pentecostal Christian.

<sup>5</sup>For a more detailed discussion of *tigueraje* and popular constructions of masculinity in the Dominican Republic, see Collado (1992), Krohn-Hansen (1996), de Moya (2002), Padilla (2007:132–140), Derby (2009:184–194), and Thornton (2013, 2016).

<sup>6</sup>I want to be clear that it is not as if men are somehow biologically compelled to pursue women in ways that necessarily go against the grain of the church. Rather, the socialization of young men in the urban barrio, combined with particular historical and cultural factors, create certain conditions that reward some behaviors and penalize others. It is against this backdrop that the church offers its alternative to street masculinity and in opposition to this that it struggles to gain the upper hand. It is assisted insofar as the ideals of the church correspond with a hierarchy of masculine values that tend to favor those configurations (such as the values of respectability) authorized by the privileged upper-classes.

<sup>7</sup>I argue that hyper-masculine male converts often use conversion narratives to claim traditional forms of masculinity like *tigueraje* by exaggerating their former exploits in the streets (Thornton 2013). Men in the church are attributed respect not only for who they have become (born-again Christians) but also, importantly, for how far they have come—how great a transformation they have made—from who they used to be as extraordinary sinners (macho-men-of-the-streets). By exemplifying the conversion ideal of transformation from sinner to saint, former men-of-the-streets claim a special kind of spiritual

authority in the church. Because they used to be exceptional sinners, these male converts can boast of more radical transformations than women.

<sup>8</sup>I use the term “makeover” here intentionally since much of the transformation the church aims to effect in the life of the converted is as much external and physical as it is internal (Thornton 2016).

<sup>9</sup>For similar examples of conversion in urban Latin America, see Wolseth (2011) and Brenneman (2012).

<sup>10</sup>See Lindhardt (2012a) for a similar observation of young Pentecostals in Valparaíso, Chile.

<sup>11</sup>Also consider van Klinken’s (2012:229–233) description of the challenges of temptation that born-again Zambian men face in consolidating their redefined manhood in the church.

<sup>12</sup>Scholars have attempted to answer the difficult question of why people convert. An exhaustive review of this literature would afford little crucial insight here. Despite a number of social factors steering men to the church in this context (from poverty to social and political marginality) and divergent statements from converts as to what brought them to church in the first place (from “salvation of the soul” to “there was a girl in the congregation I wanted to meet”), most of my informants in Villa Altagracia credited the practical benefits of prestige in the form of “respect” and the spiritual authority that comes with an evangelical, born-again identity (see Thornton 2016). In an important work on why and how men convert in Latin America, Smilde (2007) examines a comparable evangelical community in Venezuela and tackles the tricky related question, “if people can decide to believe, why doesn’t everyone?” He argues that religious conversion depends on “relational imagination,” or contextual considerations that facilitate exposure to particular meaning systems or cultural strategies that incline individuals over time to imagine certain alternatives over others—that is, conversion or something else.

<sup>13</sup>The focus here on ethical demands imposed on converts is not to ignore the broader program of spiritual empowerment of which moral transformation in barrio churches is central. Enlightenment, alongside charismata, prayer, holiness, baptism, conversion, and other emphases make possible spiritual subjectivities that enliven and distinguish born-again Pentecostals from other Christian groups and makes way for new and alternative modes of being in the world (see Marshall 2009). In the context of the urban barrio, moral transformation is the calling card of the evangélicos, a prerequisite for claiming Pentecostal identity, and the hallmark by which it is judged. It is precisely the ethical demands of the church condemning popular modes of barrio masculinity that elicits in men-of-the-streets a precarious ambivalence toward conversion. By focusing on the moral conflict arising between the values of the street and those of the church, we can locate a gendered antagonism that, for the most part, is specific to the experience of male converts; indeed, a site where gender differences lead to radically diverse religious experiences between the sexes.

<sup>14</sup>This is not to say, of course, that leaving drug addiction is easy, only that it is represented as such in the public testimonies of several former drug users that I came to know. Put a different way, few converts express much regret over having left drugs and alcohol, while almost every single young male that I came to know communicated some disappointment over not being able to flirt with girls.

