

If I Give My Soul: Pentecostalism inside of Prison in Rio de Janeiro.

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Andrew Reine Johnson

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Dr. Penny Edgell, Adviser

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Abstract

One of the most dynamic and unique manifestations of global Pentecostalism has been inside of Brazilian prisons. This dissertation examines Pentecostalism inside of the jails and prisons of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and engages with the following three research questions: Why is Pentecostalism so successful in the prisons and jails of Rio de Janeiro, how is the faith practiced by inmates, and what impact does prison Pentecostalism have on the streets and surrounding communities outside of prison? To address these questions, the author collected qualitative data inside of the prisons and jails in Rio, over twelve months.

The dissertation argues that Pentecostalism is strong inside of prison partly because it is the dominant faith in the neighborhoods where the vast majority of inmates lived before they were incarcerated. Another component of the faith's success is the inmate-led Pentecostal churches that operate inside of prisons in Rio de Janeiro. These churches rely on the charismatic leadership of an inmate pastor and replicate the organizational model of Pentecostal churches on the streets. Their legitimacy as an autonomous force inside of prison is reinforced by the criminal gangs who do not subject the Pentecostal inmates to their rules.

Pentecostal practice offers more than simply a means for inmates to escape the pains of imprisonment. It offers a counter-cultural identity and corresponding dignity to people who have been historically marginalized, treated as less than full citizens by the state, and who larger society views as expendable. The songs, rituals and communal practices of Pentecostalism offer inmates an opportunity to live dignified lives in the context of an extremely difficult situation.

Though Pentecostalism in Rio lacks an explicit, coherent political agenda, the consistent presence of Pentecostals inside of prison is a political act that has material consequences. Pentecostals have achieved an elevated position in prison by providing for the material needs of inmates and directly intervening on their behalf during life threatening crises. The unique space Pentecostals occupy also exposes the problematic nature of their intimate involvement with the inmate population as accusations of illicit financial relationships between some Pentecostal pastors and prisoners have cast a shadow of doubt over the motives of visiting Pentecostal groups.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	iv
Chapters	
Introduction	1
1. Being There: Getting into the “Belly of the Beast”	19
2. Pentecostalism: The Faith of the Killable People	50
3. A Gang of Pentecostals	89
4. The Politics of Presence	118
Conclusion	161
References	189

List of Tables

Figure 1.1 Qualitative Data Chart

49

Introduction

After more than a decade behind bars, Carlos knew the drill. He heard the singing and rhythmic clapping of a group of inmates who were beginning their daily worship service on the patio in a maximum-security prison in Rio de Janeiro. He had seen hundreds, likely thousands, of these Pentecostal services start with the musical call to worship, but he had never been moved to join them. He told me that when he was growing up in a hillside *favela* (slum) on the edge of Rio de Janeiro, “There were four or five churches, even an Assembly of God in my community, but to be honest I didn’t even like *crentes* [Portuguese for believers]. I thought they were crazy. I thought they were psychos because they walked around in the hot sun dressed just like I am right now,” pointing down to his full gray suit and blue tie pinned to a freshly pressed white shirt. But for some reason on that particular afternoon, Carlos decided to put out his cigarette, jump down from his bunk, and stand toward the back of the thirty or so Pentecostal inmates in the worship service.

He remembers the sermon like it was yesterday, specifically when the pastor, an inmate himself, read the following Bible verse from the book of John: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” The message of redemption and personal salvation resonated with Carlos, and when the inmate pastor gave the call, he lifted his hand as an affirmative response. The pastor made his way toward the raised hand through the crowd of fellow inmates and when he arrived, he placed his hand on Carlos’s head and began a fervent prayer in a staccato cadence until Carlos fell to the ground in a lifeless heap. Carlos told me, “When I finally got up, I felt really light. I stood up as if I

were another person. I believe that the legion of demons that was in me all left on that day...I started to praise the name of Jesus Christ my savior right there in prison, you know. I stopped with all that smoking and snorting cocaine. I used to use prostitutes, but I stopped that, too.” Carlos hugged the pastor and as he walked back to his cell, he reached into his pocket, grabbed his pack of cigarettes, and handed them to one of his friends. Crentes do not smoke.

Carlos, like the vast majority of inmates in Rio de Janeiro, was born into an impoverished household, but unlike most, he left for the streets at seven years old when the alcohol-fueled beatings from his parents began to increase in both frequency and intensity. He spent the next six years living with a group of homeless youth who slept on the steps of the Candelaria Church¹ in the heart of the city’s center. He supported himself by begging for money and by committing petty theft. He chuckled when reminiscing, “I used to go to the beach, Copacabana and Ipanema and rob *gringos* like you.”

Worn down by six hard years on the streets, Carlos returned to his neighborhood, joined the *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command), and worked in the local drug trade. He rose quickly in the gang, but problems came soon after his most successful armed robbery, which netted nearly US\$20,000. He kept the stolen cash on his body at all times, but it is hard to keep that sort of money secret. A neighbor tipped off a couple of police officers about the cash. The officers ambushed Carlos outside of a motel; they never planned on arresting him, but they did want his money. It was the second time in less than a week that those bills had changed hands under the shadow of a gun. The

¹ The site of the 1993 Candelaria massacre where seven street children were gunned down in cold blood by off-duty police officers.

informant likely got a cut of the police's haul for the information, but the neighborhood tipster had violated the Comando Vermelho's law against speaking to the police, and as Carlos said, "In the world of crime, the law is that if you commit an act like this, if you 'rat' on your comrade, your sentence is death." The people in Carlos's community knew who had told and brought him to Carlos for retribution. "So he came, and me, possessed by demons, took the life of that young man. I just came and took the life of that young man." Two months later he started serving the first days of what would end up being a fifteen-year stint in prison. Carlos left prison with a Bible under his arm, a new identity as a Pentecostal, but with nowhere to go. All of his family members had died, he had cut ties with his gang after his prison-yard conversion, and he was facing a city that had changed a lot since he was arrested. Rio de Janeiro's economy is booming, propelled by the emerging Brazilian economy, the discovery of one of the region's largest petroleum deposits off the coast, and a palpable optimism generated from the city's winning bids to host both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.

Though Carlos was being released into one of the strongest economies in the Americas, his options were very limited. He had never held a job in the formal economy and his recent incarceration for murder did not do much for his resume. Carlos had spent almost his entire life on the margins of society. He had gone to school for less than two years, he did not have proper identification, and when he was released from prison nobody was waiting for him. He was hesitant about heading back to his old neighborhood, but his choices were limited, so he caught a series of city buses and returned to the community where he lived when he was arrested.

I went back to my neighborhood and ran into the people that were in now in charge of the drug traffic. I remember them as little kids, but when I got back these kids were adults, they had grown up and were now the crime bosses, in other words, responsible for the community. Because I was born and raised there they invited me to take part in the traffic and offered me a position to manage a distribution point along with 6,000 Reais per month (nearly US\$4,000). They even offered me a .762, a backpack full of ammunition and an accounts book. All this they offered to me to join up with them. The only thing was that I had accepted Jesus in my heart, so I had to refuse.

Carlos declined the offer to rejoin the Comando Vermelho and the salary that offered ten times the minimum wage. Still determined to pursue the religious commitment he made in prison, he fled his old neighborhood after four days when the temptation to return to his old life grew stronger. After his second day out of prison, a twenty-year-old member of his former gang, who wore a gold chain and sat on a new motorcycle, called out to him mockingly, “How long are you going to keep this up, with the Bible under your arm?” From Carlos’ perspective, he was faced with a set of choices and allegiances that mirrored his options while in prison. The two institutions that were the strongest in prison were also the strongest in his community—the gang that controlled the local drug traffic and the Pentecostal church. When I asked Carlos why he didn’t return to the gang just until he got settled, he said, “I had already tried that life and now I wanted to try a new life, a life with Jesus.” So in an effort to start this “new life,” he travelled across the city to the Last Days Assemblies of God (LDAG), a church that sent volunteers into the prison where he served his sentence.

The LDAG is an independent Pentecostal church in Rio that is led by a very visible and controversial pastor. It has a unique appeal to ex-inmates and gang members, and at any given time there are at least fifty men living and working in the church

building, most of them ex-inmates with limited options like Carlos. When Carlos arrived at the church all of the beds were full, but he was offered a meal and invited to attend the three-hour worship service later that evening. He left the church frustrated and considered the Comando Vermelho's standing offer, but he heard the audible voice of God telling him to persevere. So instead of returning back to his community, he slept under a highway underpass, homeless again after twenty years. He went to the church each day for his meals and the daily worship services; each night he returned to his spot under the bridge. "I stayed in this rhythm for thirty days. It cost me a lot, but a space opened in the church and I have lived here for more than a year now, and I participate in the evangelistic campaigns for the church." I asked him to tell me about his new life as a member of the LDAG:

These days, I am known as a man of God. A long time ago when people talked to me, actually they didn't talk to me, they just waited until I turned my back and walked down the street to say 'look at that drug trafficker, an addict, a bum.' Today they say, 'There goes a man of God. Look what God did; he changed that man. He really is a man of God.' It is gratifying to hear these things because in the past they didn't even want to look at me. Not even if I was painted in gold. They wouldn't even look my way, now they will take a photo with me, ask me to give a word, ask me to pray for them. It is really satisfying, the best thing that has happened in my life.

When I spoke to Carlos, he was still facing many of the same problems that he had faced the day he was released from prison. He did not have formal employment or a fixed address, he was still functionally illiterate, and he owned barely anything outside of the two baggy, second-hand suits that he alternately wore to the evening worship services. As a poor, darker-skinned young man living in a gang-controlled neighborhood, he was still a member of what Brazilian anthropologists Maria Victoria

Pita and Ana Paula Miranda (2010) call the “killable people” of Rio de Janeiro. Though Carlos remained in a precarious material position over the nine months I spoke with him, he reported finding dignity living as a Pentecostal that he had never experienced at any other time in his life.

This dissertation examines Pentecostalism, a relatively young version of Christianity that has grown tremendously in Latin America and especially Brazil over the last thirty years. The growth of Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America has been largely realized among people living on the margins of society, like Carlos. In the *favelas* of Brazil, *barrios* of Mexico, and the undocumented immigrant communities of the United States, the underemployed, migrants, drug users, and ethnic minorities have flocked to the pews of Pentecostal churches. One of the most dynamic and unique manifestations of the faith has occurred inside Brazilian prisons. Though liberation theology sought to align the Catholic Church with the impoverished in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s, the poor have largely sided with the Pentecostals. Nowhere is this pattern more evident than inside prison, where Pentecostalism has replaced Catholicism as the dominant religion behind bars. Prison is not usually considered a religious space. In fact, Brazilian prisons are infamous not only for inhumane and overcrowded conditions, but for the violent criminal gangs that control every element of inmates’ daily life. Yet the Pentecostal church, specifically the Assembly of God denomination, is thriving in this very difficult environment.

My research is situated at the intersection of Pentecostalism and prisons in the city of Rio de Janeiro. My goal is to approach Pentecostalism inside prison by engaging

with three guiding research questions. First, I want to understand why Pentecostalism is so successful inside prison. Second, I want to understand how Pentecostalism “works” in the prison context—how Pentecostal inmates organize themselves, how prisoners create community and interact with the other groups inside prison, and how they make sense of their incarceration and their lives through Pentecostal practice. And, third, I want to focus on how Pentecostalism practiced inside prison impacts the communities, churches, police officers, pastors, and streets of Rio de Janeiro.

Most of the scholarly research concerning religious practice inside prison has focused on its link to recidivism (Johnson 2011). While religious affiliation has the potential to provide an inmate leaving prison with a powerful, anchoring identity that may assist his or her transition into society, I am studying the meaning of religious practice in prisoners’ lives and do not focus on (potential) future criminal behavior. I understand that there is an inherent skepticism toward “jailhouse religion” and some think inmates can only prove their conversion as genuine outside of prison. My focus will be on how the professing Pentecostal inmates practice their faith, without making judgments on its authenticity. This dissertation is grounded in the belief that the religious lives of inmates are worth consideration in and of themselves, apart from any impact on recidivism rates. Not only do my data not support such an inquiry, but my analytical focus, in this analysis, is to turn the discussion of prison ministry toward a different and broader set of questions.

Motivations

Pentecostal practice in the prisons of Rio de Janeiro is a very specific dissertation topic and possibly an unusual choice for a non-Pentecostal graduate student from the

upper Midwest. But like many dissertation topics, my interest in the subject arose from a set of life experiences and relationships that directed me to study religious practice inside prison, specifically Pentecostalism in Brazil. As a high school student, I volunteered to coach a basketball team for at-risk youth in Minneapolis. I worked with the same cohort of young men for three years while in high school and then continued to work with them through a basketball-based mentoring program that I ran through my undergraduate university and the Minneapolis Park Board while I was in college.

By the time I graduated from college, I knew some of these young men quite well, and as they started to celebrate their seventeenth and eighteenth birthdays, a number of them were either incarcerated or awaiting trial. I testified as a character witness in court on behalf of some the guys I knew from the basketball program and visited others while they were in prison. Prior to having individuals whom I considered friends inside prison, I gave very, very little thought to the prison system or daily life on the inside. It was these relationships that ignited an interest in prisons, and the accounts of their prison experiences made me aware that inmate communities are religiously active. As I witnessed the simultaneously joyful and painful re-entry process, my interest in religion and prison grew as I saw its potential to provide a bridge from prison to society for the released inmate.

My broad interest in religion inside prison turned specifically toward Pentecostalism inside Brazilian prisons through life experiences as well. I went to Brazil for the first time to conduct the fieldwork for my Master's thesis, which focused on the children living on the streets of São Paulo. I learned Portuguese through my fieldwork and became immersed in the gritty street culture of the largest city in South America. São

Paulo's street population had close ties to the prison system, as homelessness in São Paulo was increasingly being criminalized and a crack cocaine epidemic was sweeping through the center city region. On the downtown streets of São Paulo, there was a network of groups and individuals working with the homeless population, and many (if not most) had affiliations with Pentecostal organizations or churches. I saw these groups engage in everything from distributing evangelistic literature to sleeping on the streets with the homeless in solidarity to bandaging and cleaning the infected, open wounds of people living in the open-air crack markets.

I spent hundreds of hours with these groups throughout the fieldwork. Some of the groups working with street children also had prison ministries and other groups were staffed by volunteers who had spent time in prisons. Through my conversations with these individuals, I started to get a feel for the unique intricacies of the Brazilian prison system. I heard about the brutal conditions and powerful prison gangs, but what stuck with me were the descriptions by ex-inmates of the Pentecostal inmate churches that operated autonomously inside prison. When I first arrived in Brazil, I knew very little about Pentecostalism outside of a half-dozen well-publicized televangelist scandals, but four years later, when I was filling out my application to join the graduate program at the University of Minnesota, my intention was to study these prison churches.

Who will be interested?

Over the last fifteen years, sociologists studying religion have become increasingly interested in Pentecostalism, especially in the Global South. The magnitude of the movement has served as a powerful counterargument to the secularization theory, and its growth represents the most significant structural shift to the Christian religion

since Luther nailed his thesis to the gates of Castle Church in Wittenberg (Cox 2001). While truly a global movement, Pentecostal growth has been particularly robust among poor and disenfranchised Latin Americans (Bomann 1999; Burdick 1993; Chestnut 1997; Martin 1990, 2002; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Smilde 2007; Stoll 1990). This project will further the literature on Pentecostal practice and growth among this segment of Latin America as the fieldwork was almost exclusively carried out in the marginalized neighborhoods and prisons of one of Latin America's most visible cities, Rio de Janeiro.

Pentecostalism has not grown among simply the economically marginalized in Latin America, but the socially stigmatized as well. In the last five years, a subset of the literature on Latin American Pentecostalism has emerged as the faith has grown among gang members, drug users, drug traffickers, and career criminals (Brenneman 2011; Smilde 2007; Wolseth 2011). This dissertation will add to this branch of the Pentecostal literature by focusing on an under-studied and highly stigmatized group of Latin Americans: prisoners.

The interaction between religion and civil society has been one of the central themes in the sociology of religion (Casanova 1994; Chaves 2006; Edgell 2006; Emerson and Smith 2001). Earlier research on Pentecostalism has focused on defining the faith, measuring its growth, and forecasting its impact on global Christianity, but as the body of literature has evolved, there has been a push to study the impact of Pentecostalism on civil society (Miller and Yamamori 2007). This dissertation will add to the literature by looking at how religion operates in a civil society comprised of a very different set of actors and institutions than those in Western Europe and the United States. Civil society looks different in places where a weak state presence has opened spaces for shockingly

strong gangs to emerge as prominent social actors. Understanding the role of religion in societies like this will prove to be especially important over the next decades as cities in the Global South continue to swell and as pockets of these urban centers are effectively governed by organized crime organizations and other non-state entities (Hagedorn 2007; Davis 2006).

This project's focus on Pentecostalism inside prisons situates this dissertation to contribute to the sociological literature on prisons, specifically prison subculture. Inside prison, a social world exists where individuals where inmates form their own unique communities and organize themselves around shared identities whether it be race, gang affiliation, type of crime, or religion (Hunt et al. 1993; Irwin and Cressey 1962; Jacobs 1978; Sykes 1958). Whether these identities are imported from the street or arise indigenously has been a point of contention, but there is no doubt that penal facilities have their own cultures, social hierarchies, and unwritten rules that are actively enforced. Inmate culture is shaped not only by the prisoners themselves, but also by other institutions and social actors outside of prison. Prison guard unions, civil rights movements, and religious groups are examples of this phenomenon (Jacobs 1978; Page 2011). This project will add to the literature on prison subculture by investigating the role of religion in incarcerated communities and individuals. It will also make a contribution by looking at how Pentecostal churches outside of prison shape the prison culture of Rio de Janeiro through their interactions with the criminal justice system.

Throughout the fieldwork, I spoke with dozens of prisoners who reported that their religious conversion marked the beginning of a new, crime-free life. Like Carlos, who reported that after he converted to Pentecostalism he instantly felt as if he was “a

new man,” inmates’ conversion narratives were saturated with a hope that their lives had turned in a positive and permanent new direction. There is a well-established literature on turning points in the life course of prisoners that examines how workforce participation, marital status, and social network embedment contribute to an offender’s desistance from crime (Elder 1985; Laub and Sampson 1993; Uggen 2000). This dissertation will contribute to the literature by examining religious conversion and religious participation in prison as a potential turning point in the life course of an inmate. The findings from this project will not present data on religion’s effectiveness as a turning point for inmates, but rather conceptualize religious conversion as a turning point and provide a vivid picture of what religion looks like inside prison in Rio de Janeiro.

Argument

As I stated earlier, my three primary research questions for this project are why does Pentecostalism thrive inside Rio’s prisons, how does it work on the inside, and what is the impact of prison religion on the streets. First, I will argue that Pentecostalism’s success in prison is an extension of the faith’s success in the favelas and poor communities of Rio de Janeiro. Pentecostalism thrives in the marginalized, low-income neighborhoods in Rio—the same places where nearly all the city’s prisoners lived when they were arrested. So the inmate population in Rio de Janeiro is comprised of individuals who, based on their sociodemographic characteristics, are most likely to practice Pentecostalism. “Prison religion” in Rio is not just a bounded entity; it is something that is intimately connected to a set of non-state institutions, networks, and community leaders outside of prison. In both the prisons and the poor neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro where state presence is at its weakest, non-state entities (like the narco-

gangs) and Pentecostal groups comprise a network of support for the most vulnerable part of the population. In this context, both pastors and gang leaders are tremendously influential social actors, and for the Pentecostal leaders, this power is accompanied by opportunities for potential corruption.

A second part in explaining Pentecostalism's growth in prison is how the faith operates daily inside prison. Pentecostalism is not successful simply because it holds a concentrated population of individuals most likely to be "believers" based on their demographics; its organizational structure, based on a small, independent congregation led by a charismatic pastor, translates into the prison context in a way that offers protection, access to scarce resources, and a salient identity for the affiliated inmate. When the inmates form their own churches inside prison, these groups maintain an organizational structure that resembles, and is able to compete with, the highly organized criminal gangs that run the prison and jails. Gang leaders reinforce the legitimacy of prisoner conversion and the influence of the inmate churches by allowing inmates to leave the gang and join the Pentecostals without retribution. In this context, the way Pentecostalism is practiced offers a truly anchoring identity and tangible protection for otherwise vulnerable inmates.

I will also argue that Pentecostal practice does more than offer an escape from the pains of imprisonment for incarcerated believers. Rather, the faith offers a counter-hegemonic identity and corresponding dignity to people who have been historically treated as less than full citizens by the state and whom the larger society views as expendable.

The final guiding research question asked if the Pentecostalism practiced inside prison had an impact on social life beyond prison walls. Answering this question confronts the argument that Pentecostalism is an apolitical movement that focuses simply on the supernatural realm while ignoring the material and structural realities in the here and now. Pentecostal pastors and volunteers have become a regular presence inside prison. Though the power they have in some of these institutions is certainly problematic, I will argue that the Pentecostals' voluntary and consistent presence inside the prisons and jails in Rio de Janeiro is a political act and has real material consequences.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation and its arguments are organized into six chapters. In chapter two, I have two goals. The first is to describe my methodology and the second is to introduce the research sites. The overarching goal for my methodology was to spend as much time as possible inside prison amongst the inmates. I realized that I was coming from different cultural context and that I had spent very limited time inside any prison, so I felt that it was important that I get as close to the prison experience as I could before I started the fieldwork in Rio. I started the data collection by spending two weeks "living" in a prison in the neighboring state of Minas Gerais. I wore the same clothes as the other inmates, slept in the same cells, ate the same food, and was subject to the same regulations as everyone else. Though I was free to leave at any time, I did my best to spend my time as if I were a prisoner. For example, when the inmates were put on a twenty-four-hour lockdown after an incident, I, too, was under lockdown. Through this method, I was able to spend hundreds of hours in the presence of prisoners, simply

observing and soaking in the nuances of prison life. I was highly motivated to learn about the unwritten rules of this social world not only to gather data, but to make my time in there as “non-eventful” as possible. My time in the prison gave me a unique perspective on the gravity of incarceration, the role of religion behind bars, and the practical and analytical tools to carry out the next step of the project in Rio.

The second purpose for chapter two is to introduce two of the primary research sites, a jail that I am calling P#1 and a prison, Evaristo de Moraes, both located in Rio de Janeiro. Though I did not live in either of these facilities, I was intent on spending as many hours as possible inside with the inmates. I was able to do this by entering the prisons with the Pentecostal volunteers who came three to five times a week to conduct religious services. I was able to observe the worship services, and through my repeated visits, I was able to get to know and earn the trust of a number of inmates. The conditions of these facilities, especially the jail, were intense and, frankly, inhumane. I saw cells filled with five times more prisoners than their designer intended, temperatures that reached one hundred and thirty degrees, and regulated violence and police corruption that contaminated nearly every corner of the facility. I try to describe the intensity of these spaces in this chapter, as it puts the religious practice into a context that is very different from the pews of a church outside prison.

In the third chapter, I introduce Pentecostalism as the “faith of the killable people” and argue that this faith offers people on the margins of society, especially prisoners, an identity that runs counter to the way they are treated by larger society. Rio de Janeiro is a stunning, beautiful city with shockingly racialized social inequality. There are many ways to measure how this inequality manifests itself in the city, but I will look

specifically at the homicide rates and police killings over the last decade or so. The level of violence in Rio de Janeiro sets it apart from other metropolitan areas in the Americas, and the bulk of these killings occur among a certain segment of society. I will use the term “killable people” because it describes the lack of public outcry at the murder rate in the city because the vast majority of the killings take place among the poor, darker-skinned, mostly male residents of the favelas and marginalized communities in Rio de Janeiro. I present Pentecostalism as the “faith of the killable people” because the Pentecostal Church is strongest in these neighborhoods and in the inmate communities that are comprised of residents from these areas.

To understand some of the reasons why Pentecostalism is so strong among the marginalized citizens of Rio de Janeiro, I will build from the work on the role of religion in the lives of slaves in the United States and during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Here I will look at Aldon Morris’s (1986) argument that the Black Church in the Jim Crow South provided not only the institutional support for the civil rights movement, but also a collective consciousness among African Americans that helped to ignite the movement. Though in a different cultural context, the comparison is useful because of the powerful role that charismatic pastors held during that time and now hold in Rio de Janeiro. The parallel of using religious teaching to instill a sense of self-worth to oppressed people groups is also especially relevant to this project. I will also use the work of civil rights activist and social scientist Howard Thurman, who studied the religion practiced by slaves in the same region more than one hundred years before the civil rights movement. Thurman focused specifically on the role of religious songs of the slaves and argued that their faith enabled them to withstand the brutality and oppression

of slavery and enabled them to live dignified lives in the context of their subhuman treatment. I will use Thurman's work and the ethnographical data I collected during the inmate worship services to argue that Pentecostalism provides the "killable people" in Rio de Janeiro, especially inmates, an identity, community, and set of practices that equips them to live in a manner that runs counter to their stigmatized status.

Chapter four addresses the vibrancy of Pentecostalism within the walls of Rio's prisons, by showing how the faith adapts to the prison context. I will emphasize the organizational model Pentecostalism employs in prison and compare its structural and functional similarities with the gangs that essentially control much of daily life in prison. The gang that I encountered most frequently during my fieldwork in both the prisons and surrounding neighborhoods was the Comando Vermelho. Using John Hagedorn's conceptualization of the "institutional street gang" as being responsive to oppressive socioeconomic conditions, I explain how both the gang and the inmate church control prison space, have powerful leaders that enforce the unwritten rules of each group, control access to scarce resources, and offer protection inside prison. Emphasizing the "gang-like" qualities of the inmate Pentecostal groups is not an effort to conceptualize the religious prisoners as an actual prison gang, but it helps to explain the success of these groups in ways that more traditional theories from the sociology of religion fall short.

In chapter five, I will address the last of my research questions: What impact does prison Pentecostalism have on the social world outside of prison? To do this, I will focus specifically on the role of the pastors and groups of volunteers who regularly visit the jails and prisons in Rio de Janeiro. This chapter will confront the commonly held assumption that Pentecostals in Brazil are not politically engaged. It is true that the

Pentecostals in Rio de Janeiro have not formed a politically active lobby or made an organized attempt to control the seat of political power in the senate or congress, but I argue that their physical presence inside the prisons and jails in Rio are, in fact, political acts.

To conclude the dissertation, I will present Rio de Janeiro as a city that is undergoing a process of rapid change due to the booming Brazilian economy and to their role as host for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. I will present and explore three areas of potential future research. The first area is the potential of Pentecostalism as an agent of political and social change in Rio de Janeiro. I will compare Pentecostalism in present-day Rio de Janeiro with the Black Church during the civil rights movement in the United States and discuss the institutional characteristics of the Pentecostal movement that may hinder its ability to enact social change as well as its strengths in this arena. I will then suggest a way to address a question that is frequently posed when I present the findings from the research: Does Pentecostal practice inside prison reduce recidivism rates for Pentecostal inmates upon release? I suggest that conceptualizing religious conversion as a turning point in the life course of inmates is a way to move forward. I will also ask, what impact will the rapid changes sweeping through Rio and the city's prison system have on Pentecostal practice and presence inside prison? Finally, I will conclude by highlighting the major findings from the research.

Chapter 1

Being There: Getting into the “Belly of the Beast”

I was stalling as I sat in the central plaza of a town in Minas Gerais, Brazil. I felt glued to the bench and unsettled by the growing knot in my stomach. A middle-aged man taking a break from selling battery-powered beard trimmers to pedestrians occupied the other half of the bench, and the two of us sat in silence watching a street preacher stab the air with a worn leather Bible to punctuate his animated sermon. Three weeks prior, I had asked to spend a week inside this town’s prison, sleeping in the cells and living as if I were one of the inmates. It was an odd request, but it was the best way I could think of to get a glimpse of prison life from an inmate’s perspective. So I was grateful that the administration granted my request and excited about the opportunity, but as I sat there on the bench, the idea started to seem absurd and maybe dangerously naive.

I had told the prison administration that I would arrive by noon, but at 12:45 p.m. I was still sitting on the park bench feeling like a kid who is pacing along the edge of a cold swimming pool thinking that if he waits just little longer the water will warm up. I finally realized that it was time to go and caught the attention of the cab driver sitting on the hood of his taxi parked next to the square. We drove to the edge of the city where the road transitions from asphalt into gravel and arrived at the prison, which is wedged between the cemetery and the landfill. Not prime real estate. It is the part of town where trash, dead bodies, and citizens convicted of a crime are sent for storage.

I paid for the cab, knocked on the prison door, and within five minutes, I had a pillow, blanket, and set of sheets in my hands. My contact at the prison gave me a few

instructions and we walked together through three sets of heavy iron doors that kept the inmates in and the public out. We arrived at what would be my cell for seven days and nights, and I was given a bunk and a single shelf on which to place my extra pair of pants, three shirts, soap, and toiletries. I didn't have any other questions, so the prison official patted my left shoulder, gave me the thumbs-up sign, and told me that he would see me in a week. Left alone, I put the sheets on my bed, folded my blanket and wondered who was staying in the other three beds. With my bed made and supplies arranged, I walked out of the cell and started the fieldwork.

Touring the Belly

Loic Wacquant (2001) lamented that over the last twenty years, social science research on prisons had shifted away from ethnographic studies in the prison yards toward quantitative analyses of large-scale data sets. Wacquant was concerned that as the United States embraced mass incarceration and locked up an unprecedented number of Americans, the daily lives of inmates were becoming increasingly mysterious. He warned that “ethnography of the prison in the United States is not merely an endangered species but a virtually extinct one” (p.385). Quantitative social science studies on prisons have been tremendously useful in illuminating the frightening consequences of mass incarceration in the United States and other countries (Manza and Uggen 2006; Tonry 2005; Western 2006). But Wacquant argues that going into the “belly of the beast,” going inside prison facilities, is an essential component of prison studies and he implores social science researchers to return to this type of ethnographic fieldwork.

In his article, Wacquant attempts to answer his own call by describing an afternoon tour he took of the Los Angeles County Jail. As the guards accompanied him

through the facility, his senses were assaulted by the noise, filth, absence of natural light, and disproportionate racial composition of the inmate population. Wacquant's visit to the jail shook him. After he finished, he wrote that "I am numb coming out of this long afternoon inside MCJ, and I drive silently straight to the beach [of Santa Monica] to wallow in the fresh air and wade in the waves, as if to 'cleanse' myself of all I've seen, heard, and sensed. I feel so bad, like scrambled eggs" (p.381). I fully concur with Wacquant that being physically present in a prison, even for just a few hours is an intense experience that exposes the realities of mass incarceration on a more human level. But while useful, prison tours, like the one Wacquant described, are also problematic (Piché and Walby 2010). Prison tours may be the only avenue for social science researchers to gain entrance into penal facilities, but they are short, highly controlled (possibly manipulated) by the administration, and much of the contact with the inmates and guards occurs on what Goffman would classify as "front stage" interaction (Goffman 1956).

In 2009, I had the opportunity to take a guided tour of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, or Angola Prison, as it is more commonly known. In the last fifteen years, Angola Prison has become one of the most accessible prisons in the country after the appointment of Warden Burl Cain, and I was able to set up a private tour by simply sending a few emails. Angola is unique in that there is an unprecedented level of civil society participation in the facility. Over thirty programs operated by non-state entities are present inside Angola, including a fully accredited seminary program offered by the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Another of Angola's unique characteristics is that over seventy percent of the inmates are serving life sentences and around ninety

percent of the inmates will likely die in prison. In spite of the social programs, it is still a heavy, heavy place.

My interest in religious practice inside prison was the impetus for the tour, so when we arrived at the seminary building, I asked my guide if I could speak with a student. The guide forwarded my request to the prison guard on duty and after he nodded an approval, I overheard my guide ask, “Which one should we have him talk to?” The guard responded without the slightest hesitation, “Charlie. Let’s have him talk with Charlie.” In less than five minutes, an inmate dressed in prison-issue blue jeans, a faded white T-shirt and a drab gray overcoat that was frayed at the edges was led out of a bunkhouse. After a short introduction, I asked a few basic questions about the seminary classes and his thoughts on the program. Charlie gave a glowing review of the program, but as we spoke, he made repeated eye contact with the guard who stood two feet behind me listening to every word of our conversation. I can’t make any judgments on the sincerity of Charlie’s response, but as we continued to talk, it was clear that the presence of the prison guard had an influence on the conversation. After ten minutes, I thanked Charlie for his time and finished the tour by visiting the hound dog pen and making a requisite pass through the execution chamber.

The tour of Angola was invaluable in shaping my methodology for this project because I realized that in order to collect reliable data, I needed to conduct the interviews and spend as much time as possible with the inmates away from the direct supervision of the guards or prison administration. The trick would be how to do this type of research safely.

Where the Inmates Run the Prison

My project would be in Brazil, not the United States, but the lesson I learned in Angola motivated me to find a situation where I could experience prison life with limited interference from the administration and maximize the amount of “backstage” interactions I had with the inmates. Through the preliminary research for the project and connections from previous work experience in Brazil, I located a prison system in the interior state of Minas Gerais that used a distinctive penology. APAC (*Associação de Proteção e Assistência aos Condenados*, or the Association for Protection and Assistance of Convicts) is a prison system that implements a unique restorative penology that now operates in almost thirty cities in Minas Gerais. APAC was founded in 1972 by Dr. Mario Ottoboni, a lawyer and passionate Catholic. Dr. Ottoboni faced a crisis in his personal faith after seeing the conditions of the prison in his hometown. Horrified by what he saw in the prison, he set out to create an experimental prison system that was based on a unique application of the golden rule: *Treat imprisoned people the way you would want them to treat others* (Ottoboni 2003, 24). Ottoboni’s penology was based on the simple premise that if the prisoner is treated with dignity and respect, the prisons will run better and offer an environment that is conducive to personal transformation. He believed that prisons could be places of restoration and not simply punishment.

