

# ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ENDS OF WORLDS

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## ¡Crisis is Coming! Material Manifestations of Immaterial Ends

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### ***Abstract***

This paper explores how residents of a Santo Domingo barrio dream of, plan, and work towards the transformation or demise of their community. I argue that while conditions within the barrio itself may seem reason enough for this lack of hope, residents' yearnings for the end of their community primarily emerge from a much broader (and historically deeper) sense of crisis that relates government corruption to the moral degradation of Dominican society by way of explaining the failure of national aspirations for *progreso* (progress). Religion figures prominently in residents' visions of the future, underscoring two dominant visions for the barrio. The first proposes the end of the *local* material world through transforming the barrio an ideal modern community through widening streets, demolishing shacks, and creating parks. The second vision concerns the end of the *entire* material world through the second coming of Christ. This vision is a shared among the almost universally Christian community, but it is particularly the domain of the Pentecostal churches. The two main groups who espouse these visions share the contradiction that the majority of their efforts go into constructing place when they aspire to be elsewhere. In the process of meeting basic needs, residents embed their lives, their hopes, and their sense of crisis within the material environment of the barrio. In this paper I will focus on these material manifestations to discuss their

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implications for life in a very poor community while its residents wait for, work towards, or give up on, different ends.

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### ***Introduction***

In Santo Domingo's barrios, religion plays an important role in structuring people's sense of morality in relation to the contradictions of their material environment. Despite the fact that their residence is often highly stable and predictable, residents' sense of constant crisis is embedded in their community in such a way that they find it difficult to imagine any future for the barrio. While they invest a great deal of time into constructing their houses and transforming the barrio into a liveable space, few residents believe that the barrio can ever transform to meet Dominican standards of what an ideal urban community should be. I argue that while conditions within the barrio itself may seem reason enough for this lack of hope, residents' yearnings for the end of their community primarily emerge from a much broader (and historically deeper) sense of crisis that relates government corruption with the moral degradation of Dominican society by way of explaining the failure of national aspirations for *progreso* (progress).

Religion figures prominently in residents' visions of the future, firstly because of the Catholic Church's longstanding role as a provider of welfare, and secondly because of the attraction that religion (especially Pentecostalism) holds for people whose options are limited. According to my household survey, around 63 percent of residents are Catholic (around 12,000 people), 14 percent are Pentecostal (around 2500 people) and roughly 8 percent belong to minor denominations. Almost 14 per cent reported no religion. About 20 percent of surveyed residents attended church at least twice a week. Religion underscores two dominant visions for the barrio. The first proposes the end of the *local* material world through transforming the barrio an ideal modern community through widening streets, demolishing shacks, and creating parks. This redevelopment plan would require the relocation of large numbers of residents, and the relocation is supported by the Catholic Church and its congregation. The Church posits a return back to a former definition of modernity that centred upon the house and family. It does not entail the abandonment of consumption, but rather a reformation of values according with social imaginaries of an idyllic past.

The second vision concerns the end of the *entire* material world through the second coming of Christ. This vision is shared among the almost-universally Christian community, but it is particularly the domain of the Pentecostal churches. Practitioners are highly visible in the community due to their evangelising: the barrio is covered with spray-painted slogans such as *¡Cristo viene, prepárate!* (Christ is coming, prepare yourself!), and *evangelicos* (evangelists) use trucks, microphones and loudspeakers to

deliver their message throughout the community at dawn and in public *cultos* (sermons). They preach that there is no worldly solution to the unfolding crisis. The two main groups who espouse these visions share the contradiction that the majority of their efforts go into constructing place when they aspire to be elsewhere. In the process of meeting basic needs, residents embed their lives, their hopes, and their sense of crisis within the material environment of the barrio. In this paper I will focus on these material manifestations to discuss their implications for life in a very poor community while its residents wait for, work towards, or give up on, different ends. My thinking about religion in relation materiality is influenced by Daniel Miller's observations (1987, 2001) that separating subjective meanings from objects may be analytically useful but it ultimately misunderstands how people live in the world. Rather than engaging in a debate about what is material and what is not, I look at the material for what it can tell us about how people create meanings, make moral judgements, communicate viewpoints, and generate experiences. Fredric Jameson's (2005) comment that our imaginations of utopia are limited by our senses is particularly pertinent in demonstrating the materiality of our visions, regardless of whether they are geared towards the material world or the afterlife. He describes how our connection to the material world through touching, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling defines our transcendental experiences. Hence it is through the material world that we communicate our beliefs, structure our practices, and experience transcendence. There is, then, no immateriality at all apart from what we imagine through the material. I adopt this standpoint to draw attention to how, in Santo Domingo's barrios, efforts to transcend a perpetual sense of crisis are not 'escapist', but rather draw upon the very same material fabric of life from which crisis emerges. Examining this material basis can illuminate how and why people may or may not hold hope in material solutions to the poverty and insecurity of barrio life.

