The image appeared on the cover of a Sunday bulletin, produced and distributed by one of Guatemala City’s most conservative neo-Pentecostal megachurches.1 The picture presented the face of a young teenage girl, her eyes closed, lips wet, and skin kissed by a soft, transcendent light; the young woman’s head was even tilted to the side in what Jacques Lacan would call jouissance (1998). Across her pink lips read Psalm 4:6: “In peace, I lay myself down.”2 This image, stitched together by the church’s media relations department, makes a sly reference to Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s sculpture,
St. Teresa in Ecstasy (1652). The statue in Rome presents one of Teresa of Ávila’s (1515–1582) mystical experiences of God, which the sixteenth-century Spanish saint narrates with unblinkingly erotic imagery. In her autobiography, St. Teresa writes how “the great love of God” often left her “utterly consumed,” “penetrated to [her] entrails,” and made her “utter several moans” for both the “intense pain” and its “sweetness” (Peers 1927: 197). With St. Teresa in mind, my own reaction to the church bulletin parroted Jacques Lacan’s response to Bernini’s statue. “She’s coming,” Lacan commented, “There’s no doubt about it” (1998: 76).³

This Sunday bulletin, which offered a picture of divine joy in all of its excess, could admittedly be read in a number of different ways; yet for me, following two years of fieldwork with neo-Pentecostals in postwar Guatemala, this picture exists as a visual point of departure for a larger conversation about the politics of Christian eroticism in not only postwar Guatemala City but also other non-western contexts in which neo-Pentecostalism continues to mingle with efforts at democratization. From 1972 to 1996, the number of electoral democracies jumped from 52 to 118 (Caldeira and Holston 1999: 691), while from 1970 to 1997, the number of Christians who did not belong to mainline denominations rose from 185 million to 645 million (Barrett and Johnson 2004; Jenkins 2002). The citizens of South Africa, South Korea, Brazil, Guatemala, Mozambique, and Kenya (to name only a few nations) now reside at the intersection of global Christianity and efforts at democratization (Pew Forum 2006; Miller 2007; Freston 2008; Ranger 2008; Lumsdaine 2008). These are all places where a rise in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianities, such as neo-Pentecostalism, coincide with the promotion of democracy, providing the faithful with a new language and logic for national belonging, responsibility, and participation (O’Neill 2009b).

As extended ethnographic research with some of Guatemala City’s most prominent mega-churches demonstrates, the Christian songs, conversion narratives, and multimedia that contribute to the production of contemporary neo-Pentecostal worlds rely heavily upon an eroticism that both communicates and governs a particular sense of self.⁴ The phrase “sense of self” is important here because the work of Michel Foucault makes clear that “eroticism” is not an autonomous object of inquiry but is rather closely connected with the production (and reproduction) of selves (Boyarin and Castelli 2001: 359; Foucault 1990). Eroticism, Foucault notes, is largely interested in one’s relationship to oneself, principally concerned with what he calls a “hermeneutics of the

³ I owe much of this paragraph, especially my use of Lacan, to the insights of Constance Furey, especially in an early draft of her above mentioned review essay on sexuality (n.d).

⁴ For a more robust engagement with eroticism in Pentecostal worship, see Teresa Berger and Timothy E. Kimbrough’s Theology in Hymns (1995), as well as several pieces authored by Martyn Percy, including Words, Wonders and Power (1996), Power and the Church (1998), and Engaging Contemporary Culture (2006).
self”—an interpretive sensibility that allows the Christian to make legible his or her own desires and, in the process, his or her own true person (1997). It is, in fact, the erotic contours of the neo-Pentecostal self, and the political rationality that manages those contours, that this article takes as its object of study.

Wading into this relatively abstract conversation about selfhood actually begins with a rather concrete observation: neo-Pentecostal eroticism provides second- and third-generation Christians in postwar Guatemala City with a new kind of conversion narrative. While first-generation neo-Pentecostals tend to rely on images of break and rupture to communicate how they were once lost but now are found (in a classic Pauline sense), middle-class second- and third-generation Christians respond to the language of desire and seduction, which resonates well with the children and grandchildren of believers. As these younger Christians freely admit, they have never really been lost and, in turn, have never really had any reason to be found. Rather than being knocked from their horse on the road to Damascus, so to speak, Guatemala’s newest converts choose Jesus through a decidedly erotic discernment narrative. It is an observation that nuances anthropological debates over global Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity by placing eroticism at the fore of such studies (Coleman 2000; Robbins 2003; 2004; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Cannell 2006; Smilde 2007; Keane 2007; Engelke 2007; Guadeloupe 2008; Tomlinson 2009) while also re-imagining the structure and function of conversion narratives (Harding 1987; Crapanzano 1994; Stromberg 1993; Delgado 1998; Burdick 1993; Brusco 1995; Gooren 2007).

Building from this observation, this article compares this Christian eroticism with the eroticism of democracy to highlight the politics of each. This comparison begins with the work of Iris Marion Young, who argues that democracy in its ideal form involves a vision of justice that prizes “an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one’s secure routine to encounter the novel, strange and surprising” (1990: 238–41). The eroticism of democracy, at least in principle, resonates in postwar Guatemala. There, public sentiment in the wake of Guatemala’s genocidal civil war (1960–1996) relies heavily upon the promotion of a multiethnic, multilingual civil society that celebrates the promise of “harmonious participation of citizens in decision-making” and the hard work of “shouldering . . . responsibilities and commitments in the quest for social justice and democracy” (Peace Accords 2006: 80). This postwar eroticism encourages Guatemalans of all stripes to seek unity through difference, to be attracted to the other for the sake of democracy.

With these two eroticisms in tow, this article makes the case that Christian eroticism’s libidinal charge oftentimes proves more compelling than democracy’s, tethering a growing number of believers to Christian regimes of self-governance. Neo-Pentecostalism’s erotic conversion narrative evidences as much. In place of democracy’s call to engage with the other in the public
sphere, Christian eroticism directs believers to turn inward to pray, fast, and confess, to place their reckless wills under control for the sake of their nation (O’Neill 2010). This observation does not suggest that Christian eroticism de-politicizes the faithful, but rather that it re-politicizes them in ways that prompt concerned citizens to take to the soul rather than the streets (O’Neill 2009a).5 Central to this observation is the power of the comparative as an analytical approach to society and history, a comparative that evaluates two very different kinds of eroticisms, two sets of generations, and two distinct conversion narratives while also presenting postwar Guatemala as a point of comparison for all those other nations residing at the intersection of faith and democracy.

