

WORKSHOP

Gender, Pentecostalism and Diaspora Subversions, inversions, redefinitions

Bergen, 12-14 March 2013

University of Bergen

Department of Social Anthropology

Seminar Room, 8th-9th Floor

Gender, as we know has always played a paradoxical role in Pentecostalism: on the one hand Pentecostal theologies convey, through the conversion narrative, ruptures and liberations vis-à-vis given inherited gender traditions and relationalities, conveying new senses of egalitarian community and affecting domesticity. On the other, from a demographic and political point of view most Pentecostal churches remain a highly unequal system where, despite the majority of feminine frequency and adhesion, places of power and authority remain mostly masculine.

Part of this paradox can be explained through another dilemma brought about by Pentecostalism: it is informed as a global, supra-cultural ethos, but relies in a constant process of cultural 'localization', in order to adjust its own dialectics of conversion and transformation. It is intrinsic and extrinsically framed as a trans-global phenomenon, but 'succeeds' through its conversion into 'autochthony', absorbing and reconfiguring cultural logics. But a third dilemma also appears in the equation: the simultaneous rooting of Pentecostalism in 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Pentecostalism is frequently framed as the individualistic, psychologizing consequence of modernity (or post-modernity), while it constantly refers to an idea of Biblical tradition that is pre-modern: that of the Pentecostal gift or charisma. Finally, one could also argue that such dilemmas and paradoxes stem from an all-encompassing understanding of 'Pentecostalism' as an umbrella term that covers highly disparate expressions.

In this workshop we intend to complexify these dilemmas from a specific perspective: that of the diasporization of Pentecostal movements and the consequent processes of subversion, inversion and redefinition it spouts, especially in what concerns political and experiential domains. These processes, guided by the act of mobility, affect church members - as believers and migrants - in their quotidian, day-to-day life, but also in terms of morality, aspirations and self-conceptions. If migration is, by definition, a life-changing experience, how does it couple with conversion narratives and moral aspirations produced within Pentecostal communities? The question remains open: can we talk about a 'diasporic pentecostalism' in the same terms as others have talked about 'diasporic religions'? What are the implications of this in terms of 'zones' of

anthropological comparison (African, South American, Melanesian Pentecostalisms, etc.)? Possible themes for this workshop could be:

- Gender and Christian pluralism: spaces of confrontation and adaptation;
- Transporting or discovering Pentecostalism: debating trajectories of belief and adherence;
- (Re)defining moral territories and moral communities in transnational perspective;
- Spaces of subversion versus spaces of continuity in diasporic context;
- Rethinking 'tradition' and 'culture' in diasporic contexts: Christianity and Pentecostalism as agents of traditionalization.

PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 12th March

10.00-10.30 Welcome, coffee

10.30-11.30 Ruy Blanes: *Introduction: subversions, inversions, redefinitions*

11.30-12.00 Discussion

12.00-13.00 Lunch

13.00-14.00 Rijk van Dijk: *Pentecostalism, Institutional Social Mobility and the Reformulation of Relationships: the case of Botswana*

14.00-15.00 Katrin Maier: *"If your husband is backing you up, you can go anywhere!" Female Agency Through Submission to Male Authority in Nigerian Pentecostalism in London*

15.00-15.30 Discussion

Thursday, 13th March

10.00-11.00 Maïté Maskens: *Combating and reproducing 'hegemonic masculinity': the Pentecostal reworking of male identities in Brussels*

11.00-12.00 Mar Griera and Rafael Cazarín: *Gendered religious gifts? Spiritual biographies of Pentecostal women in migratory contexts in South Africa and Spain*

12.00-12.30 Discussion

12.00-13.00 Lunch

13.00-14.00 Geraldine Mossière: *Discourses on gender among young African Pentecostals in Montreal: Intersecting experiences of transnationality and representations of locality*

14.00-15.00 Kim Knibbe: *Charisma, Risk and gender in mission and migration*

15.00-15.30 Discussion

Friday, 14th March

10.00-12.00 Final discussion

ABSTRACTS

Introduction: subversions, inversions, redefinitions

Ruy Blanes (University of Bergen)

In this introduction I propose to explore the epistemological virtues of the paradoxical quality of Pentecostalism in what concerns the topics explored in the workshop. Namely, the conundrums that allow researchers to define Pentecostalism as simultaneously egalitarian and hierarchical, local and globalizing, fixed and mobile, masculine and feminine. I will explore such conundrums and suggest that they are a product of the simultaneous emphasis that both anthropology *and* Pentecostalism place upon discourse and its ideological implications.

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Pentecostalism, Institutional Social Mobility and the Reformulation of Relationships: the case of Botswana.