One of the defining aspects of the APAC methodology is the absence of any prison guards. Opponents have criticized the practice as absurd and dangerous for the local community because these facilities hold men and women convicted of murder, rape, and armed assaults. Ottoboni’s idea was that the inmates themselves should be trusted to hold the keys to the cells and hold each other accountable to restorative model expectations. Though non-traditional and inherently risky, extracting armed guards from

the prison effectively eliminates the tension that exists between the guards and inmates in regular prisons (there has never been a prison riot at APAC) and changes the culture of the prison. More importantly, the absence of prison guards sends a clear message to the inmates that they are worthy to be trusted and that the expectation is not only for them to serve sentences, but to leave the prison as better citizens. In most cases, the APAC prisons operate parallel to the traditional prison system and hold between fifty to seventy-five percent of the city's inmate population. Inmates are initially placed in the state-run jail and after six months or so, they are allowed to voluntarily transfer to an APAC prison. The living conditions in the APAC prisons are considerably better than in the "normal" prisons, so while there are not any guards watching over the inmates, the threat of being sent back to the state-run jail serves as an effective deterrent to breaking the rules.

I attended an APAC national conference where I spoke with inmates and administrators from a dozen APAC facilities and also toured two of the prisons. I genuinely believed that spending time in one of the APAC prisons would provide a unique opportunity to understand incarceration on a more meaningful level while not putting my personal well being at risk. I described my research project to the APAC officials and asked to spend a week living inside two separate APAC prisons. The APAC organization is trying to convince other municipalities that its methodology is the most effective way to approach incarceration and is currently trying to export their vision to other parts of Brazil, as well as neighboring countries in South America and parts of Africa. Assuming I made it out alive, having a foreigner live in the cells as a prisoner

would serve as further evidence that these were safe places in spite of the absence of prison guards. Permission granted.

My First Week in the Belly of a “Tamed Beast”

In the opening section of the chapter, I described the moment of doubt that I experienced before I stepped into the APAC prison for a week, but I made it and finished unpacking about an hour before the evening meal was served. Most of the inmates were either playing soccer or smoking cigarettes while huddled around a twelve-inch television set. Unsure of what to do next, I gingerly made my way out of my cell and shuffled aimlessly down the hallway. Immediately, a wiry man in his early thirties who wore a tight afro greeted me with a firm handshake. He smiled broadly, introduced himself as the “president” of the cellblock and, reading the concern written on my face, repeatedly emphasized that I shouldn’t be worried; I would be safe.²

I knew entering the prison that I had a lot to learn and that I would have to traverse a number of social and cultural divides in the prison. The first effort I made was to try to match my clothes and appearance as closely to the inmate fashion aesthetic as possible. Getting a spider web tattooed on my elbow was not an option, but before I arrived I bought a pair of generic sweatpants and a gray sweatshirt at a discount clothing stand in the hope that inmates would be wearing something similar. The inmates at APAC do not wear prison uniforms (another component of the APAC methodology) and my purchase was a fortunate one because a number of the inmates wore the exact same

² I am fluent in Portuguese and conducted all of the research without an interpreter. I also translated the transcribed interviews from Portuguese to English.

outfit that I did. My choice to show up with a thick beard was not nearly as astute. I didn't realize that beards were not allowed, and in my desire to "fit in," I was determined to shave. Unfortunately, the one disposable razor I had brought with me was not up for the challenge. My cellmate walked in during my unsuccessful attempt at shaving, and I introduced myself to him while dabbing a trickle of blood from my chin. He laughed and made a joke about how I needed a "prison razor," and within two minutes he had ripped the plastic blade guard off my disposable razor and melted away the excess plastic with his cigarette lighter. The customized instrument he handed back to me would have shaved the fur off a grizzly bear, but an unsteady hand would have produced a cut that required stitches. That is just one example of how the guys in my cell looked after me throughout the week. They made sure that I learned the rules and if I made a wrong step, they pulled me aside and corrected it.

There were three other men in my cell. The inmate on the bunk below mine was from Paraguay. He was imprisoned for international drug trafficking and snored louder than anyone I have ever met. The guy who modified my razor had been incarcerated for over a year and was serving a sentence for a series of armed robberies he had committed to feed an ugly crack habit. The third person in the cell was accused of a sexual crime of which I never asked, nor was offered, any details. He spent the days chain-smoking while sitting on his bed and listening to a news station on a portable radio. He had very little contact with anyone else in the prison. I decided before I arrived that I wouldn't ask anyone about his crimes and I never did, but by the end of the week I knew the charges of most of the men. Some told me that their sentence was too harsh, but no one told me that he was innocent.

Daily Schedule

The days in the prison had a slow, deliberate rhythm and quickly became predictable. The breakfast line started to form at 7:20 a.m. and food was served at 7:30a.m. sharp. There wasn't a bell, but nobody overslept and the morning ritual of reciting the Lord's Prayer didn't start until everyone was there. Breakfast never changed and the small cup of sickly sweet coffee and a piece of buttered bread were consumed in solemn silence. A palpable gloom hung in the air each morning. It is depressing to wake up in prison. The inmates are required to "work" throughout the day. Time was taken off their sentences for each day they worked, but in the highest security section of the facility where I stayed, the work options were limited. Most of the men occupied their time by making handicrafts with donated scraps of wood or cloth. During the morning and afternoon, the prison looked a little like a junior high art class as the men made welcome mats, picture frames, wooden toys, plaques honoring professional soccer teams, and other trinkets. A few of the finished products were for sale in the lobby, but most of them were passed on to family members on visiting day.

The men formed small groups as they worked on their projects and chatted with each other throughout the day. I spent the week making a wooden wall hanging under the tutelage of a few of the inmates, and I tried to join a different group each day while I worked. Being the first foreigner that many of the inmates had ever spoken with, I had no trouble joining in the conversations and during the first hour or so, I inevitably had to respond to a string of questions that revolved around two topics. The first was why I had travelled across the globe to voluntarily stay in a place that they were dying to leave. The second topic centered on life in the United States and whether the images and news that

they encountered in the media were true. I quickly became the resident authority on subjects ranging from the election of Barack Obama to prison life in the United States to urban myths they had picked up on the internet. I spent hours talking with the men as we worked on our handicrafts. I answered and gave my take on the government's rationale behind the use of the death penalty in the United States, my estimate on the street value of cocaine in the United States, and my best guess as to whether Keith Richards really snorted his father's cremated ashes.

Many of the conversations eventually turned to inmates' court cases, and while they were officially discouraged from talking about their specific crimes, I heard dozens of detailed stories about large-scale international drug smuggling operations, successful and botched assaults on banks and buses, as well as the nuances of the small-time cocaine trade on the streets. Most men who were serving time for murder didn't talk about their case and those convicted of sexual crimes completely avoided participating in these conversations.

Breaking Down Barriers through Soccer

In between the afternoon work shift and supper, there was ninety minutes of "free-time." Some men rested, others watched the news, but most of the younger inmates gravitated toward the daily soccer game. The game was played on a 70' by 40' enclosed concrete patio that had a small (and, from my perspective, potentially dangerous) wall jutting out from one side. The daily games were intense, rough, and peppered with shouting. There was one ball and many of the players kicked off their flip-flops and played barefoot. After watching the first five minutes of play, I decided that I would have no part of this slice of prison life. I enjoy sports, but I had a real fear of breaking

my nose on one of the shots blasted in the tight quarters or crashing head first into the concrete wall. The games consisted of two four-man teams. The first team to score two goals in the tiny goal was declared the winner and four new players then replaced the losing team. I stood along the wall, comfortable with my position as observer, but to my dismay, when the game finished the inmate in charge of choosing the next team motioned to tell me that I was on his team. My first instinct was to smile, joke about how Americans are terrible soccer players, and follow through on the decision that I had already made not to play. But as I started to refuse the invitation, I realized that this is exactly what I had signed up for so I went to my cell to grab my shorts. I am glad that I did.

It took me a few games to get accustomed to the pace of play and to get a feel for my limited soccer skills. The first day, I was left out of the pushing, grabbing, and hard tackles. I played tentatively and as inconspicuously as possible in the beginning, but I started to feel more comfortable and confident as the day progressed. During a game toward the end of the second day, I ran for the ball in the corner, placed my left hand against the wall for support, and tried to dig the ball out of the corner with my right foot. As I tried to get control of the ball, a player on the opposing team, came in and pushed me in the small of my back with his forearm. I hit the wall with my shoulder, fell off balance and he easily kicked the ball away from me. I responded angrily with an instinctual push and received nothing but a mocking laugh in return. The back and forth shoves that we exchanged proved to be an important turning point for me because I realized that shoving was a sign of acceptance more than anything malicious.

These games were one of the few times during the day where the inmates seemed to briefly forget where they were. The physical exertion provided a release from the monotony of confinement and gave me the invaluable opportunity to interact with the other inmates as a teammate or opponent, not a social science researcher. During the heat of battle, it didn't matter that I was a foreign sociologist and my teammates were convicted murderers, low-level drug dealers, or bank robbers; I could push them and they could push me. I loosened up, increased my level of intensity and enjoyed the competition. As a result, I had the chance to genuinely participate in post-goal celebrations and to receive the temporary wrath of teammates I had let down with a poor play that led to a goal from the opposing team. When I scored my first goal after three days, I pretended it wasn't a big deal, but as my teammates circled around and patted me on the back, laughing that the "gringo" finally scored, I couldn't help but grin from ear to ear. I wish someone had been filming.

I played with the same guys each afternoon, and we developed friendships that carried over to the rest of the day and throughout the week. I was involved in the banter in the dining hall about the feats and failures in the games, and I was even part of a group that was scolded by the inmate president for playing too late and not showing up for dinner on time. I am certain that my participation in the games bought me a bit of credibility and provided a medium to build relationships quickly that no other venue offered.

Jailhouse Religion

My first experience with organized religion came on the fourth night of my stay, a Wednesday. I had finished dinner and gone back to my cell to grab a sweatshirt before

joining the nightly and never-ending domino game. On my way to the domino table, one of the inmates tugged on the corner of my sweatshirt and told me, “Hey, the church is coming.” Most of the nights in prison are the same. One group of men played dominos, another watched the melodramatic Brazilian soap operas, some of younger inmates sat around strumming a guitar, and one inmate walked laps around the patio for exercise. To be honest, I was ready for a change in pace and the service offered a break in the routine. We filed into a side room as three volunteers from a local Assembly of God congregation arrived dressed in blue jeans and T-shirts and armed with Bibles and an acoustic guitar. They shook hands and greeted a few regular attendees, unpacked the guitar, and almost immediately started to sing familiar worship choruses.

An inmate who had been convicted of a drug-related murder came to the service late and sat in the empty chair to my left. I had kept my distance from this guy because he was a bit of a loner, maintained a “tough guy” façade, and started fights in the soccer games. He only referred to me as “the gringo.” He went out of his way to give me a hard time and earlier in the week I overheard him bragging about the homicide he had committed. As the volunteers played the songs, all of the inmates stood up and sang along. The guy on my left was the only one who remained in his chair, detached and defiant. I was struck by the passion and emotion that the music brought out in the room, and as the third song finished, I glanced down at the man sitting to my left. He was gently sobbing with his head hung low and hands folded between his knees. He didn’t try to hide the tears that wet his heavily tattooed arms. He was not alone in expressing emotion; a number of the men wiped tears from their eyes and sang with their arms stretched to the ceiling, reaching out to an unseen God.

After the singing, one of the Pentecostal volunteers gave a fifteen-minute sermon on a Gospel passage. This was my first experience encountering the incredible reverence by the inmates toward religion that was so consistent throughout my fieldwork. There was no idle chatter during any part of the service and participation was voluntary. After the closing prayer was finished and the service concluded, the volunteers thanked the men for coming and offered to pray individually for anyone who wanted it. The men started to form two- and three-person lines, waiting for their chance to stand face to face with the volunteers. When an inmate finished sharing his requests, the volunteer placed his hand on the inmate's head or shoulder and prayed aloud for his family, upcoming parole decisions, or for strength to make it through the next week. Once the final "Amen" was said, the volunteer would tightly embrace the inmate in a full bear hug and the next in line would step up. Except for the family visit, this was the only display of physical affection I witnessed during the week.

When I arrived at the prison, I hadn't narrowed my research focus to anything more specific than religion inside prison. As the week progressed, it was clear to me that Pentecostalism was the version of faith that resonated with these men and I decided to focus solely on Pentecostalism for three reasons. First, the emotion in the room during the singing in the service conducted by the Assembly of God volunteers was unlike anything I had seen. Second, in the dozens of interviews that I recorded, as well as in the informal conversations that I had concerning religious conversion inside the APAC prison, only one inmate reported to return to a Catholic version of Christianity. The rest talked about Pentecostalism. Finally, the Pentecostals were there in numbers unmatched by any other church or religion. The Pentecostal volunteers or pastors who visited the

prison while I was there outnumbered volunteers from any other religious affiliation nine to one.

Shaping a Methodology

I spent another week at a different APAC facility later that summer. By that time, I knew what I was getting into and arrived without the apprehension that gripped me before my first visit. This dissertation focuses on Pentecostalism in the prison of Rio de Janeiro and not the APAC facilities, but the two weeks I spent behind bars set the trajectory and shaped the methodological goals I would implement in Rio. I had read about the “pains of imprisonment” in Gresham Sykes’s (1958) enduringly influential book *The Society of Captives*, but seeing how these pains manifested themselves in the lives of people I had gotten to know helped me to understand them in a different, more tangible, way.

One of the “pains” Sykes describes is that an inmate is cut off from his or her family and loved ones. I saw how the prison lit up on Sunday afternoon during the family visits. Preparations began on Saturday afternoon as the inmates gave each other haircuts and by the time the families arrived, everyone was showered, shaved, and dressed in their best clothes. Upon arrival, passionate kisses were exchanged between the men and their wives or girlfriends, and mothers of the teenaged inmates warmly stroked the faces of their imprisoned sons as they hugged them. I got choked up when I saw three- and four-year-old children cling to their father’s legs and tug on their dad’s shirt asking to be picked up and held. The young kids scurried around the chairs and tables that were set up on the soccer court, oblivious to the fact that they were in a prison. They were just happy to see their dads. At four in the afternoon, the visitors had to leave and I

heard the same line delivered from a number of mothers to their confused toddlers: “No, my child, daddy can’t come with us; he has to stay here for a little while longer.” When the families left, they took with them all of the temporary joy that their visit had brought. The hours immediately following the Sunday visit were the most depressing of the week, and the heavy sorrow that settled in would not disappear until Monday morning.

I wasn’t a real prisoner during those two weeks of fieldwork. I hadn’t been convicted of a crime and I knew that I could leave if I wanted to. I hope that I never really “know” what it feels like to be imprisoned, but the time I spent behind bars at least gave me a taste of what it would be like. I vividly remember one Wednesday night lying wide-awake on the top bunk in the cell. I couldn’t sleep and the guy below me had been snoring uninterrupted for over three hours. Lying on my back, I looked over my toes and saw the moon shining brightly in the deeply black sky and I started thinking, “What if I had to spend ten years in this place?” Maybe we have all asked ourselves a question like this; I know that I had. The exercise wasn’t as abstract or theoretical that night because I was asking myself, “Could I handle ten years sleeping in *this* bed behind *these* bars?” I was overcome with despair just thinking about the hypothetical situation. After four days, ten years seemed to be an eternity and I didn’t know if or how I could do it. I kept thinking about what a tragic waste it would be for my life and what incredible pain it would cause my family to have me in there. Those emotions, mixed with regret or remorse over the crime I may have committed or the pain that my action had caused others, would be a torturous combination. I cannot pretend to understand how individuals cope in that scenario, but when I woke up the next morning I understood why there were no smiles in the breakfast line.

Rio de Janeiro: Beautiful Beaches and Medieval Dungeons

The jails and prisons in Rio de Janeiro make the APAC prison in Minas Gerais seem like a members-only country club. The P#1 jail is located on the corner of a busy street in a tough, gritty, and impoverished suburb on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. Inmates are brought here immediately after their arrest and remain here until their trial. Much of its painted concrete exterior has been chipped away and the exposed patches of dull gray cement add to the neighborhood's general state of disrepair. This part of the city is a long way away, both geographically and culturally, from the iconic beach neighborhoods of Copacabana and Ipanema. There can be up to 800 inmates stored inside the detention center at any given time, and on weekday mornings, hundreds of people line up waiting to spend an hour with their son, husband, boyfriend, or father. The visitor's line is not a joyful place and nine out of ten of the people waiting are either women or children. Mothers and grandmothers stand with tired, defeated expressions on their faces and plastic containers of rice and beans in their hands, quietly waiting for the doors to open. They will have to pay ten reais (six dollars) to visit and another ten to bring the food to their sons and grandsons. The cash will be discretely handed to the inmates and they will pay the guards directly once the visit is over. The money collected will be divided among the police later in the afternoon. Many of the children in the line have been told by their mothers and grandmothers that they are going to visit daddy "at work." The white lie serves its purpose for the time being, but it will not be long before the children understand why they have to wait in line to visit their father. Teenage girls waiting to visit their boyfriends are usually the most upbeat of the group and it seemed

that every day right before the door opened, they frantically passed compact mirrors between themselves in an attempt to applying the finishing touches to their make-up.

When the visiting hour finally arrives, a small sheet-metal door swings open into the jail's makeshift waiting room. The family members, pastors, and the occasional lawyer must then pass by a desk, sign their names, show identification, and present any food they brought for inspection. They can leave their cell phones in one of the six battered, rusty lockers that take two hands to pry open and a swift kick to shut, but most are already familiar with the routine. There is a gray, cracked-plastic metal detector that the visitors must walk through, but after a few months of total silence from the machine, I started to question whether it functioned or was even plugged in. Past the metal detector, the building opens into a small dirt courtyard where a half-dozen "trustees" spend the day sitting on folding chairs reading the newspaper or passing the most recent edition of *Playboy* between themselves. Officially, these men are inmates, but they are also members of a growing mafia in Rio that has strong connections to the police department. Because of their mafia affiliation, these men live in a separate section of the jail (sarcastically called the "VIP" room by the inmates) and serve as the de facto security detail, taking orders from the police officers who are officially in charge. The mafia-affiliated inmates have the keys to the cells and supervise the visiting hours.

The jail is not particularly remarkable until one passes through the long, thin hallway and arrives at the cellblock entrance. The front section of the building could be any one of the municipal offices in this part of the city, but it transforms into an otherworldly place behind the cellblocks. Two units comprise the cellblock area—two

literal dungeons. Each unit consists of five cells that has between thirteen and sixteen cement slabs that serve as beds. The number of inmates per cell fluctuates; it usually hovers around fifty or sixty detainees, but hitting eighty is not uncommon. How this many people can fit inside defies commonly held notions of space. The conditions inside the cells are simply awful and nearly everyone I met who had seen them used the word *dungeon* at some point in their description. The concrete walls in the cells were painted white years ago, but are now streaked black with layers of dirt, dried sweat, and mildew. Large sections of the walls are papered in pornography, and the seductive smiles of hundreds of nude women staring out from the faded magazine photos provide a bizarre juxtaposition of sex and misery.

The toilet is an eight-inch hole in the ground covered by a plastic curtain. The line to use it is continual, but orderly. There is a set of unwritten rules that dictate nearly every action, from where a person sleeps to when they can use the bathroom. There are no windows, so ventilation is almost non-existent and the only light comes from small television sets that are hung from the bars with bed sheets that have been twisted in ropes. Six months before I arrived, a volunteer from Rio de Paz, a local NGO, made the front page of the newspaper by posing in one of the cells with a thermometer in his hands that read 56.7°C (134°F).

The dank, rotting smell that fills the cellblocks is only thinly masked by cheap industrial disinfectant and cigarette smoke. The air inside is heavy, wet, and hard to choke down on a person's first visit. Most jarring is not the heat or the smell, but the number of people who are crammed into each cell. When the cell doors are locked, shirtless inmates squeeze together to sit on the concrete floor and both levels of the bunk

beds. Others spend their days and nights lying suspended in the air, hanging on an intricate system of improvised hammocks.

Not surprisingly, the inmates in this jail are not a healthy group. Many of the men arrive with open wounds and deep purple bruises they acquired from the police during their arrest. The ill and most severely wounded inmates are allowed to lie down next to the steel bars to get the best shot at fresh air. Other prisoners arrive having been shot during their capture, and since there is no medical care at P#1, an inmate who worked at the hospital years ago has assumed the duty of jailhouse doctor. On a shelf, he proudly displays a dozen flattened bullets and pieces of shrapnel that he has pulled from the flesh of arriving inmates. The only provision offered by the state is three meals a day. Nothing else.

Despite the conditions, a bit of humor and irony still survive and that is how the “VIP” section was named. This part of the prison holds the mafia members and the wealthy inmates who pay costly bribes to avoid the conditions of the cells. The VIP section is separate from the cells and offers a separate material reality. An air-conditioned studio apartment outfitted with two beds, including frames and mattresses, a working refrigerator, television, DVD player, and full kitchen is perched on the second floor above the administration offices. Located next to it is another air-conditioned, spacious dorm area filled with twenty bunk beds and a weight set for the privileged inmates. On my visits to this area, I was offered cold soda, bread and cheese, fruit, coffee, and the best fried chicken I have ever tasted. It is a far cry from the conditions of the other inmates in the cells just one hundred yards away. But like the velvet-roped VIP lounges of chic nightclubs, the VIP area in the prison is not open to anyone. In order for

an inmate to stay in this area, he has to pay, and pay dearly. There is not a set price; it fluctuates depending on the inmates' connections and suspected wealth. I have heard rumors that it would be cheaper to rent an apartment overlooking the beach at Copacabana than to rent a good spot in the VIP section.

Accessing the Beast

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork inside P#1, and getting access was a combination of luck, persistence, and favors called in by the right contacts. I first entered the P#1 after being invited by Rio de Paz, a local human rights organization that had just started to work in the prison. Antonio Carlos Costa, the president of the organization, visited the jail for the first time as a favor to a distant relative whose son was arrested and locked in P#1. When his visit had finished, out of curiosity he asked one of the trustees if he could take a look at one of the cellblocks. Antonio is also a pastor, a title that holds considerable weight in Rio de Janeiro, so an exception was made and his request was granted. What he saw when he turned the corner and stood in front of the cells was worse than he could have imagined. Like most people around the world, he had no idea what the inside of a jail looked like in his own city. Seeing the inmates stacked on top of each other in obscenely inhumane conditions triggered a raw and emotional reaction. He told me “it was like something in me snapped and I yelled out, ‘Whoever is responsible for this is the real criminal and should be thrown in prison!’” Antonio started to ask questions and quickly discovered that there was not one person to blame for the inhumane conditions and that what he saw was a consequence of decades of institutional failure rooted deeply in political and police corruption. He felt a call to respond, to do something, so he arranged to bring in volunteer dentists and doctors from his church to

provide basic medical care for the inmates. The group visited every two weeks and built up tremendous goodwill among the detainees for their service.

I joined the volunteers from Rio de Paz on one of the first Saturdays I spent in Rio de Janeiro, and I was assigned to help set up the portable dentist chair and organize the medicine for the volunteer doctors. After forty or fifty inmates had their teeth pulled, open wounds bandaged, and infections treated with antibiotics, I joined one of the volunteers to visit to the cellblock. I had heard that things were bad, but like Antonio, I wasn't prepared to encounter the dungeon-like conditions that I described earlier in the chapter.

I left the cellblock dazed and unable to process the intensity of the experience. I took a few minutes to steady myself, and on a whim, asked if I could talk with the inmate pastor. I had heard that inside most of the prisons, a small group of Pentecostal inmates formed a "church" among themselves and designated a pastor as their leader. The volunteer who had brought me to the unit relayed my request and in just a few minutes, three men were led out of the cells in handcuffs and brought to the visiting room to speak with me. The men sat across from me dressed in plain white T-shirts, knee-length shorts and flip-flop sandals. They squinted as their eyes adjusted to the strong florescent lights and then asked who I was. I introduced myself, explained why I was there, and started in with a few questions. The inmates were standoffish at first—more intent on figuring out who this *gringo* was sitting in front of them than on answering his questions. Paulo identified himself as the pastor and Carlos and Jobson told me that they were *obreros*, or workers in the church. Paulo was silent and locked onto me with an intense stare. I

looked down at my feet to break the eye contact, but he never flinched. The skin on his broad face hung loosely over his cheek bones as if he had recently lost weight, and his large hands, strengthened by years of construction work, wrapped around a weathered leather Bible. I was suddenly nervous and intimidated and I struggled to find the right Portuguese words to say. Pastor Paulo interrupted me in midsentence and transitioned from interviewee to interviewer. He started in with his own set of questions and I was able to regain my composure as I spoke about the time I had spent in Minas Gerais and my vision for the research. I made it clear that my interest was simply to learn about how religion was practiced among the inmates in the jail and how the church operated in this nightmarish space. Our meeting only lasted twenty minutes or so, but the men warmed up to me, were proud of their positions in the church (not as inmates), and were enthused about speaking about their church. The Rio de Paz team was about to leave, so we concluded our meeting and each of the three men gave me a quick hug and told me that they would be happy to be interviewed if I was able to convince the administration to let me in.

I left the jail still rattled by the living conditions in the cells but encouraged by the inmates' willingness to participate in the study. Obtaining the blessing from the administration proved easier than I had anticipated due to a fortunate sequence of events that placed me next to the warden of P#1 at the lunch table on the following day. There were eight of us at the table: the warden, an influential local politician, a few members from Rio de Paz, and me. As we ate, I described the purpose of my project to the warden and asked permission to interview a select number of the detainees who participated in the inmate church. I was careful to emphasize that I was not doing an exposé on the

prison conditions, but that my focus was on the religious lives of the inmates. The warden agreed and told me that I could show up on Monday and if any one gave me problems I should call him personally. This conversation was the key to gaining entrée to this jail, and I learned that being in the right place at the right time can be the foundation of a solid methodology.

I started recording interviews on the following Monday and was able to record fifteen interviews during the first six weeks. I was given access to a small room, not much larger than a walk-in closet. The room served as my office during the day and at night, was rented out as a conjugal visit room. A bribe paid to the on-duty police officer bought an inmate twenty minutes in the room and safe passage from the street for a wife, girlfriend, or prostitute. I used the room to record interviews with the detainees who participated in the prison church and with anyone else who was willing to talk to me.

I offered glasses of cold water, a promise not to ask any questions about their criminal charges, and an hour or so out of the cells, so many of the men jumped at the opportunity. When Cesar, a timid inmate with a soft voice and quiet demeanor who served as the church's song leader, arrived for an interview he told me, "Thanks for calling me; what a blessing from God. That was the first time I had seen the sun in three months." After the interview was finished, I opened the door to my "office" and called the trustee to lead him back to the cells. Cesar was escorted across the courtyard in handcuffs and just before he arrived at the hallway leading to his cell, he stopped and looked up to the sky to capture the image and sensation of the blue sky and intense sun. Recruiting inmates to participate was not a problem.

After spending a few days hanging around the jail, I realized that every morning at ten o'clock and sometimes again in the afternoon, groups of Pentecostals from local congregations arrived at the jail's entrance to lead a worship service in the cells. Besides the volunteers from Rio de Paz, these groups were the only members of civil society to enter that space. Some of the groups brought a portable sound system and a guitar, while others arrived with nothing more than a Bible and maybe a tambourine tucked under their arm. There were twelve groups that visited the prison and, in theory, each group was assigned a specific day and time to hold a service with the inmates. After a series of "double-bookings" where two groups showed up at the same time, a meeting was called by the prison administration to write up a new schedule and assign each group a time slot. Representatives from all of the involved Pentecostal churches arrived at the jail and after clearing it with the warden, I introduced myself to the group, explained my project, and asked if I could accompany them into the cells during their services. Each of the groups agreed and starting the following day, I joined the Pentecostal teams when they entered what Wacquant called the "belly of the beast." I also visited these groups' churches that were located in the surrounding neighborhoods (I will describe those congregations in more detail in the next chapter).

Even though I had permission from the warden and eventually became a fixture inside the jail, getting the interviews was a constant struggle. Just because the warden said I could do the research didn't mean that the other police officers who ran the place welcomed my presence. There was real animosity between the inmates and the police officers who ran the jail from a small dusty office near the building's entrance. Because of my involvement with Rio de Paz and the amount of time I spent with the inmates, I

was never fully trusted by the police officers because they thought I was on the side of the inmates. There were times when I was greeted with open hostility by the officers and many times I was sent away with colorful and sometimes creative cursing. I came to dread the moment when I got off the bus and approached the metal garage door that served as the only entrance to the jail. Some mornings I had to take deep breaths and work up the courage just to knock on the door. One of the officers never let me in and seemed to take pleasure in watching me shuffle back dejectedly to my bus stop. It was a two-hour, two-transfer journey to get from my apartment to the jail on public transportation, and if traffic was bad I could count on a six-hour round trip. There were other days when the entire facility was on lockdown as a punishment for an inmate infraction or as retribution for an uptick of crime in the streets. During lockdown, all families and visitors were sent away, many with return trips much longer and costlier than mine. I tried, and was marginally successful in, mitigating some of the hostility by engaging with the police officers in conversation during the day and by eating lunch with them. I also interviewed a few of the officers in an attempt not only to get their perspective on the jail, but also to let them know that I was interested in what they had to say and not just what the inmates had to say.

After six months of fieldwork, the police officer who was the acting warden was transferred to a different jail. There was a succession of wardens after that—more than five came and went in two months. I had a much harder time convincing these new wardens of my place in the jail, and I was not allowed to bring in a tape recorder or to call inmates out of their cells. There was a massive internal investigation that focused on the deep corruption in the city jails and scandalized Rio's police force while I was there .

The stories were on the news every day and I personally knew some of the officers who were being accused of the crimes. As a consequence, the entire police force became wary of outsiders and recording interviews was out of the question. Fortunately, I had recorded nearly twenty interviews during my first few months of fieldwork because my presence had become increasingly precarious.

The prisons were considerably more orderly and also more difficult to get into than the jails were. I visited three prisons in Rio, but I only visited one of them regularly to collect ethnographic data. The Evaristo de Moraes prison served as another important research site and housed the most organized group of Pentecostals I encountered in my fieldwork. Evaristo de Moraes prison is one of the largest in Rio de Janeiro. It is a dilapidated penitentiary that holds 1,800 prisoners and is scheduled for demolition before the Olympics start in 2016. In this facility, the inmates are housed in an enormous whitewashed, concrete building that resembles an airplane hangar in both size and shape. The inmates live in a strip of fifty-bed cells built on the floor in the middle of the building. Eighty percent of the inmates are held in the dozen or so cells that start at the building's entrance. The three to four hundred Pentecostal inmates, about twenty percent of the overall population, are separated from the general population by a concrete wall that stands thirty feet tall and spans the entire building. Nothing about the wall is subtle. It is covered with an enormous mural painted by the inmates that depicts Moses, staff in hand, crossing through a split Red Sea followed by dozens of Israelites. The bright, primary colors stand in stark contrast to the faded gray and soot-stained walls in the rest of the building, and "Welcome to the Prison Church of Evaristo de Moraes" is written loudly in block letters above the Old Testament scene. Adjacent to the *celas dos crentes*

(Believers' Cells) or *celas dos irmãos* (Brothers' Cells) is a chapel where the daily worship services are held and the church's headquarters housed. The church's insignia, a Bible laid open with a dove flying through the bars of a prison cell window, is painted on the chapel wall. The inmates who live in this section of the prison wear white T-shirts with the church's logo silk-screened on the chest. The shirts visibly identify the inmate as a member of the church to both the guards and other inmates.

Evaristo de Moraes prison is operated by the city's Penitentiary System, not the civil police and therefore is much more difficult to enter. In order to enter, I had to submit my passport and research visa number one week in advance, have them approved, and then bring the documents to the prison when I arrived. I could only enter the facility when I accompanied a church group to attend the worship services along with Pentecostal volunteers. All of my requests to record interviews were denied, so I took advantage of the twenty to thirty minutes after the service to establish contacts with the inmates, explain my project, and informally interview them. I knew a half dozen or so of the inmates in this penitentiary from my work in the P#1 jail. These guys greeted me like I was a long lost cousin the first time I entered to observe the service, and they introduced me to the other inmates. I jotted notes as inconspicuously as possible during my visits to the Evaristo de Moraes prison and expanded them immediately after I left the facility.

Ex-Cons and Family Members

I was in Rio for about a year collecting the data for this project. It took a couple of months to line up the contacts and gain entrée into these spaces, so I was only able to interview a handful of the inmates I met in prison after their release. After months of consistent contact with the inmates in the jail, I was called on to do a few small favors for

them. A few of the men I knew well had me call their families to tell them if the visiting schedule had been abruptly changed and I never minded doing this for them. Dozens of the men in the jail hadn't been able to contact their families since their arrest and some had gone for months without contact with anyone outside the jail. Every week I was asked to make a phone call to inmates' families telling them that their son was alive but in jail. Some of these calls were awkward, and I can't imagine how I would react if someone called me out of the blue in heavily accented Portuguese to tell me of my son's incarceration status. My willingness to play this role bought me tremendous favor and gratitude from the inmates, and it also allowed me to make contacts with a few of the families from members of the Pentecostal group in the jail. I was invited to a number of dinners and church services with these families and was occasionally called in front of the church to talk about how specific inmates were doing in prison.

