Divine mediations: pentecostalism, politics and mass media in a favela in Rio de Janeiro
Oosterbaan, M.

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5. **Só Jesus.**

Spiritual Battles in the Morro

On most Friday nights, around seven to eight, there was an unusual movement of people on the estrada de Cantagalo. People were busy unloading speakers from the trucks of the Big Mix – organizers of the baile funk –, several men lit up their barbecues and were drinking beer accompanied by the sound of the pagode coming from a nearby bar. Children were running around playing and adolescents were chatting in groups on the small stairs that lead to the estrada. Usually, while observing this movement, it was possible to see several people who patently did not partake in any of the Friday night festivities, or at least not in those I have described here. The people who did not partake in the festivities were wending their way through this movement, neatly dressed, often carrying a Bible under their arms, on their way to a culto of a church in or outside the morro. Broadly speaking, people who went to the Assembléia de Deus were more readily identifiable than those going to the Igreja Universal. The men who attended churches of the Assembléia de Deus were often dressed in shirt and trousers and the women in skirts that reached below the knees. Women generally used a minimum of make-up or other cosmetic products. Members of the Igreja Universal were usually less easily identifiable than the members of the Assembléia de Deus, or for example the Deus é Amor. Women could wear short skirts or trousers and the men could wear a *bermuda* without being frowned upon as sometimes happened in other Pentecostal churches. Though clothes did not serve so much as a mark of distinction between ‘them and people of the world *(do mundo)*’ - a phrase which people of many Pentecostal churches invoked to distinguish between them and non-converted people -, men and women who frequented the cultos of the Igreja Universal did tend to dress well and many of them were also walking to church with their Bible under their arms. One group of people certainly easy identifiable were the obreiros of the Igreja Universal, their neat uniforms were recognizable from afar.

Why did so many people in the morro attend these Pentecostal churches on a regular basis and why did they want to become part of these social groups organized around a congregation? Why is it that people feel connected to this faith so deeply that they turn their lives upside-down, go to church every day, dress differently, speak differently? In this chapter I argue that we should understand the attraction of
Pentecostalism in relation to the daily life of the morro. I begin by discussing several ritual practices of the two churches. I argue that they are powerful practices that often confirm Biblical truths in bodily experiences. However, they should not be studied by themselves. The significance of the rituals is embedded in the knowledge and experiences of the people who live in the morro. To explain how people conceptualize the place of these rituals in their life, I describe how people experience the batalha espiritual - the spiritual battle against the devil. I will demonstrate that evangélicos employ a distinction between 'being in the world' and 'being of the world'. Possible conversion from one to another creates social distinctions between people in the morro. Having done this, I will argue that Pentecostal language is crucial to such a conversion. Conversion narratives restructure the representation of the life-paths of adherents in such a way that a clear break between the former and the new identity is imagined and re-narrated to possible future-converts. In the last part of the chapter, I will describe how Pentecostal ideology is embedded the environment of the morro. To many evangélicos the violence of the tráfico is related to Afro-Brazilian religious practices. The batalha espiritual acquires a worldly garb when people imagine that traficantes are in the hands of demons and can be saved when they accept Jesus as their personal Savior.

5.1 Pentecostal Ritual and Daily Life

Ritual - the classical anthropological object of study – is often taken as point of departure for understanding cultural values and often seen as indispensable to the formation of religious communities (van Gennep 1960; Geertz 1973; Turner 1982). During the months of my research in the morro, I witnessed the persuasive powers of the Pentecostal ritual practices, in the services of both the Igreja Universal and the Assembléia de Deus.

The first Friday in December I descended the morro to the Igreja Universal in Copacabana. The church in the galeria Alaska was located in an old theater, which was most visibly apparent in the steep ascending rows of chairs from which people looked down upon the altar. When I arrived in the church, I counted approximately 500 to 600 people, many of whom I recognized as inhabitants of the morro and many of whom I had not seen before in the Igreja Universal. That Friday offered a culto de libertação (not
long after renamed sessão de descarrego). This weekly recurring church session emphasized the deliverance of demons. The encostos (demons) who posses people are held responsible for harming individuals and hindering them from attaining good health, fortune and happiness in this life and salvation in the Hereafter. The culto de libertação on Friday was very popular. As on most other events in the Igreja Universal, it was open to whomsoever was interested. Many inhabitants who were not generally considered members of the Igreja Universal showed up, including several young men whom I regularly saw smoking maconha (weed) in the morro.

One of the attractions of the cultos de libertação on Friday was the mass exorcism that lay at the heart of these sessions. The cultos were highly spectacular and involved great emotional tension and catharsis. They were characterized by a gradual increase in speed and volume of prayer that reached a climax when the demons manifested themselves and could be exorcized by the pastor or the obreiros. That Friday, the pastor explained how encostos withhold people from financial improvement. He mentioned the story of a woman who had suffered poverty but had been able to set up her own business and buy several cars after she was delivered from her demons in the Igreja Universal: ‘She had nothing and after that she became a businesswoman and earned a lot of money. She has several cars and her children can buy anything they want in the best shops. That is because she was delivered, she went to the Igreja Universal and there the demons manifested themselves. Often you are not aware, but there is something standing in your way, that is the demon.’

After the testimony we moved on to a collective prayer (oração para libertação) in which Jesus was praised in a repetitive manner. This prayer, led by the pastor, was aimed at removing the demons that haunted us. The pastor himself fervently declared: ‘O Jesus, tira todo esse mal do meu corpo, queima o encosto da inveja, queima Jesus’ (Jesus remove this evil from my body, burn this encosto of envy, burn it Jesus). Approximately 600 praying people repeated the amplified voice of the pastor in a crescendo. The people spoke ever more loudly, absolutely determined to be heard by God. The tension produced by the collective prayer for deliverance broke after the first demons started to manifest themselves. The continuous collective repetition of words led to growing numbers of people showing signs of possession by demons. The people who showed no visible signs

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210 Culto de libertação (deliverance service) and sessão de descarrego generally means the same.
211 Encostar literally means ‘to lean on’. Encostos could be translated as spiritual entities that ‘lean’ on people.
of possession were directed to perform an 'auto-exorcism',\(^2\) which means we had to place our hands on our head and say out loud 'em nome de Jesus, sai, sai, sai!' (In the name of Jesus, get out!). When someone started to scream or shake, one of the obreiros rushed towards him or her to get hold of him or her before the demon fully manifested itself. The obreiro grasped the possessed person tightly by the head, after which he could exorcize the demon in the name of Jesus, shouting out aloud: 'em nome de Jesus, sai!' Obreiros rushed through the church to help all those who manifested the symptoms.

Of the approximately twenty possessed people who manifested their possession that night, about five people were brought down close to the altar and, after the last obreiros had finished their task, the pastor started speaking with one of the possessed women. He grabbed her tightly in her neck with one hand and held his microphone in the other. Then the pastor started interrogating the spirit that possessed the woman. In a commanding tone he inquired: 'Who are you? What is your name?' The body of the woman trembled and she tried to elude of the firm grip of the pastor. 'Answer me', the pastor spoke out aloud. After several moments in which their struggle continued, the woman produced a grunting voice. 'I am Ogum.'\(^3\) The pastor commanded: 'What are you doing in the body of this woman?' 'I am here to destroy her', the voice, replied. After this confession, the pastor looked triumphantly at the audience in the church. Having confirmed the malicious character of the spirit that possessed the woman, the pastor could now publicly exorcize the demon in the name of Jesus. After the first woman, he interrogated a second woman whose spirit confessed he was *exú da morte.*\(^4\) After this woman had also been exorcized, the pastor added that only those who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit could perform an exorcism. It would be too dangerous for anyone else. It was best if they did not to touch people who manifested.

The public manifestation and exorcism of the demons is a powerful confirmation of the doctrines of the Igreja Universal. In Christianity at large, there have been reinterpretations of religious traditions encountered throughout colonial history and the constitution of an opposing deity as a manifestation of the devil is also not new, neither in the South-American (Taussig 1980) nor in the African context (Meyer 1999). Yet, the Igreja Universal presents several innovations in the Brazilian context. The incorporation

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\(^2\) The term comes from Kramer 2001.
\(^3\) *Ogum* is an *exú* worshipped in Candomblé. The spirit called *Ogum* is commonly represented in Candomblé as a warrior and he is often associated with violence. (Prandi 1996) In the syncretist movements between Candomblé, Umbanda and the Catholic Church *Ogum* is portrayed as Saint George (Berkenbrock 1999).
\(^4\) *Exú da morte* is an *exú*, a particular type of evil spirit, in the pantheon of *exus* that is common in Umbanda (Prandi 1996).
of spirits that are commonly worshipped and consulted in Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda, in combination with its ‘health and wealth’ theology, has introduced a dynamic that is different from the type of inclusion in the other Pentecostal churches (Mariano 1999; Kramer 2001). In the other Pentecostal churches (visible) possession of demons is much less common and exorcism does not belong to the standard ritual repertoire (ibid). They do refer to Afro-Brazilian religious practices occasionally but always in terms of macumba and never in such detailed ways as in the Igreja Universal.

In the Assembléia de Deus, for example, cultos de libertação also belong to the standard repertoire. I remember participating in a culto de libertação in the Assembléia de Deus Jardim 25 de Agosto, in November 2002. That night Pastor Denilson invited me to play the drums while Emerson was playing the pandeira and Rogerio the electric guitar. The culto was led by several irmãs (sisters) of the church. There were about twenty people present, most of whom were women. We had begun playing a regular 4/4 beat gospel song from the Harpa Cristã that quickly evolved into a passionate samba gospel. During the musical performances I saw that more and more people started to clap their hands enthusiastically and shout words such as ‘Senhor’ (Lord) and ‘Pai’ (Father). After fifteen minutes or so, several women entered into a trance-like state of being that signified they were inhabited by the Holy Spirit. Not long after, Pastor Denilson himself also started jumping up and down jerkily, a sign that he was also cheio do espírito (filled with the Spirit). After continuing another fifteen minutes with the singing and clapping the irmãs invited the people who had had a revelation or a vision during the louvor to come up front and tell the church what they had seen. Pastor Denilson himself led the way. To one man he said: ‘Brother, don’t stay imprisoned, move yourself’, referring to the fact that he had not participated in the clapping and dancing. To another woman, he said that he had seen an angel attacking the inimigo (enemy): ‘God wants to do his work in your life, you have to stay in touch (ligado).’ Pastor Denilson said that he had seen the enemy several times, but he had also seen Jesus who was operating in the lives of several men and women. Then, he also turned to me: ‘Martijn, Jesus wants to be in your life, but something is withholding Him. He [Jesus] says you have to try harder.’ It was not often that Pastor Denilson spoke to me in such a manner. He was aware that I was doing research and usually he did not try to persuade me to convert. However, according to the

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215 In the Assembléia de Deus one of the gifts of the Spirit is that of revelation, which may occur when filled with the Holy Spirit.
pastor it was not he who ushered me to accept Him, it was Jesus using the pastor as His instrument. That night there were no other members who approached the *púlpito* (pulpit) to tell of their visions.