Rijk van Dijk (ASC, Leiden/Centre of Excellence, Univ. of Konstanz/AISSL, Amsterdam)

While the (transnational) mobility of people should not be confused with the mobility of institutions (such as Pentecostal churches) – since these mobilities may be marked by very different dynamics and distinct processes that cannot be conflated – the current emphasis on the ‘portability’ of religious praxis (cf. Csordas) is adding another complicating dimension as to how precisely different mobilities can be distinguished from one another. While portability can be seen as an attribute to people, institutions, practices, ideologies and ideas, it does not allow for a further understanding of the differences in the dynamics of mobility that are attached to each of these. Whereas the mobility of people in the context of (religious) migration, such as is involving Pentecostalism, has been receiving ample attention and analysis, strangely institutional mobility has not. By institutional mobility we can refer to both the movement of institutions across geographical space, as well as to the movement up and down a social hierarchy, usually understood as social mobility. How does the geographical mobility of institutions affect their social mobility and vice versa? This question is explicitly pertinent to an analysis of the traveling of institutions within the rapid spread of Pentecostalism, of which this paper will specifically address the institution of marriage. The paper will argue that in the mobility of Pentecostalism in Africa, there is also a mobility of institutional ideas, ideologies and practices concerning marriage which in their geographical mobility also affect (upward) social mobility. This is thereby changing and redefining the manner in which followers relate to the institution, as in this process the institution begins to incorporate and to express changing class positions, inclusive of notions of the (ideal) affectionate nature of the relationship as well as notions concerning the changing (moral, social) responsibilities of the male and female role-models in the

relation. This is not simply indicating a Pentecostal portability of the institution, but indicates a newly intertwining of geographical and social mobilities that inform this reformulation of the marital relationship. As a case in point, the paper will demonstrate this process of the coming of transnational Pentecostalism to Botswana, and the manner in which it inspired a reformulation of the marital relationship in a fashion that places the institution on a trajectory of upward social mobility in the country; a process I define as 'institutional social mobility'.

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"If your husband is backing you up, you can go anywhere!" Female Agency Through Submission to Male Authority in Nigerian Pentecostalism in London

Katrin Maier (Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex)

The biblical scripture "woman submit to your husband..." is the basis of the social order that is at the heart of conservative Christian gender relations. But can we assume – as liberal and feminist thought often does – that 'female submission' equals the 'oppression of women' in and through religion?

The example of Nigerian-born members of the Pentecostal Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in London shows that women choose to actively engage in 'submission' under male authority to enhance their agency. The 'divine' social order in the RCCG is marked by a profound ambivalence between hierarchical and participatory power relations and far from static. The duty to submit to a male dominated hierarchy (with God at the top), is coupled with the notion of individual responsibility of each believer to take and maintain one's 'place'. By submitting, RCCG women actively mould their place as a passive position in an 'act of faith'. Rather than transgressing the biblical gender order, it is the performance of dependence and the demonstration of 'knowing one's place' that allows women to go 'anywhere'. I will use the example of female RCCG Pastor Bunmi in London to show how she gains authority over her large congregation through public acts of submission to her husband and fellow pastor as her spiritual and social 'head'.

Pentecostal female agency is shaped by men and a naturalised notion of a woman's 'role' confines them to certain spaces and tasks. However, the flexible negotiation of female submission allows for a notion of male responsibility and mutual 'love' that aims at balancing out some of the voluntary sacrifices of women who submit.

The paper I propose demonstrates the complexity of the re-negotiation of 'female submission', going far beyond a liberal/feminist dichotomy of obedience vs. agency. It takes place in the religious arena of a transnational social field that I call 'London-Lagos' and is shaped by experiences in Nigeria, the UK and 'in between'. I hope that my focus on 'submission' in a transnational setting can enhance the workshop's attempt to compare gender dynamics across religions and backgrounds.

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Combating and reproducing 'hegemonic masculinity': the Pentecostal reworking of male identities in Brussels

Maïté Maskens (Université Libre de Bruxelles)

This contribution aims at addressing the paradoxes of gender in Pentecostal churches attended by converts of African or Latin-American origin in Brussels. Religious and migratory experiences are intimately intermingled in these spaces. In most cases, the geographical shift experienced by male believers has put their 'traditional' masculinity into question. Their capacity to hold the role of breadwinner is undermined, and according to several informants, women are privileged in the European economic order. In this uncomfortable position where they experience a kind of vulnerability, religious gendered ideology often provides assurance and self-esteem by affirming men as heads of the religious space and chief of the household unit. Close to a model of hegemonic masculinity in the sexual division of domestic tasks, in the recognition of formal authority of men, or in an exclusive focus on young women as the purity "capital" of churches, the Pentecostal masculinity, however, also reveals significant ruptures with the patriarchal model of masculinity: religious discourse regularly values domestic implication, sensibilities and softness, which are encouraged as valorised masculine characteristics. Both close and distant from hegemonic masculinity, the hybrid posture of Pentecostal masculinity appears as a contrasted gender repertoire allowing men of the church to oscillate between various identifications and social locations according to specific situations at stake and different contexts of enunciation. The common denominator of this sometimes paradoxical positioning seems to be the desire to be 'different' (or to be projected as different) from the men of the 'world': either in a 'feminising' style, when kind and serious men of the church are presented as different from the violent and brute men of the outside world; or in other more conservative context, when men of the church speak against the permissiveness of local society towards social or legal recognition for same-sex partners.