Since I was not able to following many of the participants in the study as they left penal facilities and re-entered society, I sought out ex-inmates who had participated in the prison churches previously. I was able to speak with over fifty ex-inmates and record over twenty interviews with them. What I did not do was pursue a control group. Inside the jail, not the prison, I spoke with dozens of inmates who were incarcerated but not involved in the Pentecostal groups. I didn't record any of these interviews, but did my best to capture some of their thoughts about their religious colleagues and to understand their experience. I also did not try to find ex-inmates who had served time but never participated in the inmate congregations.

Hospitality and the Inmates' Code

The common denominator in the conversations I have had with people regarding the data collection for the project has been questions about my safety. I have stopped responding to jokes about “not dropping the soap,” but it is certainly a fair question to ask how I was treated inside the different prisons I visited. Some of the inmates were arrested for non-violent crimes like drug distribution or shoplifting, but most were in for armed assault or murder, especially in Rio. I would be lying if I said that there were not times when I was worried, but I can honestly report that the inmates could not have treated me more openly and respectfully. There is a separate set of rules inside the prison that is strictly followed by the inmates and strictly enforced by the inmate leaders, especially the gang leaders. I was never intimidated or hassled by the men and I was never asked to do anything illegal. The first time I left the gang-controlled section of the prison, the gang leader called the attention of the entire wing, and within thirty seconds, the radio was turned off, conversations stopped, and even the buzz from the electric tattoo needle running in the corner was shut off. In the silence that followed, the gang leader spoke to me and one of the volunteers from Rio de Paz saying, “I want to thank you for coming in here today. People on the outside think we are a bunch of caged animals in here, but as you can see we are not. I want to say that you are welcome here anytime.” As I left, I shook hands with at least two dozen of the incarcerated gang members. At first, I was shocked at the reverence I witnessed toward visitors (which were almost exclusively Pentecostal volunteers), but as I continued the fieldwork, I encountered this sort of treatment in every facility I entered. I don’t know everything that went on behind those bars when I was not there, and it is possible, though unlikely, that the inmates were simply putting on a show for the outsiders, but I can only report on my experience. After

a few months, I was no longer the least bit hesitant to go into the cellblocks even though there were no guards or police officers. I developed a deep trust in this aspect of the inmate code and could not have completed the research without the hospitality and respect that was shown to me when I went behind the bars to interact with these men in their territory.

Figure 1.1

Qualitative Data Chart

	Interviews	Participant Observation
Prisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recorded 35 interviews with prison inmates and had dozens more informal, unrecorded interviews inside prison. -Conducted 30 interviews with ex-prisoners and recorded 18 of them. -Interviewed eight police officers and prison wardens, four recorded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spent two weeks living inside the APAC prisons. -Forty visits to the jail in Rio de Janeiro where I observed more than twenty-five Pentecostal worship services inside the cellblocks. -Ten visits to the Evaristo de Moraes prison in Rio de Janeiro. I attended three worship services there and had meetings with the guards and prison administration. -Visited five other penal institutions in Rio de Janeiro.
Churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recorded 8 interviews with Pentecostal pastors in congregations that have contact with inmates or ex-inmates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attended fifty Pentecostal worship services at ten different congregations in Rio de Janeiro that had contacts with prisoners or ex-prisoners. -Visited over ten halfway houses, drug rehabilitation programs, and transition programs for ex-prisoners.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recorded interviews with three family members of prisoners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Visited the homes of men who were currently incarcerated or had recently left prison. -Accompanied pastors on visits with Comando Vermelho leaders.

Chapter 2

Pentecostalism: The Faith of the Killable People

On Saturday, November 27, 2010, I caught my usual morning bus to visit the P#1 jail. Weekend traffic is considerably slower than the usual weekday gridlock, but on this day the streets were eerily still and the bus I boarded was as empty as the streets it navigated. Most days I was fortunate just to get a seat, so when I saw only two other passengers on the bus, I checked with the driver to make sure that I was on the right route. I sat across the aisle from a young man who was talking loudly into a cell phone trying to reassure his mother that he was safe and promising another call the minute he arrived at his uncle's house. I could hear the concern in her voice as I eavesdropped on their conversation, and she had reason to worry. Over the previous eight days, over 100 buses, ambulances, cars, and trucks had been burned or destroyed by homemade bombs, reportedly by members of Comando Vermelho (Barrionuevo [Nytimes] 12/09/10). The attacks were the gang's response to reports that the city police planned to invade the Complexo do Alemão, a cluster of favelas under control of the Comando Vermelho and the headquarters of the gang's vast drug enterprise. The city was on edge and the gang's tactics had successfully unnerved Rio's residents.

Just days before, the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro called in dozens of tanks and hundreds of Marines from the national army to mount a heavily armed strike at the Comando Vermelho's stronghold, Complexo do Alemão. The invasion was part of an on-going "pacification" strategy implemented by the city government to forcibly seize control of neighborhoods dominated by the narco-gangs (Domit 11/26/2010). As I looked

out the windows from my seat on the bus, I saw dozens of soldiers posted on street corners holding polished black automatic weapons, staring down each car that passed. From my vantage point, the soldiers outnumbered the pedestrians five to one in strategic parts of the city. As we passed by a police station, the bus slowed down to allow five urban assault vehicles, equipped with heavy machine guns mounted on tripods, to leave the parking lot and head into the fray. Rio de Janeiro had felt like a war zone over the past few days and the quotes coming from the military police leading the assault reflected the tense mood in the city. Colonel Lima Castro, the spokesman for Rio's military police, announced, "We did not start this war. We were provoked and we will emerge victorious" (Phillips, Guardian, 12/25/10). The assault vehicles were headed toward the Complexo do Alemão to prepare for the evening's invasion.

Local television stations were running twenty-four hour coverage of the violence that was engulfing the city and inside the Complexo do Alemão, dozens of the highest-ranking CV members sat in a secret safe house, huddled around a television watching the news coverage. Months after the invasion, I spoke with one of the CV leaders who was sitting in the safe house watching the military prepare for the attack. He described the tension in the room and how they were horrified when they saw the news footage of military tanks tearing through the concrete barriers that the gang had set up in entrances of the community. "I couldn't believe it," the CV leader recounted of that day. "Those tanks cut through our barriers like a knife through butter, just like a knife through butter." At one point, a heated argument broke out among the higher echelons of the organization. It was between the leaders who wanted to mount an armed defense using the dozens of low-ranking gang members who were posted throughout the neighborhood and those who

wanted to flee. The CV leader told me he yelled out, “Are you kidding me? Go against the army? We are drug traffickers; we can’t fight their tanks!” It didn’t take long for the Comando Vermelho leaders to realize that their stockpiled weapons and teenage soldiers were no match for the military, so they fled the Complexo do Alemão, every man for himself. Some were arrested, others killed, but most eventually escaped. I heard a rumor from a number of CV members that one of the highest-ranking Comando Vermelho bosses escaped in the back of a furniture delivery truck after arranging a 2 million (nearly 1.4 million USD) real bribe to the police commanders, an expensive taxi ride, if true.

Leandro Nascimento, a Comando Vermelho member who controlled the cocaine and marijuana trade in the Minerlândia neighborhood located on the periphery of the city was one of those who needed to flee. He was wanted for murder and drug trafficking and could read the writing on the wall that told him the military would be sweeping through the area in a matter of hours. Leandro was a darker-skinned young male, living in a favela, a demographic trifecta that fits the majority of homicide victims in Rio de Janeiro. He knew that he would have to pass through a police checkpoint station if he wanted to escape from Complexo do Alemão and instead of shooting his way out, he opted for a disguise. Leandro put on a dress shirt and tie, a suit coat, and dress pants, and then completed the outfit by tucking a Bible under his arm. He was dressed as a Pentecostal pastor. Though Leandro’s plan failed and he was arrested, his choice to dress as a Pentecostal made perfect sense because the Pentecostal church is strongest in Rio’s low-income neighborhoods like the Complexo do Alemão, and Pentecostals walking down the street, Bible in hand, are part of the urban landscape.

In Rio's favelas and low-income neighborhoods, there are two identities for young men that are easily identifiable on the streets by the "uniform" they wear. One uniform consists of a pair of surfboard shorts, sunglasses, gold chain, often shirtless, accessorized by an automatic assault rifle and a walkie-talkie tucked into the waistband of the shorts. The uniform instantly identifies the individual as connected to a drug gang, a strong and powerful identity in the community. These young men were the targets of the military invasion in Complexo do Alemão and are hunted daily by Rio de Janeiro's police force. The other regularly worn uniform is what Leandro decided to wear: the full suit and Bible combination worn by the thousands of Pentecostals in Rio de Janeiro. Many of these Pentecostals share the same sociodemographic characteristics as the gang members, so it made sense for Leandro, an active gang member, to try to pass as a Pentecostal in his unsuccessful escape plan.

This chapter introduces Pentecostalism as the "faith of the killable people" and argues that Pentecostalism offers inmates an opportunity to live a more dignified life through a set of practices and rituals that counteract their stigma as prisoners. This argument has two primary components, the first being that Pentecostalism is the dominant faith for the racialized underclass in Rio de Janeiro that suffers from one of the highest homicide rates in the world. The inmates in the jails and prisons come almost exclusively from this segment of the city and Pentecostalism is unquestionably the most widely practiced religion among those in prison. I will emphasize Rio de Janeiro's homicide rate as one of the distinguishing aspects of this sociodemographic group, and use the term *os seres matáveis*, or "the killable people," which was coined by anthropologists Ana Paula Miranda and María Victoria Pita (2010). This term is used to

conceptualize the poor, mostly darker-skinned young men living in the favelas that make up the bulk of murder victims in the city. In the second part of the chapter, I will use the data I collected during worship services held with visiting Pentecostal groups to argue that Pentecostal practice thrives in these spaces because it offers not only a coping mechanism for the inmates to escape the pains of imprisonment, but also a counter-hegemonic identity and corresponding dignity to people who have been historically treated as less than full citizens by the state and who the larger society views as expendable. Though the religious practice of inmates in Rio de Janeiro is not entirely analogous to that of the slaves in the American South, I will build on the work of Howard Thurman (1946, 39), who argued that the religious practice of the slaves allowed them to “reject annihilation and affirm a terrible right to live.”

Murderous Inequality

Homicide

Brazilian society has been marked by extreme social inequality since it was a Portuguese colony (Fausto 1999). This inequality has been captured by social scientists through focusing on racial disparities, educational disparities, and health indices (cite here), but in this chapter I look specifically at the homicide rates of Rio de Janeiro to understand the unique character of the city’s social inequality. According to the Instituto de Seguranca Pública-Rio de Janeiro (Institute of Public Security-Rio de Janeiro), there were 45,340 murders committed in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro from 2000–2006, an average of 7,557 murders a year. An estimated 11,000,000 live in the area, which places the annual homicide rate for Rio de Janeiro at 68.7 homicides per 100,000 residents. This level of violence is nearly nine times higher than cities in the Americas

like Detroit and Mexico City and twenty times as high as Buenos Aires, in neighboring Argentina³. Though Rio is a city that is internationally famous for its physical beauty, it is one of the most dangerous places in the western hemisphere to be a poor, fifteen- to thirty-year-old man.

Homicide statistics were a concern throughout Brazil's campaign to host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Officials emphasized the surging Brazilian economy, the growing infrastructure, the unprecedented improvement experienced by the country's poor, and hinted at a decrease in the urban murder rate. The campaign was successful and in the span of twenty-four months, the world's two largest sporting events will take place in Rio de Janeiro. Since the announcement, the official homicide rates for the host city have decreased dramatically, some estimates as much as 22.2 percent between 2008 and 2009 (Abdala 2011). One reason for this sudden drop in homicides has been the implementation of the pacification police strategy like the one I described at the beginning of the chapter. But social scientists in Rio have hesitated in applauding the precipitous decline in the city's murder rate because the number of deaths that have been assigned to "unknown" causes have increased by 73.2 percent (Abdala 2011). For example, a body dumped along the side of the road with a gunshot wound may not necessarily be classified as a homicide, but assigned an unknown cause because the person could have died from a self-inflicted wound or an accident. Also, the number of

³ The homicide rate in the New York City metropolitan area during this same time was less than 6 murders per 100,000 residents. The Motor City, Detroit, which has been dubbed "The Murder City," has a homicide rate of 8.3 murders per 100,000 residents in the metropolitan area (this number would be closer to 40 if measured using only the city limits). In Mexico City, the largest city in Latin America, the number of murders per 100,000 residents resembles Detroit's rate at 8.4 per year, and in Buenos Aires the homicide rate is less than 5.

people who have been officially counted as “disappeared” has risen significantly. It is too early to tell if Rio is truly becoming a safer place to live or if the decrease in the homicide rate is the result of a deliberate attempt by the city’s government to disguise the violence in the city by cooking the books.

Police Killings

Another component of the violence in Rio de Janeiro that is not captured by the homicide rates is the number of people who are killed by police each year. Once again Rio stands out from the crowd. In New York City, the police killed eight people in 2010. In Detroit, a city known for its urban violence, local police killed forty people from 1995 to 2000, an average of eight per year. These deaths could be the result of any action by the police that results in the death of a citizen: self-defense, a suspect resisting arrest, police error, or unjustified use of deadly force. Nationally, the police kill about two hundred people each year in the United States, a country of nearly 300 million. Once again, the numbers from Rio present a different reality. According to the figures published by Rio de Janeiro’s own police department, the police killed 6,528 people from 2000–2006, an average of 1,043 per year and comparable to a city involved in a low-intensity civil war (ISPRJ 2008).

In casual conversations with inmates, ex-prisoners, and police officers, I heard dozens of stories from the front lines of an ongoing battle between the police and the narco-gangs. Many of these stories revealed a widespread tolerance of violence in Rio so long as it occurs within certain spaces and certain groups of people in the city. One afternoon while in the waiting room of a municipal building, I was watching a news program with a veteran officer in Rio’s civil police force. There was a two-minute

segment devoted to a shootout that occurred the previous night between police and the drug traffickers that ended the lives of six drug dealers. The television news anchor started to say something about a possible investigation when the officer interrupted and said, “The police can hardly do their job these days because of all the media coverage.” I asked him what he meant and he told me that four years ago, three police officers were killed by members of the Comando Vermelho during a failed raid on a favela. Saddened by the loss of their colleagues and furious at the gang members who killed them, the police mounted a much larger attack the next evening with officers from around the city. The policemen formed into small teams and simultaneously attacked the gang stronghold from different angles. “My team alone killed at least thirty. Just my team. And you know what? It never made the news because the press was not allowed to enter the favelas.” I don’t know how many people ended up dying that evening, but these sort of police operations with high death counts that are barely reported by the media and are met with little public outcry fuel the unequalled number of police killings in Rio de Janeiro. Though Brazil has officially abolished the death penalty for common crimes, the state, in effect, annually executes hundreds in Rio de Janeiro and thousands throughout the country through its police force (Garland 2012).

The Killable People

The victims of the 7,500 violent deaths that occur each year in Rio de Janeiro are not evenly distributed throughout the city. The deaths are highly concentrated among residents who are male, between fifteen and thirty years old, live in low-income neighborhoods, and are non-white (Cano and Ribeiro 2007). Men between twenty and twenty-four years old are nearly thirty times more likely to be a victim of homicide than

women of the same age (Cano and Ribeiro 2007). Spatially, the homicide rates in the city vary wildly from neighborhood to neighborhood with the highest in the low-income areas and favelas, like the one mentioned in the police officer's story (Penglase 2005). In the late 1990s when the murder rates started to rise, working-class neighborhoods like Benefica, where a number of the interviews for this study were conducted, had twenty times the rates of the wealthy neighborhoods close to the city's world famous beaches (Cano 1997). Darker-skinned residents of Rio de Janeiro are tremendously over-represented in these figures as well. Residents of Rio de Janeiro who are classified racially as "black" suffer homicide rates that are over three times those of white residents (Cano 1997). Though members of all racial identification and socioeconomic classes die violent deaths each year in Rio, the poor, darker-skinned young men are at most risk.

To understand the group of people that is severely over-represented in these statistics, I will work with the terminology from Ana Paula Miranda and María Victoria Pita (2010). These women argue that these extraordinary levels of violence have been largely tolerated by the state and society because of *who* is being killed. In an interview with Ana Paula Miranda, she stated:

In Brazil when you talk about human rights people always ask *who* the police, the criminals? As if it were possible, as if it were necessary, to qualify who is human and who is not. This is the key issue to understand in this process. The *killable people* are not incorporated into the moral framework of citizenship; they are semi-citizens and therefore not deserving of the same rights.

Miranda and Pita argue that the killable people are understood through a perverse logic that grants individuals in Rio disparate rights based on who they are. This concept is reproduced not only by the police and elites, but often by the family members of the

victims of violence. Miranda explained to me that when relatives of murder victims are interviewed in the media, they will often respond through tears to the interviewers by saying something like “my son was working, he did not deserve this.” Miranda argues that statements like these reflect underlying, dark logic that places the criteria on whether or not a person deserves basic human rights (i.e., not to be shot) on whether he or she is employed in the formal workforce. The thought process dictates that if a person is not working or worse yet is employed by the drug gangs, they do not deserve the same protections as other citizens. The incredibly high homicide rates in Rio are then tolerated because they occur among this specific people group, *os seres matáveis* or the killable people. Miranda continued by stating that “if this absurd mortality rate happened in the middle class, there would be a different reaction. These are deaths that don’t cause a commotion.”

It is difficult to quantify this concept and interviewees may be reluctant to overtly express it during formal interviews, but I encountered evidence of not only tolerance, but outright approval of the lethal response toward criminals in Rio de Janeiro. The day after Leandro Minerlandia tried to sneak out of Complexo do Alemão dressed as a Pentecostal pastor, hundreds of other low-level Comando Vermelho members escaped en masse from their hideout via a dirt road that led out of Vila Cruzeiro, a neighboring favela, and into an undeveloped jungle area. A television helicopter hovered above the hillside and streamed live footage of the gang members streaming out of the neighborhood onto the dirt road and up the mountain. From a television in a corner bar in Botafogo, a middle-upper class neighborhood in Rio’s wealthy south zone, I watched the young men run for their lives. There were about two dozen people sitting on the stools and tables, and the

bar's owner, waitstaff, and kitchen crew left their posts and stood among the patrons, everyone riveted by the images on the television. The tension in the bar increased as motorcycles started to appear from the top of the screen offering getaway rides to the fleeing gang members. The news helicopter was too far away to make out the individual faces of the gang members, but the silhouettes of automatic rifles on the backs of them were plain to see. Once the motorcycles had left, a pickup truck came speeding onto the television screen and as it slowed down, a dozen Comando Vermelho members jumped into the open bed of the truck before it sped away in a cloud of dust. The rest of the Comando Vermelho members continued up the road on foot when one of them suddenly fell to the ground, frantically holding his leg. He had been shot from an unseen police sniper. The gang members immediately ducked into the bushes and scrambled for cover, leaving their wounded colleague squirming and immobile in the middle of the road. The crowd in the bar held their collective breath, anticipating the hail of gunfire that would come from the police. One of the gang members got up and dragged the wounded man to the edge of the road and the rest resumed their flight away from the area. The next thirty seconds seemed like an eternity. The group assembled in the bar, and thousands of others watching throughout the city, braced for a barrage of gunfire from the police's automatic weapons. When no other shots were fired, a man in his late forties to early fifties raised his hands in disbelief and yelled at the police through the television: "Shoot! Shoot! Shoot! What are you doing? Shoot them! They are getting away! Why aren't they shooting?"

I had watched a dozen soccer games at this bar and had seen many men use the same intonation, urgency, and hand gestures while cheering for the Flamengo soccer

team during televised games. But on this afternoon, there were people cheering for a very different team. Everyone in the bar seemed equally perplexed at the absence of follow-up gunfire—this was not the response from the police that they were expecting. One man standing behind us guessed that because the television helicopter was hovering above, the police decided not to shoot for fear of being filmed. It was clear that a number of the bar patrons were disappointed in the police force’s decision not to fire upon the escaping gang members and everyone, including myself, was surprised.

Prisons

After thirty years working at various levels in the Brazilian penal system, Elizabeth Sussekind concluded that “prison is for people who don’t count, for those who are considered garbage, for those who don’t have any value or worth in society.” The prison system in Brazil reflects the extreme stratification in larger society. For example, two people could be convicted of the exact same crime, yet sent to different prisons based on their social characteristics. Police officers and military members who have been convicted of crimes are sent to separate prisons that have drastically more humane conditions and are not subjected to the dangerous dungeons that house the “common criminals.” Also, politicians cannot be prosecuted for crimes while they are in office and until recently, there were separate prisons for people with college degrees. Ana Paula Miranda argues that these special prisons are mechanisms that ensure it is almost exclusively the killable people that wind up in the general population. In an interview, she told me:

This is why you can’t talk about ‘human rights’ [in Rio de Janeiro] because you always have to qualify *who* is a person. I think that this is a problem. In terms of

the killable people, they are the ones that society does not consider fit to be qualified in the category as a 'person.'

Data describing the social demographic characteristics of prisoners in Rio de Janeiro is not available, but it is quite evident upon entering a cellblock that the vast majority of prisoners are young men with darker skin. In the P#1 jail, most of the three-to four-hundred inmates housed in the cellblock dominated by the Comando Vermelho were under twenty-five years old. There were only a handful of inmates, sometimes none, who were over thirty and I don't recall ever seeing an inmate in that cellblock who would likely be classified as "white." On the other side of the jail, there were close to twenty men who were in their forties or fifties and a few who may have been counted as white in the last census, but based on my observations, 90 percent were in their late teens or early twenties and would be classified as "brown" or "black." In Rio de Janeiro, the prisons and jails represent the highest concentration outside of the city's morgues of what Miranda and Pita describe as the "killable people."

Pentecostalism: The Faith of the Killable People

When I asked visiting Pastor Elizeu dos Santos why pastors like him were granted so much respect by the inmates, he said, "The majority of criminals in Rio are children of Pentecostals. Or they are Pentecostals themselves, but they are away from the church." The pastor was not asserting that practicing Pentecostalism increases criminality; rather, he was emphasizing that Pentecostalism is widely practiced in the neighborhoods where most of Rio's inmates were raised. Pentecostalism thrives in the poorer neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro, but throughout Latin America, the faith has been most successful in poor or working class urban neighborhoods (Chesnut 1997). David Smilde's research

reaffirms “the dominant social scientific interpretation is that Latin American Evangelicalism [Pentecostalism] is a religion orientated toward those experiencing sustained life problems, or ‘dis-ease’ (Smilde 2007, 55). Pentecostalism offers a unique set of tools that allows adherents to confront life crises like street violence, substance addiction, marital strife, and financial instability. Smilde argues that “conversion to Pentecostalism serves as a form of cultural agency through which they can gain control over aspects of their personal and social contexts” (p.5).

During my fieldwork observing Pentecostal services, I witnessed church members in poor congregations drop considerable sums of money into the offering plates and I often wondered how they could absorb this financial sacrifice. But the social science research is quite clear that Pentecostals who convert while poor do experience financial improvement after they convert and while they practice (Gooren 2002; Martin 1991). In spite of the demands on a participant’s time and money, Pentecostalism provides resources and networks that enable some families to persevere through dire material circumstances.

In her study on Brazilian Pentecostals, Cecilia Loreto Mariz (1994) argues that “Pentecostalism creates an alternative network of support. For most Pentecostals, this informational network is more helpful for their material survival than the institutional church itself” (p. 93). Most of the churches that I visited in impoverished neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro have ministries that are aimed to provide basic necessities like food to families in need, but the relationships these families develop as a result of attending a specific church may be more useful than the donations of food and clothing. Fellow church members can be called on to provide temporary child care, provide small loans for

late rent payments, visit them in the hospital when sick, or intervene on behalf of a teenager struggling with drug addiction. The strong identity that accompanies practicing Pentecostals may also be appealing for potential employers. Harvey Cox (2001) noted, “Pentecostals have gained a reputation for sobriety, punctuality and honesty. They are sought after as employees even by people who find their religion peculiar” (p. 171). This reputation may soften some of the prejudice that employers have against hiring from the marginalized neighborhoods in urban Latin America.

Most variations of Latin American Pentecostalism practice teetotalism and prohibit all drug use. There is little tolerance for vice of any kind. In Smilde’s study of Venezuelan Pentecostals, many people, especially males, joined the church to address their problems with drinking, drugs, and the marital strife that often results from these behaviors. The practicing Pentecostal may point to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit as the source of his or her sobriety, but the church also provides less spiritual and more tangible assistance by providing an alternate social circle that has regular activities free from alcohol and the stigma of not partaking. The faith reorients time and money spent by men away from weekend beer drinking marathons, risky sexual behaviors, and drug taking, and points it toward needs inside the home (Smilde 2007).

While components of the Pentecostal faith provide a vehicle to address financial and personal crisis, it also offers a symbolic transformation and an alternative identity for those struggling to overcome their stigmatized position in society. A theoretical approach that has been especially important to my study in Pentecostalism’s appeal to prisoners has been Robert Brenneman’s book *Homies and Hermanos*. The book is situated at the intersection of two deeply consequential social groups in Central America

by examining the conversion experiences of gang members to Pentecostal Christianity. Brenneman uses data from interviews with sixty-three ex-gang members to examine why some members transition out of the infamous Central American gangs and attempt to carve out new lives for themselves in the gritty *barrios* of the “Northern Triangle” by converting to Pentecostalism. The book draws heavily from symbolic interaction theory and from the sociology of emotions to conceptualize the role of chronic shame in the lives of marginalized Central American youth, and it argues that both gang participation and evangelical conversion represent vehicles to escape what the author calls a “shame spiral.” Brenneman identifies sources of chronic shame and argues that gang membership provides a vehicle for these youth to break away from this “shame spiral” by providing an alternative family-like structure as well as avenues to lash out against the shame through what he identifies as solidarity, violence, and “adult” pastimes, like risky sexual behavior. This conceptualization of the street gang recognizes both the structural social forces and the intensely personal wounds that contribute to a young person’s decision to join a gang in the Northern Triangle.

The heart of *Homies and Hermanos* lies in the conversion narratives of ex-gang members who left their respective gangs, and with the exception of one interviewee, avoided the death penalty that the gang enforces for deserters. The gangs recognize conversion to Evangelical Christianity as a legitimate way to exit the gang, and they pardon the defectors as long as their conversion and subsequent evangelical practice is deemed genuine. The interviews with the ex-gang members provide detailed accounts of both daily life in a gang and the monumental decisions that individuals have made to embrace a rigid and demanding faith and say *adios* to their gang. The interviews reveal

an interesting interplay between the conversion's immediate, instrumental benefit of bypassing the "morgue rule" and the convert's reported life-changing contact with an unseen supernatural force.

Beyond Coping

Both the cultural capital identified by Smilde's work and the escape from the "shame cycle" explained in Brenneman's book are useful in understanding the vibrancy of Pentecostalism inside prisons in Rio de Janeiro. Inmates are certainly struggling with acute personal problems, and Pentecostalism offers an antidote to the shame of being incarcerated. But many sociological explanations of Pentecostalism's success miss an important factor of the faith. Inside prison, Pentecostalism offers a set of practices that provide more than just a coping mechanism or relief from indignity—the faith conceptualizes inmates as people of inherent worth and a re-imagined, dignified life in the midst of intense suffering.

Detailed sociodemographic data on the Rio de Janeiro's Pentecostal population does not exist, but the sheer quantity of Pentecostal churches I saw in the favelas and lower-income neighborhoods in the city was remarkable. On a drive through a busy avenue in a suburb on the western edge of the city, I counted twenty-seven Pentecostal churches in less than two miles. Many of these churches were located in small storefronts that could hold no more than a few dozen worshippers, but others on this same street had several hundred chairs set up in their sanctuaries. Though most neighborhoods I visited did not have such an intense concentration of churches, in every low-income neighborhood I visited, Pentecostal churches were by far the most prevalent. While visiting the hillside home of an ex-inmate, I asked him how many churches were in his

relatively small neighborhood. He looked out through his window and started to count them off, pointing at each one as he listed them.

Ok, there is one at the front, two with mine, three with the ‘God is Power.’ Then if you go up from the ‘God is Power’ there is another, four, five with the ‘Community,’ six with another Assemblies of God, and seven with the ‘God is Love.’ So there are seven Pentecostal churches and one traditional Baptist church.

I followed up by asking if there were any Catholic Churches and he responded, “No. Well, there is one up there, but it is closed and there are a few Macumba centers.”⁴

In another much larger favela, I asked a pastor the same question. He said, “There are about ninety Pentecostal churches and a couple of Catholic churches, but no Macumba centers.” The conversation took place in the entrance to a community that was controlled by the Comando Vermelho. As we spoke, I could see a young man guarding the bridge with an Uzi sub-machine gun painted with red stripes and we had just finished speaking with a group of fifteen young men who were sitting on three couches set up around a high-definition television. The young men, who were passing lit marijuana joints back and forth while we spoke, had more than a dozen high-powered rifles and small machine guns hanging casually in their hands. In this neighborhood, the gang had ordered that all of the Macumba centers be closed and the stoned, heavily armed teenagers enforced the edict. The gang recognized Pentecostalism as the dominant faith in the neighborhood and also recognized Macumba as its traditional enemy. Though the active gang members were almost certainly not practicing Pentecostals themselves, they helped to reinforce their neighborhood’s identification with Pentecostalism.

⁴ Macumba refers to the Afro-Brazilian religion that is a delicate mix of African spirit worship with Roman Catholic imagery. Thought by many Pentecostals to be satanic, it is often targeted as the frontlines of spiritual warfare.

Not Killable in God's Eyes

I want to build on the argument that Pentecostalism is the faith of the “killable people” by looking specifically at how the faith provides inmates a dignified identity and collective consciousness. Here I will use social science research from the African American experience during both the civil rights movement and slavery to conceptualize the data I collected in the jails and prisons of Rio de Janeiro. Aldon Morris's (1984) study of the civil rights movement in the American South is an example of how religion (in this case, a version of Christianity that has many similarities with Latin American Pentecostalism) provides a function that goes beyond coping with immediate suffering. Morris contends:

In the case of the civil rights struggle, the preexisting black church provided the early movement with the social resources that made it a dynamic force, in particular leadership, institutionalized charisma, finances, an organized following, and an ideological framework through which passive attitudes were transformed into collective consciousness supportive of collective action. (p. 77)

An aspect of Morris's work that is especially poignant to this chapter is how the church was able to confront the dominant cultural message that told African Americans they were inherently inferior to whites and then fostered a counter-cultural collective consciousness among them. The Black Church was able to serve as the institutional center of the civil rights movement because it was not financially dependent on larger white society, and it provided both charismatic leadership through the black pastors and the infrastructure for regular meetings and organizing campaigns in the church buildings (Morris 1984). But these supports would have been useless if there had not been a shared collective consciousness in the African American community that said, “We are people of inherent value and worthy of the rights that are being withheld from us.” One of the

methods used to instill this consciousness was through the practice of religion. Though the dominant cultural message held that they did not deserve to be treated as equals, African Americans found that religion provided a platform to confront this cultural message because their faith presented a very different message. Once this consciousness was developed among the black community, the cultural norms of racism and segregation could be confronted as not only wrong, but sinful. In Brazil, Pentecostalism has not ignited a political movement like the civil rights movement in the United States, but in the prisons of Rio de Janeiro, Pentecostal practice confronts the notion that the lives of inmates are expendable.

Howard Thurman, a civil rights leader, pastor, and dean at Howard University, studied the religious lives of slaves in the United States and argued that the slaves' practice of Christianity (ironically the same faith as their enslavers) not only allowed them to cope with the brutal reality of slavery by promising a better future in the afterlife, but also offered them hope and a dignified life in the midst of their earthly suffering. In his 1947 lecture at Harvard University, "The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death," Thurman responded to the critics of his work that emphasized the role of the spiritual in the slaves' Christianity. Social scientists of the 1940s continually pushed Thurman to adopt a more classical interpretation of the slaves' worship as escapism and their religion as ultimately a tool of oppression by the white slaveholders. Thurman's interpretation of the slaves' spirituals was not only contested by the largely white, secular scholars, but he also started to perceive a hesitancy among some African Americans to embrace these songs with the reverence of the previous generation.

Again and again I have heard many people (including descendants of these singers) speak disparagingly of the otherworldly emphasis as purely a mechanism of escape and sheer retreat. The argument is that such an emphasis served as a kind of soporific, making for docility and submission.

Though in a very different sociocultural context, I heard this same sort of critique aimed at Pentecostal practice inside Rio's prisons from professors at Brazilian universities.

While these criticisms are rarely supported by empirical data, they are certainly not without merit. But Thurman argues that using Marx's opiate analogy to simply write off oppressed people's faith in the supernatural fails to recognize religion's ability to instill self-respect in the believer and enable him or her to persevere through dreadful material circumstances.