This example demonstrates that the rituals of this church are also organized on the basis of the battle between God and the devil. The invocation of their presence involves an elaborate mixture of bodily and emotional routines designed to express the manifestation of the spiritual battle between them. Generally in the *cultos* of the Assembléia de Deus, the invocation of Satan (*satanás*) and his demons (*demônios*) as the cause of misery and decay is also very common and often the popular Catholic practice of the veneration of Saints is portrayed as an example of devil worship. Yet, I have rarely heard members of the Assembléia de Deus talk about themselves as having been possessed and I have never witnessed a public exorcism during a culto. Members of the Assembléia de Deus in the morro told me of exorcisms that occurred in the homes of people who showed signs of possession and they said pastors were brought to perform the expulsions privately.

This is very different from the Igreja Universal, where demons manifest themselves during a culto and are publicly expelled. On the one hand the spectacular rituals of exorcism are dependent upon a broader field of religious notions. The invocation of religious language and symbols that stem from other traditions creates the possibility to posit the doctrines and practices of the Igreja Universal firmly in the past (religious) experiences of the people present. In a similar fashion to other Pentecostal churches, the language and theatricality of the pastors are very important in this respect, but the bodily motions of exorcism and the public interrogation of the spirits present a different kind of interaction between the members, the pastor and the otherworldly realm than in, for example, the cultos of Assembléia de Deus (see also: Campos 1997 and Kramer 2001, 2005). The kind of public interrogation and subsequent confession of the spirits that I described in the example above produces a powerful affirmation of the existence of these spirits and a confirmation of their 'true identity' as demons instead of deities (see also Mariano 1999: 132, Guimarães 1997: 86). The representations and practices of this church lend credibility to practices of different religious movements and traditions in Brazil (Mariano 1999).

The success of the Igreja Universal is often attributed to its eclectic incorporation of signs, symbols and practices from different religious traditions joined to signs and symbols that are part and parcel of a society organized by late-capitalism - luxury
consumer-products such as cars and the like. A wide range of social and individual problems, misery, misfortune, illness, violence and poverty, are invoked in the culto. People are constantly being invited to think of their daily problems and conflicts as signs of the devil's interference in their lives and then of the Igreja Universal as the best mediation of Jesus' power to achieve health and wealth. In the cultos of the Igreja Universal, the individuals are not only told that demonic possession is the root of these problems (as in other Pentecostal denominations), the visible and tangible confirmation of such a demonic possession and the subsequent deliverance of it is embedded in the collective ritual exorcism.

Undoubtedly, this eclectic incorporation is heavily dependent on a society marked by enormous differences in income and social standing, coupled with a wide-ranging access to mass media. Not only have mass media become one of the indispensable means to spread the doctrines of the Igreja Universal, but equally importantly, mass media also co-produce and organize a society that revolves around consumerism (Sorj 2000). The use of visual mass media greatly expands the possibility to link up 'classical' features of Pentecostalism with (religious) ideas and practices in Brazilian society at large. If we take a look at the Retratos da Vida Cristã in the magazine Plenitude of the Igreja Universal we see an example of the way the readers are invited to think of their problems in terms of demonic possession and deliverance. The daily problems many Brazilians face, especially those living in the favelas of the large cities, are represented by means of a fotonovela (photo-story) that chronologically demonstrates the time before and after the conversion (fig. 40) The fotonovela, entitled 'Misery, Addiction and Prostitution overcome by Love', tells of the life of a man and a woman with two children. The photos demonstrate the biography of a man who becomes a carjacker (assaltante) to sustain his cocaine habit. After being arrested and serving a prison term, he turns to Candomblé to solve his problems. He becomes a pai de santo, but still he cannot kick the habit. The woman, who lives in a shack in a favela, does not earn enough to provide for her children and accepts a job in prostitution against her will. She meets the man and, although they fall in love, their problems continue to haunt them. Despite their feelings for each other, they do not tell each other their secrets. The woman becomes so sad that she starts drinking and it is only when she is watching a program of the Igreja Universal

216 Not surprisingly the Igreja Universal is successful in South Africa (Freston 2005) and is described by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) as one of the 'fee-for-service, consumer-cult, prosperity gospel denominations (ibid: 314)', characteristic of what they have called 'millennial capitalism.'

217 Miséria, Vício e Prostituição superados pelo Amor, in Plenitude No 81, 2002
on television, that she decides to go to a temple to meet that God the Bispo was telling about on television. During the culto she experiences a force and she understands that her prayers have been heard. From that moment, she stops working as a prostitute. She takes the man to church with her and he gets rid of his addiction. Thereafter, their lives improve and they both become business(wo)men that evangelize wherever they can.

The constant invocation of goods and practices that originate outside the domain of the ritual context, primarily through visual mass media, raises important questions concerning the study of ritual as the space and time par excellence in which certain religious/moral notions of the world and the self are taught. In his discussion of the concept of ritual in anthropological writing, Talal Asad (1993) provocatively opposes ritual as symbolic representation to ritual as disciplinary practice. Following Mauss' conceptualization of habitus, Asad also thinks of bodies as 'an assemblage of embodied aptitudes' (Asad 1993: 76). My inability to communicate with Jesus in the Assembléia de Deus might not be related to my misunderstandings of the doctrines or the meaning of the ritual, but to my lack of bodily knowledge. As Asad says: “Thus, the possibility is opened up of enquiring into ways in which embodied practices (including language in use) form a precondition for varieties of religious experience. The inability to enter into communion with God becomes a function of untaught bodies, “consciousness” becomes a dependent concept (ibid: 77).”

While Asad in fact acknowledges both features of ritual, he refutes a purely symbolist approach. In other words, he is skeptical of the postulation that ritual as a category of social practice has special characteristics that other social practices cannot have.

Although the formation of moral sentiments is dependent on a signifying medium, we cannot read off the formation from the system of significations that may be authoritatively identified and isolated as distinctive semiotic phenomenon. The reading is a product of social discipline, and the text, the symbol, the rite, is the product of varying disciplined performers who discourse with one another in historically determinate ways (Asad 1993: 131).

Asad argues this does not mean that ritual practices have no meaning to be studied, but rather that:
Depois de sair da prisão, Sérgio também passou a se dedicar mais ao espiritismo. Abriu um centro, fornecendo páscoas e passou a dar consultas espirituais. Ele acreditava que os espíritos a quem serviu atuam junto ao lutador do vício das drogas.

Depois de procurar muito, Sérgio conseguiu armar um emprego de ajudante de pedreiro.

Ele tentava, todo canto, superar o vício dos drogas. Ele pensava, não importava, fazer muitos dias longe delas. Ele via que na sua casa estava lutando o vício. Naquela época, não era uma coisa que conseguisse alguém capaz de desfazer suas circunstâncias e mudar a sua vida.
Sérgio passou a ficar dias sem procurar Gibélia, o que a deixava irritada quando ele aparecia. Por que você não apareceu essa semana?

Estava, resolvendo meus problemas!

Enquanto Gibélia bebia, Sérgio se dirigia. Por várias vezes tentou parar, por amor a Gibélia. Mas a droga era mais forte do que ele.

Certa noite, sem conseguir dormir, Gibélia ligou a televisão e começou a assistir a programa sobre a Iglesia Universal. Deus vai mudar a sua vida.

Procurar uma Igreja Universal. Deus vai mudar a sua vida.

Mudar de vida era muito o que Gibélia precisava, por isso, no dia seguinte pela manhã, decidiu participar de um culto na Igreja Universal próximo a sua casa. Com vergonha, ela sentou no final do templo. Mas depois da pregação de passos participou da oração com fervor, pedindo para que Deus resolvesse os seus problemas.

Jesus mudou a minha vida. Perdoe os meus pecados.

A partir desse momento, Gibélia sentiu que algo mudou. Sentia uma paz, uma força, uma explicação. Então teve a certeza de que a sua oração tinha sido atendida. Naquele mesmo dia, Gibélia decidiu buscar a vida de economia.
Religious symbols - whether one thinks of them in terms of communication or cognition, of guiding action or expressing emotion - cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulation in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial. My argument, I must stress, is not just that religious symbols are intimately linked to social life (and so change with it), or that they usually support dominant political power (and occasionally oppose it). It is that different kinds of practice and discourse are intrinsic to the field in which religious representations (like any representation) acquire their identity and their truth-fullness (Asad 1993: 53).

As I understand these quotes, Asad does not disagree with the fact that symbols have certain meanings, but rather that the often ascribed power of these symbols to 'move people' because they have meaning misses the crucial insight that the truthfulness of certain symbols is the result of embodied dispositions that are the result of specific power relations. Following such an interpretation, the rituals I have described above are indeed powerful practices that often reflexively confirm Biblical truths in bodily experiences because the people who participate in them have embodied these practices over a period of time. To participate in a mass deliverance or in any other collective ritual is to follow certain prescribed movements through mimesis under guidance of 'religious experts', such as pastors or obreiros.

Yet, ritual practices, either as meaningful events and as spaces of embodied power relations, should not be studied by themselves. These rituals are but one of the many events and influences in the daily life of the people I lived with in the morro. The significance of the rituals is embedded in the knowledge and experience of the people who live in the morro. The reasons why people change their lives, dress differently, speak differently are just as much related to other domains of social life as they are to the church rituals. To look exclusively at the ritual context of the separate churches might obscure the fact that much more is going on at the level of daily life and that such rituals are often performed in one amongst many spaces in which religious ideologies and practices are reproduced. Therefore, in this chapter I will also focus on the voices of the people who live in the morro de Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho. I will describe why they are attracted to Pentecostalism. Specifically, I will describe the ways in which the batalha espiritual, situated at the heart of the practices of both Pentecostal churches, is embedded in the daily lives of the people who live in the morro.
5.2 Social Distinctions

From the examples of the cultos, it becomes clear that underneath many of the apparent oppositions different religious institutes incorporate features of each other's signs systems and rituals and share certain assumptions about the relationship between the individual and the divine, for example, the experience of spirit(s) possession(s). One could therefore claim that different religious institutes in Brazil 'interact in the production of spiritual objects and services' (Kramer 2001 26). Yet, the demonization of many practices also indicates that, in many instances, people identify each other according to their religious practices. Religion is a powerful component in identity formation and of social inclusion and exclusion in the morro. Contrary to what I expected, in the morro it was not so much the question if one 'believes' in God or not, the question rather was 'qual é seu religião', (what is your religion?) People often talked about themselves and others in absolute terms, using categories such as: crente, evangélico, católico, espiritista, macumbeira, cristão.24 Such frequent recourse to supposedly fixed religious identities points to the attempts of different religious institutions to inscribe a permanent religious identity on the inhabitants. In the Catholic chapel in Pavão-Pavãozinho, for example, I witnessed how children were being taught to answer the question: 'What is your religion?' with 'sou católico' (I am catholic) instead of the response 'my religion is catolicismo'. This example indicates the attempt to suppress other identity options, one simply is or is not catholic. The term 'crente tem que ser diferente' (the believer has to be different) - which people in the Assembléia de Deus often used to express their search for sanctification in relation to 'people of the world' – also shows how people attempt to identify separate groups of people in the environment of the morro.