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Gendered religious gifts? Spiritual biographies of Pentecostal women in migratory contexts in South Africa and Spain

Mar Grieria (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Rafael Cazarín (Universidad de País Vasco)

The role of women within the Pentecostal cosmology is often highlighted on tasks of building and maintaining family ties, conjugal harmony and motherhood values; in addition, by the use of a 'natural' inclination for caring and emotional approach to life, women are also encouraged to change their environment. In this sense, the feminine emotional nature is both a catalyst and an obstacle on everyday life. This work aims to shed light on the role of spiritual gifts in providing social-cognitive and emotionally-based narratives to church leaders for coping with migratory realities. Based on selected cases of participant observations and life-stories of women preachers carried out in Spain and South

Africa, we aspire to bridge conceptually these two contexts by the ritualistic and symbolic repertoires presented in deliverance, counselling and healing practices.

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**Discourses on gender among young African Pentecostals in Montreal:
Intersecting experiences of transnationality and representations of locality**
Géraldine Mossière (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Université de Montréal)

Pentecostal congregations' vitality and success rely heavily on their young populations who represent the majority of their membership. In African churches based in Montreal, broadly, members have two distinct profiles : either they have directly come from Africa, fleeing wars and political turmoils, either they have travelled through many countries before arriving in Quebec. Young members are usually part of the second category as they left home country at a young age and keep nearly no souvenirs of their country of origin. This population of migrants that has mainly been socialized in the host country is called the generation 1.5. Fieldwork conducted in these churches for 3 years show that the presence of youth hinge on two main topics : social and economic mobility on the one hand, matrimonial and sexual politics on the other hand. In this presentation, I will focus on the discourses that I have collected among young members regarding sexual and matrimonial practices. The latter reveal specific definitions on womanhood and manhood that associate man with ethnicity and paganism, and woman with Christianity and virtue. These representations are heavily impacted by the local context : in the 1970s, Quebec has been pervaded by a feminist tide that followed the Quiet Revolution and the end of the hegemony of the Catholic Church; in the last years, public space has been monopolized by vivid debates regarding Quebecois identity now defined by the principle equality of gender and laity, at the expense of the freedom of religion. Finally, by examining discrepancies between the young members' discourses and behaviors regarding gender, I show that their ethnic belonging is framed by their own transnational paths, suggesting thereby new experiences of ethnicity and categories of identity.

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Charisma, Risk and gender in mission and migration
Kim Knibbe (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

This paper will discuss the expansion of a Nigerian Pentecostal church in Europe. The Redeemed Christian Church of God is probably the largest Pentecostal church in Nigeria at the moment, and they have also realized a significant expansion in Europe (Burgess, Knibbe, and Quaas 2010). To realize this expansion, the production of charismatic leaders is important, but also the

creation of ever new and stable congregations in sometimes unstable environment, with a high turnover. This paper will focus on the narratives of receiving a calling and planting a church of some of the leaders of parishes in the Netherlands, Germany and England. Mission, like migration, is a risky business, existentially but also financially. At the same time, becoming born again seems to necessitate mobility, socially and geographically. Ambition to break through to 'the next level' is continuously encouraged. Prosperity teachings emphasize God's promise, and urges people to sacrifice, to take risks, to dream big. Through testifying to the greatness of God, one's own religious subjectivity is realized. Planting churches and evangelizing in new, potentially inhospitable places seems to be a natural extension of the burden placed upon every believer to testify (Harding 1987). The expectation is that God will fulfill his promise to those who serve him, but what happens when he does not seem to do this? What happens when a church is planted, but the chairs remain empty? What kinds of 'suffering, groaning and sweating' is going on among the 'pastorpreneurs' evangelizing Europe? How are the inversions of the migration context dealt with (Knibbe 2011a; Knibbe 2011b)? Via the narratives of individual pastors, I would like to discuss the nature of charismatic leadership and the ways it is gendered, but also the ways that the fundamental uncertainties of mission, migration and expansion are conceptualized and addressed in these narratives.