Comparing the slaves of the American South and the prisoners in Rio de Janeiro as a subset of the "killable people" is not a perfect match, but it is useful in understanding religion's role in those seemingly hopeless situations. The phrase "killable people" may be too modest a phrase to describe the chattel slaves in the American South because to be considered a "killable person," one must first be recognized as a person. The slaves were not; they were officially property. But both the slaves in United States and the inmates in Rio's prisons occupied the bottom rung of the social hierarchy in their respective societies, and in this dissertation I want to use Thurman's work to understand Pentecostalism because it reveals that religion may provide more to these groups than an escape mechanism. In the published version of the talk Thurman gave at Harvard, he argued:

The facts have made it clear that this faith, this simple faith, served to deepen the capacity of the slaves for endurance and the ability to absorb their suffering. It taught a people how to ride high in life, how to look squarely in the face those facts

that argue most dramatically against all hope, and to use those facts as raw material to fashion a hope that their environment, in all of its cruelty, could not crush. This enabled them to reject annihilation and affirm a terrible right to live. (Thurman 1975, 40)

In the fieldwork for this project, I have seen prisoners use the Pentecostal faith as a way to “absorb their suffering” and to live moral and meaningful lives in the midst of intense hardship. Pentecostalism practice inside the prisons of Rio de Janeiro, with all of its blindness to social structure, emphasis on unseen spiritual forces, and uncomfortable literalism, can provide the inmates with the symbolic material that “enables them to reject annihilation and affirm a terrible right to live.” In the following section, I will use the ethnographic data I collect in the worship services to give examples of how this process works.

Visiting Pentecostals

Pentecostalism inside prison is organized primarily around the inmate churches, which are operated by the inmates themselves and are independent of ministries or congregations outside the prison. I will focus on the inmate churches in the next chapter, but in this chapter, I focus on the worship services conducted with the visiting groups from the outside because these occasions allowed the inmates to practice their new, dignified identity as “believers.” Particularly for the recently converted, or those mulling over a possible conversion, the worship, prayer, testimonies, and preaching allowed the men to solidify their transformation into someone who is both respectable and respecting.

Brazilian law dictates that prisoners have the right to be visited by religious clergy and laypeople. During my fieldwork, around 90 percent of the visitors had some Pentecostal affiliation. Elizabeth Sussekind, a lawyer and university professor who

served as the National Secretary of Justice, has observed the rise of Pentecostal presence in prison.

Over the last forty years that I have spent observing prisons, the influence of the church changed a lot. The Catholic Church ruled until the eighties and it was practically the only [religious] experience that existed. They created a prison ministry that conducted religious services, but also help to denounce human rights violations and gave a certain type of physical protection to the inmates. They acted as intermediaries with the administration concerning visits, or solitary confinement. Their work has decreased and today the Catholic Church is not majority church inside the prisons. Now it is various forms of the Pentecostal church, this is now the main church.

The groups of Pentecostals that visited the prisons were usually comprised of three or four people who attended church in one of the surrounding neighborhoods. These volunteers occupied a tense space between the jail officials and the inmates. The police officers treated these groups as a necessary nuisance at best, or with outright disdain at worst. To police officers, the jail (and maybe all of Rio) was divided into two rival teams that were pitted against each other in a high-stakes struggle for the city. In the streets, it was the police versus the criminals, while inside the jail, guards viewed the inmates as enemy number one and vice versa. The Pentecostals, in theory, were a neutral player in this game, but since they were there on behalf of the inmates, the police treated them as supporters of the opposing side. When the groups arrived and checked in with the warden or the guard on duty, they were searched more rigorously than the inmates' family members. One of the officers told me that a couple of years ago a group of three Pentecostal volunteers visited a jail in Rio and smuggled an extra set of clothes into the cells—the classic Pentecostal uniform of a suit coat, dress pants, tie, and shoes. After the service, four young men emerged from the cells in suits and ties with Bibles under their arms. None of the police officers noticed the addition of the fourth person until later that

evening when they realized that one of the inmates had put on the clothes and walked out of the prison dressed as a Pentecostal. According to the officer, this inmate had succeeded in pulling off the disguise that Leandro Minerlandia had attempted when he was leaving Complexo do Alemão in November 2010. The officer who told me this story didn't know exactly when or where this happened, and his rendition had the vagueness associated with an urban myth, but stories like it floated around the penal facilities and fueled the distrust of the prison guards toward the Pentecostal volunteers.

After the volunteers had passed security and arrived at the heavy steel doors that opened into the cellblock corridor, one of the trustees would yell down the hallway at the prisoners: "The church is coming down!" Upon hearing the news, the inmates who were shirtless immediately disappeared into their cells or put on a shirt so they would not offend the incoming group. Inmates who remained in the hallway where the service would take place extinguished their cigarettes and the men in the cells turned down the volume of the televisions and radios that blared non-stop throughout the day. Even the jail's resident tattoo artist would pack up his improvised electric tattoo gun and move to another part of the cellblock when the outside visitors arrived. Some may have been annoyed at having to break up their card game or put out a recently lit smoke, but they did it anyway. Inmates who were arrested shirtless remained shirtless until a family member brought a shirt to wear or another inmate gave them one. If an inmate did not have a shirt but wanted to participate in the service, he borrowed a towel, wrapped it around his shoulders and participated in the service as if he had just climbed out of the swimming pool. Occasionally, the smell of marijuana smoke seeped into the hallway

from the cells, but it was never smoked openly during the services and there were other more concerning odors inside the cellblocks.

The respect that the inmates showed to the visitors was consistent with the prison code that demanded respect to all visitors including family members who visited the jail, specifically wives and girlfriends. But the inmates' reverence was also an acknowledgement of the trust and respect shown to them by the volunteers. When they entered the cellblocks, the volunteers knew that they were placing their personal safety into the hands of these inmates. The prison guards never went behind the set of steel doors that kept the inmates in their cells; they feared for their lives. So when the Pentecostals came to conduct their worship services, they knew that for ninety minutes they would be locked behind closed doors with up to four hundred inmates and not a single prison guard. I interviewed one of the pastors who visited the jail each week and I asked if he ever felt vulnerable when he was in the inmate population and he responded, "You have seen it, you have been in there with me, they really respect us. I go in there with the sisters from the church, I go in there with my wife, even my daughter. They really respect us a lot in prison." When the Pentecostal groups went into the cellblock, they knew full well that they would make excellent hostages if a riot broke out, but their presence was a strong non-verbal way of saying "we trust you."

With God on Our Side

One afternoon outside the jail, a woman dressed in a modest skirt and loose-fitting sweater got off the bus with a Bible and a dozen proselytizing pamphlets clutched under her arm. She sheepishly walked toward the jail and introduced herself to the two Pentecostal volunteers (one of them had previously been an inmate at that very jail) and

told them that she felt led to pray with the inmates. I entered the cellblock under the control of the Comando Vermelho with the three of them to observe. After a few songs, it was the woman's turn to speak in front of the men and she was visibly nervous. The words did not come easily and when they did, they left her mouth in a whisper that was barely audible above the din of the jail. She said, "I don't know what you have done and I don't judge you. I don't know your circumstances, but God has brought you here for a reason." Though most of the Pentecostal volunteers who entered the prison were more eloquent than this soft-spoken woman, her simple message was one that was repeated many times over during the visits. The Pentecostal visitors rarely spoke about the legal justification of the inmates' incarceration, but instead framed it as a lesson that God wanted to teach them or that it was part of some larger plan God had for their lives. Either way, God was an active player in their current situation.

One of the methods used to deliver this message was through the worship songs that started each service. Don Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori (2010, 23–24) note in their book *Global Pentecostalism The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*: "The engine of Pentecostalism is its worship....the heart of Pentecostalism is the music. It touches the emotions. It is populist in tone and instrumentation. And the lyrics give voice to feelings—the pain, the joy, the hope for a new life." This observation was certainly true inside the P#1 jail. The songs, which ranged from traditional hymns to recently released Christian pop songs, announced the start of the service and softened the atmosphere inside the jail. It took a few minutes to warm up, but the singing often elicited strong emotional responses from the participants. Men raised their arms toward the sky as they sang the chorus, and usually a handful wept openly.

Though none of the songs were written specifically for the prison context, some of the lyrics clearly took on particular meanings when they were sung in the jail. One song released earlier that year entitled “Faithful Lawyer” was particularly conducive to reinterpretation by inmates.. The song was released on an album nominated for a Latino Grammy in 2010 under the “Best Christian Album” category. Its intended audience was likely not the 500,000 incarcerated Brazilians, but the song resonated profoundly with the inmates held in the P#1 jail awaiting their trials.

*I will not worry about persecution
With the stones they throw at me, Jesus is near
I can trust, I can rest, Jesus is near*

*Who casts the first stone? It is he who is without sin, he who makes no mistakes
To defend me before the enemy
Take my pain, to cry with me
To support me under Thy right hand, this is an unmitigated fact,
My impossible cases will always be closed by my lawyer ...*

*My lawyer is my Lord
He defends me against the accuser
I put my cause in his hands
He has already marked my hearing
And once again assured that I will be the winner
My lawyer lives in the heaven
True, fair, forever faithful*

*Faithful lawyer, faithful lawyer
That is what my Jesus is for me*

*Faithful lawyer, faithful lawyer
That is what my Jesus is for me*

In the song, Jesus is portrayed as the defender of the accused. Though the song was inspired by an abstract theological understanding of Jesus fending off an accusing Satan, the lyrics take on a more immediate interpretation when this song is sung by

dozens of men who had been recently accused of a specific crime and are waiting an appointment with an earthly judge. In this context, the song “Faithful Lawyer” is sung as a very literal prayer. Some of the detainees had been in the jail for months without any contact with a lawyer and some still had yet to contact their families. Inmates that had been formally charged with a specific crime were given a piece of paper documenting their charges, which many kept in their pocket day and night. To many of the inmates, this document symbolized their uncertain, upcoming moment in front of a judge. Some spent hours intently studying the document, trying to extract any material for optimism. I saw this piece of paper held in the outstretched hands of inmates as they sang the chorus of the song: *“My lawyer is my Lord, he defends me against the accuser. My faithful lawyer, my faithful lawyer that is what Jesus is to me.”*

Few of the inmates in the jail could afford to hire private lawyers and from their perspective, the criminal justice process is marked by cloudy uncertainty and distrust. Some of the men had been in jail awaiting trial for over a year and the anticipation left them exhausted and frustrated. Andrew Chesnut (1997) argued that one of the reasons for the growth of the Pentecostal church in the Amazonian capital of Belém was the potential for healing from disease or health problems. He argued that the health care in this region was inaccessible for the poor, so those who were sick and had little access to doctors or hospitals were attracted to the Pentecostal faith because it offered supernatural, though not scientifically proven, remedies. For the detainees awaiting their upcoming trials inside jail, Pentecostalism offers an analogous appeal and a supernatural response to an earthly crisis. Whether Jesus supernaturally intervened in the court cases of the

inmates at the P#1 jail is unclear at best, but what was evident in songs like “Faithful Lawyer” was that its message firmly placed Jesus on the side of the inmate, not the state.

Prayers by the volunteers reinforced this message as well. When an inmate was called out by a guard during a morning worship service because he was scheduled to appear in front of the judge, the visiting pastor leading the service stopped the singing when he heard the news. He then asked for the inmates to lay their hands on the man who was about to go to his potentially life-changing meeting. Dozens of men circled around the prisoner and placed their hands on his shoulders, back, and chest while the pastor stood in the middle and put both of his hands on the man’s head and began to pray. He prayed that God would speak to the judge and that he “would have his lawyers working for him this afternoon.” The pastor stopped short of praying that the man would be found innocent, but said that he hoped the next time they prayed together they would be on the outside. When the pastor finished his prayer, he hugged the man while a chorus of “Amen’s” shouted by the inmates echoed in the cellblock.

One of the criticisms I heard from some of the police officers was that the Pentecostals ignored the victims of the crimes committed by these inmates. Noticeably absent in the prayers and worship music sung during these services was reference to the victims of the crimes many of the inmates had, in fact, committed. Though some of the men were arrested for drug possession and other offenses without easily identifiable victims, many had committed violent offenses that had traumatically altered the lives of innocent people. I often wondered what the victims of the crime or their surviving loved ones would think as their attackers cried out to Jesus for support during their trials.

Especially if the victims had cried out to the same God during their rape or before they were murdered.

Beloved Inmates

Many of the practices and rituals performed inside the jail were done in an effort to make the otherworldly, all-encompassing love of God seem tangibly present during the service. The group from Deus é Amor (God is Love) church, a Pentecostal denomination that started in a storefront church in São Paulo and now has nearly 800,000 members in more than 17,000 churches scattered throughout the world, used a unique ritual to make the supernatural love they preached seem more tangible. The volunteer leading the worship service prompted, “Just for a moment forget your troubles, forget your worries, and forget all of the things that you have to resolve today. Remember that your help comes from above; your help is in Jesus—look to Jesus.” The volunteer then instructed everyone to place the palm of one hand on the side of his face, close his eyes, and imagine that it was Jesus who was touching him. “Imagine Jesus is talking to you;,, imagine Jesus is holding you.” The service was held in the space controlled by the CV, but almost all of the inmates attending the service participated in the exercise. Each stood with his eyes closed, one hand on his cheek while the other hand clutched his wrist or was placed on his chest, and imagined that it was the Son of God who was caressing him.

Another example of the Pentecostal volunteers attempts to make this “Godly love” more experiential was a pastor who, in the middle of the service, asked the inmates to turn to the person next to them and tell him they love him (Poloma and Hood 2008). When I heard the pastor’s directions, I was skeptical that this would be a successful

exercise, but all of the sudden, the inmates started hugging each other and saying “*te amo*” (I love you). I was standing in the middle of the inmates when the call was given and within five seconds I was engulfed in the arms of the prisoner who had been standing on my right. I wasn’t expecting the hug (plus he embraced me in a way that pinned my elbows to my ribcage), so unprepared and squeezed, I was only able to utter a surprised “*obrigado*” (thank you). In the next five minutes, I was hugged by eight or nine inmates who each said, “I love you,” or “Jesus loves you.” During the time I spent in the prisons and jails, there were a handful of surreal moments where I wished someone were filming because I didn’t think words alone could adequately describe what I was seeing. This was one of those times. Sixty inmates arrested for a wide assortment of crimes, many covered in jailhouse tattoos, warmly embracing each other and telling their fellow inmates, “I love you.”

This idea of being loved while simultaneously being a person who loves his or her neighbor emerged in the testimonies that sometimes accompanied the preaching and singing. After the exercise where the inmates were asked to place their hand on their faces, the leader of the Comando Vermelho who had recently started to participate more openly in the services asked to speak to his fellow inmates. He started by saying, “I arrived [in jail] as a gangster, full of hate. I am a human being and you know I am not perfect, only God and his son Jesus are perfect, but God is working in me and I am changing.” Though still an acting gang leader in the jail, he told his fellow gang members that he was in the midst of a personal transformation. One piece of evidence he offered to back his self-reported change was that on the streets he said he kept two lovers besides his wife, but now he had changed and “only looked at his wife.” As he spoke, he

had his arm draped around the shoulders of another inmate and continued by telling his fellow Comando Vermelho members:

Today is Wednesday. If you receive a visit today from your mom or wife, make sure that the first thing you do is say 'I love you.' You know how much suffering we have caused and how much time they have spent on their knees praying for us.

Not Killable in God's Eyes

The song "Você Tem Valor," literally translated "You Are Valuable," is likely the most well-known contemporary Pentecostal worship song in Brazil. It was sung in nearly every service I attended in the penal facilities and I heard it in dozens of Pentecostal churches throughout Rio de Janeiro and other cities in Brazil. The first verse and chorus are:

*I want to recognize the value that you have
You are a person, you are someone so important to God
Stop suffering in anguish and pain
In this inferiority complex that sometime tells you that you are nobody
I have come to talk about the value that you have
I have come to talk about the value that you have*

(Chorus)

*You are valuable!
The Holy Spirit moves in you
You are valuable!
The Holy Spirit moves in you
You are valuable!*

I was in the P#1 jail when this song was being led by a group of five Pentecostals from a church on the north side of Rio de Janeiro that refers to themselves as the "Church of 'Exes.'" On that morning, the group of volunteers was made up of self-described "ex-prisoners," "ex-traffickers," "ex-thieves," and a woman who told the inmates she was an "ex-prostitute." The worship that morning was especially heavy with emotion and by the time they started to sing "Voce Têm Valor," many of the inmates had tears streaming

down their faces. The four men from the church wore the typical Pentecostal suits and ties while the woman wore a full-length purple robe as per their church's unique doctrine⁵. As the group sang the song, the four men stood in front leading while the woman, dressed in her flowing gown, made her way through the crowd of men who were packed shoulder to shoulder in the suffocatingly small space. She walked amongst the inmates, hugging them and using the fabric from the sleeve of her robe to wipe the tears off the faces of the men who were crying. When they reached the chorus, the woman would grab one of the young men by the forearm and sing the lyrics while standing face to face with him. She would point her finger at his face or chest and repeat the phrase, "You are valuable" over and over. After the chorus was finished, she would embrace the prisoner in a motherly fashion, sometime stroking the hair on the back of the inmate's head with her hand while the man buried his face into her shoulder and cried. The song's not-so-subtle lyrics like "You are a person. You are someone so important to God," coupled with the actions of the visitors go directly against the message sent by the conditions of the jail and the deeply held disdain many residents of Rio have for inmates.

When my dad was in his early twenties, he volunteered at a mission that served hot meals and provided temporary shelter for men living on what was then called "Skid Row" in Minneapolis, Minnesota. When church groups volunteered at the mission, a visiting pastor would give a brief sermon from a wooden pulpit as the men sat in chairs waiting for their food. The pulpit had a note taped to the front of it that was impossible for the visiting speakers to miss. It read: "Please do not preach on the prodigal son.

⁵ The pastor of the church said that he came up with the idea that women and young girls in his church should wear these colorful robes after receiving a vision from God.

Thank you.” The message was written to let the visiting preacher know that they were not the first one to recognize the parallels between the biblical story and the men at the mission; it was a polite way of saying “they have heard that one already.” But in prison, it is nearly impossible for the visiting preachers to ignore the context when they are giving their sermon. Though the style of the sermons delivered in the prison varied wildly depending on the preacher’s style, all of them at least focused on the inmates’ current incarcerated status. Many of the messages promised a variation of “freedom in captivity.” Jesus’s biblical pronouncement that he came to earth to set the captives free was not interpreted literally as if the doors of the jail would suddenly burst from their hinges, but it was preached as an opportunity for the inmates to be freed from their sins.

Some preachers promised the inmates that they could achieve a freedom inside prison that they had never experienced on the streets, a freedom from sin and its eternal consequences. One pastor pointed toward the walls of the jail and told the men that there are people on the streets walking around in worse prisons than P#1 because they are imprisoned in sin. Before a baptism ceremony that took place inside the jail, the inmate pastor who helped conduct the baptisms looked at the eight men who stood waiting to be immersed into the wading pool dressed in white baptism gowns and told them, “I am a prisoner just like you, but I have freedom; my soul is free. I have Jesus.” These prayers and sermons reminded me of the chorus from the song “The Greystone Chapel,” written by a prisoner at Folsom Prison in California and later recorded by Johnny Cash.

*“Inside the walls of prison
my body may be,
but the Lord has set my soul free.” (Cash 1997)*

Preaching

After the worship songs and a handful of testimonies from the inmates or short Bible readings, a pastor or volunteer from a local church would deliver a ten- to twenty-minute sermon. Some of the sermons conceptualized criminal life as sinful, emphasizing the immorality of violence and drug use. Pastor Marcos Pereira, the controversial pastor from the Last Days Assemblies of God, has become a local celebrity by preaching sermons like this in prison. In a message delivered in one of the jails in Rio, he implored the hundreds of inmates to follow the lead of other men who had left crime and decided to join his church. He told the hundreds of inmates listening to his sermon:

Thousands of men had opened their hearts. They dropped their rifles! Dropped their AR-15s! Dropped their pistols! Dropped the “Red Command”! Dropped the “Third Command”! Dropped the *Amigos dos Amigos*! Dropped cocaine! Dropped marijuana! Dropped cigarettes! Dropped alcohol! Do you know what happened? God filled them with the Holy Spirit. God filled them with the Holy Spirit! Today, God is going to change lives. Today, God is going to change lives! Whoever believes this raise your hand and give glory! Raise your hand and give Glory! (ADUD 2009)

Though many sermons overtly identified gangs, drugs, and guns as sinful behaviors that had to be stopped, other preachers confronted the marginal identity of the inmates. A sermon that resonated particularly profoundly with the inmates was delivered by Antonio Carlos Costa, a pastor and leader of the human rights NGO, Rio de Paz, four days after a suicide attempt by one of the inmates. Earlier in the week, a man in his mid-forties was thrown into P#1 almost immediately after killing his wife and her lover. One of the inmates in the man’s cell told me that when the police brought him in, he looked like he was in shock and that he didn’t seem to understand exactly where he was. Everyone in the cell could tell that he was not doing well. He sat still and silent on the

floor of the cell and then stood up unannounced and went into the bathroom. While in the bathroom, he somehow ripped a piece of metal off a mirror frame and used it to tear through the skin on his neck, hoping to reach and cut his jugular vein. The suicide attempt was not well planned and because the piece of metal he pulled from the wall was not very sharp, he lost consciousness before he was able to kill himself. The inmate waiting in line for the bathroom had waited in silence for longer than usual because he knew of the man's perceived fragility, but after a few minutes he knocked and announced it was his turn to use the bathroom. He shook the curtain, yelled inside, and then decided to open it when he didn't receive a response. When he pulled back the curtain, he found the man lying on the ground bleeding profusely from a ragged wound on his neck. The unconscious inmate's cellmates picked him up by his wrists and ankles, carried him to the front of the cell and screamed to the lone guard on duty during that evening. Initially, the guard refused to open the cell door, telling them they would have to wait until morning when the other guards arrived. He was the only guard in the building and was worried about being overtaken by the inmates if he opened the cell door. But after an intense argument, the inmates convinced the guard to open the door and call an ambulance.

Four days after the suicide attempt, Pastor Antonio stood in front of the inmates and told them, "Today, I want to confront two lies that are common in a place like this and they both come from the pit of hell." The first "lie" that he identified was that the inmates' lives were worthless. He said, "I know that some of you in here are innocent, but most of you are not. I want to tell you that no matter what you have done, no matter how awful, God still loves you." This part of the sermon, like some of the worship

songs, affirmed the value of the lives of the inmates by presenting an alternative paradigm to judge the value of human life.

In an effort to show how God's perception of the inmates drastically opposed society's, the pastor told the inmates about an encounter he recently had on an internet forum with a seminary graduate who strongly opposed the pastor's prison ministry. The unidentified man confronted the pastor about "patting the heads" of violent criminals who had hurt innocent people and blamed the city's prisoners as the primary cause for the misery in Rio de Janeiro. The pastor described how this man's temper rose as he posted message after message until finally he suggested that the best way to deal with the prisons and the incarcerated was not to visit them, but to drop a bomb on the roof. The pastor said that though this man may be publically identified as "religious" because he attended church, he didn't understand what the pastor called the "true gospel." The inmates were well aware of their unpopular status with certain segments of society and though the inmates at P#1 were unlikely familiar with the work of Pita and Miranda (2010) published in academic journals, they understood being a part of the "killable people" in a much deeper way than can be expressed through the academic literature. The pastor's presence in the jail and his sermon were deliberate attempts to confront that message and present an alternate interpretation.

After the anecdote about the vengeful internet poster, a deep silence saturated the cellblock. The pastor continued by acknowledging that many of the forty or so men listening to the sermon were likely born into extremely difficult situations that pushed them toward the crimes they may have committed. But after emphasizing the role of social inequality as a causal factor in crime, he changed his focus to individual agency by

saying each person in the room was ultimately responsible for their actions. He illustrated this point by asking the inmates to imagine a situation where someone had committed a crime against their mother or sister, a violent crime. He then asked them how they would respond if the offender were asked to account for his act and said that he committed the violent act because he was born into poverty. As the silence continued, he told them, "I know you would not accept that answer as an excuse." The pastor then held out two fingers on his extended arm and said, "The second lie I want to talk about is that you can't change. There are people out there who don't believe in rehabilitation or that a criminal can change. Maybe your own family believes this, but I want to tell you that is a lie." The sermon continued and the pastor presented religious conversion or recommitment as the first step toward a personal commitment to a different life—a turning point.

Eight men immediately went to the front of the room to make some sort of commitment. As the pastor prayed over the men, four of them knelt down, pressing their foreheads to the concrete floor while the others stood behind them with their heads bowed. When the prayer was finished, the other volunteers prayed while the inmates crowded around the pastor. I had become accustomed to this sort of response to altar calls in the jail but never ceased to be amazed by the reverence the inmates showed to the pastors. As I stood to the side watching the scene, I felt a tap on my shoulder. When I turned around to see who was trying to get my attention, I saw a man standing alone with crude, thick, black stitches covering a thick purple gash that zigzagged across the right side of his neck. I immediately knew that this was the man who had tried to commit suicide early in the week. He must have assumed I knew the pastor, so he asked me if he

could speak with him. I said I would try to get his attention. The pastor had ten people crowded around him jockeying for his attention, and after a few minutes when the crowd started to dwindle, I grabbed Antonio's wrist and led him over to the man who was standing in the corner by himself. Antonio did not know about the man's tragic week and was taken by surprise when the man threw both arms around his neck and wept uncontrollably on his shoulder. I could see that the tears falling from his eyes were leaving dark spots on the pastor's shirt, and he wept with such force that I worried his stitches might burst open. Once the man gained composure, he thanked the pastor for the message and said, "If I had heard what you had said before, I would not have done this," and he pointed to the ugly wound on his neck.

Conclusion

In Rio de Janeiro, the prison population and the favelas are inextricably linked. Most of the inmates had been living in these places when they were arrested and will head right back upon release. Prisons in Rio de Janeiro mirror certain aspects of these neighborhoods as well. The P#1 jail, for example, vividly and visibly presents the endemic state neglect that exists in the favelas as well as social and cultural phenomena that occur in these neighborhoods. For example, the chronic under-investment by the state in infrastructure in the favelas becomes strikingly clear when one sees eighty inmates squeezed into a cell built for fifteen. Prisons also act as a crucible for social networks, as gang affiliations that might be loosely held on the street become considerably more consequential and permanent for many inmates as they are forced to live in cells under the direct control of gang leaders. Many inmates leave prison with stronger attachments (and sometimes debts) to the gangs than they had when they first

arrived. The violence among rival gangs can become even more callous and cruel inside the prison as the battles waged on the hillsides of Rio are fought in confined space. The same could be said for the violence among the police and individuals involved in drug traffic. The social stigma suffered by favela residents in Rio de Janeiro exponentially increases during and after incarceration. So maybe it is no surprise that the religion most practiced in the favelas and in the poor and working class neighborhoods of Rio is also present inside prison. And that the redemption narrative, communal nature of the faith, and counter-culture identity inherent to Pentecostalism is so intensely evident behind bars.

Chapter 3

A Gang of Pentecostals

The Comando Vermelho's *grito de guerra* (war cry) rang out from the cells in the south wing at exactly six o'clock with the throaty shout from a single detainee. The lone voice was answered immediately by 400 inmates living in the gang-controlled wing of the facility. Everyone else in the jail stopped what they were doing and stood silent when the call-and-response ritual began. The war cry built to a crescendo and then ended by repeating the powerful final phrase five times. "*Comando... Vermelho, Comando... Vermelho, Comando... Vermelho, Comando... Vermelho, Comando... Vermelho.*" A sober hush fell over the building and in the silence that followed, I asked an inmate on my right what it was that I had just heard. He responded, "It's their war cry. Every day they do this, every day and always at six o'clock." The daily ritual reminds both the inmates and the guards that the Comando Vermelho (Red Command) controls the south wing of the jail.

But that wasn't the first *grito de guerra* I had heard that day. A strikingly similar ritual was performed less than thirty minutes earlier on the other side of the facility by the members of the Heroes for Christ Prison Church. After the ninety-minute worship service, the pastor, an inmate himself, yelled at the top of his lungs, "*By what are we saved?*" and the thirty participants answered, "*By the blood of Christ!*" The pastor continued, this time with more intensity, "*If he is your shepherd?*" The inmates responded, matching the heightened passion, "*Then we will lack nothing!*" The inmate pastor continued leading the call and response pacing through his incarcerated

congregation to make his final, most dramatic declaration: “*Church, together with all the inmates here, with tremendous faith, give us Lord Jesus...*” and all of the men let loose with everything they had, “*FREEDOM!!!*”

The Heroes of Christ Prison Church is just one of dozens of churches operated by inmates inside Rio de Janeiro’s penal facilities. The structure of these churches varies from facility to facility, but generally replicates the organizational model of the Pentecostal churches found in the surrounding community. These prison congregations appoint pastors, worship leaders, deacons, and secretaries from the prison population, and they practice their faith by living together in intentional community while behind bars. One way to understand the strength of these congregations is by employing Laurence Iannaccone’s (1994) strictness theory, which emphasizes the prison church’s required daily worship services, intense prayer vigils, and monthly communal fasting campaigns, as well as the stern codes against smoking, drug taking, and sexual activity outside of marriage. Stark and Finke’s (2000) rational choice model could also be used to explain the formation of these prison churches, as there is a demand for religion inside prison and Pentecostalism offers a set of unique religious goods that are very appealing to incarcerated individuals. The growth of these churches could also be seen as further evidence of Christianity’s move toward the Global South (Jenkins 2002, 2006). Penny Edgell’s (1999, 2006) cultural-institutional approach argues that “congregations develop distinct cultures that comprise local understandings of identity.” It is clear that there is a powerful sense of belonging that accompanies membership in these congregations and that living in such close proximity under tremendous stress forms a unique culture and identity. While work from scholars in the sociology of religion literature is useful in

conceptualizing these prison churches, I suggest that the literature and theory published on street gangs is essential to fully understand these religious groups in prison.

At first glance, the well-organized and brutally violent criminal gangs that control over 90 percent of Rio's drug trade and dominate the city's prisons and jails have little in common with the growing number of Pentecostals in the "Marvelous City." The Pentecostals preach submission to God, salvation through Jesus, and interaction with the Holy Spirit, while the gangs offer access to a more tangible trinity: money, sex, and power. But inside prison, I argue that both the gang and the Pentecostal church thrive in part due to their structural and functional similarities. In this chapter, I will use qualitative data collected inside two penal institutions in Rio de Janeiro and interview data from ex-inmates to illustrate the parallels between the "institutionalized gang" and the Pentecostal inmate churches. I will argue that examining these religious groups through the lens of a street gang is necessary to understand the success of Pentecostalism behind bars. I will highlight the instrumental functions served by both the Pentecostal inmate communities in the jails and prisons in Rio de Janeiro and the city's most dominant institutionalized gang, the *Comando Vermelho*. I will show that each group claims part of the prison for themselves, demand and enforce member's submission to the group's authority, provide access to scarce resources and protection in the prison, and finally, each group provides a strong identity for the participating inmate.

The Institutional Gang

Nobody knows exactly how many gang member live in Rio de Janeiro, but almost everyone who lives in the city knows of the *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command), *Amigos dos Amigos* (Friends of Friends), *Terceiro Comando* (Third Command), and

Puro Terceiro Comando (Pure Third Command). As the names suggest, these gangs have splintered off from each other, but each gang has thousands of members and effectively govern the domestic drug trade and surprisingly large swaths of the city. Each one of these gangs is what John Hagedorn calls an “institutionalized gang,” and I will use this term and his conceptualization of the street gang in this chapter to make the comparisons with the inmate Pentecostal groups.

Hagedorn is certainly not the first social scientist to write about gangs. In the early 1920s Frederic Thrasher (1963, 1927) studied over 1,300 street gangs in Chicago to argue that these gangs formed in the neglected interstitial spaces of the city by youth who were searching for an identity as they aged out of adolescence. Thrasher was largely sympathetic to these transformed playgroups and did not conceptualize gangs as inherently criminal organizations. Thirty years later, Albert Cohen (1955) responded to Thrasher by arguing through strain theory that the physical and cultural spaces occupied by the gang were not the spontaneous results of the urban ecological model but that they existed because clusters of marginalized youth had been purposefully excluded by the middle-class and effectively prohibited in participating in middle- and upper-class pathways to employment and other commonly held conceptions of success. Gang members in Cohen’s work created a delinquent gang subculture as a frustrated response to their exclusion by the mainstream.

Though the subcultural identity of gang participation never disappeared from sociological work on gangs, in the following decades, street gangs in the United States were no longer seen as only a refuge from a cold and oppressive city, like the Chicago of Thrasher and Cohen’s work. Gangs became deeply enmeshed in illegal narcotic

distribution and, as a result, turned considerably more violent. Profits from the drug trade combined with a thorough gutting of formal inner-city employment opportunities to give gangs fertile soil to grow in size and power. They grew beyond informal youth groups and institutionalized into profitable enterprises fueled by their control of illegal drug distribution networks in cities throughout the country. In the 1980s, crack cocaine skyrocketed to the top of the nation's social problems, and gangs became the well-publicized villains in the government's infamous "war on drugs." Incarceration became a weapon in this "war" and young black and Latino males were sent to prison at rates previously unimaginable (Western 2007). Gangs' strength grew by recruiting members in the nation's precarious prison yards and swollen cellblocks (Cummings 1993).