While both remarks show how much these boundaries have to be taught, expressed and performed for them to become and remain social facts, the strong reification of religious boundaries in language is particularly striking, because many of the people in the morro maintain a quite pragmatic relation to religious institutes. Numerous people switched from one religious affiliation to another. Many of those who said they did not 'have a church' they visited regularly219 often talked about a culto they attended in

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218 Identifying people along these religious lines seems to be a rather common practice in Rio de Janeiro and even in the social science literature anthropologists often refer to 'os evangélicos', 'os católicos' etc. (the Evangelicals, the Catholics etc).
219 People often talk of 'a minha igreja', 'my church'.
or outside the morro, a saint they had prayed to or a mãe de santo they had visited when they had a particular problem. Why then these reifications in an environment of quite pragmatic religious choice, where many people have experiences of different religious practices? Why is it so common to use these religious categories as fixed identities and what might that mean?

Reification of religious identities was often related to the process of conversion to a Pentecostal church and the novo nascimento (new birth) after baptism in water and/or baptism in the Holy Spirit. In many cases religious boundaries between people were drawn in relation to conversion from a Catholic or Afro-Brazilian background to a Protestant or Pentecostal church or between Protestant/Pentecostal denominations (Fernandes et al 1998). Conversion – as a passage from one position to another (Austin-Broos 2003) - is heavily based upon the common Pentecostal dichotomous distinction between the realm of God and the realm of the devil and the imagination of the spiritual fight between them, the batalha espiritual. The batalha espiritual is of central importance to much of the Pentecostal doctrine and practice in the morro. In most of the sermons during church services of both the Igreja Universal and the Assembléia de Deus, pastors preached about the dangers people face falling victim to the machinations of the devil and the necessity to act according to Pentecostal doctrines. The pastors of the Assembléia de Deus especially called for rigorous distinctions between as coisas de Deus and as coisas do Mundo, things of God and things of the world. ‘Things’ of the world were generally associated with the devil if they were described as sins in the Bible, when they went against that which is prescribed in the Bible; or when they posed a threat to what was considered a Christian life according to people in the morro. See, for example, the explanation in the Bíblia de Estudo Pentecostal, which is mostly used by people who attend the Assembléia de Deus.

Paul describes two classes of people: those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit. (1) To live “according to the flesh” (“flesh” here means the sinful element of human nature) is to desire and to satisfy the contaminated desires of the sinful human nature; to derive pleasure from them and to occupy oneself with them. That is not only fornication, adultery, hate, egoist ambition…etc. but also obscenity, addiction to pornography or drugs, mental and emotional pleasure from sex scenes, plays, books, video and so on. (2) To live “according to the Spirit” is searching for the orientation and the competency of the Holy Spirit and to submit ourselves to them and to concentrate our attention on the things of God. It is constantly to be conscious that we are in the presence of God and in Him we trust that He will guide us and grant us the grace we long for so that His will is realized in us through us.
Things of the world are often presented as analogous to things of the flesh and things of God are analogous to things of the Spirit. Hence, things of the world are often associated with sinful carnal pleasures and sinful desires. Engaging in these pleasures and indulging these desires means that the Holy Spirit cannot reside in a person and therefore that person will be spiritually dead. Abstaining from these desires means that the Holy Spirit can reside in that person and that person can experience eternal life. The pastors claim that to receive God’s blessing means that one has to abstain from many things that are part and parcel of the daily surroundings of people who live in the morro. In the churches of the Assembléia de Deus in the morro the pastors preached against sinful behavior. They often pointed out the fact that there can be no exceptions at any time: ‘I have to teach you how you should behave and please God. The believer has to be transparent, serve God at all times. Be different. We are different. With Him it is all or nothing (Pastor Assembléia de Deus Caminhando pela Fé).’

The doctrines of the Igreja Universal are similar. Edir Macedo also explains the importance of the difference between being in the world and of the world. His explanation has a particular therapeutic twist, however:

There are persons who live far from the world, despite being in it. While it is very important to live like that, since the world refers to the sinful state of humanity, we should not forget that one of the glories of the Apostle Paul was living in the world together with those he prayed for...To live in the world is to live with people and their problems, their anxieties, and their way of believing. It is to live the day-to-day with them, attempting to understand them and help them; it is to learn that every case is different and that pre-fabricated recipes prescribed by Psychology or Psychotherapy or any other science do not resolve the problems. Who lives in that way feels the same necessity that the apostle Paul felt, to live not with knowledge of the carnal, human, and natural, but in the Grace of God (Macedo 1997: 64).

Most people of the Igreja Universal whom I interviewed explained the distinctions in the same terms. When I asked Sandro, a young aspirant obreiro, how I should understand the difference between people who live in the world and those that do not, he answered: ‘The world is those who are heedless with regard to their life with God, those people do not obey to God and live in sin. Those who live in the Christian world obey God and avoid sin. Those that do not follow the Bible, do not practice what it prescribes, live in the world.’ When I asked how it was that he was also living in the world, he answered: ‘I am (estou) in the world but I am not (não sou) of the world, I am in the world but I do not live the way the world lives, I do not commit sin. I am among the sinners, but I am not
one of them.’ When I asked him what the most difficult sins to avoid were, he answered:
‘To me there are no big or small sins, to obey or not obey that is it, but there are sins that are difficult to repudiate, for men to stop having many women...for young people it is very difficult to have only one girlfriend, not to have sexual relations before marriage.’

While both the Assembléia de Deus and Igreja Universal maintain similar distinctions between the worldly and the Godly, and the batalha espiritual between God and the devil, in the doctrines and practices of the Igreja Universal much more weight is given to the possession and exorcism of demons (encostos) and the possible healing of mental and physical diseases. The physical pleasures, for example, provided by alcohol and drugs are often explained as addictions that are caused by demons who interfere in human action. For example, in their folder Obreiro Aprovado (no.1 2000), Bispo Natal Furacho states: ‘All the entities that are worshipped in the Afro-Brazilian sects drink, including the pai and mães-de-santo who act as if they are priests. That is why all the offerings include alcoholic drinks. This proves that alcoholism is directly controlled by an evil spirit, who degrades not only families but the whole of society.’

In many of my interviews with members of both churches, people would state that they used to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes (or smoke marihuana or sniff cocaine) before they started to attend a Pentecostal church. Yet, people of the Igreja Universal often explicitly stated that a deliverance from demons was the first step to be taken. Therefore most of them initially started attending sessões de descarrgo (culto de libertação) in the Igreja Universal before they actually ‘converted’. In contrast, in the Assembléia de Deus, libertação does not usually happen prior to conversion (see also Kramer 2001: 310).

The words of Dona Linda, 58 years of age, illustrate this appositely: ‘I was addicted to cigarettes and I drank, I drank beer here with Jão, I drank everything here and I smoked a lot and I knew it was bad for me. The people [of the Igreja Universal] evangelized me and they told me if I were to do a corrente de libertação (chain of liberation) in the Igreja Universal, I would quit smoking cigarettes, drinking and cure my illnesses, I used glasses... So I went to the church and did the chain of liberation.’ When I asked what liberation meant, she replied: ‘You are ill, addicted to drugs, to cigarettes, alcohol and then you go to the church to expel the demons, to listen to the word of God and that will free you. So I was liberated from my addiction to smoking and drinking and

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220 Kramer notes that in the Igreja Universal they often use the word guerra espiritual, which, he says further signifies their aggressive attitude towards Afro-Brazilian practices and their fights against poverty and misery.

221 Obreiro Aprovado, no.1, 2000, pp. 11
now I am firm (firme) with God.' Other inhabitants had similar experiences. In an interview with Jorge, a man in his early forties, the trajectory of liberation in the Igreja Universal was portrayed as follows: ‘If you are going to macumbaria, bruxaria and if you go to the fetisaria you are searching for something, you know, and what we are searching for in these places we did not find in alcohol, in drugs.’ ‘You mean maconha (weed)?’, I asked. ‘That is right’, he replied. ‘Also cocaine’, I asked. He replied:

Everything. What does that mean? We are searching for a solution to live, a real reason to live and I did not find that anywhere until I started to go to the Igreja Universal. Then I went and I heard the pastor shout and it was something that I, 32 years of age, had never seen before. He was talking as if God was present there, and there you pass from something without emotion to feeling something supernatural. I am not telling you I was firm straight away, but in the week thereafter I was longing for that experience once more...and I went there time and again and there I found myself, and there we were, starting on that straight and difficult path. If you want to stay on that path you have to be perceptive, very perceptive. I went there with a ruined life, I was addicted to drugs, and because of that my life was totally held up because the Bible says that the devil comes to destroy, steal and kill. My life was infernal. There was only the aspect of destruction and death, I already had the job I have today but half of my salary was already spent before I received it: because of depths and problems. I lived a miserable life, I wanted to win but I was conquered, so when I went to a culto it was a guerra espiritual. Because when I was there, brother, I participated in a culto and I received a prayer. In the first month I went I had no appetite for eating I was very weak physically speaking, in terms of nutrition, why because I lived for drugs and alcohol, addicted, and I had no time to eat anything, I drank instead of eating, you understand, brother (irmão) I was physically weakened. With that illnesses, both spiritual and physical I went to the church... when I went to church to receive the power of God, I ate a plate that had enough for three...I began to eat and eat...and not long after that the evil spirits manifested themselves, you see, spiritual evils began to manifest themselves, when I went to the church evil, evil, evil. First God began to repair me physically, but since I was suffering from physical and spiritual illnesses, spiritual evils began to manifest itself and then the struggle started, brother, a fight (luta), a fight of good against evil.

Here we see in what ways the experience of physical transformation is connected to the imagination of a metaphysical fight between good against evil. It is not only in the direct corporal experience that the batalha espiritual can be imagined and narrated. The man continued to explain that after his initial attendance at the cultos, one of the walls in his house collapsed because of the water in the bricks. This was a clear sign to him that the spiritual fight between good and evil was taking place: ‘When people go from the evil side to the good side, evil tries to stop them. God exists and the devil as well, you may
believe in this, if one exists, the other exists as well.' He demonstrated where the crumbling wall had destroyed half his house. The house in which the man lived was a typical favela residence that he had built himself with poor quality bricks, which he did not plaster to protect them from the rain.

5.3 Conversion Narratives

The experience of feeling a *nova criatura* (new being) enhances the reification of religious boundaries. In the wake of their conversion, people often start to dress differently, consume differently (no alcohol or *maconha*) and talk differently (no swearing (*palavrão*)) to dissociate themselves from those who are living in the world. This conversion often happens after a moment of divine insight or contact with God in a time of turmoil, stress or conflict. A good example of this is the story of Paola, a young woman, mother of two children, who had started attending the Assembléia de Deus only six months before the interview. Before that she considered herself Catholic and her family members, who lived in Campo Grande, were all *espiritistas* who also practised *Candomblé* until they all converted. One night, in a time of conflict and depression, she started reading Psalm 91 in the Bible when she could not sleep. She experienced difficulty in reading but when she persisted she felt pains all over her body. The next day, friends from the Assembléia de Deus came to her house and started praying for her. When they ended, they asked her if she would accept Jesus as her Savior and so she did. Only two weeks after, when she participated in an oração in the house of *Missionária* Edineia (see Chapter Four), she was baptized in the Holy Spirit. She had not expected that it would happen; she had come only for the oração when suddenly her heart accelerated and she started speaking a language she did not know. At first she was very scared, she did not know what was happening, but then she understood she was baptized in the Holy Spirit. If she were to be baptized in water at the headquarters of the Assembléia de Deus in Leblon, she had to get married to the father of her children, otherwise she would be continuing to live in sin. She had to wait till the papers were ready, but when they were, they married and her husband also accepted Jesus.