SERMONS, SONGS, AND CELLS

Christian eroticism is a slippery object of study. It can, at times, be more atmospheric than substantive, glimpsed more readily by way of participant-observation rather than documented through formal interviews or with prepared surveys. This is because Christian eroticism often lingers below the level of narrativity, altering in innocuous ways how people live their lives and govern their bodies. Given these methodological challenges, it is helpful that the Guatemalan context provides a somewhat exaggerated case in point for some of the many ways in which neo-Pentecostal Christianity mixes with the promotion of democracy by way of the erotic. Guatemala’s slow transition from a genocidal civil war (1960–1996) to a formal democracy (1981 to the present) has coincided with the rapid evangelization of a once overwhelmingly Roman Catholic population (1976 to the present).6 Today, more than half of Guatemalans is Pentecostal or charismatic Christian (Pew Forum 2006),7 and Guatemalans have already seen two Pentecostal presidents (and several more viable hopefuls) over the last twenty-five years.8 My own fieldwork with

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5 The idea that neo-Pentecostal Christianity could de-politicize Guatemalans builds on the so-called “withdrawal hypothesis,” which argues that Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity’s rejection of the material world allows the faithful to withdraw from the public sphere into churches. Variations, or at the very least explorations, of the withdrawal hypothesis can be seen in the work of David Stoll (1990), David Martin (1990; 2002), Jean Comaroff (1985), and John Burdick (1993).


7 Many scholars make strong arguments against the accuracy of these numbers. In a review essay, Joel Robbins (2004) identifies several. They include Corten (1997: 313); Levine (1995: 157); and Stoll (1990: 6). For the Guatemalan case, see Althoff (2005); and Garcia-Ruiz (2004).

8 By “Charismatic,” I mean “those who practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit but are not members of historical Pentecostal denominations, such as Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant or evangelical Protestant denominations.” By “Pentecostal,” I mean “members of denominations that emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the belief that speaking in tongues is necessary evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” These definitions come from the glossary of Spirit and Power: A 10-Nation Survey of Pentecostals by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006). See also Lofton (2008); Wacker (2001); Cox (1995); Martin (1990; 2002).
congregations keenly interested in the moral salvation of their postwar nation has even overlapped with one pastor’s presidential campaign. Public sermons delivered at his church demonstrated repeatedly how erotic narratives provide the faithful with a framework for how they might participate in postwar Guatemala.

This neo-Pentecostal candidate is Dr. Harold Caballeros and his church is El Shaddai, a worldwide congregation with twelve thousand members in Guatemala City alone and a central church structure that holds up to six thousand participants. Historically upper middle class and non-indigenous, the El Shaddai congregation includes more than eighty incorporated satellite churches throughout the Guatemalan countryside, from Chiquimula to Chimaltenango, as well as the Americas, from Bogotá to Boston. Connected via the Internet and radio stations, weekly services use contemporary Christian music to excite large crowds, guiding them through emotional peaks and valleys. Indeed these songs provide this study with an important line of evidence. Contemporary Christian music generates hundreds of tracks every year that are dripping with decidedly erotic imagery. These songs place the model listener in constant sexual tension with both the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

Another line of evidence worth flagging, even if only briefly, is El Shaddai weekly support groups, or “cells.” Comprised of between five and twelve congregants, these groups meet in informal settings (homes and eateries, for example) and provide opportunities for believers to reflect on their place in this world as well as the next. If my fieldwork in Guatemala’s mega-churches allowed me to approximate the sometimes-oceanic dimensions of these ecclesiastical structures, then my work in cells enabled me to glimpse the emotional texture of how individuals wrestle with questions of morality and belonging through the language of Christian eroticism. During my time in Guatemala, I visited dozens of cells but attended four regularly, each for at least eight months. With over five hundred in the capital city alone, I chose each cell carefully, making sure that they contrasted with regard to gender, class, and ethnicity. The contrast proved productive, allowing me to understand the place of eroticism across a range of social milieus.

**NEO-PENTECOSTALISM**

Neo-Pentecostalism is one of three kinds of Protestant Christianity that currently enjoy worldwide growth. The other two are Pentecostal and charismatic Christianities. All three are characterized by personal conversion,

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9 It is important to note that the congregation in question has been historically upper middle class and non-indigenous, but now, like so many of Guatemala City’s mega-churches, it is quickly becoming an ecclesiastical representation of Guatemala’s diversity. Seen as sites of inspiration and upward mobility as well as salvation and sanctification, mega-churches attract those with money, but they also draw men and women, young and old, who seek a better life.
evangelization, belief in the Bible’s authority, and the understanding that Jesus Christ’s crucifixion was a sacrifice made on behalf of humanity’s fallen nature (Bebbington 1989). Pentecostalism, the first of the three movements, arose in the early 1900s through a series of revivals in Kansas, Texas, and California, and places great emphasis on the so-called “Gifts of the Holy Spirit”: speaking in tongues (glossolalia), healing, prophecy, spiritual discernment, and miracles. Since then, Pentecostalism has expanded throughout the world, with the movement yielding converts at such an impressive clip that many suggest that Pentecostalism may soon overtake the Roman Catholic Church as Latin America’s largest Christian presence (Lofton 2008; Wacker 2001; Cox 1995; Miller 1997).

Traditional Pentecostalism of the twentieth century eventually gave birth to charismatic Christianity—the movement’s second wave—which began in the 1950s and includes self-conscious efforts to renew historic churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, through an emphasis on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Csordas 1994). Yet it is neo-Pentecostalism, a much more recent development that takes place in largely independent churches, which has set postwar Guatemala afire. Understanding neo-Pentecostalism begins with the movement’s ministerial focus. These churches emphasize the Christian responsibility to usher in the kingdom of God today instead of waiting for Jesus Christ’s second coming. The time to act is now. This kind of Christian participation means subscribing to a narrative that announces the church’s responsibility to save nations from the power of Satan through the grace of Jesus Christ. Neo-Pentecostalism also involves an active demonological imagination that understands the world as constantly under attack by fallen angels (O’Neill 2009b; Meyer 1999; Englund 2004). In the Guatemalan context, neo-Pentecostals also stress a personal relationship with God through worship services defined by song, testimony, healings, and speaking in tongues. And while traditional Pentecostalism has been historically popular among Guatemala’s poorer communities (both urban and rural) and has been relatively conservative in behavior and dress (e.g., no dancing, no makeup, no revealing clothes), neo-Pentecostalism, in contrast, tends to thrive in the capital city and is popular among middle and upper middle-class professionals, as well as those who long to be upwardly mobile. Neo-Pentecostalism in Guatemala has also been historically ladino/a, or non-indigenous, but today is increasingly indigenous as mega-churches broaden their ministerial scope. Guatemalan neo-Pentecostalism tends to maintain strong ecclesiastical relationships with congregations in the United States as well as those in Africa and Asia.