The emergence of large, powerful and institutionalized gangs with strong prison ties was not a uniquely American phenomenon. Cities throughout the world, not just Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, were home to gangs that had become permanent, institutionalized components of the city. John Hagedorn (2008) studied gangs in cities around the world (Milwaukee, Rio de Janeiro, and Cape Town) and found that shockingly large segments of these cities had "become unmanageable, and armed groups are stepping in to manage the unmanageable spaces" (p. 21). Gangs were emerging in places where state presence was at its weakest and often worst. The gangs in these cities were clearly not the interstitial youth groups studied in the early- and mid-twentieth century. These were parallel powers that governed sizable chunks of these "global cities." Gangs, using Hagedorn's conceptualization, are not just cliques of juvenile deviants, but a collective response to grinding poverty, racial and ethnic oppression, and chronic inequality. He defines gangs as organizations of the socially excluded:

While gangs begin as unsupervised adolescent peer groups and most remain so, some institutionalize in barrios, favelas, ghettos and prisons. Often these institutionalized gangs become business enterprises within the informal economy and a few are linked to international criminal cartels. Most gangs share a racialized or ethnic identity and a media-infused oppositional culture. Gangs have variable ties to conventional institutions and, in given conditions, assume social, economic, political, cultural, religious, or military roles. (p. 309)

Hagedorn's conceptualization of gangs as response to an oppressive socioeconomic reality is useful to understand gangs like the Comando Vermelho (Red Command) in Rio de Janeiro. In certain spaces in cities throughout the world, gangs are institutions that provide a quasi-governmental structure and a strong identity that are highly stigmatized in the mainstream social world, but legitimate and consequential in the neighborhoods they dominate. With an understanding that while gangs are often deeply involved in criminal activity, they are not inherently anti-social, I will illustrate the "gang-like" qualities of the Pentecostal inmate communities in Rio de Janeiro. There are limits to comparing gangs and religious groups for various reasons; first and foremost is that the gang does not make supernatural claims. But the comparison can be useful if both gang membership and Pentecostal affiliation inside prison are seen at least in part as a response to extraordinarily harsh material conditions fueled by an unjust social system. The same set of conditions may nudge, or shove, a person toward either the gangs or God.

Sociologists have noted the proximity of religion, specifically Pentecostal Christianity, and street gangs worldwide. Hagedorn (2007, 300) notes, "It is easy to dismiss such claims as hypocrisy, opportunism, or conversion in the face of prison. But among the oppressed worldwide, religiosity is especially influential," and that in Milwaukee and Chicago, "street corner Pentecostal Churches recruit heavily from current

and former gang members, particularly Latinos.” Luis Barrios and David Brotherton’s (2007) work with the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation in New York show how a gang can evolve into a quasi-religious organization, and they emphasize the pro-social aspects of gang life and the potential that gangs possess for positive social change. They argue that “street organization” is a more appropriate term for these groups and use their research to push for gangs to be viewed as social movements as opposed to deviant groups.

Ownership of Space

Hundreds of neighborhoods in Rio are effectively governed by non-state entities. These “parallel powers” are institutionalized gangs, like the Comando Vermelho, and mafias with ties to corrupt police departments. The mafias have grown tremendously over the last decade by using connections and weapons from the police to rid the neighborhood of a drug gang’s rule, but they implement their own rule through extortion and extract money from the community through monthly protection fees from local businesses and a cut of the utilities consumed in the neighborhood. Unlike mafias, gangs physically occupy the neighborhoods they control. In some neighborhoods, gangs erect concrete and steel barriers to block the entrances into the community and heavily armed gang members dictate who enters and exits the community, twenty-four hours a day. State presence in these spaces is minimal. The police rarely try to pierce the gang’s armed line of defense and when they do, it is in the form of tactical attack squads pursuing a high-profile drug trafficker. The gangs implement and enforce their own laws and residents’ concerns and complaints are directed through gang leadership, not state authorities.

Four organized criminal gangs rule the domestic drug market in Rio de Janeiro. Of the four, the Comando Vermelho is undoubtedly the most powerful; in fact, it is one of most powerful criminal organizations in the world (Anderson 2009). Since its inception, the Comando Vermelho has had a strong presence inside prison. During Brazil's military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985, thousands of left-wing political opponents of the regime were incarcerated and thrown into the same facilities as inmates convicted of non-politically-motivated crime. Though tensions flared between these two groups, in the early 1980s inmates from both groups organized to fight against the state-controlled prisons for improved conditions and expanded protection of their human rights. The Comando Vermelho was able to grow into a powerful force because they improved daily life inside prison, not by pushing for legislation, but by implementing and enforcing a code of conduct. An ex-prisoner who was incarcerated when the Comando Vermelho first took control of the prisons told me, "When they started the gang in 1982, those things [random acts of violence] stopped happening. The prisoners stopped robbing each other, raping each other, you know, the Falange Vermelha [now called Comando Vermelho] started to kill the people that did these sorts of things inside of prison."

The Comando Vermelho (CV) established a new order inside prison. This new set of rules drastically reduced the chaos and nearly eliminated rape and random assaults on the inside. But the order was achieved by setting up an authoritarian regime that would have made the Brazilian military dictatorship blush. Challenging the CV inside prison or breaking their laws carried a death sentence. The CV's initial mission reflected a left-wing, anti-authoritarian ideology imported by the political prisoners but was flavored by

the criminal street culture from the other inmates. The Comando Vermelho's political agenda quickly evaporated as the military dictatorship fell in the 1980s, but the organization's tie to the criminal operation on the streets quickly filled the vacuum, and profit through highly regulated organized crime became the gang's central purpose.

Over the last three decades, the gang's position inside prison has only grown and the Comando Vermelho has been institutionalized into the city's prisons. Today, inmates are assigned to specific prisons, or parts of the prison, if they are gang members. In the jail where I conducted my fieldwork, the gang "owned" one wing of the institution. Five out of the ten cells and around four hundred out of the seven hundred detainees lived under direct Comando Vermelho control. Some of the men were deeply involved in gang activity before they were arrested and therefore joined the prison population with their gang affiliation, while others were placed in these cells simply because the neighborhood where they lived was under control of the Comando Vermelho. The prisons are recruiting mechanisms for the gang as inmates with weak or non-existent ties to the gang are subject to the gang's authority and must pledge allegiance to the CV upon arrival.

Pentecostalism emerged as an alternative non-state organization in Brazilian prisons in the mid-1990s, about a decade after the formation of the Comando Vermelho. As Pentecostalism spread like wildfire throughout Brazil, the faith's lost-to-found narrative, direct link to the supernatural, and literal interpretation of the Bible resonated with inmates and quickly became the dominant faith practiced inside prison. The success of Pentecostalism inside prison mirrors the growth of the faith in the favelas on the outside. Like the Comando Vermelho had done ten years earlier, (through different methods) the Pentecostal inmate groups started to claim cells for themselves and

implemented an alternative form of self-governance and authority structure. The Pentecostal groups did not confront or condemn the gangs (as many of them had come directly from the gangs' cells) and were respected by the gangs as long as they did not directly interfere with their business. Unlike the CV, the Pentecostal groups did not have formal connections to Pentecostal congregations on the outside. The groups were indigenous to the prison and were not formally sponsored by specific congregations outside of prison.

The most organized group of Pentecostals I encountered in my fieldwork was in the Evaristo de Moraes prison, which I described in a previous chapter. Membership in the Pentecostal community is voluntary, but an inmate's move from the general population must be approved by both the church leadership and the prison administration. The prison church conducts well-planned proselytizing campaigns and holds daily worship services, so an inmate's opportunities for conversion are ample. If an inmate converts or makes a commitment through the Pentecostal faith and would like to join the other Pentecostal inmates, the inmate pastor makes a request to the administration and the move is made. The gangs in Rio do not hold to the "gang member to the grave" model like the Central American *pandillas*. An ex-Comando Vermelho prisoner explained to me, "The truth is that the gang, at least the gang I was with, respects the opinion of the person as long as you do not waver. If you do not steal, do not rape, do not kill the wrong person, don't do anything that would embarrass the gang, you have the freedom to get out." So inmates who convert to Pentecostalism or return to an abandoned faith inside prison are free to cut ties with the gang as long as they do not have any outstanding debts.

Authority

While the state decides who is sent to prison and for how long, inmate organization and the day-to-day activities inside prison are largely dictated by non-state authorities. Gang and Pentecostal inmate organizations enforce a set of rules that are separate from the formal rules of the prison administration. Both organizations have vertical authority structures that are led by a clear and powerful leader. In the gang cellblocks, each cell has a gang-appointed leader who is in charge of the inmates in that specific cell. This cell leader is under the authority of a gang member who acts as the boss or “president” for the gang-affiliated inmates. This individual is appointed by the gang’s institutional leadership and receives information and commands from his superiors through text messages sent by smuggled cell phones and notes handed through family members and inmates in transit. Prison gang bosses can rise through the ranks inside prison or inherit the post based on their street status, but their authority is always backed from the top. Looking back on his fifteen-year sentence for homicide, an ex-inmate came to the conclusion that “you have to do whatever he [the gang leader] says, get it? If you don’t, you will end up dying in that place.”

Jorge is an inmate in his late twenties who served two prison sentences in the most notorious penitentiary in Rio as a member of the Comando Vermelho. During his second arrest, his leg was shattered by a bullet fired by a police officer and getting up the stairs that led to the patio where I interviewed him was a painful chore. While in prison for the second time, a rival gang had taken control of his neighborhood, making a return home difficult at best, a suicide mission at worst. He became a Pentecostal Christian inside prison and with nowhere to go, he went to live in a church that offers housing for people in his situation. As he recounted his prison experience as a member of the

Comando Vermelho, he emphasized the gang's total dominance of his cellblock. When I asked him to explain how the gang maintains its control behind bars, he responded:

Inside of prison, the Comando Vermelho has a leader who decides what happens to the people in there. Just like the church has a pastor who leads his church, the gang had a guy who was responsible for the 1,400 men in prison, their president, who is responsible for everyone. The president has his group and he solves problems within the prison, you know? They take the guy who they think has done something and put him in a kind of a trial. They they grab you, see what you have done, judge you and sentence you.

Gang leadership decides not only where the inmates under their command sleep at night, but also enforces a strict code of conduct that maintains order inside the prison. The gang leaders act as judges, juries, and executioners. The CV, for example, strictly prohibits fighting, sexual assault, and unauthorized violence among inmates inside the prison cells they control. Violations of the code are punished by the gang. Over months of fieldwork inside the jail, I spoke frequently with and got to know the inmate who was the CV leader. Every time I entered the gang-controlled cells, he met me at the entrance and my first and last conversations in the cells were always with him. In one of our conversations, he emphasized that the presence of his organization decreased the violence and maintained order, which he maintained improved the living conditions for everyone. "People out there think we are animals in here, raping and killing all day long. It's not like that, brother. There is respect in here. Everyone is on edge in here, but I don't let confrontations go beyond shouting. [long pause] But there are times when I have to *resolve* some things." I did not ask him to elaborate on *how* these conflicts or rule violations are resolved, but it was clear by the treatment he received from the other inmates in the CV wing that his position of authority was clearly recognized.

The Comando Vermelho is not the only organization that enforces a strict code of conduct inside prisons through a rigid hierarchal organizational structure. The Pentecostal prisoners organize themselves through inmate churches like the “Heroes for Christ Prison Church” and the “Prison Church of Evaristo de Moraes.” These groups are led by a charismatic and authoritative pastor and a leadership team comprised of deacons, a worship team, treasurers, and secretaries. Rio’s prison churches adopt an organization model similar to the Pentecostal churches, like the Assembly of God denomination, in the surrounding community. When I interviewed the acting pastor of the Heroes for Christ Prison Church, the inmate responsible for leading the *grito de guerra* described at the beginning of the chapter, he explained how his church appoints leadership positions and how they measure a person’s ability to perform his assigned function:

We hold a plenary session with the brothers who are involved in the day-to-day work in the church. We reach consensus by holding a meeting with the members to vote. We base the vote on how this brother lives day to day, his contribution to the work, the example he has given; all of this holds weight. From here, he will be placed as the legal representative of the church as president, vice president, or as the leader of an individual cell’s worship services... If you appoint someone as a deacon, here [in prison] you can be the deacon, but this will not have any legal value out there [Pentecostal churches on the outside]. But in spite of this, the position has a strong symbolic value in here.

The Pentecostal inmates vote on their leaders as opposed to having them assigned from a larger network on the outside like the gang does, but the church is led by a hierarchical leadership group that resembles gang leadership. Inmates voted into these positions are responsible for a set of tasks that are associated with their position and receive a corresponding rise in status among the inmate population. Jorge, the ex-inmate who served the first years of his sentence in the CV cells before transferring to the Pentecostal cells, was quick to make the comparison between the gang leader and the

pastor in his quotation above. From an inmates' perspective, Jorge's comparison is an obvious one because both the gang and church leaders hold unique positions of authority in prison. The pastor is the "boss" of the Pentecostal cells. He does the bulk of the preaching, leads the worship services, and is in charge of the leadership team. He is also the one who ultimately decides who is allowed to enter the group and punishes or expels the members who have broken the rules.

Joining a Pentecostal group inside prison offers a set of benefits, but one of the costs of belonging to a prison gang or a prison church is submission to authority. Being a member of the inmate church is not simply an abstract identity or a temporary allegiance. Jorge was subject to Command Vermelho leadership while he lived in the CV cells. After his religious conversion, he moved his personal belongings to the Pentecostal cells and found himself subject to a new authority. Looking back on his transition, he told me about the difficulty he experienced when he first joined the prison church and how, initially, he butted heads with church leadership over their expectations concerning his behavior. One of the deacons confronted him, took him aside, and told him: "The key to being a believer inside prison is a simple one: obedience. You can't be a believer without obeying. If you are not obeying the leadership of your pastor, you are disobeying God." The power of Jorge's new leaders was fused with religious authority. In this case, the pastor is God's representative in the flesh; a more authoritative position is hard to find. Jorge confessed that he had struggled with obeying authority figures throughout his life but pointed to this confrontation as a turning point in his faith and his corresponding change in behavior as a confirmation of his conversion. "I really took to heart what that guy said and I started to obey in there, inside the prison. Before, I was a guy who walked

around prison full of demons, but I started to obey the little brothers that held the ecclesiastical positions in the church. From there I saw that I was different; my mother came to visit and she saw that I was different.” He had to show that he was not just “hiding behind a Bible” in prison and prove that his conversion was genuine by submitting to church authority. When the gang members convert and join the Pentecostals, they import with them part of the gang culture of obedience to authority, creating a congregation with a unique gang flavor that doesn’t exist on the outside.

Resources

While interviewing Felipe, an ex-inmate who had done time in four prisons in Rio de Janeiro, I interjected as he was describing his downward spiral into drug addiction inside prison. I asked, “Are there really that many drugs on the inside?” He looked at me like I had asked a question to which the answer was so obvious it hardly merited a response. He overlooked my own naiveté and told me, “In prison, if you have money you are king. You can get women, conjugal visits, TV, VCR, whiskey, the best cocaine. You can have whatever you want, food from the street, you can buy cigarettes, a newspaper, a cup of coffee. If you have money, you have everything you want.”

Inmates trade cigarettes for small favors, use them as chips in low-stake card games, or as currency for small transactions, but the informal marketplace inside the prisons in my study operates on cash. Most inmates depend primarily on their families to provide for their basic necessities, especially the Pentecostals who cannot openly operate in the illegal drug trade. As I described in the last chapter, the conditions inside prison, especially the jails, are truly inhumane. The jails are especially brutal because the state

provides three meals a day and virtually nothing else. They do not provide any formal health care, soap, toothpaste, medicine, or even clothing. If a person is arrested without a shirt, they remain shirtless until their family or another inmate lends them one. Not only was there not a nurse or doctor available, there wasn't a first-aid kit provided by the state. Prisoners whose families lived in different states or were unable or unwilling to visit them are most vulnerable because the rations provided by the administration are hardly sufficient. They must fend for themselves by participating in the inmate economy or by depending on the generosity of their fellow inmates.

The Heroes for Christ Prison Church addresses the physical needs of the inmates by collecting tithes from church members. Family members who are willing or able will give cash to their loved ones during the visiting hours, and the inmates who tithe give to the church knowing that it will be used to provide for their fellow inmates. I saw this system in action inside the jail during the ten months I spent visiting this facility. Over time, I became a trusted entity inside the jail and toward the end of my research, church leadership approached me and asked if I could buy toiletries with the money that they had collected and bring them back to the jail. At the time, I had a privileged position in the jail and with the reluctant blessing of the jail administration, I was allowed to bring in toothpaste, soap, and toothbrushes. A couple of weeks later, when I was able to record interviews with the prison pastor, I asked him about how the church uses the tithes they collect.

We spend it on the people here. We receive the tithe from the church and use it on the people who don't receive visitors. Toothpaste, soap, prescription medicine, sandals, the basic material to survive in here on a daily basis...I have received miracles from God and many here rely on the help of friends and people we could not even imagine.

A few weeks prior to the interview, the church collected over 300 Reais (nearly US\$200) to buy bus fare for an inmate's family to travel from another state to visit him. While the church's budget may be meager, it is one of the few accessible resources for the prisoners in the most difficult situations. For inmates without gang affiliation or family visits, joining the church can be an enticing option given the alternatives.

Protection

Even though violence is highly regulated by the gangs in the prisons, these facilities remain violent, unforgiving, and intensely dangerous places. Gang membership may provide protection for a threatened inmate, as unauthorized attacks on gang members are not tolerated by gang leadership. But the gang doesn't protect everyone, and it deals with certain types of offenders more swiftly and often more harshly than the Brazilian justice system.

An inmate's crime directly impacts the way they are received by the general population. Two mid-level Comando Vermelho representatives, one on the streets and one in jail, told me that their gang does not tolerate crimes they consider "dishonorable." The CV does not allow offenses committed by someone against his own mother or armed robberies on public buses. The position of a mother is idealized and treated with tremendous respect in the favelas and lower-income neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. Violence from son to mother is highly stigmatized. The public buses are considered off-limits for assaults because members of the community living in neighborhoods dominated by the Comando Vermelho largely depend on these buses to get to work. This decree from the gang regulates behavior on the buses much more effectively than any

police initiative, but it is not always followed. During my fieldwork, a bus that I rode frequently, though fortunately not on this day, was boarded by four young men armed with a grenade. Three of the men paid their fare and sat down while the fourth took the grenade from his pocket and shoved it into the face of the bus driver. The driver was told to change course and head straight for Complexo Alemão, a Comando Vermelho-controlled neighborhood, while the three young men in the back of the bus collected wallets, jewelry, and cell phones. When the hijacked bus arrived at the entrance to the community, the four men disappeared into the hilly maze of crowded houses, leaving the passengers frightened and robbed, but unharmed. But as in many countries and cultures, the most reviled inmate is the person who lands in jail because of a sexual assault on a woman, or worse yet, a child.

Men convicted of pedophilia, or rape, are subject to two separate punishments—the first is handed down by the judge and the second by his fellow inmates. The second judgment, enforced by the inmates, ranged from total social exclusion and isolation, to execution. Inmates accused of rape or pedophilia are sometimes killed on the first night if a relative, friend, or neighbor of the victim is in the same cellblock; other times their lives are used as instruments in never-ending battles between the inmates and the prison administration. During a prison riot in São Luis, a city in Northern Brazil, the inmates took control of the facility and held six guards hostage. To catch the attention of the outside world and to show that they were serious in what they were demanding, they decapitated an inmate who had been convicted of raping his daughters and proceeded to tie his head to the cell bars with a thick cord. The inmates' complaints and demands centered on food and the conditions of the facility; it had nothing to do with being housed

with child abusers. Their choice to kill the inmate convicted of child rape was a reflection of how the lives of these prisoners are treated with absolute contempt. Inside prison, men who have committed these sorts of crimes are hardly considered human and subject to brutality at nearly any moment.

The Pentecostal members inside prison are largely left out of prison violence as long as their participation in the church is deemed genuine and their daily behavior falls in line with the expectations of a convert. An inmate can join the Pentecostals without sanction as long as they do not have an outstanding debt with the gang or another inmate. They may be jeered or insulted by their fellow inmates and accused of “hiding behind a Bible,” but those consequences pale in comparison to what may be in store for them in the general population. I asked the acting pastor of the Heroes for Christ Prison Church about the protection offered by the church to vulnerable inmates. He acknowledged that church membership can be an appealing alternative for this type of inmate and offered a theological defense of his organization’s position to accept the sexual offender:

The reality of prison life is that being caught with a 214, penal code 214, which is rape or pedophilia, this crime is not accepted inside of prison. The person arrested for this crime is not well received here. So the church works with the word of God, because to God a little lie is the same as a big lie, sins don’t have different sizes. Getting caught with a 155[theft], may not have a long prison sentence, but to God there is no difference between that and abusing a life, being a pedophile...I keep hitting this point with them that God loves the prostitute, God loves the rapist, God doesn’t love their attitude, the sin he commits, but God is there with open arms to transform them into a new creation.

Joining a Pentecostal inmate community isn’t a free pass for a threatened inmate. You could compare it to buying a house in the United States at the height of the recent real estate bubble; it was easy to buy the home, but much more difficult to pay for it. If a man convicted of a sexual crime converts to Pentecostalism, he may be accepted by the

church but must prove his commitment daily. Pentecostal affiliation inside prison is a twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week commitment. It has a wholly different character than religious conversion on the streets, where a person can sit in the pews of his or her church on Sunday morning, sing the songs and shout “amens” at the pastor, yet where very few people may have any notion how the person lives their life the other six days a week. Not so in prison—there is twenty-four hour accountability. Felipe, the ex-inmate who explained the abundance of drugs available in prison, emphasized the importance of proving the authenticity of a jailhouse conversion.

You have to show it daily. Your language, you have to change your attitude. If you say you are going to do something, you have to do it. For a Pentecostal to have credibility you have to really show that now you are light and not darkness, you have to shine. The prison system is nothing but fights and curses all around. Unlimited marijuana and cocaine keep the place in peace. So after I converted, I had to show in my day to day that my attitudes had changed.

Though Felipe didn't commit a sexual crime, he still had to show that he had changed, and he had to toe the line daily. The consequences for an inmate convicted of a “dishonorable” crime are subject to severe retribution if his religious commitment is not matched by strict adherence to the group's expectations. In the prison where I conducted the fieldwork, a pastor told me about an inmate who was caught sexually abusing a younger, weaker church member in his cell. The abuse went undetected for a few weeks, but when church leaders discovered it, they immediately convened and decided to remove the offender from their community. The church's punishment did not stop at simple expulsion; they told the administration what he had done, knowing that a transfer would likely ensue. The offender was quickly moved to another prison and placed in the most dangerous wing of that institution. I do not know what happened to that individual

but the assumption was that he would not survive long in there. The protection provided by belonging to a Pentecostal group is not free. An inmate must maintain his status as a Pentecostal by daily adhering to the rigorous standards held by the group in a place where leading a double life is nearly impossible.

Identity

The first time I walked through the hallway past the cells at the Evaristo de Moraes prison, I thought that the building's power was out. The cells were dark and dreary, and the naked light bulbs that hung from the ceilings were not turned on. It had been raining, so I assumed that the weather had shorted out the building's ancient electrical system. I passed close enough to the cells to exchange quick head nods and greetings with the shirtless inmates who stood in the cell doors smoking cigarettes, but the cells were so dark that I couldn't see more than ten feet beyond the bars. I continued to walk down the prison hallway with a pastor visiting from a local congregation and two female volunteers from his church. We were accompanied by a leader from the inmate church whose assigned task was to escort us to the morning's worship service. When we arrived at the painted concrete wall that marked the start of the Pentecostal cells, it became clear that the power was working because the Pentecostal cells, unlike those in the general population, were brightly lit with florescent lights.

After ninety minutes of singing, preaching, communion, and prayer, the service concluded and the visitors were asked to meet in the back room to sign the guest book and have a cup of coffee with the inmate church's pastor, deacons, and secretaries. Like the chapel, this room seemed out of place in the prison. It was immaculately clean and orderly and a tray of cookies was passed around to the dozen people in the room. The

tithes collected from the inmates during the service were counted and recorded and the pastor of the inmate church and the pastor from the local church exchanged updates on their respective congregations. As the pastors talked shop, I asked a series of questions to the secretary of the inmate church. The secretary, Felipe, was in his early twenties, had wavy hair parted to the side, and a smile that revealed a half a dozen missing teeth. He was serving time for homicide and was not scheduled to leave prison until sometime in his mid-thirties. I asked why the other cells were unlit and Felipe responded matter-of-factly that the inmates in the general population preferred to keep the lights off during the day because it provided privacy from the watchful eye of the prison guards. “They do drugs and things of the devil in there.” He told me that when he arrived at Evaristo, he lived in one of these cells, but since he accepted Jesus and moved to the Pentecostal cells, he now “lived in the light” and motioned with his hand to the sterile, florescent light that lit the office. The dichotomy of good/bad, serving God or the devil, being in the light or the dark is woven into the Pentecostal worldview on the streets. The identity associated with the “saved” and with the “lost” is even more pronounced inside prison. Being an “*irmão*” (brother), living in one of the inmate congregations or an active member in a gang, provides a strong identity in eyes of the guards, family members, fellow inmates, and volunteers.

Pentecostal identity is usually achieved through some sort of conversion or recommitment experience during incarceration. In contrast, gang identity is often brought into prison from the street upon incarceration. I spoke with Mateos, an ex-Comando Vermelho leader from the City of God neighborhood in the western suburbs of Rio, about his life that up to this point had followed a trajectory that is becoming

increasingly common for young men born into the city's favelas: poor adolescent to gang-member to prisoner to Pentecostal. We spoke before the evening worship service and Mateos had yet to put on the tie and suit coat he wore to the four services he attended every week. I asked questions about growing up in the City of God neighborhood and his immersion into a criminal career. He described a fairly successful run in his late teens and early twenties as a brazenly daring car thief and armed assailant. Born with almost nothing, Mateos now had cars, cash, and a near celebrity status in his neighborhood. The run ended in a shootout with the police that took the life of his friend and sent him to prison. I asked him to talk about what he felt entering the prison on the first day and he described the "heroes' welcome" he was given:

In my community, I was known by the crimes that I committed. They wrote a *baile de funk* [hip-hop song] in my honor and that song was heard in a lot of communities. These days, people don't see me like that, but many people heard about me through that song. I remember when I arrived in prison and said my nickname was "Bad Bullet," there were people who knew who I was, but had never seen me before. My name was advertised throughout the gang because of that song.

Mateos' reputation and identity as a Comando Vermelho member on the outside was immediately recognized by his fellow inmates. He was quickly installed into the gang's leadership council inside the prison and was called to be the representative for the Comando Vermelho-affiliated inmates from the City of God neighborhood. His participation in the gang grew during the first few months of incarceration and he soon held a lucrative position in the Comando Vermelho's drug distribution business inside the prison.

Inside there [prison] I started to get to know the leaders of the drug dens from other communities. I began to acquire gold, drugs, cell phone and expand my dealings in

the prison to the point that when I was going to be released, I had been invited to take control of a drug den [in his neighborhood].

The depth of Mateos' participation in the gang deepened when he was inside prison, and his identity as a gang member to his fellow inmates and fellow gang members on the street strengthened as well. Prestigious and profitable opportunities opened up to him with the gang on the street because of his rising status in the prison section of the gang. When his sentence was switched to parole and he was allowed to live in a halfway house, only reporting to the building at night, he was in control of two drug distribution points. But as the doors started to open for Mateos in the gang world, other doors started to close. After three years in prison and the criminal celebrity status cemented, Mateos told me that "my mom didn't want me in the house, my family didn't want me, and the community rejected me because of all the crimes I committed." Mateos' fellow inmates, the guards in the prison, the police on the streets, and his family members viewed him as a Comando Vermelho boss and treated him accordingly.

But identity in prison is not static and can change, in some cases quickly. Transitioning from gang to Pentecostal identity inside prison can happen very quickly and is often started with a public conversion. When Jorge attended a Pentecostal service inside prison as an active member of the Comando Vermelho, he stood in the back with his arms folded. The inmate pastor had been pursuing Jorge for weeks challenging him to drop his gang allegiance and make a commitment to Christianity. During those weeks, Jorge had started to question membership in his gang after seeing the way that the Comando Vermelho killed people inside prison who did not adhere to the gang's rules. He told me, "To the leader, you are just a disposable cup in the hands of the Comando

Vermelho, any faction, really it just doesn't matter. I mean a disposable cup because when you are serving their power well, it's all good, but the first time you waver, you hesitate, you're already dead." Jorge started to see that once he had lost his utility to the gang or his unquestioned allegiance waned, his life could be crumpled up like a used cup and thrown away like the others he had seen. Jorge had been shot by the police during his arrest, which rendered his leg nearly useless. During the sermon in the prison, he started to question his life in the gang. "I started to realize that things weren't working for me anymore in here [prison]. I thought, wait a minute, I have just this one prison bunk, an injured leg; what I am doing, man? I'm gonna enter the Church, man, I'm going to start following the Bible; why should I keep living like this?" The sermon continued and as the altar call was sent out to the inmates, the pastor locked eyes with Jorge, started to make his way through the dozens of inmates, and spoke to him directly. The pastor sensed something in Jorge and challenged him, "Are you going to accept it, man? Are you going to come to the Brother's cells?" Jorge was put on the spot; he had to make a decision that would shape his identity in the prison. He said, "I still hadn't accepted Jesus and the pastor was walking quickly towards me saying 'you're going to accept-you're gonna, you're gonna come to the Brothers' Cell, man,' and I said, 'Yes, yes I am going come to the Brothers' cell.' so he put my name in to go to the Brothers' Cell, and I started to congregate at the Brothers' Cell." Once the transfer was approved, Jorge retrieved his belongings and moved to the Pentecostal cell in the prison. He remembered that it took a few days to lose the tough façade required by gang members, but he ultimately decided to release his gang identity and embrace his new identity as a

Pentecostal inmate. He summed up his decision, “You have to leave the old guy behind so that the new one can be born.”

I asked him how his colleagues from the Comando Vermelho treated him after he had made his very public decision at the worship service.

Huh! They stoned the heck out of me, they stoned the heck out of me. They stoned me—it was crazy difficult, really difficult. No one wants to talk to you any more, they think that you've changed, ‘Ah, you know, he's just hiding behind the Bible.’ In prison it's really hard to serve God because the group is always accusing you, the guys keep saying, ‘I just wanna see if you keep this up on the outside; here on the inside being a believer's easy’ and so on. These guys from my area came near me, and they didn't pay any attention to me, I was just trying to read the Bible to them. It was all good, I made a promise to God that I would study the Bible and learn more about God, and so I learned and learned and learned. And during that time, man, I'd never seen myself like this, never seen myself do this kind of thing inside the prison. Before I would walk here and there, resolving problems for the gang, this and that, but little by little God showed me what'd been a mystery, the reason I was in the prison. I got a suit and a tie inside the prison, I started to preach inside; there are 2 pavilions, 1,400 men, right, at each pavilion 700 men. Every day it was me and 2 other guys, and God knows where they are walking today; hopefully they are well.

Jorge's conversion to Pentecostalism changed the way he saw himself, but it also changed the way others viewed him. He had to absorb the verbal jabs and doubts of friends from his gang, but the gang members did not question whether an inmate could assume a new identity through Pentecostalism; they questioned whether Jorge would be able to fulfill the commitment he had made. Though he did not go through any formal theological training, he soon started to preach inside the prison and his use of a suit and tie was a strong visible symbol of his new identity as an inmate pastor. He said that he started to see the change that this decision had on his daily life as an inmate, “I started to see that I was different, and even my mom when she came to visit saw that I was different.” When I asked him what his mother thought of her son's transformation from

active gang member to Pentecostal evangelist, he told me, “Man, she was happy, my mom liked this change a ton.”

Prison Religion: Embattled and Thriving?

Christian Smith (1998) presented a subcultural identity theory to explain the persistent success of the Evangelical movement in the United States, particularly the suburbs. Though the orderly and often affluent American suburbs represent a starkly different cultural context for Protestant practice than the prisons of Rio de Janeiro, Smith’s theoretical interpretation of religious success contains many of the same themes as the gang comparison used in this chapter. Smith constructs his argument through a series of propositions, the first one being that all humans have an inherent yearning and desire for meaning that is quenched through belonging to groups with morally significant collective identities (p. 90). This component of his argument can be easily seen inside prison as the inmates organize around gangs and religion.

Smith builds on the importance of group membership by saying that strong, meaningful identities are formed by creating a distinction between those who are in the group and those who are not. Gangs use tattoos, initiation rituals, and specific clothing to set themselves apart from other prisoners and to create identity. With the exception of tattoos, Brazilian Pentecostal inmates use these same techniques and are purposeful in drawing boundaries between themselves and other prisoners. There is a Pentecostal “uniform” inside many of the prisons and a person’s daily practices of prayer and worship immediately identifies him as a member of a Pentecostal group in the same way that a tattoo can identify gang membership, or a W.W.J.D. bracelet or possibly a Tim Tebow jersey can identify an American evangelical.

Another proposition that Smith uses for his argument is that “religious traditions have always strategically renegotiated their collective identities by continually reformulating the ways their constructed orthodoxies engage the changing sociocultural environments they confront” (p.97). Prison is a unique social context, comprised of a unique subset of society. Smith argues that Evangelicalism is malleable enough to fit into a pluralistic modern culture, and though the cramped, sweaty prison cell may not be the best example of modernity, Brazilian Pentecostalism has evolved not only to survive, but to thrive in the prison culture.