### ***Local transformations***

The Dominican Republic is a former Spanish colony that occupies the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola (of which the remainder is occupied by Haiti). Its capital city, Santo Domingo, is located 1330 kilometres from Miami. The United States receives approximately 60percent of Dominican exports, and remittances make up about 10percent of the GDP (CIA World Factbook). In Santo Domingo's barrios, most residents make a living as domestic servants or construction workers. Apart from small amounts of funds sent from relatives abroad, most of their experience of the economy is profoundly local. Indeed, my observations suggest that a great deal of their income gets spent within the barrio itself, where a profusion of grocery stores, bars, betting agencies, and home businesses compete for the attention of residents.

The barrio of La Ciénaga began to be populated in the 1960s. It is close to the city centre but it is one of the city's most underdeveloped barrios. Turning into the *avenida de la marina* via the sole entrance *abajo el puente* (local rendering of 'under the bridge'), there is a pretty street lined with newly planted trees, the wide river running alongside to the right, barricaded off by brightly coloured railings. The visitor passes the neat fire

station, the military post and the salami factory, a basketball court and numerous people buying street food and hanging out to the sounds of bachata (a Dominican style of music) and motorbikes passing. This is considered the nicest part of the barrio, the public face where motorists passing by the entrance can admire the “progress” that is seeping into the squatter settlements from the city.

After the salami factory, the street diverges and narrows. No longer are there newly laid pavements to walk on or places to sit, and if you duck into an alleyway, you end up meandering through the alleyways of *abajo* (below, meaning the lower swampy ground in the barrio) where houses are pressed close together and street vendors’ carts can barely pass, let alone a fire truck to put out a fire. Soon the concrete paved parts run out and you are clambering over rocks and planks to bypass the large dirty puddles left by the summer rain and pass over canals full of *agua negra*, water so black that it looks like came straight out of an oil well, emitting something akin to Engels’ miasmatic gas in the canals of nineteenth century Manchester. Kids play in houses that have half sunk into the swamp since their owners converted them from shacks to concrete block, making them too heavy to withstand the pull of the mud. This is La Ciénaga, The Swamp, still indicative of its name after years of filling in the land with rubbish and digging networks of drains.

When I lived in La Ciénaga in 2005, the barrio was much worse than it is now. Tropical storm Alpha trapped many of us in for a few days as Calle Nueve flooded impassably. Since Leonel Fernández won his first term as President in 1996, the federal government, together with the European Union and local organizations, have invested money in projects to make the area safer and provide more extensive and frequent services. These have included installing telephone lines, paving streets and alleyways, improving housing, installing indoor lavatories, building the school, and improving access to electricity. Large stormwater drains have now been installed, solving the flooding problem for much of the barrio. A large playground and park now exists where there used to be a permanent rubbish heap. And most importantly, according to residents who answered my latest survey in November 2009,<sup>2</sup> most of the alleyways *abajo* have been paved. Here, concrete is the saviour; it improves drainage, banishes mud, and provides a place for kids to play. It is what houses are ideally made of when owners can scrape together enough money to start buying concrete blocks and cement. Indeed, the expanding presence of concrete in the barrio, in the form of paving and *casas buenas* (good houses) is the primary indicator of progress here in La Ciénaga, both for residents and outsiders who can view the barrio as they cross the bridge spanning the Ozama River. Not everyone in the barrio has benefitted equally from these improvements, and La Ciénaga continues to be perceived as an underdeveloped and dangerous place by both residents of the barrio and throughout Santo Domingo. Many of the barriers faced by residents are still in place, such as lack of land title, discrimination

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<sup>2</sup> I have carried out two surveys, mostly qualitative, in La Ciénaga. The first, in August 2005, consisted of 48 questions and was answered by 50 people in each of the barrio’s six sectors. The second, in November 2009, consisted of 58 questions and was answered by 40 people in each of the barrio’s six. The questions primarily concerned demographic information, migration and family dispersion, people’s opinions of the barrio and its organisations, and views on Dominican society and politics.

in the work force, limited access to education, unsatisfactory sanitation and denial of citizenship rights.