Not long after she was baptized in water, she discovered that she had the gift of prophecy (*prophecy*). During one of the cultos of the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagalo, she felt the urge to speak to a girl in the church. At first she did not dare talk but finally
she could no longer resist it. She just stood up and began to talk: 'I did not know what was happening. It is God who is using our mouths to tell what is happening in the life of this girl, and I began to say a lot of things. "What is this", I thought and I felt shocked afterwards.' After she talked to the pastor, she understood that it was God who had sent her to talk to these people.

I began to have visions. It is like watching a movie (filme) in the church. I don't know if you believe it. It happens mostly in the Assembléia de Deus, this power of God, and also in the Deus é Amor. Seeing a movie with your eyes closed. For a moment you think it is your imagination, but then you know it is not because you feel so much pain all over that you can't speak, you can no longer glorify. It is as if you are paralyzed in your face, like when you are at the dentist. And then you see a whole movie, something that is happening, either in the church or in someone's life.

Sometimes explaining what she had seen to people she knew was hard, especially when the message was negative:

We Christians have to give a good testimony so that people can see we are calm, passive, because otherwise people will say: 'What are they doing in the church?' No, we have to give a good testimony because of Jesus. What help would it be if at home I were to fight with my husband cursing him, beating up my children and arrive in the church singing, gloria, gloria Deus. Then we would sit in the church with two faces, serving two lords, God and the devil. When we become Christians we can no longer swear. The Holy Spirit also teaches us to stop lying. When we are in the world, we lie a great deal. The word of God teaches us to say yes or no.

While for Paula the divine experience had occurred at a time of mental discomfort, other people emphasized other conflicts common to life in the morro as the context in which God spoke clearly to them. Some people emphasized they had felt the presence of God during their lives before, but had not responded until it was almost too late. Tiago, an elder of the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagaló who had become dirigente (leader) of that church, explained that God intervened in his life while visiting family in the Nordeste. At the age of eleven he was playing with wood at a large water tank when he fell in. He swallowed a lot of water and he would have drowned had it not been for someone who appeared and rescued him. 'It was the hand of God. People who were working there came running up to the tank and pulled me out and called my grandmother. I remember that I almost died. Today I know that it was the hand of God in my life. At that time I did not know that. Today I can say it was the hand of God in my life, because when God has a plan with your life, things happen that must happen.' When he was young he had
attended the Baptist church for a while, but he stopped going (afastar-se) and at the age of fourteen he got involved with the drug trade in the morro. He starting smoking maconha, he sniffed cocaine and he traded *barbitúricos* (barbiturates).\(^2\) After using a while he noticed that he had been physically harmed and he decided to stop using drugs:

But today I also see that as the hand of God, again, even if you continue on that wrong path (caminho errado), you stop and do things differently. I should have known it was the hand of God because I was brought up in the church, but the enemy blinds our sight. Today I know it was the hand of God that made me understand I was doing something wrong and should change. I went on living without going to the house of God and without wanting to redeem. It was till 1997, when a Missionária came to live here in the morro. I had gone to the Deus é Amor several times but I did not like it there. One day I passed the house of Missionária Edineia when there was a culto. She called me in and even while I declined she said: “a chair is reserved for you, none will sit in that chair except you.” Not long after, I decided to go to a culto. I went with a thirst, with a desire to redeem myself because that whole week I had gone through such a friction in my soul. Within me there was the knowledge that I needed to be of Jesus. When I entered, she was glad and exclaimed ‘Gloria’. When she asked if there was someone who wanted to accept Jesus as his or her Savior, I was already on my knees in front of her before she could finish her sentence. Since then God has done very much in my life. I ended an illicit relationship with a woman who was not my wife, and from there on I started a new life.

Conversion is a much debated topic in anthropology and religious studies. The encounter between the colonizer and colonized often involved conversion practices in relation to a reworking of local religious practices under the influence of European Christians (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Hefner 1993; van der Veer 1996; Meyer 1999; Engelke 2004).\(^2\) Many of the authors who have analyzed conversions describe the tension between the spontaneity of the religious experience prior to conversion and the ‘ulterior motives’ - or, in academic terms, the socio-cultural circumstances - that accompany such a conversion (van der Veer 1996). In many of the testimonies I heard in the morro, people told of a divine experience that had led them to decide to join a congregation. The decision was mostly followed by several emotional rituals that marked a clear break

\(^2\) Pharmaceutical drugs often prescribed for people with sleeping disorders

\(^2\) Many of the discussions on conversion to Christianity are related to the question if and how conversion involved the rationalization of culture envisioned by Weber (Weber 1978 in Hefner 1993). Yet, many Brazilians who convert nowadays were already familiar with Catholicism and, although the Protestant denominations place much more emphasis on the Book and literate skills and could therefore be seen as enhancing the systematization and intellectualization of religious knowledge (Hefner 1993), the majority of people I worked with learned to read and write at school and were already familiar with the Bible.
between former and new identity. As we saw in the case of Jorge, his emotional experience in the cult led him to return to the church. In the testimony of Paola, the incentive for her to convert was the result of her personal encounter with God and the physical experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. After she accepted Jesus, she was baptized in the Holy Spirit and, after she was baptized in water, she received the gift of prophecy. In retrospect, Tiago saw the hand of God on several occasions and decisions, which had escaped him at the time of their occurrence.

Such divine moments indicate a clear-cut break between past and future. In practice, however, conversion was a much more continuous process that involved learning and performance. I agree with Austin-Broos that one should pay attention to the specific dynamic of conversion: "To be converted is to reidentify, to learn, reorder and reorient. It involves interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course. Not mere syncretism, neither can conversion involve a simple and absolute break with a previous social life. Learning anew proceeds over time and requires a process of integrating knowledge and experience (Austin-Broos 2003: 2)." In the morro participation in church life was characterized by a gradual increase in attendance instead of a definite moment of transition. The people I knew who had converted recently before or during my stay often started to visit a church for a while to see if they were attracted. Those who continued to attend a particular church gradually adopted the Pentecostal language and modes of conduct of that church.

Such gradual learning and incorporation of religious modes of behavior raises important questions concerning the intentionality and agency of the converts. If people willingly adopt certain modes of behavior, including a certain language, it may be supposed these people had reasons for doing so. In the testimonies I recorded, people often referred to their improved socio-economic and political circumstances and their enhanced mental and physical health as signs that justified their conversion. How can we take the spontaneity of the divine experience prior to conversion seriously, while simultaneously explaining such a conversion in terms of socio-cultural circumstances? In search of possible solutions, Hefner (1993) states we should see these two as a duality:

224 In order to understand what conversion means we should maintain critical distance from the Pentecostal discourse on conversion. See also: Lehmann 2001. An example of the attempt to describe conversion as a process is its conceptualization as a 'career'. Conversion Careers and Culture Politics in Pentecostalism: A Comparative Study in Four Continents, headed by Prof. dr. A. F. Droogers (VU) and Prof. dr. A. W. J. Houtepen (UU).
Politics and social ethics are intrinsic to the psychocultural reality of conversion, informing an agent's commitment to an identity and the moral authority that commitment implies. From this perspective, rather than oppose psychological models of conversion against sociopolitical ones, we should insist and explore their interpenetration (Hefner 1993: 28).

Talal Asad has given useful comments to clarify how this may work in practice: 'If one wishes to avoid the danger of confusing word with concept and concept with practice, it would be better to say that in studying conversion, one was dealing with the narratives by which people apprehended and described a radical change in the significance of their lives' (Asad 1996: 266). Such a view on conversion allows for discontinuity in people's lives, which conversion narratives often bring forward, without uncritically adopting the religious conceptualization of conversion as a clear and complete break (Meyer 1998; Engelke 2004).

Understanding conversion in terms of narratives people tell about themselves and through which they organize their lives opens up space to see conversion as a continuous process in which people are reworking themselves. As Hollstein and Gubrium (2000) argue: 'Considering the self in terms of narrative practice allows us to analyze the relation between the how and what of storytelling; analysis centers on storytellers engaged in the work of constructing identities and the circumstances of narration respectively. We can view the storytelling process as both actively constructive and locally constrained (Hollstein and Gubrium 2000: 104)'. This notion of the self highlights the processual and never-ending character of self-construction and an acknowledgement of the constraining elements of language in use. Pertinently, it also leaves room for the multiplicity of the available stories people might tell about themselves. 'Their diverse and now seemingly ubiquitous narrative practices work to constitute subjectivities in accordance with local relevancies that link broadly with familiar experiential themes (ibid). Such a view does not lead to open-ended storytelling. Rightfully, in my opinion, the authors stress that people do not construct stories on their own terms. Race, class, and gender, for example, are 'deep reservoirs of self-construction resources comprising influential conditions for self narration (ibid: 105).'

The narrative reworking of the self within Pentecostal testimonies and through practices often demonstrates a structure that allows for both an instrumental notion of belief and the divinity of the religious experience. As David Smilde (2003) has argued about Latin American Pentecostalism:
The notion of "instrumental" implies that a belief is a means to some external end – it is an "instrument" for attaining something else. But since the Pentecostal belief system is a bundle of narratives that includes a conceptualization of the way humans can live well, both means and ends are integral parts of the belief – being in communion with God is tantamount to overcoming one's problems. In addition, both while the conversion is occurring and in the consolidation process afterwards, the narrative conceptualizes key aspects of this process in such a way that the convert's agency is minimized, with the result that he or she no longer appears to be the primary source of that belief (Smilde 2003: 327).

Especially those who consider themselves to have crossed the boundary between good and evil describe the new perspective as evident.

Looking back on the evil world from whose sinfulness believers are fleeing, they are comforted by having taken the right decision. Once this fundamental choice has been made the convert's life becomes both transparent and comprehensible. This helpful and therapeutic world-view should therefore be brought to others, indeed to as many as possible. Such a rich experience cannot be kept to oneself. There is a certain 'narrative compulsion' felt by many Pentecostals, and the experience becomes truly self-fulfilling when transmitted to others (Droogers 2001: 46).

This last sentence addresses one of the key features of conversion narratives. Transmitted to others, they are simultaneously stories told to others and narratives about the self told to the self. They reproduce an understanding of the self as something that can be worked upon, as Foucault would argue,²²⁵ and they invite the listener to become part of a personal emotional experience with God. Speaking and listening to the Gospel is tantamount to the narrative reworking of the self. As Susan Harding has demonstrated vividly in the case of fundamentalist Baptists, conversion narratives often have a decisive emotional character. It is not the material circumstances that necessarily lead one to convert, but it may well lead a person to listen to the gospel and believe the one who is telling it:

The membrane between disbelief and belief is much thinner than we think. All I had to do was listen to my witness and to struggle to understand him. Just doing so did not make me a fundamental Baptist believer, but it drew me across the membrane in tiny ways so that I began to acquire the knowledge and vision and sensibilities, to share the experience, of a believer (Harding 2000: 58).

