Divine mediations: pentecostalism, politics and mass media in a favela in Rio de Janeiro
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Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the open-air service I described in the introduction. The deliverance service of the famous Pentecostal Pastor Marcos Pereira da Silva of the Igreja Assembleia de Deus dos Últimos Dias in the quadra de Pavao brought together a mixture of narrated violence, politics, amplified music, video and Pentecostalism.

Favelas and Pentecostalism

Pastor Marcos Pereira da Silva presented himself as mediator of the Holy Spirit to save the people in the community just like those men who presented their testimonies. As we have seen in this dissertation, members of different Pentecostal churches contrast their churches with the drugs-related violence in Rio de Janeiro. The churches are represented as agents of God that make up for the failure of the Brazilian state to counter the violence in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. In this dissertation I have shown that this perspective should be critically challenged by an analysis of the social environment and the daily life of the inhabitants of the favelas.

In Chapter One, I have argued that favelas are not pre-modern islands in an overall modern Brazilian society but the product of a specific Brazilian modernity. Therefore, the morro is a place that cannot simply be described as pre-modern, modern, or post-modern. The demarcation of the space of the favela from the areas around it, and the subsequent dynamics of exclusion and inclusion of the favela inhabitants, is reinforced by the presence and absence of certain state institutions. The community has a police force, but it has not ended the rule of the traficantes. People can buy televisions and radios, but they cannot send their children to a good school, nor can they afford to fall ill. The morro is surrounded by the neighborhoods Copacabana and Ipanema where consumerism and beach-culture go hand in hand. Inhabitants of the morro participate in the informal economy of the beaches and become familiar with the life-styles of the rich and famous, but mostly from the perspective of the favelado for whom fame and fortune is so close, yet so far away. At the end of the day, the young men and women from
Leblon return to their guarded condominios and the young men and women of the morro have to pass the boca-de-fumo, hoping that they do not fall victim to a gunfight.

The appeal of Pentecostal churches is certainly related to the schism between the world of affluent people who live in secured areas and that of the inhabitants of the morro. Pentecostal churches present alternative utopias and life-projects for individuals who aspire to a better life. The churches propose rigid distinctions between good and evil. The pastors, preach that only the acceptance of Jesus as one’s personal Savior offers redemption from social and individual problems. As I have argued in Chapters Two and Five, this message is appealing to many individuals in the morro because it is framed against the background of the popular cultural practices and living-conditions of the favela. The styles and practices of the churches are presented as contrasts to the cultural practices associated with immoral behavior and with the evil of the devil. Musica evangélica is opposed to musica do mundo - samba, pagode and funk - because that is the popular music of parties at which people court, drink and dance without obeying the strict moral prescriptions of the Bible. Instead of interpreting the excitement as a well-deserved escape from the dreadful day-to-day life, evangélicos understand these cultural practices to be the root of all social and individual problems.

Many converts understand their crossing from a ‘worldly’ life-style to a ‘Godly’ life-style as a way to protect themselves from the harsh circumstances of life in the morro. For this, and other reasons, one is tempted to see these churches as forces that protect people, help them to order their lives and to come to terms with their harsh reality. We should not take this celebratory self-description of the churches completely on board. Pentecostalism is fraught with paradoxes and tensions. Pentecostal institutions in the favela present popular discourses and practices related to poverty, risk and danger that sometimes complement and substitute state discourses, but at other times contradict them.

While Pentecostal churches promote a type of individualism that concurs with notions of a modern bounded subject, the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit always invokes a sense of multiple selves, more commonly associated with Afro-Brazilian religious practices and Kardecismo (Sanchis 1994). Conversion puts one on the safe side of the spiritual battle, yet the devil lurks close-by and is ready to take advantage of anyone who slips. Paradoxically, Pentecostal churches continuously invoke the evil of the devil instead of eradicating it and hence also reproduce anxiety themselves (Meyer 1999). As I have demonstrated in Chapter Three, such a contrast also becomes apparent when
one examines the images and narratives presented in the mass media of the churches and the reactions of the people to the news. The Igreja Universal proposes to resolve the violence in the city and restore in the individual the belief that the world can be manipulated and is not arbitrary, but it produces an image of a society that is inherently evil.