The state's improvements to the barrio are significant but they come late in the piece. For the vast majority of the barrio's existence, the Jesuit priests and nuns of the Catholic church have provided the main institutional support for the barrio, often conflicting with state attempts to disband the community, such as during state evictions in 1977 and 1991 (Taylor 2009a), and protests against the construction of a sewerage treatment plant in the mid-1990s (Taylor 2009b). When the barrio first began to be settled in the late 1960s, the earliest forms of social organization in the barrio were based around family arrangements, especially the proximity of residence of other family members such as children, parents, cousins, uncles, and so on. These were very closely followed, in the early 1970s, by the formation of a religious community by a local priest who animated the community to attend church in a neighbouring barrio and hold their own prayer meetings in La Ciénaga. Over the next few decades, the Jesuit priests and the nuns who ran the local school provided an important source of psychological support to residents and were the primary motivators of material transformation:

“We did so much work to *levantar* (raise up) this community, we walked around this entire gully of Maria Auxiliadora, we were *chancleteando* (walking in sandals) down the alleys carrying the word of God to all parts, evangelizing the word of God. It was a lot of work to form the community, and to get it like it is today I spent thirty-four years. I am one of the old women and those that haven't moved away have died, but I'm always here thanks to God. God has me here because he needs me here. Many people were evicted but not me.

I believe that the community has advanced a lot in this barrio, because this was mud, lots of mud and water. Here below you couldn't go anywhere because of the water... The community has helped the barrio *subir* (rise), given it strength, like the reign of God has grown because before the people didn't want to go to the reunions and now they come to Mass. Many women have died, now there are few of us who remain.” (Felicia)

For Felicia, the spiritual and the material development of the community are two sides of the same coin. Without God, nothing can be achieved because only God can give residents the strength to work hard for their community's future. Felicia's approach is not surprising given the absence of other organisations in the community, or indeed any support from the outside. In the early days of the community, the Catholic Church was the only point of meaningful institutional contact for many residents, and it remains the most influential organisation in the barrio.

However, it is not residents' piety but the material transformation of the barrio that has altered the way in which residents are valued (Taylor 2009b). Visible material improvements, easily noted from the bridge, indicate to outsiders that La Ciénaga is indeed transforming slowly but surely from the swamp it is named after to a barrio that is fit for human habitation, though it still falls far short of meeting the standards of an

ideal urban community. The dominant political strategy in the barrio has been to resignify the barrio, and revalue residents, in accordance with normative notions of what it means to be legitimate urban dwellers and Dominican citizen<sup>3</sup>. The Catholic Church has played a dual role in mobilizing material transformation and providing moral legitimacy for this project. As Samuel, a participant in my study, explained to me:

“The church, particularly the Catholic Church, we know it has a lot of power. When the Catholic Church pronounces that it is in favour of or against something, generally the government pays attention because although it represents a great power, the Catholic Church has a universal power”. (Samuel)

While the Catholic Church has been a powerful force in the Dominican Republic since colonization in 1492, it has only begun to be directly involved in development since the 1960s. The Trujillo dictatorship that reigned from 1930 to 1961 depended upon church support and use of religious symbolism to legitimate his regime, permitting the Catholic Church to pursue its ecclesiastical activities so long as they did not interfere in the state’s economic and ideological programs (Betances 2007; Derby 2009). Whereas during authoritarian rule any conflict of interest between the state and church was muted, today the Catholic Church’s ideological and material projects frequently diverge from those of the state (Sáez 2007).<sup>4</sup> The church continues to assist the state in governing and producing subjects, but it also suggests alternatives to national culture and socio-economic structure. During the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, the Catholic Church reframed its politics around ideas of liberal democracy and social change. It took on a central role as mediator of political disputes such as accusations of electoral fraud. It presented itself as a leader in the transition from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy, advising on legislation, founding civil organizations, and campaigning for services and development in poor communities.

The Jesuits run various programs including mother-infant support groups, fathers groups, youth groups, and a Haitian choir. They lecture against racism and discourage parents from buying toy guns for their children. In short, they integrate material and spiritual concerns in their work in the barrios. Their sermons explicitly link crises in the barrio with national crises and global issues, telling the congregation that ‘poverty is not the fruit of God’. They preach that we have been living in the end of times since Christ was born, and it is our responsibility to live well with each other to meet the apocalypse. Thus the political project of transforming the barrio has an immaterial end. A brand new church opened in November 2009. Although it is a simple structure, it is large and sparking new, so in the environment of La Ciénaga it looks somewhat out of place.