²²⁵ Foucault argues that the conversion process produces "two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault 1982 in Van der Veer 1996: 20)."
Harding highlights the specificities of language, the sensibilities of the spoken word, the persuasion of the narrative structure, to argue for a more complex understanding of conversion. 'If conversion is a process of acquiring a specific religious language and witnessing is a conservative Protestant rite of conversion, then if you are willing to be witnessed to, if you are seriously willing to listen to the Gospel, you have begun to convert (ibid: 57).’ Consequently, if a gradual adoption of ways of speaking means a gradual increase in believing, as Harding argues, then a gradual reworking of the world and the self seem to follow such a process inevitably. Such an understanding of conversion links up well with the work of Berger and Luckman (1967), who have emphasized the importance of language in the social construction of reality, and with the work of Hefner. Hefner states religion is 'dually constructed (Giddens 1984)': ‘emerging both from the ideas and intentions of individuals and from the institutions that constrain and routinize the world in which people act, often outside their full awareness (Hefner 1993: 27).’

While the above-mentioned authors were not speaking about Brazil or Latin America in particular, a focus on language and speech links up with the cultural background of the region. The work of Quentin Schultz (1994) on orality and power in Latin America connects with the emphasis on oral performances I mentioned above Building on the work of David Martin (1990), amongst others, Schultz argues that the popularity of Pentecostalism should not be analyzed from the perspective of the economic or the sociological only, we should also include the cultural force that reasserts orality as an important feature of religion. Pentecostalism is very successful in Latin America because it allows for an emphasis on performance and playfulness which many religious practices that are highly text-centered do not have - or much less - (Schultz1994: 78). In Brazil, the emphasis on the oral communication of the message - and its truth that is demonstrated in *glosalíia* - produce an 'immediacy and presentness' that contemplative religious practices, particularly those in mainline Protestant churches, do not offer. In the morro many people were more concerned with the direct experience of the divine through sound than with the rather abstract notions of the divine provided by literary practices.

Both in the Igreja Universal and in the Assembléia de Deus being part of a culto is a highly acoustic experience, in which styles of preaching are enormously important. In the morro pastors and preachers were generally considered truthful and good when they
succeeded in producing the right words in the right tone and the right volume, combined with the right physical gestures. Besides narrating their own experiences, the pastors also often included testimonies of people in their sermons to corroborate their words and to reinforce their message. As Schultze also states: 'The most effective and usually most popular preachers will be able both to recite effectively the Bible's stories and to elicit personal testimonies, particularly spoken autobiographies, that support the theme of the sermon (Schultze 1994: 80).

The themes of the sermons were, not surprisingly, mostly related to the separation of the worldly and the Godly realm, which was explained with references to life in the morro. The differentiation between the practices of God and the practices of the world creates the possibility for a particular kind of identity politics. In the morro, the transformation in modes of conduct and dress and a regular participation in church-life were commonly understood as inward and outward signs of the transition from 'being of the world' to being crente, Cristão or evangélico. Such a demarcation of identity is not only typical of Pentecostal growth in Brazil (Novaes 1985; Burdick 1993; Mafra 2001), it occurs in many other places in the world (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Meyer 1999; Poewe 1994; de Witte 2003). Yet, in the morro, the demarcations were related to specific cultural circumstances. In the previous chapters I have described some of the characteristics of the life world of the morro, in which traficantes continue to influence local governance and where people struggle to maintain their livelihood. I have also described it as a place situated closely to the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema and as place where samba, pagode and funk can be heard. How is this reality integrated in the narratives of the people who attend Pentecostal churches? How do people employ the Pentecostal conceptualization of the batalha espiritual in the environment of the morro.

In the next section I will describe which cultural practices are identified as at variance to a pious life according to the evangélicos.

5.4 The Batalha Espiritual in the Morro

On a given Friday in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho, the estrada was filled with people celebrating the end of the working week. People sat on the street or on their stoops and shared bottles of beer, boys and girls were dressed up to go to the baile funk and one could hear the sound of the cavaquinho accompanying a samba beat. Although this joyous
picture is part of the recognizable image of life in the favela (aside from the images of violence and poverty), the Friday was also the moment that evangélicos demonstrated they no longer wanted to be part of the life they considered sinful. Many of them had ceased to attend the bailes. Consider the words of Paula, the young woman whose conversion narrative I discussed above: ‘Your vision changes after you are in the church. You look at things differently, you see the world in a different light, totally different, from one minute to the other you change your personality. I adored funk, I loved funk, pagode all these things, I did not miss one baile funk, I adored it. I lost the desire, I can’t even sing the music, many things I did I don’t do anymore.’ Paula’s words indicate that the distinction between the old and new self is strongly related to music and the local festivities. Music was one of the strong features of identity politics as we have also seen in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, there were other important elements which also marked Pentecostal identity in the morro. Take, for example, Marcus, a young father who lived in the morro with his wife and son. Marcus was a member of the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagalo. He explained that once he converted, he had to restrain many of the things he used to do in the past:

I like football but because of an injury I had to stop, I think that if I were to continue I would be hurt. That is what the enemy wants, but God is so great that He changes things in such a way that you no longer feel the necessity. Look at the example of Luís. He is a surfista (surfer) but he has often said that the desire in his heart isn’t the same as it was in the past, the wish to go to the beach every day has disappeared. I also stopped drinking and lying. Music, I had to separate. I loved pagode. I sang, but God works in such a way that you don’t find that important anymore. Certainly, when you hear it you remember, but you won’t pay it much attention.

When I asked if he never missed pagode, he replied:

Let’s put it like this. Our flesh, which is sinful, remembers certain things you did, very vividly sometimes. Today our fight is not against the flesh or the blood, but against the things we don’t see. It can take us by surprise. I was at my work and there was a young girl and I heard a voice saying ‘You can have her’. But I was alone there. It was the enemy. He is like someone who conceals himself close by and says things such as: ‘Ah, you are beautiful’ about this girl. Angels surround us, but outside that circle is the enemy. We have to make sure the angels protect us against the enemy by praying, by going to the cultos so that the enemy does not breach the circle... As we say, do not grant space to the devil. It is a constant struggle. If you look at the people here who are involved [in the tráfico], you see they don’t shine (ter brilho). The devil is behind that, violence, famine. What he wants is that people will die without salvation. Talking about violence,
many persons who have been brought up with the evangelho are bandidos who know the word of God, well, they know the Bible, if you truly know the word of God, you would not do that.

As also becomes clear from the words of Marcus, living in the world and leading a sinful life was often associated with the festivities that are common to the morro. Pagode and baile funk were associated with many of the illicit carnal pleasures, according to most evangélicos. Drinking alcohol, using drugs, committing adultery, being involved in crime and violence, these were all considered to belong to the domain of the devil. When I asked Bernardo, a young man who participated in the grupo jovem of the Igreja Universal in Copacabana, in what kind of practices he saw the work of the devil in the morro, he answered:

I see plenty, even in here [in the morro] you see death, you see young people who are violated by their own parents, sometimes when you see a young girl who is pregnant and you ask who the father is, she says it is her own father. You see much inequality, a mother killing her children, young people who become prostitutes. In our group we have four people who were prostitutes, today one of them came with a box of clothes and she said: “These were the clothes that I wore and I never want to put on my body again.” This kind of short (hotpants), you know. You see many bad things, youngsters who end up in drugs. Fathers who end up in alcoholism.

As the words of Bernardo also indicate, the distinction between the domain of the devil and the domain of God - and the spiritual battle between the two - was mostly explained to me by citing examples from the social and cultural life in the favela. In their turn, these social practices were often related to the religious practices in the morro.

Evangélicos had a tendency to describe their practices and ‘other’ religious practices as mutually exclusive.226 Many people described how their own conversion was caused by the insight that they had been involved with wrong and harmful religious practices, for example Catholicism or macumba. Several people became quite fanatical when they began to consider these religious practices as demonic instead of divine. For example, one young man who had converted to the Assembléia de Deus in the morro, attempted to break all the statues of Catholic saints his mother had collected in her house. During my conversation with his sister, she said: ‘He even wanted to break the saints of my mother. He said they were not holy. These stone statues were false saints,

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226 Popular Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian religions existed in a religious field that was dominated by the Catholic Church, but never restricted. That is not to say that the authorities did not forbid these religious practices in the past. See also the ‘Myth of religious tolerance’ within the Catholic self-image (Birman and Leite 2001).
according to him. I had to calm him down and tell him he had to respect her religion and, if he wanted to save his mother, he should pray to Jesus to save her, not break her saints.'

In the morro, conversion to a Pentecostal church often implied that people were pressured to evaluate and question their ties with friends, neighbors and relatives and to stop participating in certain groups in which they had previously been involved. People learned to express their relation with their friends, neighbors and relatives in terms of the fight against the devil and his demons. A good illustration is Dora, a young woman of 18. She had recently joined the grupo jovem of the Igreja Universal and was determined to become obreira. Eventually she wanted to marry a pastor:

In this house we need an obreira, to expel the demons, my mother, she also manifested [a demon]. She was talking. I was doing very well in church and they explained that when you are close to a victory in a fight (luta) that has been going on for so long, the devil starts to raise himself. He does this so that people will topple into hell. So when I returned from church, my mother was already in full flight, attacking me, talking all kinds of things, swearing, saying things that had nothing to do with it. I did not even listen. Clearly I couldn’t talk back. The word of God says I have to respect my parents. I can only read the Bible and tie down the devil (amarrar o diabo).

Dora’s words echo the specific language employed in the Igreja Universal. Not only is the formulation of intra-personal and intra-family conflict in terms of the fight against the devil and his demons, but also in her choice of specific words such as luta (fight) and amarrar are often used in cultos, testimonies and reports of the church. Kramer says the word amarrado has attained ritualistic qualities in the cultos of the Igreja Universal:

In services, often in exorcism rituals, pastors declare the devil amarrado. Tá amarrado (literally, “it’s tied up”) is a phrase which has the ritual force of reprehending spirits in IURD discourse. This language has performative effects in the context of IURD services. Most often during collective prayers, I witnessed that by merely speaking of tying up (amarrando) particular problems, the pastor immediately grabbed the attention of audience members. As if this were a familiar routine, many people began stamping their feet and clenching and hitting their fists, gestures which signify the destruction of the devil and associated problems. It is as if the verb amarrar as a linguistic sign becomes an indexical icon of subject

227 Lehmann (2001) specifically invokes the word amarrar in relation to conversion and the family. Remarkable is the fact that he uses this word to demonstrate the link between Ghanian Pentecostalism, which Meyer describes (1998), and Brazilian Pentecostalism, which Birman describes (1998). According to Lehmann amarrar is the Brazilian version of ‘binding the Devil with a rope’ – curtailing the individual free from family relations, which are the channel used by the Devil to control and hold them back (Meyer 1998 quoted in Lehmann 2001: 65).
transformation in the church, accompanying the person from a situation of affliction to one of newly found empowerment (Kramer 2001: 173). 

Many people who attended the Assembleia de Deus also often envisaged relations in terms of the luta against demons, even though exorcism is much less common in the cultos and doctrines of the Assembleia de Deus. Leonildo, a man in his forties who had accepted Jesus only a few years before and was presbítero (elder) in the Assembleia de Deus exemplifies this. Leonildo told me that, after his conversion, he no longer let certain kinds of people enter his house: ‘Before anybody could come in, but nowadays they have to stay on the threshold. They can bring demons in with them, like a dog that carries fleas. As a Christian you should not let all kinds of people inside. My neighbors, for example, do not live like Christians. You should not let people enter who don’t have the same faith. The Bible says so (a Bíblia diz).’