10 This commonly accepted four-part definition obscures the diversity of evangelical expression, effacing the fact that the term (historically speaking) has been broad enough to include an assortment of rather distinct traditions: Dutch Reformed churches, Southern Baptists, some Episcopalians, and the majority of African-American Protestant sects (Lofton 2008: 224–28).
Mega-churches in Guatemala, for example, tend to have North American-trained pastors as well as satellite churches throughout the United States; they worship in large auditoriums modeled after mega-church structures in the American South.

**FIRST-GENERATION CHRISTIANS**

The vast majority of Guatemalans were Roman Catholic up until 4 February 1976. On this day, at 3:03 a.m., an earthquake measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale rocked the country. The quake’s epicenter lay to the west of Guatemala City, near Chimaltenango, but the entire nation felt the effects: 23,000 dead, 77,000 wounded, and 370,000 houses leveled. Over 1.2 million people were left homeless and 40 percent of the nation’s hospital infrastructure was destroyed. Guatemala City, proportionally speaking, reflected much of the nation’s damage. In a city with a population of 1.3 million, the earthquake wounded 16,549 residents and killed 3,370, and destroyed 99,712 homes leaving nearly a half-million residents homeless. Water services were completely interrupted. In the capital city, people slept in the open air, considering it safer to be in the streets than in their homes (Montenegro 1976; Thomas 2006).

As residents braced themselves for aftershocks, Guatemala’s now storied Pentecostal and charismatic Christian growth took root. The reason was not, as one might first guess, because an act of God scared a population into a millennial worldview. This may have happened for some, at first, but fear is hardly a sustainable cause for conversion (Smilde 2007). Rather, the earthquake set into motion a number of other processes that all contributed to a sustained expansion of Guatemala’s Pentecostal and charismatic Christian populations. Virginia Garrard-Burnett notes that the first, and possibly most important, reason was that Protestant aid agencies from the United States came to Guatemala soon after the earthquake. They provided much appreciated relief in the short term, and in the long term “saturated [Guatemala] with Scripture” (Garrard-Burnett 1998: 121). As immediate relief gave way to efforts at sustainable development, many of these Protestant relief agencies established regional offices in Guatemala City, continuing their work to rebuild both the nation and its soul. The strategy worked. Garrard-Burnett explains that Pentecostal and charismatic church membership jumped by 14 percent only a few months after the earthquake, while the annual growth of Protestant conversion in Guatemala rose to 26 percent by 1982. This number was nearly four times what it had been only a decade prior (Garrard-Burnett 1998: 121).

In addition to fostering North American efforts at spreading the Word of God, the earthquake also initiated a wave of migration from the rural interior to Guatemala City, as survivors moved to the capital looking for work (Gellert and Pinto Soria 1990). When they found little, Pentecostal and charismatic churches provided these newcomers with basic resources (such as food and shelter) while also offering them spaces where they could cultivate a
sense of belonging in uncertain times and unfamiliar places. Garrard-Burnett points out that the earthquake brought to clearer relief many of Guatemala’s societal problems: “unemployment and gross inequities in income distribution; the vast chasm that separated the nation’s poor, largely indigenous majority from the wealthy and cosmopolitan elite; and the societal stresses of increased urban migration by the poor” (1998: 127). One result of all these changes was the rapid escalation of the country’s then low-level civil conflict, which would soon turn genocidal (O’Neill 2005; Hinton and O’Neill 2009). Pentecostal and charismatic growth ultimately took place alongside (and partly because of) political violence and brutal military governments. While most everyone felt the brunt of this violence, many scholars make the argument that Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity kept the faithful out of harm’s way by delivering a far less political message than the Catholic Church’s then-popular brand of liberation theology.

The conversion narrative that emerged amid this dramatic history is familiar to any researcher working with first-generation Christians. David Gutterman characterizes the narrative as follows: “The moment of conversion—when the spirit enters your heart—is the necessary door through which a person must pass if he or she is to move from chaos to order, from ignorance to belief, from blindness to sight, from sinfulness to grace, from dissonance to harmony, from isolation to reconciliation, from death to salvation” (2001: 22). In fact, Guatemala’s earthquake as well as the subsequent political and economic changes allowed many to see themselves in the biblical story of Paul, who was knocked from his horse on the road to Damascus (en route to persecute Christians) by a “bright light from heaven” (Acts 19: 1–19). As the story continues, God addressed this sinner by name, questioned him about his life, and ordered Paul to live better—to spread the Word of God. Struck by lightning, thrown from his horse, Paul agreed, breaking free from his old ways, embracing his new life as a Christian, and devoting his very existence to spreading the Word of God. Once a literal threat to Christianity, Paul now stands as one of Christianity’s most celebrated apostles.

The story is inspirational, providing a narrative framework for Guatemala’s “earthquake generation.” And, true to Paul’s story, first-generation Guatemalan Christians tend to narrate their conversion as happening in a single moment that demarcates a life once lost from a life hailed by Christ. Expectedly, the life once lost is replete with fornication, drugs, alcohol, and spousal abuse; the life before conversion is full of doubt, sadness, and confusion. Manuela Cantón Delgado’s seminal Bautizados en fuego (1998), for example, documents dozens of first-generation conversion narratives from Guatemala. One middle-class El Shaddai congregant confesses:

I had always heard people speaking of Christ, but I never knew Christ... [In my twenties] I worked and dedicated myself to going out on the town, traveling, partying, and women... At the age of thirty-two, I married, but I married before I knew Christ...
[And so one day] my wife was traveling, and I went to a birthday party with some friends. Beginning in the afternoon, we started drinking liquor and partying. . . . Later in the night, my friends said “let’s all go out on the town” and I said “no, I need to go home.” But they told me “no, you need to go out with us!” That night I fell into the sin of fornication and adultery. . . . And when I returned home that night, I sank into an emotional pit. It is difficult to describe this feeling to anyone who hasn’t lived it, but it was overwhelming. I was in anguish. I was depressed. . . . I had no idea what to do, [but] I finally spoke to a Christian about Jesus Christ. He delivered to me a very powerful testimony about how Jesus Christ saved him and all of his children from a very serious accident. The testimony touched my heart, and so I asked him, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ can forgive me of any sin?” and he told me “of course! Just open up your heart to Jesus Christ right now and he will enter. . . .” So I did. And that day when I opened my heart to Jesus Christ, my depression went away in an instant. When I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, I lost all of my guilt from all of my past sins instantly. With Jesus as my savior, I lost that sinking feeling forever (in Delgado 1998: 198–203).