The Pentecostal churches preach against the evil of the traficantes, but they do not actually oppose the actions of the latter or hinder their business. The binary ethical codes of Pentecostalism oppose the jogo de cintura (wheeling and dealing) of daily politics and many people indeed change their life of crime after an encounter with God. This does not dampen their awareness that there is a difference between the strict codes that one preaches and the things one does in daily life. The discourses of the Pentecostal churches do not entirely replace other discourses and practices. In the morro things are never entirely certain, a policeman cannot be trusted and your friendly neighbor could be a traficante. One has to deal with both on a daily basis and therefore inescapably one also has to know how to behave according to the worldly day-to-day life of the morro.

Conversion to Pentecostalism is attractive because it offers experiences of empowerment through collective rituals in combination with a newborn identity in the complex power relations of the morro. People can claim a status aparte, beyond the jogo de cintura of daily life. The trope of the spiritual battle is crucial to understanding the nature of the conversions but also the inherent paradoxes. While their new-born identity is God-given, it is also an identity they must perform on a daily basis. The status aparte is generally granted, but other inhabitants only accept it when people do indeed show the signs of God's grace and do not engage in the behavior they condemn of others. This demands extra awareness and a multitude of self-disciplinary performances. Evangélicos should no longer practise those diabolical things they did before: no more baile-funk, samba or pagode; no more adultery, drinking or smoking. Conversion restores the feeling of power over their destiny (Mariz 1994), but also heightens the responsibility to behave according to the Biblical norms (Oro&Seman 1999).

These self-disciplinary practices are not totalizing. While some people are attracted to the strict codes certain Pentecostal churches prescribe, others see such stipulations as a limitation on their freedom. What may be seen as empowering from the perspective of the convert at a certain moment may be experienced as a limitation at another. Of course, Pentecostalism also generally offers some leeway. According to the evangélicos, conversion means that they have positioned themselves on the right side of
the battlefield, but the devil is now more than ever interested in their soul and therefore they are more likely to be tempted by him. An occasional relapse into diabolical behavior can therefore be excused. Some even oscillate back and forth between a strict church lifestyle and a worldly lifestyle. Such a movement is possible, but it is also limited within the social environment of the morro. Church members and other inhabitants generally do not accept the newborn status when people do nothing at all to comply with the codes of conduct.

Pentecostal churches not only mend the gaps. They have developed a very antagonistic attitude towards many popular Brazilian practices. In an attempt to break down the cultural hegemony of the popular practices, Pentecostal movements have launched aggressive media campaigns against other religious and cultural practices in Brazil (Sanchis 1994; Montes 1998; Birman&Lehmann 1999). Such a fierce opposition against cultural practices that are deemed immoral and un-Christian is in some aspects similar to the cultural opposition of the religious right in the United States (Harding 1993, 2000; Schultze 1996; Frankl 1997; Gormly 2003.) However, the religious-cultural practices in Brazil differ from those in the United States. Brazilian Pentecostalism relates to different religious practices and symbols. The popular Catholic- and Afro-Brazilian religious practices are especially demonized in the Pentecostal churches and in the Pentecostal mass media. Based upon a fundamentalist reading of the Bible, these religious practices are depicted as idolatrous and devil worship. In the morro, the devil was mostly associated with Afro-Brazilian religious practices. Evangélicos in the morro were also inclined to align the violence of the traficantes with Afro-Brazilian practices. Indubitably this can be understood as positive. Contrary to those cariocas who think all traficantes should be locked up without a trial, these evangélicos treat them as fallible humans who can still repent and change their ways. Nevertheless, it can be perceived as very negative. It limits religious freedom and tolerance, presents a one-dimensional image of the Afro-Brazilian practices and sets people up against each other rather than uniting them in the face of the unequal distribution of income and security (Oro&Seman 1999).

**Pentecostalism, Politics and Mass Media**

Pastor Marcos Pereira da Silva presented himself as mediator of the Holy Spirit and savior of the community in much the same way Bispo Crivella did. Both used mass
media to mediate their powerful religious charisma and both were involved in politics. Crivella was campaigning for himself, while Pereira da Silva used the spectacle to campaign for the son of the owner of the popular radio station Radio Melodia. Since Pentecostal churches have become involved in politics, the trope of spiritual warfare is also applied to the political domain. Corruption, greed or simply the bad governance of politicians is also ascribed to the presence of the devil in politics (Oro 2003). Leaders of the Igreja Universal claim only they are capable of delivering politics of such evil. Only with the help of the Lord can corruption be stopped and an equal and just distribution of wealth be achieved. As Ari Pedro Oro states: 'The consequences of this discourse mean that for the *iurdianos*[^1] to vote is not only a civil exercise. It is also conceived as a quasi-religious act. It is a gesture of exorcism of the demon encountered in politics. It is to deliver it so that politics can be performed by “people who fear Lord Jesus”, following views expressed by Bispo Rodrigues (Oro 2003: 58).'