5.5 Denominational Differences and Beyond

While the fierce demonization of Afro-Brazilian religious practices is often associated with the Igreja Universal, members of the Assembleia de Deus also expressed their fear of demons, as the words of Leonildo demonstrate. These commonalities place questions on the differences between these denominations. As many authors have argued, the particular doctrines and costumes of the Igreja Universal, described as neo-Pentecostal, differ from the ‘classic’ and ‘deutero’ Pentecostal churches (see Introduction). Although the neo-Pentecostal churches stress certain characteristics that are also present in other Pentecostal churches, their business-like structure, their mass-mediated spiritual warfare against the devil and their ‘health and wealth’ gospel have resulted in ‘a rupture with the traditional sectarianism and Pentecostal ascetism. This rupture with sectarianism and puritan ascetics constitutes the principal distinction of neo-pentecostalism’ (Mariano 1999: 36).

There is much truth in this, but too rigid a separation between the denominations cannot account for the people who switch from one denomination to the other. It has become clear that there are plenty of people in Rio de Janeiro who switch from one

228 Kramer also argues that the phrase: “to be amarrado” (to be stuck (spiritually)) is also used in Umbanda, and that therefore the adoption of the word in IURD signals the continuity of religious language/conceptions across the institutional boundaries (Kramer 2001: 173).
Pentecostal church to another (Fernandes et al. 1998), something I also witnessed in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho. Several people either went from attending the Assembléia de Deus to the Igreja Universal, the other way around, or even both at the same time. Kramer says: ‘What denomination is “comfortable” for one person may not be so for another of a similar demographic background, depending on the contours of that person’s biography, as well as on their ambitions and expectations of the world, a “habitus” of sorts that shapes and is shaped by experience (Kramer 2001:254).’ Furthermore, people from different denominations often identified themselves as one group of Cristães (Christians) in opposition to people who practise Afro-Brazilian religions.

In one family I visited frequently, there were seven people - the mother, named Maria, five of her children and the wife of her son - living in the same little house. Of this family, two were members of the same Assembléia de Deus, one attended another, one frequented the Igreja Universal, one went to both the Assembléia de Deus and the Igreja Universal, one infrequently attended the Deus é Amor and the Igreja Universal, one attended the Igreja Internacional da Graça and one went first to the Igreja Universal and after that to a mãe de Santo. Amongst themselves, the members of this family often had discussions about different doctrinal standpoints. Gilberto, the youngest son, eighteen years old and member of the Assembléia de Deus, told me that the Igreja Universal was ‘tradicional’ because they were too ‘liberal’, a feature that he associated with an unjust interpretation of the Bible in the past. His older brother, who played the drums in the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagalo, mimicked the pastors of the Igreja Universal in an argument with his older sister. He skillfully impersonated an auctioneer who was selling blessings for hundreds of reais, in order to highlight the emphasis on money in the Igreja Universal. She was not bothered by the fact they asked so much money during the cultos. When I asked her if she felt no pressure to give money, she said: ‘God knows that I have faith.’

Despite their arguments over the correct interpretation of the Bible, they did agree on the evil of macumba. One sister had suffered a mental trauma when her husband had divorced her. She became restless and nervous. Besides receiving medication, one of the family members took her to the Igreja Universal where she participated in several cultos de descarrego to get rid of the demons that haunted her and which she claimed caused her illness. For a period she became very devout, until she stopped taking her drugs and started drinking quite a lot of alcohol. Therefore another
relative of the family took her to a terreiro to ask for advice. Many of the family members considered this as a dangerous development. On one occasion we were sitting outside in the small alley with her and other family members. She seemed quite drunk and she was shouting at her sister, brother and mother (and me), accusing us of mistreating and neglecting her. When they told her to go away, she shouted: 'I will go, and I will take my horse (cavalo) with me. It is right here in front of the window.' In Candomblé, cavalo is the term used to designate the person who incorporates a certain spirit or orixá. Her words implied that a spirit had taken possession over her and was now controlling her actions. When she had left, the other family members expressed their fears. They agreed that she was going to a macumbeira and that it was the devil who was doing this to her. 'She is talking nonsense, the way they do in macumba', her mother said. Her brother added: 'The legion (legião) is with her, we should take her to a culto de libertação and expel the demons.' Not much later I found her sister praying on her knees. She told me she had been attacked by her sister that day. 'It is pure evil, we have to pray and deliver her into the hands of God', she said to me. Despite their denominational differences, the family members agreed that only Jesus could free her of such a demonic presence.

This example introduces another important argument against too rigid a separation of denominations. The changes that have occurred in Brazilian society at large and changes in the field of Pentecostal institutions have had consequences for Pentecostal practices across denominations, both at the institutional level and at the level of daily life and practice. As Montes argues:

'It is not difficult to understand that the neopentecostal churches have changed the face of Protestantism and that Pentecostalism itself is in fact changing...The media multiply proselytism much more efficiently by showing exorcism sessions and in the suburban areas and peripheries of the large metropoles the neopentecostals do not have to persecute their enemies directly (Montes 1998: 136, translation mine).

Members of the Assembléia de Deus have been influenced by the changes brought forward by the neo-Pentecostal churches. No one would deny they cannot operate easily without taking into account the powerful presence of the Igreja Universal in the public spaces, but likewise the Igreja Universal offers models and trajectories that can be copied, adopted or 'rejected' as a means to (re)identify the borders between the denominations. For example, many members of the Assembléia de Deus Caminhando pela Fé criticized the Igreja Universal for its emphasis on wealth. One woman who had
attended the Igreja Universal before said: 'I went to the Igreja Universal for a while but I don't agree with the buying of blessings.' Referring to their emphasis on money, another man said to me: 'Igreja Universal do Reino do Deus, someone told me that 'católica' means 'universal', so the Igreja Universal is really the Catholic Church in disguise, is it not so?' While they criticized the Igreja Universal, I also noticed how the pastor of the Assembléia de Deus *Caminhando pela Fé* began to experiment with a classification of cults and with rituals that resembled these of the Igreja Universal. Once, he suddenly introduced the Thursday culto as the *campanha da prosperidade* (prosperity campaign), during which people could donate money in order to be blessed financially. The adoption of the language of 'prosperity theology', specifically that of the Igreja Universal (which uses mass-mediatized 'campaigns' to draw people to its churches) indicates the influence of the innovations of the Igreja Universal on other churches. On another occasion, the pastor handed around pen and paper on which to describe personal requests directed to God. The paper could then be put in a basket that became the focal point of prayers. This small ritual resembles the mass rituals in the Igreja Universal where all kinds of objects and leaflets can become religious artifacts.

On many occasions, people themselves approached the different Pentecostal churches simply as bodies providing different opportunities, constraints or benefits. This raises questions about the different subject positions that emerge as a result of the differences in doctrines, rituals and practices in the various denominations. Since the continuities between Pentecostal denominations are often more prominent than their differences and people often shift from one denomination to the other or attend multiple Pentecostal denominations at the same time, we might question the extent to which the people who attend neo-Pentecostal churches — in general considered to be much more individualistic than classic Pentecostal churches and much more geared towards the gospel of prosperity — maintain a fundamentally different attitude towards features of late-modern Brazilian consumer society than the people who attend the Assembléia de Deus? Despite their differences there are important continuities and similarities between the ideas and experiences of people who attend different Pentecostal denominations. According to Kramer:

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229 As I have also explained in earlier chapters, the Assembléia de Deus *Caminhando pela Fé* was in many ways independent and could experiment more than, for example, the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagalo where doctrine was thoroughly controlled.

230 Kramer describes these artefacts as 'faith artefacts' and 'artefactual media': 'Church services display and distribute such forms of artefactual media, dramatizing them as faith-based vehicles of individual empowerment (Kramer 2002: 23)
Despite the doctrinal differences and presuppositions about the world among classic, deuto- , and neo-Pentecostal denominations, my hypothesis is that Pentecostal forms of identity, in so far as they presume a particular subjectivity, operate through similar forms of consciousness and expression. The flux of adherence between these denominations observed by many researchers is enabled by shared features of a Pentecostal orientation to the experience of emotion, personal transformation, and of supernatural power. In addition to this shared set of subjective dispositions within the Pentecostal field, there is a broader continuity with popular religious discourse — particularly that of mediumistic religions—and the forms of agency, self, and subjectivity, which they presuppose (Kramer 2001: 247).

Even with regard to clear markers of difference between the members of the two churches, for example the accepted clothing, appearances can be deceiving. In general, members of the Igreja Universal who lived in the morro were not as easily identifiable as the members of the Assembléia de Deus. Although men and women did tend to dress appropriately when they went to church, clothes did not serve so much as a distinction mark between them and others. Yet, the recurring description of members of the Assembléia de Deus as rather ascetic in relation to their fellow Pentecostals of the Igreja Universal should be complemented by the notion that the denunciation of ‘the world’, which people of the Assembléia de Deus regularly preach, is not to be mistaken for an actual ‘disconnectedness’ from the world. The choices that members of the Assembléia de Deus make with regard to clothing are strongly related to the late-modern consumption society. Most people know what is fashionable to wear, and which styles of clothing represent which collective identities. Discussions and decisions about what to wear and what to do take place within an arena of consumer products, fashions and styles. If people want to be recognized as a (wo)man of God instead of a (wo)man of ‘the world’, they must know what (not) to wear and what (not) to consume. Identifying these people as somehow ‘disconnected’ from the world often implies that one runs the risk of staying within their own Pentecostal discourse of seclusion.

The struggles over worldliness show themselves often in examples of people who switch from attending one church to the other, and even more so in the examples of people who attend both at the same time. Several young women I knew did not comply with the generally shared opinion that one has to choose one church and congregation that one then attends regularly. Instead, they attended both the Igreja Universal and the Assembléia de Deus at the same time. Take, for example, Daniela who attended the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagalo. During my visits I often encountered her in the Igreja
Universal and, when I asked her why she went to both churches, she gave me several answers. The first time I asked her she replied that she did not like the fact that she always had to wear a skirt in the Assembléia de Deus. She often went to the Igreja Universal because she felt there was more freedom to dress differently. Later, in an interview with her and her boyfriend, she said:

I like the Assembléia de Deus, I like being there, but what I find difficult are the clothes. I like to wear a skirt, but I also like variation, to wear trousers or a bermuda... I think you should go to the church to listen to the Word... I also like going to the Igreja Universal. Now that Renato and I are restricted in our own church because we are not married yet I often go to the Igreja Universal because I like that they work with children. When I go, I sit in the children's room and watch how they learn the Bible and so, so that when I return to working with children I will have more experience because I know how they work there. This is why I like to visit that church, the only difference in doctrine between here and there for me is this thing about the clothes.