In my own research, one El Shaddai congregant often narrated to me how he was not just an alcoholic, a drug addict, and a philanderer before knowing Christ, but also a childless cynic—how he and his wife simply could not conceive and how this made him spiteful and even jealous, he would sometimes say, of those Christians whose lives seemed bursting with happiness. From his own pre-Christian perspective, his marriage and his life were ruined. Yet, he says with much confidence, Christ changed his life dramatically. In an instant, the Word of God poured over him “like warm oil”; feeling God’s presence, hearing His voice, he became a born-again Christian in an instant. Destined to spread the Word of God to whoever would listen (and oftentimes to those who would not), he not only quit his addictions in a day but fathered two sons in the years to come.

Life, by any stretch of the imagination, is still very difficult for this El Shaddai congregant. His marriage is again on shaky grounds; his wife is no longer a believer, and Guatemala’s continued efforts at economic restructuring in its postwar era have not provided him with many sustainable job opportunities. What is of interest, however, is the constancy with which first-generation Christians narrate their experience of coming to know Christ. The narrative tends to be jagged, literally constituted by breaks, falls, and bursts of lightning. The change is also quick, even rushed from a certain perspective, with a great emphasis on—and a hyperbolic concern for—life before Christ as being bad and life after Christ as being inspired. The difference is between night and day, with the contrast as stark as the difference between lightness and darkness.

What is also important to note is that even though these first-generation Christians are obviously the authors of their own spiritual biographies—in the sense that they themselves make a number of autobiographical decisions during the process of writing their conversion narratives—they consistently narrate themselves out of the experience. First-generation Christians do make it clear that they have chosen a life with Christ. Individual choice, as both
theologians and anthropologists of religion note, is central to neo-Pentecostal cosmologies; “the Protestant problematic,” the Blackwell Companion to Protestantism reads, “is that it places priority on individual conscience in response to revelation—in the Bible and the experience of salvation—as its defining characteristic” (McGrath and Marks 2004: 14). This is why neo-Pentecostalism, like other forms of Protestant Christianity, does not have infant baptisms; one must be old enough to willfully choose a Christian life, be able to announce in his or her own voice a decision for Christ. However, first-generation neo-Pentecostals often narrate their decision to choose Christ in such a way as to make conversion something of a non-choice. Amidst deep despair, Christ seems to have provided these first-generation Christians with a life preserver that only a fool would reject. The narrative itself begs the question: when confronted by God’s voice—when eternal salvation addresses you personally, when the question is posed to your very soul at a time when you are at your most vulnerable—what could anyone answer but “Yes!”? This distinct lack of authorship stands in contrast to the conversion narratives embraced and employed by second- and third-generation Christians who are the sons and daughters of Christians. As mentioned earlier, these younger people have never really been all that lost and have in turn never had much reason to be found.

WHAT SECOND- AND THIRD-GENERATION CHRISTIANS WANT

“It’s like when teenagers are in love,” Carolyn explained to me during an El Shaddai cell group that met weekly in one of Guatemala City’s middle-class neighborhoods. “Have you seen the youth (los jóvenes) in the streets? When they are in love? They hold hands. They hug. They kiss!” For effect, Carolyn began to act out this kind of affection, hugging and kissing the air with a kind of exaggerated and completely unrealistic swivel of her head. As Carolyn continued her demonstration, the rest of the group giggled. They agreed happily with her answer to my question: What is it like getting to know Christ? Between chuckles, another pointed at Carolyn’s pantomimes, adding: “That’s what it’s like!”

For these second- and third-generation Christians, these young men and women, conversion to Christianity is best understood in the language of a budding relationship. Conversion is exciting, emotionally risky, life changing, and titillating. Conversion makes these young believers toss and turn in their beds at night. Their daydreams drift toward Christ; their spare moments are filled with visions of Him. They would often tell me that coming to know Christ put a skip in their step, made them believe and know that they were someone special, that they had an intimate, personal, and lifelong relationship

11 Jóvenes, or youths, in Guatemala are typically men and women between ages eighteen and thirty.
with Christ that was only in its beginning stages. In all sincerity, the faithful suggested in obtuse ways that they were “horny” for Christ (in a spiritual sense) and that their youthful infatuation would one day develop into something much more mature. In fact, Carolyn’s reference to los jóvenes who “eat each other’s faces off” in the streets smartly parallels the awkward efforts of young lovers with the efforts of young converts coming to terms with their spiritual lives. Both are adolescent, exuberant, discomfited. In contrast to the writings of St. Teresa of Ávila, for example, Carolyn’s musings are not of a mystical saint but of a spiritual novice who gropes in the dark for whom she so desperately yearns.

One rhetorical engine that provides second- and third-generation neo-Pentecostals with a vocabulary of desire is contemporary Christian music—the tracks played over Christian airwaves, traded by way of informal cassette economies, and performed during church services by sometimes talented but oftentimes struggling bands. To its credit, the music is crisp, catchy, and contagious. They are the kinds of songs that are easily remembered, that haunt the unsuspecting listener for hours after first hearing them. They circle the mind, without ever really landing, dominating internal dialogues with passionate stories and dramatic subplots. Furthermore, the emotional texture structuring these songs is explicitly erotic, with titles such as “I Want More of You” (Yo quiero más de ti), “From the Inside Out” (Desde mi interior), and “All I Need is You” (Creo en ti).12 Given that so much popular music throughout the Americas lingers on an erotic tension between a suitor and his or her crush, it has not been difficult for Christians to replace the name of a given squeeze (e.g., Jaime) with the name of their savior (i.e., Jesus), or even to leave the pronouns open-ended, allowing the church setting to give the antecedents some direction. One popular song performed often by believers and cited just as often by Christians is entitled “Your Love,” and reads: “I am here / Waiting for you at each dawn / I am here / Dying to live in you / You found me / You, your fragrance, I breathe for you / You are the source of my love / Your love is inexhaustible/Your spirit is incomparable / You are my love.”13 This visceral music—with its pounding rhythm, thumping base, and sugary refrains—produces dynamic and desire-filled soundscapes. The music provides the faithful with vibrant interior worlds replete with both scripts and scenarios that help them make sense of a budding yearning for Christ, of their own slow realization that they cannot live without God’s love and that Jesus Christ is their door to eternal salvation.