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<sup>3</sup> Marianna Valverde (1994) uses the term ‘moral capital’ to draw attention to the ‘relative independence’ with which moral beliefs operate in relation to economic and social capital, thereby amending Bourdieu’s forms of capital and arguing against Marx’s subordination of the moral and social to the economic. Morality, then, is not a means to an economic end, but an end in itself. She cites Bourdieu’s work on distinction as an example of how the goal of the accumulation of goods is to create the cultured self. In a similar vein, I argue that the use of moral capital by barrio residents is both strategic and meaningful.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of these divergences and continuing relations between church and state in Latin America, see Gill (1998).

Residents commented to me that it belongs to an *otra clase*, another social class, and the attraction of this new, modern, comfortable structure has resulted in a significant increase in attendance, from about 300 people at a Sunday morning mass to about 500 people.

The Catholic Church's significant breadth of influence in the Dominican Republic renders it an influential force. Its embeddedness in local communities, strong state relations, and status as a global institution give it an advantage over other political and economic organizations. Depending upon local context, the church may work directly in poor communities to provide services (such as education, health and political training); campaign for the state to install services and make legislative changes, or help poor communities to seek resources from other sources, such as international NGOs (see Levine 1992; Shepherd 1993). While the church works with the state on many occasions to coordinate its social programs, in other instances it bypasses the state altogether in favour of working directly with communities or with international organizations.

The Jesuits, through their research and teaching organisation Centro Bonó, founded the Coordinación para el Desarrollo de La Ciénaga (CODECI) in September 1998, after Hurricane George devastated the community. CODECI is an umbrella organisation that coordinates all grassroots organisations within La Ciénaga. CODECI's purpose is to coordinate community development between the barrio's political, religious and social groups, and to liaise with government and non-government organisations. These local organisations include sporting groups, an association of professionals and a home owners' association. Most concentrate their activities on developing the barrio and raising its public profile. CODECI's activities centre on lobbying for the installation of urban services such as drainage, sewerage treatment, electricity and water, to bring La Ciénaga into line with the rest of the city.

CODECI worked with the Santo Domingo organisation Ciudad Alternativa (Alternative City, founded in 1989) on the development of a plan to redevelop La Ciénaga and the neighbouring suburb of Los Guandules. Plan Cigua (Navarro 2004) is a detailed urban plan that provides for residents on the higher ground to remain in La Ciénaga and Guachupita, while relocating families residing in dangerous parts of the barrio such as the riverbank, low-lying areas prone to flooding, and the cliffs, which regularly experience landslides. This plan does not appear to be particularly divisive in La Ciénaga, yet neither are many residents actively involved in pushing them forward. The reasons for this are various and little consensus appears to exist on why this is so. For one community leader I spoke with, the barrio is redeemable, but many residents lack the intelligence necessary to understand the problems that the barrio faces:

“I think that for the future – this is speculation, like dreaming – but I think that within a short time it will be necessary to evict the people who live in the uninhabitable zone at the edge of the Ozama River. They live in extreme danger. We understand, although one can't say it because if you say it to them, they don't understand. Their abilities don't permit them to understand that they live in danger. I believe that for the future we should evict this group of people who live

so close to the river that their backyard is water. Here where we live, where you live, where I live in Clarín, I believe with time this could urbanize, and so that a large portion of La Ciénaga could live in this sector in high buildings.” (Joaquín)

This statement does not acknowledge that many residents live where they are because they have nowhere else to go. On the 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2008, eight people died in neighbouring Guachupita when a landslide caused by Tropical Storm Gustav buried their houses. The Catholic Church led a mass protest and the resulting media pressure caused the government to announce a program to relocate 150 families from the area to a new settlement near Herrera Airport. These families are now, at the time of writing (November 2010), finishing building their new houses and are awaiting relocation. But for now, they remain in Guachupita because they have nowhere else to go.