She also said she was thinking of switching to the Assembléia de Deus of Pastor Abrahão because she felt there was a bit more freedom there and the people were so humble. Other young women were also attracted by the dress codes of the Igreja Universal instead of the rigid dress codes of the Assembléia de Deus. Isabel, a girl of eighteen years old who was hoping to become an obreira in the Igreja Universal, had participated in the cultos of the Assembléia de Deus in the past. She also saw the difference between the two churches as being primarily discernible in the rules concerning dress and make-up. She objected to the idea that women who go to church should not put make up on or wear dresses that show the knees. 'You have to be beautiful for your husband no, and the husband also for you', she said. She did not stop putting make-up on when she attended the cultos of the Assembléia de Deus. She claimed the problem was not the pastor. When she asked him where it said in the Bible that she could not put on make-up or wear certain clothes, he said it was not written in the Bible:

But he wasn't the problem. The problem was the older women of the church, who want to boss the young people around, that is the reason that many people don't stay in the presence of God. If you put on that sort of dress you know is not correct and people tell you, 'You cannot', you will leave the presence of God,... let God work one step at the time. It is not as if God changes your life in one day, He will change you but little by little, they don't understand that.
In many of the local Pentecostal churches the older members, for example the women Isabele referred to as 'these older women who still live in the past century', functioned as watchdogs over the newcomers and many young men and women felt pressurized by them to behave in certain ways. However, both of these young women were fully aware of the opinions about girls wearing few clothes and going to the bailes every weekend. They also strongly disapproved of what they saw as immoral behavior. The thin line between wanting to dress according to the latest fashion and losing the correct religious/moral posture is something they also worried about.

5.6 The Search for Sanctification

I often wondered about the meanings of the sentence 'a Biblia diz' (the Bible says). People used this phrase quite often to legitimate or condemn the behavior of themselves and others. Intriguingly, during my fieldwork, I encountered plenty of people who said people should not do this or should not do that according to the Bible, whom I have found doing exactly those things they objected to. Many young people of the Assembléia de Deus often said they could no longer go to the beach of Ipanema or Copacabana, dressed in bikini or (swim) shorts, but nevertheless I did encounter plenty of them. When I asked why they went to the beach even though pastors advised them not to, most people said that as long as their intentions were pure, as long as they did not go to look at men or women and to flirt (paquerar), there was no problem. Some people admitted they did not always do as the Bible prescribed. The pastor who committed adultery confessed how difficult it had been for him to preach about the values of marriage while he was having an extra-marital affair.

Converted people often presented the demonic practices as something they had left behind for good. However, I also encountered people who honestly expressed their difficulties stopping with certain behavior from one minute to the next. Bernardo, a young man, who lived in a wooden shack near Maria, told me that he wanted to stop drinking: 'I am trying cut down on my drinking and return to the church again.' Instead of describing it as a clean break, he described going back to church as a gradual process in which he would slowly decrease his drinking while increasing his church visits. It might seem that all this behavior contradicts the rigid distinctions of the evangélicos. The break between past and present, between new self and old self, is not clear when people
do not behave so differently after all. Some of the tensions between old and new identity are incorporated into the Pentecostal language. In the Pentecostal formulation people can, for example, be converted but *afastado or desviado* (distant, deviated) from God temporarily. At one time, I had a conversation with the brother of one of the inhabitants of the wooden shack near to Maria’s house. The man was clearly drunk, judging from the smell of his breath and his manner of speaking. After he learned I was interested in Pentecostal churches, he started talking fervently: ‘I have already been in the Igreja Quadrangular, Presbiteriano and Igreja Universal, but my church is the Assembléia de Deus, there the fire really comes down.’ I think that the preaching in the Igreja Presbiteriano is lukewarm (*morna*) and so is the preaching in the Universal, if you go church you want to return in a blessed state. If you are still in doubt if you are blessed, that is bad. At this moment I am of the Assembléia de Deus, but I have deviated (*afastado*) a little bit.’ Similarly, the *dirigente* (leader) of the Assembléia de Deus de Cantagalo, whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, explained his temporary deviation during his youth as a deviation from the straight path. The fight against deviation is conceptualized as a *batalha espiritual* (spiritual battle). People say that the devil is primarily interested in seducing those who are in the church, because they are close to salvation and are a bigger prize than those who are not. Therefore, there is always the possibility to explain sins or temporary church departure in terms of demonic seduction.

Some people converted, but stopped attending church after a while and often they returned to their former modes of conduct. For some this could even be a continuous process. The eldest daughter of Maria was a member of the Assembléia de Deus *Caminhando pela Fé* when I arrived in the morro. She had four children by three different fathers and lived in the lower part of the morro, which was commonly known as a bad area to live because it lacked infrastructure. She worked as a cleaner in a post-office in Copacabana. In church she behaved very piously. She always wore long skirts and often prayed out aloud in public. During an interview in the beginning of my research she told me passionately about her newly found grounding in church life. She had been converted and baptized in the Holy Spirit at the age of sixteen, but had lived a turbulent life in which she continued to enter and leave the church. She was the one who strongly advised me not to go to the bailes in the morro. Nevertheless, at a certain

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231 “*Ia o fogo desce mesmo*”. In Matthew 3:11-12 John the Baptist mentions both the baptism of the Spirit and the baptism of fire. The popular expression ‘*o fogo desce*’ that was often used in the morro indicated the emotional and vivid character of the cultos.

232 The movement in which people enter and leave a church community has also been described as the process of ‘the revolving door’ (Martin 2002: 112).
moment she stopped attending church and not long after she began dating men who did not attend Pentecostal churches. Near the end of my stay, we danced at a baile together. When I asked her why she stopped attending church she said: 'Right now I am searching for a man to support me'. Just before I left she told me she wanted to return to church and organize her life. To some this might seem hypocritical but to me it exemplified the conditions of the morro. Many women had to raise their children alone without the financial aid of the father. The possibilities of finding a man in church were slim, given the fact that she already had four children. Undoubtedly, her departure from the church was beneficial to her love life and it increased her possibilities to encounter someone who could support her financially. Despite such prospects, her feeling that returning to church life would solve her conflicts also prevailed.

This example indicates that while Pentecostal churches present an environment in which people can experience a break between past and present, some structural conditions and the inclinations of people remain the same. While people say they have converted, not everything changes from one minute to the next. Yet, this does not mean it is necessary to go to the opposite extreme and describe Pentecostal language as mere rhetoric. This would not clarify how language, power and behavior interact in daily life. I have already discussed some of the specificities of the Pentecostal language and its relation to the socio-economic environment, but I also think Foucault has made a very valid point:

We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies. It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects – according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated – that it implies; and with the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulas for contrary objectives that it also includes (Foucault 1978: 100).

The discrepancies between what people say and what people do, or what people say today and tomorrow points to the fact that social identities are always in a state of flux and that as much as one likes to represent a coherent self, in fact, most of us are not. Instead of taking the differences between what people say and what people do in the morro as hypocrisy (as most Catholics I encountered in the morro did), I propose to see these slips as insights into the mechanisms of power in the morro. If we understand
Pentecostal language as one powerful discourse among others, the questions that should be posed are: 'What does it mean to present oneself as a crente or evangélico? What is at stake? Through which social mechanisms are such identity claims enforced, contested and disputed? What are the constraints and possibilities of the uttering of a specific discourse in specific situation? The question here is: why are these Pentecostal discourses employed and in what contexts?'

In the context of the morro, belonging to a specific religion and participating in certain rituals in many instances provides people with a philosophy of life, a meaning for the phenomena that happen around them. Yet, people simultaneously position themselves in a field of power relations. It is not the same to attend one or another church or religious institute, there are different social pressures and socio-political implications tied to the performance of specific religious practices and identities. Because of their denunciation of ‘worldly’ pleasures and non-Christian life styles, those people in general are assigned a special status in relation to the other inhabitants. Broadly speaking their ‘righteous Christian’ behavior and their rejection of worldly pleasures that do not accord with the Bible, is respected by others. They are often seen as honest people, who practise what they preach, though certainly not always. This status aparte stand or falls by the demonstration of a certain amount of self-discipline in the eyes of the other Pentecostals and the non-Pentecostal inhabitants. As many of my informants used to say: ‘Crente tem que ser diferente,’ - ‘The believer has to be different,’ to show to everyone that he or she is no longer ‘of the world’, but ‘of God’.

5.7 Crentes and Traficantes

This self-proclaimed ‘sacred’ status in relation to those people ‘of the world’ who do not live according to the Bible, is constantly contested by others. Nevertheless, the self-disciplining efforts to regulate everyday behavior gives the people a specific position in the favela which is acknowledged both among them and among other inhabitants as a recognizable identity referred to as evangélicos (or crente). This status aparte has also been described for other favelas in Zona Sul of Rio de Janeiro, most clearly by Clara Mafra (1998). Clara Mafra addresses the question of why Pentecostal churches flourish in favelas, where drugs-related violence and armed conflict are most common, when it might well be thought they are opposing forces. She argues their coexistence is possible
because the crentes, instead of directly opposing the movimento, incorporate the evil of the traficantes in their scheme of the world characterized by the divine struggle against the devil. In the words of Mafra: 'In the last years this *guerra espiritual* – which can assume many different shapes – has attained a version centered particularly around the drama of violence (ibid: 288).’ Mafra claims the reason why they both flourish in favelas must be sought in the similarities of the symbolic system of the movimento and the crentes, especially the similarity of their conceptions and the language that is used: the *bandidos* use weapons as an affirmation of power; the crentes use the Word as their weapon in the affirmation of power (Mafra 1998).

While I think that Mafra is correct when she says that the symbolic orders of crentes and traficantes are related, I would like to take the matter one step further. The worlds of the movimento and the crentes are also related because the people occupy the same social space and have knowledge of each other's ideas and practices. Pentecostal churches, and especially their members, are part and parcel of the dynamics of life in the favela and it is this proximity that strengthens the Pentecostal message. As Lucia Montes argues:

> In this context, the evangelical growth among what is called the “popular classes” begins to reveal another disturbing meaning. The violence, which today extends its tentacles without rules, or at least without longer permitting the negotiation of social contact through known or stable rules, means that those segments, ..., are now obliged to search for another symbolic anchor to comprehend an experience of the world that appears to have reached the end of its intelligibility (Montes 1998: 134-135, translation mine).

As has been shown throughout this chapter, almost all of my contacts explained the necessity of living life according to the Bible by referring to the proximity of the evil that surrounded them. In other words, it is not the distance or separation from this evil that characterizes the symbolic order of Pentecostalism, it is the knowledge and experience of evil that characterizes it. It is in the daily surrounding and in the personal experiences that the metaphysical battle between God and the devil demonstrates its physical counterpart. For Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho, this dynamic of proximity and distance is aptly characterized by the church of the Assembléia de Deus which stands ten meters away from the *quadra de escola de Samba* on the other side of the street. This *quadra*, hall, is the place where the popular bailes were held at the weekend. Often on Friday nights the pastor of the Assembléia de Deus in Cantagalo would shout in his microphone,
condemning all sin, calling for battle against o diabo who was leading the children to prostituição, while five meters away the music was pumping and the beer was flowing. There the battle between God and the devil was taking place through the loudspeakers on each side of the street (see also Chapter Two). Moreover, the battle was not only audible, it was also visible. Often I would step out of the church of the Assembléia de Deus at Friday to walk straight into the arms of a group of heavily armed youngsters looking tough and showing off with their guns.

The proximity of the 'evil other' is pretty essential in the Pentecostal message in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho. The presence of armed traficantes sauntering through the favela or sitting at the boca-de-fumo smoking marihuana is not a negation of the power of God, it is the proof of the existence of the devil and a very clear sign of the necessity of Jesus in the lives of all the people involved. The threat of violence is often understood in Pentecostal terms. During one interview in the house of a member of the Igreja Universal, suddenly we heard several gunshots next door. The man was in the middle of explaining to me about the message and the practice of the Igreja Universal, and, when the gun went off, he tried to continue without stopping, although we had both clearly heard the shots. When I asked him what he thought the noise was, he explained it was his neighbor who was always firing his gun. Then he said: 'We are accustomed; it is the devil who tries to hinder the speaking of the word of God. If one is predisposed to speak the word of God, one has to endure the battle.' After the gunshots he continued, clearly troubled but determined not to have his concentration disturbed. His interpretation of the gunshots of the neighbor as a metaphysical plan of the devil to stop him from telling me about the Lord enforced his Pentecostal image of the world (see also Chapter Three).