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12 This particular cluster of song titles comes from the hugely popular producer of contemporary Christian music, HillSong Music Australia. Popular in Guatemala, these English-to-Spanish translations are HillSong Music Australia’s, not my own.

Christian eroticism provides these young men and women with not only a soundtrack to their spiritual lives but also, as mentioned in the introduction, a very different kind of conversion narrative than that of their parents and grandparents. This is all to say that buttressed by contemporary Christian music’s eroticism, second- and third-generation Christians tend to employ a conversion narrative that allows for a rather distinct construction of personhood. They narrate their conversion with a kind of authority, choice, and even bravado that is absent from their forefathers’ stories. There is very little despair—little emphasis on life before Christ and life after Christ, and not much interest at all in conversion’s immediate material or emotional gains. Parented by Christians, having spent Sunday mornings playing on church grounds, having been raised on a steady diet of Christian media, maybe even having attended a Christian elementary school, second- and third-generation Christians are simply unable to narrate their experience of God in the same way as their parents. Instead, the most common of conversion narratives employ an erotic kind of discernment that makes evident how these young Christians do not need Christ but want Him; they yearn for Him. These young Christians do not desperately flail for Him amidst a life that is barely worth living. Rather, they narrate themselves as curious and cautious, frustrated but intrigued, and ultimately capable of making a mature decision about someone who sets their hearts afire.

Cecelia Caballeros, the wife of Dr. Harold Caballeros, plays the role of “first-lady” to a growing neo-Pentecostal empire, and she captured the tone of this new conversion narrative one Sunday morning. She preached, as she tends to do, in a breathy voice, performing a seductive kind of femininity that only helps make the point that Christian eroticism is omnipresent in Guatemalan neo-Pentecostal communities. She began one particular sermon with a quote from the Book of Revelation: “The spirit and the bride say ‘Come.’ And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as gift” (22: 17). The passage allowed the pastora to announce the following:

The spirit of the wife says ‘come.’ It is a call that the body, the wife, and the lover make. We are screaming [as Christians] to the Lord: Come! [¡Ven!] Come! Come! Just like a girlfriend [novia] in love seeks her boyfriend [novio]... just as young lovers yearn for each other, the girlfriend seeks her boyfriend. And when the young lover finally sees her partner? She will say: You are so good looking! You look so good! How I missed you!

14 This is not to say that the so-called Gospel of prosperity is not important to the lives of Guatemalan neo-Pentecostals. There is a very real sense for second- and third-generation Christians that a good Christian life has material rewards (see Coleman 2000). There is just little sense that conversion alone leads to prosperity. The difference parallels Martin Luther’s sixteenth-century theological distinction between salvation and sanctification. Salvation, for Luther, is something bestowed by God onto the sinner through faith, not works. Sanctification is a process of purification in which the Christian participates throughout life (Luther 1962). Salvation happens in a moment through the conversion experience; sanctification takes a lifetime of work. Prosperity, like sanctification, involves a day-to-day plod.
I missed you so! And when the young lover returns home, she will call him. She will call her lover [and say]: Today I want to hear your voice. Today I want to speak with you. You make me miss you so much!

The *pastora* then turned this erotic exegesis into a model for spiritual adoration. She continues her sermon with a rhetorical question: “When are we going to tell the Lord this? When are we going to tell Jesus to come? Come! Come! When are we going to scream out to the Lord like a young lover [for Him] to come? Come! Come! . . . It’s about going to the Lord and saying, ‘Look, I am in your hands. I give myself to you totally because you are my boyfriend [*novio*]. I command you to come! Come! Come! . . . I give myself to you, my lover.’”

The *pastora*’s performance leaned on exasperated tones, long sighs, and a whimpering kind of mood befitting a *telenovela*. The *pastora* also relied on the command “come!” (*¡Ven!*). While the connotations of the word can carry the same sexual overtones in Spanish as they do in English (usually meaning to have an orgasm), of particular interest is that the Christian—here, the girlfriend—addresses the Lord with a “familiar” or informal construction of the verb “to come” (*venir*). In the Spanish language, where grammar constitutes social standing, the use of *¡ven!* (an informal command delivered between either familiar equals or to someone of a lower status) suggests not only a noteworthy degree of informality between Christians and their savior but also a great deal of authority on the part of the Christian.

This informality is not unique to neo-Pentecostals, to be sure. It is common in Roman Catholic prayers, for example, to invoke God, saints, and Our Lady with a certain degree of familiarity, especially through the use of *tú* (you, informal) instead of *usted* (you, formal). And, as one might expect, the relationship between Christianity and different regimes of subjectivity is a dense point in the literature on modernity in Latin America. Patricia Seed’s *Love, To Honor and Obey in Colonial Mexico* (1988) traces similar indexical transitions in eighteenth-century Roman Catholicism, and Pamela Voekel’s *Alone before God* (2002) follows suit, highlighting a shift from an external, corporate Catholicism to a more interior piety. Yet, Roman Catholic and neo-Pentecostal uses of informal constructions are not the same. They have different ends. If one reads Roman Catholic prayers, for example, they invoke theological dogmas. The Hail Mary references the Immaculate Conception, and this prayer’s recitation works to inscribe formal articles of faith into the devotional context. Postwar neo-Pentecostal subjectivity, however, is far less doctrinal, stressing an active and ongoing dialogue with Jesus Christ—one that tends to take the form of a coy exchange between the faithful and his or her Lord. For neo-Pentecostalism, intimacy aims at a personal dialogue between the believer and God through the use of (among many other constructions) *¡ven!*.

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15 I owe this paragraph to the intellectual generosity of Fernando Armstrong-Fumero. Thank you.
Through the use of ¡ven!, it is clear that the Christian has a choice to make, that he or she can command Jesus to “come,” and that he or she ultimately has the ability to say no—to tell Jesus not to come, to in fact stay away, at least for now. This rejection of Christ seems unlikely, but nevertheless, the pastora makes possible the role of the lover who cannot wait any longer, who demands from her lover not just his presence but his entire self. And this kind of adoration, the pastora continues, is more than appropriate. It is ideal, even, because, in the words of Cecelia Caballeros: “We are the lovers of our church... [And] our churches are in love with Jesus Christ and one day, we [ourselves and Christ] will arrive at our wedding day together.” Implicit in all of this erotic devotion is a form of personhood that is not only impatient—or head over heels for Christ—but one that also has choices and the authority to make those choices. Gone are the desperate nights when drugs and alcohol brought Christ his converts; gone is this kind of spiritual triage. Now young men and women find themselves willfully being seduced by Christ and narrating it as such.