Though Smith’s argument is useful in understanding the success of Protestant Christianity in Rio’s prisons, the participants in his study make their religious choices in a social context that is different in three important ways. First, American Evangelicalism is thriving in a highly voluntary context. Most Evangelicals in the United States participate in faith communities that meet once, or maybe twice, a week for an hour or two. The majority of their week is spent away from their congregations, and though a practicing Evangelical may balk at purchasing a *Playboy* magazine at their local convenience store for fear of being seen, their actions are not under the constant supervision that is inherent to Pentecostal practice inside prison. Second, the vast majority of American Evangelicals do not suffer from the same type of social stigma that prisoners or ex-prisoners do. Inmates are on the bottom, or very close to the bottom, of the social hierarchy and have a fundamentally different motivation for an identity that can offset their status as a “bad guy.” Finally, Pentecostal inmates and American Evangelicals face drastically different expectations for their immediate and long-term futures. All inmates must deal with a very specific problem—their present

incarceration—but most of them will leave prison, return to communities branded as ex-convicts, and confront a job market where they will be woefully uncompetitive..

Pentecostal identity and participation in this context carries with it a unique set of benefits in the prison context.

I submit the gang perspective in my study not as a replacement for Smith's and other sociologists of religions' theoretical work; the dominant themes in the literature can be seen throughout the data I present in this chapter. But the prison context is a truly distinctive social world with a unique set of actors and forces and threats that other theories are unable to fully capture. I argue that using the gang comparison is a useful and necessary tool to understand religious practice, specifically the vibrancy of Pentecostal in the jails and prisons in Rio de Janeiro.

Chapter 4

The Politics of Presence

My cell phone buzzed one afternoon with an incoming call from an unknown number. When I answered, I immediately recognized the voice that belonged to Zé, an inmate who had escaped from prison three weeks ago. I had gotten to know Zé well during my research, so I had been concerned since I saw his photo in the newspaper next to the article detailing how nearly a dozen inmates had escaped by sawing through the bars of their cell and exiting through a hole in the building's roof. I wasn't expecting the call and as I asked how he was doing, I hoped that he wasn't going to ask to spend a night or two on my couch. Zé didn't ask anything of me; he said he called "just to let you know that I am safe and everything is alright. I am with God and with my family. I am cool." We only spoke for three or four minutes and I ended our conversation by offering to call a pastor we both knew. The idea sounded good to him and we agreed to speak again in the next day or two. I knew his current situation was not sustainable and my immediate concern was that if the police found him, he might not survive the arrest. In a city where over one thousand people are killed every year by the police, a gang-affiliated fugitive from a highly publicized prison break is a dangerous status to hold.

Later that day, I called the pastor but was unable to reach him. Feeling the pressure of the situation and uncertain of what, if anything, I should do, I called a member of this pastor's church who also knew Zé and who would be interested to know that he was safe. He answered the phone and before I completed the usual pleasantries, I immediately started to explain that Zé had called to say that he is safe and ...The

volunteer from the church cut me off midsentence and said, “OK, Andrew, thanks for calling. Let’s talk about this later: not now, later.” I quickly picked up on the curtness of his response and from the tone of his voice, I could tell that he did not want to discuss this issue over the phone. I changed the subject and gave an awkward goodbye, realizing that I needed to be more prudent in how I handled this sensitive situation.

I was able to talk with the pastor the next day and we arranged a face-to-face meeting, careful not to discuss the details over the phone. When we met, we talked over the situation and he called a trusted friend of his at the police department. The pastor told him in the vaguest terms possible that he was in contact with a fugitive, and without revealing any specifics of the situation, he inquired about the legality of contacting the man. The police administrator informed him that he could meet with the fugitive as long as it was in a public setting, not in his home or in a gang-controlled favela or a drug trafficking locale; he emphasized that the pastor could not give the fugitive any money or financial assistance. The pastor then asked if the police department could guarantee the safety of the individual if he agreed to surrender. The pastor’s friend gave his word that he would be safe, but warned that his guarantee only went as far as the prison doors.

The pastor thanked his friend at the police department, hung up the phone, and we discussed the next steps. The next call placed was to a lawyer in the pastor’s church, who after some convincing, reluctantly agreed to sit down with the fugitive, look over his case and explain his options (which would be limited at best). I called Zé and explained I was with the pastor; the two of them spoke for about twenty minutes and talked about the article that had come out in the newspaper. Zé was stuck. He couldn’t turn himself in

because that would violate the rules of his gang. He didn't want to continue as a Comando Vermelho member, but he also knew that he couldn't hide forever.

The pastor was hesitant to use his own phone to call Zé because he had received a tip that the police might be monitoring his calls, so it was decided that I would make the arrangements for a meeting with the four of us since my phone was registered to another person living out of the state. I made the calls and met Zé the next day on one of the busiest intersections in downtown Rio. He was an hour late for the meeting and I was ready to give up on the whole idea when he tugged on the back of my shirt. He was wearing a soccer jersey and had the visor of a baseball cap pulled down low over his eyes. We had arranged to meet the pastor and the lawyer at a restaurant located on the first floor of one of the tallest, busiest buildings in the city. When we arrived, Zé and the pastor embraced like old friends and the lawyer, visibly uncomfortable, introduced himself and made a playfully disparaging comment about Zé's soccer jersey, which belonged to a rival team. The restaurant's host grabbed the menus and as he led us to our table, I recognized a man sitting by himself reading a book at the table next to ours. I couldn't place his face for a minute, but when I did, I grabbed the pastor by the shoulder and told him not to look right away, but there was a high-ranking police official sitting at the next table. We took our seats and when the pastor looked over his shoulder and saw the man in question, his face lost its color and his lower lip dropped an inch. The pastor knew the police official much better than I did and he looked at me and said urgently, "We have to go." Looking back, it was unlikely that the police official would have recognized Zé, but that was a chance no one at our table wanted to take. I tapped Zé on the arm and whispered to the lawyer that we had to get out, and get out fast. The three of

us set our menus down and started to head for the exit as the server looked on, completely bewildered at our hasty exit. The lawyer left the restaurant like he was shot from a cannon. Zé and I followed him with our eyes pointed toward the floor while the pastor immediately went toward the seated police official. He placed both of his hands on the corner of the table as he greeted him and positioned himself in a way that blocked the official's line of sight while the three of us bolted for the door.

Ten minutes later, the four of us reconvened at a café across the street and the pastor, now breathing considerably easier, reported that our close call was just that; the police official didn't see anything. We all laughed nervously, breathed deep breaths of relief, and grabbed plates to go to the self-service buffet. Zé didn't order anything for lunch, not even a glass of water. I am not sure if he was trying to keep us from wading into a legal gray area of aiding and abetting a known fugitive, or if he just wasn't hungry; I didn't ask. The lawyer had printed out Ze's case and explained what his legal options were. He hadn't committed a violent crime, but he had been caught with a sizable amount of drugs, a gun, and radio equipment—the tools of Rio's domestic drug trade. The pastor told Zé that morally he could not tell him to go back to a prison situation that was inhumane and possibly deadly, but if he wanted to turn himself in, he could get thirty people from his church to accompany him to the prison door and try to bring the media along to cover the scene. The idea was that this sort of visibility would provide some sort of protection.

Zé made no decisions that day, but the image of the pastor standing between the police and the gang member symbolizes the space that some Pentecostal pastors occupy in Rio de Janeiro. Pentecostals have generally been thought of as apolitical and

otherworldly. While Brazilian Pentecostalism does not emphasize a theologically informed political agenda, as is present in Liberation Theology or in some conservative evangelical churches in the United States, it does foster a kind of politics in how its members, especially pastors, interact with prisons and inmates—a politics of presence. By that I mean that the Pentecostals' choice to be physically present inside prisons and to take an active role in Rio's criminal justice system is a political act that has political consequences. In Rio de Janeiro, there are crucial state-run institutions, like the prison system, that are so corrupt and under-funded that they place inmates and their families in an incredibly vulnerable position.

In the first section of this chapter, I will explore how churches and pastors mediate between prisoners and their families and how their unique position in this social milieu allows them to be important buffers between inmates and the state. A second implication of the Pentecostal presence inside prison is that Pentecostal pastors themselves have become powerful figures in society as ones who interact with power brokers in the prisons and marginalized communities in Rio de Janeiro. In the second section of the chapter, I will show how charisma in the Weberian sense gives pastors a platform to interact and influence both gang leaders and state authorities. Finally, I'll close the chapter with an extended discussion of one church, the Last Days Assembly of God (LDAG) and its leader, Pastor Marcos Pereira. The LDAF is not a typical Pentecostal congregation, nor is its pastor, but its high-profile, central involvement in prison ministry illustrates the structural ambiguity of the pastor's role and the potential for corruption when religious leaders are placed in mediating roles between the state and gang-run criminal enterprises. My goal in this chapter is to suggest that we need to

rethink what it means to call a church apolitical. In Rio de Janeiro, there is more to the Pentecostal church than its otherworldly rhetoric; its deliberate position inside prisons and interactions with criminal gang leaders has political implications.

Earning the Inmate's Trust

Meeting Material Needs of Inmates

One of the reasons Pentecostal pastors are trusted and influential actors inside prison is how they work to meet some of the prisoners' immediate material and emotional needs. Obviously, an inmates' most immediate concern is leaving prison as soon as possible. I did not hear of any pastors lobbying judges for leniency for any particular inmates, but they were very active in providing services for the incarcerated. For example, detainees locked up in P#1 do not get the chance to call their family or a lawyer when they arrive. If the person is arrested in his own neighborhood, word of his arrest will likely travel quickly to his family through informal channels, and since certain neighborhoods in Rio supply an inordinate amount of the city's inmates, messages can be sent through other inmates' family members who live close to his home. Inmates with limited social networks or those from out of town need someone to deliver the news of their incarceration, and they often turn to the pastors who regularly visit. At the end of the worship services, many of the pastors would jot down phone numbers of inmates' families next to the prayer requests in their notebooks and then call the families when they left the cells.

By the time individuals have passed through jail and reached the penitentiary, contacting their families is not a pressing concern for the inmates but caring for them is. The Brazilian government offers a stipend to the families of inmates who were working

full-time jobs in the formal sector at the time they were arrested. Like the multi-tiered prison system that sends certain inmates to better prisons based on their social standing, this benefit largely assists inmates from certain social classes and not the gang-affiliated inmates or those involved in the drug trade full-time. The incarceration of a family member placed many families in an acute financial emergency. Though the pastors themselves could not meet all the needs for all the inmates, a number of them regularly visited the families of prisoners. Throughout the data collection process, I joined a number of pastors on these family visits as they brought food and clothing collected from their congregations to the needy families of prisoners. Not only were the families grateful for the support, the prisoners, too, were thankful that someone was looking after their loved ones.

In the jail, there was absolutely no medical assistance provided by the state—just food and water. A few of the Pentecostal churches conducted campaigns to collect medical supplies (gauze, general pain relievers, and other medications) and then brought them to the jail for the inmate “doctor” to administer to the other inmates. The NGO Rio de Paz, whose members would not self-identify as Pentecostal but who were viewed as such by the inmates, earned the respect and trust of the inmates by providing basic medical services to the detainees in the jail. The Rio de Paz team visited P#1 every two weeks, led worship services, and brought a skilled dentist along with a portable dentist chair and equipment to perform dental work for the inmates. In this context, pulling a tooth was conceptualized by the volunteers as a sacred act of service.

Pastor Elizeu Coutinho Moraes, the pastor of a small, traditional Pentecostal congregation, drove 90 minutes each way to lead a weekly worship service at P#1. He

was in his early fifties, kept a well-trimmed mustache, and wore a tie clipped to a short-sleeve shirt that covered the bullet wounds on his torso from a time in his life that he described as being spent “participating in things of the world.” In the jail, he led traditional hymns from a battered electric guitar that he played with whatever coin he found in his pocket, and he usually passed the instrument to an inmate to play after the first couple of songs. When I met Pastor Elizeu for the first time, he handed me a business card that had Psalms 146:7 written on the bottom: “He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free.” Watching him month after month inside P#1, I noticed that the inmates held a particular respect for him, and he provided a fatherly presence inside the jail. He did not pastor a large congregation nor was he a flashy preacher, but he had a weighty presence in the jail. When I interviewed Pastor Elizeu on the patio of his very humble home, which sat adjacent to his church in an equally humble neighborhood, one of the first questions that I asked him was why the inmates treated him with such respect. He told me:

It is because we bring peace to them. The moments we pass with them in there, they can blow off some steam. They are able to let out what is going on inside of them. The things they can't talk to the guards about, they can't talk to the administration, they tell us. We don't only support them, we don't only support the prisoner, I go to the inmates' house. I give psychological and spiritual support to the families, the children, the mothers, so they respect us for this.

There were at least two reasons the pastor had such respect among the inmates. First, he brought rice, beans, cooking oil, and other food staples to some of the inmates' families who were struggling to make it with their loved one incarcerated. Second, the pastor himself had been incarcerated and was able to tell the men, “I know what it is like to sleep on the ground in a prison cell, ashamed and lonely.”

Defenders of Against the State

Being inside the prison on a consistent basis can provide opportunities for pastors to act as the inmates' direct defenders. Marcelo, an inmate housed on the Comando Vermelho side of P#1, can attest to this. Marcelo was an inmate who was likely safer inside the gang-controlled jail cellblock than he was on the streets. He arrived at P#1 just a few weeks after I did, and physically, he didn't stand out from the other inmates in his cellblock. He was in his early twenties, had brown skin, a light build, and a couple of poorly planned tattoos. One thing that was different about Marcelo was that he was the only inmate in P#1 with a photo of his daughter hanging from a string around his neck. The girl's smiling, four-year-old face was framed by shiny, metallic, precisely folded and interwoven candy wrappers. The smiling, innocent face in the custom frame created an object that looked strikingly out of place in the gray, dismal, dungeon-like conditions of P#1. Over the next six months, I never saw Marcelo without the necklace. During the worship services, he prayed with his daughter's photo pressed between the thumbs of his folded hands, and he silently mouthed his prayers while lightly pressing his lips to the picture.

Marcelo had a lot to pray about. He had been arrested after a botched robbery attempt that ended the life of a police officer, and he was the only one who had been arrested. I did not talk to Marcelo in depth about that evening, but he told me that he was part of a four-person group that carried out the heist. Since he was the only one caught, he was being accused as the shooter as well. He told me that he participated in the robbery as a driver but didn't kill anyone. I do not pretend to know what really happened on that evening, but what was clear to me was that members of the police force held

Marcelo responsible for the murder of their colleague and they knew where to find him. One afternoon a group of police officers arrived at P#1 and informed the warden that they were there to pick up Marcelo; they said he was being transferred to another facility. Usually the inmates are transferred in groups, so when word of the unusual transfer reached the CV cells, Marcelo panicked. He told me that when he heard the news, he knew that the police officers had arrived as executioners, not for a routine inmate transfer. Marcelo's fears were not the result of paranoia; inmates involved in the killing of a police officer regularly die in prison from mysterious causes.

Pastor Cicero was in the middle of the cellblock leading worship songs along with three teenagers from his church when a frantic Marcelo stopped the service to explain to Pastor Cicero what was happening. The pastor heard the inmate's plea for help, closed the service, and asked to be let out of the cells. Pastor Cicero told me that he went directly to the warden and said, "Please don't do this warden; please don't do this. In the name of Jesus, don't give this man to them." I don't know if the pastor touched the warden's conscience or if he created a concern that this pastor could serve as a witness, but the police officers left P#1 without Marcelo. I wasn't at P#1 that morning but heard corroborating versions of the story from the pastor, Marcelo, and another inmate who was in the CV section of the prison. The pastor didn't resolve all of Marcelo's problems that afternoon, but he may have saved his life and if he did, he could have played this role only by choosing to be physically present in the prison. Simply talking or writing about the injustices of the prison system may be useful endeavors but would not have helped Marcelo that afternoon. The pastor's act was not lost on the other men from the CV side

and instances like this buy the Pentecostal pastors respect even in the gang-controlled cells of the prison.

During the sermons in the cells, the Pentecostal pastors rarely spoke about the social injustices of Rio de Janeiro. They didn't tell the inmates that they were victims of an unjust legal system that disproportionately punishes the poor and exonerates the socially connected for a fee. Nor did they subscribe to the dominant narrative in Rio that not so subtly conceptualizes the criminals as the source of the city's social problems, deserving of the harshest punishment at hand. The pastors who visited the jail and prison in my study treated the inmates as people with inherent worth and value not only by preaching a message of redemption and hope, but by meeting some of the prisoners' most immediate material needs. In the prison context where lawyers and human rights advocates are nearly entirely absent, pastors can occupy a role that goes beyond spiritual guidance.

Keeping the Sacred Separate from the Profane

There is a separation between the sacred and the profane inside prison, though the line between the two can be blurred, if not completely crossed. The inmates themselves keep the two spheres separate by creating a strong Pentecostal identity that is enforced by both the Pentecostal inmates and the gang leaders. This is most evident in the fact that the Pentecostals and gangs live in their own cells, but it also periodically manifests in less predictable situations.

One Saturday morning, I joined the group from Rio de Paz to visit the P#1 jail. Rio de Paz had been visiting the jail every two weeks, but this routine had been broken because of a flare-up in gang violence against police in the streets. The jail's

administration cut all visits for a few weeks as a punishment/risk aversion strategy. As a result, there was confusion when the volunteers from Rio de Paz group showed up on Saturday morning. There had been a miscommunication and the group's arrival came as a surprise to both the guards and inmates. Eventually, the guards allowed Rio de Paz to enter. They set up their temporary medical center and held separate worship services for the inmates in the Comando Vermelho wing and for the others. The day passed without incident, and at the end of the day, the volunteers and jail administration both pledged to communicate better in the future.

Months after he left the jail, I spoke with a CV member who had served as the gang leader in P#1. We sat in the food court of a shopping mall and traded stories about the jail and people we both knew. After twenty minutes of catching up, he laughed to himself and started a new story by saying, "You never knew this, but..." The ex-inmate told me that on that Saturday when the volunteers from Rio de Paz arrived unexpectedly, the CV leaders had planned an escape in order to free a number of Comando Vermelho members. I was at P#1 that day but was in the cellblock when five men dressed in Civil Police uniforms arrived at the jail, entered the building, and started to talk with the two officers who were on duty as if they were part of the same police force. The men were not actually police officers but members of the Comando Vermelho dressed in police uniforms.⁶ The ex-inmate I spoke with did not tell me how these gang members procured

⁶ One of the unusual manifestations of police corruption in Rio is the illegal sale of police-issued firearms and uniforms on Rio's black market. The utility of the guns is fairly obvious, but the uniforms are another useful tool for criminal activities. The weapons and uniforms both command prices that are many times the monthly salary of a police officer and are sold, or rented, to the gangs by corrupt police officers.

the police uniforms, but they served their purpose as the guards on duty opened the jailhouse doors and let the group in.

I don't know exactly how the CV members planned to break out the specific inmates—they could have claimed to have a transfer notice for specific inmates or they could have taken hostages, demanding the cell door be opened under gunpoint. Whatever they had planned inside P#1 was cut short by a phone call placed by the CV leader whom I spoke with in the mall. He knew that an escape had been planned because he had been in conversations with the CV leaders at the maximum-security prison Bangu on cell phones that were illegally smuggled in to the jail and prison. The gang leader told me that he called his superiors in Bangu and told them to call off the escape attempt immediately when he realized that the escape was going to go down while the Rio de Paz volunteers were in the facility. When he hung up the phone, the Comando Vermelho leaders in Bangu then called one of the five gang members who had just entered the jail dressed as police officers. When the phone call from Bangu came in to a disguised gang member in the jail, he peeled off from the group and took the call. The voice on the other line told him to abort the mission. The group of CV members took the signal that the plan was called off, said good-bye to the guards, and left the building. A successful jailbreak was pulled off a few weeks later and dozens of Comando Vermelho members escaped, but on that day it was canceled because, as the ex-inmate told me, “We didn't want to get you guys in the middle of anything.”

The deliberate separation of illegal gang activity and public Pentecostal practice, the sacred and the profane, is present on the streets as well. Larger Pentecostal churches wanting to hold street revivals in gang-controlled neighborhoods must negotiate with the

gang leaders always, and the city officials sometimes, to take care of the logistics for the event. During these sorts of events, the gang will usually close or move their drug distribution points so as not to disrespect the church. I asked Pastor Elizeu about his experience in working with the gang members in these types of situations. He told me:

They don't close it [the drug den], but they have a certain respect. I had a project inside a community, inside a favela, and on the side of the community center there was an open-air drug market. Every time I went there, they transferred the drug market to a different place. They didn't want to endanger the people who were coming. They moved it so the police wouldn't arrive shooting, and then hit one of us in the crossfire. We are Pentecostals, so they move the drug traffic out of there when we come. If we were there, doing our work, the drug traffic in that area stopped. They moved it to another street or put it in back in a place where it is hidden. After, when we leave, it [the drug traffic] comes back and functions like usual. They have tremendous respect for us. They actually help us a lot. When we go inside a favela, they open a space for us in the neighborhood. They carry the chairs in on their head, or they give a soda or sandwich for everyone there. The drug traffickers tell me 'hey pastor, whatever you need, it will be there.' They bring a sound system, a complete sound system and we do our work. They really care for us. If there is drug use, they stop it because 'the brothers are here.' They don't let other pass through. They don't let people smoke, snort cocaine close to us, nobody. Sometimes when we come and they are smoking drugs, they hide it. You can smell it, but they are like 'hey, the pastor is here; hide that.'

Pastors and Gang Leaders Outside of the Prison Walls

There were surprisingly fraternal interactions between some of the pastors and some of the gang leaders in the favelas and gang-controlled neighborhoods in Rio. The pastors did not necessarily recognize the leadership of the gang leaders as legitimate, but they did acknowledge the power those leaders held over their communities and realized that if they wanted to work in those neighborhoods, they could only do so with the blessing of the non-state entities that effectively governed those areas. I had limited contact with gang leaders outside the prison walls, but I did observe this unlikely meeting of community leaders in Rio de Janeiro.

When I walked by the newspaper stand on my way to breakfast, I did an actual double take—the kind you see in the movies. What caught my attention were the three-color photographs spread over the front page of one of Rio’s newspapers. The photos were taken from inside the apartment of one of Rio’s most wanted drug bosses and were being used to show the luxurious apartment where he lived until he was forced to flee just as the police arrived to arrest him. The interior of the apartment was glitzy and gaudy. It was furnished with glass tables lit by a neon light, imported liquor bottles along the mantle, and an overstuffed sofa and chair curved around a large flat-screen television. This individual worked for one of Rio’s narco-gangs and controlled the drug trade as well as day-to-day life in a series of favelas in Rio. The accompanying article in the newspaper detailed the near arrest of the notorious gang leader while mixing in sensational details like the two crocodiles that were found in a house nearby and apparently used to intimidate whomever the gang felt needed to be intimidated. Stories like this were weekly, if not daily, occurrences in Rio de Janeiro’s tabloids, so seeing the photos were not out of the ordinary. The reason, then, that this particular newspaper story caught my attention was because I had been sitting on the very sofa shown in the newspaper’s photo less than two weeks before.

I hadn’t planned on sitting in the living room of a Comando Vermelho leader when I arranged to accompany a pastor on a visit to a poor neighborhood dominated by one of the narco-gangs. The pastor had met “Niko” a year ago when his church had arrived in the neighborhood with food and clothing to give to residents after a particularly destructive series of floods that were the result of inadequate infrastructure. It was widely known that Niko controlled the cluster of favelas and gave orders to the armed

young men who enforced the gang's unwritten rules. The notice for Niko's arrest posted on the police's webpage said as much. When the pastor visited the neighborhood for the first time during the food and clothing distribution, he asked to speak with Niko. The request was relayed through a messenger, and though the two had never met, Niko agreed to the meeting because he recognized the authority of the head pastor. The pastor informed Niko that he wanted to continue the social work in the neighborhood and asked, albeit naively, for Niko to end his armed occupation of the neighborhood. Niko told the pastor that it wasn't so simple. He had nearly a decade of prison time hanging over his head and even if his high-priced lawyers were able to reduce his prison time, he had powerful enemies in the police force that he was certain would kill him or frame him for something if he tried to live as a citizen.

After the first meeting, the two agreed to speak again in the future and I accompanied the pastor on his follow-up meeting. Though I didn't have any official standing in his church, the pastor was glad for another person to come along with him. Entering communities that are outside the police's control is an intimidating enterprise and having another person along decreases an individual's vulnerability. When we arrived at the entrance to the neighborhood, we were met by leaders of the community association and given a brief walking tour of the community. As the pastor spoke with two women who lived in adjacent wooden shacks that had an exposed sewer running five feet in front of their homes, Niko arrived on his motorcycle. When I shook his hand, I couldn't help but stare at the semi-automatic pistol strapped to the side of his leg. The pastor handed Niko a religious book that he had promised to bring in their last meeting, and the two of them agreed to meet in the courtyard in fifteen minutes. When we arrived

in the open space outside Niko's apartment building that served as the headquarters for his operation, he had taken the gun off his leg and was following the day's police movements on a mobile internet device. The pastor introduced me to Niko again because he wanted to know exactly why I was there, and the three of us sat around a concrete picnic table. I told Niko that I would not reveal the details of the conversation and I won't, but Niko spoke openly about the neighborhood and how the new pacification strategy was dismantling the gang's ability to do business. After talking for over an hour, he invited us into his home because his lunch was ready. The pastor and I each accepted a glass of water and sat on the sofa as Niko ate his lunch while sitting at the glass table that would soon be on the front page of the newspaper. I was surprised that Niko would talk so openly to a pastor considering that he was not a religious person, but I believe one reason he was willing to do this was because he trusted the pastor's intention to implement educational programs for the children of the community, and he appreciated the pastor's willingness to listen to his problems without judging.

After another forty minutes, Niko got a phone call and had to leave abruptly so we shook hands and parted ways. The community association leaders who were serving as our "guides" were waiting outside for us when we left the apartment and at the pastor's request, we continued the neighborhood tour by visiting the area where the gang sold crack cocaine. Visiting *Cracolandia* (Crack Land) placed Niko's role in the community in a more complete and harsher light. Cracolandia was located under a commuter train underpass and had been operating as an open-air crack cocaine market for over a year. Neither of us was prepared for what we encountered there. There were over a dozen people living in ad hoc tents and sleeping on discarded mattresses. Thousands of pieces

of paper and plastic wrapping littered the rocks around the train tracks. The pieces of paper were printed with the gangs' logo and the "brand name" of the crack and were inserted as labels into the plastic wrappers when the drugs were packaged.

Our small group approached some of the people living in Cracolândia and after a set of very tense introductions, the pastor spoke with two young women who were living there and, as they said, were "slaves" to crack. One of the women started to smoke crack after a fire that destroyed her house and killed her mother and only child. Homeless, alone, and profoundly depressed, she began what had been a two-and-a-half-year crack addiction. The other young woman first smoked crack while she was in jail and for the last three years had become involved in prostitution to support her habit. The pastor and I sat in silent shock as she told us that the johns who came to Cracolândia were not just looking to use someone for sex, but for someone they could violently abuse in the anarchy of this place. We were emotionally shaken by their stories and by the tears that streamed down their emaciated cheeks from their vacant eyes. These women put a face to the consequences of Niko's business, and the realization that his gangster-chic apartment was funded in part by these women's addiction put his position into a different context.

The interaction I witnessed between pastors and active gang leaders was marked by mutual respect, but it is important to note that not all pastor/gang interactions are so harmonious. In 2009, Pastor Odilon Calixto da Cunha arrived in the Vigário Geral favela in Rio de Janeiro from the neighboring state of Minas Gerais to pastor a *Deus é Amor* (God is Love) Pentecostal church. Rio can be a difficult place for Brazilians from other regions to gain acceptance because of cultural differences and regional rivalries, but the

pastor did not help his cause when he refused to accept food from the back of a truck that the gang had stolen shortly after he arrived with his family. After telling members of the Pure Third Comando, the gang that dominated Vigário Geral, that his car was broken when they asked him to take a colleague with a bullet wound to the hospital, relations between the pastor and the gang cooled even further. The gang's leader called the pastor to a face-to-face meeting and accused him of being a police informant, revealing the problematic arrangement between some pastors and drug traffickers. The gang leader told him that another pastor in the neighborhood actively cooperated with the gang and that Pastor Odilon's refusal to participate signified to the gang leader that he was involved with the police. The meeting didn't end well, and the next day, three armed gang members invaded the pastor's house demanding the family leave immediately. The pastor and his family spent the night huddled under the awning of a closed supermarket with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Pastor Odilon told the newspaper, "I know I shouldn't be so angry, but when my youngest, a two-year-old, was lying on the sidewalk, cold and hugging me, I could not want anything other than that they all be arrested and pay for the humiliation that they put us through. It was very cowardly to send my wife and children out of the house with only the clothes on their backs, not even letting them eat the food that was on the stove. I want them to suffer" (O Dia 11/23/09).

This story highlights the fact that there is an inherent conflict between expressed goals of the gangs and the Pentecostal churches. Though they often operate in the same spaces, they have a fundamentally different set of operating values and actions. It also highlights the importance of charisma in an individual pastor's ability to maneuver in a world where the gang, not the state, is the strongest power. If Pastor Odilon had been

able to establish a more charismatic authority, he may not have had such a conflict with the Pure Third Command. Also, not all of the gangs acknowledge the legitimacy of the Pentecostal pastors equally. The Pure Third Command has a different institutional culture than the Comando Vermelho, for example. Finally, though the unnamed pastor accused of cooperating with the gang was an unsubstantiated accusation, it shows that the close proximity to a wealthy criminal organization may lead to illegal activity by the pastor. Because the power achieved by the pastor as an individual and in at least in some through personal charisma, there is little institutional oversight the temptation for a pastor to use his or her privileged position for person gain is very real.

If you are too close to the fire...

Stories of “corrupt” Pentecostal pastors swirled around Rio de Janeiro. I spoke with a pastor who had been visiting the prisons of Rio for the past ten years and he told me about an offer he was given at one of the maximum-security prisons in Rio. The prison he visited as a volunteer held some of the most well-known leaders of one of Rio’s strongest criminal gangs. One morning as the pastor was leaving the cellblocks after a worship service, he was approached by a man who introduced himself as the uncle of a very powerful organized crime leader. The man complimented the pastor on his work and said that his nephew had been observing him over the past few months and had given him a glowing recommendation. He thanked the pastor for the work he had been doing with his nephew and the other inmates and followed up by telling him that he would like to bless his church.

The blessing this man offered was a bit more complicated than dropping an envelope into the offering plate. The man offered to open two bank accounts, one in the

pastor's name and the other in the church's name. He said that at the beginning of each month he would deposit a substantial sum, around 100,000 Reais (\$60,000) in each of the two accounts. At the end of the month, the man would withdraw ninety percent of the money and the remaining ten percent would stay as the "blessing." He said that he wanted to see the money in the church account be used for church business, rent, and fuel for the car that the pastor used to visit the prisons. He then told the pastor that the remaining deposit left in the account under the pastor's name was his to use as he pleased.

I had visited this pastor's church and there is no doubt that this sort of arrangement would have dramatically increased the church's budget, which relied solely on the tithes of the congregation members. The pastor told me that he was certainly tempted by the offer, but he told the man in the most delicate terms possible that he had to decline the offer. The man who claimed to be the uncle of the incarcerated gang leader did not press the issue any further but told the pastor that he had made this offer to a number of pastors in the city and very few of them had refused it. Though I did not witness any illegal activity by Pentecostal pastors or volunteers inside the prisons, the unique space they occupy in the prisons is very valuable to certain inmates and the opportunities for corruption are an inherent risk run by these individuals.

The Last Days Assembly of God

Shortly after 11:00 a.m. on November 9, 2010, authorities lost control of the Pedrinhas Prison Complex in São Luis, the capital city of Maranhão, Brazil. A rivalry that had been simmering for weeks between prisoners from two different cities boiled over into a violent prison riot. A dozen inmates had been killed, and law enforcement

officials were sent in to collect the severed heads of three prisoners that had been thrown over the walls. It was a brutal Monday morning. Inside the facility, corpses were piled on top of each other in a janitor's closet, five prison employees had been taken hostage and ten inmates had been marked for execution if the other inmates' demands were not met. São Luis' Prison Marshal Daniel Brandão needed to act swiftly but didn't want to send in the SWAT team, which would certainly double or triple the already staggering body count. Brandão made a decision that has become increasingly common for prison officials facing this type of situation: he called on a Pentecostal pastor to negotiate peace.

Marcos Pereira, minister of the Last Days Assembly of God (LDAG) church in Rio de Janeiro, received the call from the prison marshal that afternoon. Within a couple of hours, he and ten other members of the church had boarded a plane to Sao Luis, nearly 2,000 miles to the north. The group arrived at midnight and went straight to the prison, which was now completely controlled by the inmates. Pastor Pereira was able to speak with the inmates leading the riot through a cell phone that had been smuggled inside, and he received authorization to return the next morning to start negotiations. On November tenth, Pastor Pereira and the church members were allowed to pass through lines of heavily armed police and walk through the prison yard to speak to the inmates through the windows. After the initial contact between the pastor and the prisoners, the inmates released two hostages. The remaining three were freed an hour later. Pereira then entered the prison, where the inmates surrendered three handguns and a collection of knives and told him that the siege was over. The local newspapers covered the bloody riot, but only briefly mentioned the arrival of the LDAG group. The newspaper articles didn't say exactly how the riot ended, just that prison authorities had regained control of the facility

and that a Pentecostal pastor from Rio de Janeiro assisted in the process. I interviewed some of the members of the church who were there during the riot, but I was able to gather the details of the event because LDAG filmed it and sold the footage on a DVD, which I bought for six dollars in a store outside the church.