<sup>15</sup>Examples in this article draw primarily from the lives and testimonies of three converts—Radames, Héctor, and Mariano (pseudonyms)—but the analysis presented here is informed by the totality of data collected throughout my fieldwork. Although not an exhaustive sample, it is a representative one. By focusing on several individual cases that stand out as typical and reflect more or less common experiences in the community, I hope to demonstrate with efficiency the stakes at hand for converts in Villa Altagracia and the issues salient to my informants’ lives, both as I observed them and as they were recounted to me.

<sup>16</sup>Due in no small part to their relegation to the domestic sphere, pervasive expectations that they conform to respectability norms and compelled by punitive social sanctions that follow when they do not, most women come to the church already familiar with if not by then already accustomed to the gender ideals of the faith and acquainted with its moral demands. They have been subject from birth to parallel expectations that dominate Dominican culture and, indeed, socialized to model behavior not entirely at odds or incompatible with the church. Those women who do convert who once lived promiscuous lives or those the public denounces as loose women (or colloquially as “women-of-the-streets”), are typically viewed as outliers by the community and it is uncommon for them to acknowledge openly what are considered publicly shameful sins. Lindhardt (2012b:181–182) observes that in the case of Chilean women, conversion rarely implies a drastic change of lifestyle since most come to the church having lived relatively austere daily lives prior. He notes that female testimonies as a result tend not to emphasize the dualism between sinful and sanctified life often highlighted in male conversion narratives and instead stress the contrast between “security and insecurity, illness and healing, and...the presence and absence of a loving protecting savior” (2012a:182).

<sup>17</sup>However paradoxical, the common perception is that women are inherently less sinful than men, even as images of the wicked female temptress circulate freely. It is possible this irony is rooted in a local iteration of the “virgin–whore” complex where women are simultaneously valued and degraded. This appears to be especially acute for men in the church who must reconcile undisciplined sexual desire with the demands of the faith that prescribe respect for women as caring providers. It may also be the result of contrasting images of sexual identity advanced by male and female congregants respectively as they negotiate the gender politics of their church and local community.

<sup>18</sup>That is the common belief, anyway—one widely held throughout the Caribbean and Latin America (see Chesnut 1997:99–100, 2003:142; Burdick 1998). To hear that women are more spiritual than men is a common refrain throughout the country and few would argue with the assertion that the church is more popular among them. However, despite these assertions, this general belief is not substantiated in every locale, not the least by my own observations of two particular churches in Villa Altigracia where men are consistently the more enthusiastic participants in nightly services. It might be true that women generally outnumber men in Pentecostal churches globally (Cucchiari 1990, Chesnut 1997, Martin 2001, Miller and Yamamori 2007), but it is by no means a universal characteristic of individual Pentecostal churches everywhere.

<sup>19</sup>See Brusco (1995) for a discussion of women who form prayer groups to convert their husbands; also Burdick (1993:113–114).

<sup>20</sup>For a similar observation with regard to Brazil, see Mariz and Machado (1997).

<sup>21</sup>The pervasive idea that women are, by nature, less sinful than men very much directs the differences of incentive when it comes to tolerating unhappy marriages. Men are expected to backslide from time to time; women are not. The image of a repentant husband who prays for his wife’s conversion and endures her infidelity in the hopes that she one day finds Jesus is so unfamiliar as to likely be viewed with some humor were it to surface. In well over two years of fieldwork in Villa Altigracia alone, I cannot recall hearing of such an instance, however probable such a scenario might have been (cuckoldry is not uncommon in the Dominican Republic). It is uncertain whether such a man would be praised for his perseverance or pitied for not asserting authority over his wife.

<sup>22</sup>All conversions are procedurally linked by general practices of publicly accepting Jesus Christ as one’s savior, attending church, praying for salvation, and later preaching the gospel. Nonetheless, the reasons that lead someone in the barrio to conversion are consistently driven by different motivating factors for men and women.

<sup>23</sup>It may be worth noting here that with time and with age marriage appears to men to be more of a boon than a burden, especially as their prospects for female attention and male prestige outside of the home begin to dry up and the security and stability of marriage starts to have more discernible benefit. Long before middle age, men are encouraged to secure domestic partnerships and children of their own. As men grow older they become less competitive in the economy of reputation values (*tigueraje*) that are promoted in the streets and that distract from establishing stable domestic scenarios upon which they increasingly rely. The church, like marriage, financial stability, homeownership, and dependable employment, offers converts access to respectability otherwise out of reach for most barrio residents (Thornton 2016). This remains a notable compensation for converts of all ages but may appeal especially to older men who are more likely to be constrained by domestic obligations that usually widen to include their extended family as their own parents grow older and require their support. Nevertheless, all Pentecostal men in Villa Altigracia, presumably, must negotiate the conflict between barrio masculinity and evangelical Christianity, regardless of age.