Carolyn, mentioned above, is but one example among many. When asked to tell me about her conversion, Carolyn did not begin with some variation of being lost. She quickly admitted to never having had to experience such despair. She was the fourth child of six; her parents are neo-Pentecostal Christians and her older siblings are active in the church community. She has never known a life outside of a neo-Pentecostal church. El Shaddai celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2008 just as Carolyn celebrated her twenty-fourth birthday. So rather than employing Paul’s conversion narrative, one that emphasized a cracked and splintered existence, she referenced a very popular song at the time: “I Want to Fall Even More in Love with You” (Quiero enamorarme más de ti).16 She explained that this one particular ballad, often sung by the crowds in church with raspy voices and through a plodding melody, spoke to her. The song also told her story, she explained, by capturing her growing relationship with Jesus Christ. She did not know Him completely (“Who could?” she asked), but she wanted to continue to know Him more. The lyrics, the rhythm, the song’s emotional texture—they all narrated Carolyn as well as other second- and third-generation Guatemalan Christians who find themselves embodying a rather curious biography, one that announces through song: “I do not want to conform / I have tried and I want more / I want to fall in love with more of you / Teach me to love you and to live / I conform to your justice and your truth / With my life I want to adore you / With all that I have and all that I am / All that I have been I give to you / That my life be part of yours / Like perfume on your feet.”17

16 This song is produced by Hillsong Music Australia.
Like perfume on his feet, Carolyn’s adoration lingers intimately on Christ’s body, on wanting something even more unique than her present life. Of interest here is that the song speaks for Carolyn not simply because of the lyrics, although the words are unmistakably important. This song also reflects her experiences because of the style in which the song is commonly sung during church services, on Christian airwaves, and at church organized concerts. The song is slow, even confessional, and oftentimes performed with closed eyes by a solo keyboardist; the song creates a space where the performer can initiate an intimate dialogue with Christ. As breathy as the *pastora* who sermonized on Christ coming to each believer, the song stretches the lyrics into something overly sincere, crowing the refrain with the intensity and sincerity befitting a love song. Constituting Carolyn’s conversion narrative, the song ultimately represents a genre of adoration that is unmistakable in postwar Guatemala. It is in fact one of Christian eroticism’s greatest emotional purchases that it can narrate through song the dynamics of spiritual awakening, the very dynamics that parallel young lovers calling for and pawing at each other.

**TO DESIRE AS A CHRISTIAN**

Before turning to the second part of this essay, before beginning the important work of comparing the above Christian eroticism and the eroticism of democracy, a word on gender is in order. It is, simply put, important to make the observation, even if only briefly, that neo-Pentecostal men long for Christ in much the same way as women pine for him—that, to quote Caroline Walker Bynum, all Christian language “opens out beyond itself to an intractable physicality” (1992: 20). This is not to say that conversion is not a gendered and gendering process. Virginia Lieson Brereton comments: “Perhaps most damaging to their image of themselves, in converting men had to renounce the activities that tended to identify them as manly men: lusty drinking, gambling, smoking and womanizing” (1991: 99). Conversion reconfigures masculinities (Brusco 1995). Yet the metaphor of Christ as bridegroom has proved a flexible trope for both women and men ever since the medieval era, allowing the faithful of all stripes to assume and become subsumed by a devotional desire. St. John of the Cross (1542–1591), a contemporary of St. Teresa of Ávila, describes in his *Spiritual Canticle* a relationship between a bride and bridegroom. With Christ as bridegroom, the language of desire provides St. John with an idiom for his overwhelming yearning for a deep, spiritual connection with God. This gendered trope serves as allegory for St. John’s direct need of God—for God’s touch, for God’s taste, for God’s hold. He writes: “There he made gently free; / had honey of revelation to confide. / There I gave all of me; / hid nothing, had no pride; / there I promised to become his bride. / Forever at his door / O gave my heart and soul. My fortune too. / I’ve no flock any more, / no other work in view. / My occupation: love. It’s all I do” (John of the Cross 1979: 9). Throughout his poetry, St. John articulates a
kind of spiritual hunger that is satiated only by palpable manifestations of Christ as lover; it is a theme he pursued throughout his writings.

In *The Dark Night*, St. John of the Cross writes of a young woman’s desire for a lover and how she escapes into the night, how her burning heart drives her into the unknown. In complete darkness, after a frantic journey, the young woman finds her beloved—which is to say, this young woman finds God. Thrilled by the union, they consummate their relationship: “I abandoned and forgot myself, / laying my face on my Beloved; / all things ceased; I went out from myself, / leaving my cares / forgotten among the lilies” (John of the Cross 1991: 359). The end product, in a narrative sense, is nothing to dismiss, especially given its ethnographic resonance in the Guatemalan context. What St. John of the Cross accomplishes throughout his writings is to establish the notion that “loosing oneself in the lilies” is a deeply Christian concern for both men and women of faith (Furey n.d.; Elliott 1997; Atwood 1997; Fogelman 2003; Bynum 1982). His poetry makes thinkable today what was obviously salient in the medieval era—that eroticism is central to Christianity and that desire is a narrative device, if not a phenomenological tool, that contributes to the production of Christian worlds as well as selves. As theologian Martyn Percy notes, “The grammar of [contemporary Pentecostal] intimacy is highly developed beyond the implications of being hot, wet, passionate and open. There is a distinctive vocabulary of sexual consummation. Worship is described as ‘making love to God,’ Jesus is ‘turned on by our desire for him,’ and the Spirit a ‘brooding lover who woos and courts’” (1998: 148). This eroticism, Percy continues, is principally about spiritual assent (about the believer opening himself to Christ and Christ coming to the believer) rather than a domestic politics that might limit men’s participation in this erotic scenario. Neo-Pentecostal men desire Christ just as women desire him, even if the details of such gendered desire would make for a compelling study in and of itself. It is a lesson that neo-Pentecostalism retells often, with male artists singing erotic songs as often as female artists, with men of faith humming along to these erotic songs as much as women, and with second- and third-generation men narrating their conversion experience through the very same erotic trope as women.