In general, the people who attended Pentecostal churches interpreted the involvement of the young boys and girls in the drugs business and organized crime within their religious frame of reference in which criminal behavior should clearly be condemned. While they were inclined to portray behavior in dualistic terms, right or wrong, Christian or non-Christian, and they portrayed the world as a reality in which two entities - God and the devil - are pulling the strings, the presence and behavior of armed traficantes was in many ways incorporated into their worldview. Members of the Igreja Universal in Copacabana and Ipanema, and members of the three congregations of the Assembléia de Deus in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho often evangelized in the morro and tried to persuade the inhabitants to come to their church service at night. Walking through the morro, searching for people to invite, it was impossible to avoid the boca-de-
Some of my Pentecostal friends proudly told me that they were not afraid to talk to these boys (meninos do tráfico) and tell them of the power of God to change their lives. They believed they had nothing to fear from the traficantes because the Holy Spirit protected them against evil. Rather, they said, they would become instruments in the hand of God to combat this evil. My contacts in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho claimed some traficantes did indeed give up their criminal existence and became crente. Taken in conjunction with the conversion narratives of people who lived a life of crime before they encountered God, these stories strengthened the narratives that Jesus saves where all others fail.

The logic that only Jesus - 'Só Jesus' - can put an end to the evil at work in the life of people in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho is enforced by several mechanisms. First: in Pentecostalism evil is primarily interpreted as the work of the devil who has got hold of an individual, not as the conscious and rational decision of that person (although that is also possible). Because born-again Christianity offers individuals the possibility of the redemption of all their sins (novo nascimento), people are in some ways always respected as possible subjects for salvation. Second: in the transition from an evil or bad life to a righteous and Christian life lies the proof of the power of God and the Holy Spirit to heal. This is why preachers love to give their (mass-mediated) testimony of their previous life of crime and why audiences love to hear about it.

Third: Pentecostalism has created the signs and proofs of a relationship between the individual and the devil by demonizing acts and people who deal with Candomblé, Umbanda and other religious practices. Evil is often identified as emanating from these acts and these people (see also Montes 1998: 136; Alvito 2001: 209-218). Fourth: the Pentecostal worldview is strengthened by recurring references to behavior related to the devil. There is a kind of functional necessity of evil in the Pentecostal message, or in other words, as Meyer would say, Pentecostalism actively reproduces the evil other instead of eradicating it (Meyer 1999: 204-212).

5.8 A Hand Grenade from God

To give an example of the way these four mechanisms operate in the morro, I will describe the testimony of Pastor Denilson, who was born and raised in

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233 See also Chapter Three.
Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavozinho and can be considered an important member of the *liderança* (group of leaders) in the favela. After half a year of fieldwork, I heard from another pastor of the Assembléia de Deus that Pastor Denilson had been involved in the tráfico in the past and that he had suffered a terrible accident, after which he converted. Furthermore, the pastor told me that the accident, an explosion of some kind, had taken place in the house of Maria, the woman whom I visited every day and with whom I had established a friendship. It was hard to believe they had never told me anything about it and the next day I immediately went to Maria to tell her I heard about an explosion that had taken place in her house some time ago. Her youngest son, Gilberto, was there as well. I asked them what had happened.

Maria laughed at me and asked who had told me that story? I told her it was her neighbor and friend – people are quite anxious about gossip and I did not want to tell her I heard it from the pastor – she told me that an explosion had indeed taken place, right in her bedroom. I asked both of them why they had never told me. Maria replied: ‘Because you never asked.’ I said: ‘No indeed, I am not going around in the favela, visiting people and asking “has *senhora* by chance had a bomb explosion here?” They laughed and told me that Denilson – not yet a pastor then - had thrown himself on top of a hand grenade that was about to explode in the bedroom. They said he had been torn to pieces and that was the reason he had become pastor. Gilberto said one of his sisters was going out with a traficante who was a chefe at the time and that she, Denilson and the chefe were in the bedroom. Gilberto claimed the chefe had sniffed a bit too much cocaine and had pulled the pin out of the hand grenade as a kind of trick, without realizing the danger. Denilson had tried to save them by throwing himself on top of the grenade.

Maria said there was blood all over the place and Gilberto showed where I could still see the splinters of the grenade on the ceiling of the bedroom. Then he enthusiastically said that I should interview Denilson because his testimony was great. Apparently, Denilson’s brother was a *macumbeiro* who had tried to attack him with a knife to draw his blood to offer to the spirits. He had almost died in the explosion, which was another sign of the power of God to save those who turn to Him. Maria said that after the explosion her daughter changed her life totally and dissociated herself from the men involved in the tráfico: ‘*Virou de vinho a água*’ – ‘She turned from wine into water,’ she said.
The next week I interviewed Pastor Denilson, whom I had visited many a times and with whom I had established quite a good contact. He told me that, as a child, he had been in the church but he had left it as an adolescent. The chefe was a childhood friend and after Denilson had left the church he and his friend were both involved (envolvido) in criminality and drugs. His friend had been at a centro de espírito, in order to 'fechar o corpo' – literally 'close' your body to safeguard it against evil spirits – and he had been in a ritual lasting seven days, in which he could not eat. That day the chefe was in Maria's house and Denilson came to bring him some food. There he had found his friend with the grenade in his hand. He pulled the pin, threw the grenade and tried to leave the room. That was when the grenade went off.

I think that was a plan of God, it was so that He could come close to me and speak that He had permitted this accident to happen. I could pass in the shadow of death but that in His name I could be glorified. From then on I went through the process... I went to the hospital and almost died. It was terrible. I made a promise that if He would get me out, I would return to the church and stay strong.

Denilson thought it was a miracle – the hand of God. A similar accident had occurred in a neighboring favela and there the whole barrack building, including the owner, had been blown to pieces. I asked him why he thought his friend had pulled the pin. Denilson replied:

He was possessed by an evil entity (entidade), because he had been in this ritual locked up inside without food, using only drugs. It was the devil. In his case the devil's spirit entered and took over, because he was sitting there and suddenly he pulled the pin. In reality, the devil wanted to take me, because I was a promise. The devil did not want to take him because he would lose a lot. He wanted to take me, but the Lord showed me mercy and gave me another opportunity.

He also told me that when he decided to return to the church and he accepted Jesus, he was strengthened in his faith when he returned to the community. Upon his return, some traficantes wanted to kill him because the chefe had been disgraced and had to be killed. While his friend was indeed killed by rival traficantes, God did not let him die because he had already returned to the church. Denilson said: 'Traficantes are always involved in macumba, because they are searching for protection and ask for consultations about how they should engage in certain matters. They call these spirits 'entidades' while in reality they are demons.'
As this example indicates, the discursive attempts to separate right from wrong for eternity, are faced with the unruliness of the actual day-to-day social life in the morro. As in the case of Maria’s daughter, some people switch from attending the Igreja Universal to a terreiro de Candomblé and some young men try to get out of their life of crime by converting, but relapse into their former habits. Although people attempt to maintain a discursive separation of the world of the traficantes and the evangélicos, all people share the same life-world of relative poverty, violence and uncertainty. And even though people create such solid distinctions between social categories, social life is much more flexible and fluid. The difference between traficante and evangélico may be clear at the symbolic level, the people have often grown up in the same environment. Although at the discursive level the crente is identified in many ways in opposition to the traficante - the evil ‘other’ of the community - such a strict separation is impossible to maintain in reality. In the morro almost everyone knows someone involved in the tráfico, has a friend or relative who is somehow related to people who deal with crime and drugs, or has a story of someone who was involved but has become crente. This proximity between seemingly opposing forces is beautifully demonstrated by the rap-lyrics which are the motto of this dissertation. The lyrics were sung to me by Marcello, member of the Assembléia de Deus in Cantagalo. They not only show a glimpse of the life in a favela in Brazil through the eyes of a young man, they also show the complicated relationship between people who share the same life-world, even though they are often defined as opposing each other. Dissociation from the tráfico is not a given fact, but an attempt to counter some of the destructive effects of its presence.

Despite the conversion narratives that present Jesus as the final solution to poverty, violence and conflict, when people say they put their destiny in the hands of the Lord it does not mean that people do not know that there are certain things they should avoid doing. Shortly after I had moved into the house of Pedro, a much respected crente, he informed me of things I should not do, for example, standing at specific places, talking to specific people. He said that as an evangelical you could and should be polite to everyone, but also stay away from and not get involved with certain people. Pedro himself did not talk to the police, for example. He, just as other people, seemed perfectly

234 Take, for example, the young man I described in Chapter Two. After being shot in his leg by the police he started frequenting the Assembléia de Deus and he said to me he gradually wanted to stop going to the bailes. However, after a while he stopped frequenting the church and I saw him mostly with the traficantes smoking maconha at the boca-de-fumo.
aware of the limits of the Pentecostal discourses on peace and violence, just as he knew that the government discourses on the position of the police had their limits.

It is also important to realize that there were different understandings of the origins of violence and therefore different opinions how people might cope with it. Most people in the morro often did not know what was going on exactly. While they knew much more than I about their own local situation, the people who were attending Pentecostal churches were faced with uncertainties and anxieties their narratives did not resolve completely either. In addition, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the persistent representation of evil in both rituals and the mass media of the churches constantly reproduces the anxieties they set out to end.

5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that if we want to understand the attraction of Pentecostal discourse and practice, the religious practices of the people have to be studied in relation to the daily-life of the morro. People conceptualize daily life as a spiritual battle against the devil and the rituals and practices are part and parcel of their social conditions. Evangélicos employ a sharp distinction between ‘being in the world’ and ‘being of the world’, among other reasons to demonstrate that they maintain a status aparte in the complex and harsh conditions of life in the morro. In many cases, they refrain from the practices that were part of their social and cultural life before conversion and this is generally respected by other inhabitants. The urge to create and maintain solid distinctions between crentes and others is related to the tráfico and the threat of violence. Many evangélicos believe the violence of the tráfico stems form involvement in Afro-Brazilian religious practices. For them, the batalha espiritual acquires a worldly appearance in the daily environment. People imagine that traficantes are in the hands of demons and can be saved when they accept Jesus as their savior.

On the one hand, conversion narratives restructure the representation of the life-paths of adherents in such a way that a clear break between the former and the new identity is imagined and re-narrated to possible future-converts. On the other hand, some people revert to their old habits after a while. While conversion to a Pentecostal church or doctrine often creates social distinctions between people in the morro, proximity to non-converted neighbors and relatives also blurrs neat boundaries. While this may seem
to produce contradictions, we do not have to argue that conversion produces either continuity or discontinuity. Many old practices are reproduced under a new guise after conversion, but they change nevertheless. Even when people fall back into their old habits and smoke a cigarette or drink a beer, they often perceive this within a new religious framework that describes them as temporally derailed, instead of completely lost to the devil.