Converting the barrio into a ‘good’ suburb would require evicting many of its current residents to make space for the improvement of housing and the installation of services and facilities, such as parks, schools, and clinics. The small size of houses, their density, proximity to the street, lack of yards, and distribution along narrow alleyways would be replaced with planned suburbs with houses set back from the street. They know this from the past: in 1977 and 1991, state evictions of residents in La Ciénaga targeted people with the poorest housing, leaving residents with concrete houses on the wider streets alone. The minority of residents who have street frontage have witnessed the most improvements, as most residents’ houses line crowded alleyways and services were not always extended there. It therefore makes little sense for residents in poor housing to campaign for the development of the barrio. While they appreciate improvements such as concreting alleys and installing drainage, they are unlikely to be beneficiaries of any material transformations in the long term. Furthermore, many people simply find it difficult to believe that a barrio with so many – and such longstanding – problems can ever be transformed. The extent of poverty, perceptions of criminality, and stigma attached to the barrio appear inalienable from the space it occupies.

### ***The non-locality of crisis and aspirations***

This imaginary of inalienable hopelessness is not just based on barrio conditions. Rather, a sense of the failure of national progress, in the form of government corruption and the breakdown of Dominican society, does not exactly induce hope in residents that their efforts will bear fruit. Furthermore, it reflects the fact that most people’s aspirations do not lie in the barrio at all. While people dream of converting their *ranchitos* (wood and tin houses) into concrete houses, and in fact put a great deal of effort into doing so, they overwhelmingly place hope that their children will be able to access good education, become professionals, and leave the barrio altogether. For the vast majority of residents, the way forward is not to make the barrio liveable, but to leave the barrio altogether for a better suburb elsewhere in the city, perhaps by educating a child to become a doctor or lawyer.

Despite significant material improvements in the barrio that have been widely applauded by residents, my survey also found that residents have less hope in the future than they had four years previously. When I conducted my first survey, Leonel Fernández had been in the second term of his presidency for less than a year. Confidence in his government was especially high because people were relieved to have left behind the disastrous presidency of Hipólito Mejía from 2000-2004. Fernández's focus on education and technology as the way for the nation to *echar pa'lante* (move forward) seemed like sound policy to squatter settlement residents who viewed (and continue to view) education as a primary route out of poverty. Today, however, in Fernández's second consecutive term, residents have lost that hope. They view corruption as continuing as it did before, reneging on possibilities for a fair distribution of resources and opportunities. CODECI's program was virtually halted between 2000 and 2004 during the presidency of Hipólito Mejía of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD). The Dominican economy took a drastic downturn in 2003, when fiscal mismanagement and the embezzlement of funds from the Central Bank caused the devaluation of the peso by 74 percent (ECLAC 2004). The period saw a rapid rise in inflation and therefore a serious decline in real wages (ECLAC 2004). Cienigüeros (residents of La Ciénaga) still talk about the steep rise in food prices and complain of government corruption during the four years of Mejía's presidency:

“Things are worse in this country because the international price of combustibles is high and we don't produce them. Also it is because the politicians believe that they buy the country for four years, that it belongs to them, and they take everything because for them there is no justice; they haven't been an example, and so they are going to continue like runaway horses, as they say, taking everything that passes through their hands. Here we have a serious situation, so calamitous that if fifty million pesos are allocated to fix a problem, forty-two million will disappear and they will invest the remaining eight million. This is very serious.”  
(Carlos)

Corruption prevents a fair and equitable distribution of resources amongst the population. Despite the country's long history of poverty and economic turmoil, most Dominicans do not believe that poverty is necessary. Cienigüeros feel that their contribution to the nation's development is not duly rewarded. According to my surveys and interviews, they recognize the nation's precarious financial situation, while criticizing wasteful practices such as corruption, clientelism, the concentration of wealth among a small population, foreign ownership, low taxes and extensive incentives to investors. The corruption of the wealthy and powerful has a direct effect on the moral well-being of the barrio, since it affects the ability of families to raise their children in a safe and secure environment:

“There are many lost young people and this hurts me because here there are many powerful people who could do something. There are children in the streets living

below the bridge, in the parks, on the benches and here in the country there are many people who could make schools and collect these children and take them to school. The politicians are only interested in politics and making money for themselves; they don't see what is happening in the streets, what is affecting us in the streets.