<sup>24</sup>See Wilson (1995) on the structural contradictions of Caribbean social organization and the predominant matrifocal character of Caribbean households that together create irreconcilable expectations for men and women of the popular classes.

<sup>25</sup>Locating the demonic within the tradition of Afro-Dominican religion serves as an especially searing native critique of non-Christian spiritual authority and a critical renunciation of supposedly illicit spiritual power. The demonization of local saints and spirits is a key tactic deployed by the church to wrest legitimacy away from popular forms of religious devotion including Catholicism and its derivative forms. This process of demonization has been widely observed where Pentecostal Christianity has found popularity (see especially Meyer 1999). It should also be noted that for those who serve the *metresas* their power is morally ambiguous. They can at times be helpful or harmful; they are neither perceived as demons nor as angels but rather as beings, like humans, who may be given over to good or evil depending on the situation. For those who revere a popular *metresa* called Santa Marta, for instance, she is a powerful ally against unfaithful men and a symbol of extraordinary female power over negative, destructive forces (Drewal 2008:165). This is in sharp contrast to Pentecostal

characterizations of her as the antithesis of proper femininity and as profoundly threatening to home, family, and respectable behavior.

<sup>26</sup>Sleep is outside of Pentecostal discipline. It is, in a more complicated way, impossible to sin while one is asleep. This is because it is not believed that one has complete control over his or her behavior in this state. It is also accepted that the Devil will tempt and try to trick committed believers and therefore assaults such as these are not viewed as transgressions but rather opportunities for the faithful to defeat temptation. More pessimistically, sinful dreams are viewed as the result of waking transgressions during the day.

<sup>27</sup>An additional note I would like to make here is that my informants never use the terms “nightmare” or “dream” in discussions about metresas. However they conceive of such encounters, the terms “*pesadilla*” and “*sueño*” are reserved for the “imaginary” and not the very “real” threat of illicit desire, of demonic manipulation, or the conditional salvation of the soul as they see it.

<sup>28</sup>See Dundes (1980:51–55) for a discussion of the concept he coined “projective inversion,” drawing on the psychoanalytic insights of Freud and others.

<sup>29</sup>Some observers have gone so far as to suggest that possession performance itself exhibits an explicit sexual cast, noting that in some places spirit possession has explicit sexual connotations (e.g., Bourguignon 2004:565).

<sup>30</sup>This would be consistent with anthropological accounts of spirit possession phenomena as “culturally specific forms of conflict management” that simultaneously disguise and yet resolve social tensions (Ong 1988:28; e.g., Firth 1967, Lewis 1971).

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**Foreign Language Translations:**

Victims of Illicit Desire: Pentecostal Men of God and the Specter of Sexual Temptation

[**Keywords:** Spirit possession, gender distress, conversion, masculinity, succubi, demonization, anthropology of Christianity]

“Victimas del deseo ilícito: Hombres pentecostales de Dios y el espectro de la tentación sexual”

[**Palabras clave:** posesión espiritual, angustia del género, conversión, súcubos, masculinidad, evangélico]

不伦欲望之受害者：五旬节信徒之神与性引诱之幽灵

[**关键词:** 魂灵附体，性别困扰，皈依，男性特质，女妖，妖魔化，基督教人类学]

Жертвы незаконного желания: пятидесятники-мужчины Бога и призрак сексуального искушения

[**Ключевые слова:** одержимость духами, гендерная расстройство, конверсия, маскулинность, суккубы, демонизация, антропология христианства]

Vítimas do Desejo Ilícito: Homens Pentecostais de Deus e o Espectro da Tentação Sexual

[**Palavras-chave:** Possessão espiritual, angústia de género, conversão, masculinidade, súcubos, demonização, antropologia do cristianismo]

ضحايا الرغبة غير المشروعة: رجال العنصرة من الله وشبح الاغراء الجنسي  
كلمات البحث: حيازة الروح، الضائقة النوع الجنيس، التحويل، الذكورة، جنية تضاجج الرجال في المنام، الشيطنة، انثروبولوجيا المسيحية