The use of mass media by Pentecostal movements in Brazil presents challenging questions and insights concerning the role of religious communities in modern democracies. The successful mediated political projects of various churches negate the recurring assumption that religious organizations will gradually disappear from the public realm in postcolonial societies. Pentecostal churches in Brazil have started to use electronic media professionally. Because Pentecostal pastors so often appear in the iconography of power in Brazil (Banck 1998), one of the persistent questions concerning Pentecostalism and mass media among Brazilians is to what extent media influence the political behavior of viewers and listeners, often with the presumption in mind that pastors ‘use their religion for political purposes.’ While this may be so, in this dissertation I have argued that we should go beyond a simple effects model of religious media. To understand the influence of mass media in society, we should focus not only on the medium itself (Rajagopal 2001), but also on the social life where images, sounds and narratives presented by mass media intersect with other experiences, discourses and institutions. What attracts people to Pentecostal media? How is this related to their daily lives? How do people relate to mass media in general?

Instead of analyzing media, society and religion as separate domains, I have examined the daily lives of the people. I have shown that Pentecostal media help to convince people that a spiritual battle between God and the devil is taking place, but the media are not the only important factor. The imagination of the spiritual battle is fueled

[^1]: *iurdianos* are the members of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD).
by the harsh environment of the morro and the broader arena of the mass media available. Both in the public space of the morro and inside their houses, inhabitants see all kinds of programs and hear many different music styles. It is within this environment that Pentecostal images and narratives find their place and acquire the meaning that helps us to understand why Pentecostalism appeals to people. Pentecostal churches have not only appropriated the technological means, they have copied and invented new styles and formats to communicate the divine. These styles are essential to the establishment of a sense of belonging and the formation of communities in the age of mass media (Appadurai 1996; Keil and Feld 1994; Maffesoli 1996; Meyer 2004).

Styles of behavior, of clothing and of music intersect with the power relations in the morro and in Brazilian society at large. In a Pentecostal division of the world, the sonic battle between music styles articulates with the spiritual battle between God and the devil. The soothing sounds of gospel music are imbued with feelings of despair, but this does not prevent them answering the sound of the funk and pagode music. For the evangélicos in the morro, funk and pagode are associated with the devil because it is during those festivities that substance abuse, promiscuity and violence occurs. People tune in to the evangelical television programs because they search for edification, a powerful sermon, an emotional testimony, but television is also perceived as an arena of spectacles where a moral battle is fought between diabolical telenovelas, reality shows and erotic programs engage in combat with evangelical programs (some programs are seen as neutral, for example the news). For many evangélicos such experiences of spiritual warfare via television are dialectically related to the social life of the morro. Unquestionably ‘immoral’ clothing styles and sexual behavior appear on television and in the morro; violence of traficantes appears in the news and in the environment; improper lyrics are heard on television and at your neighbors. This is juxtaposed by the fact that gospel programs on television play the same music as people do in their churches and in their house; the pastor on television dresses in the same style as the members in the morro; the stylized testimonies on tape, CD and television concur with those of fellow congregants in the neighborhood.

The development of electronic mass media has influenced the intersections between politics and Pentecostalism, but also the very nature of the religious experiences. Instead of understanding technology and religion as discrete domains, religion can be comprehended as a practice of mediation (de Vries 2001; Meyer 2006). As I have argued in Chapter Six, electro-acoustic media are essential to the process of conversion and the
Pentecostal experiences of people in the morro. People use their sound-systems to understand, feel and demonstrate what the difference is between 'being in the world' and 'being of the world'. People feel profoundly touched by the sounds in the morro. They experience the analogy between the transmission of the Holy Spirit, the amplified louvor, and the emotional voice of the pastor. Likewise, television offers people an instrument through which they see the work of God and the devil, but they also feel their presence physically. Some people are prompted by the Holy Spirit and others aroused by the devil, as I have shown in Chapter Seven. These physical reactions call for a more detailed approach to the relationship between technology, religion, culture and the senses in studies of Brazilian Pentecostalism.