If you have a headache and you don't go look for medicine you're not going to get better. So if you come here and tell me 'Oh, my head hurts', then I'm going to say, 'Well go look for a pill!' So if I take a pill my headache goes. I had the intention to get rid of my headache. So, the politicians come here campaigning for us to vote for them. After they get into power, if each one built a little piece of street we would live in gold, because here in this country there is money. This is a millionaire country, but there are no good intentions. Here there are millions and millions in the banks but for the street nothing, you see the politicians going around in jeeps but they don't help the barrios." (Jorge)

Barrio residents tend not to think highly of their place of residence, but their sense of social corruption and moral failure stretches far beyond the barrios. It is part of a broad anxiety that the fabric of Dominican society is falling apart. According to popular discourse, all of a sudden in the last two decades, people steal from each other, neighbours don't support each other (see Taylor 2009b). Parenting is failing as people have to leave their children while they work, and people are fixated upon consumer goods at the expense of social relations:

"The rich can pay for their children to go to a nursery, but us poor have to leave them alone in the house to look after themselves as well as they can. While we are in the street working, they are doing whatever they feel like because there are no adults watching them. This is why our society is so corrupt, with so much delinquency, so much crime and ugly things, the lack of care on the part of the parents.

I always say that us the parents are responsible for delinquency, because if your children aren't watched they will follow the wrong path. I don't blame them but rather us. This and globalization, because before we didn't have televisions because we couldn't buy them, but now every poor person has a 20-inch television in their house, a huge stereo, a VHS and a fridge, everything. Parents have left their children behind to go achieve what they want, what they wish, to scale the ladder. Before it was Father and Mother before everything. Material goods have diverted them from parenting." (Bethania)

It is not uncommon to hear people say that thieves and drug dealers are primarily young men who have been deported from the US back to the Dominican Republic and imported the crafts they learned on the streets of Washington Heights and Miami. Hence the problem has sources on so many levels that it is impossible to see how progress can occur. The streets of La Ciénaga are paved, but nothing is going to change because the

problem is so widespread. If there is any solution at all, it will involve craftsmanship and nurturing, rather than violence and struggle, to transcend the 'violences of everyday life' (Scheper-Hughes 1992) through a humanitarian and unified process of progress. This is why the church's messages of peace and harmony ring true to so many residents. Its combination of spiritual transcendence and political power provide a practical model for reconciling twin contradictions: one in which the self embodies both positive and negative values, and a second in which urban life brings both violence and progress. In the following statement, Felicia connects her idea of spiritual transcendence with her material conditions:

"At times one asks God for something but God says that if one asks him you have to wait for the reward, and if he doesn't give it to you it's because it doesn't suit him. Every day you need to have more confidence in him because he is the only one that can help you in everything. If you are going to go out first you ask that everything will go well. You thank God for the bread that he has given you, for the water, the daily bread, also for the air, the nature and also I thank God for the name he has given me, also for the force he has put in me because it is him that gives me the strength I need. Because look at the time we are living in, with so much wickedness, so much selfishness, so much injustice, so many things that we need every day that hold us to God. He is the only one who can help us." (Felicia)

The wickedness and injustice that Felicia identifies is not simply an abstract biblical wickedness (a characteristic of an unredeemed humanity), but rather it is very much part of the everyday milieu in which barrio residents live. The structural violence of urban poverty is unendurable without God, who provides a wealth of spirit that replaces and becomes superior to, material wealth. Transcendence balances the transience of barrio life in a dialectical fashion to create a synthesis in-between, which is the outcome of the structural position of people and the deployment of available strategies. This is the act of self-creation, the positioning of the self or group as a complete social being who embodies neither the rupture of an immoral soul divorced from God and society, nor the material want and despair that informs others' readings of the barrio. Marcia, who spent a year studying as a novice in Santiago before returning to Santo Domingo to study law, commented of her fellow barrio residents:

"The poor are stronger believers. The poor look for a refuge in religion. It doesn't matter which religion, but they look for a refuge. The rich aren't like that. The rich look for refuge in their money, and at times, perhaps one day, they go to Mass. The poor no, as the poor don't have any money so they look for something that fills them, and they put themselves in religion because they want to believe in something and the only manner to believe is to put yourself in a religion, whichever it is. There are many poor people who are rich in spirit, that's what I've always said." (Marcia)

Hence religion is not merely a matter of individual faith divorced from economy. While constructing the barrio and their housing has provided residents with a sense of achievement and community, religion helps residents cope with the moral side of the crisis, in terms of both their own stigmatization and their sense of a loss of morality nationwide. It plays a social role in bringing residents together, and it also has a transformative potential by providing an institutional platform through which residents can represent themselves to the outside world.