**THE POLITICS OF CHRISTIAN EROTICISM**

After sunset, members of Carolyn’s cell group arrived at her home one by one, filing into her kitchen. Twelve in all, the faithful exchanged hugs and quick laughs before finding their seats. Settling in for yet another weekly meeting, they would soon address the theme of good Christian citizenship and how believers (for the sake of postwar Guatemala) could employ their faith to make themselves more punctual, masturbate less, pay their taxes, and stop littering. Groups such as Carolyn’s provide opportunities for neo-Pentecostals to listen to each other, teach each other, and on many occasions challenge each
other to do more to themselves for the sake of Guatemala. Before they uttered a single prayer, however, Carolyn turned off the lights, forcing everyone to sit in the dark. After some time of silent prayer and reflection, Carolyn then pressed “play” on her cassette player to let each member sing along to the very song cited above in the introduction, “Yo quiero más de ti.” With eyes closed and tears beginning to stream down their cheeks, the group sang along to this popular song: “Break open my heart / Break open my life / I hand over my life to you / All that I am Lord / All I have is yours / I want to be consumed by you.” In absolute darkness, eyes closed, framed by the warmth of fellow believers, these members clamored for Christ—announced again that they “want to be consumed by you.” One young man dropped to his knees during the song, massaging his thighs with his hands, demonstrating (it would seem) his frustration for wanting so badly what the music allowed him to taste but that which he could not have in full. Yet, once the song ended, Carolyn turned on the lights, which broke sharply with the calm that had settled over the group. With emotions still trained by the music, by the darkness, by the intimacy, the group fell into a conversation that stretched late into the night, one that addressed their desire for Christ, the state of each person’s soul, and how each believer might work harder to corral their reckless will for both Christ and country. Postwar reform, these Christians agreed, begins with moral reform.

This shared conversation amongst second- and third-generation Christians, the one that shuttles between contemporary Christian music and questions of transformation, both political and moral, allows us to begin to glimpse the ethnographic fact that Christian eroticism interacts with a range of postwar developments that simply cannot be ignored. To conclude this study by announcing that Christian eroticism provides Guatemalan neo-Pentecostals with an alternative conversion narrative would be an accurate statement but would also suggest that neo-Pentecostal eroticism is somehow contained—is something that can be studied as an object, as something with clean borders. The reality is something entirely different, and far messier. The erotic narratives that neo-Pentecostals such as Carolyn employ to recount their spiritual lives intermingle with postwar efforts at democratization. Christian eroticism provides neo-Pentecostals with not just a narrative for how they come to know Jesus Christ but also with a political rationality that details how one might begin to think about postwar participation.

The ultimate observation that this final section makes is that amid postwar Guatemala’s continued efforts at democratization, amid a continued erotic call for one’s democratic other, “saving” Guatemala tends to begin with saving the self. And these Christian acts of self-governance take place in a

number of confessional settings: Sunday services, Christian concerts, reflection
groups, praise and healing sessions, prayer and fasting campaigns, journal
entries and moral manuals, and public as well as private testimonies that
detail the shadowy corners of the broken and fallen self. In place of what Iris
Marion Young understands as democracy’s eroticism, one that encourages
the citizen to take to the streets, neo-Pentecostal eroticism contributes to the
production of “democratic” citizens who turn inward to pray, fast, and
confess (O’Neill 2009b). And this shift in directionality (in empathy, in
concern, in ethics) brought about by neo-Pentecostalism is a critically impor-
tant dimension of democracy in Latin America because neo-Pentecostal eroti-
cism is a mood that not only directs the believer away from the streets and
toward the soul, but also contributes to the governance of that soul.

This observation makes sense when one considers the different “affective
economies” (McAlister 2008: 879) that circulate in postwar Guatemala. By
affect, I mean the experience of feeling or emotion that is “at once abstract
and concrete, . . . more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more
fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings”
(Stewart 2007: 3).19 This is to say that neo-Pentecostal Christianity is one of
the most consistent producers of affect (of feelings, of emotion) in postwar
Guatemala, announcing to the faithful through Christian eroticism that their
nation can be “saved” (can democratize) once each and every person corrals
his or her sinful self. Christian eroticism contributes to the constitution of a
nation (and a self) in need of development. As I write elsewhere, this is why
neo-Pentecostals, such as Carolyn, organize their friends into cell groups,
dim the lights to pray, play contemporary Christian music, and discuss sin as
problem for both the self and the nation (O’Neill 2009b). These are concerted
efforts at “setting a mood,” at generating and sustaining a certain kind of par-
ticipation that is itself angled at a certain kind of improvement. During an elec-
tion year, Carolyn’s pastor, Dr. Harold Caballeros, a presidential candidate
himself, explained to his congregation that the neo-Pentecostal must work dili-
gently on his or her self for the sake of the nation—that the self is a kind of
public in need of reform:

In reality, I need to train my spirit. I need to forge my character. I need to see my actions
as being a direct result of my inner life . . . and a new life [with Christ] generates new
works, produces new actions. A new person makes new fruits that are completely differ-
ent. In this sense, we need to forge our character—and I use the word forge like one uses
the word to describe the melding of metal with fire. I am using the word forge to say that

19 When addressing affect, I follow the charge set by Michelle Rosaldo some twenty-five years
ago: “As anthropologists interested in affect, we might do well to work from [emotions] where the
relevance of culture is clear, towards cases where it is more problematic, instead of starting with
presumed physiological universals and then ‘adding culture on’” (1983: 11). My analysis has
done just that—beginning not with timeless emotions but with the many ways in which people
and policies rule themselves and each other through affect.
we need to forge our character just as one breaks in a wild horse, to make the horse go in a certain direction. We need to make our conduct and our life subjects to our control.

Dr. Caballeros’ narrative, as it so often does, then became entangled in a larger apocalyptic scenario. He continues elsewhere: “God called this nation. He made a calling, a choice, and called unto [Guatemala] with the goal of making it His own nation. You all remember, we have already been over Peter’s letters. We have already been over Deuteronomy and saw how God tells you that you are my special treasure, a holy nation, a nation of kings and holy people. A nation chosen by God.” His vision allows the believer’s desire for Christ and a saved nation to meld with his or her own recognition of sinfulness. While the faithful choose Jesus in much the same way a teenager might pursue his or her crush, Dr. Caballeros assures the faithful that God has already chosen Guatemala. The faithful must simply choose God and then make themselves worthy for God. This effort at worthiness takes a great deal of confessional work, the very kind of work that Carolyn and her fellow Christians pursued late into the night.