Pentecostal churches in Brazil have found creative ways to lace together domains of socio-political life that were often thought to be separate. While the distinction between the worldly and the godly remains the driving force behind most churches, they incorporate many styles that were considered worldly in an attempt to use their appeal for the benefit of spreading the gospel efficiently and changing the world according to Christian norms and values. The Igreja Universal is the best example. It publishes its own glossy magazines and its own newspapers. It contracts rock-gospel bands under its own record label and play these on its own radio stations. It presents itself simultaneously as an NGO, as a political organization and as a powerful mediator of the Holy Spirit. It is no coincidence that Crivella is a politician, a pastor and a gospel singer. One could argue that he embodies a postmodern condition in which it impossible to tell if he is using religion for political purposes, politics for religious purposes or popular media for both? Yet, the fact that Pastor Marcos Pereira da Silva supported deputado estadual Fábio Silva, son of the owner of the popular evangelical radio station Melodia, demonstrates that the Igreja Universal is not the only Pentecostal church which plays this field and its innovations are quickly copied by others.

These crossovers make it increasingly difficult to pinpoint what is 'religious' and what is not. I have shown that samba and gospel are often presented as opposing forces, but whatever strictures are imposed people want to play samba gospel. Following Eric Gormly (2003), contemporary Christian music in the US plays an important role in the experience of belonging to a Christian community that is part of a broader secular (sic.) community. In the last few decades Christian churches have incorporated different 'worldly' music styles to evangelize more effectively to a younger and broader audience. Gormly says: 'It provides a musical medium for religious expression that allows its
adherents to feel they are participating in the broader, secular culture although maintaining the integrity of their religious faith (Gormly 2003: 263).’ Gormly argues that it is thus not longer the musical form (genre or style), but rather the lyrics that mark the specific Christian character of the songs.

While similar arguments about the possible incorporations of worldly styles in Brazil are made, one wonders what are the limits of the appropriation of worldly cultural practices and styles? How far can one go and yet maintain the integrity of one’s religious faith? As I have demonstrated, Pentecostals in the morro remain reluctant to incorporate samba into their gospel and, though some evangélicos have started to make funk do bem - good funk - in Rio de Janeiro, I never heard it in the morro. The significance of funk as musica do mundo is tightly connected to its association with drugs and violence, according to the evangélicos in the morro. Can the form of funk be saved for evangelical purposes if the diabolical content is excised? As long as the funk of the morro is not really a mainstream popular music style but an expression of anger that resembles a counter culture, incorporation seems unlikely. The appeal of funk music is so strong because form and content correspond to the violent and insecure reality of the morros. The appeal of the Pentecostal churches in the morro is so strong because their devil is tangible in the harsh reality of daily life.

The dialectical relationship between the fictional or dramatized mass media and the everyday life of the inhabitants urges us to take seriously the role of fantasy and the power of imagination, as Appadurai (1996) and Meyer (2003) have also argued. The public presence of Pentecostalism and its contemporary political growth not only question recurring assumptions that religion will disappear from the public realm in postcolonial societies, the examples that I have shown also argue for a political analysis that takes the appeal of the Pentecostal worldview in the age of mass media seriously. It is remarkable that, for example, in recent work of Mauro Porto (2003) on mass media and politics in democratic Brazil, he does not mention any religious-political project under democratic rule. The material presented here demonstrates that Pentecostal churches collaborate with other mass media in the representation of a violent, apocalyptic society by means of spectacular images and narratives of urban warfare. These images and narratives fuel the Pentecostal imagination and experience of a society that is assailed by demonic forces. The example of the deliverance of traficantes by Bispo Marcelo Crivella, demonstrates that the relationship between Pentecostalism, politics and mass media generates space for a type of populism that envisions worldly progress for
‘the people’ through spiritual interventions mediated by pastor-politicians. Such an imagination of society is highly credible to inhabitants of the favelas who are confronted with violence and insecurity on a daily basis and who experience limited control over the circumstances of their lives, while television programs fuel both their dreams of limitless consumption and their nightmares of misery and suffering.

This is not a particularly Brazilian or even a Latin American development. David Martin (2002) has argued that: ‘There is a discernible consonance between Pentecostalism and the simultaneous (indeed, related) advance of global liberal capitalism’ (Martin 2002: 15). Similarly, Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) have argued that global capitalism in its present form engenders notions of occult forces such as magic, sorcery, and witchcraft in a wide range of politico-economic activities around the world. Their insights link up with the work of de Vries (2001) and Meyer and Moors (2006) who have argued that the global availability of mass communication technologies has spurred mass mediated religious imaginations that incite political actions in many parts of the world. This ethnography has attempted to examine how this works in practice by describing the daily-lives of the inhabitants of a favela and their relationship to mass media and Pentecostalism.