But what stands out is how this sense of overwhelming crisis, rendered in apocalyptic terms, is fuelled by rapid changes in Dominican society. Urbanisation, political instability, and growth in crime since the 1960s, as well as increasing access to media such as television, have fuelled and deterritorialized Dominicans' constant sense of crisis. Both the Catholic church and the Pentecostals preach that we are in 'the end of times', though their interpretation of this process differs strongly. For the Catholics, we have been living in 'the end of times' since the birth of Jesus, and their high valuation on life directs believers' attention to the secular plane.

The Pentecostals' activities, on the other hand, put much more emphasis on the afterlife, albeit in a way that is acutely presentist, and made so through the material. The barrio is decorated with graffiti and handpainted signs with declarations such as *¡Cristo viene, preparate!* (Christ is coming, prepare yourself!) or *Hoy yo sigo Cristo* (Today I follow Christ). Almost every morning, at dawn, the barrio is evangelized awake by a believer pronouncing the word of God with a loudspeaker (either on foot or in a truck). The sound of this daily ablution is very particular. Being lulled out of one's sleep by urgent proclamations of the end of the world has a bodily effect – physical as much as psychological – that tends to imprint itself on one's memory. Along with the roar of motorbikes, the sound of chatter, and the smell of coffee, it forms an experience of dawn that always reminds me where I am, whenever I am in the field. It is not possible to be in La Ciénaga and not know where you are.

Pentecostal sermons maximise this bodily effect through many means. Sound is also of crucial importance in their *cultos* (sermons) with the requisite sound system prevailing supreme as attendees sing animatedly to their enthusiastic audience. Coupled with glossolalia, *cultos* are very much a physical event. They are designed this way to draw attendees into the moment, and also to encourage the attention of neighbours on the street, to encourage them to come along. This is, in fact, a major drawcard: a number of Pentecostals explained to me that it was the music that inspired them to attend the church initially. The highly sensory nature of *cultos* reminds me of Fredric Jameson's (2005) comment that our imaginations of utopia are limited by our senses: our connection to the material world through touching, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling defines our transcendental experiences. Hence it is through the material world that we communicate our beliefs, structure our practices, and experience transcendence. There is, then, no immateriality at all apart from what we imagine through the material.

While poverty and consumption form part of crisis, the source of the problem is fundamentally a moral one. It cannot therefore be resolved through the redistribution of resources, the improvement of housing, or through access to mass produced goods.

Rather than commodities and material world, people turn to religion as the staple of values and an already-existing utopia that does not have to be invented or struggled for except on a personal level. This does not mean that they do not share the material aspirations of other residents, or the desire to leave the barrio for a better neighbourhood; rather, the particular apocalypticism of the Pentecostals deprivileges the material as the source of crises or the means to resolve them. Pentecostals in La Ciénaga appear to reject what Jean and John Comaroff call 'millennial capitalism', 'a capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:2).

In this they differ from manifestations of Pentecostalism that have emerged elsewhere in the region, such as Jamaica, where Pentecostalism offers a path not just to respectability but also material gain (see Austin-Brooks X). They also differ from Christian fundamentalism in the United States where, if poverty is not actually viewed as the 'fruit of God', wealth is cast as a reward for moral (church-going, tithe-giving) behaviour. More research needs to be done to determine whether this manifestation of Pentecostalism is peculiar to the particular conditions of the barrio, or if what Manuel Vásquez (1999) terms 'religious post-Fordism' has deposited many different interpretations of the moral world.

### **Conclusion**

The rejection of the possibility of material transformation, whether through old-fashioned class action or neoliberal salvation, has quite a different relationship to ideals and values than the material solutions I have outlined. Visions of achieving *progreso* within the material world require some degree of sacrifice of sociality in order to achieve an ideal life. Respectable personhood, which entails living in a 'good' house and community, brings about a certain degree of physical isolation from one's neighbours, thereby reducing the sociality that is so highly valued in Dominican culture. The end of the world, on the other hand, rejects the material in favour of maintaining the ideal of sociality, envisaged in this instance not as a practice throughout Dominican society but by humankind as a whole within the spiritual realm. Visions of a global humanity joined together by religion or by consumption appear irreconcilable. Yet the fact that the material is the medium for communication in both cases suggests that people do not see any contradiction in objectifying that which is meant to transcend. Hence, whether we are discussing the development of a poor barrio, or the psychological-institutional methods people use to cope with difficult lives, the material environment is good to think with.

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