This Pedrinhas riot wasn't the first prison emergency that Pastor Marcos had negotiated; he has been called to more than a dozen prison riot or hostage situations in the last decade. He has gained notoriety and abundant media attention not only in Rio de Janeiro, but throughout the country for his work in the prison system and his influence within Rio's criminal networks. The visibility of Pastor Marcos and his church first rose to national prominence during the last three days of May 2004, as Rio de Janeiro was suffering with the worst prison riot in the city's history. The prisoners had taken control of the Benefica penal facility and after two days of rioting, over thirty guards and prisoners lay dead on the concrete prison floor. Negotiations between prison officials and the inmates had completely stalled, but before the military police stormed the facility, the rioting prisoners asked for Pastor Marcos by name and he was flown in by helicopter to negotiate with the inmates and the hostages. The pastor entered the prison with fifteen church members and spoke with the prison gang leaders who were in control of the rebellion. After a few hours, Pastor Pereira and the members of his congregation left the prison and informed the guards that they could now enter the facility without fear—the riot was over. When asked how he was able to negotiate a peaceful ending to this brutal episode, he responded:

Coming in, I saw prisoners dangling by their feet, ready to be decapitated, others were tied to gas cylinders. There were many with wounds and burns. I said a prayer

and many fell possessed by demons; I prayed and sung praise hymns. Then we took the guns from them before they got back to their cells. (Guilherme 6/1/2004)

Before the media coverage that followed the 2004 Benefica prison riot, Pastor Marcos had gained a strong following among Rio's inmates and it is important to look at the pastor's work in prison from not only the medias' and church members' perspectives, but from the inmates' perspectives as well. I spoke with João who was in the maximum-security prison Bangu in 2002 when a riot started. In response to the transfer of Comando Vermelho leaders to another prison, the imprisoned gang leaders led a full-scale riot and demanded that all inmates in the cellblocks they controlled throw their mattresses into the hallways and set them on fire. From João's perspective, the pastor's arrival was a divine intervention for a riot that had gotten out of control.

The Comando leader ordered to set fires in the prison, and it was hell. I don't know what hell is like, but they say in the Bible that hell is hot, and there's wailing and gnashing of teeth. I'll tell you that things were really ugly there, because the guy in charge of the jail ordered people to set fire to the mattresses and everything. They made a huge bonfire, and the prison doesn't have any ventilation system- it's just a big passage without any outlet for the smoke, so the smoke from the mattresses, reeking, began to fall down, and there wasn't any ventilation system. The smoke kept falling if you were walking through the hall, it looked like the roof was caving in with all of that smoke. People were dying from suffocation and were being trampled, and the riot squad came, wanting to get in, wanting to get in, and I remember it as if it was today and the only person who was able to get inside to calm the prisoners was Pastor Marcos. That was in 2002. If the riot squad had come in they would have killed everyone, you know? But that didn't happen because Pastor Marcos, that man is a man of God—he doesn't know a lot of things that I'm telling you, but what he—what he did—him passing through there was really important for my life because if the riot squad had gotten in that day, I would be dead, man.

Though the police force was grateful for the pastor's intervention in the maximum-security prison, just three years after the riot, Pastor Marcos Pereira was banned from entering Bangu by the very same police force because he was accused of

having illicit ties to the Comando Vermelho gang. Pastor Marcos and his church, the Last Days Assemblies of God, is a vivid example of the controversial position that Pentecostal pastors have achieved in the penal facilities of Rio de Janeiro and much of Brazil. Pastor Marcos and a select number of other Pentecostal pastors have used what Max Weber would define as charismatic authority to become powerful players in the prison system and have used this authority to thwart potential prison massacres. But this type of power is inherently vulnerable to be used by a charismatic individual for personal gain and possibly illegal activity. I spent nine months and hundreds of hours at the LDAG church and accompanied them on dozens of prison visits. The data I collected at LDAG shows how complicated the Pentecostal pastor's role of liaison between the state and the inmate can be.

Welcome to our church...you're not the police are you?

I wiped sweaty hands on the side of my pants before reaching into my wallet to pay the motorcycle taxi driver when we arrived at the Last Days Assemblies of God Church. The shirtless driver that I had hired at the end of the subway line had employed a different risk/reward ratio while driving than I would have, but I was glad to have made it in one piece. I had visited the church a couple of times in the previous weeks and sent a dozen emails, but I had been unable to speak with Pastor Marcos Pereira or to receive official permission to include the congregation in my study. I decided to take a more direct approach by showing up at the church's doorstep in the early afternoon, three hours before the Wednesday evening worship service and try to make the necessary connections face to face.

There was a group of four men in suits talking by the staircase that led to the church and when I arrived, they stopped their conversation and looked at me as I handed the cracked plastic helmet back to the motorcycle driver. I recognized one of the men in the group and said hello with a familiar tone, pretending to know him better than I really did. He turned to the man next to him and said loud enough for me to hear, “That is the ‘gringo’ I told you about,” and he smiled cautiously at me. I shook hands with all of the men in the circle and tried to succinctly explain my intentions. Before I could finish my researcher’s spiel, a person who turned out to be Pastor Marcos’s brother turned to me and said, “*vamos.*” He pointed to a new, imported SUV that was covered in a giant decal of a church member who was running for senate in the next month’s election. Without knowing where we were going or exactly why I was going along, I hopped into the vehicle. Once I got into the car, the first question he asked me was if I was part of the police. I laughed off the odd question (though it was repeated by others at the church during my fieldwork) and said I wasn’t. As he drove, I did my best to answer the questions he asked me concerning who I was and why I was there. I told him that I first heard about the church more than a year before when I was walking through a street market in Rio and saw a video clip playing on a portable television of a service conducted by Pastor Marcos and the members of his church inside a jail.

The Last Days Assemblies of God is located in a lower-income neighborhood more than thirty miles from the beach and is surrounded by favelas. As we drove, I felt like I was with a local celebrity because almost every pedestrian waved at us as we passed. In the middle of one of my answers to the pastor’s questions, he stopped the car in the middle of the street to talk to a group of teenagers standing huddled on the corner.

The pastor rolled down the window, greeted them, and asked what the police had been doing in the neighborhood. The boy who looked to be the oldest responded by saying that the police had passed through the area a few hours ago, but things had been calm. Without a good-bye we continued cutting through the backstreets, and in between fielding numerous phone calls on his three cell phones, the pastor talked about the sinful life he had lived in the past, his conversion experience, and how there were people out there persecuting his family's church.

After zigzagging through the neighborhood, he jumped the curb on the side of the street and parked the truck directly beneath a "no parking" sign in front of a busy bakery. He motioned for me to follow, so the two of us entered the bakery and passed in front of the fifteen people who were waiting in line for their chance to buy the bread that was just coming out of the oven. The bakery's owner was in the back by the ovens, and when he saw the two of us, he immediately dropped what he was doing to come out from behind the counter and greet the pastor. I was introduced to the owner as a reporter from the United States (I didn't feel like splitting hairs and correcting him) and the pastor and the bakery owner, who was not a church member, spoke for a few minutes before the owner darted behind the counter to grab a paper bag. He filled it with steaming, fist-sized loaves of white bread and the owner then called over to an employee and had her grab a large loaf of his locally famous sweet bread. He handed the overflowing bag to the pastor, and after shaking hands, the pastor and I headed toward the door. I think I was the only one in the bakery who was surprised when the pastor walked past the cash register without revealing even the slightest hint of paying.

As we climbed back into the SUV, I realized that I was with someone who had considerable pull in the neighborhood. On the way back to the church, we stopped at a traffic light and a small sedan sped up and stopped directly next to the driver's side of the SUV. The passenger in the car rolled down his window, said something to the pastor that I couldn't understand, and then passed a piece of paper that was rolled up into a cylinder about an inch long with the diameter of a plastic drinking straw. After the handoff, the car sped away. Sitting in the passenger seat, I pretended that the exchange I had just witnessed was not out of the ordinary and continued to look out the window as the pastor unrolled the note and read the message. I have no idea what was written on the paper. It could have been anything from a prayer request to a message that the person did not want to risk passing over the telephone, which may be tapped by the police. The pastor's phone rang again as we headed back to the church and I had a question pop into my head that would become a recurring one during the time I spent at the Last Days Assemblies of God: "Who exactly are these people?"

After my ride through the neighborhood, we returned to the church and parked next to one of Pastor Marcos's vintage American automobiles (he collects them). I wandered around the church grounds talking with the men who were living at the church. One of the church members brought me to the sleeping area where more than fifty men were currently living. Each man had a bunk bed, mattress, and a closet for their possessions. These men were there because they were trying to break a drug habit, were recently released from prison, or were in imminent danger in their neighborhoods. Some of the men in the dorm had arrived wounded from a recent beating or shooting and lay on their beds with heads, arms, and legs in bandages. Those who were of able body spent

their days working on construction or maintenance projects in the church, or in street evangelism, or during the elections, political campaigns. When I told the guy who was showing me around that I was interested in talking to people who had been in prison, he started to shout out to the people milling around, “Who here has been in prison?” or to individuals, “Have you been in prison?” More than half the men staying at the church said they had—one had been previously incarcerated, one man just left prison the day before and had come directly to the church.

I went to the worship service that evening and after three hours of singing, testimonies, offerings, and preaching, the service ended with a prayer. I hung around talking to members of the congregation and introduced myself to as many people as possible. I started to speak with a man in his mid-twenties who came to live in the church while trying to recover from a cocaine addiction that was destroying his life. His uncle, who was not a practicing Pentecostal, came to that evening’s worship service to check on his nephew and was genuinely thrilled to see how the young man’s gaunt, skeletal face had been replaced with fuller cheeks and clear eyes. He told me that this was the only place he knew that accepted drug addicts for no fee and said that God was using Pastor Marcos in his nephew’s life. The uncle drove over an hour to get to the church and was ready to start his journey home. I was a bit concerned because it was already past 10:30 p.m. and my prospects for public transportation were waning, so I gratefully accepted his offer to drop me off at the metro station. Before we could work out the details, Gustavo, one of the church leaders, stood by the door and waved me over. I tried to motion with my hands that I would be right there and kept talking. Gustavo responded with a frown of frustration and shuffled through the empty chairs to talk to me.

When he arrived next to us, he stopped our conversation and told me, “Pastor said I was supposed to give you some attention,” and he led me away. I told the uncle that I would meet him in the parking lot in a few minutes and walked with Gustavo, who was in charge of the fifty men living at the church.

This was my first of many interactions with Gustavo, a former Comando Vermelho leader who converted inside prison, and it was awkward. He was posted at the church’s exit to say good-bye to the people as they left, but when he told me that he was supposed to give me some attention, he really meant that he was supposed to watch me. In order to do that, he wanted me as close as possible, so for the next ten minutes, I stood next to him in silence as he wished the churchgoers a safe trip home. It was a not-so-subtle way of letting me know that my movements were being monitored. Five months later, just before recording an interview with Gustavo, he laughingly told me, “You know, when you first came, we thought you were a spy. So we wanted to keep you close.”

It took two months of making the four- to five-hour round trip journey to visit the church before I was able to break through the initial suspicion of the church’s leadership. I was able to speak to Pastor Marcos in his office and he gave me permission to conduct fieldwork at the church and talk to whomever I wanted, but that was the only time I spoke with him. The men living at the church were more than happy to talk with me and I was treated with genuine warmth and hospitality from the congregation members. I got to know many of the men who lived at the church well, and they invited allowed me to observe dozens of their worship services in Rio’s jails and gave me access to dozens of hours of footage they had filmed in the prisons and favelas. But in order for me to record

any interviews or to speak with anyone individually, they had to get permission from Pastor Marcos or one of his family members.

Not Your Typical Congregation

Though LDAG is certainly not a typical Pentecostal church and my reception there was even more unique, I was determined to include it in my study because of its very public focus on working with prisoners and ex-inmates. Five days a week, LDAG sends a van with a team of church members out to the different jails throughout Rio de Janeiro, including P#1. Unlike any other Pentecostal congregation I visited, nearly one hundred people (sixty to seventy men and thirty to forty women) lived on-site in the church building. Nearly all of them arrived at the church during intense personal crisis. Apart from the church, LDAG has an immense, immaculately well-groomed piece of land outside the city that is used as a residential drug rehabilitation center. People are brought into the intake office at the church where staff members evaluate each person's situation and decide whether he or she will be accepted. Some of the men arrived on the church's steps after coming down from a cocaine binge while some were literally carried in by distraught family members desperately trying to find a solution for their loved one's addiction. Others came to the church to escape death threats on their lives from rival gangs or a failed drug transaction. The church has a hotline that is staffed twenty-four hours a day that tipsters or people in peril can call. Others arrived at the church simply because they were tired of living criminal lifestyles and this was the only way they could think of to get out. Once they were accepted into the program, they were assigned to a bed in the church or put in a minivan and taken to the off-site rehabilitation center. In my conversations with the men (I didn't interview any women and spoke with very few) and

in the testimonies I recorded, they spoke about their personal crises, but each of the stories was framed as part of a religious conversion or recommitment. It wasn't simply that they wanted to quit drugs or the gangs—they wanted to live lives that were pleasing to God and their membership in the church was part of this project.

Though the church had “Assembly of God” as part of its name, it was an independent congregation and was not a part of the Assemblies of God denomination, nor was it accountable to any outside entity. Many Pentecostal groups in Latin America stress modest dress, but the LDAG implemented their own distinctive clothing requirements that set them apart from other Pentecostal congregations. All of the men had to wear dress slacks and button-up shirts during the day, were prohibited from wearing the colors red or black (colors associated with the Comando Vermelho, and according to Pastor Marcos, the devil), and were prohibited from wearing clothing with any visible logos or images. During the services, all the official members of the church wore suits and ties and sat on gender-specific sides of the sanctuary. I asked Gustavo, the church member who kept watch over the day-to-day operations, to explain the men's dress code and he told me:

Imagine if I'm gonna speak with Obama, right? The President of the United States. I can't be wearing shorts and be shirtless. I have to be presentable. And I know a person who is more important than Obama, and that's Jesus. He is dignified, completely honorable, glorious, magnificent. So we dress this way because we're speaking with him all of the time, and so we have to be prepared to be in the presence of a king.

The women had a separate dress code that Pastor Marcos said was revealed to him during a time of prayer and fasting. Female church members, even young girls, wore brightly colored robes, not only during the services, but during the day as well. Their

doctrine, which is posted on their website, also requires that a woman's hair be tied into a bun on the top of her head and during the services, men and women sat on separate sides of the sanctuary. The official written doctrine offers a number of Old Testament verses as justification for the strict dress code and emphasizes that a woman should keep her body covered and only expose it to her husband. During one of the services I attended, the subject of the robes came up in one the sermons and the pastor stressed how the church members' lives must be lived as a godly example because people on the streets could identify them as LDAG members because of their dress. The pastor then continued by saying that the robes were a blessing because they effectively decreased the temptation for sinning or for tempting others to sin. To prove his point, he pointed to one of the women on stage and said, "I mean, just try sinning in one of those."

Because of the size of the church, the popularity of the worship services, the thousands of people who had participated in the drug rehabilitation program, and the media coverage, LDAG was very well known throughout the community. People who were facing financial or personal crisis showed up at the church almost every day. One afternoon, I brought to the church two American academics who represented the organization that had funded my project. The three of us were taken on a tour of the building and when we arrived at the women's dorms, there was a young woman sitting on a chair being consoled by female members of the church in their brightly colored robes. The woman was in her early twenties and gently sobbed through swollen, reddened eyes that revealed both sorrow and fear. A woman from the church sat with her arm draped over the crying visitor's shoulder and told us that the police had executed the lady's husband the day before. She had come to the church because she didn't have the money

to bury her husband and was scared that the police would come after her next. I don't know if, or how, the church was able to help this woman, but her choice to turn to the church reveals the trust that many community residents place in the LDAG.

Politics

The tremendous influence of the church was not lost on the local politicians, and the interest of the politicians was not lost on Pastor Marcos. I arrived at the church a couple of months before the elections in 2010 and during those first two months of fieldwork, political candidates were a constant presence at the LDAG worship services. Some of the candidates were only introduced to the congregation at the beginning of the service, but others were given a more enthusiastic and direct endorsement by the pastor. One candidate in particular was called onto the stage by Pastor Marcos three or four nights in a row during the week before the election. Pastor Marcos brought the man on stage and prayed that God would bless his campaign and told the congregation about the candidate's genuine interest in doing what was best for his community. As if the resounding endorsement accentuated by a direct plea to God was not clear enough, Pastor Marcos put his hand on the politician's shoulder and asked the following question of the seven or eight hundred people in the congregation, "Who here likes my work?" Almost every hand in the sanctuary shot up in response. The pastor waited a beat for the hands to lower and then asked the follow-up question, "So then, who here is going to vote for this man?" Once again, a sea of hands rose into the air.

That same evening, another politician who hadn't been called onto the stage did his best to elicit goodwill from the potential voters in the church by inserting himself into the spotlight during the nightly offering. The candidate looked out of place in a

congregation comprised mostly of poor and working class people, many of whom had all their worldly possessions stored in one of the lockers at the church or its rehabilitation center. The candidate's white skin, tailored sport jacket, long and wavy white hair, and bleached teeth didn't fit the LDAG aesthetic, and the personal assistant/body guard who followed him around didn't either. When the candidate was briefly introduced to the crowd at the beginning of the service, he turned to the congregation and flashed a rehearsed smile, greeting them with a mechanical wave before he took his seat. An hour or so later, when the call for the offering was given, hundreds of people got up from their chairs, formed a long line that wrapped around the sanctuary, and waited to drop their envelopes of cash into the purple velvet bags held by the ushers. The politician waited in his chair as a vocalist in a violet robe belted out praise songs over a prerecorded track. Her new CD was for sale at the end of the service. After seven or eight minutes, the line of people waiting to give their tithes and offerings had dwindled down to just a few stragglers. In a calculated move that ensured maximum visibility, the politician got up from his chair and literally raised an offering envelope above his head for everyone to see. He was the last person of the evening to approach the ushers and by the time he got to the front of the church, he was the only person standing. With his envelope now elevated only to shoulder level, he turned to the congregation, paused, and dramatically placed the envelope into the offering basket. He then hugged each of the ushers and turned to face the crowd where he again smiled and waved before taking his seat. I don't know how he fared in the election that took place a few days after the service. I didn't see him at LDAG after the election, but he certainly understood the political influence of the church and its pastor.

Pastor Marcos was not just handing out endorsements in the November 2010 elections; he had his own horse in the race. Waguinho, a well-known samba musician who had converted to Christianity and had been working for the church for more nearly a decade, was running for office in the state senate. Leading up to the election, the church routinely handed out propaganda for the candidate that contained a full-page personal endorsement from Pastor Marcos along with his photo in the upper right corner. The church had two SUVs (I was given a ride in one of them) parked in the church's parking lot that were covered with Waguinho's photo and campaign slogan, and the church used them to bring teams of men and women who lived in the LDAG dorms to canvas neighborhoods and pass out campaign literature on busy street corners. The ex-addicts, ex-inmates, and ex-gang members became a political campaigning machine, and for weeks leading up to the elections, the church would send out men and women to campaign for Waguinho. Though Waguinho didn't win a spot in the state senate, 1.3 million people voted for him, and his initial campaign was a clear example of LDAG's future political ambition.

A Pastor Under Fire

Pastor Marcos was the most polemic figure I encountered in Rio de Janeiro. I heard dozens of testimonies from individuals who credited the pastor for single-handedly saving their lives by intervening during the prison riots, mediating gang conflicts in the favelas, or helping them quit using drugs. The church's printed literature says that over 7,000 people have participated in their drug rehabilitation program free of charge. Pastor Marcos acknowledges the existence of his detractors, but defiantly states that no hard evidence of illegal activity has ever been uncovered by the media or by Rio's police

force. But a cloud of suspicion has hovered over LDAG, particularly Pastor Marcos, over the last few years and much of the criticism has come from the Brazilian Protestant religious leaders and commentators.

Widely read religion blogger Danilo Fernandes has accused Pastor Marcos's church of transforming into a cult. He cites the lack of biblical foundation for the pastor's unique doctrine that includes not only the dress code for men and women, but oddities like prohibiting members from drinking Coca-Cola, watching television, or keeping animals as pets. He also accuses the pastor of using hypnotic "tricks" in his demon exorcism ritual, citing one of the most (in)famous routines where Pastor Marcos lines dozens of people in a row and runs alongside them, passing his sport coat over their heads and causing them to fall like dominoes (<http://www.genizahvirtual.com/2010/06/seita-do-pastor-marcos-pereira.html>). I spoke with dozens of Pentecostal pastors who stopped short of accusing the pastor of heresy, but expressed deep concerns with the theology, or lack thereof, taught in the worship services. Others, including some of the ex-inmates I spoke with who were living at the church, were uncomfortable with the very visible personal wealth displayed by the pastor. He wore a Rolex watch and had a collection of very expensive imported vintage cars parked at the church that were washed daily by the recovering drug addicts and ex-inmates. Rumors circulated in Pentecostal circles that the pastor had an illicit relationship to the Comando Vermelho through his extended family members.

Other, less theologically based, accusations have been levied against the pastor by members outside Rio's religious community. In 2004, Pastor Marcos was banned from the maximum-security prison Bangu by Rio's Penitentiary Administration, even though

he had negotiated peace in a number of prison riots. The official reason for the pastor's ban was that two sisters of the Comando Vermelho's leader, Marcinho VP, attended the LDAG and were present during the pastor's visits to the CV's wing of the prison. Concerns over this relationship were heightened when a high-ranking Comando Vermelho member was found hiding in an apartment owned by an LDAG sister church in another state. No evidence of any wrongdoing was uncovered in the ensuing police investigation, but Pastor Marcos's permission to enter the facility was revoked, even after he negotiated peace in a deadly riot in that very prison. Currently, Pastor Marcos is under investigation again after the leader of the NGO AfroReggae accused the pastor of being the "largest criminal mind in Rio de Janeiro." In a televised interview, he told the audience, "If one day a gun appears inside of AfroReggae, it was on his order. If cocaine appears, it was him who ordered it to bring us down. If anything happens to me, Pastor Marcos Pereira da Silva is the one responsible."⁷ Junior said he also suspected that Pastor Marcos had instigated some of the thirteen prison riots that he had been brought in to mediate and that he uses his influence with the gang to increase his personal wealth.

A one-hour, televised investigational journalism program that aired in March 2012 on one of Rio's networks added to the accusations being lobbed at Pastor Marcos. Reporters interviewed a number of former church members who left the LDAG after they had witnessed the pastor's transformation from a servant of God to a self-serving and dangerous rogue pastor. The ex-church members, all but one of whom asked for their identity to be hidden for fear of retribution, accused the pastor of everything from sexual

⁷ <http://veja.abril.com.br/noticia/brasil/policia-investiga-ligacao-de-pastor-com-ataques-do-trafico-no-rio>

assault to drug trafficking and money laundering. Pastor Marcos has vehemently denied the allegations and when he was interviewed by the reporters, over 200 church members sat in the pews in support of their leader.

At this time, the serious accusations against Pastor Marcos are only accusations. The Civil Police is still conducting their investigation as I write this and no evidence has been presented to back these accusations. I had very little contact with the leadership team in LDAG, but I had frequent and unsupervised contact and conversations with the men who lived at the church. In the nine months I spent collecting data at LDAG, I witnessed a lot of strange things and saw a pastor hungry for media attention and for expanding his church but nothing illegal. Also, nobody I spoke with in an interview or otherwise reported any illicit connections between LDAG and criminal organizations in Rio de Janeiro. In candid conversations, some members living at the church complained about the church's strict rules and said that the pastor gave more attention to the high-profile guests during the worship services. One church member confessed that he was uncomfortable with the pastor's tremendous wealth and constant focus on money, given the Bible's warnings against accumulating riches. I spoke with dozens of church members who live in the church building and dozens of others who live in the neighborhood and regularly attend the services. While I did hear some rumblings of dissatisfaction, these concerns were overwhelmingly outweighed by resounding support and admiration for the man and his church. It was not only the church members who spoke positively about LDAG. The inmates I spoke with at P#1 (both gang- and non-gang-affiliated) spoke highly of the church's work in the jail, and I had literally dozens of people tell me that if it were not for LDAG opening its doors to them, they would be

dead. But I would not be completely honest if I did not mention that I stopped visiting the church for more than a month because I was worried that if I uncovered something illegal during my research, my personal safety would be at risk.

My discussion of Pastor Marcos and the LDAG is not an attempt to determine whether the pastor is actually saint or sinner, a prophet or heretic, or if the church has, in fact, turned into a cult. I doubt the answers to those questions are as clear-cut as the binaries would suggest. I focus on this church because the congregation and pastor vividly exemplify that Pentecostalism is located right in the middle of Rio de Janeiro's complex social world of gangs, God, and guns. The LDAG is a church that opens its doors to the most stigmatized members of society and provides both spiritual and material assistance to those with nowhere to turn. But the respect and devotion it has gained from the inmates, ex-gang members, and ex-drug addicts has launched Pastor Marcos into celebrity status in Rio de Janeiro, which has proven to be a very profitable position.

Entering the cellblocks with the Pentecostal pastors during the first couple weeks of fieldwork, I was struck (and privately critical) at the lack of outrage they displayed at the conditions of the penal institutions, especially the jails. I thought that the pastors were turning a blind eye to the gross human rights violations and the inhumane living conditions and focusing simply on the spiritual realm. The critique I made internally was not a new one. I was reminded of a Johnny Cash chorus that tells some unnamed, religiously pious leader that “You’re so heavenly minded, you’re no earthly good” (Cash 2003).

But as I continued to visit the prisons, I realized that the situation was more nuanced than I first thought. First, as I became more familiar with the jails and prisons through regular visits, I, too, became acclimated to the environment and less and less appalled by the overcrowded cells, the intense heat, and the rampant corruption. After a few weeks, I expected my shirt to become heavy with sweat and wasn’t shocked when I had to step over an obviously ill or wounded inmate lying on the concrete floor in order to get to the Pentecostal space at the back of the cellblock. Looking over my field notes, I noticed that after my first few visits I wrote almost exclusively about the horrific conditions of the prison, the abundance of contraband, and the corruption that dictates everything from the type of food an inmate eats, to the bed where he sleeps, to his access to family visits. After just a few weeks of fieldwork however, I had stopped commenting on the inmates’ material hardships and more on the people living in the midst of them. I developed relationships with the inmates through casual and frequent conversations and recorded interviews, and their stories and struggle to survive dominated the notes I took after just a few visits.

The frosty interactions I had with the guards warmed a bit over time and in the rare moments of open frankness, some of them expressed their frustration with the corruption embedded in the criminal justice system but saw themselves as cogs in a deeply corrupt machine. They had their own worries about maintaining their families on a minimal salary and navigating the moral gray areas that they confronted every day in their occupation. They didn't create the system; it had evolved over decades and continued with a heavy inertia.

Going into the prison with the volunteers from Rio de Paz also forced me to reevaluate my initial condemnation of the Pentecostal pastors and volunteers as being oblivious to the conditions of the jail. Though Rio de Paz is not officially a religious organization and has board members who are not associated with any religious tradition, almost all of the volunteers were there as a result of their professed Christian faith. Some of the volunteers would have self-identified as Pentecostals, others would not have, but they were largely from the middle- and upper-class in Rio de Janeiro, unlike the other Pentecostal pastors and volunteers who visited during the week. The two groups came from different sides of the track and had experienced Rio de Janeiro from wildly dissimilar realities. When some of the Rio de Paz volunteers arrived at P#1 for the first time, they were as appalled at the conditions for the jail as I was when I first entered. One volunteer nearly fainted when she entered the cells, and I heard others question aloud, "How can this exist in my own city?" The leader of Rio de Paz, a Presbyterian pastor of a fairly wealthy congregation, started the program because he was simply shocked at the conditions. As I mentioned before, when he entered the cellblock for the first time, he yelled in indignation, "Whoever is in charge of this place should be in

prison!” For many of the Rio de Paz volunteers, this was the starkest confrontation they had had with the reality of the “other” Rio de Janeiro. But for the Pentecostal pastors who led poor congregations miles away from the glamorous beaches of Rio, the failure of the penal institution fit perfectly with the failure of the other state-sponsored institutions in their communities. In Rio’s poorest neighborhoods, the health, education, sanitation, and security systems are simply abysmal, and they have been for decades. Therefore, confronting the underfunded, overcrowded penal facilities was not a surprise; it was just another example that fit the pattern of institutional failure that has suffocated poor neighborhoods in Rio for decades.

Though the Pentecostal pastors and volunteers did not display the level of righteous indignation that I initially thought they should have, it would be a mistake to classify them as apolitical or blind to structural inequality. Their presence inside prison and their concern for the inmates’ spiritual and material well being was a counter-hegemonic act. They purposefully identified with the most stigmatized population in Rio de Janeiro and called them *irmão* (brother) instead of *bandido* (bandit) or *vagabundo* (bum). Though most of their churches did not have job-training programs or internationally funded reentry programs, the pastors by and large told the inmates that the doors of their churches were open to them once they were released. This invitation certainly did not represent a city-wide solution to the consequences of an increasing prison population. However this message that offered their humanity resonated with the inmates more than any other political or ideological discourse on the market.

Conclusion

Prison Pentecostalism in a Changing City

To conclude this dissertation, I will suggest and engage three areas of future research that will hopefully be launched from the data I presented, and I will summarize the key findings from the project.

Less than a year after I left Brazil to return to the United States, P#1 stopped receiving inmates and the cells were abruptly vacated on a weekday morning during the last week of April 2012. On the order of Dr. Martha Rocha, the head of the Civil Police, the remaining inmates were transferred to penitentiaries or holding cells run by the Rio de Janeiro's State Penitentiary system and not the Civil Police force. I have heard rumors that the jail's "VIP" section still clandestinely houses a few dozen inmates who continue to pay handsomely to avoid being housed in the regular cells, but the ten dark, dank cells that used to hold up to eight hundred inmates are now empty. I have seen the photos. The decision was celebrated as a victory by members of the human rights group Rio de Paz, as they had lobbied for such a move for nearly a year. The Civil Police stated that the decision to shut down the jail was due to the gross human rights violations and the repeated, successful, prisoner escapes. But months before the plans were announced publically, Antonio Carlos Costa, pastor and president of Rio de Paz, informed Dr. Rocha that they were planning on constructing a replica P#1 cell on the most visible part of the world famous beach, Copacabana. The replica cell would have been built to the exact dimensions of those in P#1 and would have had seventy to eighty volunteers standing shoulder to shoulder to show the public what was happening behind the walls of their

city's jails. Costa had already contacted officials from local and international press agencies to cover the scene as this sort of public display would have surely garnered significant attention, considering Rio de Janeiro had recently been awarded the 2016 Olympic Games. It would have been a public relations disaster for the city. Dr. Rocha approached the Rio de Paz leader, asked him to cancel the protest, and gave her word that these jails would close within the next year. Costa not only agreed to call off the protest, but held a much smaller event at the same spot publicly praising Dr. Rocha's decision. Plans to close the jail had reportedly been in the works for months and P#1 would likely have closed without the threat of Rio de Paz's public protest. But the incident raises a very important question and one that may be the center of social science research on Pentecostalism in the next decade. The question is: What is the potential of Pentecostalism to mobilize resources and people to challenge social issues like the inhumane prison conditions or even larger structural injustices, especially in the Global South?

Challenges

This is not a question that lends itself to a simple answer. I will not attempt to answer this question here, but instead I will identify institutional characteristics that would hinder Pentecostalism's potential in this arena and identify other assets that would enable it to be an agent of social change. First, the majority of Pentecostal groups I met in prison focused primarily on the spiritual lives and immediate material needs of individual inmates and their families. The emphasis on the individual and his or her spiritual welfare consistently trumped focusing on the larger social structures that create places of human suffering like P#1. This gravitation toward the individual does not mean

that these Pentecostal pastors and volunteers are apolitical or unaware of the social inequality in Rio de Janeiro—many experience it daily—but it does steer time and resources toward transforming individual inmates' lives, as opposed to transforming an institution like the criminal justice system.