This kind of confessional work further establishes that neo-Pentecostalism involves a kind of subjectivity that has certain responsibilities and dispositions—to be active and disciplined (Rose 1996; Gordon 1991; O’Malley 1996), and to pursue what Michel Foucault (1988) understands as the care of the self (see, for example, O’Neill 2009a). Neo-Pentecostalism, especially in Guatemala, involves a political rationality that constantly asks: What should the good citizen do for the sake of democracy? A critically important part of this question is its ability to nest in the hearts and the minds of Christians. This means that rather than the nation-state simply governing its citizens, Christian citizens often take on the responsibility to govern themselves—to regulate their own conduct, or even to forge their character. The logic and the promise of neo-Pentecostalism prompt people to do things—to themselves, for their nation, and in the name of postwar democracy. Dr. Caballeros’ sermon about taming one’s reckless will is but one example. 20

Important here is the point that this Christian eroticism as political rationality is observably different (in scope, in form, and in effect) from another postwar

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20 Foucault’s notion of governmentality, as I write elsewhere (2009a), lends some perspective on how neo-Pentecostalism involves a kind of political rationality. His lasting contribution has been to see the problem of government as not only tied to state politics but also linked to the formation of the modern subject, especially the citizen, in a variety of ways and through certain modes of thought (Foucault 1991). Neo-Pentecostal eroticism, this article argues, is one such “mode of thought” that provides a range of cultural practices through which citizens are both constituted and governed: “Governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants” (Foucault 1999: 162). Rather, governing involves getting citizens to “evaluate and act upon [themselves] so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to” (Cruikshank 1996: 234). This point rings especially true in societies with decentralized or weak modes of authority, such as postwar Guatemala. There, neo-Pentecostal eroticism involves a political rationality that involves the production of “autonomous and calculable members of society [who are] able to be left for the most part to regulate their own behavior” (Hindess 1996: 72; Dean 1996: 10). Neo-Pentecostalism as a political rationality promotes self-governing subjects, citizens that governments do not have to rule because these men and women manage themselves.
eroticism. This second eroticism is democracy’s erotic call to engage the other. Reverberating throughout Guatemala’s peace process and postwar context, this charge bends Guatemalans toward the public sphere by way of the erotic. Guatemala’s peace process began amid political unrest, with a series of talks and accords that ultimately led to a United Nations-mediated peace process (1994–1996). The Oslo Accord, signed in 1994 as part of this peace process, initiated the Historical Clarification Commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, [CEH]), a project created to investigate human rights violations and to make recommendations on how to promote peace in postwar Guatemala. According to the CEH, more than two hundred thousand people died or disappeared as a result of Guatemala’s thirty-six-year civil war, of which more than 80 percent were Maya. The report also notes that 93 percent of these human rights violations can be connected to the state (CEH 1999). The CEH establishes in light of the United Nations Genocide Convention that the Guatemalan state committed acts of genocide against Maya people.

In this postwar context, there has been a continued effort toward democratization, with particular interest in celebrating Guatemala’s ethnic diversity by way of a pan-Maya movement for increased indigenous rights (Sieder 1999; Fischer and Brown 1996; Warren 1998; Handy 2002; Fischer 2002; Nelson 1999). The 1996 Peace Accords, for example, are in many ways rooted in a vision of justice that stresses a culturally plural network of contemporary life, one that promotes group-differentiated policies that do not just cultivate but also crave harmony through dissimilarity. The Peace Accords model the spirit of Iris Marion Young’s philosophical work, which understands the nature of democracy to be erotic. Young does so by way of an analogy between democracy and an idealized vision of the city. She writes, “The erotic dimension of the city has always been an aspect of its fearfulness, for it holds out the possibility that one will lose one’s identity, will fall. But we also take pleasure in being open to and interested in people we experience as different” (1990: 239). This emphasis on difference—on an attraction to and respect for the other—ultimately allows Young to understand not just the city but also democracy as erotic, as based on an excitement in variation, on the extension of one’s own self toward another. Democracy, ideally, is rooted in “an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one’s secure routine to encounter the novel, strange and surprising” (1990: 238–41). For Young, eroticism exists as a metaphor for democratic justice, as a surge to engage the public sphere, as a precondition for the cultivation of such democratic virtues as persuading, debating, listening, compromising, and seeking common ground. Democracy’s eroticism draws citizens to the streets and into face-to-face encounters.

The problem, however, is that the Peace Accords’ erotic call for the other has not so much flagged over the years as having never been truly erect in the first place. Pan-Maya activism has not had the same kind of success as comparable movements in Bolivia and Ecuador (Poster 2004; Zamosc 2004). While urban
Maya activists have had relatively good success in leveraging international awareness to advance their goals, they have not been able to generate a grassroots movement, or even a groundswell of support, that might draw people into the capital city to protest or even to vote (Fischer 2004: 92). A disconnect remains between the Maya movement’s urban-based leadership and those indigenous people who reside in or beyond the capital city. What is more, postwar Guatemala continues to be a decidedly anti-democratic place. Unity through difference remains a mere metaphor. The numbers tell the story. Violent murders rose from 3,230 in 2001 to 5,338 in 2005, making Guatemala City’s homicide rate 109 per one hundred thousand inhabitants and the capital city one of the most dangerous in the world (Canadian Red Cross 2006). Guatemala’s female mortality rate today parallels those during the country’s genocidal civil war. As Victoria Sanford reports: “Between 2001 and 2006, while the female population increased by 8 percent, the female homicide rate increased by more than 117 percent” (Sanford 2008: 21). These statistics make United Nations Rapporteur Philip Alston’s audacious comment seem rather ordinary: “Guatemala is a good place to commit a murder,” he announced, “because you will almost certainly get away with it” (Painter 2007). This postwar impunity partially explains the country’s disturbing level of extrajudicial executions (MINUGUA 2004; see also O’Neill and Thomas n.d.).

Instead of democracy’s erotic call for the other, something very different takes root in postwar Guatemala today. Christian eroticism provides a growing number of Guatemalans with not just a new kind of conversion narrative, as described above, but also a particular political rationality that governs through erotic moods and emotional charges. This eroticism is much more literal than the eroticism that the Peace Accords seem to advocate. In fact, driven by Christian eroticism, dutiful believers do not turn outward toward the other for the sake of the nation, as Young proposes, but turn inward toward the Christian self for the sake of the nation. This subsection’s opening vignette begins to animate the fact that an increasing number of neo-Pentecostals follow Dr. Caballeros’ cue to work diligently on their selves for the sake of their nation instead of engaging the other, however that other comes to be imagined. Carolyn’s reflection group demonstrates that neo-Pentecostalism’s brand of Christian citizenship forces a reimagining of what democracy is and how it works, inverting (it would seem) democracy’s erotic logic. Not so much replete with an erotic charge that draws individual citizens together, efforts at postwar democracy (when pushed through a Christian register) have instead become an erotic, interpersonal affair.

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