Another institutional liability in mobilizing a large-scale social action is that most Pentecostal congregations are relatively small and depend on the charismatic leadership of their particular pastor. The charismatic leadership and strong personalities present in many of the pastors are very effective at inspiring action in their congregation, but very, very few of these churches work with each other. For example, if a neighborhood had twenty Pentecostal churches and 2,500 active participants, the Pentecostal population in this one community would likely function as twenty individual groups, with twenty different ideas on what aspects of society, if any, should be confronted. There is not an institutional hierarchy among the Pentecostals in Rio like there is in the Catholic Church, so it would be very difficult to organize these 2,500 people around a particular initiative. Pentecostal churches are kept afloat by voluntary offerings from the congregation and many pastors may be understandably hesitant in devoting time and resources to issues outside their own church. The potential gains may come at the cost of their church's survival.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, I cited Aldon Morris's (1984) work on the role of religion in the civil rights movement. It is interesting to compare the Pentecostals in Rio with the Black Church in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s because both cases deal with the faith of marginalized people groups, but there are some very distinct differences between the two that reveal challenges that Pentecostalism

in Rio de Janeiro faces in putting pressure on the state. One difference is that the social and cultural contexts of Rio de Janeiro in 2010–2011 and the southeastern United States in the middle of the twentieth century are quite different. Though both countries had large slave populations, and the roots of the tremendous inequality, segregation, and marginalization among the poor in Rio de Janeiro can be traced to this system, there is no formally enforced legal mechanism to rally against in present day Brazil as there was in the Jim Crow South. In theory, every resident in Rio has the right to sit where they please in a theater, restaurant, or bus; they have the right to attend public universities; and voting is obligatory for all citizens. The laws are all there, but the mechanisms that keep lower-class Brazilians on the margins of society are much more difficult to identify, and therefore, more difficult to address. Another difference between the two social contexts is that the “poor,” “marginalized,” or “killable people” in Rio de Janeiro comprise a much less distinctive group than the racial identification that clearly identified African Americans in the United States. The underclass in Brazil does not have a collective identity that is anywhere near as strong as the African American identity during the civil rights movement, and therefore, is more difficult to mobilize (Telles 2004).

Potential Social Force

After listing the possible barriers to Pentecostal social engagement, I want to state that there is also tremendous, if largely unrealized, potential. Though the Pentecostal movement began in Brazil as a result of European missionary work in the early 1900s, today’s churches are largely indigenous enterprises. Christian books and study materials from the United States and Europe that have been translated into Portuguese are much more accessible now than they have ever been, but I did not encounter any Pentecostal

churches that received funding or pastoral support from foreign churches. Most church members attend services that are close to their homes and are led by pastors from those same neighborhoods. A Kenyan pastor was asked why he thought Pentecostalism was thriving in Nairobi, and one of the reasons he presented was that the pastors “smelled like the sheep” (Miller and Yanomori 2010). I believe the same could be said in Rio.

Pentecostal pastors and clergy do not need to pass through expensive and highly selective seminaries to rise to leadership positions; they usually emerge from the local congregations and are mentored within the church. The Brazilian pastors also “smell like their sheep” because they often experience many of the same obstacles, hardships, and social stigmas as the members of their congregations. Though their view of society may lack a broader structural perspective that is grounded in the social science theory taught in universities, many of them have a firsthand understanding of daily life in their communities that is invaluable in understanding social injustice and cannot be bought or learned in the classroom.

If there is a movement to push back against an oppressive criminal justice system or other injustices in Rio de Janeiro, it will likely be led by the people who suffer directly from these institutions and know what it is like to be a “killable person.” Though liberal white students from the Northeastern United States supported the African American ministers, they were certainly not the impetus for the civil rights movement, nor were they the engine that propelled it forward. The civil rights movement was led by the people being oppressed—black Americans. If there is a rise against a particular set of social injustices in Brazil, it will probably not be championed by the wealthy elites who profit from the system as it is, but by those on or near the bottom of the social

hierarchy—the actual victims of injustice. If this is the case, the Pentecostal church is socially situated in such a way that it could serve as the organizational platform for such a movement.

Unlike many of the NGOs, Pentecostal churches do not receive funds from the government and are largely autonomous organizations. During the civil rights movement in the United States, the Black Church was not dependent on contributions from the government or from white churches (Morris 1984). These churches then had the freedom to pursue agendas that went against the power structure with the explicit intent of reshaping society. Rio has been known for a civil society that has been notoriously disengaged. Over the last twenty years, a number of NGOs have arisen in the city and a few of them have reached international prominence. These large NGOs have been able to procure some money from international funding organizations like the Ford Foundation, but they receive the bulk of their budget from the Brazilian government. Though this money allows these NGOs to hire highly trained employees at very competitive wages, the source of their funding certainly influences their political agenda. A university in Rio de Janeiro told me that the government realized that the best way to control these groups was to fund them, and fund them well. The strings attached to the government and corporate funding essentially act as the reins on a horse and guide the NGOs' agendas. Many Pentecostal churches struggle to pay the electric and water bill each month, but crumpled bills and coins dropped into the offering plate provides these churches with an autonomy that government support or corporate donations would suffocate. In this way, Pentecostal churches would be able to pursue more radical social agendas than the NGOs in Rio.

As I mentioned early in this chapter, I witnessed very little interaction between the Pentecostal churches in Rio. That being said, Brazilian Pentecostals have proven that they can mobilize people in highly organized and public street displays as well as any organization in the world. For example, July 14th, 2012, marked the twentieth annual March for Jesus in Sao Paulo. Somewhere between one and three million people congregated in the most recent event and participated in a carnival-like procession down the streets of the largest city in South America (Aljazeera 7/15/2012). The march, organized by the *Igreja Renascer em Cristo* (Reborn in Christ Church), has been dubbed the “largest Christian event in the world” and attracts participants from various denominations (Associated Press 7/5/2012). There are few, if any, other institutions in the world that could mobilize this many people around a single event every year. A million people on the streets may open the eyes of politicians to the Pentecostals as a potential voting bloc, but the event does not advocate for any particular political or social cause. That might be one reason it is so successful, but the sheer number of people on the streets each year reveals that the Pentecostal church does have incredible potential as a mobilizing force.

From what I can tell, there is no evidence that the Pentecostal churches are poised to become a powerful political force in Rio de Janeiro. Many Brazilian Pentecostals view the political system as a worldly institution that doesn't represent the ultimate battle that is taking place in the spiritual realm. Also, Liberal Protestantism and Catholic-inspired Liberation Theology are examples of two Christian faiths that actively pursued progressive political agendas while simultaneously diminishing the role of the supernatural and traditional Christian dogma (Douthat 7/15/2012 New York Times).

Neither of these faith traditions has fared well over the last thirty years and both are facing literal extinction if the current trend continues.

Does it work?

Before I had stepped foot inside a prison in Rio de Janeiro, I wrote a phrase in the first draft of a funding proposal that said something to the effect of “an inmate’s conversion can only be proven as genuine on the outside.” Looking back, I wince at the line and I am glad it didn’t make the final cut. My experience inside the prisons has pulled the rug out from under that sort of thinking, but I understand the logic behind it. Since I started the fieldwork for the project more than two years ago, I have been on the receiving end of hundreds of raised eyebrows when I have responded to the question, “So, what is your dissertation about?” What I have realized from speaking with people from all walks of life is that there is a deep skepticism toward prisoners who claim to have made religious conversions inside prison. People who have never seen the inside of a prison or even spoken to an inmate have told me quite confidently that inmates use religion simply to create a façade to fool the guards, prison administration, and parole boards. The thought that an inmate could have an authentic religious conversion strikes many people as unlikely, extremely naïve, and maybe dangerous. In responding to the “ulterior motive thesis,” I usually say that I am certain that some of the inmates I met went through the charade of being a Pentecostal for some hidden reason, but that it was not my job to identify who they were. Some inmates in Rio talked about their colleagues “hiding behind a Bible,” but this idea is probably not unique to prison congregations. If a person were somehow able to uncover the “real” motivations for everyone praying in the churches, mosques, synagogues, and other places of worship outside prison, the results

would not likely fit into a sincere/insincere dichotomy. They would be all over the place. Therefore, I purposefully avoid making any judgments on the authenticity of the inmates' faith. But an important question that goes unanswered in this dissertation is: Does Pentecostal conversion or participation inside prison reduce the likelihood of that inmate returning to prison upon release? This question purposefully focuses on changed behavior as opposed to any underlying motivations.

Before I make suggestions as to how this question could be approached, I believe that equating religious participation and recidivism in Rio de Janeiro is still deeply problematic. Byron Johnson's book *More God Less Crime* (2011) compiled recidivism data from 1944 to 2010 in the United States and a handful of other countries, including Brazil. He found that 90 percent of the 273 studies reported that faith-based rehabilitation programs decreased criminal activity after the incarcerated participant was released. Eight percent of the studies reported no change in behavior and 2 percent reported an increase in criminal behavior. Johnson summed up the basics of his argument in the title of the book, which is a play on a phrase used by the pro-gun lobby: "more guns, less crime."

While there are certainly some selection-bias issues with the book that I will not pursue here, I hesitate to suggest a similar type of study to measure the impact of Pentecostal practice on recidivism for inmates in Rio de Janeiro. There are a number of reasons for my concern in affirming those types of causal analyses, but the primary one is that the prisons in Rio de Janeiro are not bursting at the seams because of a lack of religion on the streets. In fact, the neighborhoods with a higher concentration of Pentecostal churches and adherents produce many times more prisoners per capita than

the more affluent neighborhoods that have lower levels of religious participation. I am weary of framing Pentecostalism as a crime prevention mechanism, because as Elizabeth Sussekind, former National Secretary of Justice in Brazil, concluded, in Rio “prison is for people who don’t count, for those who are considered garbage, for those who don’t have any value or worth in society” and people with certain sociodemographic characteristics are much more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than others, regardless of their religious affiliation. There are too many social forces at play to isolate religion alone as a crime preventer.

That being said, Pentecostalism offers a set of practices that, if followed upon release, would likely drastically reduce ex-inmates’ chances of returning to prison. I met dozens of inmates who reported experiencing life-changing religious conversions inside prison. I also met dozens of ex-inmates who were living as Pentecostals after being released from prison anywhere from a week to ten years prior. One of the weaknesses of this methodology is that I do not know what most of them are doing now, one year after the data collection. I would love to know. I think that the best way to approach the question of whether or not Pentecostalism has an impact on potential future criminal activity for released inmates would be to approach religious activity in prison as a turning point in the lifecourse and follow a cohort of religious inmates released from prison over a ten year period, not just a year or two (Elder 1985; Laub and Sampson 1993; Uggen 2000, 2003). This sort of study, while expensive and incredibly labor intensive, would allow for a more nuanced analysis that showed how Pentecostal identity translates into society when an inmate is released, if it opened opportunities in the labor force, strengthened family ties, and created fruitful social networks outside prison. I met a

number of ex-inmates who reported that after their first conversion, they were arrested and sent back to prison, and it wasn't until their second stint in prison that their faith matured to a sustainable level. The results from this sort of study would be messier than *More God Less Crime* but would hopefully provide a deeper and richer answer to the question posed.

Pentecostalism in a Changing City

Rio de Janeiro is a city that is changing, and changing rapidly. The eyes of the world are already starting to shift to the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (Marvelous City) and will stare directly at it when the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games arrive. The municipal, state, and national governments are embracing the city's "coming out party" by investing billions of dollars in athletic stadiums, updating the international airports, and, in the case of Rio de Janeiro, pacifying the favelas. An estimated 4,000 residents will be evicted from their homes to clear space for the Olympic Park that will be erected in the southwest part of Rio and thousands of others will have to move as the cranes and bulldozers start their work on other high profile construction projects (Romero, New York Times, 3/4/2012). A fifteen-foot wall has been erected along the highway that will bring soccer and Olympic fans from the international airport to the world famous beaches without have to see a series of neighborhoods that do not fit the government's desired aesthetic for the city. By the time the first goal is celebrated in the 2014 World Cup, eighty-nine neighborhoods will have been "pacified" and permanently occupied by Rio's police force (Barbassa, Associated Press 4/30/2012).

The prison system is changing in Rio de Janeiro as well. P#1 and all of the other jails operated by the Civil Police have been officially closed. Though closed officially, it

became apparent that they were not fully shut down when on July 3, 2012, a group of fifteen heavily armed men arrived at a jail demanding the release of an infamous drug trafficker who had been arrested earlier that morning with two grenades attached to his belt. He had been brought to a jail after his arrest in direct defiance of the new official procedure (Barros 7/3/2012). The armed men left after firing a few rounds into the jail's walls and successfully freeing the gang leader. Many in Rio believe that members of the Civil Police profited from the conveniently swift escape. Change is not always instant. Even though there have been some hiccups in the process, the prison system is transforming. Evaristo de Moraes prison, which is home to one of the strongest and largest inmate churches and one of my research sites, is scheduled for demolition, and new prisons modeled after the maximum-security American facilities are being built. The question here is how Pentecostal practice in prison will be impacted as Rio de Janeiro passes through a phase of intense and rapid change.

One avenue of inquiry will be to examine the relationship between the Pentecostal pastors and the inmate communities in a prison system that is increasingly comprised of high-tech facilities. The new prisons will restrict the movement of inmates within the facility and seek to isolate gang leaders, as opposed to letting them effectively run sections of the prisons. Currently, leaders of the city's narco-gangs are increasingly being held in solitary confinement for twenty-three hours a day, not so different from the death rows of the United States. This penology will likely decrease the ability of inmates to self-organize around the gangs and may also hinder the formation of independent inmate churches. In the past, pastors could enter the city's jails with their groups of volunteers simply by receiving verbal authorization from the jail's warden. This will no

longer be possible and in the near future they will have to pass through a long and tedious approval process that could dramatically reduce access for the Pentecostal groups. I was fortunate to arrive when I did because it would likely be much more difficult for me to conduct the research for a project like this in the near future.

Another part to this overarching question will be the role of the Pentecostal church and the Pentecostal pastors in neighborhoods that now have a decreased gang presence and increased police presence due the pacification initiative. The pacification of Rio's favelas has been surprisingly successful and residents of communities living in the pacified neighborhoods have reported overwhelming support for the program (Gimenez Stahlber forthcoming). Gangs like the Comando Vermelho are losing their ability to completely control parts of the city and the state's presence in these communities is much stronger with the twenty-four hour police encampments. In many neighborhoods, mobile police units have replaced the shirtless teenagers holding automatic weapons who once enforced the gang's unwritten law. Since the strength of the Pentecostal church is not dependent on a strong gang presence, the arrival of a permanent police presence in these communities may open the door for an even stronger church presence. But many people I spoke with in Rio doubt that the state is willing to continue to invest the resources necessary to sustain the protection provided by the police after the Olympics end in 2016. They fear that things will quickly return to the old system after the event's closing ceremonies. Also, corrupt police officials make tremendous amounts of money from the city's domestic drug trade and since the police officer's salaries are not scheduled to increase dramatically, there could be internal pressure in the police force to return to a

system where drug traffickers openly reign. Whatever happens, the Pentecostals will be in the middle of it.

Between 2003 and 2009, 35 million Brazilians joined the middle class and another 20 million are projected to become members by the time the World Cup starts in 2014 (Domm 4/28/2011). Levels of material consumption and standards of living that were unimaginable just fifteen years ago are now available to millions of Brazilians. Brazilian society has not undergone such a dramatic upheaval since the country transformed from having a primarily rural population to a predominantly urban population in the thirty years after the end of World War II (Fausto 1999). Scholars have argued that these years of rapid urbanization rearranged traditional values and social structures and created conditions conducive for the growth of Pentecostalism (Annis 1987; Lomnitz 1977; Mariz 1994; Martin 1993; Roberts 1968; Willems 1967). It is conceivable that a wealthier, more consumer-driven Brazil may decrease the demand for Pentecostalism.

Contributions to the Literature

Prison Subculture

There is little debate among sociologists that inmates participate in a unique subculture, but there is an enduring debate on how this subculture is formed. Two primary theoretical models have emerged to explain the impetus of prison subculture; the indigenous model and the importation model (Hunt et al., 1993). The findings from this dissertation contribute to this debate by presenting Pentecostalism in prison as an integral part of inmate subculture in Rio de Janeiro that can be best understood through a hybrid of the indigenous/importation models. The Pentecostal groups in prison import the

organizational structure, language, theological tenants and leadership roles from Pentecostal culture outside of prison, but when the faith is practiced behind prison walls, it becomes a unique expression of the religion. I argue that Pentecostalism in prison is fundamentally shaped by a combination of social forces originating both inside and outside of the penal facility.

Irwin and Cressey (1962) argued that prison walls were permeable to outside influence and inmate culture was organized around the roles, cultural norms and criminal identities that existed on the street. In Irwin and Cressey's research, prison life was a reflection of street life as prisoners belonged to "thief", "convict", and "straight" criminal subcultures that were active both in the streets and in prison. The Pentecostal groups inside the prisons and jails in Rio de Janeiro provide evidence to support their argument. In Rio de Janeiro, gang affiliation and the corresponding authority an individual has on the street transfers with them when they are arrested and join the prison population. The Pentecostal groups in Rio's prisons are also deeply influenced by Pentecostal affiliation and culture on the streets. One clear example of the street/prison subculture relationship is that the inmates import the Pentecostal organizational model and use it in the prison context. The inmate churches are led by charismatic pastors who are supported by deacons, secretaries and worship teams just like they are on the streets. The worship services also resemble the churches outside of prison and use the same vocabulary, praise songs and prayers as the non-prison churches. Inmates' Pentecostal identity can also make the transition from the streets to prison. The pastor of the Heroes for Christ Prison Church at the P#1 jail had been a deacon in a Pentecostal church before he was arrested. After publically renewing his commitment to God a week after his arrest, he was

appointed as a deacon in the inmate church and when the acting pastor was transferred, he assumed the role. The theological tenants of personal redemption and abstinence from perceived sinful behaviors are imported from the streets as well and reinforced by the visiting Pentecostal groups. Though Irwin and Cressey argued that in the United States the criminal subculture present on the streets was the primary organizational model for inmate subculture, their theoretical model is strengthened by the importation of Pentecostal identities, values and practices that inmates organize around in the prisons of Rio de Janeiro.

Irwin and Cressey's work was largely a response to the indigenous model of inmate culture that dominated the sociological literature in previous decades (Hunt et al., 1993). Donald Clemmer (1940) was one of the first scholars to argue that an inmate's identities, values, loyalties and norms were reoriented while incarcerated by a process he referred to as "prisonization". He argued that every inmate goes through this process to some degree and the penal institution, not the street criminal subculture, shaped inmate culture. Further support for the indigenous model was presented when Gresham Sykes (1958) published his landmark book *Society of Captives*. Sykes studied inmates in a maximum security prison in New Jersey and identified the "pains of imprisonment" as the impetus for inmates organizing their own "society" as a means to alleviate these pains. Their argument that prison subculture was largely shaped by the penal institution fit with Goffman's (1961) conceptualization of the "total institution" and set the foundation for an indigenous model of inmate culture.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I presented data that supports an indigenous interpretation of the Pentecostal groups in prison. The data reveal an inmate

church that provides a mechanism for prisoners to confront the isolation, lack of security and deprivation of goods inherent to incarceration. The inmate churches provide a tightly knit, family-like community for its members who are separated from their loved ones; they make living in prison more bearable. The churches protect vulnerable inmates from violence indigenous to the prison population which may explain part of Pentecostalism's success in these spaces. The inmate church also collects free-will offerings that are used to provide for the basic necessities of needy prisoners. The physical space where the inmates live also offers support to an indigenous interpretation because incarcerated Pentecostal members live in confined quarters alongside each other. A Pentecostal inmate's actions are under twenty-four hour surveillance by fellow church members creating a uniquely intense religious community. As a result, there is a pressure for the Pentecostal inmates to participate in the daily rituals and follow the strict behavioral guidelines required by the faith. Contributing to the tense environment is the fact that an inmate may be expelled from the group if their participation is somehow deemed disingenuous which would mean that the protection offered to the inmate by the church would disappear.

This dissertation contributes to the sociological debate on inmate subculture not by completely supporting either the indigenous or importation model, but by showing how each are simultaneously active inside of prison in Rio de Janeiro. The organizational and theological foundation of the Pentecostal groups in Rio's prisons are imported from the religious institution outside of prison, but forces inside of the penal institutions turn "Prison Pentecostalism" into a unique religious form that is indigenous to the prison and separate from Pentecostalism on the street.

Lived Religion

There are competing sociological approaches to studying religion; one emphasizes the beliefs and doctrines of the faith while the other focuses on practice, embodiment and the emotional character of the religion (Cadge W, Levitt P, Smilde D 2011 & Edgell 2012). Edgell (2012) argues that market-based interpretations of religion as well as research embedded in the secularization theory favor the beliefs, doctrines, and authority of religious institutions as more important than daily practice and emotion of religious experience. To these scholars, understanding the religious beliefs is important because they assume that an individual's actions will rise to meet their stated religious doctrines (Evans & Evans 2008; Smith 2003; Stark & Finke 2000). More recently, a "lived religion" approach has emerged in the discipline which focuses on the embodied practice and emotional content of religion (Edgell 2012; Smith 1998; Tavory & Winchester 2012; Winchester 2008). These scholars focus on *how* individuals reach towards and interact with the supernatural other. Consequently, the rituals, experiences and emotions involved in religious activity are the most important areas to study. This dissertation is a lived religion study and the research contributes to the emerging lived religion literature by showing how Pentecostal inmates in Rio de Janeiro make prison a sacred space and how Pentecostal practice reorients inmate dispositions in a way that informs, creates and strengthens doctrines and beliefs.

The end of the corridor in the east wing of P#1 and the Pentecostal cells in the Evaristo de Moraes penitentiary and are sacred spaces to the practicing Pentecostal inmates. I asked the acting inmate pastor in P#1 why the inmates treated the last twenty feet of the corridor with such reverence:

The worship time belongs to the church and the church's space belongs to the church. You can't smoke in this space and the cell leader [gang affiliated leader] has nothing to do with how the church is run here...The church has to be respected and I don't want anyone smoking in the church's space, the worship time is sacred. We see the respect they [non-church members] have for us, a fear. The moment the service starts there is silence so they can hear the word, they put on their shirts and listen to God. So we can see their respect.

As the pastor explained, this seemingly dingy, dank, unsanitary space in the jail became sacred to the members of the Heroes for Christ Prison Church through a series of practices. The inmates make this space sacred by extinguishing their cigarettes, turning off their radios and putting on their t-shirts when the worship service begins. They may or may not believe that God supernaturally ordained this spot as a holy area, but it is treated as such by the inmates and has become sacred over time through these practices.

The Pentecostal cells in the Evaristo de Moraes penitentiary have been set apart through a similar sacralization process. These cells, which comprise about ten percent of the total number of cells in the facility, immediately stand out to the visitor because they are the only cells in the prison illuminated by electric light. The other cells are purposefully kept dark during the day in order to provide cover for inmates who want to consume drugs and participate in other activities they want to keep hidden. The Pentecostal inmates maintain that the "light of God" shines in these cells, but the inmates themselves are the ones who flip the light switch each morning. Another practice that sets aside these cells as sacred is the prohibition of posting pornographic photos on the walls. Photos of nude women pulled from the pages of pornographic magazines serve as the default wallpaper in the other cells. The absence of these images in the Pentecostal cells is another example of how religious practice turns profane prison cells into sacred spaces.

C.S. Lewis, a well known Christian theologian warned that simply believing that a Christian should be a loving person will not necessarily inspire loving behavior:

Do not waste time bothering whether you “love” your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more (Lewis, 2001 p.130).

Though not a social scientist, Lewis illustrates Winchester’s argument (2008) that religious practices, like Muslims fasting during Ramadan, can serve as the engine behind the construction of the moral self. Winchester (pp.1754-1755) argues, “religious practices are not simply derivative of underlying moral attitudes or dispositions, but, rather, that embodied practices and moral subjectivities operate through a relational and mutually constitutive process that unfolds over time”.

An example of lived religion approach is one of the practices I described earlier in the dissertation. The Pentecostal inmates in P#1 believe that they are supposed to treat their fellow inmates in a loving manner; it is a core Pentecostal belief. But during the fieldwork, I observed the inmates embody this belief through daily practice. In some of the worship services in P#1, the inmates embraced each other and as they hugged their fellow inmate they said out loud, “I love you”, just as the pastor had told them to. As both Lewis and Winchester contend, reshaping dispositions does not rationally follow abstract belief, there are a set of embodied practices that occur over time which reshape dispositions. I concur with other lived religion scholars that the importance of these embodied practices is missed in the belief-centered approach and captured through a lived religion perspective.

Desistance from Crime

This dissertation speaks not only to the literature in the sociology of religion, but to criminological literature as well. Though I did not collect longitudinal data that is essential for desistance studies, the findings produced from this research are situated to make a contribution to criminological studies focusing on the issue. In this section I will present points of contact between my findings and three influential studies on desistance from crime.

In the early 1990's, John Laub and Robert Sampson published *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life* (1993), a groundbreaking book that presented an age graded theory of informal social control to explain anti-social behavior, delinquency, and crime over the lifecourse. The authors emphasized the importance of social control in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to argue that crime and deviance are largely the result of weak and broken social bonds. They continued their argument by asserting that strengthening weak social bonds for offenders, specifically through marital attachment, military service and job security, would decrease the likelihood of crime and deviant behavior. Laub and Sampson conceptualized getting married, finding a dependable job, and joining the military as "turning points" in the lifecourse and emphasized their influence in desistance above other factors that criminologists had traditionally used.

Making Good did not include religious conversion and/or religious participation in their model on desistance from deviant behavior. Though the qualitative data I collected in the prisons and jails of Rio de Janeiro is of a different nature than the longitudinal data used by Laub and Sampson, it holds the potential to further their theory on informal social control. Pentecostal conversion, like marital attachment, military

service, and employment has the potential for inmates to strengthen otherwise weak or broken social bonds upon release and could be thought of as a turning point (Abbott 1997). The Pentecostal churches I encountered in the prisons and jails in Rio de Janeiro, as well as many of those in the surrounding communities, actively recruited ex-inmates to join their congregations. Church membership and regular attendance strengthens social bonds and the churches represent one of the few institutions open to ex-inmates (Putnam & Campbell 2010). Conceptualizing religious participation as a turning point in the lives of offenders presents a promising addition to Laub and Sampson's important theoretical model.

This dissertation also has potential to contribute to the criminological research that employs an interactionist perspective to explain desistance from crime. Shadd Maruna (2001) used qualitative data from two groups of British ex-offenders; one group was still actively involved in criminal behavior while the other was comprised of ex-offenders who were actively "going straight". Maruna (p.17) argued, "sustained desistance most likely requires a fundamental and intentional shift in a person's sense of self." Maruna compared the narratives from the two groups of ex-offenders and identified three themes, that were present in the responses from the interviewees that had actively desisted from crime that were not present in those continuing in criminal behavior:

1. an establishment of the core beliefs that characterize the person's "true self"
2. an optimistic perception (some might say useful "illusion") of personal control over one's destiny
3. the desire to be productive and give something back to society, particularly the next generation (p. 88).

All of the inmates I interviewed in the jails and prisons in Rio de Janeiro expressed a strong desire not to return to criminal activity and though incarcerated they could comprise a similar group to the ex-offenders who were actively going straight in Maruna's study. These themes, what Maruna refers to as the "rhetoric of redemption", were also present in the narratives of the Pentecostal inmates I interviewed. Pentecostal inmates talked about their new identity as a "son of God" in a way that was similar to Maruna's idea of the "true self". Some of the men spoke of how they were being used by the devil before their conversion and two inmates reported that they had been "slaves to a deceitful gang" before they found God. Pentecostalism offers a core set of beliefs and series of practices that allow Pentecostal inmates to construct a moral self in a way that mirrored the narratives of the ex-offenders in Maruna's study. Also present in the Pentecostal narratives was optimism about their post-prison future. They were confident that they would not participate in criminal behavior once they were released from prison with God now on their side. They talked about God's active presence in their lives being a force that would give them the strength to resist the temptations that reigned over their old lives. Finally, many of the inmates involved in the prison churches reported that they had found their vocation in life, prison ministry. When I asked inmate church members what they thought they would be doing in five years, most of the men thought that they would be involved in some sort of prison ministry, helping others to overcome the same problems they had faced while incarcerated. Nearly all of the volunteer Pentecostal groups I met in the P#1 jail had at least one member who had previously been incarcerated, so there were inmates who followed through with their plans. Though this

dissertation and Maruna's study were conducted in profoundly different social contexts, the presence of the "redemption rhetoric" in both the narratives of the British ex-offenders who were pursuing a crime-free life and the narratives of the Pentecostal inmates is significant for future study of desistance from an interactionist perspective.

The last criminological study I would like to engage is Massoglia and Uggen's (2010) work on the consequences of delinquency on the transition to adulthood. Massoglia and Uggen use lifecourse data and an interactionist perspective to argue that people who continue to participate in delinquency will be less likely to make timely transitions to adulthood. Deviant behavior like drunk-driving and recreational drug use become age inappropriate as individuals reach their mid-twenties. Those that persist in delinquency start to lag behind others in their age group and this shapes their transition to adulthood. Persistent delinquency, which transitions to crime as an individual enters their twenties, impedes an individual's ability to achieve traditional markers of adulthood, becoming financially self-sufficient, marriage, having a job and completing their education.

Pentecostalism presents an interesting intervention in this research as it represents a potential marker of adulthood that is accessible to individuals who have missed on the more traditional markers due to the consequences of delinquent or criminal behavior. Ex-inmates and ex-offenders may not be able to make the transition to adulthood by marrying, completing their education, or obtaining stable employment, but they can, and often do, make a religious commitment. This dissertation could further Massoglia and Uggen's work by studying Pentecostal affiliation's ability to provide ex-offenders an opportunity to transition towards adulthood through their religious participation.

Conclusion

To conclude, I will return to the three overarching research questions that guided this dissertation. The first asked why Pentecostalism is so successful inside of the prisons and jails in Rio de Janeiro. The second focused on how the faith is practiced inside of these spaces. While the last question looked outside of the prison walls and was concerned with how Pentecostalism practiced inside of prison impacts the communities, churches, police officers, pastors and streets of Rio de Janeiro.

Pentecostalism is unquestionably the most widely practiced faith in Rio's prisons. I argue that the faith's success among inmates is in part a reflection of the socio-demographical composition of the inmate population. The individuals in prison do not comprise a representative sample of the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area; the vast majority of the inmates come from the favelas and low-income neighborhoods. Pentecostalism is the dominant faith in these neighborhoods, so the faith success inside of prison can be partly understood as a manifestation of this larger trend.

But the intensity of Pentecostal practice in prison cannot be fully explained by demographics alone. The unique, inmate-led Pentecostal churches that operate inside of prisons in Rio contribute to the faith's growth and strength behind bars. These churches replicate the organizational model of Pentecostal churches found on the streets of not only Rio de Janeiro, but much of Latin America. The inmates themselves appoint pastors, worship team leaders, secretaries and deacons to lead the prison congregations.

The continuity of these churches is maintained as the leadership positions are passed on to other inmates when a prominent church member is released from custody. When an individual is arrested in Rio de Janeiro they will likely know that they will encounter a Pentecostal church operating behind prison walls. These congregations operate as largely autonomous groups and are not officially linked to churches or ministries on the outside. The prison gangs, which are powerful forces inside of prison, reinforce the strength and legitimacy of these inmate churches by recognizing the authority of Pentecostal leaders and allowing their churches to operate outside of the gangs' power structure. Finally, though the inmate churches are not formally affiliated with outside congregations, they are visited regularly by groups of Pentecostal volunteers. These volunteer pastors and laypeople support the inmate churches by worshipping with them and by recognizing Pentecostal inmates as fellow *crentes* (believers). These findings contribute to the literature on Pentecostal growth in Latin America, specifically concerning the faith's ability to resonate with those living on the margins of society.

Studying how Pentecostalism is practiced inside of prison, (the songs, prayers, and rituals that are practiced daily) produced data that reveals what the religion means to incarcerated individuals. First, the faith provides a mechanism to deal with "the pains of imprisonment" (Sykes 1958). The close-knit, communal nature of the Pentecostal groups inside of prison offers a strong sense of belonging, companionship, safety and material support for participants who are isolated from friends and family. In many of the penal institutions, Pentecostal inmates live together in designated cells and participate in religious rituals as a community. Belonging to a Pentecostal group provides protection for prisoners who are vulnerable to violent retribution from other inmates for crimes

(specifically sexual crimes) they committed on the streets. The prison gangs do not subject these inmates to their judgment as long as their participation in the inmate churches is deemed as genuine.

Pentecostal practice offers more than simply a means to escape the pains of imprisonment. It offers a counter-cultural identity and corresponding dignity to people who have been historically marginalized, treated as less than full citizens by the state and who the larger society views as expendable. The faith confronts the notion that these individuals are “killable” through its message of spiritual redemption and by emphasizing the inherent value of each individual, a worth that is not tied to the crime they may have committed. Using the words of Howard Thurman (1975, p.40), Pentecostalism, the faith of the killable people in Rio de Janeiro, enables inmates to “to reject annihilation and affirm a terrible right to live”.

In this project, I decided to study the impact of prison Pentecostalism on larger society by arguing that though it lacks an explicit political agenda, the presence of Pentecostals inside of prison is a political act that has material consequences. Pentecostal pastors and volunteers show support and sometimes solidarity with inmates by consistently visiting them in prison and addressing some of the material needs of the inmates and their families. Throughout the fieldwork, I observed Pentecostal volunteers provide medical services to inmates, visit the families of prisoners, and embrace incarcerated individuals as they wept during times of emotional brokenness. The decision to engage the prisoners in this manner has elicited a reverent and grateful response from the inmates. This elevated position Pentecostals hold in prison has provided pastors with opportunities to directly intervene on behalf of inmates during life

threatening crises and mediate between the state and prisoners during riots. This unique space the Pentecostals occupy also exposes the problematic nature of their intimate involvement with inmate populations. Accusations of illicit relationships between some Pentecostal pastors have cast a shadow of doubt over the motives of visiting Pentecostal groups and the personal wealth that certain Pentecostal leaders have amassed while having direct contact with incarcerated drug traffickers is alarming. Nevertheless, the findings in this dissertation contribute to the discussion of what it means for religious groups to be politically engaged. They also reveal the potential of Pentecostalism as a transforming force in society.

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